

Don't Keep History a Mystery

Port Phillip Citizens
For Reconciliation

2018 Reconciliation
Writing Competition

Port Phillip Citizens for Reconciliation welcomes all newcomers to our meetings held on the third Tuesday of each month, 6.30 pm at the South Melbourne Town Hall Community Hub, Fishley Street, South Melbourne.

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Cover Photo courtesy of Todd Condie.

St Kilda's majestic and ancient Corroboree Tree, now known as the Ngargee Tree, is a 700-year-old river red gum – one of only a handful of pre-contact eucalypts in the inner city today.

Ngargee is the local Boon Wurrung word for 'a gathering; a celebration of community.'

FOREWORD

'Come with purpose' is something often expressed when members of the Yaluk-ut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung give a Welcome to Country at events and ceremonies in the City of Port Phillip.

It means that people coming together should make the most of the opportunity of learning about one another's culture, background and world view.

Understanding and empathising with the position of another is an important step towards positive and respectful working relationships.

With Victoria possibly taking a step on the road to a treaty between the state's Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, 'standing in someone else's shoes' is crucial during the negotiation phase of the process.

Many of the entries in this publication come from the next generation of Australians who will determine what 'type' of nation exists in coming decades.

It is pleasing to note that their poetry, songs and stories reflect a willingness to have a new look at Australia's history with fresh eyes and with a compassionate heart.

Unity in the Struggle,

Todd Jigarru Condie

Indigenous Policy Officer
City of Port Phillip

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Port Phillip Citizens for Reconciliation (PPCfR) respectfully acknowledges the Yaluk-ut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung. We pay our respects to their Elders, both past and present. We acknowledge and uphold their continuing relationship to this land and water on which we rely. We recognise the intrinsic connection to Country of the Traditional Owners.

Port Phillip Citizens for Reconciliation is a vibrant, dedicated community group that started in 1997. The Co-chairs are Rosemary Rule and Dennis Fisher. PPCfR aims to:

- Build close relationships in our community between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- Provide a forum for community discussion
- Promote an understanding of the culture, heritage and history of Aboriginal people, particularly the Boon Wurrung – the Traditional Owners of Port Phillip.

We gratefully acknowledge the support from the City of Port Phillip and especially Todd Condie, Indigenous Policy Officer, for his continual guidance and encouragement. We also thankfully acknowledge the office of the Honourable Martin Foley MP for their ongoing support.

PPCfR also expresses sincere appreciation to Judith Jackson, esteemed Aboriginal Elder in the Port Phillip community.

We express our appreciation and thanks to the following individuals and organisations who have helped create a very successful Writing Competition in 2018:

- Our dedicated Judges – Professor Tony Birch, Mr Bryan Andy and Emeritus Professor Clare Bradford
- Graeme Wilson from Wilson Agents for donating First Prize for Adults
- Helen Sykes from Future Leaders for donating First Prize for Years 10-12 students in honour of the late Andrew McCutcheon
- Benson Saulo and Dr Kate O'Brien for donating First Prize for Years 7-9 students
- Geoff Cayzer for his donation
- Greg Hocking for his donation
- The Avenue Bookstore for their invaluable ongoing support and encouragement
- Prem Reghunath and Provincial Events for generously catering the Awards' Night event
- The creative and dedicated individuals and schools that participated in the Writing Competition
- The committed Writing Competition Working Group: Rosemary Rule, Fiona Olney-Fraser, Jo Bond, Gael Wilson, Janine Wilder, Vivienne McCutcheon, Sushena Krishnaswamy and Deb Stewart (Convenor).



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JUDGE'S REPORT

Primary Students

The 110 entries from students in primary schools came from eleven schools, mainly in the Port Phillip area. These entries demonstrate the writers' strong engagement with topics relating to Aboriginal cultures and history, ranging from the Ngargee Tree at St Kilda Junction to the return of Mungo Man to his country, and the Freedom Ride led by Charlie Perkins in 1965.

In keeping with this year's theme, *Don't Keep History a Mystery*, many of the young writers have carried out research which has enlivened their appreciation of Aboriginal history and the effects of colonisation.

Being the judge of the primary student entries has been a privilege because all these entries speak so eloquently of their writers' respect for Aboriginal cultures and their commitment to Reconciliation.

It has also been a challenge to award only three prizes in each division, because of the high quality of the entries.

I offer my congratulations to all entrants and to their schools and families. Children develop values by learning from parents, teachers and important people in their lives. The entries for this competition give us hope for a reconciled Australia.

Clare Bradford

Emeritus Professor Clare Bradford is Personal Chair as Alfred Deakin Professor in the School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, and is internationally regarded for her research into how children's books depict Indigenous peoples and cultures.

JUDGE'S REPORT

Secondary Students

I want to thank all of the writers who offered work for the 2018 Reconciliation Writing Awards, along with the Port Phillip Citizens for Reconciliation for nurturing our country's commitment to learning from the past and looking to the future.

It's been both a pleasure and an honor to read such engaging and thoughtful writing. There's a reaffirming sincerity within the words of all of the finalists, whether their work is fiction or non-fiction, they're insightful, meaningful, assertive and inspiring. I have really admired the breadth too - how some writers have offered poignant, solemn reflections on our collective past, while other writers look to inspire a collective future with hope, compassion, understanding and Reconciliation.

Reading the students' submissions has reminded me of my own high school years and how we spent a mere two weeks studying Aboriginal people within

a curriculum that I now see as cursory, irrelevant and ill-considered.

It wasn't until I went to university that I was awakened to Aboriginal peoples' experiences within white Australia, and it wasn't until I was 18 years old that I was able to approach Aboriginal affairs and studies critically, politically and with empathy - as all of the finalists have in their entries. Young people give me such hope!

Thank you for every single entry in this year's Reconciliation Writing Competition - they're all from promising writers as each and every piece I read as part of this year's Awards offers insight, hope and Reconciliation.

bryan Andy

bryan Andy is a local government community planner with Banyule City Council. He is a radio broadcaster and writer, and the Convenor of OutBlack - an LGBT social support and advocacy group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria.

JUDGE'S REPORT

Adults

As the judge of the adults' category of the Writing Competition this year I want to thank each of the entrants for their amazing writing. The body of work presented this year was of the highest quality, which made deciding the winners an onerous but enjoyable task.

While reading the stories and poetry I reflected on the times we live in, which can be both challenging and difficult. What was so refreshing for me was that, through the words I read, I was able to reflect on the real potential for Reconciliation at a community and grassroots level.

I would recommend that our politicians read these works, as I am sure they would teach them something invaluable about humility, remorse and generosity.

To the winning entrants, I want to congratulate each of you on your individual writing. I would also like to thank you for your thoughtfulness and creativity.

Tony Birch

Professor Tony Birch is a researcher, academic, educator and widely-published author, winning the 2017 Patrick White Literary Award for his contribution to contemporary Australian literature. He is the inaugural Bruce McGuinness Research Fellow at Moondani Balluk Academic Centre, Victoria University - Footscray Park Campus.

FIRST PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years Prep-2

EVERYONE SHOULD LEARN MORE

Alix Ruegg

I think everyone should learn more about the Aboriginal languages, and think how lucky we are to live in this land.

I think Australians should learn much more, as I only know a few facts about the Aboriginal language and I would like to know more.

I know two Indigenous words from the Boon Wurrung people that lived here. 'Bundabun' means turtle and 'Narang' is blue-tongue lizard. I learnt these words at my kindergarten, where we had our walls covered in Aboriginal paintings and beautiful artwork.

That is all I know, so what is stopping us from learning more. So come on Australia, start learning more about the Aboriginal culture.

At our school we hold up the Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander flag every Monday at assembly.

Once a year at my school, we have a ceremony where an Aboriginal lady comes and talks to us about how it is important to respect Aboriginal culture. This year an Aboriginal man came in and talked to us about his amazing life living in the bush.

I also know that 'Bunjil' is the Indigenous creator. I love how he is a beautiful eagle. I know that at the top of the Aboriginal flag is the Aboriginal people, the yellow circle is the sun, and the red is the dirt, but I want to learn more.

SECOND PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years Prep-2

STORIES OF THIS LAND

Darby Ruegg

White people should have let the Aboriginal people stay on their land.

Aboriginal people deserve to look after their land.

Bunjil is a very special eagle that can keep us all safe.

I know about Bundabun and Narang in our area, and I would like to know more.

I want to know about the stories of this land so we can look after it better.

THIRD PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years Prep-2

THE STOLEN GENERATION

Max Rankin

I've always thought the Stolen Generations were the worst thing that's ever happened to mankind. I feared the Stolen Generations would come back, but they haven't, not in around 50 years.

If you think it doesn't matter, imagine if you were an Aboriginal getting taken away from your family.

The Stolen Generations made millions of people sad: mothers, fathers and children, who are now happy it's over.

FIRST PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years 3-4

NGARGEE TREE

Tomek Burton

I am the tree of the red gum type. I was originally part of a vast tree grove, surrounded by swamps and many water birds, created by the spirit of Bunjil - the great eagle spirit of the Dreamtime.

Over the many years I saw Aborigines dancing around me, their skin decorated with brown and white ochre. Echoes of their chants surrounded me, the rhythm of their clapping hands enchanted me. In the shadows of a bright fire I heard the secrets of many on their journey: pregnant women on the way to birth, lanky boys on their voyage to manhood...

A sudden storm of strange whitefellas descended onto the beach one day! A horrible sickness not to be cured and my people came no more. Forgotten for years I stood alone but I did not forget the times before. Suddenly catastrophe surrounded me, monstrous machines dug up my roots to create a vast, concrete

roadway. If it wasn't for a few good souls I would not exist anymore...

Now... Some people come to my shade to rest, dogs and their owners wander by, most people pass without a thought, without the knowledge of the sacredness of this site. The space around me feels empty, people fill it with small bushes and shrubs. Patches of colour appear on the ground: orange, wrinkly, spongy mushrooms, soft and wet.

Constant building going on around me, skyscrapers taller than me emerge. I can see my image in their blue-glass windows. It is never silent here. There is a constant hum of passing traffic. Sudden braking noises from trucks awaken me from my sleep, the traffic drowns out the birds' chorus. The ground is covered by red eucalyptus flowers: a sign of corellas and cockatoos. Honeyeaters dart through the air. I hear the delightful sound of a flock of lorikeets.

A little boy strolls towards me in silence. He touches my wavy and bumpy bark, pokes his fingers in the tiny holes, stretches his hands around me, admiring my patchwork of colours: grey, beige, white and pink. He measures his footsteps from me to the road. It's a tiny gap...

He tries to imagine the time which has been... Sadness fills the air... A sudden bird call is heard above the traffic noise! Bird wings flap overhead. It's the spirit of Bunjil... A sign of hope for a better future.

SECOND PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years 3-4

RECONCILIATION

Manon Muir

Reconciliation Week is an important week to the Indigenous people because they had this land before anyone else and they should be allowed to have this land.

Reconciliation means trust, respect, kindness, importance of culture and cultural celebration. It is important for Australia to celebrate it because the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have worked hard to keep Australia and their connection to country. We should not ignore history because we will not have a better and positive future without our true history.

Throughout history it's been pretty sad and stressful for Indigenous people. Aboriginals have been fighting for a long time to keep their culture, and as an Aboriginal Boon Wurrung girl I can see how this is important, not only for me but for all Australians to understand the importance of Reconciliation.

THIRD PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years 3-4

MUNGO MAN

Alex Gurvich

Not many people know about the oldest skeleton found in Australia. They don't know his name, don't want his culture, don't even know his age. If you are wondering about any of these questions or want to know more about the oldest skeleton, you are in the right place reading the right book. It would take you about two hours to find this amount of information on the internet, so listen in well.

About Mungo Man

Mungo Man was one hundred and ninety-six centimetres tall – which is very tall. Mungo Man was also quite strong and muscular. Mungo Man died at the age of fifty years – that is much older than scientists thought the prehistoric Aboriginals could live for.

Mungo Man was found in 1974 by Jim Bowler, geologist. Jim Bowler was on a research trip and when he came along Mungo Lake, Willandra Lakes, NSW, he noticed the tip of Mungo Man's head poking out of the sand. So he continued on, dug it up, and found Mungo Man!

Mungo Man *continued*

The Great Argument

The Aboriginals were furious that Mungo Man had been taken away to the city to be studied. The Aboriginals believed if their Aboriginals were taken from their grave they would lose their spirit and would not be able to R.I.P. - Rest in Peace.

So there was a big argument about whether Mungo Man should be taken to study. But, to make things worse, the farmers joined in saying it was their land. In the end, the Aboriginals won and after forty-two years of studying, Mungo Man was put back secretly. Now only the people that buried Mungo Man know where he is.

When He Was Around

Mungo Man was born over 42,000 years ago, and when he was young it was the time woolly mammoths were around! Mungo Man was most likely important because at his funeral someone or a few people sprinkled red ochre over him – red ochre can't be found for 50 kilometres, or over, around Mungo Lake. Mungo Man was not vegetarian. Mungo Man was most likely a carnivore, and that explains why Mungo Man had big and sharp teeth and was missing two at the front.

The Secret Return

Mungo Man had his second funeral in November 2017 after 42 years of studying, and many Aboriginals came. Jim Bowler gave an apology to the Aboriginals. But there was one thing different...Mungo Man was buried secretly.

Mungo Man Today

Mungo Man is still buried secretly but that's not the end of the story. There is still an argument if Mungo Man should be dug up and studied with better technology, or not.

FIRST PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years 5-6

FREEDOM RIDE

Marlena Eales-Grziwotz

Travelling in the car to Queensland I am singing
along with Troy Cassar-Daley:

All aboard the Freedom Ride,

Fight for justice, fight for rights,

All aboard the Freedom Ride.

In the year 1965, the Freedom Ride led by Charlie Perkins took place, touring the western and coastal parts of New South Wales. The group travelled on a bus to interview Aboriginal people about their point of view on racism and land rights.

Freedom Ride *continued*

Passing through Moree, the words of the song start to come alive:

“Step back,” said the man. “You can’t get in,

You got the wrong coloured skin,

We ain’t want no trouble here, you see.”

It’s surprising that on a scorching summer's day people were not allowed into their local pool because of their skin colour, but that's exactly what happened in Moree. Protesting against this were the Freedom Ride group and local Aboriginal people, who had experienced this unfair racist rule. Time and again, Aboriginal people were banned from taking part in public activities such as going to clubs, swimming at pools and enjoying cafes. They were also treated with disrespect when being served in shops.

I take it for granted being able to do things I would call ‘normal’, like going to swimming pools, cafes, being treated fairly and being able to go to school. Even though the past for Aboriginal people has been hard, keeping the past a secret and trying to forget what happened is not going to help. We need to learn from the mistakes our country has made to help us learn.

The Freedom Ride was a group of people protesting about laws that were unfair for Aboriginal Australians. They also went to see for themselves the conditions in which people were living and to share their lives with Australians. This important story comes alive in this song, *Freedom Ride*, and has taught me about our country and this sad time in our history.

Learning about the past is just as important as learning maths or writing. Not everyone knows what happened and by sharing Australian history, people can learn the truth. Understanding our mistakes will help us grow to be better people. As we continue to go out into the world and learn from people's stories, the words of Troy Cassar-Daley help us to look for answers:

We'll always need a Freedom Ride.

SECOND PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years 5-6

MY POSSUM SKIN

Maxime Michaca

My possum skin

I add to it every year

Telling my story

So when I pass

I'll be wrapped up in my story

Watching my life all over again

Every step of the way

THIRD PRIZE

PRIMARY STUDENT: Years 5-6

I AM MAYA

Stella Varney

I don't know who I am...

I don't know where I come from...

I don't know who I'm meant to be...

I only know two things...

My name is Maya and I don't belong here.

I belong out there. With the sky, with the stars, with Bunjil. The last thing I ever remember my Mama saying was: "Bunjil will look after you." I remember nothing more, nothing less.

The guards told me that my parents had abandoned me. But it doesn't seem right. Things here aren't great. We have to do so much work.

I am Maya continued

I have to leave. I need to get out of here. The other girls are used to it. They've been here much longer than I have. Anytime I mention escaping to them they just look away and pretend they can't hear me. They don't understand.

I have the key to get out. I've decided I'm going to do it. Tonight. This is it.

I slowly slip myself under my sheet. The key is held tightly. I don't know that I'm going to be able to let go of it again. The cool metal soothes my red, raw hands. I know this is it. I am ready. I think. I wait until all of the other girls are asleep. I long for them to come with me but I'm not like the other girls. They're white. I'm different.

It's time to go. I follow my plan. I creep out of my bed and into the hallway, being careful not to make a sound. I know Bunjil will look after me like Mama said. The guards can't catch me now. I won't let them. But then I hear them slowly approaching behind me. I freeze. I don't know what to do or where to go.

Suddenly I notice a small cupboard to the left of me. I have no other option. I'm getting in.

I try and cram myself into the tiny space. There are old clothes and cockroaches in here but the guards are coming past. I hold my breath. I don't know what I'm going to do if they catch me. They are standing right in front of the cupboard. I'm terrified that they can hear my heart beating like crazy in my chest. But they don't. They keep walking but now they are in the way of the door.

I silently escape the cupboard. The guards are gone. I quickly thank Bunjil. Down the hallway. To the door. I carefully slide the key into the lock. The door opens...

I am free.

FIRST PRIZE

Donated by Benson Saulo & Dr Kate O'Brien

SECONDARY STUDENT: Years 7-9

THE HOUSE OF WHITE

Daisy Phillips

She doesn't remember home much, only blurry pictures of a mother's smile and a father's laugh. These pictures have become worn and faded from overuse. She can't tell which parts are real and which parts she made up.

They're a comfort in a place such as this. When she arrived she was told everything she had done in her life up until now was wrong. Her language was wrong, her beliefs were wrong, her very existence was wrong. She was also told that it didn't have to stay that way. They said they were going to help, they said they were going to fix her. She was taught new things, different things, wrong things. She was taught to hate who she was, to forget that it ever happened.

Now when she thinks of where she came from, there is no more happiness at the memories of smiles and laughter, only shame. She doesn't have parents anymore, that's what they told her. Her parents had died, and they had saved her and taken her here.

There are other kids here, in this building of white. Some kids go to families, families with different skin colours, they get taught the same, to forget. But most kids go here, to the house of white. The days in the house of white don't seem to have endings; sleep is the only thing that separates them. Some have pain, some have fear, some have both. They're only different because each day has new expectations. Expectations to say the white thing, to do the white thing; each day these expectations get higher and higher.

They say they're preparing her, preparing her for the day when she will be released. Only if she meets these expectations will she be accepted.

When she does get 'released' it is not how they said it would be. There are no smiles, no big houses and fancy clothes, only more scary faces and scathing looks. They said it would be easier for her because she was only half wrong. But in truth it only made it harder, she was only half, not whole, not truly part of anything.

The House of White *continued*

The house of white was still with her even after she left. All the lessons she had learned there, they followed her everywhere, no matter how fast she ran. She dreamt of the lessons sometimes, especially the ones she couldn't learn, and what happened when they asked her something she couldn't answer. The lessons were hard. The lessons were necessary.

She got a job. Not a nice job, it was a hard job. She worked for someone, someone owned her. They told her what to do, they told her what to think, just like they did at the house of white. She is still at the house of white, just a different house, with different white.

She's old now. They've stopped taking the children, they said they were trying to fix things. But what about her? Can they undo what they did to her, unlearn all the lessons she was taught? She tried to find them, her parents, but they were gone, just like they said they were. All she has left of them are memories.

It's still not the same, even after all this time. She still thinks of herself as wrong, dark. She was made to forget, so there was room to put in new things, wrong things. Some things she didn't learn, some things she couldn't. But most things stayed, most things left a scar. There's no fixing what they did to her, in the house of white.

SECOND PRIZE

SECONDARY STUDENT: Years 7-9

BELONG WUGUBANK

Tealia Holmes

Black hands hold onto white,
Dust settles in the evening air,
Sunlight warms my body.
Arms sling over shoulders,
People rush up to hug me.
“I missed you, sister.”
I had missed my family too.
Echoes of laughs float along the wind,
talking in the distance.
Voices overlap and mix in a pool of sound.
Hands entwine,
Welcoming arms embrace me.
Children of all ages and backgrounds,
They call me sister, aunty, grandma,
For we are related in our hearts.

Belong Wugubank *continued*

Learning language,
The ways of the bush.
Different languages, skin colour, cultural
backgrounds and beliefs.
They do not dictate how we see each other.
Not 'I' and 'me', instead 'us' and 'we'.
Sharing with our family.
When we leave we take our memories,
hold them close to our heart.
Memories of places:
Barunga, bats dripping off the trees.
Top Yard, water and art.
The Falls, sitting on the sand, laughing, catching
fish and eating bush tucker.
Skin names, connecting us together.
Black and white, side by side.
Sharing cultures, sharing lifestyles.
Creating a new history, one we can all be proud of.
We are the way of the future,
Australians all, united.
The dawning of a new way of thinking.

THIRD PRIZE

SECONDARY STUDENT: Years 7-9

A SHADOW OF EXISTENCE

Alyssa Seckinger-Crow

(In memory of Lois Olney, a victim of the Stolen Generation)

Just go with the breeze, whatever it takes,

Allow all to flow, and follow away.

But memories do pass, and sun may rise high,

But never again to see you may fly.

A feeling of gone, a feeling of then,

A time that has past, but will never end.

A time to go back, allow river to flow free.

But never might now, be the day of acceptance.

The stolen current of peace, still stolen away.

She wants to accept, that all may be well,

but deep in that river, who knows the currents?

The places she's been, the fear of the dark,

A Shadow of Existence *continued*

The fear forced upon her, by cold and by stone,
will the stone sink to the bottom and allow river to flow?

The ripples deflected out, reflected in,
A stone too buoyant to return to the ground.
The currents that changed by the blackness of stone,
Deflecting, reflecting and allowing no peace.
Isn't it enough to sink and retreat?

Its choice is not hers, but all around,
The deflecting objects, they need to crumble,
Allow the current to return to its former peace.
Only then will light turquoise, dark blue,
The shades of all life, return to a harmony within her.
Let stone sink down, allow the river to flow.

A feeling of now, but a speckle of then,
the darkness of stone, chipping off just slightly.
Seeping into her colours, our colours,
the rainbows of life.
At least stone has settled, allowed life to flow.

Still ripples are seen, but freedom has dawned,
The harmony that existed within her,
now a shadow of existence.

FIRST PRIZE

The Andrew McCutcheon Prize

Donated by Helen Sykes from Future Leaders

SECONDARY STUDENT: Years 10-12

KEEP A FLAME BURNING

Bella Tolhurst

Playing in the rainforest of the tranquil
Queensland country,
Dipping toes in waterfalls, swimming till you're hungry.
Gathered round the fireplace,
Brown limbs growing warm,
Hurrying to shelter to escape the rainstorm.

Moving with the land, adapting to the seasons,
Making use of resources, whatever be the reasons.
Learning from your elders, wise as wise could be,
Taking on lessons you'd pass down the family tree.

A life of a happy child, carefree and serene,
Not a clue of what the colour of your skin may mean.
Family is family, a mob is a mob,
Should never cross one's mind that this
would be robbed.

Keep a Flame Burning *continued*

I'm heartbroken for my great grandma,
Who was stolen from her family.
Dragged away screaming, fingers growing clammy.
Men in trucks, with skin creamy and white,
Sneaking into communities in the depth of the night.

Chasing after the truck,
Screams slicing through the trees,
Mothers' hearts are broken, falling to their knees.
A bond like no other, ripped apart in a flash,
Driving into the distance, leaving a cloud of dusty ash.

Put in a white apron, stripped of her culture,
My great grandmother was picked at by vultures.
Whitewashed of her childhood growing up with the land,
An experience no child should have to experience
first hand.

She was young and alone, she had lost her voice,
Which is why it's important for us who have a choice,
To keep a flame burning for those who were stolen,
To recognise culture for more than a moment.

You can't change history, no matter the circumstance,
But we can speak out for those,
Who never had the chance.

SECOND PRIZE

SECONDARY STUDENT: Years 10-12

THE YOUNG BOY AND HIS SPEAR

Laure Petrie

The mighty ship drew into a deep serene body of water. As the anchor was lowered, the captain of the ship ordered for the release of the row boats so the crew could enter the new land. Lieutenant Cross, looking out at the breathtaking view, remarked how green and lush the land looked, nothing like the filthy streets of London.

The air was thick and hot. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the sunlight upon his face, glad to finally be in a place with warmer weather. Cross jerked his head up when he heard the final call for soldiers boarding the boats. He rushed over to the side of the ship and climbed in. As they rowed, Cross plunged his hand into the cold water, swirling his hand around, admiring how the light glistened on the surface.

The Young Boy and his Spear *continued*

Once docked, he waded through the shallow waters and onto the white sand. He sat down and closed his eyes, feeling the blistering heat on his skin. Suddenly, the bush behind Lieutenant Cross started to rustle. Startled, he leapt up and grabbed his musket. Peering through the thick bushes, Cross could make out the faces of several natives. When they saw that he wanted to approach them, the dark-skinned people skulked back into the shadows - however one sole figure stayed behind. Cross crept closer, drawing back stray branches in his way. When he was close enough to discern their facial features, his eyes widened in surprise.

It was a young boy, with striking features. His skin was a beautiful dark brown, as were his eyes. His hair was long and unruly, his gaze piercing. He stood tall with his chin lifted, communicating a sense of fearlessness. He held a spear taller than himself, with a weapon tip as sharp as a knife. From behind him, a voice called out in a foreign language. Silently, the young boy retreated into the foliage, walking back to rejoin his people.

For weeks Lieutenant Cross hadn't caught a glimpse of the natives he saw that first day. He wondered whether he would see them again. Pushing this thought aside, Cross crouched by the creek and splashed water onto his face. As he stared at his glossy reflection in the water, he noticed movement. It was a large fish.

Cross began grabbing at it ferociously, but the fish escaped, slipping swiftly through his fingers each time. Cross gave up and walked away when he heard a loud splash. He turned around slowly, his gaze falling upon the dark-skinned boy with a fish speared on his weapon.

Cross was astonished; the boy seemed proud, standing taller than the first time they met. His facial expression was captivating, his eye contact remained constant. Lieutenant Cross stayed still, unsure if the boy wanted to interact. The native boy stepped forward, and then again with less trepidation. He ripped the bloodied fish from his spear, and placed it at Cross's feet respectfully. Its scales shimmered in the sunlight, reflecting magnificent colours of blue and silver.

"Thank you. What is your name?" Cross said. Confusion washed over the boy's face. He cocked his head to one side slightly and furrowed his brows. When Cross saw that the boy did not understand, he held his hand to his chest, motioning to himself.

"John, John Cross," he said slowly and calmly. The boy repeated the words. They sounded foreign in his mouth but Cross was filled with a sense of joy, for he was the one to teach him those words. Copying Cross's movement, the young boy knocked a closed fist to his chest.

"Wirung," said the boy, smiling as the syllables left his open mouth.

THIRD PRIZE

SECONDARY STUDENT: Years 10-12

RECONCILIATION

Christina Burke Broderick

My Dad said to me the other night:

“Historically,” he paused, “Australia’s been pretty good about racial tolerance”.

He had to amend it.

“Except, of course, with Indigenous Australians”.

It’s hard to wrap your head around the extent to which this nation's First People have been violently colonised, persecuted, forced into poverty and treated as second class.

That's as a white Australian. How much harder still is it for Indigenous people to deal with? And their race isn't something to deal with, no, it's the actions of colonisers, and repercussions that ripple out, as strong today as they ever were. It's the Stolen Generation, it's that Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander youth are 25 times more likely to be incarcerated. It's that intergenerational trauma means that people are more likely to engage in self-destructive behaviours, develop lifestyle diseases, and enter and remain in the criminal justice system.

There was a boy, at my school, he said, "Aboriginals can't be white."

When we learn about the colonisation of Australia, we learn about massacres and Captain Cook, but we don't learn about the Stolen Generations or, at least, I don't remember if we do. Uncomfortable history is the most important kind. More than a whole generation: children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters - identities. How do you erase a culture? You take their children, their future.

Sorry Day is the time for people who were taken, who had children, family taken, to grieve and be acknowledged. So many more people know about Australia Day.

My brother asked me:

"Who's the guy on the \$2 coin?"

Reconciliation *continued*

The Indigenous Australian on the tails side is colloquially called “One Pound Jimmy”. He doesn’t represent a specific Indigenous person, he’s a caricature of what Indigenous Australians are ‘meant’ to look like. Next to him is an Indigenous plant. It’s commonly known as a ‘blackboy’. The Australian \$2 coin was released in 1988 - Australia’s bicentenary - celebrating 200 years of white ‘settlement’.

I’m never going to know the Indigenous experience. I’ll never truly understand the extent of intergenerational trauma, nor the discrimination against Indigenous Australians.

I know Reconciliation isn’t racist caricatures on a \$2 coin, it isn’t invasion day and it isn’t 53% of youth in detention centres being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

It’s the Mabo Decision, and the Native Title Act 1993. Reconciliation is saying sorry, and not climbing Uluru. Reconciliation should be Australia finally making a Treaty with its Indigenous population. It should be acknowledging and paying reparations to Indigenous Australians. More than words its actions, its funding and healthcare plans and opportunities. Reconciliation is a chance for white Australians not to make up for the past, but to make chances for the future.

OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS CONTRIBUTION AWARDS

We warmly thank and congratulate the following three schools for their outstanding work in encouraging many students to contribute entries into our Reconciliation Writing Competition.

St Mary's School, East St Kilda

Albert Park Primary School, Albert Park

Albert Park College, Albert Park

FIRST PRIZE

**Donated by Graeme Wilson from Wilson Agents
ADULT ENTRY**

A PIECE OF HER-STORY

Jeanine Arthur

I love bird of paradise flowers because they have such beautiful shape and colour and they do look like inquisitive birds with big beaks. Agapanthus are my second favourite because I love purple and blue and they are like a combination of both these colours.

It was such hard work to break up the roots and try to force them apart. Blisters were starting to form on our hands. We tried using a spade but it only made small marks. I was learning how to use a pick to break up the roots so that the precious plants wouldn't break and die. It felt kind of wrong to be destroying something so strong and lush and beautiful, but I knew we were trying to separate them so that they would have more room to grow and flourish, as well as make the garden look even prettier.

My name is Tilly and I am the grandchild of Patty, a woman with amazing, interesting stories to tell. I love it when I get to stay with her and learn about life in the bush, and how things were in the old days. She takes me down to the mangroves to spear mud crabs to cook up for a campout. We sing as we gather wood to light a campfire and she shows me how to cook the crabs over an open fire. Grandma's favourite memory is of when her mother would do the same for her. It's a family tradition that has been carried through generations. I love spending time with my Grandma. She shows me all the plants we can eat, and which ones are good bush medicine if you get hurt or sick. Grandma says that the Earth will always provide what you need. You just have to stay connected and trust that it will take care of you.

"The Earth is at one with the spirits of our ancestors that belong to the land. Honour them both and everything will be taken care of," she would say, over and over again. I don't really understand it all, but Grandma knows a lot of stuff. Maybe one day I will.

One day while Grandma and I and the rest of the mob were walking the sacred songline, we stopped amidst the middens. I found a shell which looked so old and beautiful that I put it in my pocket to keep. Grandma showed me the spot where our family had camped for thousands of years, and she picked up many rocks and showed me how they were tools from the campsite: knives, grinders, bowls and spoons.

A Piece of Her-Story *continued*

“You must never take things from the land, for the land is where it belongs.”

“Never?” I questioned.

“Never...” she repeated. “They have belonged to this land and here they must stay. The spirits of the land will bring you bad luck until it is returned,” she said matter-of-factly, while staring straight into my eye.

Did she know I had one in my pocket? Did anyone know? “Don’t be silly!” I told myself. “It’s just one!”

We walked on for ages but my mind could not stop thinking about the shell in my pocket. I tried all I could to ignore it but nothing could stop my worry about the ancient shell in my pocket.

Grandma was talking to me but I could not hear a word. My mind was fighting over the shell in my pocket. It was driving me near crazy!

Finally, I decided I had to return it to the campsite.

“Wait!” I said. “I have to do something. I’ll be back.”

I raced along the beach and up the sand dunes to the campsite.

“Sorry...It’s back where it belongs,” I whispered, though not sure to whom. I skipped my way back to Grandma who was waiting for me with a smile.

“I knew you’d make the right choice,” she hugged me.

How did she know so much?

I spent hours asking questions and being filled with the magic of her answers and what she could show me, but sometimes Grandma had no answers and she just looked away sad. I would cast around for something else that she could show me and share stories about, so we could get back to the magic of the world and continue on our adventures.

We were out looking for bush honey one sunny afternoon when we came upon a snake across the path. Grandma put her arm out to stop me from stepping on it and we stood still. I was about to run and scream when she held my hand with a ‘shh’ finger to her lips. She closed her eyes and stood still. My eyes were wide open and fixed upon the snake. As she opened her eyes, the snake slowly slithered away. She talked to the snake, not with words but with her heart, she said. I hoped that one day the snakes, the bees and the creatures of the ocean would all be able to hear me too.

A Piece of Her-Story *continued*

Our uncles, aunts and cousins would often join us for a feast at Grandma's, and we would sit around on a starry night and hear stories of days long ago. I loved the stories about how the world came to be and I remember them now, every time I look at the stars. We sang songs under the stars, and everyone was happy. I wanted to bottle this feeling and take it back home with me. It was not always so happy back home.

As I got older, I became more and more curious about why Grandma would often not know things, and would just look sad and quiet. I wondered about all of the possible reasons. Did I say the wrong thing? Was she disappointed in me that I should have known the answers to these questions?

Had I forgotten what she had already told me?

Did she have a memory problem?

I heard about a disease called dementia and I was so worried that Grandma was getting it. I spent many hours trying to figure it out, because I didn't want to upset her anymore. One day, I would get the courage to ask...

Grandma often said, "Sometimes, if you want to know something, you just have to ask."

So I did. I asked! She told me it had nothing to do with me at all. At least that is what she said, but I was not sure whether to believe her, because what she told me sounded so hard to believe. She said that there were many things that she didn't know and couldn't share because she was taken away from her family for twelve years. She was only eleven when a fancy car drove up to where her sister and she were playing in the bushes, trying to trap a rabbit and get it out of a hole. Strange well-dressed men grabbed them both, forced them into the car and drove off with them both kicking, screaming and sobbing. They were looking out from the back window and all they could see amidst the cloud of orange dust was their mother running after the car screaming and crying and shouting out, but the car did not stop. She never saw her mother again. Grandma didn't want to tell me anymore.

Grandma said that she had nothing else to say about it whenever I asked. She said it was better that I didn't spend my time thinking about it... better to stay present and put my mind to useful things like learning how to read the patterns of the weather and connecting to the stars.

My Grandma is my inspiration as she gives me strength and hope. I know she has had some tough times but she stays determined to be positive. Some of my relatives have not adapted so well.

A Piece of Her-Story *continued*

“Alcohol has become their object of worship,” Grandma says. I guess they are like those bird of paradise plants that are picked off from their root system and they haven’t been so good at growing new roots of their own.

One day, I will look for more information about how Grandma was taken away from her family, just to make sure she is telling me the truth. It sounds more like something she may have seen in a scary movie. You can’t just be stolen from your family without all the police and the news stories telling everyone you are missing and searching for a kidnapper! It just doesn’t add up. In a strange way I am hoping that it is true, just so I can be sure that it isn’t something I said!

**SECOND PRIZE
ADULT ENTRY**

ADVANCE AUSTRALIA

Peta Heywood

The statue of Doug and Gladys Nicholls stands in the gardens of Melbourne's Parliament House in Spring Street. It was dedicated in 2007 to celebrate Doug's achievements as a footballer, pastor and Aboriginal leader. This was 40 years after Doug had visited the Warburton Ranges in Western Australia; the area used for nuclear weapons testing.

His visit was organised by West Australian politician Bill Grayden, who had initiated an inquiry into the welfare of the three Aboriginal groups living in the area that had been taken over. Rupert Murdoch refuted the findings, which claimed that the people were starving and living in appalling conditions. Murdoch claimed the people were 'well fed and happy.' To provide evidence that supported the original claim, Grayden went back with a camera and witnesses.

Advance Australia *continued*

Doug was profoundly upset by what he saw and he contacted Stan Davey. Together with politicians Doris Blackburn and Gordon Bryant they developed a plan of action. Doris was the only federal parliamentarian who spoke against the atomic testing when it was first proposed. They used Bill Grayden's documentary, *The Warburton Ranges Film*, for publicity to form the Victorian Aborigines' Advancement League in 1957. Doug, Stan and Gordon went on to assist in establishing the national body, FCAATSI.

I became involved with the League in 1964 after meeting Blackburn branch member Jane Quick. She invited me to a meeting and that was the beginning of my commitment.

The League had 50 branches and three main functions: welfare, education and campaigning for social justice. Its premises in Northcote provided a meeting point for Aboriginal people and others who enjoyed the social activities and relationships. Doug was the centre of the organisation and was committed to working for 'his people'. Stan worked closely with him and brought a political focus to their actions. Stan was an astute political thinker and adept at lobbying politicians and government agencies. He wrote many of the articles in the League's journal *Smoke Signals*, and sent copious press releases to the media.

As a regular volunteer, I met many great people, not something that was possible for most Melburnians. Until then the only Aboriginal person I had known was Bill Onus, who visited my primary school and threw boomerangs. Of course, he did more than that. He may have sown the seeds of my interest! It was lovely getting to know him as adults. I accompanied Doug or Stan on many trips and speaking engagements and by the time of the Referendum I was adept at addressing schools, churches and clubs. For these occasions, I took care in how I presented myself, knowing that half the message of any speaker comes from things other than the words. For church events I even wore a hat.

Like most non-Aboriginal people, I had been unaware of how many Aboriginal communities there were in Victoria. I was lucky to be able to visit some of them, and especially remember going to Doug's birthplace, Cumberagunja, and the community at Lake Tyers. There I watched young boys playing on the lake and heard one shout, 'that Koorie did it!' It was the first time I'd heard the word Koorie.

Bruce McGuinness became a special friend, and years later told me that signing my petition against the Vietnam War was the first and scariest act of rebellion he had ever made. It was not his last.

Advance Australia *continued*

I have memories of many other people who became dear friends and are still in my heart, and my photo album.

Another memory is of a young girl from Lake Tyers who had just given birth. Doug was busy and asked me to visit her in hospital. I arrived to find a tiny person nearly lost among the white sheets and blankets. I asked if I could see the baby and she answered in the softest voice: "No they are going to have her adopted." I was shocked and asked if that was what she wanted. She answered no. Had she told them that? Yes.

I had no idea what Doug would do in this situation but I had two children of my own and the thought of her baby being adopted against her will was too much. I found the social worker and let her know that she did not want her baby adopted and was desperate to see her.

The League conducted an annual Button Day appeal, selling badges bearing the letters *AAL* and a boomerang. I took part and found that shaking a tin in front of busy and uninterested pedestrians was a sobering experience. I had not faced such public apathy and indifference before and it was horribly like begging. Worse, I thought it demeaned Aboriginal people.

So I suggested a project to replace it. This involved a map showing how each area of Australia had once belonged to a particular language group. We are used to seeing the

country divided into states and territories. This map, based on one by anthropologist Norman Tindale, showed Aboriginal occupation. Melbourne Museum provided the original and Sands and McDougall did the artwork and printing. The poster had the names of the 500 language groups on a huge map showing the location of each group. The package included a sticker bearing all the names. We sent it to every school in Victoria and for sixpence a sticker could be put in place. This project did not raise as much money as Button Day but was, I believe, far more respectful. It also showed clearly that Australia was no *terra nullius*.

We also developed a major project for publicity and education in the form of a three-day display in the Lower Melbourne Town Hall. Bruce McGuinness suggested the name, Koorie Boogaja, meaning 'Koories going somewhere'. Ron Croxford, a Methodist minister who had spent time in Arnhem Land, was a key person in developing this exhibition. There were speeches, songs, displays and discussions. This daring venture was a much greater success than any of us envisaged.

There was a rising sense of purpose among many of the younger Aboriginal members, and Stan, sensing this, knew it was time for him to resign as a paid Director. This action was consistent with his commitment to empowering Aboriginal people.

Advance Australia *continued*

It was a sad meeting when he made his resignation. He had no job to go to and no source of income, although he did have a plan. He had met Don McLeod who worked with the Nomads, a group of former pastoral workers who had gone on strike. Their land was near Port Hedland and they asked Stan to come and work with them. He sought and was granted the honorary position of Field Officer for the League. This position gave him an organisational base from which to issue bulletins and press releases. He was joined there by my sister, Jan Richardson.

And then came Black Power.

The younger members of the League had grown impatient, as the young often do. Roosevelt Brown, a member of the Bermudan Parliament and Chairman of the Caribbean and Latin American section of the Black Power Movement, visited the League. This caused a total upheaval of personnel and the resignation of white staff and voluntary members. *The Herald*, on 3 October 1969, ran the headline, 'Whites told to get out.' I was one of them.

I remember the shock of arriving at a Management Committee meeting to find the way blocked by Aboriginal people, many of whom I did not know. Although this was exactly what we had worked for, it was nonetheless awful to feel dismissed so suddenly. I was grateful that the more

experienced non-Aboriginal members called for a discussion that allowed us to explore the experience and confirm our sense of having completed an important task. Doug was deeply troubled by Black Power and its consequences and so resigned, although when things settled down he took up his position again. He argued that when black and white work together, like piano keys, the music is better.

The League provided a vital early force in recognising the injustices done to the original inhabitants and taking steps to redress this inequality. It enabled Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal to meet and work together to achieve social and personal change. Historian Richard Broome has written an excellent history of the League. It is well worth reading.

**THIRD PRIZE
ADULT ENTRY**

**VIEW FROM A
PEAK-HOUR TRAIN:
BURNLEY
CORROBOREE TREE**

Jude Power

Near inner-suburban river you stand

Trapped by traffic and railway line

Corroboree Tree

Bleached white by time

Hollowed black by fire

Like your people, still standing

Most weekday mornings, high-rise office bound,
I saluted you silently with a glance
Acknowledging your survival and your scars
Standing solid, still here

One unforgettable morning
A young black woman approached you
Purposeful stride, hair reflecting the sun
She stood before you, hands on your trunk
Young straight body leaning to your ancient strength
Young energy flowing from palms of hands
Through bark to heart timber
And back again

Old white man walking his dog
Stood transfixed, bewildered
And the train rushed on

**View from a Peak-hour Train:
Burley Corroboree Tree continued**

I never saw her again

Corroboree Tree still stands

Strength in survival flows and grows

Older than a tree

As old as country

As old as a people