

V**A** Victorian Association for **T****E** the Teaching of English

2026 VATE State Conference Ode to Joy

The 2026 VATE State Conference – **Ode to Joy** – is a celebration of the work of English teachers that is joyful, playful, experimental and human. A tribute to work that reflects bold choices, twists, turns and the collective delight of students, colleagues and community. An expression of the quiet and the loud joys of the profession and of the deep, purposeful and enjoyable learning that springs from human connection. Classrooms are places of discovery, where joy lives, creativity grows and where we delight in the intellectual activity of teaching¹ and shared pleasure of language. **Ode to Joy** invites teachers to seize an ‘opportunity for creative transformation’² and reacquaint themselves with the joys inherent in subject English that are fuelled by passion, collaboration and authenticity.

Jon Batiste’s ‘**Ode to Joyful**’³ provided the inspiration for the 2026 VATE State Conference theme. Through his interpretation of Beethoven’s classics and the joy derived from spontaneous composition and play, Batiste reminds us that joy is something that ‘continues to transcend and stand the test of time’⁴, highlighting its connection to imagination and its ability to help us ‘bend and shape and mold and push back against the world’⁵. Friedrich Schiller’s poem ‘An die Freude’ (**Ode to Joy**) and the widely recognisable melody made famous by the chorale finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, treats joy as not just an emotion, but as a force of nature.⁶ Joy coaxes ‘flowers from the buds’ and is ‘drunk by every being’. Joy is for ‘all ye millions!’ – a message evoked in each stanza as Schiller extends joy to ‘the worms’ and to ‘every good thing’ beyond the stars. He praises the power of joy to efface social and political inequalities, unite people in their differences, and celebrates the power of personal friendship – a metaphor extended to encompass the entire human race where ‘every man becomes a brother’. ‘**Ode to Joy**’ honours joy as the ‘hardy mainspring/Of the universe’.

At its core, ‘**Ode to Joy**’ is about humanity. It’s the hymn to the dream, the capacity of human beings to dream.⁷

Ode to Joy challenges us to imagine something better and dares us to dream for our classrooms, communities and worlds. **Ode to Joy** recognises the challenges of our daily realities yet encourages opportunities to linger in the big and little joys of our work and amplify the components of our profession that makes it fun, bold, humorous, whimsical and energetic – both for us and for our students. At the heart of this State Conference is the belief that joy is serious work and the spirit of dreaming is alive and well in each of us.

¹ Vo, C. (2025). [Why teachers feel time-poor with Professor Nicole Mockler](#). [YouTube].

² Deggans, E. (2024). [Jon Batiste reinterprets the classics on his new album ‘Beethoven’s Blues’](#). NPR.

³ Batiste, J. (2024). Ode to Joyful [Song]. On *Beethoven Blues (Batiste Piano Series, Vol. 1)*. Naht Jona, LLC.

⁴ Gross, T. (2024). [Jon Batiste finds the Blues in Beethoven](#). NPR.

⁵ Batiste, J. [@jonbatiste]. (October 28, 2024). [I love this part in “Für Elise-Batiste” as you can see by my huge grin](#) [Video]. Instagram.

⁶ McGath, G. (2023). [Schiller’s Ode to Joy, and Beethoven’s](#). The Online Library of Liberty.

⁷ Forbes. (2023). [This is the true meaning of Beethoven’s 9th](#). [YouTube].