



DAVID STRATTON, THE AUSTRALIAN

*“Deeply moving,  
evocative and beautiful.”*

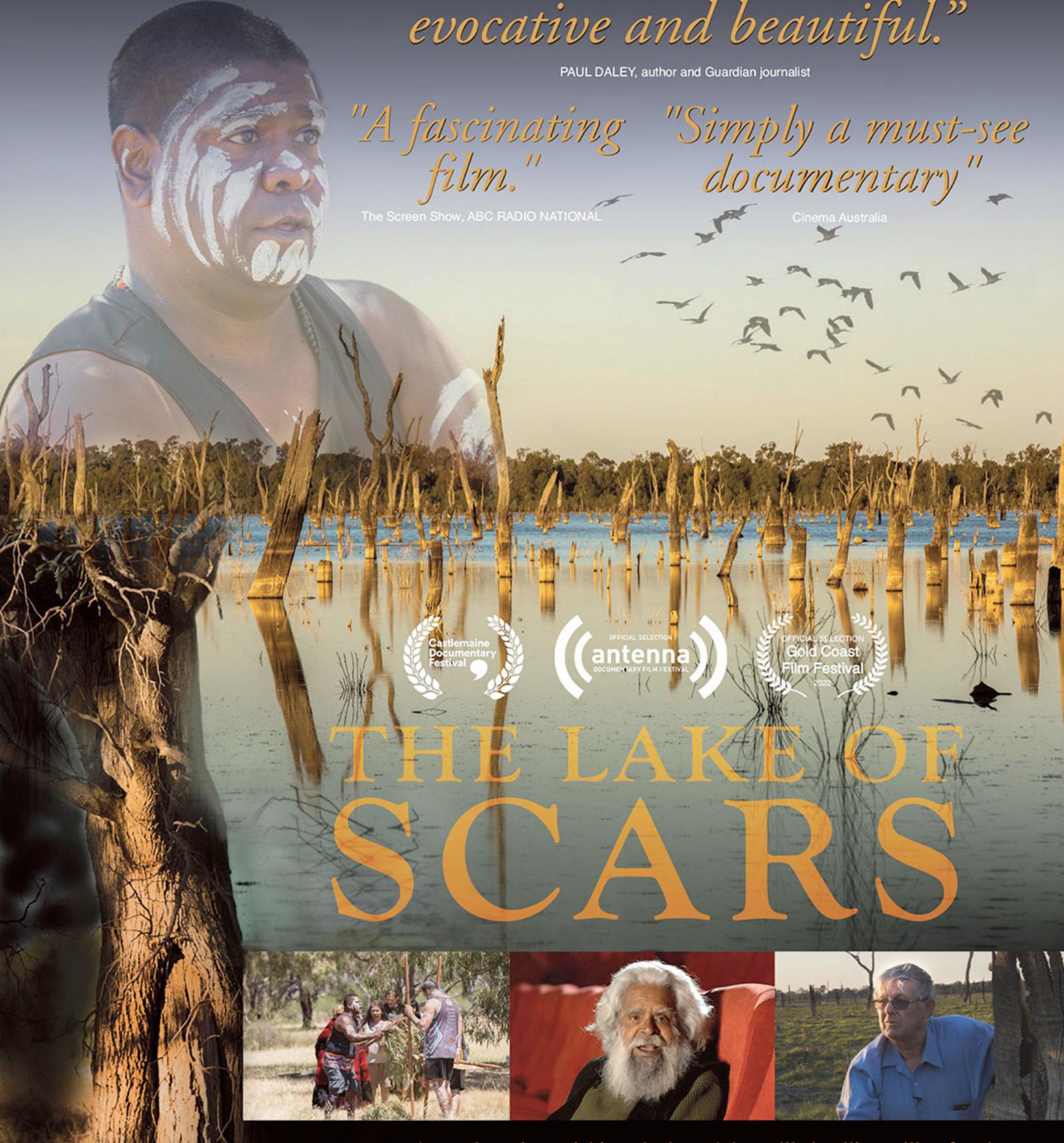
PAUL DALEY, author and Guardian journalist

*“A fascinating  
film.”*

The Screen Show, ABC RADIO NATIONAL

*“Simply a must-see  
documentary”*

Cinema Australia



# THE LAKE OF SCARS



An ancient site, a ticking clock, and the unlikely allies calling for change.



**Writer Thomas Redwood**

<https://theeducationshop.com.au>

<https://metromagazine.com.au>

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# STUDY GUIDE



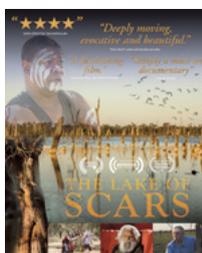
*The Lake of Scars* is supported by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, Documentary Australia Foundation, Eucalypt Australia, and Djaara (formerly Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation).

All photos taken by Rodney Dekker for Wedge-Tail Pictures

## SYNOPSIS

***The Lake of Scars*: An ancient site, a ticking clock, and the unlikely allies calling for change.**

In a corner of Australia exists a place of astounding natural beauty, archaeological significance, and age-old culture. But the Indigenous scarred trees and artefacts found here are at risk – until an unlikely intergenerational partnership comes forth to save the site for future generations. *The Lake of Scars* tells a story of allies, environmentalism and cultural rebirth; a picture of what reconciliation between Aboriginal and European Australians might look like. But is that idea harder than it seems?



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*The Lake of Scars* is as much a portrait of a hidden facet of Australian history and environment as it is a musing on what reconciliation can look like in Australia. While exploring the beautiful, mysterious scarred trees, middens and stone scatters left at one remarkable site in country Victoria – the ephemeral Lake Boort and surrounds – we meet the people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who are working against the clock to preserve and promote what they can. With organic relics at its heart - hundred year old scarred and dying trees - the film examines the preservation of culture and environment as our protagonists fight for scarred trees to be preserved, for middens and stone scatters to be protected and recognised, for environmental flows of water

to be allowed into the seasonal lake, and for a ‘keeping place’ to be built.

Within the keeping place they hope to put remarkable already deceased trees, as well as dozens of artefacts, or cultural materials, stored in the former farmer Paul’s garage, with the clan’s permission.

For Paul, getting the town’s almost entirely white population interested has been a slow, hard process. But slowly it takes note - it has an unusual shared history; some of the earliest photos ever taken in Australia were shot here, showing relations between settlers and Indigenous people. Paul works tirelessly with clan members - located in Melbourne and other towns, forced from their land in the subsequent 150 years - as together they try to forge a path forward to recognition. Ultimately though, it is the arrival in Boort of a Yung Balug man much younger than Paul, Jida Gulpilil – son of the late legendary actor David – who brings his own flavour to his mother Diane’s country.

Amidst a backdrop of treaty talks and the fight for water rights, can the relationship between characters of different backgrounds and generations survive the stresses of fighting for country, and overturn 200 years of protocol? Or does the road to reconciliation contain more bumps than we might imagine?





## CULTURAL SAFETY

Before proceeding with this study guide it is essential for teachers and students to become familiar with standards for cultural safety. The following links provide directions in (1) developing cultural safety in the classroom, (2) tackling the problem of tokenistic study and discussion of Indigenous subject matter and (3) creating safe environments for the use of visual media.

### Cultural Safety and Respect in the Classroom

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*The below text is taken from Nurrunnawali Reconciliation in Education website:*

Where appropriate, providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, Elders, families and wider community members to share their perspectives, histories and cultures in the classroom can be incredibly enriching. However, it is important for teachers and educators to be careful not to assume what stories or knowledges can be shared by particular community members, students, or children, and when, where and with whom they can be shared. This activity encourages staff to consider scenarios, evaluate policies and principles and consider how cultural safety could further be promoted within the wider school or early learning service community.

[www.narragunnawali.org.au/professional-learning/90/cultural-safety-and-respect-in-the-classroom](http://www.narragunnawali.org.au/professional-learning/90/cultural-safety-and-respect-in-the-classroom)

### Tackling Tokenism

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*The below text is taken from Nurrunnawali Reconciliation in Education website:*

'Tokenism' is often cited as a barrier to demonstrating respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and perspectives, particularly in visible and tangible ways. This activity encourages staff to reinterpret or reinvent a demonstration of respect which may, on the surface, appear to be tokenistic. In doing so, they consider how to effectively turn 'tokenism' into meaningful symbolic and practical action.

[www.narragunnawali.org.au/professional-learning/40/tackling-tokenism](http://www.narragunnawali.org.au/professional-learning/40/tackling-tokenism)

### Ensuring Film Screenings are Culturally Safe and Respectful

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The following links provides general guidelines around how to facilitate culturally safe and respectful screening sessions and pre-screening or post-screening discussions.

Cultural safety ([humanrights.gov.au](http://humanrights.gov.au)) - [www.childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/diverse-needs/cultural-safety](http://www.childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/diverse-needs/cultural-safety)

[www.sbs.com.au/sites/sbs.com.au/home/files/reconciliation\\_film\\_club\\_planning\\_guide.pdf](http://www.sbs.com.au/sites/sbs.com.au/home/files/reconciliation_film_club_planning_guide.pdf)



## PEOPLE FEATURED IN THE FILM

**PAUL HAW:** (above) A white former sheep farmer, horticulturist, Vietnam vet and self-published historian ('Footprints Across the Loddon Plains', Paul Haw and Margaret Munro) who lives on the edge of Lake Boort, riding a segway thanks to childhood polio. In his later years he has become ever more obsessed with documenting and caring for the scarred trees, middens and stone scatters in and around the lake, convincing white townfolk of the lake's cultural and environmental value, and working alongside, and for, the absent Yung Balug traditional owners.



**JIDA GULPILIL:** (below) Jida Gulpilil is Yung Balug/Dja Dja Wurrung on his mother's side; his late father, David Gulpilil, is a Yolngu man from the Northern Territory. After spending time running cultural tours in Kakadu, Jida returns to his Yung Balug country and gets the ball rolling carrying out cultural tours in, on

and around the lake and trees, receiving a grant from the local council to get the company its first 'gigs' with local schools. He returns ready to use and share the cultural knowledge he has received from his mother, from his father's Yolngu country, and to learn from Paul, too. Jida is an achiever who is pragmatic in hosting cultural events, using knowledge from his Dja Dja Wurrung and Yolngu heritage, gleaning from Paul, mixing and creating as he goes.

**CATHIE HAW:** (left) Paul's gentle, good-humoured wife who has, quietly, a similar moral fortitude. Like Paul, Cathie has for years talked the talk when it comes to reconciliatory acts at the local level.

**GARY MURRAY:** A strong and politicised spokesman and elder for the Yung Balug, Paul's main go-to concerning clan affairs over the years. Gary is the one of the most outspoken members of the clan, now living in Melbourne.

**NGARRA MURRAY:** Gary's daughter Ngarra is picking up the mantle her father is leaving and fighting for the advancement of Victorian Aboriginal people - and her clan. Ngarra returns to country many times with her four kids in tow, striving with her cousin Jida to pass on Yung Balug culture to a new generation, with a focus on land and water rights and Treaty talks.

**BOBBY NICHOLLS:** A thoughtful Yung Balug man and elder who cares deeply about the young people in his community and wants the lake preserved and cared for to nourish culture for the next generation.



## MEET THE FILMMAKERS

**Directed and shot by Bill Code:** Bill Code is a producer and DOP with a background in journalism and short documentary for Al Jazeera English, the BBC and others. Starting his career with SBS, he went on to head up video at Guardian Australia following its launch. *The Lake of Scars*, which he has been producing since late 2015, is his first feature length film.

**Storyteller/co-writer - Uncle Jack Charles:** Dja Dja Wurrung elder and Victorian icon Uncle Jack Charles carries out a unique writer/narrator/presenter role for this landmark documentary. Jack was selected by a group of Dja Dja Wurrung/Yung Balug elders and the film's co-producers. This unique role sees Jack guide us through the film from the front row of Melbourne's Lido cinema.

**Produced by Bill Code and Christian Pazzaglia:** Christian Pazzaglia is the producer of acclaimed experimental live cinema performances such as 'Miraculous Trajectories', directed by one of China's leading visual artists, Cheng Ran, and of the ground-breaking live documentary 'Those Left Waiting', directed by Michael Beets, which premiered at CPH:DOX in 2021. Christian is among the producers of the feature film 'Little Tornadoes',

directed by Aaron Wilson, which premiered at MIFF in 2021. In 2016 he co-produced the feature film *Yamato* (California), directed by Daisuke Miyazaki. He is a co-creator of the Bangalow Film Festival in NSW.

**Cultural advisor - Ngarra Murray:** Ngarra is a Dja Dja Wurrung (Yung Balug), Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Dhudhuroa woman whose country and family is at the heart of this film. She is the Head of Oxfam Australia's First Peoples Program, a member of the National NAIDOC committee and a Board Member of the Pastor Sir Douglas and Lady Gladys Nicholls Foundation (she is also their great granddaughter).



# THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

## National Programs and Standards for Teachers

The National Professional Standards for Teachers specify many key areas in which teachers should develop programs inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities. Programs also need to be developed which are informed by a knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. Examples of these areas are listed below (From [http://www.qct.edu.au/pdf/QCT\\_AustProfStandards.pdf](http://www.qct.edu.au/pdf/QCT_AustProfStandards.pdf)):

Standard 1.4: Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parents/carers.

Standard 2.4: Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

## Cross-Curriculum Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

### [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures | The Australian Curriculum](#)

The Australian Curriculum is working towards addressing two distinct needs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education:

- that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the curriculum of each of the learning areas, can fully participate in the curriculum and can build their self-esteem;
- that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority is designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

The **key concepts** of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures priority are:

- The first key concept of the organising ideas highlights the special connection to Country/Place by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and celebrates the unique belief systems that connect people physically and spiritually to Country/Place.
- The second concept examines the diversity of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' culture through language, ways of life and experiences as expressed through historical, social and political lenses. It gives students opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.

- The third concept addresses the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. It examines kinship structures and the significant contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on a local, national and global scale.

*All Australian Curriculum learning areas can contribute to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.*

In the content descriptions and elaborations for each learning area, teachers will find an icon (of an out-stretched hand) that indicates a connection of that learning area to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.



## Links to the Australian Curriculum

*The Lake of Scars* has other links to the following learning areas within the Australian Curriculum. Please note this list is not exhaustive:

- Year 11 Modern History
- Languages
- Media Arts
- Civics & Citizenship
- Science
- Geography
- Humanities & Social Sciences

Year 11 Modern History, Unit 2: 'Movements for Change in the 20th Century'

Recognition and rights of Indigenous Peoples

- The nature of the relationship of Indigenous peoples with their land and their response to perceptions of, and feelings about, the arrival of the colonisers (ACHMH070)
- The basis on which the colonists claimed sovereignty and imposed control, including conquest, treaty and the doctrine of 'terra nullius'; and the consequences for the legal status and land rights of Indigenous peoples (ACHMH071)
- The nature of government policies and their impact

on Indigenous peoples, for example protection, assimilation (including the Stolen Generations), and self-determination (ACHMH072)

- The role of individuals and groups who supported the movement for indigenous recognition and rights, including the methods they used and the resistance they encountered (ACHMH073)
- The economic, political and social challenges and opportunities indigenous peoples have faced, including the role of cultural activity in developing awareness in society (ACHMH074)
- The achievements of indigenous peoples at the end of the 20th century, including the right to vote, land rights/native title, and attempt at reconciliation (ACHMH075)
- The continued efforts to achieve greater recognition, reconciliation, civil rights, and improvements in education and health (ACHMH076)

Languages -Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (Years 8 and 9)

- Investigate programs, initiatives and techniques that keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages strong
- Understanding the importance of intergenerational collaboration and transmission in keeping languages strong and discussing some of the associated challenges

Media Arts (Years 9 & 10)

- Manipulate media representations to identify and examine social and cultural values and beliefs, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAMAM074)
- Analyse a range of media artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their media arts making, starting with Australian media artworks, including media artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and international media artworks (ACAMAR079)

Media Arts (Years 7 & 8)

- Develop media representations to show familiar or shared social and cultural values and beliefs, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAMAM067)
- Analyse how technical and symbolic elements are used in media artworks to create representations influenced by story, genre, values and points of view of particular audiences (ACAMAR071)
- Identify specific features and purposes of media artworks from contemporary and past times to

explore viewpoints and enrich their media arts making, starting with Australian media artworks including of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media artworks (ACAMAR072)

Civics and Citizenship (Years 8 and 9)

- How and why individuals and groups, including religious groups, participate in and contribute to civic life (ACHCK079)
- How Australia's international legal obligations shape Australian law and government policies, including in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACHCK093)
- Identify, gather and sort information and ideas from a range of sources and reference as appropriate (ACHCS083) and (ACHCS096)
- Critically evaluate information and ideas from a range of sources in relation to civics and citizenship topics and issues (ACHCS084) and (ACHCS097) · Account for different interpretations and points of view (ACHCS085) and (ACHCS098)
- Recognise and consider multiple perspectives and ambiguities, and use strategies to negotiate and resolve contentious issues (ACHCS086) and (ACHCS099)
- Present evidence-based civics and citizenship arguments using subject-specific language (ACHCS088) and (ACHCS101)
- Reflect on their role as a citizen in Australian, regional and global contexts (ACHCS089) and (ACHCS102)

Science (Year 8)

- Science knowledge can develop through collaboration across the disciplines of science and the contributions of people from a range of cultures (ACSHE226)

Geography (Years 7–10):

- Spiritual, aesthetic and cultural value of landscapes and landforms for people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACHGK049)
- The perceptions people have of place, and how these influence their connections to different places (ACHGK065)

Humanities and Social Sciences:

- Understanding and knowledge of developments in technology, public health, longevity and standard of living during the twentieth century, and concern for the environment and sustainability (ACOKFH024)



## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

# I. What is Reconciliation?

*“We’re slowly getting there. We’ve still got a long way to go. But I think the younger generation are getting braced for change. And people are starting to get a better understanding of our history and culture. I’m confident that our younger people will make the change.”*

**-Ngarra Murray (from *The Lake of Scars*)**

Australia’s First Nations cultures and histories have profound significance for modern Australian society and identity. To know who we are as a nation and what Australian culture is, Australians need to develop their own knowledge and respect for the cultures that have lived in this land for 65 000 or more years. Knowledge of First Nations histories and cultures is an essential step in the development of a modern Australian culture and identity.

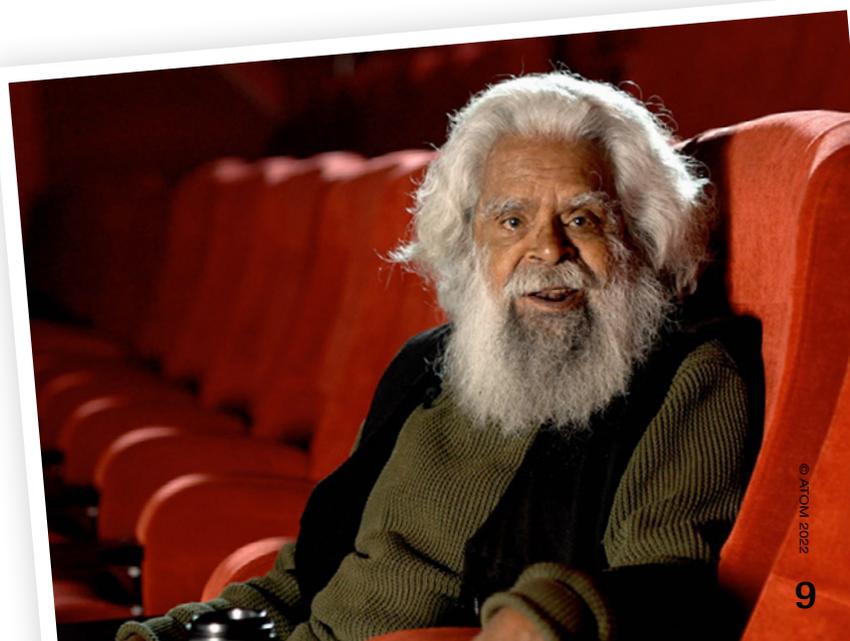
Contemporary Australian society has a long way to go in this process. Unlike in New Zealand/Aotearoa -where Maori cultures and languages have long been acknowledged as an important part of the national identity –many Australians still remain ignorant not only of First Nations cultures, but also of the lasting impacts of colonisation and the social and political challenges facing First Nations peoples today. The lack of any Treaty with First Nations peoples in Australia is certainly relevant here. Unlike New Zealand, where the British Crown first signed the

Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, Australia remains the only Commonwealth nation to have never signed a treaty with First Nations peoples. In an attempt to address this failing, there are currently steps being taken by the Victorian and other state governments to establish treaties at a state level. At a federal level a proposed referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament can be regarded as an important part of a treaty process, as called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The Reconciliation movement began as an initiative in 1991 with the goal of bringing about cultural change for all Australians by addressing our nation’s history in a truthful way (*truth telling*) and by overcoming racism. Reconciliation is a movement that continues to develop to meet the needs of different communities in different ways. It is a movement that calls on all Australians to find ways to depend their knowledge and respect by promoting cultural change across schools, businesses, government and other sectors.

Reconciliation relies on the efforts of everyday citizens for its implementation. One important way for Reconciliation to be achieved is for schools, businesses and community organisations to develop and implement Reconciliation Action Plans (or RAPs). You should check to find out if your school a RAP and what the plan involves.

Another form of Reconciliation is for individuals to take initiative in their own community and region –for example, by establishing relationships to care for country, to revive cultural heritage and to overcome historical divisions and racism. *In The Lake of Scars* we are shown the profound impact that a small community of people, both First Nations and non-Indigenous, can make when they take the initiative to work for Reconciliation in their area. In his efforts to establish a cultural centre to store cultural artefacts and some of the sacred scar trees of Lake Boort, Paul Haw in particular demonstrates a tireless example of a non-Indigenous person committed to progressing Reconciliation in Australia.





# The Five Dimensions of Reconciliation

The following text found at the Reconciliation Australia website: [www.reconciliation.org.au/what-is-reconciliation](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/what-is-reconciliation)

## RACE RELATIONS

- All Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights and experiences, which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect and that are free of racism.
- Goal: Positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians throughout society.
- Action: Overcome racism

## EQUALITY AND EQUITY

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participate equally in a range of life opportunities and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.
- Goal: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life—i.e. we have closed the gaps in life

outcomes—and the distinctive individual and collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are universally recognised and respected. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are self-determining.

- Action: Renew focus on Closing the Gap

## INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

- The active support of reconciliation by the nation’s political, business and community structures.
- Goal: Our political, business and community institutions actively support all dimensions of reconciliation.
- Action: Capitalise on the RAP Program to create a wider range of opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

## UNITY

- An Australian society that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity.

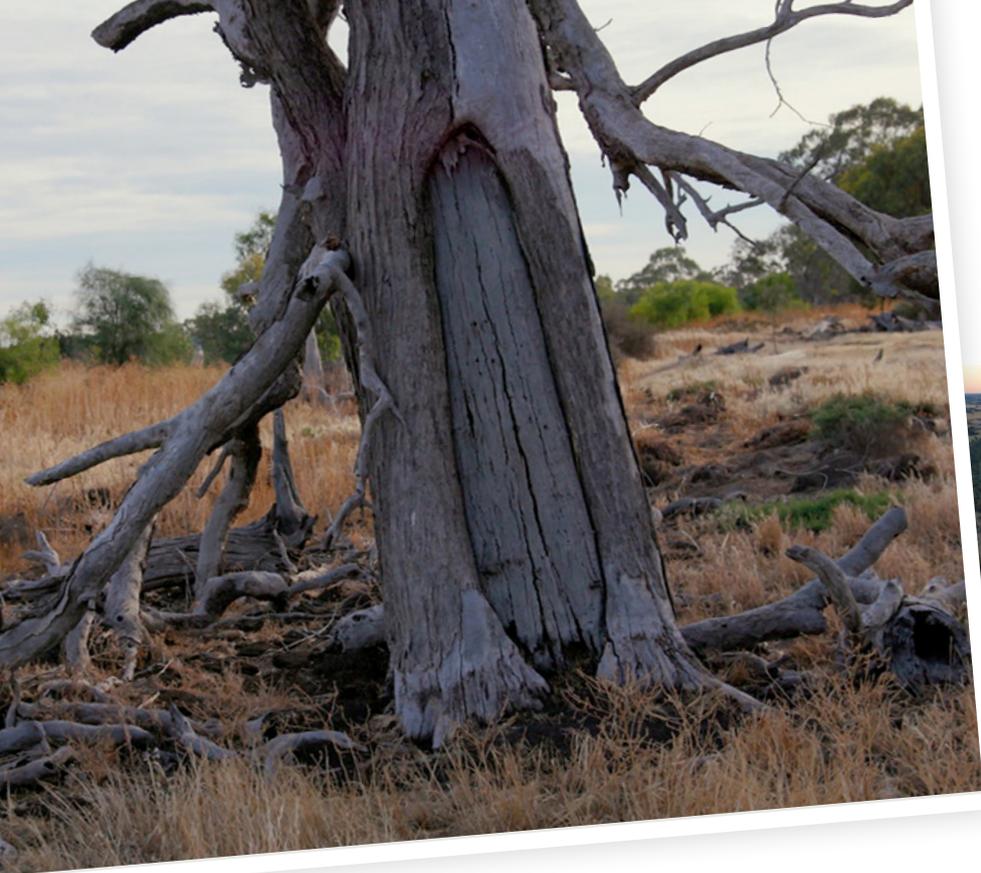
- Goal: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are a valued and recognised part of a shared national identity and, as a result, there is national unity.
- Action: Achieve a process to recognise Australia’s First Peoples in our Constitution.

## HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE

- All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia makes amends for past policies and practices ensures these wrongs are never repeated.
- Goal: There is widespread acceptance of our nation’s history and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated— there is truth, justice, healing and historical acceptance.
- Action: Acknowledge our past through education and understanding.

## QUESTIONS

- Discuss the following statement from Paul Haw in *The Lake of Scars*: “As I often say, to be a true Australian you have to learn about the First Australians.”
- What are the “Five Dimensions of Reconciliation”? What is the key action prioritised for each dimension?
- Read the Uluru Statement from the Heart. What are the three key recommendations of the Statement? (The Statement — Uluru Statement from the Heart)
- What is meant by the terms “Historical Acceptance” and “Truth-Telling”? Why are these goals so important for Australia? What would these goals look like in practice?
- If someone expressed the view that ‘Reconciliation is just for Indigenous people’, what would you say to them?
- Does your school have a Reconciliation Action Plan? If so, who are the people involved in organising it? If appropriate, invite one of these staff to the class to outline the RAP for the students.
- As a class table ten ways that the goals of Reconciliation can be reached in your school and broader community.
- What are your school’s plans for Reconciliation Week (and/or NAIDOC Week)?



coots and dotterels. But even more remarkable, the series of lakes and creeks is home to the largest number of scar trees in the world – as many as 2000!

This makes Lake Boort one of the most significant Aboriginal cultural landscapes in Australia.

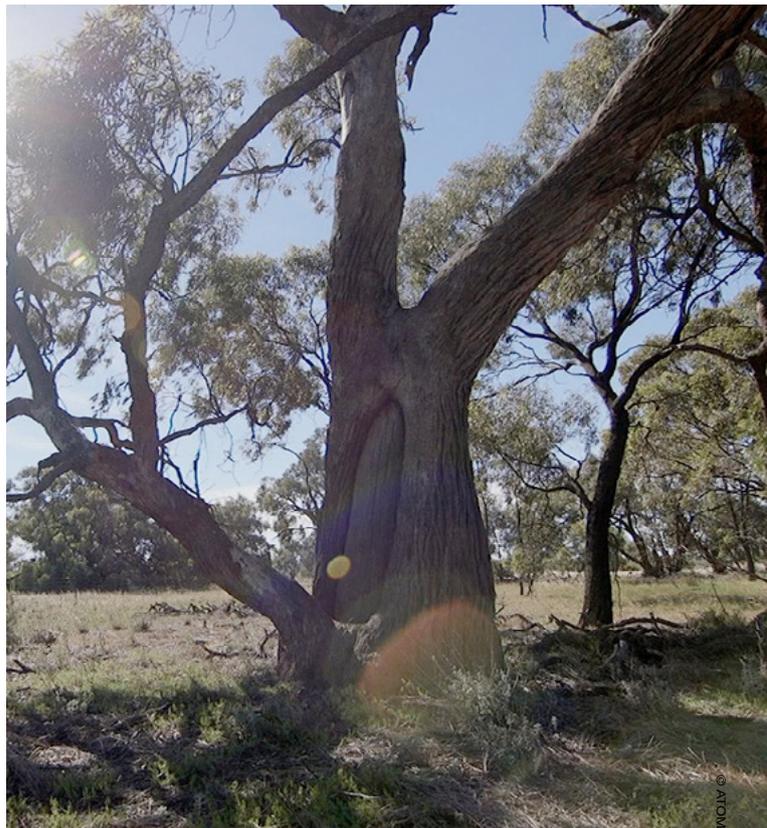
**AFTER WATCHING THE FILM**

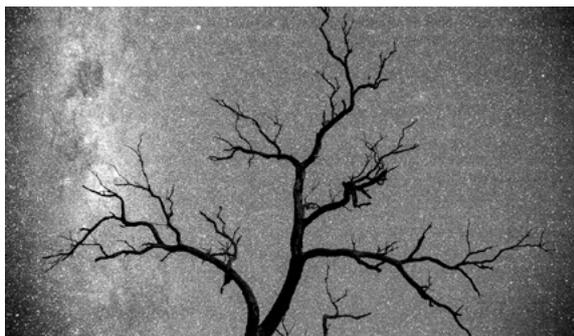
## 2. Lake Boort's Scar Trees and other sites of Cultural Significance

*The Lake of Scars* is filmed on Dja Dja Wurrung country, on the traditional lands of the Yung Balug clan. The area is located some 250 km northwest of Melbourne and is the location of the small town of Boort, which was first settled by Europeans in the 1840s and now is home to around 875 residents. The consequences of European invasion, colonisation, dispossession and assimilation mean that many Dja Dja Wurrung people do not now live on their traditional lands –however, deep cultural ties remain and connect them to their country and ancestors.

The major natural feature of the area is 'Big' Lake Boort, part of a series of lakes, a shallow freshwater marsh over 2 square kilometres in size. We learn in *The Lake of Scars* that the lake is home to an abundance of birdlife, including birds blue-faced honey-eaters, musk lorikeets, ducks, pelicans, cormorants, spoonbills, swamp-hens, moorhens,

So what are scar trees? Scar trees are trees which bear the marks of significant cultural use. In other words, scar trees are trees where layers of wood and bark have been removed using specific techniques for specific uses. In the scar trees of Lake Boort there are hundreds of examples of trees used for important cultural tools and structures like canoes, shields, shelter, food and baby carriers. These trees offer





profound access to the cultural heritage of the area, with the trees bearing living testimony to the life of the Yung Balug and other communities who have used these waters and country for thousands of years.

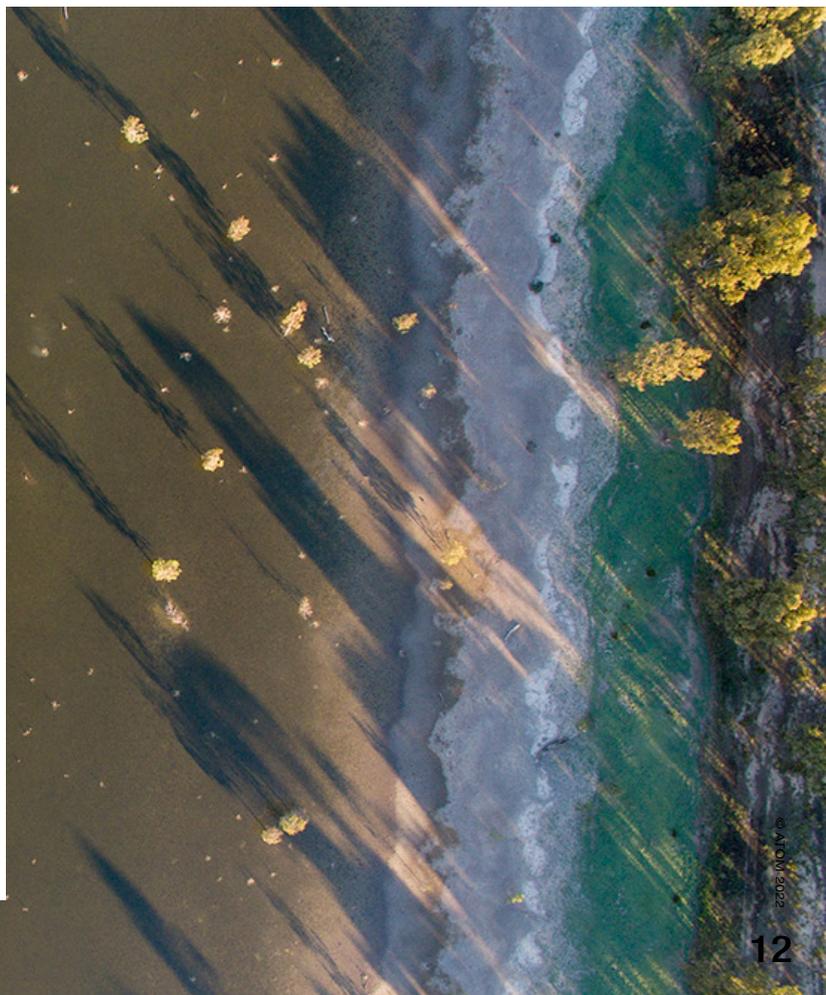
With such lengthy and intensive use, it is not surprising that the lake is also home to a number of other significant cultural artefacts –numerous burial grounds and thousands of cultural artefacts both wooden and stone used for cutting and grinding have been found. The sixty or more cooking ovens (middens) around the big lake are evidence of the lake’s significance as a bountiful source of food. Paul Haw estimates around 3000 cooking mounds in the wider Boort area. In the documentary, Paul and Jida Gulpiil explain together the process involved using clay heat balls when cooking in a midden:

*“They had a beautiful round oven underground. The floor was lined with heat-beads made out of clay, which were cooked in a hot fire until they were made just like a house brick. The walls [of the oven] were lined and they lit a big fire in their cooking mound. Then they got rid of all the flame and the clay balls would retain all the heat. They then took some of the hot rocks out. They put on a layer of wet grass.*

*Then they put on their vegetables and meat. They would cook fish and duck and bush potato [and more]. And then another layer of grass and herbs and then they would line the top with these hot rocks which had just come out of the fire. Then they’d cover it over with bark and the edges with soil and everything would roast. And they would open up a couple of hours later and they would have steamed vegetables and meat... They kept coming back to the same spot because all the cooking balls were already made.”*

#### QUESTIONS

- Locate Djajawurung (Dja Dja Wurrung) country on the AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia: [Map of Indigenous Australia | AIATSIS](#)
- For how long is it estimated that First Nations people have occupied the country around Lake Boort?
- For how long have non-Indigenous people occupied the country?
- How was Lake Boort changed after European settlement?
- List at least three main reasons why Lake Boort would be a place of intense cultural significance to Dja Dja Wurrung people.
- How many scar trees are estimated to be found at Lake Boort?
- For what cultural purposes are scar trees used?
- What other cultural artefacts have been found around Lake Boort?
- What is a midden?
- Explain the cooking process described by Paul Haw and Jida Gulpiil in your own words.





# 3. The John Hunter Kerr Photos – Case Study

*“John Hunter Kerr caught these people at the very moment when they were in the throes of their world collapsing all around them.”*

**–Uncle Jack Charles**

The *Lake of Scars* features a series of very important early photographs taken in the 1850s by pioneer settler John Hunter Kerr (see page 15 for some of these photos). The photos depict a Dja Dja Wurrung clan in the Lake Boort area. Taken in the earliest years of colonisation and only a decade after the introduction of photography to Melbourne, these photographs provide the earliest possible photographic images of the traditional life of the Dja Dja Wurrung people.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume these photographs depict a society simply carrying on their traditional life. Instead, Kerr’s photographs show a First Nations society, in Uncle Jack Charles’ words, “at the very moment when they were in the throes of their world collapsing all around them.” With the onslaught of pioneers claiming land for themselves, these Dja Dja Wurrung inhabitants saw their fishing depleted, the hunting fields fenced off, their native sources of flora cleared and their fauna eradicated in favour of European stock and crops. Kerr’s photographs show, in other words, a First Nations people staring back at alien colonisers who had arrived with the intent to destroy their country and culture.

## Class Activity

Read the following text, closely analyse the photographs and answer the questions.

*The following text is taken from: ‘People undergoing great change’: John Hunter Kerr’s photographs of Indigenous people at Fernyhurst, Victoria, 1850s - No 76 Spring 2005 - La Trobe Journal (slv.vic.gov.au)*

John Hunter Kerr, the photographer, was a squatter who took up the land in 1849, acquiring an existing station, Edgar’s Run, and re-naming it Fernyhurst after the Kerr clan’s ancestral castle in the Scottish borders... At Fernyhurst, Kerr knew numbers of Indigenous people... mainly from the Dja Dja Wurrung tribal groups... Kerr recognised that they ‘revisit[ed] periodically the spots which had been their old hunting grounds’, to hunt in the traditional manner and also to receive food and other support from the squatters.

By the mid 1840s, well before Kerr settled on the land, virtually all the Dja Dja Wurrung’s traditional lands had been taken up by squatters. European settlement decimated the original inhabitants... [amd] Kerr was interested in how European settlement was affecting the Indigenous people of the area.

Kerr seems to have had good relationships with the Indigenous people. In his autobiography, he described his interest in his ‘Aboriginal neighbours’, and claimed to have been ‘always on very friendly terms’ with



them. He wrote of being invited to join in their hunting expeditions for kangaroo, possum, and wild turkey. He was honoured by being invited to attend many of their ceremonies, including corroborees and the burial of an elder; he later sensitively described the people's grief and the funeral rituals. He described family relationships within the tribe, and the people's work, trading routes, daily life and beliefs.

Photography was introduced to Melbourne in 1845... Kerr, a 'gentleman amateur', was fascinated by the new invention, and was well-placed to experiment with its marvellous possibilities. He quickly saw its documentary potential... It appears that he began taking photographs on the station around 1853, when the collodion wet-plate negative process was introduced to Victoria. Thirty-one of Kerr's photographs of Indigenous people survive, together with some general views around the station. They were probably taken over a period of several years. Kerr initially made contact prints from glass negatives on salted paper. Later, further prints were made from his negatives, using the albumen silver process.

Kerr records that his major purpose was 'to take a likeness' of the Indigenous people. He described

their love of bright colours, their capacity for imitation, and how they appropriated with 'great pride and exultation' articles of clothing discarded by Europeans... 'At first they were a little alarmed by the machinery, but when their first shyness was overcome they were never weary of sitting in any attitude...'. (This stillness was necessary as the exposure time with the wet-plate collodion process could be up to several minutes.)

Some of Kerr's photographs of Aboriginal people appear, on the face of it, to be taken as simply a documentary record of the people's life in transition. But they were more than that. Each image was the result of a transaction between the photographer and his subject. They were taken at 'slack times' on the station, when there was time for consultation and to set up the apparatus. Before each image was taken, a conversation occurred between people who knew each others' names. As with the photographs taken a decade later by Charles Walter, there is evidence for their subjects' involvement in the picture-making process.

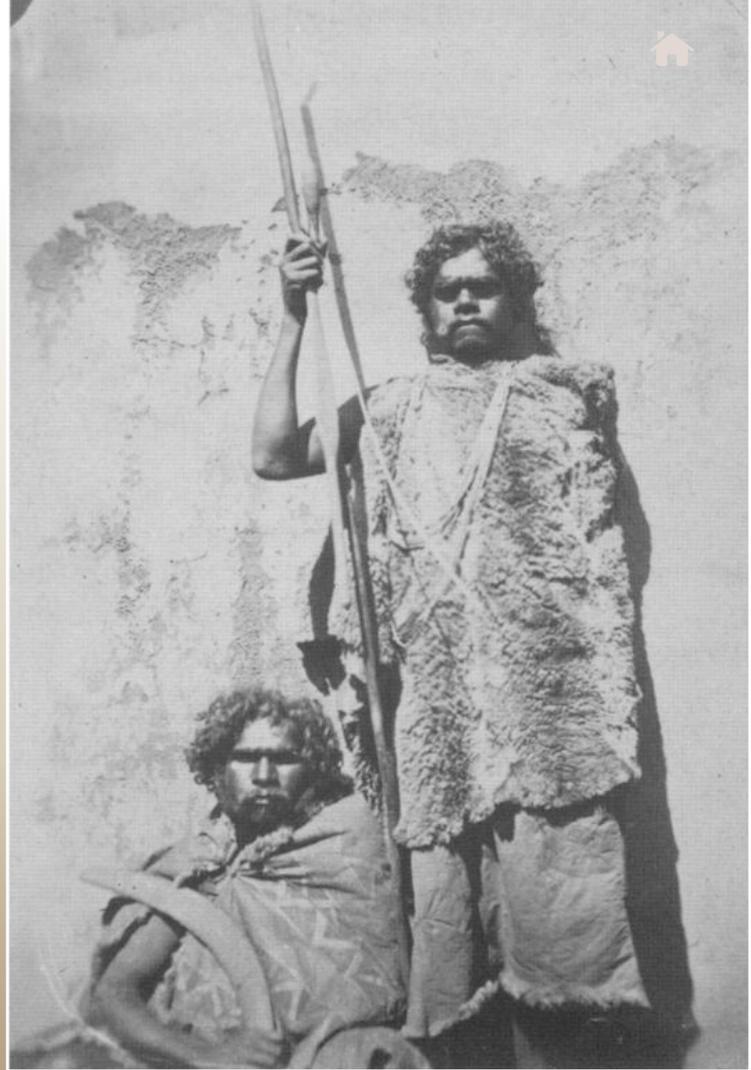


#### QUESTIONS

- How long after the first European colonisation of Dja Dja Wurrung country were Kerr's photos taken?
- What was Kerr interested in documenting in these photographs?
- Why was Kerr limited to photographing the Dja Dja Wurrung people at "slack times" when they were not moving?
- What tools, structures and clothing do these photographs document?
- What characteristics in the photographs suggest the life of a nomadic people and culture?
- What do you think was happening on the days when these photographs were taken? Explain why you think so in reference to details in the photographs.
- What do you think the interaction of the Dja Dja Wurrung people with the camera tells us about their relationship with the earliest pioneers like Kerr?
- Discuss this sombre and powerful observation by the narrator of *Lake of Scars*, Uncle Jack Charles: "'John Hunter Kerr caught these people at the very moment when they were in the throes of their world collapsing all around them.'



THE PHOTOS OF  
JOHN HUNTER KERR





# 4. Cultural Revival

Across Australia today, an enormous amount of work is being done towards *cultural revival*. This work involves:

- work towards achieving treaties as a means to achieve cultural revival;
- the revival of First Nations languages;
- the returning to country of displaced First Peoples;
- the repatriation of ancestral remains to Country;
- the collecting and conservation of First Nations' cultural artefacts;
- conservation of native flora and fauna;
- and restorative land management.

These and many other areas of cultural work address a network of responsibilities that make up an important part of First Nations' *cultural identity* and *connection to country*. The specific areas of work (for example, land management) belong to a much bigger picture of cultural revival –a picture of people, language, culture and country, once devastated by colonisation, now again becoming strong.

In *The Lake of Scars* we see a number of very important efforts being made by the Yung Balug people and their supporters towards cultural revival for their people, culture and country. First of all, Jida Gulpillil and Paul Haw work tirelessly to collect and preserve important cultural artefacts and to educate non-Indigenous visitors about the sites of cultural heritage around Lake Boort, including the many traditional ovens and of course the

remarkable scar trees. The pair also attempt to practice traditional land management strategies around the Lake Boort area (however this is complicated by ecological changes brought by introduced species).

A second key way the participants in *The Lake of Scars* work for cultural revival is through their attempt to establish a cultural heritage centre in Boort. A cultural centre would house and display the many cultural artefacts found in the area, providing a place of education into Dja Dja Wurrung culture for interested visitors and students. The centre would also, more importantly, offer a space for Dja



Dja Wurrung to practice their culture and develop employment pathways. In Jida Gulpilil's words:

*“It’s about having a place for ceremony, education, economic management, learning and teaching –having the safe cultural space to be able to do that. But we need to make money out of our land. We need to make money out of our natural resources... we can’t be just crown land managers... we’ve got to own the land.”*

Thirdly, perhaps the most effective “first step” towards cultural revival is the Yung Balug gathering shown in *The Lake of Scars*. As Yung Balug man Uncle Bobby Nicholls explains, many First Nations people live far removed from their ancestral country and culture as a result of colonial dispossession, assimilation and genocide:

*“We didn’t move away from Boort (Yung Balug Country) free and easy... we were forced off... and that forced up to other places... they herded us up like cattle and forced us onto a reserve/ mission and controlled us by handing out rations.”*

Through efforts of Gary’s daughter Ngarra Murray, and many others, the dispersed peoples and families of the Yung Balug are brought back together to their country, to share and celebrate their culture and their identity as Yung Balug. This is an essential foundation for cultural revival and the primary way knowledge can be passed on to younger generations. In Ngarra’s words:



*“It’s important that younger people step up and take on some of the roles and responsibilities... it’s important to make sure that we include our children... that they know our ceremonies and our cultural practices, that they know our language and they know the dances and the songs.”*

#### QUESTIONS

- Explain how the following have been seriously impacted by colonisation:
  - First Nations languages;
  - First Nations cultures;
  - First Nations country.
- In what ways does *The Lake of Scars* show how the culture of the Yung Balug has been impacted by European colonisation?
- How would you explain to someone that land management and conservation is an important part of cultural revival for First Nations cultures?
- What is repatriation and why are many First Nations people fighting for their ancestors to be repatriated?
- What arguments are made by Jida Gulpilil and Paul Haw in favour of a Dja Dja Wurrung cultural heritage centre at Boort?
- Where is the nearest cultural heritage centre (and/or First Nations council) to your school?
- Why are cultural heritage centres important for Reconciliation and cultural revival?
- What do you think non-Indigenous Australians need to understand about the impacts of colonisation on First Nations people and the challenges for First Nations cultural revival?



# 5. Cultural Self-Awareness

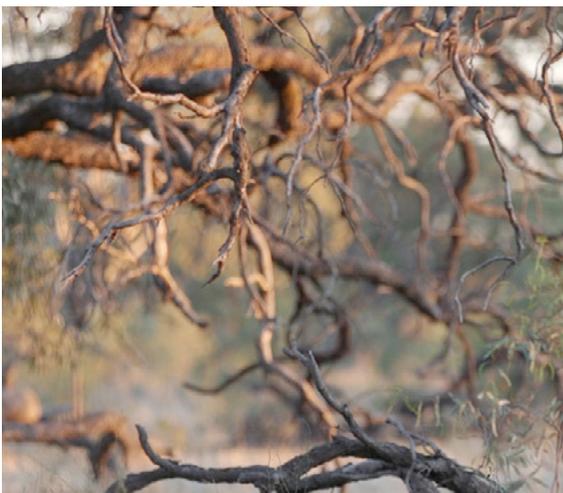
*There's no word in the English vocabulary that can describe the relationship [with the country] that we have.*

**Jida Gulpilil**

Jida Gulpilil's statement above points to something of great significance for *Reconciliation* in Australia. As Australians we should all be striving for greater cross-cultural understanding and respect. But a key part of Reconciliation also involves our recognition that some things cannot be fully known and understood by another culture. *Connection to Country*, for example, is a First Nations cultural concept that cannot be fully translated and understood in English. The meaning of *Connection to Country* depends on a First Nations person's place in their culture and history.

*Lake of Scars* documents the challenge of deepening one's knowledge of First Nations cultures while also remaining respectful of those cultures and not overstepping boundaries. The documentary shows that to genuinely engage in Reconciliation requires more than knowledge of another culture. It also requires *cultural self-awareness*. To be culturally self-aware involves things like:

- how your language (including body language) follows certain rules and communicates in certain ways;
- how your culture has certain values and expectations (about money or time or "life priorities", for example);
- how your culture has certain dominant ways of thinking about things and ways of coming to solutions;
- how your culture organises power roles in a social group (i.e. who has authority and why?).



Cultural self-awareness is fundamental for Reconciliation, because by becoming more self-aware we can recognise how our culture informs our perceptions and attitudes towards people from other cultures. In Australia, cultural self-awareness may take many forms, including:

- recognising one's own racist or discriminative attitudes;
- recognising how one's language and behavioural norms can affect and potentially marginalise others;
- recognising the relationship between one's own material privileges and Australia's history of such things as racially discriminative policies and dispossession of First Nations Peoples;
- recognising the ways institutions like school and the legal system prioritise some cultures and marginalise others (ie. how well represented is your family culture at school?).

Cultural self-awareness of our own privileges, our own histories and our own prejudices establishes the foundations for the meaningful and lasting cross-cultural dialogue and truth-telling that is essential for Reconciliation.

## QUESTIONS

- Why is cultural self-awareness important for Reconciliation?
- Why is it easy for many white Australians to remain unaware of how their cultural norms affect others?
- In groups, try to name and define at least five key values that are typical of dominant cultural values in Australia (eg. home ownership).
- How much is your culture represented at school (in subjects like English and history)?
- What efforts does Paul Haw go to in *Lake of Scars* to remain culturally respectful and self-aware of his position as a non-Indigenous person?

# 6. Collaboration and Reconciliation

*“This is Reconciliation we’re talking about. Maybe making amends for all the mistakes of the past 200 years isn’t as easy as they said it was going to be... But they’re giving it a red hot go.”*

**Uncle Jack Charles**

The collaboration of Paul Haw and the Dja Dja Wurrung people in *The Lake of Scars* offers a powerful and instructive example of cross-cultural collaboration in action. Paul, in many ways, stands as a model for what non-Indigenous Australians can do in their part for Reconciliation.

- Paul educates himself deeply in the culture and history of his area;
- He takes active steps to conserve artefacts of cultural significance;
- He takes active steps to revegetate the area with local flora;



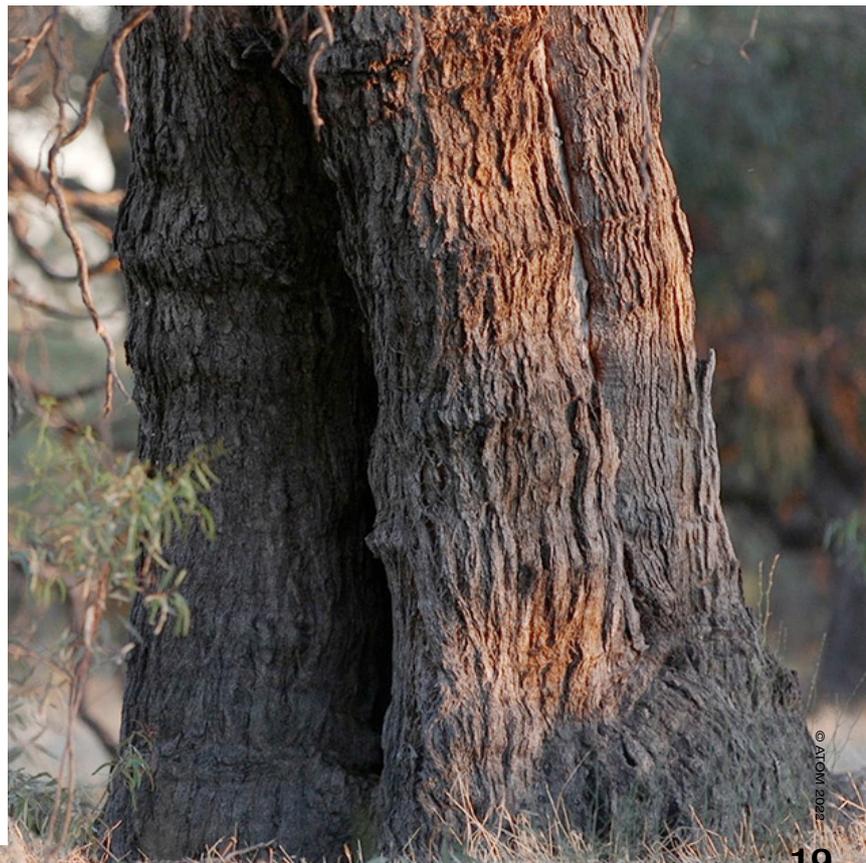
- Most importantly, he seeks out Dja Dja Wurrung guidance and collaboration in his efforts.

Paul takes the initiative to educate himself and take action for cultural conservation at Lake Boort. But he also places immense importance on consulting and collaborating with the traditional owners.

With so many unresolved problems in our histories, sometimes collaboration between First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples leads to difficulties. The collaboration between Paul and the Dja Dja Wurrung faces many such obstacles –from local prejudices against a Dja Dja Wurrung cultural centre to breakdowns in understanding between Paul and Jida. But ultimately these experiences are essential for the Reconciliation process –which is as much about people working it out together as it is about the protection of cultural heritage.

## QUESTIONS

- What challenges do Paul Haw and Jida Gulpilil face in their collaboration?
- Discuss at least three different efforts that Paul Haw makes to establish collaboration or seek consultation from the Yung Balug clan of the Dja Dja Wurrung.
- Do you think Paul has done the right thing to establish the temporary museum at his home? What evidence from the film are you using to make this judgement?
- In what ways has your school engaged in consultation and collaborations with the local council or Traditional Owners?
- What future collaborations or consultations are planned at your school?
- What do you think are the essential ingredients for a respectful and productive collaboration between First Nations and non-Indigenous people?



## FURTHER INFORMATION

### LINKS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE FILM

- Lake of Scars official website: [The Lake of Scars documentary \(lakeofscarsfilm.com\)](http://The Lake of Scars documentary (lakeofscarsfilm.com))
- ABC article on Paul Haw's work at Lake Boort: [Boort's significant Indigenous history on a global scale - ABC News](#)
- The Age article on Jida Gulpilil and Paul Haw's collaboration: ['Into the Aboriginal world' – Victoria's secret emerges from lake and creek \(theage.com.au\)](#)
- Interview article with director Bill Code: ['The trees are disappearing slowly and people often don't know what they are'](#)

### SOME OTHER USEFUL LINKS

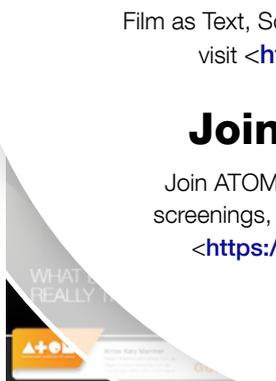
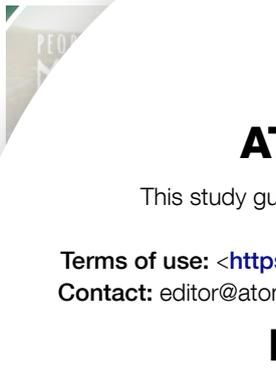
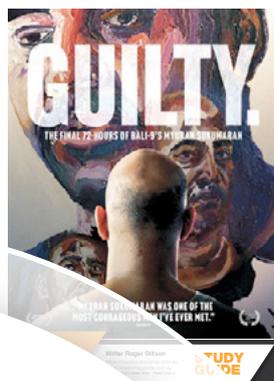
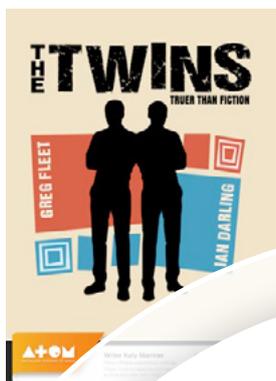
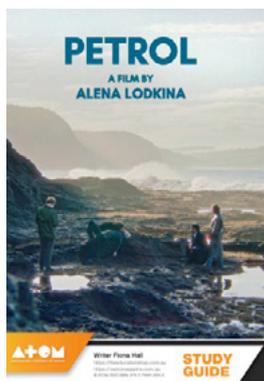
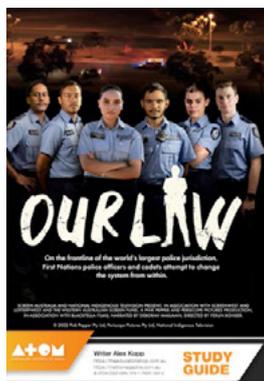
- Reconciliation Australia: [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)
- Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation offers practical steps in culturally responsive and respectful teaching: [Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation - 3Rs \(rrr.edu.au\)](#)
- Cross-Curriculum Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures | The Australian Curriculum](#)
- The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) [aiatsis.gov.au](http://aiatsis.gov.au)
- The University of Melbourne's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Curricula Project: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander School Curricula \(unimelb.edu.au\)](#)
- CSIRO: [www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Land-management/Indigenous/Indigenous-calendars](http://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Land-management/Indigenous/Indigenous-calendars)
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Australian Curriculum: [www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2018/11/05/experts-say-indigenous-knowledge-will-enrich-science-education](http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2018/11/05/experts-say-indigenous-knowledge-will-enrich-science-education)
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Australian Curriculum: [www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2018/11/05/experts-say-indigenous-knowledge-will-enrich-science-education](http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2018/11/05/experts-say-indigenous-knowledge-will-enrich-science-education)
- The Aurora Project – for more information on

initiatives in Indigenous education. [www.auroraproject.com.au](http://www.auroraproject.com.au)

- The Central Land Council (Northern Territory) [www.clc.org.au](http://www.clc.org.au)
- The Uluru Statement: [www.ulurustatement.org](http://www.ulurustatement.org)
- United Nations UNDRIP: [www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html)

### USEFUL BOOKS AND ARTICLES

- Paul Haw and Margaret Munro, 'Footprints Across the Loddon Plains': [Footprints across the Loddon Plains : a shared history - Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies \(AIATSIS\) \(library.link\)](#)
- Simone Barlow & Ashlee Horyniak, *Dark Emu in the Classroom: Teacher Resources for High School Geography*
- Fred Cahir, Ian Clark, Phillip Clarke, *Aboriginal biocultural knowledge in South-eastern Australia: Perspectives of early colonists*, CSIRO Publishing
- Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*
- Mary Graham, "Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews": [australianhumanitiesreview.org/2008/11/01/some-thoughts-about-the-philosophical-underpinnings-of-aboriginal-worldviews/](http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2008/11/01/some-thoughts-about-the-philosophical-underpinnings-of-aboriginal-worldviews/)
- Marcia Langton, *Welcome to Country: An Introduction to our First Peoples for young Australians*
- Steve Morton, Andy Sheppard, Mark Lonsdale, *Biodiversity, Science and Solutions for Australia Series*. <https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/6967/>
- Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds, Agriculture or Accident?*
- Peter Sutton and Keryn Walshe, *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers? The Dark Emu Debate*
- Fiona Walsh, Peter Christophersen, Sandra McGregor, "Indigenous Perspectives on Biodiversity" in *Biodiversity Science and Solutions*, Morton et al 2014, CSIRO Publishing



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