

TEACHING FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES

You Can Teach That: Prioritising Blak voices

In conversation with Dr Tamika Worrell

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

Dr Tamika Worrell, is Senior Lecturer in Critical Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University. Worrell's family is from Gamilaroi Country, and she has been grown up by Dharug Country, Western Sydney, since birth, where she continues to live and work.

In this interview for VATE's *You Can Teach That: Teaching First Nations Perspectives*, Worrell discusses her research into the text selection practices of English teachers who are embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and her culminating Representational Framework for English teachers

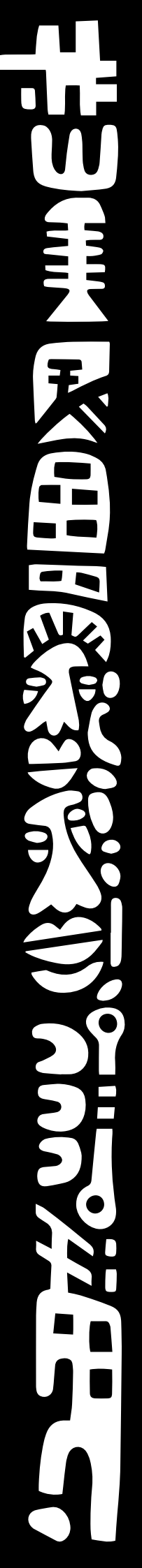
Key knowledge

- Positionality
- Relationality
- Fear
- Privilege

Key concepts

- Representation
- Authentic characterisation
- Diverse voices

TIMESTAMP	KEY FOCUS
0:21 mins	An overview of the research and methodology
8:53 mins	Moving beyond the fear of doing the wrong thing
16:02 mins	Exploring the representational framework

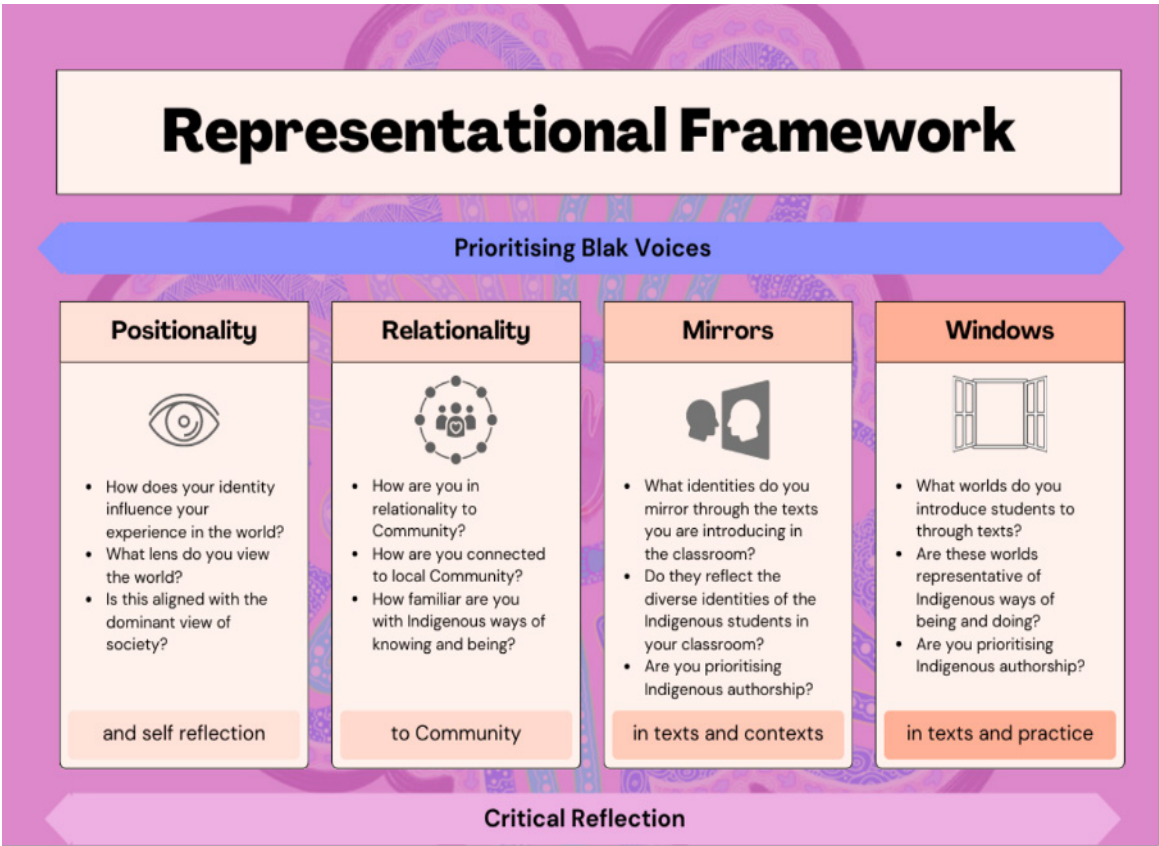


The following activities, prompts, lesson ideas and external links are designed to interrogate and embed the concepts, ideas, questions, themes and knowledge presented in the accompanying video. They are designed for English teachers to gain further understanding of the topic and explore how the topic 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.

The suggested activities that correspond to this interview with Worrell relate to her Representational Framework. You can read about and view the Framework in her article ‘Texts, voices and stories: Indigenous education futures are Blak and bright’ (*The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 2024, p.9).

As Worrell explains, the Framework is grounded in two factors: prioritising Blak voices and critical reflection. It is designed to be intuitive and user friendly, where individual teachers can work through the prompts at their own pace.



Representational Framework (Worrell, 2024)

LEARNING MAPS: Positionality and self-reflection

Worrell explains that “our positionalities are always important to be upfront about”. It is important to know that if you are reading an article on a topic related to First Nations peoples, “that the author has positionality in relationship to community”.

When thinking about your own positionality, consider:

- How do I view the world?
- How does my position in the world shape the ways I engage with the people around me?
- What is my local context?
- How does my identity influence how I experience the world?

One way to undertake this reflection could be with a learning map – a visual representation of your pathway that shows how you have wound up where you are, how you have obtained the knowledge you have, and your connection to the world around you. Map:

- Your background including lived experiences and beliefs that influence you
- Your educational and cultural background
- Your biases, assumptions and beliefs – including those you might have about your students
- Your intersectionality – what privileges or oppressions do you face in respect to your race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, ethnicity and even language.

Worrell encourages non-Indigenous people to “be actively reflecting and acknowledging their positionality” as well. Worrell draws on the work of Palyku academic Dr Ambelin Kwaymullina, [Living on Stolen Land](#), and her poem that asks “You are living on stolen land/What are you going to do about it?” A review of the Kwaymullina’s anti-colonial handbook is [here](#). Some of Worrell’s suggestions for engaging with your positionality:

- Consider how you honour the peoples of the land that you’re living on
- [Pay the Rent](#)
- [Treaty for Victoria](#)
- Engage with First Nations voices on social media. Here are some [suggestions for Instagram](#).
- Diversify the types of media that you are consuming. Consider [ABC Indigenous](#), [SBS NITV](#), [IndigenousX](#), [Koori Mail](#), [National Indigenous Times](#), [Victorian Aboriginal News](#).
- Professor Braden Hill’s [reflections on non-Indigenous allyship](#) and giving space to First Nations voices
- Dr Terri Farrelly ‘[Calling yourself an ally is like choosing your own nickname](#)’ (*Journal of Global Indigeneity*, 2024)
- [You Can Teach That: Decolonisation and comradeship](#) with Associate Professor Al Fricker
- [Moving from performative to substantive reconciliation](#), concepts explored in detail by Professor Andrew Gunstone especially after the result of the Voice referendum.

In her interview for *You Can Teach That*, Associate Professor Jeanine Leane explores the concept of positionality alongside relationality and context (activities to support this are on p. 4 and 5 of the resource).

“with any good relationship, you have to nurture it.”

COMMUNITY LINKS: Relationality to community

Worrell noticed that those teachers who were “exemplifying” some of the key values underpinning her Framework “were in relationships with Indigenous peoples in their community. So even if they weren’t Indigenous themselves, they were connected to local Indigenous communities, or local Indigenous teachers, or...having Indigenous peoples in their families”. She notes that the proximity to First Nations peoples directly impacted the teachers’ level of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content.

Discuss with your colleagues the opportunities for connecting with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This [Australians Together](#) resource is a great guide to respectfully engaging with First Nations communities, as is the Australian Curriculum’s [FIRST](#) framework for engaging with First Nations communities to support implementing the curriculum. Victorian teachers may like to consider working in partnership with Aboriginal communities by supporting Aboriginal businesses, engaging with [Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated](#) (VAEAI) and [Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups](#) (LAECG) or supporting the [Koorie Heritage Trust](#) or other First Nations cultural learning centres like the [Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre](#) at the Melbourne Museum

Worrell acknowledges that it can be uncomfortable for some people to form connections with local First Nations communities and recognises that it’s difficult to suggest a partnership with community without putting “your workload onto an Indigenous person, right?” With that in mind, she suggests:

- Managing time and expectations – “If you are seeking a transactional relationship, that’s fine...but then expect transactional exchange”
- Offer appropriate remuneration. VATE uses the recommended rates suggested by the [Australian Society of Authors](#) as a guide for payments we make to our presenters, consultants, and guest speakers.
- Reciprocity and relationship building – “with any good relationship, you have to nurture it”. [Reconciliation NSW](#) suggests that connecting with a/your local community is a process that should involve the three Ts: time, trust and a cup of tea.
- “The first time you invite an Indigenous person to your school, hopefully it’s not because you need something from them”. Consider inviting them to participate in your school community, to attend an assembly, a morning tea, or a showcase.
- Recognise that institutional distrust is a valid reason why some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may not want to your school. [This article](#) outlines education as a tool of colonialism and more about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been excluded from schooling experiences can be found in [submissions to the Yoorrook Justice Commission](#) and in the reports prepared by the [National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition](#).

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NON-LINEAR: Mirrors in texts and contexts and windows in texts and practice

The 'windows and mirrors' component of Worrell's Framework is attributed to [Rudine Bishop Sims](#)' work about the power of books to "transform human experience and reflect it back to us". Worrell notes that when Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students see themselves reflected back to them, "it teaches them a valuable lesson about how they are valued in the world".

With this in mind, [Worrell's research](#) (2024) identified four books that were most identified as being used for teaching First Nations perspectives in New South Wales schools. These were:

- Year 7: *Honey Spot* by Jack Davis (1987)
- Year 8: *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan (1998)
- Year 9: *Deadly, Unna?* By Philip Gwynne (1998)
- Year 10: *Jasper Jones* by Craig Silvey (2010)

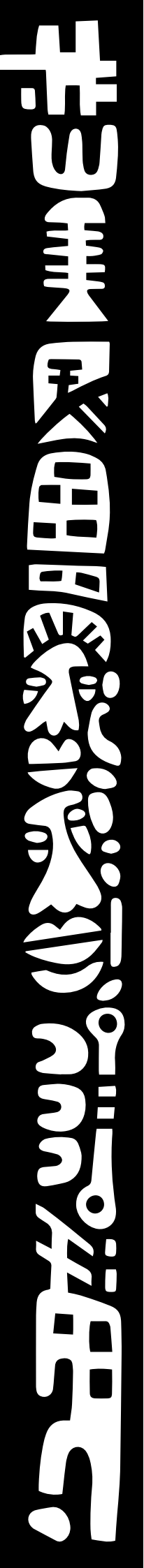
What Worrell draws attention to in her work is the publication dates of these texts – especially of *The Rabbits* and *Deadly, Unna?* – as both were written over 20 years ago, and that these texts have "faced criticism for perpetuating a colonial perspective and failing to adequately represent Aboriginal experiences in Australia" (Worrell, 2024, p. 7).

Worrell asks us to consider what these mirrors and windows could mean. She writes "When considering the desire to incorporate windows, which is the right course of action, we observe teachers acting as agents of social change" (2024, p. 8), acting in solidarity with First Nations peoples to bring their stories into the mainstream. However, the "concerning reliance on non-Indigenous-authored texts to teach Indigenous perspectives in English" (Worrell, 2024, p. 7) needs to change. With "misinformation about Indigenous peoples... rampant", it is important to include authentic representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and ask whether a non-Indigenous person can truly reflect the identity, knowledge systems and worldview of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. More about the impact of mis- and disinformation on the First Nations community can be viewed in the [Teaching First Nations Perspectives](#) resource for Uncle Charles Pakana.

Worrell mentions the [AIATSIS guide to evaluating and selecting education resources](#) (2022) as a helpful tool for selecting texts about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the critique by Brooke Collins-Gearing, 'Who will save us from *The Rabbits*?' Cara Shipp's [Listening from the Heart: Rewriting the teaching of English with First Nations voices](#) also responds to a number of concerns from English educators specifically. And Worrell has also contributed her advice to 'Including Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum' (Macquarie University teaching blog) and 'Profiles of Practice: Influences when selecting texts to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in English' (*English in Australia*, 2022).

A list of recommended texts for study can be found in the resource for *Teaching First Nations Perspectives* resources for [Tony Birch](#) and [Anita Heiss](#).

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