

Shared Understanding Submission

What do you know about the colonisation of Victoria and its impacts on First Peoples?

My knowledge is patchy; this is in itself a reflection of the broader history of colonisation. In all cultures, the received history of colonisation is the story of the exercise power told by the hegemony. Perhaps what characterises the history of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria, is that the story of the dispossession and displacement of First Peoples from their lands has been only slowly recognised and the history of the massacres and violence that took place in Victoria was not something that was taught in the education system until relatively recent times.

In Victoria, we have often learned about the impact of the trauma of the Stolen Generations at the time when a prominent First Nations person has passed away. We were not taught that systemic racism and injustice had a long history in Victoria. We would prefer to think that this was part of the shadow of the colonial past, but we know that First Peoples are over-represented in the criminal justice system.

In Victoria, I suspect that our unconscious bias leaned towards believing that the worst aspects of systemic injustice from colonisation were manifested in the 'deep north' of Queensland or the 'wild west' of West Australia. The tragic death of Tanya Day following her being held in a police cell at Castlemaine for appearing to be intoxicated and being unable to find her train ticket tells us much about the ongoing impact of systemic racism and injustice in Victoria.

What has been your experience learning about First Nations history and culture in Victoria's education system? Do you feel it was comprehensive?

My experience of learning about First Nations history and culture in Victoria's education system was very limited. When I studied Australian History at school, a First Nations woman came to speak of her mother's experience of being part of the Stolen Generation. We were all shocked but when we went back to class the messaging was that terrible things happened in the past through misguided policies. There was no mention of the frontier wars, or of systemic dispossession and displacement.

We learned nothing of First Nations culture. My son went to primary and secondary school in Sandringham. The schools took the children on the usual trips to the museums and various historic sites. In all that time, they never went to see the beautiful sculpture of The Ancient Yarra River with Benjil's Eggs in Black Rock nor the Barraimal (Emu) Constellation Sculpture in Brighton.

In Victoria, Year 7 children learn about Greek myths in Heroes, Myths and Legends, but learn nothing about the stories of First Peoples.

What changes would you like to see in Victoria to promote better understanding and respect for First Peoples cultures?

Cultural suppression can be both intentional and unintentional. To give just a few examples, if we say that we recognise that First Peoples are the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather, then to avoid cognitive dissonance, we could recognise that by having both English and First Nations place names. Dingoes are a sacred animal for many First Nations people. If we say we respect the culture of First Peoples, then we should also respect the significance that dingoes hold

for First Nations people. The lethal management of dingoes does not recognise the significant role that dingoes play as an apex predator. Cultural burning has been used by First Nations people as a land management practice to reduce the risks of bushfires, encourage new growth, and protect native wildlife on Country. It is important to demonstrate respect for First Peoples' cultures by learning from them and incorporating First Peoples' land management practices.

How could First Peoples history and culture could be better promoted in Victoria

In the first instance, First Peoples history and culture could be better promoted in Victoria by being taught and told in the voices of First Peoples. Educational resources used in the education system that deal with the history of colonisation should be written by First Peoples authors and educators, so that the impact of colonisation on First Peoples is heard and understood.

If we say that we recognise First Peoples as the oldest living culture, then our education system should also teach the stories and legends of First Peoples.