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# RESPECTFUL CIVIL DISCOURSE:

POST-REFERENDUM

TEACHING RESOURCE: YEARS 7 & 8

**CIVIL DISCOURSE**



*This resource has been produced by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia as part of a pilot for a broader suite of evidence based, peer-reviewed classroom resources for Australian students and teachers in the social sciences. Feedback and further inquiries are welcome via email: [info@socialsciences.org.au](mailto:info@socialsciences.org.au)*

## Acknowledgments

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are warned that the following booklet and associated video material may contain images, voices and words of deceased persons.

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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# RESPECTFUL CIVIL DISCOURSE: POST-REFERENDUM

**TEACHING RESOURCE:** YEARS 7 & 8

## Introduction

For democracies to work, people need to be able to express their opinions, particularly on issues of national importance. It is crucial that these conversations are respectful, approached in a factual way, do not use stereotypes or denigrating language and importantly, do not cause harm.

This booklet on civil discourse education offers resources and learning experiences for teachers to use and adapt based on teaching and learning needs.

Civil discourse education builds student knowledge to promote understanding, with the aim of maintaining an Australian society where people with different ideas and views can work together fairly, ensuring everyone feels included and valued, despite division of opinions.

This becomes even more important when the issues being discussed particularly affect some individuals or communities, such as the referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament.

This resource booklet uses the Uluru Statement from the Heart (Uluru Statement) as its focus, as a topic that has ongoing contemporary relevance in Australia, and that lends itself to developing knowledge and activities related to civil discourse.

## Background on the Uluru Statement and the Voice to Parliament Referendum

In 2015, Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Leader of the Opposition Bill Shorten appointed a Referendum Council to provide advice to Parliament on progress and next steps towards a successful referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution, as this was identified as an opportunity to improve life and equality for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous people. This Referendum Council recommended establishing a new body to provide an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Voice to Parliament.

In 2017, delegates chosen as representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities convened at Uluru in central Australia. There, they crafted and issued the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which emerged as a pivotal document influencing the 2023 Australian referendum on a Voice to Parliament. In 2023, the referendum asked eligible voters whether to support or reject a Voice to Parliament. The period leading to the referendum vote revealed strong and differing opinions and claims among Australians on this issue, and the final result was that most people and states voted No.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart continues to be relevant in Australia, with ongoing efforts by leaders and organisations to promote reconciliation.

## Teacher guidance

This page is dedicated to supporting teachers in their professional reflection and learning. The listed resources and tools aim to promote the teaching skills necessary for facilitating classroom civil discourse.

- Consider any relevant school policies that are available that relate to topics such as racism, discrimination or behaviour.
- Introduce the concept of shared norms for civil discourse and remind your students of these norms by displaying the printable *Shared norms for civil discussion* and *Respectful disagreement prompts* posters included in this resource booklet.
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides an Indigenous cultural responsiveness capability framework and an Indigenous cultural responsiveness self-reflection tool to assist educators to reflect and deepen connections with students: [bit.ly/3UDKCfP](https://bit.ly/3UDKCfP)
- Be You, delivered by Beyond Blue in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace, offers resources for culturally respectful engagement for learning communities: [bit.ly/48pk5Wx](https://bit.ly/48pk5Wx)
- Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program provides a range of relevant resources, including a terminology guide: [bit.ly/4bEp7Bu](https://bit.ly/4bEp7Bu)
- The Australian Human Rights Commission offers *Minimising harm in conversations about the referendum* guide: [bit.ly/3OJYzoC](https://bit.ly/3OJYzoC)
- Consider classroom management and student groupings that will best promote respectful civil discussions.

## Lesson structure

Help students differentiate between trustworthy and non-trustworthy sources of information by viewing the three-minute *How to spot an expert* explainer video on the Seriously Social Youtube channel: [youtube.com/@seriouslysocials](https://youtube.com/@seriouslysocials)

### Discussion question:

What does the Uluru Statement mean for all Australians since the referendum?

## Part 1: What does the Uluru Statement mean to you?

- Use the class engagement prompt to lead a class discussion to consider students' existing knowledge and to stimulate thoughts about the topic.
- Watch video: *The Uluru Statement from the Heart read by Professor Megan Davis*: [youtu.be/YJrHStMY1Gg](https://youtu.be/YJrHStMY1Gg)
- Watch this short video which presents the different opinions of Aboriginal people in the lead up to the Voice Referendum: [ab.co/3OHDKKs](https://ab.co/3OHDKKs)
- Read *What is the Australian Constitution and what was the 2023 Voice referendum all about?* text and watch the [support video](https://bit.ly/3UtkPWX): [bit.ly/3UtkPWX](https://bit.ly/3UtkPWX). Explore interactive hyperlinks and glossary to assist where new vocabulary may be unclear.
- Students individually work through the above materials, while completing the included facts, questions and thoughts template.
- Students move into a think-pair-share and exchange thoughts about the Uluru Statement.

## Part 2: Class discussion

- Teacher to set shared norms for discussion using *Shared norms for civil discussion* and *Prompts for respectful disagreement* posters.
- Move to focus on the question 'What does the Uluru Statement mean for all Australians since the referendum?'. In groups, students use the template for group discussion to note down and share their thoughts.
- Finish off the session hearing back from each group about their responses to the question.

## Part 3: Reflection

- Teacher facilitated conversation. Using the *Shared norms for civil discussion* and *Prompts for respectful disagreement* posters, students discuss how hard or easy it was to maintain respectful civil discourse or to agree on opinions.
- Students respond to the questions listed in the reflection template, to reflect on their learning about civil discussions that took place during group conversations.
- Follow up with students using the second reflection template to think about different opinions that people may have about the Uluru Statement from the Heart, listing ideas for how to develop a sense of belonging for all Australians, since the divided results of the 2023 referendum.

## Uluru Statement from the Heart

Watch the video and read the text: *Uluru Statement from the Heart Read by Megan Davis*, Seriously Social Youtube: [youtube.com/@seriouslysocials](https://youtube.com/@seriouslysocials)

### Uluru Statement from the Heart

We, gathered at the **2017 National Constitutional Convention**, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this Statement from the Heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first **sovereign** Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from **'time immemorial'**, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the **ancestral** tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return **thither** to be united with our **ancestors**. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been **ceded** or extinguished, and coexists with the sovereignty of **the Crown**.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Click on the highlighted words to find out what they mean or view the glossary on page 11.



Proportionally, we are the most **incarcerated** people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in **detention** in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

**Makarrata** is the culmination of our agenda: 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.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and **truth-telling about our history**.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country and we invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

**While reading or watching, use the facts, questions and thoughts template to take notes about the Uluru Statement from the Heart.**

## What is the Australian Constitution and what was the 2023 Voice referendum all about?

The Constitution of Australia has been in operation since 1901. In that year, under the Constitution, Australia became a nation through the federal union of six self-governing British colonies (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, and Western Australia). In 1897 and 1898, selected delegates from these colonies had met in Federal Conventions to draft the Constitution. The Constitution was then adopted by the colonial parliaments and, between 1899 and 1900, ratified by the eligible voters in referendums in each colony. It was then passed as an Act of the British Parliament and proclaimed, to begin operating on 1 January 1901. Following this process—known as Federation—the colonies became the Australian states. The Constitution created a national parliament with powers to pass laws that apply across the nation. It also recognised the parliaments of the states which retained their powers of self-government, subject to the Commonwealth’s powers.

To make any alteration to the Australian Constitution, the Commonwealth Parliament first needs to introduce a Bill for an Act, setting out the proposed alteration or alterations. If the Bill is passed by the Parliament, then a referendum is held in which Australia’s eligible voters are required to vote for or against the proposed alteration(s). For a referendum to be successful and the Constitution to be altered, a majority of voters in at least four states as well as a majority in the nation overall need to have voted in favour of the alteration(s). These steps are all set out in the Constitution itself. Since 1900, there have been forty-five referendums, but only eight have achieved the necessary majority of votes to change the Constitution.

First Peoples of Australia are not recognised in the Australian Constitution. First Peoples of other comparable democratic nations (Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) are recognised in the constitutions of these countries. In a referendum in 1967, an overwhelming majority of more than 90% of the nation voted for changes to the Constitution that resulted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being included in the count of ‘the people’ of Australia for various constitutional purposes, and the Commonwealth Parliament gaining the power to make special laws for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2015 Australia’s Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Leader of the Opposition Bill Shorten appointed a Referendum Council to provide advice to Parliament on progress and next steps towards a successful referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution. The Referendum Council was composed of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and non-Indigenous members from a range of expert fields and backgrounds. The Final Report of the Referendum Council is summarised in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which was presented as a gift and invitation to the Australian people in 2017. The full report and Uluru Statement were presented to the Australian Parliament in 2017.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was created in meetings with 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders at Uluru in 2017. The Referendum Council's final report supported the Uluru Statement from the Heart, stating that the wider Australian community also agreed with the message conveyed. The Referendum Council proposed a Voice to the Parliament and an extra-constitutional Declaration of Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Uluru statement from the Heart was identified by the Referendum Council as a significant response to the historical exclusion of First Nations Peoples from the original process that led to the adoption of the Australian Constitution.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart called for two things:

1. A First Nations Voice to Parliament to be permanently included in the Constitution
2. The establishment of a Makarrata Commission to supervise agreement-making and truth-telling about our history.

In 2023, the Australian Government followed the advice of the Referendum Council and called a referendum responding to the first of these two requests. The referendum required all eligible voters to vote Yes or No to the question of whether to alter the Constitution to establish a body called The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

If this referendum had been supported, the Constitution would have required the Australian Parliament to create an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'Voice', an advisory body, that would have been consulted by government regarding all policy matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There was a great deal of debate about the issue in the leadup to the Voice referendum in October 2023, with many people arguing strongly for and against the proposal.

This referendum was held on Saturday 14 October 2023, but was not successful. Fewer than 50 percent of voters nationally supported the proposed change and no state voted Yes overall. Information now available about the Voice results shows us how people across Australia voted.

Despite the outcome of the Voice Referendum, the Uluru Statement from the Heart continues to influence Australian society, as people consider what reconciliation means for all Australians.



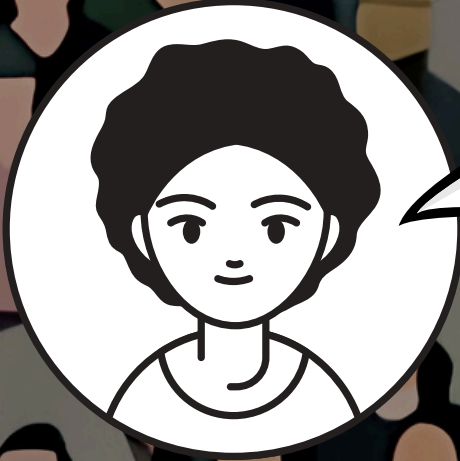
## Uluru Statement from the Heart glossary

TERM	MEANING
2017 National Constitutional Convention	a gathering of 250 representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to discuss and agree on a way to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution. The Uluru Statement from the Heart was agreed upon at this gathering
ancestors	a person related to you who lived a long time ago
ancestral	something belonging to, or inherited from, an ancestor or ancestors
ceded	given up; given control or ownership of something to someone else
the Crown	the government of a country that is ruled by a king or queen; for Australia, this means the government of the United Kingdom
detention	imprisonment
incarcerated	imprisoned; in jail
Makarrata	a word in Yolgnu language meaning to come together after a struggle, facing the facts of wrong and living in peace. In the Uluru Statement, it is another word for Treaty, or agreement-making
sovereign	having power and authority over itself; independent from the rule of others
thither	there; to the place or situation already mentioned
time immemorial	a time so long ago that no one alive can remember it; since forever
truth-telling about our history	telling the facts openly and honestly; exposing the facts about injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Australia's history; reaching a shared understanding about Australia's colonial past and the impacts it is having for people living today

## Web references: What is the Australian Constitution and what was the Voice referendum all about?

REFERENCE	WEB LINK
The Consitution	<i>The Australian Constitution</i> , Parliamentary Education Office: <a href="http://ausconstitution.peo.gov.au">ausconstitution.peo.gov.au</a>
selected delegates	<i>The Writers of the Australian Constitution</i> , Australian Constitution Centre: <a href="http://australianconstitutioncentre.org.au/the-writers-of-the-australian-constitution">australianconstitutioncentre.org.au/the-writers-of-the-australian-constitution</a>
First Peoples of Australia are not recognised in the Australian Constitution	<i>Fact Check: Is Australia the only first world nation with a colonial history that doesn't recognise its first people in its constitution?</i> video, ABC News: <a href="http://abc.net.au/news/2019-10-24/fact-check:-is-australia-is-the-only-first-world/11631580">abc.net.au/news/2019-10-24/fact-check:-is-australia-is-the-only-first-world/11631580</a>
Referendum Council	<i>Get the full picture</i> article, Referendum Council Website: <a href="http://referendumcouncil.org.au">referendumcouncil.org.au</a>
Uluru Statement from the Heart	Uluru Statement from the Heart website: <a href="http://ulurustatement.org">ulurustatement.org</a>
The Voice	<i>Referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice</i> , National Indigenous Australians Agency: <a href="http://niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/referendum-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-voice">niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/referendum-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-voice</a>
about the Voice results	<i>Beyond No, here's what we know about the Voice results</i> , ABC News: <a href="http://abc.net.au/news/2023-10-15/voice-results-explained-map/102978520">abc.net.au/news/2023-10-15/voice-results-explained-map/102978520</a>
The Voice referendum explained video	<a href="https://bit.ly/3UtKpWX">bit.ly/3UtKpWX</a>

# SHARED NORMS FOR CIVIL DISCUSSION



**Be respectful of others and yourself**

**Allow everybody the chance to speak**



**Debate topics, discuss ideas and form your opinions based on facts**



**Be a self-advocate: let others know how you are feeling about the discussion if you need to**



# PROMPTS FOR RESPECTFUL DISAGREEMENT

## Phrases to help you to respectfully disagree with others' opinions



You have the right to feel safe in all conversations. Here are some prompts to help you navigate respectful discussions on complex topics with differing opinions while prioritising your wellbeing.

**"Is that so?"**

This comment neither agrees nor disagrees with what the other person has said. It offers a comment for the other person's reflection.

**"Can I check that I have understood your ideas correctly please? What I heard was..."**

This sentence starter can be finished with any information where you are not sure about the other person's thinking and would like to understand them better.

**"Could you please explain why you believe ... "**

This sentence starter can be finished with the ideas that another person presents, to help you understand how they formed their opinion.

**"When you said .... I felt ... because I thought..."**

This sentence can help to explain your feelings and thoughts in response to what somebody has said. (Our feelings are based on our thoughts).

**"Could we please pause this conversation here as I am feeling... (uncomfortable)."**

This statement can help stop a conversation and help you to look after your wellbeing.

**"Thank you for sharing your opinion with me, I have a different view..."**

This sentence starter shows respect for an opinion that is different to yours and allows you to respond with your own ideas.

**"When you explained your opinion about ... I didn't agree because..."**

This sentence helps you provide a different opinion to another person, explaining your reasons for this.

## Class engagement prompt

Use the questions below to begin a class discussion to share knowledge and consider questions associated with the learning topic of the Voice referendum and the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This is suggested to begin learning prior to reading or viewing resources.

If both governments had agreed on how people should vote in the Voice referendum, do you think the outcome would have been different? Why or why not?

Where do you think people learned about the Voice referendum to help them decide how to vote?

How do you think people learned about the 1977 referendum in Australia to help them decide how to vote?

How do people learn about politics in Australia now compared to when the Constitution was first written in 1900?

What are the arguments for and against establishing a Voice to Parliament?

Does it make a difference if people vote in Australia? Why or why not?



## Individual opinion forming template

The Uluru Statement from the Heart has already had a significant impact on the lives of all Australians and will continue to do so. It is important that every Australian considers what the Uluru Statement means to them.

### FACTS

What facts do you know about the Uluru Statement from the Heart?

### QUESTIONS

What questions do you have about the Uluru Statement from the Heart?

**Your opinion:** What does the Uluru Statement from the Heart mean to you?

## Template for group discussion

### DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What does the Uluru Statement from the Heart mean to all Australians since the referendum?



Individually, write your response to the question, 'What does the Uluru Statement mean for Australians since the referendum?'.  
Consider both facts and questions.



Spend one minute each letting others in your group know your response.



As a group, agree on choosing up to four responses total to represent your group response.  
Read this out to the class.

### Remember to:

- Be respectful of yourself and others
- Allow everybody the chance to speak
- Debate topics, discuss ideas and form your opinions based on facts
- Be a self-advocate: let others know how you are feeling about the discussion if you need to
- Use the *Prompts for respectful disagreement* poster to help you communicate.

QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS

Group Response

FACTS

FACTS

FACTS

FACTS

QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS

## Reflection template

Respond to the following questions to help you reflect on learning that took place during the group civil discussion about the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

What are some advantages of people discussing different opinions about the Uluru Statement?

What are some disadvantages of people discussing different opinions about the Uluru Statement?

What did you say or do that helped to keep the group civil discussion respectful?

What is a learning target to help your future involvement in respectful civil discussions?

When considering what the Uluru Statement means to all Australians since the referendum, were there topics where people seemed to have a lot of agreement?

When considering what the Uluru Statement means to all Australians since the referendum, were there topics where people seemed to have a lot of disagreement?

## Reflection template

Australia consists of people from diverse belief systems. This results in different values and opinions. These different opinions need to be taken into consideration, along with democratic processes to try to find solutions to issues. The Voice to Parliament is a complex issue and the 2023 the Voice Referendum showed a big divide of opinions from the people who voted.

**Reflect on different opinions that people may have about the Uluru Statement from the Heart, listing these below:**



**Consider ideas for how to develop a sense of belonging for all Australians, since the divided results of the 2023 referendum:**









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