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# RESPECTFUL CIVIL DISCOURSE:

POST-REFERENDUM

TEACHING RESOURCE: YEARS 9 & 10

**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

This resource has been produced in consultation with Fellows of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, who are experts in related fields. Reconciliation Australia, Education Services Australia (ESA), Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) are thanked and acknowledged for their advice on the creation of this resource.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Australian Constitution Centre, Australian Human Rights Commission, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), Be You, Collins Dictionary, Parliamentary Education Office, Reconciliation Australia, Referendum Council and Uluru Statement from the Heart are credited for materials used throughout this resource.

This fact checked school resource is produced at no cost to users and is fully funded by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. This resource aims to support student learning, to encourage Australian society to strengthen capabilities as informed democratic citizens who can engage in respectful civil discourse.

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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Published March 2024

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Introduction
4	Background
5	Lesson structure
7	Teacher guidance
8	Class engagement prompts
9	Uluru Statement from the Heart
11	<i>What is the Australian Constitution and what was the Voice referendum all about?</i>
13	Uluru Statement from the Heart glossary
14	Web references
15	Shared norms for civil discussion poster
16	Prompts for respectful disagreement poster
17	Venn diagram
18	Table: Facts/Unsubstantiated Information
19	De Bono's Thinking Hats
21	Reflection templates
25	Assessment checklists

# RESPECTFUL CIVIL DISCOURSE: POST-REFERENDUM

**TEACHING RESOURCE:** YEARS 9 & 10

## 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.

## Lesson structure

Students will discuss the difference between facts and unsubstantiated information, in relation to the 2023 referendum for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Students are reminded that facts are based on information found in reputable sources. Unsubstantiated information may not be supported by reputable sources and may be repeated information circulated through informal conversations and social media in the absence of any evidence.

To assist student understanding, view and then discuss the following video *How to spot an expert* to learn about critical literacy and reputable sources of information: [youtu.be/nCnzcot06b0](https://youtu.be/nCnzcot06b0) (two-minute video).

### Discussion question:

How can Australians with different ideas and views work together fairly to help everyone feel included and valued?

### Part 1: What does the Uluru Statement mean to people who had different points of view about the Voice to Parliament referendum?

- Use the class engagement prompt to lead a class discussion to consider students' existing knowledge and to stimulate thoughts about the topic.
- Students watch the video of Professor Megan Davis reading the Uluru Statement from the Heart: [youtu.be/YJrHStMYIGg](https://youtu.be/YJrHStMYIGg)
- Students watch the following videos:
  - A two-minute video that considers different opinions from Aboriginal people in the lead up to the Voice referendum: [ab.co/3OHDKKS](https://ab.co/3OHDKKS)
  - A three-minute education Video - The Voice referendum explained: [bit.ly/3UtkPWX](https://bit.ly/3UtkPWX)
  - If time permits, a 13-minute video and reading material, with further explanation of different opinions about the Voice referendum: [ab.co/4blikGT](https://ab.co/4blikGT)
- Students read the Uluru Statement from the Heart text, accessing hyperlinks and glossary to help with comprehension of information.
- Students read the article *What was the recent Voice Referendum all about?*, accessing hyperlinks and the glossary to help with comprehension of information.
- Once students have had time to view and read through information provided about the referendum, a class discussion led by the teacher is suggested, to consider student comprehension.
- Students individually reflect, refer to video and reading materials, while completing the Venn diagram that is included in this booklet, capturing potential thinking from voters who represented Yes, No or undecided voting positions.
- Students move into a think-pair-share to discuss their recordings on the Venn diagram. They share their reflections and discuss voters' thoughts, considering if these thoughts were based on facts or unsubstantiated information. Decisions can be noted in the *Facts and unsubstantiated information* table provided in this booklet.
- The teacher facilitates a reflective conversation. Students offer examples of facts and unsubstantiated information that they believe may have influenced voters during the Voice referendum.

## Lesson structure

### Discussion question:

How can Australians with different ideas and views work together fairly to help everyone feel included and valued?

### Part 2: Class discussion

- The teacher introduces shared norms for discussion using *Shared Norms for Civil Discussion* and *Prompts for Respectful Disagreement* posters, to promote and model respectful conversations.
- After considering what the Uluru Statement from the Heart meant for different voters in Australia, the class is presented with the question 'What does the Uluru Statement mean for all Australians since the referendum?'
- A template with De Bono's *Six Thinking Hats* is included in this booklet. Consider differentiation to accommodate the learning or cultural needs of students in the class. The number of hats could be reduced, with specific hats identified as the focus for discussions that best match individual students or the class's needs.
- Whole Class Discussion - Vertical Wall: A3 sized prints of De Bono's *Six Thinking Hats* template are placed on walls around the classroom. The teacher arranges students into groups of four. Please note, there must be enough posters to match the number of students (for example, a class of 32 would need eight posters). Each poster is labelled to identify the perspectives of a Yes, No and Undecided voter. The group of four students read through the perspective of the thinking hat, writing down ideas for each perspective. Depending on the time available, consider groups contributing to one poster only or rotating three times to contribute to all perspectives.
- To conclude the whole class vertical wall session, students are provided time to move around the room and read what has been written on each poster. The teacher then facilitates a discussion, with students invited to offer their ideas on 'What does the Uluru Statement mean for all Australians since the referendum?'

### Part 3: Learning reflections

- 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 and to agree on opinions. The intention is not to agree on opinions, but rather understand strategies to maintain respectful conversations while voicing different opinions.
- Students respond to the questions listed in the *Learning reflections* template provided in this booklet.
- Further learning reflection is available, using the second *Learning reflections* template to promote an idea that answers the question of 'How can Australians with different ideas and views work together fairly to help everyone feel included and valued?'

## 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 a *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.



## 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?

## The 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 13.

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.

## 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

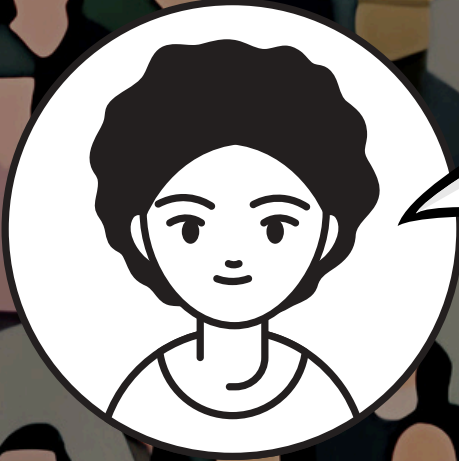
TERM	MEANING
2017 National Constitutional Convention	a gathering of 250 representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to discuss and agree on a way to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution. The <i>Uluru Statement from the Heart</i> 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.

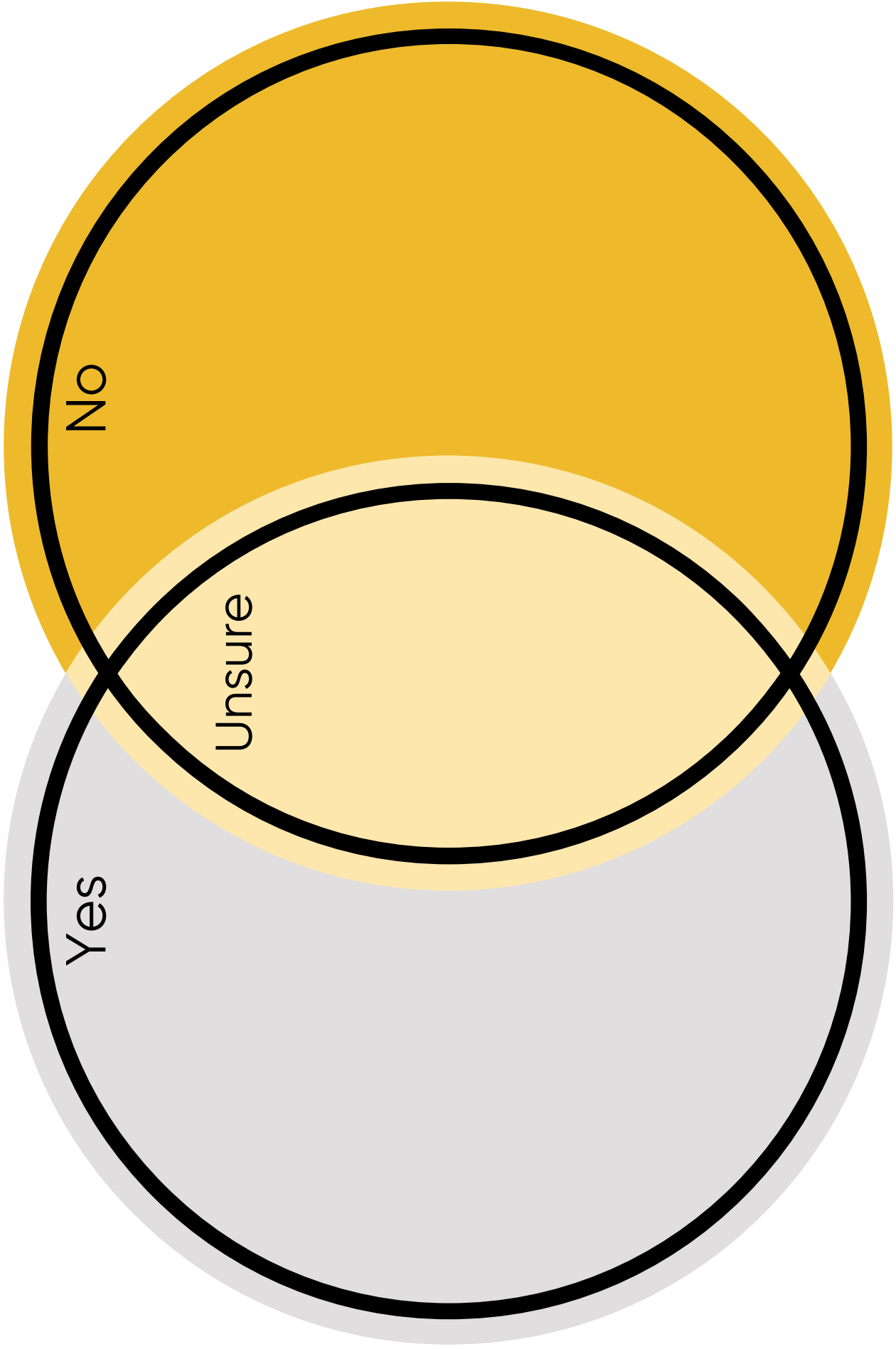
**"Thank you for sharing your opinion with me, I have a different view..."**

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..."**

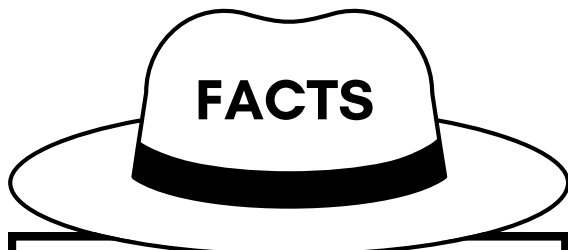
This sentence helps you provide a different opinion to another person, explaining your reasons for this.

**Venn diagram:** Thinking that may have informed Voice referendum voting decisions



<b>FACTS</b>	<b>UNSUBSTANTIATED INFORMATION</b>

## De Bono's Thinking Hats



### Information, Details, Proof

- What are the facts?
- What information is missing?
- How do we get the info we need?



### Feelings, Guesses, Hunches

- How do we feel about it?
- What is our gut reaction?
- What is making me feel this way?



### Advantages, Improvements, Optimism

- Why is this valuable?
- How can we make this work?
- What is the best case scenario?



### Solutions, Alternatives, Possibilities

- What other options are there?
- Can we look at this from another perspective?



### Difficulties, Weaknesses, Risks

- What negative consequences could there be?
- Will this create problems or challenges? For who?



### Organisation, Analysis

- What goal are we aiming for?
- What has already been achieved?
- Who has been/needs to be involved?

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

Use De Bono's Thinking Hats to explore ideas.



**Information, Details,  
Proof**

What are some **facts** about the Uluru Statement from the Heart?



**Feelings, Guesses,  
Hunches**

How **may** people be **feeling** about the Uluru Statement from the Heart and what it means for Australians?



**Advantages,  
Benefits, Optimism**

What are the **benefits** of the Uluru Statement from the Heart for Australians?



**Solutions, Alternatives,  
Possibilities**

How could Australia **move forward** on the Uluru Statement from the Heart?



**Difficulties, Risks,  
Weaknesses**

What **difficulties** have there been for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians since the referendum?



**Organisation, Analysis,  
Planning**

What **new goals** have been established for the Uluru Statement from the Heart since the referendum?

## Learning reflections

Answer the below questions to help you think about what you learned from group civil discussions.

What strategies do you use when you talk to someone who disagrees with you about important topics?

How can respectful conversations help Australians of different views feel like they belong?

How can schools make sure everyone feels safe, included and like they belong?

How can governments support different cultures, religions and opinions?

How can the media help bring together Australians with different beliefs?

## Learning reflections

Think about the Voice referendum and the different viewpoints. How can Australians with different views work together through democratic processes to make everyone feel included?

Plan a short video or letter to the editor of an Australian newspaper that encourages Australians to accept everyone, even with different beliefs.

The flow chart below is to help you consider ideas. The following pages provide a template that you can use to plan out your short video or letter.



## Learning reflections: Short video planning template

### Script

Capture attention

Identify different opinions

Ideas to create belonging

Inspire with a call to action

Concluding remarks

### Suggested Visuals



## Learning reflections: Letter to the Editor planning template

**Introduction:** What is the purpose of your letter? Explain in one or two sentences.



**Body:** Write two reasons/facts/arguments that support your purpose. Remember to use persuasive language.



**Conclusion:** Write one strong sentence to sum up your arguments.









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