



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this article contains images of people who have passed away.

## Teaching as Truth-Telling: A Demythologising Pedagogy for the Australian Frontier Wars

Eight guiding principles add to the academic conversation about pedagogies for traumatic historical periods, and help to establish positive practices when teaching the Frontier Wars.

*Alison Bedford and Vince Wall*

The Glennie School and the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba;  
All Hallows' School, Brisbane

While there is a great deal of research on the inclusion of First Nations perspectives and the needs of First Nations students, there is little written about how to teach the history of First Nations and European conflict specifically, particularly in the Australian context. We see a need for this gap to be addressed for a range of reasons: far more teachers are now teaching the Frontier Wars as a dedicated topic, there has been a shift in public thinking about First Nations experiences of frontier violence, and we as educators want to ensure that our students leave our classrooms with a truthful account of our nation's past and a feeling of safety and respect, regardless of their background.

This article argues that, particularly in teaching the Frontier Wars, there is a need for a new pedagogical framework that reflects and explores our shifting attitudes: from foundation myths to an exploration of our nation's foundational truths. To begin, we consider the current political climate in Australia and the ways in which First Nations history and experience are still a site of contestation and debate. We then propose eight guiding principles for teachers to consider when teaching our nation's contested past. We hope that these add to the academic conversation around pedagogies for traumatic historical periods, and are useful to teachers in establishing positive practices when teaching the Frontier Wars.

» Alison Bedford and Vince Wall, 'Teaching as Truth-Telling: A Demythologising Pedagogy for the Australian Frontier Wars,' *Agora* 55:1 (2020), 47–55 «

## The Political Landscape

Until recently, the dominant understanding of our national history was centred on the settler-colonial narrative of Australia as an ‘uninhabited’ land with only a few scattered Indigenous tribes who were destined to disappear. First Nations peoples were subject to laws enacted by men like A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia (1915–36) and Commissioner for Native Affairs (1936–40), who saw the goal of answering the ‘native question’ to be a society in which ‘absorption becomes fact instead of wishful thinking.’<sup>1</sup> This attempted erasure of First Nations cultures and peoples was seen as a natural outcome of the colonising project. However, social and legal changes have challenged the validity of this perspective. Australian First Nations people have a continuous history of struggle against European colonialism and protectionism, from the Frontier Wars to the 1938 Day of Mourning and their constant and ongoing advocacy for self-determination and self-representation.

The first significant socio-legal shift was the recognition of Indigenous Australians as citizens in the 1967 Referendum, removing discriminatory language from the Constitution and adding Indigenous people to the Census count. Another landmark legal change was the destruction of the myth of *terra nullius* – the view that the land was unoccupied and therefore could be claimed by the British without treaty when Cook reached Australia in 1770. The Mabo decision, which recognised that Indigenous Australians have a claim of ownership over their traditional lands, marked a significant shift in Australian law. While the Mabo decision destroyed the legal ‘myth’ of *terra nullius*, we as a nation are only now confronting the myth of colonisation (as opposed to invasion) and a lack of First Nations’ agency in our social discourse and school curricula.

Currently, First Nations’ leadership and advocacy is centred on achieving Constitutional recognition. These aims are encapsulated in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, which has as its key goal ‘*Makarrata* ... the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.’<sup>2</sup> The key tenets of voice, treaty and truth are a call for action. First Nations peoples are seeking to have their voice enshrined in the Constitution, along with the establishment of a Makarrata Commission that ‘would supervise a process of agreement making [Treaty] with Australian governments’ and ‘oversee a process of truth-telling about Australia’s

### **Makarrata**

*Makarrata* is a word from the language of the Yolngu people in Arnhem Land. It means two parties coming together after a struggle, to heal the wounds of the past, and to live again in peace. The word’s core message is to acknowledge that something wrong has been done and to seek to make things right. University of Melbourne n.d.

history and colonisation.’<sup>3</sup> While the Referendum Council report states that ‘these recommendations for constitutional and extra-constitutional recognition are modest, reasonable, unifying and capable of attracting the necessary support of the Australian people,’<sup>4</sup> the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* was rejected by the Turnbull Government in late 2017.<sup>5</sup> However, the current Coalition Government recently announced that it would work towards holding a referendum on constitutional recognition for Australia’s First Nations peoples in their three-year parliamentary term,<sup>6</sup> suggesting a slight shift in attitude or a recognition of the changing tides of popular sentiment on the issue.

In their discussion of The Uluru Statement, Gabrielle Appleby and Megan Davis note that truth-telling about First Nations histories has been stymied because ‘there remains a level of disaffection, disinterest and denial of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history in Australia, reflected, for instance, in the failure of the Australian educational curriculum to comprehensively and consistently teach this history.’<sup>7</sup> The Uluru Statement was developed through a series of consultative dialogues held around Australia. Delegates at the Dubbo Dialogue ‘spoke of the need to acknowledge the illegality of everything done since colonization, the first act of aggression on first contact, the extreme cruelty and violence of the government, and the impact of the forced removals.’<sup>8</sup>

Yet it becomes clear from other commentary that this truth-telling cannot be just a massacre narrative in which First Nations peoples are yet again dispossessed of agency and identity. As delegates in the Adelaide Dialogue noted: ‘They wanted the history of Aboriginal people taught in schools, including the truth about murders and the theft of land, Maralinga, and the Stolen Generations, *as well as the story of all the Aboriginal fighters for reform*. Healing can only begin when this true history is taught’ [emphasis added].<sup>9</sup> Appleby and Davis argue that truth-telling ‘must also recall defiance against the government actions and policies, narratives of survival and revelation, thus telling a more complicated version of the truth, in which individuals are not simply victims, perpetrators or heroes, but live complex and heterogeneous lives.’<sup>10</sup> The essential role of education in this process was emphasised,<sup>11</sup> as was the Makarrata Commission as a means of allowing ‘these local truth-telling activities to be collated, properly archived, and where appropriate and with the proper permissions, made public. This would create a record of history: a unified understanding of the contested nature and experience of Australia’s history.’<sup>12</sup> The current climate is one where the essential nature of First Nations recognition, both politically and socially in school curricula, is becoming more evident yet is still deeply resented and contested by some sections of the Australian community.

Looking to our colonial siblings in other Commonwealth nations, the settler-colonial narrative is also being challenged and demythologised. Canada established the



The Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, A.O. Neville, opening the new girls' dormitory of the Graham Home at Mt Margaret Mission. Neville saw the goal of answering the 'native question' to be a society in which 'absorption becomes fact instead of wishful thinking.'

Source: State Library of Western Australia (Call number: BAI340/Era3/16A)

Truth and Reconciliation Commission to assess the impact of Canada's residential school system on its First Nations peoples and, at the Commission's conclusion, established The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Within this context, Métis scholar Chelsea Vowel recognises the need for systemic change, including education in the Canadian context to achieve the reform suggested in the Commission's 94 Calls to Action:

We all need to work on reclaiming our histories, but this cannot be an individual exercise, it absolutely must be a national one. We must share our histories and learn the histories of others, and our curriculum and media must reflect our evolving understandings.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that both public sentiment and First Nations' advocacy in Australia support the reclaiming of a truthful, demythologised account of our nation's past. As Vowel points out, curriculum is one of the key areas where this must be seen.

### **Towards a Demythologising Pedagogy**

A great deal has been written about decolonising the Western university curriculum, but less scholarship exists about doing this at a secondary level, and even less about specific pedagogical principles that may facilitate this shift in teacher practice and student learning. Discussion tends to centre on which content should be taught or on strategies for teaching First Nations students generally, rather than teaching First Nations and settler-colonial histories to a

varied audience. The decolonising project is vast, and to be successful needs to encompass the entire curriculum (and, in fact, our entire society). As such, we use the term 'demythologising' in reference to the foundational myths that have become the dominant narrative of Australian history, and which we now seek to identify and challenge in order to take up the First Nations' call for truth-telling, specifically in our discipline of History.

Many nations with a settler-colonial past are struggling with how to change the practices of a schooling system imported from Europe to improve their shared First Nations and settler-colonial understandings of the world. What follows here are suggestions for guiding principles that may form the basis of a demythologising pedagogy that is specifically suited to the History classroom. These suggestions are underpinned by a range of research from our colonial siblings, Canada and New Zealand, which provide some insights that may be relevant to the Australian context as we work towards teaching as truth-telling, particularly when teaching the Frontier Wars.

### **Principle 1: First, Do No Harm**

The history of Australia's Frontier Wars is confronting for many Australians. History teachers must recognise this fact, especially since 59% of First Nations Australians report having experienced racial discrimination in a twelve-month period.<sup>14</sup> We must also acknowledge that non-Indigenous Australians can harbour anger or resentment



Meeting in Australian Hall, Sydney, organised by Aborigines' Progressive Association mourners on January 26, 1938. Source: State Library of NSW.

if they feel they are being held accountable for the distant past. As such, teachers should prepare age-appropriate curriculum materials that both share truth and enhance a sense of shared humanity. These materials must play a role in leading individuals and communities towards wholeness and healing. At no time should they cause further hurt or division; teaching the Frontier Wars must take place in a spirit of *Makarrata*. It is for this reason that we would suggest that teaching the details of the Frontier Wars be left until the upper secondary years.

In saying that, we argue that it is important that teachers do not gloss over the realities of European settlement when teaching topics such as the European discovery of Australia, such as acknowledging that Captain Cook's voyages included violence against First Nations people. One way in which teachers of younger students can begin to explore a demythologised account of the past is to discuss explicitly with students the imperial, white European perspectives that colour accounts of the time, and the ways in which First Nations voices of the period are silenced. The development of this critical lens when reading lays a strong foundation for future engagement with more confronting and challenging accounts of the past.

Canadian Jeremy Siemens proposes two complementary pedagogical approaches that may promote greater empathy. He argues for a 'critical pedagogy', which is a:

pedagogy [that] recasts national narrative in a manner that explicitly identifies historical and current injustices, and forces non-Indigenous Canadians to consider their place within these systems ... such education moves

colonialism from the distant past to the present. It similarly shifts responsibility for the legacy of colonialism from former governments to present-day Canadians.<sup>15</sup>

However, it is not Siemens' goal to make non-Indigenous Canadians 'take the blame' for past injustice. This was a key point of contention during the Australian History Wars, with former Prime Minister John Howard arguing against a government apology to the Stolen Generations: 'I do not believe, as a matter of principle, that one generation can accept responsibility for the acts of an earlier generation.'<sup>16</sup> In the Canadian context, Chelsea Vowel explains the beliefs that underpin this attitude: 'There is no history of colonialism and systemic racism that informs the modern view of indigenous peoples, because that problem was solved at some point in the past.'<sup>17</sup> Yet it is clear that this is not the case, as racism and intergenerational disadvantage persist in Australia. The current educational model facilitates scenarios such as 'the differentiation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in shared classrooms, which occurs by the tacit acceptance of teaching designed to affirm Indigenous students, while teaching to challenge and unsettle non-Indigenous students' by preventing students from asking difficult questions.<sup>18</sup>

However, if we take Siemens' argument that critical pedagogies are designed to create genuine change and progress towards reconciliation, 'The purpose of helping students recognise their place within systems of oppression is not to reduce them to guilt or shame, but to provide them with empowering knowledge that allows them to stand

against these oppressive systems.<sup>19</sup> Hence, while it can be discomfiting, truth-telling (*Makarrata*) must take priority.

Hogan, McCracken and Eidinger provide some tangible ways in which teachers can have these difficult discussions while ensuring that the safety of both First Nations and non-Indigenous students remains paramount.

Let students know in advance when you are going to discuss potentially triggering topics. Best practices recommend giving your students at least a week's notice, both in class and in emails. Allow your Indigenous students the option to opt-out of these lectures/discussions, and/or leave the classroom without any penalties or explanations. Revisiting these subjects, particularly without sufficient warning, can be traumatic. Do not make Indigenous students discuss their family histories or individual experiences of racism and colonialism, it is not the job of Indigenous students to educate you or their classmates. You may also consider providing a list of resources available on campus for emotional support and counselling on your syllabus.<sup>20</sup>

In these tangible ways, teachers of the Frontier Wars can establish a classroom environment where confronting truths can be articulated in a way that does not perpetuate the cycle of inter-racial resentment that has silenced classrooms of the past.

### Principle 2: The Past Is Not Even Past

American novelist William Faulkner wrote: 'The past is never dead. It's not even past.'<sup>21</sup> When teaching the Frontier Wars, History teachers should assume an existing connection between the events being taught and the lived experiences of their students, the families of those students, and the communities in which they belong. This connection will drive a diverse emotional and intellectual responses to the history we share.

Some of the students we teach will have close associations with and relationships to colonial dispossession. Within our History classrooms are children who are descendants of both conquering colonisers and dispossessed First Peoples. The lessons we teach about the historical conflicts on Australia's frontiers are connected to where and how Australians live today. For example, the lessons we teach connect with the experiences of the Stolen Generation, native title and black deaths in custody. The past is very much alive in our communities. In fact, the legacy of the Frontier Wars is part of our shared present. This fact needs to be respected as we move towards reconciliation, and underpins the need to adopt the pedagogical strategies outlined in Principle 1.

### Principle 3: Songlines

Songlines lie at the heart of understanding the life of Australia's First Nations. If we teach the history of Australia's frontier conflicts without teaching about the vibrant life of pre-contact First Nations' communities then we are not telling the whole truth. There is a need for students to

develop an appreciation of the nature of First Peoples' society prior to contact with the Europeans, and understand that this connection to place and country remains unbroken. In our teaching of the Frontier Wars we are called to honour pre-colonisation societies, connect students with the songlines of pre-1788 Australia and give them a 'chance to glimpse Australia as Aboriginals saw it.'<sup>22</sup> Some helpful strategies to achieve this are put forward by Maori scholar Linda Tihwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies*, which offers more tangible descriptions of how Indigenous ways of knowing can be reflected in research. While Smith is focused on a tertiary setting, many of her points are relevant to Siemens' argument that Indigenous ways of knowing are a necessary corollary of a critical pedagogy. 'The need for Indigenous knowledges is not rooted in some sense of curricular equality, but it is in the holistic and critical role such knowledge can play in the work of reconciliation.'<sup>23</sup> Siemens argues:

Indigenous knowledges offer an alternative to the oppressive imposition of Eurocentric worldviews. Whereas traditional Eurocentric models of knowledge created spaces for exploitation and division, many Indigenous knowledge systems present an embodied understanding of life that promotes interconnection and harmony.<sup>24</sup>

This clearly aligns with the ideals of reconciliation, and is a useful framing device for teaching. Smith lists 25 Indigenous projects, but here we explore just a few. Smith points out the benefits of 'claiming' their own histories: 'They teach both the non-indigenous audience and the new generations of indigenous peoples an official account of their collective story.'<sup>25</sup> This is another way in which interconnection can be promoted.

Another key methodology suggested by Smith that can be incorporated into classrooms is 'naming' – using the First Nations names of places and practices as a way of foregrounding First Nations language and demonstrating that the colonial namings were in fact renamings of places that were already known.<sup>26</sup> This naming of place can be further built upon through excursions: 'teaching of history might provide students with a sense of belonging, and more specifically on how students can be enabled to reinhabit places with a sense of reciprocity and emotion through pedagogical practices that revolve around socioecological actions involving the restoration of local lands, waterways and Indigenous stories of place.'<sup>27</sup> Manning and Harrison continue, arguing for the benefits of adopting a local focus as part of a demythologised, highly contextualised pedagogy:

Indigenous histories ... can only really begin to be understood by teachers and students of history in the context of their 'local' Indigenous places and sites of cultural significance. It is in these places where local flora, fauna and land/seascapes provide vital mnemonic prompts, and natural pedagogical props which are essential to 'feeling' and 'thinking' about history in ways that are most likely to be deemed by Indigenous peoples, themselves, as being, 'culturally-responsive.'<sup>28</sup>

Demonstrating to students that the country upon which they live has a deep history, and providing them with knowledge and experience of this through awareness of place, is another way that we can help students understand the land over which the Frontier Wars were fought.

#### Principle 4: Give Voice

Kate Habgood points out that ‘generally speaking, students are rarely exposed to strong and diverse Aboriginal voices.’<sup>29</sup> Likewise, there is a silence in sources related to Australia’s Frontier Wars. This silence can easily pervade the History classroom. While there are many primary and secondary sources available for students’ study, we must acknowledge that students may find it difficult to access records that present First Peoples’ perspectives.

It is clichéd to state that history is written by victors, but there is significant truth in this when we explore Australia’s colonial history. In teaching the Frontier Wars we must seek out opportunities to present to students the voices from the ‘other side’ of the frontier, and thus give voice to the voiceless. We must seek to allow the voice of First Peoples to be heard in our History classrooms. Habgood reminds us that ‘blending contemporary and recent voices of Aboriginal people with the history of early European occupation helps counter the fallacy of victimhood.’<sup>30</sup> A caveat to this is to avoid speaking on behalf of First Nations peoples in an attempt to fill the silence left by the dearth of primary sources that capture First Nations voices.

‘Giving voice’ also aligns with Hogan et. al’s point that non-Indigenous teachers need to be wary of teaching ceremonies or spiritual beliefs; this should be done by an elder. All teachers should also avoid generalising Indigenous cultures, instead focusing on local and specific beliefs, knowledge and experience.<sup>31</sup> Since there are more than 500 First Nations groups in Australia, this context is essential. Smith describes another way to ‘give voice’ in her outline of Indigenous ‘reading’. This reinforces the necessity of including First Nations perspectives, not only as primary sources but as a vital part of the milieu of academic voices.

The rereading of imperial history by post-colonial and cultural studies scholars provides a different, much more critical approach to history than was previously acceptable. It is no longer the single narrative story of important white imperial figures, adventurers and heroes who fought their way through undiscovered lands to establish imperial rule and bring civilization and salvation to ‘barbaric savages’ who lived in ‘utter degradation’.<sup>32</sup>

Since working with historical evidence is one of the key skills that we aim to instil in our young historians, the careful curation and consideration of sources provided to students is another way in which we can ensure that we demythologise our past by showing students the diversity of experience in primary evidence and the range of perspectives in contemporary scholarship.

#### Principle 5: Life in All Its Complexity

Truth-telling must explore the complexity of the human experience. In our History classes, we should try to engage with the perspectives of all for whom the frontier experience was lived reality. The histories of individuals and groups on the colonial frontier is far from simple. People’s actions are complicated, and motivations are often mixed. Creating a dichotomous ‘good versus evil’ narrative in studying the Frontier Wars only serves to perpetuate mythmaking. The study of the Frontier Wars is a study in humanity.

Brisbane historian Ray Kerkhove urges teachers not to avoid dealing with ‘ethical complexities.’<sup>33</sup> ‘We want Australia to take a giant leap in humanity. This is about truth-telling ... It is not about colour. It is about truth-telling and justice.’<sup>34</sup> The choices facing individuals and communities on both sides of the colonial frontier were nuanced and tinged with specific circumstances. Two-dimensional tropes cannot convey the richness of the human experiences present during this period of Australian history.

To avoid the creation of binaries, it is important to avoid falling into a reversal of perspectives, as Nakata highlights:

decolonising as a de facto education theory often instates and privileges particular forms of logic and analytical practice as ‘the preferred’ Indigenous ones. Students are positioned to critique the Western narrative but also to accept without question the Indigenous counter-narrative, however it is reworked as the basis for developing more appropriate practices for Indigenous contexts.<sup>35</sup>

The history of the Frontier Wars is one in which students will find evidence of all shades of humanity. Those who lived on the Australian colonial frontier were people who lived lives as complex as ours today. Our students must be given opportunities to connect to this truth. This means that History teachers must seek out and then find ways to share the stories of individuals to avoid the perpetuation or creation of Frontier Wars stereotypes. Nakata offers a way forward, suggesting:

- an awareness of the persistent pervasiveness of ‘all knowing’, ‘taken-for-granted’ Western frames, and what these obscure from view
- an awareness of the inversion of those frames in Indigenous analysis, and some of the limits of that
- an appreciation of just how intricate and open to interpretation that the dance around worldviews, knowledge and practice is as a result.<sup>36</sup>

The explicit teaching of context and historiography are ways in which teachers can avoid falling into ‘absolutes’ by prioritising different ways of knowing in their classrooms, and allow for a recognition of ‘the shared nature of this truth-telling. It is not for or owned by any particular group, but for all Australians as we come together after the many, often violent and tragic, struggles of our past.’<sup>37</sup>



An engraved 1869 depiction of First Nations people attacking a settler's hut. Far from being passive victims of colonisation, the First Nations stood in opposition to the colonisers. A teaching approach that privileges a 'massacre narrative' incorrectly ascribes to First Nations people a lack of agency and a passivity that didn't exist in the face of a colonial expansion.

Source: National Library of Australia, <https://nla.gov.au/443/tarkine/nla.obj-135904910>

### Principle 6: It Was a War

In Australian society there remains some reluctance to acknowledge that frontier warfare was a daily reality. Despite a mountain of primary source materials that refer to warfare, there is a reluctance in some quarters to accept this reality. History teachers must be clear on this point. The Frontier Wars were wars.

The history of the Frontier Wars is not a history of massacres. In teaching the Frontier Wars, it becomes obvious that there were innumerable massacres. This cannot and should not be denied. It is important, however, to ensure that First Peoples are not falsely positioned as merely inevitable fatalities of a colonisation process. A teaching approach that privileges a 'massacre narrative' incorrectly ascribes to our First Nations peoples a lack of agency and a passivity that didn't exist in the face of a colonial expansion. Kerkhove warns that teachers must studiously reject such 'simplistic, narrow interpretations' of Australia's colonisation.<sup>38</sup>

History teachers should ensure that students are aware that there was nothing inevitable about the process of colonial expansion. Frontier warfare was widespread. It involved patterns of resistance, retaliation, massacre and survival.

It involved recognisable tactics, strategies and alliances. The warfare was especially intense in the highly populated areas of northern Australia. While the process of European colonisation culminated in European imperial ascendancy across the continent, resistance was very real and prolonged. Far from being passive victims of colonisation, the First Nations stood in opposition to the colonisers. To suggest otherwise is a denial of the evidence in the source material.

Smith's 'celebrating survival' methodology is also important here, as it helps teachers and students to avoid falling into a 'massacre narrative' in which the First Nations people are decimated by a superior military force with little leadership or resistance. Celebrating survival not only centres on the survival of First Nations people in frontier conflicts, but 'the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity.'<sup>39</sup> This deconstruction of the myth of largely peaceful settlement to reveal the truth of fierce and ongoing resistance to British settlement is a core pillar of a pedagogy suited to the Frontier Wars.

### Principle 7: Teach History Well

The skills of interpretation, analysis and evaluation rest upon having a solid knowledge of our content area. As teachers we have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about the topics we teach. The Frontier Wars is no different to any other topic in this respect. Teachers must seek out and learn about the history of these wars. In teaching the Frontier Wars, teachers will inevitably need to address the absence of sources that give insight from the perspectives of First Peoples. The place of oral histories is significant here. Teachers will need to help students grapple with studying history when voices have been silenced, when evidence has been falsified, and when euphemisms abound in the historical record. Teaching the Frontier Wars provides extraordinarily fertile ground for teachers and students who are prepared to inquire deeply.

In the teaching of the Frontier Wars, students (especially in senior years) will need to learn to research thoroughly, to engage with their learning authentically, and to use evidence from different sources, such as archives, databases, parliamentary records, artworks and local museums. The need to teach good historical practice and the disciplines of our craft have never had a greater imperative. This questioning, critical mindset of the historian equips students to ask questions, evaluate evidence, make informed decisions and 'empathise with others and make meaningful connections between the past, present and possible futures.'<sup>40</sup> To teach the Frontier Wars well, History teachers must be relentless in their efforts to teach students to be good historians.

### Principle 8: Empower Students to Build a Better World

Stephen Covey famously urged his readers to 'begin with the end in mind.'<sup>41</sup> In teaching the Frontier Wars, History teachers should reflect upon the meaning of their work. Goals in the History classroom include giving students agency and empowering them as active and responsible citizens in their communities.

While studying the Frontier Wars has a key place in Australia's national journey towards reconciliation, it also provides opportunities for students to examine their own views on truth, bearing witness and relationships. When studying the Frontier Wars, students are challenged to 'seek to make things right' in their world.

Students can be challenged through a study of the Frontier Wars to make changes in their lives and better their own spheres of influence. They may see that larger positive changes result when they make things right in what appear to be small ways. This is an empowering message for young people today.

### Conclusion

The contested history of European arrival in Australia and the ongoing call for greater First Nations recognition and autonomy mean that teaching First Nations history is a political act. Exploration of how our syllabuses have reflected the ebb and flow of public sentiment highlight this, and impress upon teachers how important it is that First Nations history is taught well to give students a nuanced, fair and truthful understanding of our collective past.

We argue that the adoption of eight guiding principles can assist History teachers in demythologising Australian history: first, do no harm; acknowledge that the past is not past; explore songlines; give voice; acknowledge life in all its complexity, recognise it was a war; teach history well; and empower our students to make a better world. We offer these principles as part of the conversation around pedagogies for teaching the Frontier Wars and other traumatic historical events, and look forward to seeing how these ideas might be adopted and adapted in classrooms.

Teachers are able to make their History classrooms places where the spirit of *Makarrata* thrives. Our work has been of lasting worth if we, as History teachers, are remembered long after ATARs are forgotten as professionals who took the time to assist young people in our care and helped them to discover ways of 'coming together' after conflict.



- 1 A.O. Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community* (Sydney: Currawong, 1947), 263.
- 2 *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement>.
- 3 'Voice. Treaty. Truth.' *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://ulurustatement.org>.
- 4 Pat Anderson and Mark Leibler, *Final Report of Referendum Council* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), iv.
- 5 Michelle Grattan, 'Turnbull Government Says No to Indigenous "Voice to Parliament"', *The Conversation*, October 26, 2017. <https://theconversation.com/turnbull-government-says-no-to-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-86421>.
- 6 Amy Remeikis, 'Ken Wyatt Wants Referendum on Indigenous Constitutional Recognition within Three Years.' *The Guardian*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jul/10/ken-wyatt-wants-referendum-on-indigenous-constitutional-recognition-within-three-years>.
- 7 Gabrielle Appleby and Megan Davis, 'The Uluru Statement and the Promises of Truth,' *Australian Historical Studies* 49:4 (2018): 507.
- 8 Appleby and Davis, *The Uluru Statement*, 504.
- 9 Appleby and Davis, *The Uluru Statement*, 507.
- 10 Appleby and Davis, *The Uluru Statement*, 506.
- 11 Appleby and Davis, *The Uluru Statement*, 507.
- 12 Appleby and Davis, *The Uluru Statement*, 509.
- 13 Chelsea Vowel, 'We Can't Get Anywhere until We Flip the Narrative.' *âpihtawikosisân: Law. Language. Culture*, August 22, 2013, <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2013/08/we-cant-get-anywhere-until-we-flip-the-narrative/>.
- 14 Scanlon Foundation, *Australians Today: Landmark Research into Multiculturalism 2016*. August 2016, <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/australians-today/>
- 15 Jeremy Siemens, 'Education for Reconciliation: Pedagogy for a Canadian Context,' *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education* 8:1 (2017), 130.
- 16 Anne Davies 'Nothing to Say Sorry for: Howard'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 12, 2008., <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nothing-to-say-sorry-for-howard-20080312-gds4t6.html>.
- 17 Vowel, 'Flip the Narrative.'
- 18 Martin Nakata., 'Difficult Dialogues in the South: Questions about Practice.' *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 47:1 (2017), 5.
- 19 Siemens, 'Education for Reconciliation,' 131.
- 20 Skylee-Storm Hogan, Krista McCracken and Andrea Eiding, 'Appropriation vs. Incorporation: Indigenous Content in the Canadian History Classroom,' July 15, 2019, <http://activehistory.ca/2019/07/appropriation-vs-incorporation-indigenous-content-in-the-canadian-historyclassroom/?fbclid=IwAR06qvh1YyMz-gEl3pYtYADG2TXcH37YCSI2fVOOLhb6FlwofuDBIUNMcy>.
- 21 William Faulkner. *Requiem for a Nun*. (London: Penguin Random House, 1951), 85.
- 22 Bruce Pascoe. *Dark Emu* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014), 2.
- 23 Siemens, 'Education for Reconciliation,' 132.
- 24 Siemens, 'Education for Reconciliation,' 132.
- 25 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 144.
- 26 Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, 157.
- 27 Richard Manning and Neil Harrison, 'Narratives of Place and Land: Teaching Indigenous Histories in Australian and New Zealand Teacher Education.' *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 43:9 (2018), 59.
- 28 Manning and Harrison, 'Narratives of Place and Land,' 71.
- 29 Kate Habgood, 'Teaching Aboriginal History for Justice and Reconciliation: A Personal Reflection,' *Agora* 52:3 (2017), 54.
- 30 Habgood, 'Teaching Aboriginal History', 55.
- 31 Hogan, McCracken and Eiding, 'Appropriation vs Incorporation,' 2019.
- 32 Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, 149.
- 33 Ray Kerkhove, email to author, July 1, 2019.
- 34 'Voice. Treaty. Truth.'
- 35 Nakata, 'Difficult Dialogues in the South,' 5.
- 36 Nakata, 'Difficult Dialogues in the South,' 6.
- 37 Appleby and Davis, 'The Uluru Statement,' 504.
- 38 Kerkhove, email, 2019.
- 39 Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, 145.
- 40 Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Modern History 2019 v1.2: General Senior Syllabus*, [https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior-qce/syllabuses/snr\\_modern\\_history\\_19\\_syll.pdf](https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior-qce/syllabuses/snr_modern_history_19_syll.pdf)
- 41 Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (Franklin Covey, 2015).

#### SUNGRAPHÔ SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

'Sungraphô' means 'I report' in Ancient Greek. Thucydides uses this verb to describe the product of his historical research. It reflects the aim of the refereed section of *Agora*, which is not necessarily based on the issue's theme.

Sungraphô submissions must be original work that has not been previously published elsewhere. Articles published in *Sungraphô* are subject to double-blind peer review by at least two independent experts.

For any queries, please contact Sungraphô editor Dr Heather Sharp, [heather.sharp@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:heather.sharp@newcastle.edu.au).

Send submissions to [agora@htav.asn.au](mailto:agora@htav.asn.au).

#### SUNGRAPHÔ EDITOR

Heather Sharp, The University of Newcastle

#### SUNGRAPHÔ EDITORIAL BOARD

Carmel Fahey, The University of Sydney  
 Trudie Fraser, The University of Melbourne  
 Robert Guyver, The Historical Association  
 Catherine Hart, Independent consultant  
 Deborah Henderson, Queensland University of Technology  
 Adrian Jones, La Trobe University  
 Robert Parkes, The University of Newcastle  
 Ronald Ridley, The University of Melbourne  
 Ruth Sandwell, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
 Michael Spurr, Cengage Learning  
 Tony Taylor, Monash University  
 Rosalie Triolo, Monash University  
 Joseph Zajda, Australian Catholic University

Copyright of Agora is the property of Copyright Agency Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.