

# Forgotten heroes: Honouring the Service and Sacrifice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

“ The colour of a man's skin becomes utterly irrelevant, at best a stupid diversion in the common struggle for victory, valour and survival. ”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who served and sacrificed their lives alongside fellow Australians in overseas wars and conflicts since the South African War (Boer War) 1899–1902, have received limited recognition. Accurate numbers and names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women are largely unavailable as enlistment forms did not enable or require identification of cultural heritage until after 1980.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were not regarded as full citizens until 1967; yet many chose to enlist in the Australian Armed Forces to serve. The fact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were keen to enlist in the Australian Armed Services and serve in overseas conflicts provides an ironic twist in Australian history. Many of these same peoples had been engaged in active resistance to prevent dispossession of their own land and sea since the arrival of Europeans on the First Fleet in 1788.

Land and sea are central to the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, determining their social, cultural, economic and political organisation and existence. Enlisting in the Australian Armed Services, anticipating overseas service and leaving the shores of the continent inhabited by their peoples for over 55,000 years, represents both tension in decision making and unique commitment.

We know that many served in the Australian Armed Forces in the past, and continue to do so, although it was not straight forward during WWI and WWII for them to enlist:-

*“When war broke out in 1914, many Aborigines who tried to enlist were rejected on the grounds of race; others slipped through the net. By October 1917, when recruits were harder to find and one conscription referendum had already been lost, restrictions were cautiously eased. A new Military Order stated: “Half-castes may be enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force provided that the examining Medical Officers are satisfied that one of the parents is of European origin.”*

Australian War Memorial website

Membership of the Australian Armed Services served to build special bonds of comradeship not experienced to the same degree in civilian life. Terry Garwood in the introduction to Jackamos Et Fowell, 1993, *Forgotten Heroes* said:-

*“In times of common peril and hardship, men and women discover what they had in common rather than dwell upon their differences. A soldier particularly, understands how thoroughly he depends upon the comrades by his side and at his back. They literally stand guard against death for each other. When the earth explodes and the guns roar, men are levelled. Leadership and courage come to the fore. The colour of a man's skin becomes utterly irrelevant, at best a stupid diversion in the common struggle for victory, valour and survival.”*

**Reconciliation South Australia realises the importance of reviving the memories, stories and records within communities. By capturing and recording the service and sacrifice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women we contribute to the Reconciliation process.**



## INTRODUCTION

# Forgotten heroes: Honouring the Service and Sacrifice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The Education Pack has been designed so that students:-

- Develop **knowledge** of Australia's participation in war and commemoration of service and sacrifice, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women.
- Develop **understanding** that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been members of the Australian Armed Services from the Boer War until the present. They were not recognised as full Australian citizens until 1967 and were not officially entitled to enlist in the Australian Armed Services, yet despite these regulations many did serve.
- Develop **values and beliefs** that the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women to the Australia's war efforts should be given greater recognition at a community, state and national level.
- Take action to ensure that records, achievements and stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women are documented and shared.

Teaching and learning activities have been developed with a research and inquiry focus to encourage exploration and use of local records and resources where possible. Students are encouraged to contribute to Reconciliation by researching, documenting and sharing stories about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women.

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is highly recommended. Activities should maximise appropriate local war service information, community members and primary resources where possible. If students plan to ask community or family members about their recollections of war it is important that they:-

- Understand that many veterans may choose not to speak about their war experiences.
- Seek permission and explain the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used.
- Develop questions sensitively and seek feedback on the questions from a teacher before conducting an interview and recording information.

The key focus areas are developmental and sequential across the Early Years, Primary Years and Middle Years and can be adapted and interchanged to suit the availability of resources, students' prior knowledge and interest.

The key focus areas include:-

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples served in the Australian Armed Services in the past and continue to do so. As was the case with non-Aboriginal servicemen and women some were killed, wounded or suffered as prisoners of war. Their service and sacrifice is worthy of research and recognition.**
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were not fully recognised as Australian citizens until 1967 and were not considered eligible to join the Australian Armed Services during World War I and early in World War II. However due to pressures of war, relaxation of enlistment guidelines and administrative loopholes, many did succeed in joining the Australian Armed Services.**
- **Australian society has long valued *mateship*, a tradition which had gained recognition by the 1890's. Similarly, *mateship* defined by interdependence and comradeship, became a recognised experience among Australian servicemen and women or *Australian diggers*. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women experienced *mateship* while serving in the Australian Armed Services, although this was not always maintained when returning to civil society.**
- **We can contribute to Reconciliation by valuing and acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' service and sacrifice during Australia's war efforts.**



**National Consistency in Curriculum Outcomes**  
**Civics and Citizenship**  
**SACSA – Society & Environment & English**  
**Australian Curriculum: History & English**  
Early Years, Primary Years and Middle Years Bands

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples served in the Australian Armed Services in the past and continue to do so today. Through remembrance and commemoration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women we contribute to Reconciliation.

**Civics and Citizenship**  
Historical Perspectives  
Government and Law, Citizenship in a Democracy  
**SACSA – Society & Environment & English**  
**Australian Curriculum: History & English**

### KNOWLEDGE

Gain knowledge about the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women to Australia's war efforts since the Boer War.

*read, examine, name, view,  
listen, locate, research, summarise,  
record, list, note, outline, describe*

### SKILLS & UNDERSTANDING

Use a range of sources to research Australian servicemen and women including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Understand the culture of "mateship" and comradeship within the Australian Armed Services.

*investigate, develop, reflect, explore,  
tell/retell, discuss, use, interview,  
analyse, propose, define, write,  
compare, contrast*

### VALUES & ACTIONS

Value and acknowledge the service and sacrifice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women. Contribute to Reconciliation by ensuring their stories are recorded and told.

*create, invite, organise, design,  
devise, imagine, debate, propose,  
envisage, recommend, write,  
conclude, justify*

Australian Curriculum – [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Home](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Home)

South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework – [www.sacsa.sa.edu.au](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au)



## Cross Curriculum Links

### The Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship

describe the knowledge, skills, understandings and capacities that all young Australians should have the opportunity to learn and develop.

**Government and Law** explores institutions, principles and values underpinning Australia's representative democracy including the key features of the Australian Constitution; the role of democracy in building a socially cohesive and civil society; ways in which individuals, groups and governments make decisions; how governments and parliaments are elected and formed; levels and roles of government; concepts of power, leadership and community service; the purpose of laws; and the ways in which Australia's legal system contributes to the democratic principles, rights and freedoms.

**Citizenship in a Democracy** explores the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society and the civic knowledge, skills and values required to participate as informed and active citizens in local, state, national and regional and global contexts. Australia's cultural diversity and place in the Asia Pacific region and in the world are explored. Issues of environmental sustainability are examined as well as opportunities to learn to make decisions that build a capacity for futures-oriented thinking. The ways in which the media and ICT are used by individuals and governments to exert influence and the influence that media and ICT have on civic debate and citizen engagement are examined. Opportunities to practise democratic values and processes in classrooms, schools and communities are included.

**Historical Perspectives** explores the impact of the past on Australian civil society. The impact of British colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their pursuit of citizenship rights are examined. The ways in which individuals, events and popular movements have influenced the development of democracy in Australia and the influence of past societies in Australian democracy are explored. The influence of local, state, national, regional and global events, issues and perspectives on Australia's changing national identities and the impact of government policy on the development of Australia as a culturally diverse nation are examined.

An overview of the Civics and Citizenship Statement of Learning can be accessed at [www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/civics\\_SOL06.pdf](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/civics_SOL06.pdf)

The South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA) *"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Perspectives* recognise that a cohesive and diverse society requires each child and student to develop a growing understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' heritage, experiences and issues - past, present and future - and to engage all learners in a process of furthering the aims of Reconciliation." (SACSA 20:2001).

**SACSA – Essential Learnings and Equity Cross Curriculum Perspectives** - [www.sacsa.sa.edu.au](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au)

### Australian Curriculum – Cross Curriculum Perspectives

*"Indigenous perspectives, which will be written into the national curriculum will ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and respect the history and culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders."*

### Australian Curriculum – Capabilities

*"Ten general capabilities addressed in the Australian curriculum include literacy, numeracy, ICT, thinking skills, creativity, self management, teamwork, intercultural understanding, ethical behaviour and social competence."*

2010 [www.acara.edu.au/home\\_page.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/home_page.html)

