

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

- We remember the men and women who joined the Australian Armed Services and served our nation in overseas wars and conflicts. We especially remember those who gave their lives, were wounded or suffered as prisoners of war. Discuss the special days, ceremonies, symbols and memorials that help us remember and commemorate their sacrifice.
- Who are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women that served in the Australian Armed Services dating back to the Boer War? What do we know of their drive and motivation to enlist and serve a country which had not yet granted them full recognition as citizens?
- State legislation and Armed Services policy prevented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from enlisting, yet despite the barriers many enlisted. They served alongside fellow Australians enjoying "mateship" not previously experienced in civilian life.
- Accurate numbers and names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women involved in overseas wars and conflicts in the past are not known. We can contribute to Reconciliation by researching, recording, sharing and commemorating their efforts and stories.

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Commemorate means "to keep alive, or to honour, the memory of some person, group or event by a ceremony" (Their Spirit, Our History (2007), Australian War Memorial).

Students form groups of four and research acts of commemoration in Australia: including days, dates, ceremonies, places and symbols. Refer to the Middle Years Resources list for additional websites and information. Record the findings in the templates provided (Appendix 2).

Read the book *Memorial* (see Middle Years Resources) to students, allowing them the opportunity to focus closely on the illustrations. Discuss the significance of the "memorials" to members of the family i.e. the statue and significant tree.

Students construct a family tree, representing each of the generations and family members mentioned in the book, *Memorial*. Record their names, the wars they served in and the dates.

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Students complete a timeline of overseas wars and conflict (Appendix 3) and then add a brief summary of South Australian and Australian legislation and the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at corresponding points in time. Use links to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission website:-

The laws: South Australia - www.hreoc.gov.au/education/bth/download/laws/bth_lawsSA_5r.pdf

Track the history - www.hreoc.gov.au/education/bth/download/history/bth_trackhistory_1r.pdf

Discuss with students, the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australian colonies or states at each juncture on the timeline.

Read *My Mother's Eyes – The Story of a Young Boy Soldier* (see Middle Years Resources). Discuss the motivation of the young man in the story to join the Australian Armed Services and to serve in a war.

Students read biographies of a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women listed in the resource list and *Enlistment in World War II* - Leon Kent (Appendix 1). Focus students' attention on the opening sentences (Appendix 1), which highlight a change in recruitment strategies of the Australian Armed Forces late in WW II.



MIDDLE YEARS

Shortages of servicemen resulted in active recruitment/conscription of men from Aboriginal Reserves in South Australia. Using the graphic organiser (Appendix 4) record the motivation and reasons given for enlisting and anticipating they would go overseas to face wars and conflicts.

Students view *The Forgotten* DVD (see Middle Years Resources) and add additional reasons to their graphic organiser which explain why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enlisted.

Students choose a major war – e.g. World War I, World War II or the Vietnam War and gain an overview of war events and experiences by researching the Australian War Memorial website (see General Resource List). They then use their research to develop a double page which will represent a soldier's scrap book or war diary. Encourage students to visualise and depict in their own words the experiences and perspectives of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander serviceman or woman – focus on war action, conditions, food, weather, clothing, comradeship and their feelings about being in a foreign country, absent from family and friends. Include diagrams, sketches, mementos and photographs in the scrap book/war diary pages.

State legislation and Armed Services policy prevented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from enlisting, yet despite the barriers many enlisted. They served alongside fellow Australians enjoying "mateship" not previously experienced in civilian life.

Read the story of the Aboriginal Lovett family and design a family tree to represent the Lovett family, the wars they served in and relevant war dates. Information in this article can be supplemented by accessing the National Australia Archives and War Memorial websites – using a "name search" of members of the Lovett family.

Students access the National Archives website and read the *Attestation form for Herbert Lovett* and *Attestation form for Trooper Frank Fisher* at vrrroom.naa.gov.au/records/?ID=19501 and vrrroom.naa.gov.au/records/?ID=19493

Draw students' attention to questions on the forms "In or near what town were you born?" and "Are you a British subject?" (Lovett) "Are you a natural born British subject or a naturalised British subject?" (Fisher) In particular note the responses given.

Discuss with students the contradiction evident in the World War II Services Regulation used to determine enlistment of non-Europeans. The Australian Military Regulations and Orders Number 177 stated (regarding race and fitness): "Every person before his enlistment in the Military Forces will be medically examined, and no person is to be enlisted voluntarily unless he is substantially of European origin or descent and reaches the standards of medical fitness, age, chest measurement, eyesight and teeth authorised by the Military Board." (Hall, R.A. (1997), p 15)

The interpretation of "substantially of European origin" was open to varying interpretation, debate and appeal.

Research *All in - Indigenous service*, www.ww2australia.gov.au/allin/indigenous.html. Students form groups of four and research the primary documents available at www.ww2australia.gov.au/allin/images/pdf/enlistment.pdf. Each student reads three (3) original documents and writes a brief summary, recording their notes under the headings: who, when, what, and why. They provide an oral report for their group using their written summaries and ensuring the date sequence is maintained.

At a time in Australia when legislation within each separate state governed the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and racism and prejudices were evident in civil society an Infantry Section Commander in WW II stated – "... we came to love one another in that section. We depended on each other, and throughout some fairly stiff actions we got to know just about everything about each other... we lived with... (an Aborigine) as a brother... Our love for him was such that there could be no place for any colour barriers... we were forced together by events, and our comradeship was completely necessary." (Gordon H. (1965), p 47)

Read the quote above which relates to WW II to students and provide a copy of the article *Vietnam War* (Appendix 1). Students develop and write a hypothesis explaining why they think mateship and comradeship existed between black and white servicemen within the Australian Armed Forces, yet the same relationships were not as evident in Australian civilian life.

Students find out about the expectations of returned servicemen of European descent following WW I and WW II – employment, housing, land and pension benefits. Compare this with the benefits provided to those servicemen of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Students construct a "compare and contrast" diagram to record their findings.

Accurate numbers and names of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women involved in overseas wars and conflicts in the past are not known. We can contribute to Reconciliation by researching, recording, sharing and commemorating their efforts and stories.

Students can research and write a biography /war service record of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander serviceman or woman using wherever possible, primary resources, community, state and national records. Examples of biographies of South Australian Aboriginal servicemen are located at www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=834 and at www.connectingspirits.com.au/pages/soldiers/2008-soldiers.php

A useful step by step procedure for students to do their own research, *How to Research a Soldier*, is available at www.connectingspirits.com.au/pages/soldiers/how-to-research-a-soldier.php

See resource list for access to examples of completed biographies and biographical information at National Australia Archives www.naa.gov.au and vrrroom.naa.gov.au

Curriculum Links

South Australia Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA)

- Society and Environment & English
- Equity Cross Curriculum Perspectives – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives
- Essential Learnings – Futures, Identity, Interdependence, Thinking, Communication

Australian Curriculum: History

Australian Curriculum: English

- General Capabilities
- Cross Curriculum Perspectives – Indigenous perspectives

Middle Years Resources

Books

Crew, G. & Tan, S. (2003). *Memorial*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne.

Wilson, M. (2010). *My Mother's Eyes – The Story of a Boy Soldier*, Hachette Children's Books, www.mymotherseyes.com.au.

Australia at War

Australians at War:-

Education Kit

www.australiansatwar.gov.au/education/index.html

Primary Schools Education Resource Part 1

www.australiansatwar.gov.au/pdf/aaw_primary_p1.pdf

Primary Schools Education Resource Part 2

www.australiansatwar.gov.au/pdf/aaw_primary_p2.pdf

Australian military history: an overview

www.awm.gov.au/atwar/conflict.asp

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War servicemen and women

'All in' – Indigenous service

www.w2australia.gov.au/allin/indigenous.html

Australian War Memorial:

Captain Reginald Walter Saunders, MBE
www.awm.gov.au/people/302.asp

Encyclopaedia: Indigenous Australian servicemen
www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/aborigines/indigenous.asp

Encyclopaedia: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders in the Australian Defence Force
www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/aborigines/index.asp

Australian Military Units
www.awm.gov.au/units/

Memorial boxes
www.awm.gov.au/education/box

Connecting Spirits: Soldiers
connectingspirits.com.au//pages/soldiers.php

Indigenous Australians at War: Dedication
www.1aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/IAAW/dedication.html

Indigenous Australians at War: Honour Roll
www.1aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/iaaw/honour.html

National Australia Archives
www.naa.gov.au

NAA virtual reading room
vrroom.naa.gov.au

SA Memory, Experiences at War: Aboriginals and War
www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=834

The ANZAC Day legend & Coloured Digger Anzac march
www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/anzac-day-digger-march.html

