

# Teacher notes



Occupation: Native

This education resource was created in partnership with Reconciliation Australia.



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Any questions? Contact [sbslearn@sbs.com.au](mailto:sbslearn@sbs.com.au)



# 1. About the Teacher Notes

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## About the Resource

This SBS Learn resource is shaped around three short clips from the *Occupation: Native* documentary film. While the stand-alone clips have been selected to serve as meaningful stimuli for classroom learning, teachers and students are also encouraged to consider them in the context of viewing the full-length documentary.

## About the Documentary

The majority of Australians grew up with a very one-sided history of our nation. From white settlement to today, that account has mostly been viewed from a single perspective. *Occupation: Native* sets out to change that. Using a range of approaches – some serious, some humorous – filmmaker Trisha Morton-Thomas adjusts the narrative to include the experience and history of Australia's Indigenous community. There's always more than one way to look at a story, and this documentary presents – without judgement – a perspective that's been disregarded for too long.

**Director:** Trisha Morton-Thomas

**Writer:** Trisha Morton-Thomas

**Producers:** Rachel Clements, Meredith Garlick, Trisha Morton-Thomas

**Director of Photography:** Tim Alewood

**Editor:** James Bradley



# 3. Curriculum Links

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## Curriculum Links

The documentary film, *Occupation: Native*, and the classroom resources are closely linked to the following Australian Curriculum Content Descriptions:

### Humanities and Social Sciences

Year 6: [ACHASSK135](#) [ACHASSK137](#) [ACHASSI128](#)

Year 7: [ACHASSI156](#)

Year 7 (Civics and Citizenship): [ACHCK053](#)

Year 8 (Civics and Citizenship): [ACHCK066](#)

Year 9 (History): [ACDSEH020](#)

Year 10 (History): [ACDSEH106](#) [ACDSEH143](#) [ACHHS182](#) [ACDSEH104](#) [ACOKFH022](#)

### English

Year 7: [ACELT1619](#)

Year 8: [ACELT1806](#)

Year 9: [ACELY1739](#)

Each of these Content Descriptions and/or their Elaborations are explicitly tied to the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures](#) cross-curriculum priority. Teachers are encouraged to consider how they may be able to adopt and adapt the suggested classroom activities outlined below to suit further subject areas and/or year levels. You can download a document containing the [full curriculum descriptors here](#).

## 4. Recommendations Before Viewing in the Classroom

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### Recommendations Before Viewing in the Classroom

As with all resources, teachers are encouraged to watch *Occupation: Native* and the associated clips before showing them to students. The content addresses some significant themes and it is important for teachers to feel comfortable with the content before introducing it in the classroom. These resources have been designed to help you feel more confident to engage in safe and robust discussions in your classroom.

- Talk, if possible, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, families and/or local community members before using these learning resources. *Occupation: Native* raises themes that may be sensitive for students, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Considering and pre-empting possible responses is very important.
- Set classroom ground rules: Due to the potentially sensitive nature of some of the content in *Occupation: Native*, setting classroom ground rules with your students before viewing is an important step in creating a safe space and helping develop mutual respect and understanding between the members of your classroom community.

#### Examples of Classroom Ground Rules

**Be respectful:** Each person has their own beliefs and values.

**Value diversity:** Each person has their own world views, experiences and opinions.

**Listen politely:** Each person has a right to contribute without pressure or intimidation.

**Act with honour and courage:** Be brave in sharing experiences, ideas and opinions.

**Appreciate privacy:** Each person has the right to uphold their privacy.

**Act responsibly:** Share feedback with thoughtful consideration and a positive attitude towards others.

As each classroom is unique, add any further rules that may be required.

Other ideas for consideration:

- Encourage students to frame discussion comments as their own (as in “I think”) and avoid forceful language (such as “you should”). Also encourage students to draw on evidence from their viewing, and from further critical research, in shaping their responses – engaging with diverse perspectives, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, is key to formulating strong understandings and responses.



## 4. Recommendations Before Viewing in the Classroom continued

- When responding to others in classroom discussion or within the associated activities, encourage students to challenge *ideas* rather than people. Allow adequate time at the end of each viewing session to debrief the content, discussion and associated activities.

For further guidance around fostering safe and respectful learning environments, visit the below sources from Reconciliation Australia's [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning](#) online platform:

- [Cultural Safety and Respect in the Classroom](#)
- [Guide to Using Respectful and Inclusive Language and Terminology](#)

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# 5. Activities

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## Clip 1: Historical Acceptance



### Reflective/Discussion Questions

After viewing the above film clip, encourage students to reflect on, and respectfully discuss, the following:

1. Alluding to the process of Federation, and the enforcement of the Constitution of Australia in 1901, the Narrator exclaims, *“Even though us blackfellas were here first, they decided not to include us in the new country. Now where’s the old Aussie “fair go” in that?!”*

How have colonial laws, policies, and historical accounts marginalised and/or excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures? Can you identify any examples of symbolic and/or practical actions that have since been made to help to make amends for the injustices of the past, and to ensure that these wrongs are not repeated? Consider engaging with [this reconciliation timeline](#) for some relevant information and ideas:

2. This film clip ends with a “still kicking!” montage. Why is it important to appreciate the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, despite the intergenerational inequalities and inequities experienced as a result of unjust colonial policies and practices?
3. This clip mentions the date of Federation and the corresponding date on which Australia Day was originally marked as a national day of celebration *“And so, on the first of January, 1901, the Federation of Australia was born. ‘What!?’ First of January? You mean, I’ve been protesting Australia Day on the wrong date?”*

Why do you think January 26 can be considered a contentious date on which to



## 5. Activities continued

celebrate Australia Day for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Based on the film clip's content, and in the context of the current "Change the Date" debate, why do you think it is important to appreciate that the debate around the date on which Australia Day is scheduled to be celebrated is not new?

4. The concept of a national 'Australian identity' is brought forward in this short film clip. What do you think some of the shared characteristics of an Australian national identity are? Why is it important to appreciate that, since tens of thousands of years prior to colonisation, more than 250 distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait geo-cultural communities of Nations have existed? Why do you think it is important to promote an Australian society that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity and sense of unity?

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## 5. Activities continued

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### Clip 2: Untold History



#### Reflective/Discussion Questions

After viewing the above film clip, encourage students to reflect on, and respectfully discuss, the following:

1. How does history that Pascoe speaks of compare with the two colonial historical accounts recited in *Clip 1: Historical Acceptance*, and the accounts in many standard “Australian history” textbooks? Why is it important to not just acknowledge, but also celebrate, the rich, longstanding, and continuing cultures and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

#### Activity:

Historical acceptance is one of the five key dimensions of reconciliation in Australia. At one point in the full-length documentary film, the Narrator expresses, *“Alright, let’s say we re-write our history to reflect the truth, then where do we start? Well, there’s always the beginning... On this country, us blackfellas have the longest continuing laws, customs, beliefs and connection to land on the planet. Now, I know it’s hard enough to imagine 3, 4, 5 hundred years, but try and get your head around 77,000 years. Now looking at it this way might help: I’m going to draw this line in the sand continuously for 77 seconds, and each second will represent a thousand years...”*

Encourage each student to silently draw a line in the sand, continuously for 77 seconds, reminding them that each second will represent a thousand years. A variation to this activity could involve students measuring out a 77-metre-long line, with each meter representing a thousand-year time period.

## 5. Activities continued

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After carrying out this activity, set time aside for students to reflect on, and discuss:

- Why is it important to acknowledge, appreciate, and celebrate, the tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories prior to British arrival in Australia in 1788?
- Why is it simultaneously important not to simply relegate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the past, and to recognise that these peoples and cultures continue to have an active and important presence to this day?
- Recognising that Australian history since colonisation is represented by less than your final second/metre count, has this activity challenged you to reconsider the way in which one thinks or learns about 'Australian history'? How/why?
- What are your hopes for the future of Australia, particularly with regard to the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? What might Australia 'look like' in one thousand years? What might it 'feel' like?

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### Clip 3: Frontier Wars



#### Reflective/Discussion Questions

After viewing the above film clip, encourage students to reflect on, and respectfully discuss, the following:

1. This film clip opens with a dramatic balloon popping sequence, followed shortly thereafter by a visual representation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic-cultural map of Australia being whitewashed. What does the powerful symbolism within these visual sequences suggest about the impacts of colonisation in Australia on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures?
2. *“People my age were told this country was settled peacefully. Yeah right!”* This sarcastic statement is used by the Narrator/Director, Trisha Morton-Thomas, to debunk the myth of peaceful colonial settlement in Australia. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “European colonial arrival was an invasion, and not a peaceful settlement” and why? Use evidence and quotes from the text to support/challenge your perspective.
3. The wider documentary film explores examples of visitation to Australia by foreign nations for hundreds of years prior to British arrival in 1788: *“Going back over 500 years, Aboriginal people were being visited by explorers and traders like the Macassans, the Portuguese, Arabs, Chinese, Dutch and French, and not one of them took over our Country or tried to change us. They were the kind of visitors that you don’t mind dropping in on you and, like all good visitors, they went home again and they told other mob about my mob’s deadly Country. Pretty soon, a tribe called ‘English’ heard all the stories...”*

What makes a respectful ‘visitor’? What kind of sensitivities and responsibilities do you think visitors should uphold in order to meaningfully demonstrate this respect?



## 5. Activities continued

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4. In the full-length documentary film, audiences are also introduced to a parody sequence which compares British colonists to 'boat people'. During this sequence, the following comment is made: *"I'm sick to death of these WW' boat people. They land on our Country, they disrespect us and our way of life, they take our land, they make criminal gangs, they supply our kids with drugs and alcohol, they don't assimilate into our communities, and they don't even try to learn our language!"*

Although comic in nature, what does this comment indicate about the serious impacts of British colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures? How does it help to highlight the irony behind the contemporary debate about asylum seekers (so-called 'boat people')? What are some of the unjust policies and practices directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and introduced by colonial authorities, who themselves arrived in Australia by boat?

5. Colonial historical accounts, such as that of British Explorer, Sir Thomas Mitchell, are recited within this short film clip and throughout the full-length documentary film. Towards the end of this short clip, it includes a comment, *"Our history books reckon that explorers like Mitchell, Sturt, Kennedy, Eyre and Burke and Wills opened up this country but, once again, they forgot to mention us blackfellas."* Similarly, the final message of the full-length film is, *"This is the end of our film, but it's not the end of our journey. If Australia continues to shine a light on the white story, but keep the black story in the dark, we're never going to be able to come together, and we're never going to be able to go into a future where we can be friends. Because, we all want to be friends, hey?!"*

Why is it important to critically engage with a variety of perspectives – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives – to develop a holistic understanding of the past? Why is a holistic understanding of the past necessary for understanding, and positively shaping, the present and the future? Why is truth-telling, and historical acceptance, important to reconciliation in Australia?

#### Activity

While the short film clip above provides some more general insights into the historical relationships between colonial authorities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the wider documentary film also explores some specific examples through following the stories of Aboriginal figures such as Bennelong, Pemulwuy and Yemmerrawanne. Support students to carry out some careful and critical research about the life of Bennelong, Pemulwuy and/or Yemmerrawanne, focusing their research on these people's relationships with colonial authorities. Encourage students to reflect on:

- What these relationships tell us about the state of race relations in Australia in the early colonial era;
- Why do you think a focus on race relations and the valuing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, rights and experiences, important to reconciliation in Australia?
- Set time aside for students to present their research and reflections in the form of a critical report, or a creative response (poem or artwork, for example).



## 5. Activities continued

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### Clip 4: Slavery and Stolen Wages



#### Reflective/Discussion Questions

After viewing the above film clip, encourage students to reflect on, and respectfully discuss, the following questions:

1. The opening sequence in this short film clip alludes to some of the crimes for which convicts were historically sentenced to imprisonment. The Narrator then poses the following rhetorical: *“Is it just me or does that sound real petty? Now, imagine if those kind of convictions were happening today...”* you are then shown a document with convictions of Aboriginal men and women for similar crimes as recent as 2014.

What does the film clip suggest about the parallels between convict prison sentences for petty crimes, and the petty crimes for which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are continuing to be incarcerated for to this day?

In 2016 it marked the 25th anniversary of the tabling of the recommendations of the [Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#), one of which stated that imprisonment should be used as a last result only. Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rates of incarceration continue to be markedly higher than those of the general Australian population (and have indeed doubled in number since the Royal Commission), what kind of government understandings and actions do you think might be important to improving these circumstances into the future? Why is it important for these understandings and actions to be based on meaningful consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities?

2. Alluding to the end of convict labour in Australia, the Narrator articulates, *“There’s no more convict labour, so the young Aussie country finds itself in a wee spot of bother... They was looking at us [Aboriginal people] alright, for our own “protection,” they reckon...”*

What is ironic about colonial policies and practices of so-called “protection”? Whose interests were these policies and practices serving or “protecting”? What are some

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of the immediate and intergenerational impacts of these policies and practices on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures?

3. *“Now that the Aussies couldn’t treat their own mob like white slaves, it wasn’t long before they dragged in us blackfellas and South Sea Islanders to take their place,”* explains the Narrator. Historian and Author, Dr Thalia Anthony, continues by explaining *“Aboriginal people were quite key to a lot of the Australian industries... generations and generations of Aboriginal families being forced into work. Their labour value was very high to the big bosses in the early 20th century, right up until the 1970s. You were born to be exploited, to be a worker, and, really from the age of 10, children would be expected to undertake minimal duties in terms of working on the fences, for example, working in the yards, working as domestics for the women. But, as they got older, they’d take on much more high level responsibilities. This idea of “citizenship” didn’t apply to Aboriginal people. Instead, they were treated effectively as disposable labour. I think the problem is that it is not very well documented, so the degree of exploitation is still something that is somewhat buried.”*

What evidence is there to indicate that, historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were treated as “slaves” rather than “citizens” by colonial authorities? What is problematic about the fact that evidence of the degree of exploitation continues to be somewhat “buried”? What value is there in bringing some of this evidence to the surface, and actively acknowledging it?

4. Activist and Academic, Ken Canning, states, *“We had slavery in this country; non-Aboriginal people don’t know that. We had the whole cattle industry, we had domestic servants on the cattle industry working for not one penny. For generations, the cattle industry was on the backs of Aboriginal people. Pearlising industries, a lot of industries that brought wealth to this country, no wages were paid. So we became a wealth country on slave labour.”*

What is the relationship between stolen generations, stolen wages and slavery? In what ways has the prosperity of the British colony been built on the exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and how does acknowledging this help to explain some of the socio-economic inequalities/inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities to this day?

### Activity

In the full-length documentary film, following on from the short film clip above, the Narrator articulates, *“And they reckon Australia was built on the back of a sheep! ... My mob have been called “lazy” ever since we stopped working for free! ... Sick of being imprisoned like slaves, and tired of being refugees in their own Country, my mob keep fighting...”*

Support each student to select an example of an important event or movement in the fight for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and freedoms. Some examples explored in the film include: William Cooper’s Petition to the King; the Freedom Ride; the Wave Hill Walk-Off; the erection of the Tent Embassy and subsequent protests; and the Mabo decision.



## 5. Activities continued

Encourage each student to create a poster about their selected event or movement which helps to summarise, and explain:

- Who was involved in the event/movement;
- What the goal of the event/movement was;
- What the event/movement helped to achieve.

Display each student's poster in chronological order along your classroom wall to construct a timeline of these important events or movements in the fight for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and freedoms. At the end of the timeline, include a whole-class poster which summarises students' thoughts about what they believe some important 'next steps' might be in strengthening the recognition of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights into the future.

[Sign up here](#) to get a free 'reconciliation timeline' classroom poster.

My own notes

## 6 Further Resources

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### Further Resources

#### SBS Learn

[SBS Learn](#) is our online education hub housing all schools resources to support SBS programming including; *My Grandmother's Lingo*, *The Boat*, *Go Back to Where You Came From*, *First Contact*, *Servant or Slave* and *Filthy Rich and Homeless*.

#### Related resources on SBS Learn:

- [Servant or Slave: Classroom Resources](#)
- [Explainer: What Were the Frontier Wars](#)
- [My Grandmothers Lingo: Interactive and Classroom Resources](#)

#### Narragunnawali

Reconciliation Australia's *Narragunnawali* platform aims to create a community of positive and engaged schools and early learning services that are committed to promoting reconciliation between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *Narragunnawali* is designed to support all schools and early learning services to develop environments that foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The cost-free [professional learning](#) and [curriculum resources](#) listed under the following reconciliation [Action](#) pages may be of particular relevance and significance in exploring some of the key content and themes of *Occupation: Native*:

- [Teach about Reconciliation](#)
- [Explore Current Affairs and Issues](#)
- [Recognise and Respect Rights](#)
- [Take Action against Racism](#)
- [Inclusive Policies](#)
- [Teach about Days of National Significance](#)

Consider engaging with some of the resources listed under these pages as Extension Activities to complement students' learning around the three *Occupation: Native* film clips above.

Many of the key themes explored through *Occupation: Native*, such as historical acceptance; race relations; and the importance of equality, equity and unity; simultaneously represent some of the five key and interrelated dimensions of reconciliation in Australia, as identified in the landmark [The State of Reconciliation in Australia](#) report, 2016. Consider engaging with [The State of Reconciliation in Australia Discussion Guide](#) to inspire further learning and action around these important themes.

- Reconciliation Australia - [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning](#)



[Find Occupation: Native on Facebook](#)

