

Resource Guide

Humanities and Social Sciences— History

The information and resources contained in this guide provide a platform for teachers and educators to consider how to effectively embed important ideas around reconciliation, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions, within the specific subject/learning area of [Humanities and Social Sciences—History](#). Please note that this guide is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, and that users are encouraged to consult with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and [critically evaluate resources](#), in engaging with the material contained in the guide.

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Please be aware this guide may contain references to names and works of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are now deceased. External links may also include names and images of those who are now deceased.

Background and Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories

“Here in Australia we’re fortunate enough to have...the richest and oldest continuing cultures in the world. This is something we should all be proud of and celebrate.”

– Dr Tom Calma, Reconciliation Australia Co-Chair

Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are among the oldest *living* cultures in the world, having been carried out for tens of thousands of years prior to European arrival in Australia and, despite the impacts of unjust colonial policies of assimilation, continuing to resiliently and actively contribute to community life to this day. As such, the depth and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories is incredible to acknowledge, share pride in, and celebrate.

It is important to consider “histories” in the plural here as, just as there is no single Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture or identity, nor is their one homogenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander historical experience. For some Aboriginal communities, the temporal connotations of “history” are also somewhat problematic in that stories and experiences across generations are understood to be inextricably connected to the Dreaming, which is an intricate and interrelated continuum of past, present and future. That is, although Dreaming elements and events may often be spoken of as residing in the past, so too are they actively involved in present and continuing cultural and community life. In the words of former Warlpiri teacher at Lajamanu School, Jeannie Herbert, the Dreaming is “an all-embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment...it is holistic— [the Dreaming] provides for a total, integrated way of life...The Dreaming isn’t something that has been consigned to the past but is a lived daily reality.”¹

Recognising the relationship between the past, present and future is also essential to effectively addressing the historical acceptance dimension of reconciliation in Australia. Critically reflecting on the present [state of reconciliation in Australia](#), and fostering a stronger, shared future of truth, justice, healing and reconciliation for Australia, requires widespread acceptance of our nation’s history, and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated.

One other important relationship to appreciate is the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and all other subject/learning areas. That is, as any given subject matter can never be entirely accurately, authentically or appropriately abstracted from its historical context, staff and students are encouraged to actively consider the histories that underpin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives pertaining to The Arts, Science, Technologies, Mathematics, Humanities and Social Sciences, Languages, and Health and Physical Education alike.

Attempting to cover the true depth and detail of the incredibly longstanding and ongoing timeline of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, and these histories’ relationship to all other subject/learning areas, is beyond the scope of this resource guide. However, please use this guide as a platform for engaging with some of the more general resources relating to Aboriginal

¹ Reference: <http://theconversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833>

and Torres Strait Islander histories, and the history of reconciliation in Australia. This may inspire you to engage further with the full suite of *Narragunnawali* resource guides from a historical perspective, and to engage with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to learn more about the particular events and experiences that have played out over time in the area on which you are living and learning. Remember that, for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, sharing these knowledges and experiences may come in the form of oral histories and [storytelling](#). A strong tradition of oral storytelling has, for tens of thousands of years, served as key vehicle for passing cultures and knowledges on through generations. Today, many of these stories are being written down or digitised as a mechanism for maintaining them, but so too are many continuing to be shared through spoken exchanges, and through song. Do bear in mind that some of these stories are sacred, passed on only to specific people with the authority and responsibility to serve as their custodians. However, actively listening to those oral histories which have been publically shared, or which you have been personally welcomed to access, is a meaningful way of learning about History from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspective.

Historical Timeline of Reconciliation in Australia

The timeline below highlights some of the significant dates to acknowledge, and milestones to appreciate, in the history of Australia's reconciliation journey.

- **60,000+ years ago – (before contact):**
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have occupied Australia for at least 60,000 years. While there was significant contact and trade between the diverse peoples who inhabited this continent, there was no contact, no exchange of cultures or knowledge between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the world.
- **600 years ago – (early contact):**
 - The outside world started to make contact with some Aboriginal skin-groups. People from what is now Indonesia established trade relations with people of the north. Later when European sailors made contact, some of it was positive for Aboriginal peoples including sharing technologies. Other aspects of this early contact had a negative impact, in particular the introduction of diseases.
- **1770:**
 - Captain Cook enters Botany Bay on the Endeavour. The British Government does not recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and special connection to land. Instead, they claim the land for the British Crown and declare that Australia is *terra nullius* – land belonging to nobody.
- **1788:**
 - The First Fleet arrives and builds a settlement at Port Jackson in Sydney, New South Wales.
- **1901:**
 - The Commonwealth of Australia is formed.
- **1932:**
 - William Cooper establishes the [Australian Aborigines' League](#). During the 1930s, Mr Cooper and other leaders of the [Aborigines Progressive Association](#) gathered 1,814 signatures on a petition calling on Prime Minister Joseph Lyons and King George VI to intervene “for the preservation of our race from extinction and to grant representation to our race in the Federal Parliament”.
- **1938:**
 - The Aborigines Progressive Association and the Australian Aborigines' League declare 26 January a day of mourning for Aboriginal people.
- **1948:**
 - The Commonwealth Nationality and Citizenship Act gives the category of 'Australian Citizenship' to all Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for the first time. However, at a state government level Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still suffer legal discrimination.

- **1962:**
 - The Commonwealth Electoral Act is amended to give the vote to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at Federal elections.
- **1963:**
 - Yolngu leaders present the [Yirrkala bark petitions](#) to the Australian Parliament, protesting against the seizure of more than 300 square kilometres of Aboriginal land in Arnhem Land for mining.
- **1965:**
 - University of Sydney students, including Charlie Perkins, launch the [Freedom Rides](#), travelling around NSW by bus to draw attention to discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- **1967:**
 - On May 27, more than 90 per cent of Australians vote 'yes' in a [referendum](#) to give the Australian Government the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Census.
- **1971:**
 - Neville Thomas Bonner becomes the first Aboriginal parliamentarian following his election as Senator for Queensland.
- **1972:**
 - The Aboriginal [Tent Embassy](#) is pitched outside Parliament House in Canberra, campaigning for the recognition of Aboriginal land rights.
 - The Australian Government establishes the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.
- **1975:**
 - The Australian Parliament passes the [Racial Discrimination Act](#) to help ensure that Australians of all backgrounds are treated equally and receive the same opportunities.
- **1976:**
 - Patricia (Pat) O'Shane becomes Australia's first Aboriginal barrister.
 - Australian Parliament passes the [Aboriginal Land Rights \(Northern Territory\) Act 1976](#) (Cth), leading to the establishment of Land Rights legislation in most Australian states in the 1970s and 1980s.
- **1985:**
 - Uluru is handed back to Traditional Owners.
- **1988:**
 - The [Barunga Statement](#), calling for self-management and land rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is presented to Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who indicates his support for a treaty.
- **1991:**
 - The [Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#) presents its final report into the

- deaths of 99 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian jails.
- The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation is established.
 - **1992:**
 - The High Court recognises native title in the landmark [Mabo v Queensland \(No.2\)](#) (1992), busting the myth of terra nullius.
 - Prime Minister Paul Keating delivers the '[Redfern Speech](#)' recognising the history of dispossession, violence and forced removal of Aboriginal children.
 - The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner position is created, with Professor Mick Dodson AM appointed to the position.
 - **1993:**
 - The United Nations declares 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People.
 - Australian Parliament passes the [Native Title Act](#).
 - The first National Week of Prayer for Reconciliation is supported by Australia's major faith communities.
 - **1995:**
 - The Australian Government officially recognises the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags](#).
 - **1996:**
 - Following on from the National Week of Prayer for Reconciliation, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launches Australia's first [National Reconciliation Week](#).
 - **1997:**
 - The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families releases the [Bringing them Home report](#).
 - The Australian Reconciliation Conference is held in Melbourne
 - **1998:**
 - National [Sorry Day](#) is commemorated for the first time on 26 May.
 - **2000:**
 - The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation delivers its final report to Prime Minister John Howard and the Australian Parliament at Corroboree 2000.
 - [Reconciliation Australia](#) is set up as an independent, not-for-profit organisation.
 - Approximately 300,000 people walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge as part of National Reconciliation Week, showing support for the reconciliation process.
 - **2004:**
 - The Commonwealth Government establishes a memorial to the Stolen Generations at Reconciliation Place in Canberra.
 - **2005:**
 - National Reconciliation Planning Workshop is held, attended by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

- **2006:**
 - The [Close the Gap campaign](#) for Indigenous health equality is developed following the release of the [Social Justice Report 2005](#).
 - Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan program begins.
- **2007:**
 - Australia celebrates the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum.
 - The Australian Government, led by Prime Minister John Howard, begins the Northern Territory Emergency Response.
- **2008:**
 - Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally [apologises to the Stolen Generations](#) on behalf of the Australian Parliament.
 - COAG commits \$4.6 billion towards Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage for projects in health, housing, early childhood development, economic participation and remote service delivery.
- **2009:**
 - Australia supports the United Nations [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). Previously, Australia had been one of only four nations to oppose the Declaration.
- **2010:**
 - The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples is established.
- **2011:**
 - The Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leads wide-ranging public consultations and delivers its findings in January 2012.
- **2012:**
 - The [campaign to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution](#) begins.
- **2013:**
 - The Australian Parliament passes the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013](#) to maintain momentum towards a referendum.
- **2015:**
 - The [Referendum Council](#) is established.
- **2016:**
 - Reconciliation Australia releases [The State of Reconciliation in Australia](#) report.
- **2017:**
 - Australia celebrates the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo decision.
 - [The Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) is made at the First Nations National Constitutional Convention in Uluru.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History Resources

Listed below are examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History-related resources that can meaningfully contribute to classroom learning, and to the field of History in Australia as a whole. Note that the resources in this list are relatively broad, largely national-level resources, so teachers and educators are also encouraged to research and engage with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories of their local area. Furthermore, given that all other Subject/Learning Areas cannot be separated from their historical context, teachers and educators are also encouraged to engage with the full suite of Narragunnawali resource guides and consider each guide's content from a historical perspective.

- ABC— [Right Wrongs](#)
- ABC Education— [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures](#)
- Australian Children's Television Foundation & Education Services Australia— [My Place for Teachers: Decade timeline](#)
- Australian Children's Television Foundation & Education Services Australia— [Teaching activities](#)
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies— [Collections online](#)
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies— [History](#)
- Australian Museum— [Indigenous Australia](#)
- Australian Screen – [Education: Indigenous Australia: History](#)
- Gary Foley – [The Koori History Website Project](#)
- National Film and Sound Archive— [Indigenous Connections](#)
- National Museum of Australia— [Indigenous Australians' rights and freedoms](#)
- National Museum of Australia— [Indigenous rights and freedoms](#)
- National Museum of Australia— [First Australians](#)
- Reconciliation Australia— [Share Our Pride: Our Shared History](#)
- SBS— [First Australians](#)
- SBS Learn— [First Australians Histories and Cultures](#)
- State Library of Western Australia— [Indigenous Oral History](#)

Significant Annual Anniversary Events for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and/or for Reconciliation in Australia

Reconciliation is of everyday importance. There are, however, a number of days and weeks of particular national significance to reconciliation in Australia, which are celebrated or commemorated each year. These dates not only remind Australians of some of the key historical events in the nation's reconciliation journey; they also have great relevance and resonance to shaping the present and future direction of the reconciliation movement. Some of these annual anniversary events are listed below.

- [26 January \(Australia Day\)](#)

The 26th of January, 1788, was the date on which Captain Arthur Phillip took formal possession of the colony of New South Wales and raised the British flag for the first time in Sydney Cove. Australians hold many different views on the significance of this date. For many, it is not a day for celebration, and instead represents a day on which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of life were changed forever. For some, it is known as 'Survival Day,' and is a celebration of the resilience of people and culture, and the continuing contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to Australia.

- [13 February—Anniversary of the National Apology](#)

On the 13th of February, 2008, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd moved a motion of apology to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the House of Representatives. The Apology acknowledged and apologised for past laws, policies and practices that devastated Australia's first peoples, in particular members of the Stolen Generations. This anniversary acts as a reminder to all Australians that 'sorry' is more than a word. It is a reminder that communities, peak body organisations, politicians and policy makers must continue to work together to achieve key positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- [March—National Close the Gap Day](#)

Close the Gap is Australia's most prominent health equality campaign, focused on achieving health equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation. On National Close the Gap Day, hundreds of thousands of Australians take action by holding events around the nation. These events both celebrate the successes of Close the Gap and raise awareness of the important work that still needs to be done.

- [21 March—Harmony Day](#)

Harmony Day celebrates Australia's cultural diversity. It is about inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging for everyone, and is a day for all Australians to embrace cultural diversity as well as share what we have in common. The central message for Harmony Day is that 'everyone belongs,' reinforcing the importance of inclusiveness across Australia.

- [25 April—ANZAC Day](#)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a long and proud, but often little known, history of contributing to Australia's military efforts. ANZAC Day is an important opportunity to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have served, and continue to serve, in all major conflicts alongside their non-Indigenous comrades.

- [26 May—National Sorry Day](#)

National Sorry Day has been held each year since 1998 and was born out of a key recommendation in *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. This report was tabled in Federal Parliament on 26 May 1997. National Sorry Day commemorates and remembers all those who have been affected by government policies of forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, which resulted in the Stolen Generations.

- [27 May—Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum](#)

This day marks the anniversary of Australia's most successful referendum and a defining event in our nation's history. The 1967 Referendum saw over 90 per cent of Australians vote to give the Commonwealth the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise them in the national Census.

- [27 May to 3 June—National Reconciliation Week](#)

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) is celebrated across Australia each year between the 27th May and the 3rd of June. The dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey—the anniversaries of the successful 1967 Referendum and the High Court Mabo decision (Mabo Day). It is a time to celebrate and build on the respectful relationships shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. Each year has a different theme set by Reconciliation Australia.

- [3 June—Mabo Day](#)

The Mabo decision was named after Eddie (Koiki) Mabo, of Mer Island in the Torres Strait, who challenged the Australian legal system and fought for recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of their land. The Mabo decision was a turning point for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, because it acknowledged their unique connection with the land. It also led to the Australian Parliament passing the Native Title Act in 1993.

- [1st Week of July—NAIDOC Week](#)

NAIDOC Week is a celebration of the histories, cultures and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC formally stands for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee,' but, over time, the acronym has become the name for the entire festival week. Each year, the week focuses on a different theme, set by the National NAIDOC Committee.

- [1 July—Coming of the Light Festival \(Torres Strait Islands\)](#)

This festival marks the day when the London Missionary Society first arrived in the Torres Strait in 1871, introducing Christianity to the region. It is a significant day for Torres Strait Islander communities across the region and in mainland Australia.

- [4 August—National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day](#)

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day ('Children's Day') is a time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to celebrate the strengths and culture of their children. It is also an opportunity for all Australians to show their support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and learn about the impact that community, culture and family play in the life of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child. Each year has a different theme set by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

- [9 August—International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples](#)

The United Nations International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples is celebrated every year on the 9th of August. Globally, there are over 350 million Indigenous people, representing over 5,000 cultures and languages in more than 70 different countries. The UN General Assembly first proclaimed the Day of the World’s Indigenous People in 1994 and adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

- [September—National Indigenous Literacy Day](#)

Organised by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF), National Indigenous Literacy Day is held in September each year to spread the word about the improving literacy levels and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in some of the most remote and isolated parts of Australia. Funds raised on National Indigenous Literacy Day support the purchase of books and resources for these communities, with a focus on culturally responsive reading materials.

Other Online Guides/Reference Materials

- Department of Environment of Environment and Conservation NSW (2004) *Talking History: Oral History Guidelines*, <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Aboriginal-cultural-heritage/talking-history-oral-history-guidelines-040001.pdf>
- Government of South Australia State Records (2017) *State Records of South Australia: Finding your Aboriginal History*, <https://www.archives.sa.gov.au/content/finding-aboriginal-history>
- Government of Western Australia State Records Office of Western Australia (2017) *Aboriginal Records*, <http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/archive-collection/collection/aboriginal-records>
- Museums Australia Inc. (2005) *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: Principles and guidelines for Australian Museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage*, http://www.nma.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/3296/ccor_final_feb_05.pdf
- National Museum of Australia (2001) *Telling Our Indigenous Stories*, http://www.nma.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/18903/Telling_Indigenous_stories_all_colour.pdf
- NSW State Government State Archives & Records (2017) *Aboriginal Resources: A Guide to NSW State archives*, <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/aboriginal-resources-guide-nsw-state-archives>
- Queensland Studies Authority (2008) *Defining Aboriginal stories*, https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/approach2/indigenous_res014_0802.pdf
- Queensland Studies Authority (2013) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures resources: History*, https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/aust_curric/ac_ccp_atsi_cultures_history.pdf
- Reconciliation Australia & Healing Foundation (2019) *Truth Telling Symposium Report*, <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/truth-telling-symposium-report1.pdf>
- Tasmanian Government (2017) *Records on Tasmanian Aboriginals*, <https://www.linc.tas.gov.au/archive-heritage/guides-records/Pages/Aboriginal.aspx>
- Tasmanian Government (2018) *The Orb: Living Cultures*, <https://www.theorb.tas.gov.au/living-cultures>
- Victoria State Government Public Record Office Victoria (2017) *Aboriginal Victorians (1830s – 1970s)*, <https://www.prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/explore-topic/aboriginal-victorians-1830s-1970s>

Reflective Questions for History Staff and Students

- How have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories influenced 'Australian history' as a whole, and what active role do these histories continue to play today? Why is it important to recognise the relationship between past, present and future events in the shared history between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community?
- What is the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and all other subject/learning areas? Why are these relationships important to appreciate?
- Choose to research an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander historian or storyteller. What is the importance of his or her contributions to History education, either at the local or (inter)national scale?
- Where possible and appropriate, organise an excursion to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander historical society, heritage centre, cultural centre or museum exhibition. What important messages, information or ideas did you gain through engaging in this excursion?
- Choose to research a key date in Australia's reconciliation journey. What was, and/or continues to be, the significance of this event?
- How might your school or early learning service contribute to the celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, as well as key milestones and anniversaries in Australia's shared reconciliation journey?
- How can embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories into wider study of History help to foster reconciliation?