

NATIONAL SORRY DAY



National Sorry Day on the 26th May, is a day of commemoration and remembrance for the Stolen Generations - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families, communities and cultures between the 1800s and the 1970s. The *first* Sorry Day was held in Sydney on 26 May 1998, this year marks the 20th anniversary; and has been commemorated nationally on 26 May each year since, with thousands of Australians from all walks of life participating in memorial services, commemorative meetings, survival celebrations and community gatherings, in honour of the Stolen Generations. National Sorry Day was born out of a key recommendation made by the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families in the *Bringing Them Home Report* that was tabled in Federal Parliament on 26 May 1997.

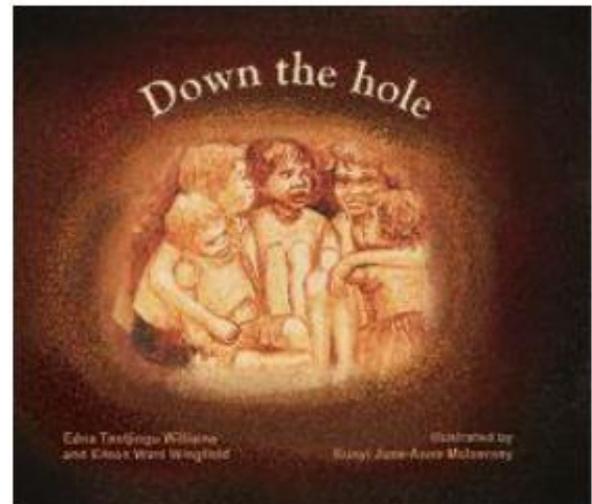
Over time, state and territory governments issued apologies for the laws, policies and

practices which had governed forcible removal. However, at that time (1998), the Australian Government, refused to make a formal National Apology in the Australian Parliament and instead offered a motion of reconciliation.

Download the National Sorry Day Committee's excellent resource [Learning about the Stolen Generation: the NSDC's school resource](#)* for great classroom and whole-of-school activities.

With students explore the deeply personal [Stolen Generations Testimonies](#) site featuring the stories of those taken from their homes and communities and information about the subsequent Inquiry.

Organise a school National Sorry Day event, such as an assembly, ceremony, concert, or oral history/ story sessions.



The illustrated children's book '[Down the Hole](#)' by Edna Tantjingu Williams, tells a true and different story about a group of children in Cooper Pedy, and how when the government came to take the fair-skinned Aboriginal children away, they didn't always find them ... For a paper attesting to the power of stories such as *Down the Hole* in "positioning child readers both to understand the dislocation and pain caused by

government policies such as those which enforced the removal of the Stolen generations in Australia, and to appreciate the tactics of resistance by which children evaded or subverted institutional power”, read [‘They went Home: racialised spaces in contemporary picture books’](#).

With secondary students, explore the excellent National Museum Australia site [Collaborating for Indigenous Rights](#) and teaching [resources](#) and work through the activities with your students.

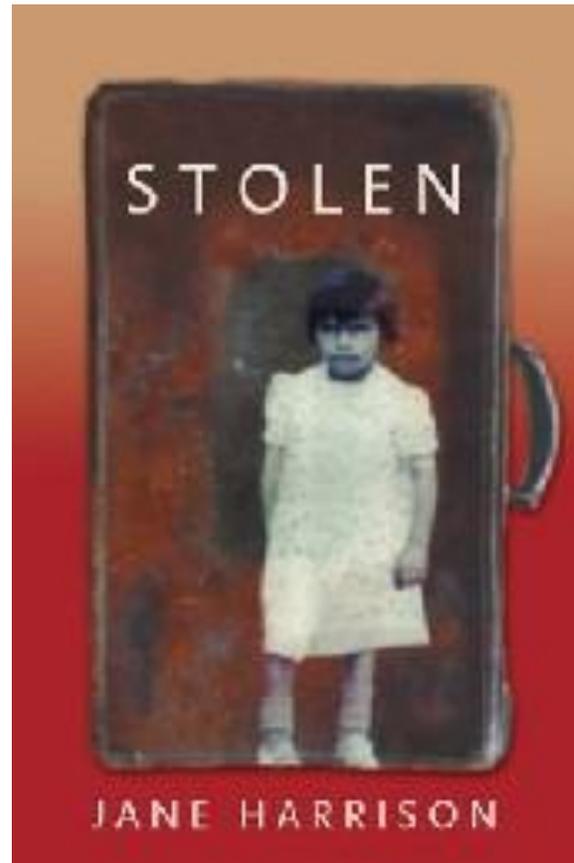


Sydney on Australia Day 2008, three weeks prior to the Apology. The ‘Sorry’ writing was commissioned by a private individual. Photo: Michael Davies.

With secondary students, a number of plays and songs powerfully tell the stories of the Stolen Generations. Victorian singer Mati-mati singer Kutcha Edwards is both a member of the Stolen Generations and sings these stories. Archie Roach’s music also starting with [They took the Children Away](#).

The acclaimed plays *Stolen* and *Yibiyung* include teacher notes also. [Stolen](#) (with teacher notes) by Jane Harrison tells of five young Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their parents, brought up in a repressive children’s home and trained for domestic service and other menial jobs. Segregated from society from their earliest

years, not all of them successfully manage their lives when released into the outside world. [Yibiyung](#) is a Western Australian Noongar story of the play writer’s nan who was forcibly removed and story uncovered through archived government records.



AIATSIS holds over [500 Sorry Books](#); 461 these have been placed on the [UN Australian Memory of the World Register](#). The **Sorry Books** were a response to the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which released its findings in 1997. A key recommendation of the Bringing Them Home Report was the need for official acknowledgement of, and apology for, the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The Sorry Books are a powerful record of the personal responses of Australians to the unfolding history of the Stolen

Generations. They are a “people’s apology” for past wrongs to Indigenous Australians, a public expression of regret, compassion, and hope. The Sorry Books campaign was launched in Sydney on Australia Day, 26 January 1998. Over the following four months, around 1000 Sorry Books were circulated around Australia by ANT, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, and networks of volunteers. Many organisations and individuals also made up their own Books.

** Developed by the National Sorry Day Committee in 2013, the **Learning about the Stolen Generations** resource provides accurate and concise background information about the Stolen Generations as well as a set of age-appropriate useful classroom exercises and ideas for commemorating both National Sorry Day and the Anniversary of the Apology. In previous years schools were encouraged to register with the NSDC, join their schools program and download **Learning about the Stolen Generations** from their website. However, since last year, this is no longer available online. Given the value of this resource to schools and the NSDC’s original aims, VAEAI has temporarily made this resource directly available on our resources site. To download a copy, click [here](#).*



Victorian Curriculum:

[VCHHK076](#) 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: History 3-4: Community, remembrance and celebrations.

[VCHHK094](#) The different experiences and perspectives of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants, women, and children: History 5-6: Australia as a nation.

[VCHHK154](#) Significance of the following events in changing society: 1962 right to vote federally, 1967 Referendum, Reconciliation, Mabo decision, Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology and the different perspectives of these events: History 9-10: Rights and freedoms (1945 – the present).

[VCCCG031](#) Explain the Australian government’s roles and responsibilities at a global level, including provision of foreign aid, peacekeeping and the United Nations: Civics & Citizenship 9-10: Government and Democracy.

[VCDSTS044](#) Investigate the ways in which designed solutions evolve locally, nationally, regionally and globally through the creativity, innovation and enterprise of individuals and groups: Design and Technology 7-8: Technologies and Society.

Personal and Social Capabilities (various Content Descriptions) –

For Levels 9 and 10, the curriculum focuses on analysing factors that influence respectful relationships in a range of diverse settings and the importance of empathy and respect for diversity in creating a cohesive society. Students are provided with opportunities to engage in activities that promote initiative, independence, interdependence and leadership. They evaluate their contribution to group tasks and suggest improvements to enable achievement of a team goal. Students explore the nature of conflict in a range of personal, local, national and global contexts. They evaluate a variety of strategies to prevent or resolve conflict.