

# CONTRIBUTION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

# ACTIVITIES

## → Lesson plan for teachers

### 1. WARM-UP ACTIVITY: THE ABORIGINAL FLAG

Further information about Indigenous Australia flags can be found here:

[www.naidoc.org.au/indigenous-australian-flags](http://www.naidoc.org.au/indigenous-australian-flags)

Symbols are a 'thing' that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.

Ask students to individually think of the three colours that best symbolise them as a person (they might like to consider their values, beliefs, interests and/or personalities).

Ask students to write down why they selected each colour, explaining how the colour symbolises aspects of who they are as a person.

Introduce the image of the Aboriginal flag (available on website above). Ask students to guess what the three colours might symbolise.

Explain that a man called Harold Thomas (an Indigenous artist) who designed the flag in 1971 identified the colours of being symbolic of:

- Black: represents the Aboriginal people of Australia
- Yellow circle: represents the Sun, the giver of life and protector
- Red: represents the red earth, the red ochre used in ceremonies and Aboriginal peoples' spiritual relation to the land

The flag was recognised as an official flag of Australia (under the Flags Act) in 1995.

Students can now use their three chosen colours, incorporate shapes or other symbols and design their own personal flag. Distribute A4 or A3 poster paper for students to produce their own flag. On the back of the flag, students should explain why they have chosen these three colours and shapes/symbols.

## 2. THINK / PAIR / SHARE: 3 SYMBOLS

Ask for sixteen volunteers. Distribute one piece of paper (sign) to each student from the 'Human Timeline' resource sheet. You might like to complete this activity outside or somewhere where you can spread out to illustrate the scale of the timeline.

Ask the students who have been given a year to line up in chronological order, trying to estimate the right amount of space between them so that the timeline is to scale. The remaining eight students should be given the key events. The challenge is for the class to give instructions to these eight about which dates they should line up against.

### Answers:

**1788:** Before this, Aboriginal people were the first people and only inhabitants of Australia. The First Fleet lands at Port Jackson in NSW on 26th January. Some people now refer to this date as 'Invasion Day' instead of 'Australia Day'

**1835:** The first Europeans to arrive in Victoria found the future site of Parliament House on the hill known as Eastern Hill (later known as Parliament Hill). It was a traditional Kulin meeting place

**1836:** One of the Europeans (Garryowen) wrote an eyewitness account of a corroboree taking place on the future site of Parliament House. He wrote that the Aboriginal people "treated their guests - for the first time performed before white man - to their great national dance, known as the ngargee"

**1856:** The first Parliament of Victoria was elected

**1949:** Aboriginal people were given the right to vote in Victoria

**2004:** The Victorian Constitution was amended to recognise Aboriginal people as the original custodians of the land on which the colony of Victoria was established

**2006:** The NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) Art Exhibition marks the 150th anniversary of Parliament of Victoria

**2015:** The Aboriginal flag is flown permanently from the top of Victoria's Parliament House

**2017:** The first Aboriginal member of Parliament is elected in a by-election.

### Questions for discussion:

Why do you think 93 years passed between when Parliament started, and when Aboriginal people were allowed to vote?

What does this timeline suggest about the history of Aboriginal rights in Australia?

What do you think of Parliament's decision to fly the Aboriginal flag at Parliament House? What else could Parliament do to help repair the damage done to the first inhabitants of Victoria?

## 3. UNDERSTANDING AND HONOURING CUSTOMS

Students should use these Parliament of Victoria videos (youtube clips) to find answers to the questions below:

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5DmiWNEzVk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5DmiWNEzVk)
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=a60la4adQw4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a60la4adQw4)

1. What is the Aboriginal tradition that forms the start of the 'Opening of Parliament' ceremony in Victoria?
2. Who do the Aboriginal elders meet and welcome at the start of the 'Opening of Parliament' ceremony in Victoria?
3. Why was it important to Aboriginal people that they could become involved in the opening of Parliament?
4. What did Carolyn Briggs wear at the 'Opening of Parliament' ceremony in Victoria? Why was this significant?

5. What was the gift that the Governor received and what did this mean?
6. Explain why the ritual of fire is significant to Aboriginal people.
7. What did the Tarnuk do?
8. What was the law that was created many thousands of years ago called?

Students could use the Internet to research three other significant traditions of the Aboriginal people.

### Discussion questions:

- What are your family traditions? Why are these important to you?
- Why is it important to honour Aboriginal traditions at Parliament today?
- Have you ever seen/heard any Aboriginal traditions like 'Welcome to Country' or the smoking ceremony? Where? When? What was it like? How did it make you feel?

#### 4. ABORIGINAL POLITICIANS IN VICTORIA: WHY THE GAPING HOLE?

It is interesting to note that in all the years of Victoria's Parliament, there has only been one Aboriginal person elected to Parliament. (Lidia Thorpe was elected in a by-election in 2017). Six Aboriginal people have been elected to the Parliament of Australia (five in the Senate and one in the House of Representatives) but it took until 2017 for one Aboriginal person to be elected in Victoria.

Some good questions for class discussion or think/pair/share might be:

- Why do you think there are so few Aboriginal politicians in Victoria?
- What could be done to rectify this situation?
- Aboriginal people have made huge contributions to other areas of public office: teachers, activists, lawyers and judges. Does it reflect badly on the Parliament of Victoria, or on Victoria as a whole, that there are so few Aboriginal Members of Parliament in Victoria? Why?/Why not?

Have a class discussion about some of the barriers that may prevent Aboriginal people from becoming politicians:

- Disadvantage
- Racism
- Inequality
- Poverty
- Teaching and Learning materials that do not acknowledge them (can make people switch off in school)
- Health (the 'close the gap' campaign publicised the 20 year lower life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Caucasian Australians)
- Access to education
- Access to employment

Be sure to challenge any negative or racist stereotypes during your discussion with students. (e.g. One useful fact is that 'abstinence from alcohol' is 1.6 times more common among Indigenous peoples than non-Indigenous peoples - *Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet*).

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#### 5. MY POINT OF VIEW: THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION OF VICTORIA'S FIRST PEOPLE

Students can use the Internet (or Library) to research one Victorian Aboriginal person and write a persuasive speech about why this person should become a Member of Parliament. They might like to research Aboriginal: artists, sports-people, someone they know (and can interview), athletes, activists, actors, dancers, singers, campaigners, medical professionals, media presenters online.

Students should make their research as wide as possible. There are many useful websites to recommend for students:

- [www.aussieeducator.org.au/reference/famousaustralians.html#indig](http://www.aussieeducator.org.au/reference/famousaustralians.html#indig)
- [guides.slv.vic.gov.au/Victoriasearlyhistory/aboriginalaustralians](http://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/Victoriasearlyhistory/aboriginalaustralians)

Key questions to answer in preparation for their speech:

1. What do you know about this person's contribution to life in Victoria/Australia?
2. What makes this person special?
3. Why do you think they deserve to be elected as an Aboriginal member of Parliament?

Students should read their speeches to the class when finished.

Questions for discussion afterwards:

- How have Aboriginal people made significant contributions to life in Victoria/Australia?
- Why do negative stereotypes persist in the face of these contributions? What does this say about Victorian society in general?
- How might Parliament of Victoria further recognise the important spiritual connection that Aboriginals have with Victorian land? How might they better utilise their talents, skills and abilities?

## 6. EXTENSION: CLASS EXCURSION

To build on student learning, consider arranging a class excursion to one, or both, of these organizations:

### The Koorie Heritage Trust

Levels 1 and 3, the Yarra Building  
Federation Square  
Melbourne

03 8662 6300

[korieheritagetrust.com.au/cultural-education/schools-and-educators/](http://korieheritagetrust.com.au/cultural-education/schools-and-educators/)

### The Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre

Melbourne Museum  
11 Nicholson Street  
Carlton

03 8341 7767

[museumvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/](http://museumvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/)

Each venue is easy to access by public transport. The exhibitions and education programs are either free or have a small cost attached.

### For each organization:

#### Pre-visit activity

Before your visit ask students to each write down something they want to know from the organization, looking at the important and significant role of Aboriginal and Torres Islander people, focusing on: history, place, future. Collate these questions in class and work out three to four key questions that cover as many of points raised as possible.

Appoint particular students to ask these questions of the educator taking the program at the place you visit.

#### Follow up activity back at school

Hold a class discussion where students share their recollections of the answers to the key questions. Summarize these findings on a white board.