Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Victorian Curriculum F–10
Version 2.0

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# Introduction

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority provides opportunities for all students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of Australia by learning about the world’s oldest continuous living cultures. Students learn that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are strong, resilient, rich and diverse.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority sets out essential cultural knowledge that all Australians should know: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples form significant, diverse and resilient living communities within contemporary society. Learning about this cross-curriculum priority is embedded in the curriculum areas of the Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0. Through this cross-curriculum priority, the Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, in the words of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration:

… provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the ability to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in the curriculum; and allows all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world’s oldest continuous living cultures.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Learning about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority requires engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ knowledges, experiences, values and perspectives. For the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 cross-curriculum priority, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), through its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group, sought the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to inform the key aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures that all Australians should know. For the development of the Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and the VCAA have collaborated to ensure this cross-curriculum priority meets Victorian standards and is relevant to the Victorian context.

It is crucial to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in decision-making about information relevant to them. Working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples has ensured a respectful and culturally responsive curriculum, with appropriate language. Shared decision-making is an essential component of reconciliation and strengthening relationships.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living throughout Victoria and across the country are diverse. While the term ‘Koorie’, or ‘Koori’, is commonly used to describe the Aboriginal Peoples of Victoria, the Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0 cross-curriculum priority uses the term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ throughout because the cross-curriculum priority includes all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Within the cross-curriculum priority, ‘histories’ and ‘cultures’ are used as broad terms. ‘Histories’ relates to more than the History curriculum area; it also relates to contexts and perspectives in multiple curriculum areas in the Victorian Curriculum F–10. ‘Cultures’ refers to ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. Living communities and identity are central to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.

# Structure

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority has 3 sets of organising ideas: Country and Place; Culture; and People.

## Country and Place

Through the ‘Country and Place’ organising ideas, students are able to recognise the special connection to Country and Place and celebrate the unique belief systems that connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples physically and spiritually to Country and Place.

‘Country’ refers to the physical environment that a particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ group has a relationship with. This is a reciprocal and deep relationship, where Country both owns and is owned by the People. For Torres Strait Islander Peoples, ‘Place’ is a space mapped out that individuals or groups occupy and regard as their own and that has varying degrees of spirituality; for Aboriginal Peoples, ‘Place’ refers to the special places that exist within Country.

Students understand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the Traditional Owners of Country and Place, and they develop their knowledge of native title law. Through these organising ideas, the rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Country and Place are recognised, and the impacts of colonisation and the now overturned doctrine of terra nullius on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ ownership of, and access to, Country and Place are acknowledged.

## Culture

The ‘Culture’ organising ideas help develop students’ understanding of the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, including their unique ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are recognised as belonging to the world’s oldest continuous cultures, and the many historic and enduring impacts of colonisation on the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are acknowledged. Through these organising ideas, students understand that the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are not static and that they have internationally enshrined special rights that ensure they can be maintained, controlled, protected and developed.

## People

Through the ‘People’ organising ideas, students learn about the occupation of the Australian continent and adjacent islands by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples from time immemorial. Students develop their awareness and understanding that Australia has 2 distinct groups of First Nations Peoples, each encompassing a diversity of nations and peoples. Through these organising ideas, students build their understanding of the sophisticated social organisation systems, protocols and kinship structures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the significant contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ histories and cultures on a local, national and global scale.

# Organising ideas

The organising ideas of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Organising ideas of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority

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| Version 2.0 organising ideas |

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| Country and Place  |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Australia maintain a deep connection to, and responsibility for, Country and Place and have holistic values and belief systems that are connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways. VC2CCPACP1 |
| The occupation and colonisation of the land now known as Australia by the British, under the now overturned doctrine of terra nullius, were experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as an invasion that denied their occupancy of, and connection to, Country and Place. VC2CCPACP2 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the Traditional Owners of Country and Place, protected in Australian law by the *Native Title Act 1993*, which recognises pre-existing sovereignty, continuing systems of law and customs, and connection to Country and Place.VC2CCPACP3  |
| Culture  |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies are diverse and have distinct cultural expressions, such as language, customs and beliefs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural expressions, while also maintaining the right to control, protect and develop culture as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. VC2CCPAC1 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ ways of life reflect unique ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. VC2CCPAC2 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people belong to the world’s oldest continuous cultures. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples demonstrate resilience in the maintenance, practice and revitalisation of culture despite the many historic and enduring impacts of colonisation, and they continue to celebrate and share the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures. VC2CCPAC3 |
| People  |
| Australia has 2 distinct First Nations Peoples; each encompasses a diversity of nations across Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have occupied the Australian continent and adjacent islands from time immemorial. VC2CCPAP1 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have sophisticated political, economic and social organisation systems, which include but are not limited to family and kinship structures, laws, traditions, customs, land tenure systems and protocols for strong governance and authority. VC2CCPAP2 |
| The significant and ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their histories and cultures are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally. VC2CCPAP3  |

1. Council of Australian Governments, Education Council (2019) [Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration](https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration), p. 15, Australian Government Department of Education website. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)