

Australia Day, Survival Day and the Great Debate

A day off, a barbecue and fireworks? A celebration of who we are as a nation? A day of mourning and invasion? A celebration of survival?

The 26th of January aka Australia Day, Survival Day, Invasion Day, Sovereignty Day and The National Day of Mourning marks an important time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for non-Indigenous Australians alike. For our first Australians this day essentially marks the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and our cultures. For non-Indigenous Australians it marks the landing of the First Fleet, a group of eleven ships from Britain that landed on the shores of Botany Bay where the clash of two cultures and the fight for one land began. Australia Day officially became a public holiday for all states and territories only 28 years ago, in 1994.

From 1940 until 1955, the **National Day of Mourning** was held annually on the Sunday before Australia Day and was known as **Aborigines Day**. In 1955 Aborigines Day was shifted to the first Sunday in July after it was decided the day should become not simply a protest day but also a celebration of Aboriginal culture and survival.



Australians hold many different views on what the 26th of January means to them. Watch this special 2017 [BTN report](#) and discuss with your students what this day means to them.

Consider why there is continuing debate and [conflicting emotions](#) about our national day.

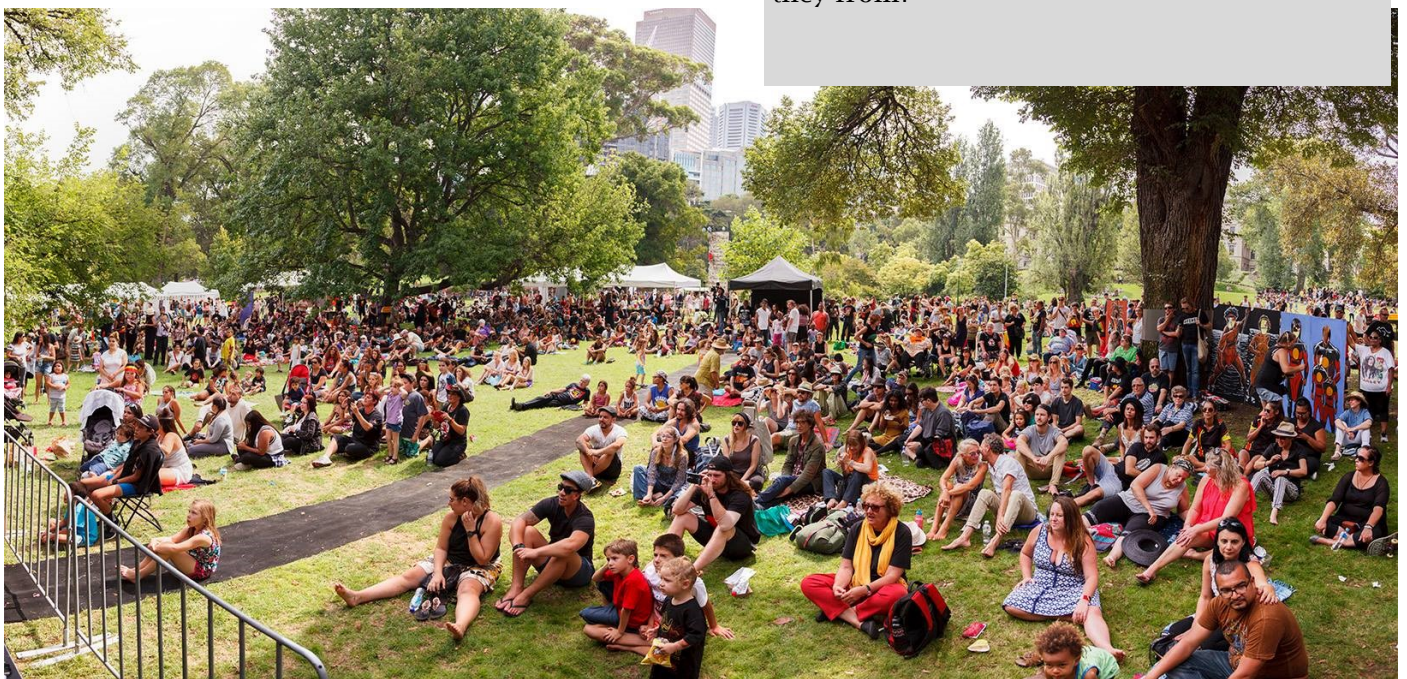
For an Aboriginal perspective read the [communiqué](#) from the National Peak body of Aboriginal Health organisations.

Watch the short video [Aboriginal People Respond To “Australia Day”](#)(2016).

A class poll could be taken on the topic ‘Alternative days to celebrate Australia Day’ with results analysed and presented as a graph.

Did you know that the celebrated Kurnai Gunditjmara world champion boxer [Lionel Rose](#) was the first Aboriginal person to be named **Australian of the Year** back in 1968?

How many Aboriginal Australians of the Year have there been? Who are they and where are they from?

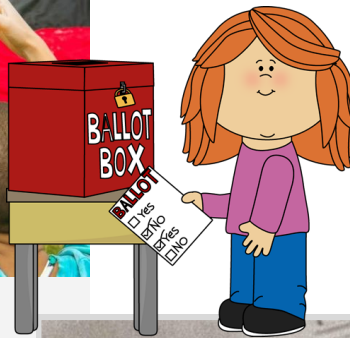


Australia Day: If we were to change the date, these are some of our options

In 2017 several councils including the City of Yarra [controversially](#) decided to no longer celebrate Australia Day on this day and since then Change the Date debates have raged across the country in homes, schools, on the streets and elsewhere.

There are calls to change the date of Australia Day to make it a celebration that is inclusive of the people who lived here before those ships arrived. The Australia Talks National Survey 2021 revealed a majority of people now believe Australia Day should not be celebrated on January 26, given the historical significance of the date for Indigenous people. There are, of course, arguments against a change.

Either way, select the [ABC News](#) link to examine other dates and participate in the **online poll** *Which date do you prefer?*



Aborigines Day of Mourning, 26 January 1938

January 26 1938 marked the 150th anniversary of the landing of the First Fleet in Australia. For some this was a day to celebrate, for many a day to mourn. On that day a group of Aboriginal men and women gathered at Australia Hall in Sydney and moved a major resolution proclaiming the day as a day of national mourning. The photo of the reading of the resolution by President Jack Patten, with Doug Nicholls leads to the comprehensive [AIATSIS online exhibition](#) *Aborigines Day of Mourning*.

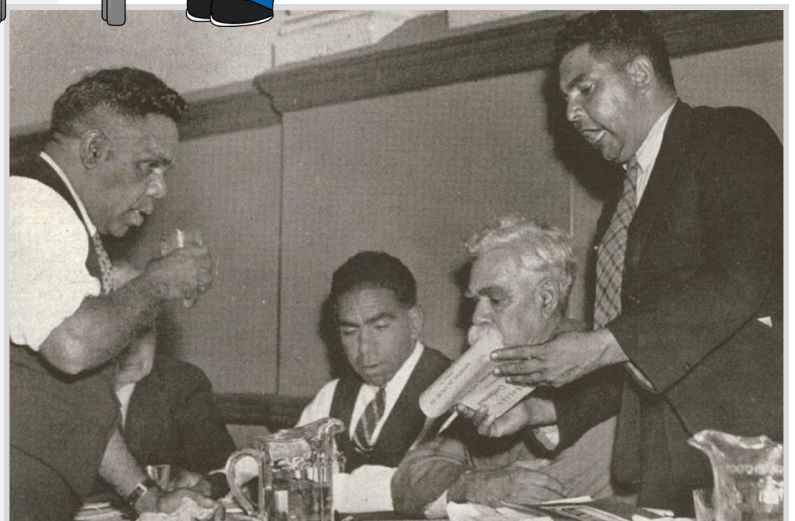
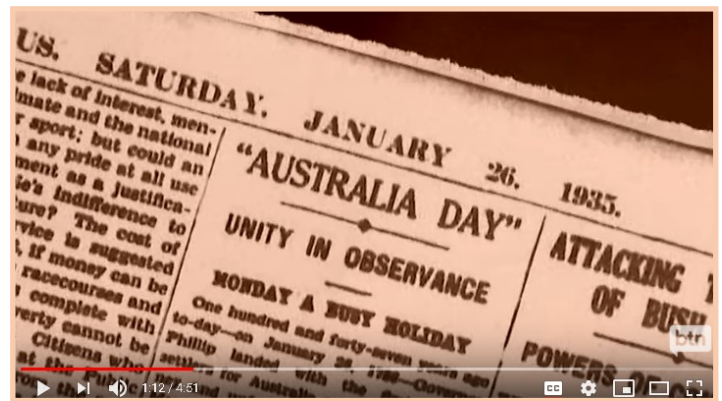
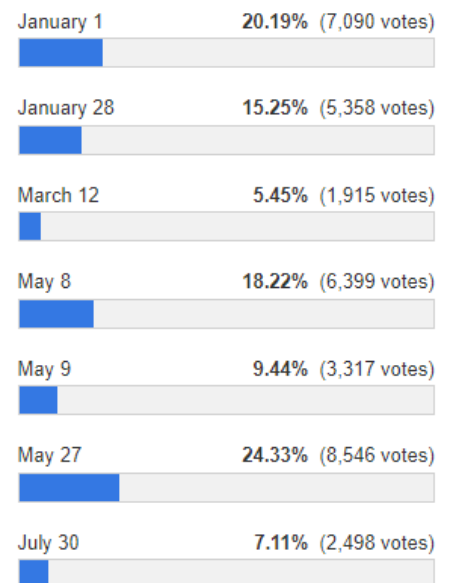


Photo SLV: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-24/aboriginies-day-of-mourning,-26-january-1938/9352774>



BTN explores the issue of the date change in this report on YouTube with links to teacher resources and related stories.

Which date do you prefer?



Total Votes: 35,123

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Curriculum Links

Victorian Curriculum: ([VCHHK076](#))

History / Levels 3 and 4 / Historical Knowledge / Community, remembrance and celebrations.

Significance of days and weeks celebrated or commemorated in Australia and the importance of symbols and emblems, including Australia Day, ANZAC Day, Harmony Week, National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC week and National Sorry Day.



Australian Curriculum: ([ACHASSK064](#))

Humanities and Social Sciences / History / Year 3 / Historical Knowledge and Understanding / Community and remembrance.

Days and weeks celebrated or commemorated in Australia (including Australia Day, ANZAC Day, and National Sorry Day) and the importance of symbols and emblems.



Victorian Curriculum

[VCHHC125](#) Evaluate different historical interpretations and contested debates: *History / Levels 9 and 10 / Historical Concepts and Skills / Historical sources as evidence.*

[VCHHC101](#) Explain different historical interpretations and contested debates about the past: *History / Levels 7 and 8 / Historical Concepts and Skills / Historical sources as evidence.*

[VCHHK160](#) The perspectives of people and different historical interpretations and debates from the period: *History / Levels 9 and 10 / Historical Knowledge / The modern world and Australia / The globalising world.*

[VCELY367](#) Participate in formal and informal debates and plan, rehearse and deliver presentations, selecting and sequencing appropriate content and multimodal elements for defined audiences and purposes, making appropriate choices for modality and emphasis: *English / Level 6 / Literacy / Interacting with others.*

[VCELT406](#) Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts: *English | Level 8 | Reading and Viewing | Literature.*

