Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives

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Acknowledgement of Country
Social Education at the Crossroads

Indigenous Perspectives: a vital dimension of Social Education
Acknowledgement of Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation
Terminology - Who is Indigenous?

“An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives.”

*Australian Government definition*
Terminology - Aboriginal State Names:

Victoria - Koorie
New South Wales - Koori, Goorie, Koorie, Coorie, Murri (top part of the State)
South Australia - Nunga
Western Australia - Nyoongah
Northern Territory - tend to use their own names, eg, Yolngu (Arnhemland); Anangu (Central Australia)
Queensland - Murri
Tasmania - Palawa
Torres Strait Islanders like NT tend to use their own names, eg Murray Island peoples, Mer Island peoples.
Past definitions of Aboriginal identity

From 1910 to the 1940s white people classified Indigenous people into castes. They defined
- a 'full-blood' as a person who had no white blood,
- a 'half-caste' as someone with one white parent,
- a 'quadroon' or 'quarter-caste' as someone with an Aboriginal grandfather or grandmother,
- a 'octroon' as someone whose great-grandfather or great-grandmother was Aboriginal...

These terms are not acceptable today.
The year is 2012, and we have crossed over the dawn of the new millennium.

I hope to provide you with a window of opportunity to be introduced to ‘Australia’s best kept secret.’

This ‘secret’ is the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is intrinsically woven into the history of this country, which makes it a part of your history too!
In order to get the Aboriginal perspective happening, reflect on the following:

• What do you know about the history of Aboriginal Australian & Torres Strait Islander’s peoples?
• What did you learn at school about this history?
• Do you know the name of the Aboriginal group that lived in your area before the arrival of Europeans?
In order to get the Aboriginal perspective happening, reflect on the following?

What do I know about...

- Government & Protection Polices that governed the lives of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples until 1967?
- Missions and Reserves - why were these places set up? Did these ‘establishments’ harm or benefit Aboriginal people?
- Family and kinship structures that are an integral part of Aboriginal society?
In order to get the Aboriginal perspective happening, reflect on the following?

**Personal Reflection...**

- What did you learn at school about the European colonisation of Victoria?
- Do you know what are the major areas of conflict between the Aboriginal and Europeans peoples.
- What was the Aboriginal response to European colonisation?
- What was the impact of colonisation for Victorian Aboriginal peoples?
Before satisfying the desire to move ahead and forge a nation that in principle looks really good, there is the need to look back and not only see, but to also acknowledge the reality that is our past.

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander history - 60,000 years plus

Non-Indigenous history – 214 years

Whose history do we teach in schools?
• What will it take for us to experience the kind of truth that has the power to hurt and heal at the same time?
• If we are about **healing** and not **upheaval**, how do we acknowledge what can be seen as a flaw on how Australian history is presented?
• What will **reconnect us to our past** and help us to re-inhabit a moment in time that is very painful?
• How do we deal with **the true realities** that await us there?
Working with Indigenous Communities

Be Controversial

Cultural protocols

Courage

Out of comfort zone

Knowledge

Language

Learning styles

To challenge & be challenged

Part of the solution
Some facts about Aboriginal culture

We belong to the world’s oldest, continuous living culture.

Current documentation says we have occupied Australia for about 60,000 years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples believe we have been here since the first day, emerging directly out of the Dreaming of our Creative Ancestors.
Australia has over 500 different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are focused on recording the origins of life.

We strongly value oral traditions - stories and sacred messages were passed on from one generation to the next using different concepts.

* The written form of other civilisations was not part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
Time for an imaginative journey into the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that will.

Develop an understanding of where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander story is placed in Australia’s history.

Increase your understanding of the importance of land to the culture and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Totems and Identity

* An important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.
* Link to the country of birth, their clan group and ultimately to the Creator Spirit (God).
* There are a number of different totemic relationships - individuals can possess one or more totemic connections.
* Each totem carries specific responsibilities and obligations, and unites us with the land, plant and animal spirits of our particular clan area.
Examples of different totems:

* Inherited totems - passed on from one generation to the next via kinship lines (can be either patriarchal or matriarchal)

* Gender based totems (women’s business/men’s business).

* Moiety totem – this totem determined a number of things, eg a marriage partner had to be chosen from the opposite moiety.

* Birth totem – associated with the place of birth.
Significant Wurundjeri Totems

Bunjil the Eagle

Waa the Crow
My totems...

Gunditjmara – Black Cockatoo

Boonitj Iwaidja - Crocodile
On receipt of our totems, we become “custodians” of the land.

We are taught to love, honour and respect the land and it is the sacred duty of all to safeguard the precious balance of nature that has been created at all times.

You must protect the delicate balance that nature has created. (Sustainability)
Totems can be linked to religion with the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. (Naming & Belonging).

Baptism ➔ connected to the Church ➔ united with God.

In Aboriginal culture when a totem is received, the individual is bound to the land of their totem, it becomes an intrinsic part of their identity.

This provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with an intimate link to the Creator Spirit.
The art of storytelling...

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people passed on story using a number of different concepts, and not in the ‘written’ form as other civilisations did.
Painting a story

Gunditjmara Possum Skin Cloak
By viewing Aboriginal art, we can tell a number of things about the artist:

* where they are from

* what their country looks like

* what is important to them, such as the totem/s that are part of their identity

* to the ‘initiated’, the sacred story contained within can be revealed through ceremony
Dancing the story...

Another way that Indigenous Australians communicated the story from one generation to the next was through the dance.

The body art that covers the dancers who are to perform is of cultural and spiritual significance, and in many cases the painting of the body takes much longer than the actual dance.
To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ‘dancing their totem’ is a sacred act performed as a mark of honour and respect.
FORCED MIGRATION(Policy)

As part of Government policy, Aboriginal people were placed on mission stations and reserves.

Indigenous peoples were forcibly moved from their traditional homelands...This ‘displacement’ caused major problems in terms of identity and belonging.

In many cases, traditional enemies were often forced to live together on the same mission station.
An Act to provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria.

[11th November 1869.]

BE it enacted by the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly of Victoria in this present Parliament assembled and by the authority of the same as follows (that is to say):—

1. Save where there is something in the context repugnant thereto or inconsistent therewith the following words shall have the respective meanings hereby assigned to them (that is to say):—

The word "Governor" shall mean the person administering the Government acting by and with the advice of the Executive Council.

The word "Minister" shall mean the responsible Minister of the Crown administering this Act.

The word "Board" shall mean the board for the protection of the aborigines.

2. It shall be lawful for the Governor from time to time to make regulations and orders for any of the purposes hereinafter mentioned, and at any time to rescind or alter such regulations (that is to say):—

(i.) For prescribing the place where any aboriginal or any tribe of aborigines shall reside.

(ii.) For prescribing the terms on which contracts for and on behalf of aboriginals may be made with Europeans, and upon which certificates may be granted to aboriginals who may be able and willing to earn a living by their own exertions.

(iii.) For

Published as a Supplement to the 'Victoria Government Gazette' of Friday, 12th November, 1869.
Aboriginal Stolen Generations

Read more at www.CreativeSpirits.info
Singing the story...traditional

A song is sung as a series comprising many short verses

Each verse relates to an event or place associated with the ancestors

Ceremonial singing - appropriate verses used.

Songlines can follow a totemic line which can cross over the boundaries of many different Aboriginal groups...
The Songman/Songwoman
* highly regarded
* special performer who composed songs to describe daily happenings
* sang the songs handed down from ancestors.

Opera, folk and rock singer Shellie Morris (right), with Borroloola song woman Amy Friday
Telling a story (Oral Traditions of Storytelling)

In Aboriginal society, an Elder is a highly respected member of the group and is responsible for:

* Ensuring the Dreaming Stories are being told properly and regularly.
* Check that the laws of the land were being observed and rituals practiced daily.
* Making decisions for the whole group after consultations with other Elders.
* Making certain that their country was protected and maintained.
You should now have a sense what was important to Indigenous Australians prior to 1788: People, Spirit, Land & how Indigenous Australians handed their stories from generation to generation by means of:

- Art & Painting
- Song
- Dance
- Storytelling
Prior to colonisation the Dreaming was complete. Ever present in the traditional life of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders were:

* The Land / Mother
* Identity / totems
* Family
* Ceremony
* Sacred Sites
* Language
* Songs and Dances
* Spirituality

The bush that gave: shelter, food, clothing, healing medicines
What happened to change this for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

...
Destruction ➔ Disconnection
When Europeans came to this land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were dispossessed of:

**LAND** - the very essence of our being. From the land of our ancestors came our past which guided us through the present and prepared us for the future.

When the pastoralists cleared the land, they took away our Dreaming.
Inequity

We've decided to compromise. We keep the land, the mineral rights, natural resources, fishing and timber, and in return we'll acknowledge you as the traditional owners of it.
With the land came our IDENTITY LANGUAGE...that helped pass on the story, speak no more your tongue...

TOTEMS that were our connection to the plants, animals and landforms of our areas.

CEREMONY / SACRED PLACES
THE DANCE & SONGS, an important part of the Dreaming were *ordered* to be silent.

No more dancing, no more song.

This was part of the "civilising the natives" policy of the government and missionaries.

Practise culture => denied rations

Choice for Indigenous peoples?
Only ONE choice => RATIONS were needed survival
And if that was not enough, they then took our CHILDREN and tore our families apart...
Reflect on your feelings in response to this action.

Imagine living with the fact that you could be ‘selected’ for removal at any time. (Stolen Generations)

How would you feel?

Would/could you adapt to your ‘new’ group? Would the new group make you feel welcome?

Can you imagine the devastation?
Love and Reconciliation is at the very core of the Gospel, where we have a God that tells us to ‘love one another as I have loved you’.

Reconciliation is so simple, in its purest form it is simply an act of love. Nothing more, nothing less.

It is our human nature that has created barriers based on our own prejudices, fears and inhibitions, to create something that is clearly not the intention of our God.
But what kind of love is it that:

* develops policies that take away a person’s identity?
* herds people onto mission stations and reserves in chains, under the guise of ‘civilising them’ and providing a better way of life for them?
* brings terror into the lives of peoples whose culture is focussed on protecting and nurturing people, spirit and creation.
* brings in laws that takes children away from their mothers, and then says it’s for the best?
Reflect on the following:

Look at your painting now...what do you see?

Can the ‘ripped pieces’ of Indigenous Australia’s history be put back together?

If yes...how? If no...why not?

What is the role of Catholic Education in this process?
http://www.yarrahealing.catholic.edu.au/
Closing the Gap

Rich Question
How can we work to a more ‘equitable’ world?

Indigenous Perspectives
Comparison of the living conditions and health related issues round the world, including Aboriginal people
Close examination of ‘Close the Gap’ campaign in addressing these inequities.
Introduction

This section offers teachers curriculum support materials and holds information on School Initiatives which showcase some exemplary projects, programs and celebrations for Reconciliation that have been undertaken by Catholic schools, deaneries and parishes in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Key Resources

Mark Rose introduces this section by discussing the need for appropriate cultural heritage education. This section also offers information about other key resources and some learning outcomes for students.

V.E.L.S.

Here you will be provided with VELS information for Levels 2 through to 6. Information about the 1967 Referendum unit is also provided.

Inquiry Learning (Lesson Plans)

This section provides a listing of units which have been designed to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into integrated units of work that are traditionally taught in Primary schools.
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The following units have been designed to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into integrated units of work that are traditionally taught in Primary schools. The units are drawn from the curriculum content described in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. These units were developed with and trialled by 4 Catholic primary schools in Melbourne.

**Unit 1: Celebrating Culture**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St Catherine’s, Melton West

This unit is about the different cultures that coexist in the local community and in Australia. It explores the ways in which people from these cultures express their beliefs and values through art, music, dance, drama, and especially story. Students will compare the similarities and differences between a variety of cultures that are significant in the school and local community including Indigenous Australian culture. They will have the opportunity to create some art works and experience some stories from different cultures. Students will begin to develop an understanding that the Australian nation is enriched by the diversity of cultures that contribute to it.

**Unit 2: Walking with the Wurundjeri**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St Brigid’s, Gisborne

This unit is about local community and how it has changed over time. During the unit students investigate life as it is now, in and around the local community. They use stories, songs, and activities to reflect on the environment, community, and climate and to provide awareness and respect for the local community and their environment.

**Unit 3: Signs of Celebration**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St Joseph’s, Kilsyth

This unit is about exploring the cultural diversity of the local community and celebrating the cultural traditions of Australia. Students will learn about the significance of cultural celebration through traditional stories, songs, and activities. They will also explore their own cultural heritage and the importance of respecting and acknowledging the cultural traditions of others.

**Unit 4: We Are One**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St John’s, Eltham

This unit is about understanding the diversity of cultures that exist within the local community and how they contribute to the richness of the Australian culture. Students will explore the importance of unity and diversity through stories, songs, and activities that celebrate the cultural traditions of the local community.

**Unit 5: Melbourne Dreaming**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St Paul’s, South Melbourne

This unit is about exploring the cultural heritage of the local community and understanding its significance. Students will learn about the history and traditions of the local community through stories, songs, and activities. They will also explore their own cultural heritage and the importance of respecting and acknowledging the cultural traditions of others.

**Unit 6: Sacred Land**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St Mary’s, Glen Iris

This unit is about understanding the importance of place and appreciating the significance of the natural environment. Students will explore the cultural significance of the local community and its relationship with the natural environment. They will also learn about the importance of protecting and conserving the natural environment.

**Unit 7: Changing Lives Changing Ways**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St Andrew’s, Box Hill

This unit is about exploring the impact of cultural diversity on the local community and understanding the importance of respecting and acknowledging the cultural traditions of others. Students will learn about the significance of cultural diversity through stories, songs, and activities that celebrate the cultural traditions of the local community.

**Unit 8: Closing the Gap**
Level: Years 1 and 2
School: St Teresa’s, Ringwood

This unit is about understanding the importance of acknowledging and respecting the cultural heritage of the local community and its significance. Students will explore the significance of cultural diversity through stories, songs, and activities that celebrate the cultural traditions of the local community.

**Key Resources**

**School Initiatives**
Unit 5: Melbourne Dreaming

Level 3 VELS, Years 3 and 4

Overview

This unit is about the history and development of Melbourne. During this unit students investigate the people who make up the Kulin Nation, in particular the Wurundjeri and the Boon Wurrung and their role as traditional landowners of the area we now know as Melbourne. They will find out about significant people and events that have contributed to Melbourne’s continuing story. They will identify changes that have occurred, and the effects of these changes on the people and the land. They will begin to consider why it is important to remember and preserve stories and artefacts from the past.

Understandings
Celebrating Culture (1/2)

Rich Question
How do we celebrate our culture?

Indigenous Perspectives
How Aboriginals express their beliefs and values through art, music, dance and story.
Explore similarities and differences between cultures
Investigation of Aboriginal myths and legends
Wurundjeri Wandering (1/2)

Rich Question
How has life changed for the people in our local community?

Indigenous Perspectives
Explore what the community looked like long ago (when it was first settled by Europeans and long, long ago (before European settlement.) education, food, family, transport, shelter, traditions

Learning about local Aboriginal people in Gisborne (Gunung Willam Ballack)
Efficient learners are persistent...
Rich Question
How do symbols and celebrations reveal what people value?

Indigenous Perspectives
The importance of celebrations in all communities
Identifying Aboriginal symbols and their significance in Aboriginal culture
Compare different celebrations such as Welcome to Country, Aboriginal smoking celebrations, birthdays and Anzac Day
We Are One (3/4)

Rich Question
What inspires ordinary Australians to do extraordinary things?

Indigenous Perspectives
‘Who are Australians?’ recognising that Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for more than 60,000 years

Very strong focus on identity in relation to multiculturalism.

Study the contribution made by a variety of individuals, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples
Melbourne Dreaming (3/4)

Rich Question
How have changes in Melbourne affected the lives of people?

Indigenous Perspectives
Investigate the people who make up the Kulin Nation and their role as traditional owners
The importance of preserving stories and artefacts from the past
Gaining an understanding of what Melbourne looked like prior to white settlement
Sacred Land (5/6)

Rich Question
Will continuing the practices of the Aboriginal people allow us to have a sustainable future?

Indigenous Perspectives
How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cared for the land and their spiritual connection between the people and their land
Make links about what they have learned between the sustainable practices and conservation practised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with current environmental issues
Changing lives, changing ways (5/6)

Rich Question
How does an accurate knowledge of events in Australia’s past help us to understand Australia today?

Indigenous Perspectives
The arrival of the First Fleet and its impact on the Aboriginal people
The changes to their lives as a result of this event
View a range of sources with a critical lens questioning the perspectives of the authors
Ancient Civilisations Year 7

During the unit the students learn about Ancient Aboriginal society, and how it is the world’s oldest surviving culture. They will also investigate other Ancient civilisations: Sumer, Egypt, Rome, Greece and China.

They analyse change and continuity over time and compare key aspects of these past societies. Students also make links to today and examine the influences of ancient societies on contemporary societies.
Ancient Civilisations

Essential Understandings
The organisation and lifestyle of ancient Australian Aboriginal communities, the world’s oldest enduring culture.

Essential Questions
Why has the Aboriginal culture endured when many other ancient cultures didn’t?
Environment & Sustainability Year 8

During this unit students investigate ways of maintaining a sustainable planet for the future. They examine the cause and effect of people’s use of the earth’s resources and human impact on the environment.

They explore the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander philosophy and connection to the land, and question how their sustainable practices can be used to contribute to a healthier sustainable environment for all Australians.
Essential understandings
How Aboriginal people have always assumed stewardship of the earth. Aboriginal people saw themselves as part of the environment; they believed Mother Nature provided for them and they had a responsibility to care for her.

Aboriginal people’s beliefs about and approaches to sustainable land management, which can continue to contribute to a healthier sustainable environment for all Australians.

Essential Questions
Can Aboriginal beliefs and practices in particular, enable us to have a sustainable future?
Questions/concerns of teachers

- Not being an expert
- Resources
- Language/terminology
- Political correctness
- Family/parent attitudes
- Coverage of VELS
**Key learnings**

* Imperative to find out prior knowledge
* It is essential to incorporate authentic experiences
* Use understandings to keep you focussed
* Need to dig below the surface when finding information
* Be critical when selecting resources - Some of the older resources are still good
Key Learnings

* Make links to today and students’ lives
* Flexible planning
* Perspectives can sometimes be subtle and at other times be very explicit
* Passion
* Teacher as learner
* Build partnerships within the local and wider community
* Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated  www.vaeai.org.au/
“You are now at a crossroads. This is your opportunity to make the most important decision you will ever make. Forget your past. Who are you now? Who have you decided you really are now? Don't think about who you have been. Who are you now? Who have you decided to become? Make this decision consciously. Make it carefully. Make it powerfully.”

Anthony Robbins