

TEACHING FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES

You Can Teach That: Reconciliation, Truth-telling and Treaty in Victoria

Uncle Charles Pakana

Important notice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers: Pages linked throughout this resource may contain names, images, and footage of persons who are now deceased. We acknowledge the significance and sensitivity of this content and advise reader and viewer discretion. This resource contains language that may be offensive.

Curriculum overview

Through subject English, students explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural knowledge, traditions and experiences as they are represented and communicated through text. Specifically, subject English provides students with the opportunity to:

- Appreciate and investigate texts created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and illustrators
- Engage with and respond to literature that explores the histories, cultures and perspectives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Examine texts that include events, Country/Place, identities and languages, and
- Discuss the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

In the [Victorian Curriculum 7–10 English Version 2.0](#) explicit references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are found in the below content descriptions:

Year 7

- Identify and explore ideas, points of view, characters, events and/or issues in literary texts, drawn from different historical, cultural and/or social contexts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and a wide range of Australian and world authors ([VC2E7LE01](#))

Year 8

- Explain the ways that ideas, issues and points of view in literary texts drawn from diverse historical, cultural and social contexts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors, and a wide range of Australian and world authors, may represent the values of individuals and groups ([VC2E8LE01](#))

Year 9

- Analyse the representations of people and places in literary texts, drawn from diverse historical, cultural and social contexts, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and a wide range of Australian and world authors ([VC2E9LE01](#))

Year 10

- Analyse representations of individuals, groups and places and evaluate how they reflect their context in literary texts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and a wide range of Australian and world authors ([VC2E10LE01](#))

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority provides more guidance around the responsibilities of educators to help students deepen their knowledge of the oldest continuous living cultures and contemporary First Nations communities. The below organising ideas are from the Victorian Curriculum F-10 English Version 2.0 and are reflected in the *You Can Teach That: Teaching First Nations Perspectives* series.

Country/Place	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Australia maintain a deep connection to, and responsibility for, Country and Place and have holistic values and belief systems that are connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways. (VC2CCPAC1)
Culture	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies are diverse and have distinct cultural expressions, such as language, customs and beliefs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural expressions, while also maintaining the right to control, protect and develop culture as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. (VC2CCPAC1)
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life reflect unique ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. (VC2CCPAC2)
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people belong to the world's oldest continuous cultures. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples demonstrate resilience in the maintenance, practice and revitalisation of culture despite the many historic and enduring impacts of colonisation, and they continue to celebrate and share the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures. (VC2CCPAC3)
People	Australia has 2 distinct First Nations Peoples; each encompasses a diversity of nations across Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have occupied the Australian continent and adjacent islands from time immemorial. (VC2CCPAP1)
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have sophisticated political, economic and social organisation systems, which include but are not limited to family and kinship structures, laws, traditions, customs, land tenure systems and protocols for strong governance and authority, (VC2CCPAP2)
	The significant and ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their histories and cultures are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally. (VC2CCPAP3)

Capabilities

- [Critical and Creative Thinking](#)
- [Intercultural Capabilities](#)
- [Personal and Social Capability](#)

Introduction to the resource

Uncle Charles Pakana is a Victorian Aboriginal man of Tasmanian descent. He is the second of three successive generations of Aboriginal journalists and is the founder of [Victorian Aboriginal News](#).

In this interview for VATE's *You Can Teach That: Teaching First Nations Perspectives* series, Uncle Charles discusses the progress being made toward reconciliation in Australia and shares updates about the Treaty process in Victoria.

Key knowledge

- Use of the titles 'Aunty' and 'Uncle'
- The campaign of mis- and dis-information against First Nations people
- First Peoples' Assembly and the Treaty process in Victoria
- Journalistic integrity and promoting First Nations' current affairs

Key concepts

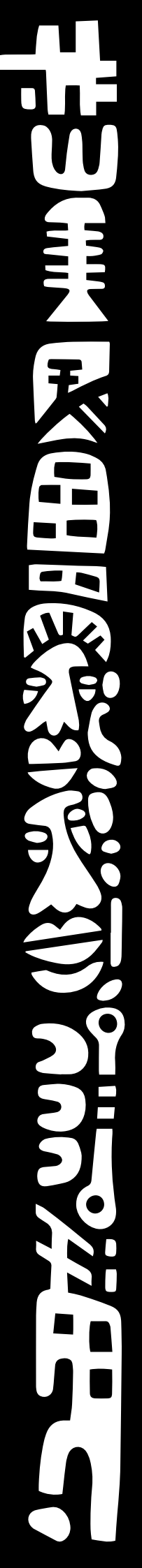
- Self-determination
- Reconciliation
- Voice
- Treaty
- Truth

TIMESTAMP	KEY FOCUS
0:21 mins	What is the significance of the titles 'Uncle' and 'Aunty' and when should they be used?
1:52 mins	What is self-determination?
6:17 mins	What do the pillars of Voice, Treaty and Truth look like in Victoria today?
13:40 mins	How do campaigns of misinformation and disinformation impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
19:29 mins	Journalism and Victorian Aboriginal News
23:04 mins	How can teachers and students contribute to the important work of reconciliation?
27:48 mins	Uncle Charles' recommended reading

A note on the Aborigines Advancement League

The [Aborigines Advancement League](#) (AAL) is the oldest Aboriginal rights organisation in Australia. It was founded in 1957 by Yorta Yorta man Sir Douglas Nichols, Doris Blackburn, Stan Davey and Gordon Bryant. The purpose of the AAL is to support Victorian Aboriginal peoples through programs that improve their social, economic and cultural wellbeing, promote self-determination and preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage. Uncle Charles refers to the organisation in the interview.

The AAL retains their original name due to the cultural and historic significance of the work of this organisation. However, this is not an acceptable way for non-Indigenous people to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and it should not be used. Please refer to the activities in the resource for more.



The following activities, prompts, lesson ideas and external links are designed to interrogate and embed the concepts, ideas, questions, themes and knowledge presented in the accompanying video. They are designed for English teachers to gain further understanding of the topic and explore how the topic can be utilised, dissected, or cemented in the classroom. Materials and activities in this section have been selected with a view to creating opportunities for bringing the content of this topic to students and colleagues.

The structure of these activities has been inspired by the [8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning pedagogy framework](#) which is grounded in the research of Dr Karen Martin and Dr Martin Nakata and created by Department of Education staff, James Cook University's School of Indigenous Studies, and the Western New South Wales Regional Aboriginal Education Team.

STORY SHARING: Inclusive and respectful language

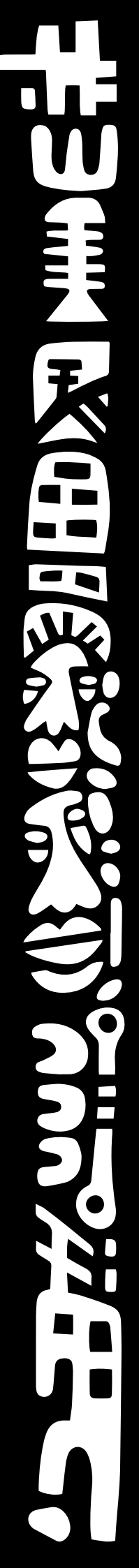
At the beginning of the interview, Uncle Charles explains a little about the titles 'Uncle' and 'Aunty' and their significance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. As Uncle Charles says, these terms are given to people in the community who are seen as able to provide leadership and cultural guidance. Prior to the interview, Uncle Charles asked me to refer to him as such as it is a title given to him by Wurundjeri Elders and his community. Clarifying the title provided a natural point to start the interview.

Along with Uncle Charles' explanation of the importance of the title, listen to [this short clip](#) from ABC Victorian Statewide Mornings where [Dr Doris Paton](#) outlines some of the cultural rules and etiquette around First Nations titles and language. She explains that some older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are referred to as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' due to their status in the community and reiterates that it is respectful behaviour and protocol to ask First Nations peoples if they'd like to be referred to as such. Likewise, Uncle Charles suggests erring on the side of caution and using the terms as a sign of respect. Aunty Munya Andrews suggests looking at the titles as like those of other spiritual leaders such as rabbis or priests – it is respectful to acknowledge their standing and gravitas in the community with the appropriate title. As [she explains](#), if a person does not want to be addressed as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle', they will let you know.

Based on your own research and engagement, you may have culturally appropriate terms that you prefer to use. For example, I try to avoid using the term 'Indigenous Australian/s' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I am conscious that the term 'Indigenous' can be offensive due to its scientific connotations and respect that its use tends to homogenise the diverse identities of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There are many guides available online for you to consult in order to ensure the language you adopt is culturally respectful, inclusive and appropriate. I encourage you and your students to delve into the importance of language as it pertains to the First Peoples of this country and adopt a shared understanding around the use of inclusive and respectful language in your classroom and in your discussions. VATE commissioned Kamilaroi, Scottish and English writer, Darby Jones to develop a language and terminology [guide here](#).

Useful terminology guides:

- [Reconciliation Australia Narragunnawali terminology guide](#)
- [Reconciliation Australia inclusive and respectful language guide](#)
- [Australian Government Style Manual](#)
- [Australians Together language and terminology guide](#)
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people article](#)
- University of New South Wales [Indigenous terminology guide](#)
- A [comprehensive guide for HealthInfoNet](#) prepared by Edith Cowan University that can inform your choices



In [this video](#) and [this interview](#), Yorta Yorta academic Dr Summer May Finlay talks through some of the preferred terms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and outlines the reasons why some terms and grammatical choices are offensive.

Aunty Munya also answers some common questions about First Nations terminology and languages through her '[Ask Aunty](#)' platform on Evolve Communities including:

- [Is it okay for non-Indigenous people to use First Nations languages?](#)
- [Is using the term 'Black Fella' when referring to an Indigenous person a good word to use?](#)
- [What is the appropriate term to use when referring to an Indigenous Australian?](#)
- [What are some Aboriginal words I can use in day-to-day conversation?](#)
- [Can I call myself 'gubba'?](#)

NON-LINEAR: Voice, Treaty, Truth and self-determination

As Uncle Charles explains, the pillars of the Uluru Statement from the Heart are embodied within the fabric of Victoria right now. He explains the process of advancing Treaty, bringing us up to today with the establishment of the [First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria](#) and the negotiations between the Assembly and the state government (details in [this annual report](#)). He also speaks about the [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#), the first Royal Commission into truth-telling in Victoria. You can view the evidence submitted to Yoorrook [here](#). Uncle Charles has also spoken about Treaty [here](#) and with Constitutional Law expert Professor Cheryl Saunders [here](#).

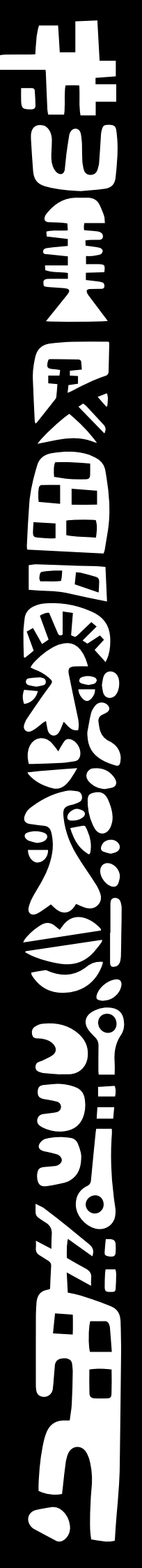
Contemplate how the specific definitions of the three pillars that underpin the Uluru Statement from the Heart - Voice, Treaty and Truth - are demonstrated in the reading and listening you have been doing about the Treaty process in Victoria or other states/territories, reporting in the media and such. As a further step, you might like to consider the pillars and how they are represented in your work, your school context and community. To what extent does your curriculum planning amplify these components for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

After listening to Uncle Charles outline the components of [self-determination](#), consider the ways that your students are given opportunities to shape their "own futures, their own destinies, their own lives, their own wellbeing" in your English classroom. To support your thinking, you can find more information about self-determination through the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) [here](#) and the Victorian First Peoples - State Relations [here](#).

The Victorian Government has [produced some guidelines](#) for strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination in education. The feedback they received outlined a number of factors that can help to strengthen self-determination in education including professional learning for teachers, greater communication and ensuring a culturally safe and responsive learning environment. On page 88 of the report, there is a table that aligns the report's directions with possible actions for each individual school including some reflection questions like:

- How do all staff demonstrate their shared responsibility in this space (i.e.: strengthening self-determination)?
- Does our whole-school curriculum recognise the legacy and ongoing impacts of colonisation?
- Do all of our subjects highlight the strength, diversity and enduring cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- How do we know if our school is culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- How do we create space for deep listening and storytelling?
- What resources, knowledge and tools are available to build the capacity of our staff?

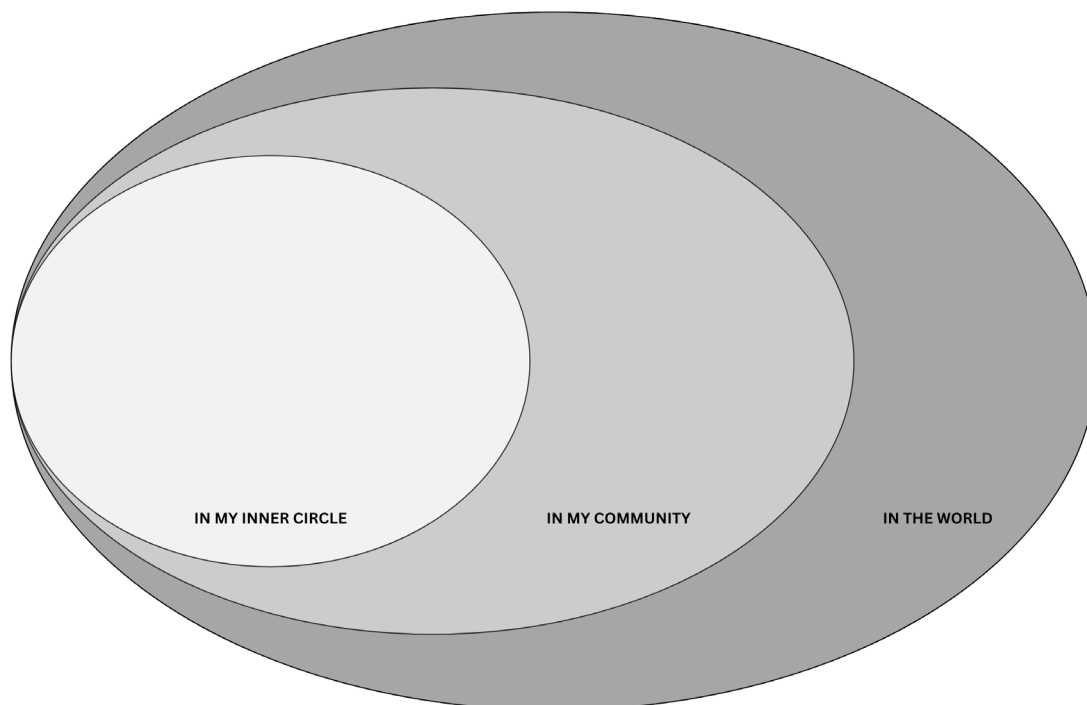
These questions would be worth exploring with your English department and are valuable in helping your colleagues to move further with their decolonial thinking and classroom pedagogy. One way of summarising the discussion of these questions is to complete a '[circles of action](#)' style activity. Below is an example.



Question: What can I do to contribute to strengthening self-determination...

- In my inner circle (of students, English teaching colleagues, family)
- In my community (colleagues from other faculties, other school staff, parents and guardians, school neighbourhood, professional community)
- In the world (where I live and spend my personal time)

WHAT CAN I DO TO CONTRIBUTE TO STRENGTHENING SELF-DETERMINATION...



Uncle Charles reminds us that “everybody says that we have this equal society, but we can’t have equality until we have equity”. In order to achieve equity, some people and/or groups need to be given assistance as he says, “That is the human thing to do...someone’s always going to need a hand right now”. This [video from the Australian Human Rights Commission](#) clearly explains the two concepts and how they’re related. The page also has some student activities that can be done around these concepts.

In 2020, researchers at Australian National University found that [three in four Australians held a negative view of First Nations peoples](#). As the key researcher, Siddarth Shirodkar, commented the “study presents stark evidence of the solid invisible barrier that Indigenous people face in society” and that this bias “can seep seamlessly into the everyday decisions at all levels of society” and into interactions and dealings with First Nations peoples. Facilitating some discussion or reflection time with your English department to consider the below may be useful in opening a dialogue about [unconscious bias](#). This activity should be undertaken with extreme caution. If there are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples present, this activity should be avoided.

- What are your core beliefs and how do these beliefs enable or constrain your colleagues or students?
- What do you know about the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- When did you learn the truth about the colonisation of this country?
- What messaging have you received about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how have these impacted your understanding of them?
- Do you know any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and has your relationship with them shaped your understanding of the community?
- What kind of internalised racism might you be harbouring regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? How does this impact your interactions with others?
- How does your positionality impact your life? Consider the ways in which the unique positionality of your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, students and neighbours is impacted by their experiences and beliefs.

COMMUNITY LINKS: “Utter editorial bullshit”

Please note: there is some explicit language in the interview as Uncle Charles discusses this content.

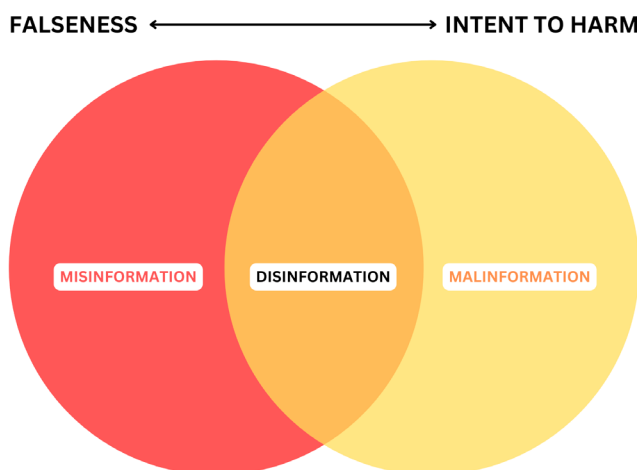
In the interview, Uncle Charles refers to the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation as “utter editorial bullshit” citing “politicians, journalists [and] so-called leaders who wish to gain a degree of notoriety” as responsible for the “pure, outright ignorance and racism” that has been on display in the Australian media landscape recently, especially during the failed referendum on the First Nations Voice to Parliament.

Some definitions to help the discussion about mis- and disinformation are below. The collective label for these terms is ‘information disorder’.

- **Misinformation** is the term used to refer to the unintentional spreading of inaccurate or false information. An example of misinformation is when satire is taken seriously, dates are incorrect, or statistics are misinterpreted.
- **Disinformation** is more deliberate. It refers to the purposeful spreading of inaccurate or false information with the aim of deceiving the audience and altering public opinion. Examples of disinformation include manipulated audio/visual content or fabricated conspiracy theories.
- **Malinformation** is a lesser-known term. It refers to information that is based on the truth but is exaggerated in a way as to cause harm. Instances of revenge porn are a classic example of malinformation.

This diagram is also a useful representation of how the terms interact (based on the work of [Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakshan](#), 2017)

Some examples of the ways that information disorder has been wielded against Aboriginal and Torres



Strait Islander peoples include:

- [Terra Nullius](#) (overturned by the landmark *Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)* judgement)
- The notion of ‘the dying race’ (more on constitutional recognition [here](#))
- Various assimilation policies as documented in the [Bringing Them Home Report](#) (1997)
- The notion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as ‘hunters and gatherers’ (disproved by many including Bruce Pascoe in his text, [Dark Emu](#)).

The Australia Institute [released a report](#) in October 2023 about the way in which misinformation impacted the referendum with Executive Director Dr Richard Denniss stating “Misinformation and disinformation swamped the referendum campaign with arguments that had little to do with what Australians were being asked to vote on”. Key findings from the report indicate that “9 in 10 Australians support truth in political advertising laws, regardless of how they voted in the referendum or their political affiliations”. Researcher Associate Professor Timothy Graham from Queensland University of Technology [studied](#) the ways in which rumours and misinformation spread on X (formerly Twitter) during the Voice referendum. He found that posts that dominated the ‘no’ campaign messaging were “characterised by rumours, unverified information and conspiratorial assertions”. Two examples of information disorder around the Voice to Parliament included the [scaremongering around land rights](#) (also [here in this viral video](#)) and the lie that the Voice was something that remote [First Nations communities did not want](#).

Graham identifies several phenomena that influenced the Voice referendum and that appear to have also influenced the state of politics in the United States and may very well influence Australian politics in the future:

- [Avoidance activation and disinformation spread](#) as explained by Francesca Tripodi, Lauren Garcia and Alice Marwick (2022): Where the decline in trust in broadcast media encourages people to use other sources for information to 'do their own research' (i.e: social media, Google search etc) supported by access to multiple platforms, with many perspectives and opinions, fuelled by high-speed wireless internet access and smartphone technology.
- The [oxygen of amplification report](#) by Whitney Phillips for Data & Society (2018) on better practices for reporting on extremists, antagonists, and manipulators online to avoid accidentally propagating extremist ideologies. The correlation to the Voice referendum here is in that the more that the 'yes' campaign tried to counter the 'no' campaign's arguments, they drew attention to the misinformation being circulated in the first place.

Regardless of the outcome of the referendum, and of which political party you support, there has been a documented rise in '[anger-tainment](#)' when it comes to news reporting in Australia. In 2025, the [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) identified an [increase in distrust in the media](#) in 14 of the 28 countries they survey annually, including Australia. In 2023, [they reported](#) that almost half of Australians (45%) say the nation is more divided today than in the past, with journalists identified as a major dividing force (51%). Some other alarming findings include:

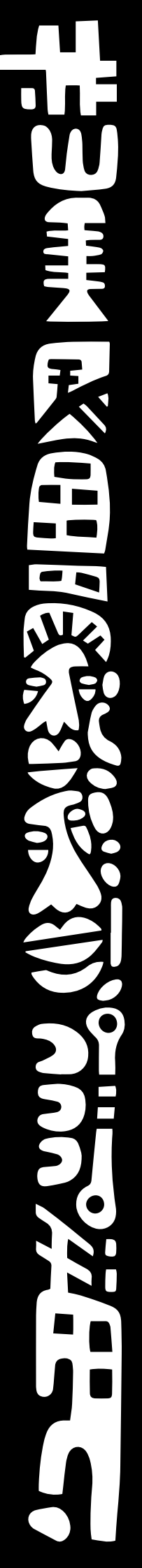
Australia is straddling the boundary between 'moderately polarised' and 'in danger of severe polarisation'.

- The majority of Australians (54%) think the nation's social fabric has become too weak to serve as a "foundation for unity and common purpose".
- "More than half (61%) think the lack of civility and mutual respect today is the worst they have ever seen".
- "Media continues to be most distrusted institution in Australia, only trusted by 38% of people (down 5 points)".
- "The media are seen as a source of misleading or false information by 48% in Australia, versus 37% of respondents who felt the media are a reliable source of trustworthy information".
- Alarming, the 2023 Trust Barometer confirmed that "no news source is trusted in Australia, with traditional media only trusted half of Australians (50%, up 2 points vs 2022), owned media by 31% (down 2 pts), and social media by 25% (down 1 pt)".

Building students' critical media skills to be able to discern fact from fiction, as well as truth from '[opinion creep](#)' is essential to ensuring the integrity of democracy. The Australian Electoral Commission has produced a resource about [media literacy in democracy](#) and other media literacy resources to support the connection to democracy [here](#). The Australian Communications and Media Authority also has some information about the [Australian Code of Practice for Disinformation and Misinformation](#).

One way that teachers can encourage students to engage with the media and news reporting in a more critical way is to employ lateral reading strategies. The News Literacy Project has a suite of [resources](#) that share ideas and strategies for teaching lateral reading skills and engagement with the media. Their free weekly newsletter, [The Sift](#), which highlights news reporting and examples of misinformation in the media comes with access to '[Daily Do Now](#)' media activities such as discussing conspiracy theories, identifying advertising and reflecting on standards of journalism. While the activities are centred on American content, the media skills that are developed are universal and could easily be adapted for the Australian context. You and your students can sign up to [Checkology virtual classroom](#), a free e-learning platform with lessons on media bias and misinformation (and more) that assist in developing skills to identify credible information online.

Being aware of the way in which students are being manipulated through the news and other media they consume is an important step in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by ensuring the discussion and circulation of credible, accurate and reliable sources. Teaching students to identify misleading and false information is a necessary skill for democratic and engaged citizenship.



Have a look at the [Victorian Aboriginal News \(VAN\) website](#) and read through their latest news stories. There is so much here! So much of this work would be suitable for bringing into the classroom to support texts being studied or the exploration of issues as they impact Victorian First Nations peoples.

- There are a number of interviews about the Victorian Treaty process and post-referendum reflections including those with [Rueben Berg](#) (First Peoples' Assembly) and [Barkindji Elder Uncle Col Clark](#).
- [Aboriginal cultural safety and the education system](#) with Bunurong woman Zoe Upton and [bringing Aboriginal content and relevancy into education](#) with Professor Uncle Mark Rose
- [Incorporating culture into everyday life](#) with Wurundjeri man Thane Garvey
- An interview with [Bruce Pascoe](#)
- A discussion about the [repatriation of Woi-wurrung language](#)

LAND AND COMMUNITY LINKS: Working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

If you are looking to make contact with your local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, below are some resources to assist you:

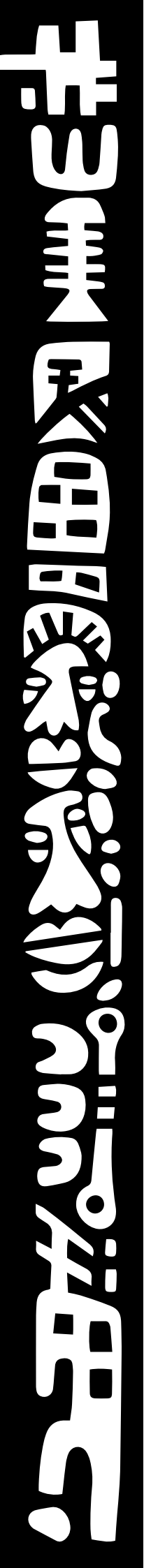
- [Guide for respectfully communicating with Elders](#)
- [Connecting locally with First Nations communities](#)
- [Tips for engaging with Elders](#)
- [Build relationships with community](#)
- [Respectfully engaging with Indigenous communities](#)

One thing that I have learned in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is that relationships are paramount. Reaching out and seeking to create a reciprocal relationship is valued by many First Nations communities. Sometimes, reaching out and asking for things (a workshop, an interview, a speech) can be perceived as rude and removed from creating genuine relationships. Creating safety and a space for honesty takes time.

It is essential to pay Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for their time, knowledge and the energy they bring to your event. If you are unsure of how to budget for this, review the [benchmark rates of pay](#) established by the Australian Society of Authors as a guide. Be mindful that each individual person may have their own consultancy rates and negotiation may not be welcome. (This advice is true for all guests you invite into your school.)

If you want to organise a [Welcome to Country](#) to connect with community in your area (in Victoria), visit the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council [website](#) to identify the Registered Aboriginal Party of your region. You can also view the [Welcome to Country and Acknowledgements map](#) to find more specific information about the Traditional Owners of your area. The City of Melbourne [has more](#).

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This resource has been reviewed by Darby Jones. Darby is a freelance writer with matrilineal ties to the Kamilaroi mob in Southwest Queensland. View Darby's work at <https://www.darbyjones.au/>.

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