To be near the animals they hunted and the plants and fruit they gathered, Aboriginal people built houses close to water sources, which the plants and animals needed for survival. Few of these homes were permanent. As food supplies decreased or water dried up, people moved in search of new supplies.

Bark Shelters
Different groups built different kinds of houses across Australia. The Kuku-yalanji people of Queensland built large dome-shaped shelters with bark cut from living trees. The houses’ frames were made of saplings (thin branches) bent into semicircles. People in other areas made bark houses with flat or peaked roofs.

Above: Bark was treated with smoke, which hardened it. As a result, bark shelters could last up to a year or two.

Other Kinds of Houses
In Tasmania, the southern island state with the coldest winters in Australia, the Toogee people built large dome-shaped houses made of grass and other plant material and decorated with feathers. A bark lining provided protection from the weather, and the houses had room inside for a fire. In Victoria, archaeologists have found the remains of stone houses. These houses were U-shaped and open on one end, with walls about 3 feet (1 meter) high. The roofs were made from rushes and bark. The Nunggabuyu people of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory still build houses that look like bark shelters, except the builders use modern materials such as iron and Masonite (a compact building material made from wood fiber).

Inside the Houses
The size of a bark house depended on the number of people who needed to live in it—usually between six and twenty-five. Family groups or groups of single men shared one house.

Aboriginal houses had no walls to divide rooms. But houses had special places for each different activity—to prepare food or for children to play, for example. In some houses, people built fire pits for cooking and warmth and to keep away insects.

Left: Most modern Aboriginal people live in modern-style houses made of wood, stone, and brick.

SPECIAL POSITIONS
The arrangement of houses in an Aboriginal settlement was important. For instance, in a large group, relatives built their homes close together. Young married men lived near their fathers, and single men lived separately from families. Many modern Aborigines live in towns and cities. But as much as possible, especially in rural areas, they still prefer to position houses according to their relationships. This system shows order in the community.