

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. This day also marks the landing of the First Fleet - a group of eleven ships from Britain that landed on the shores of Botany Bay in NSW, 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 just over 30 years ago, in 1994.

From 1940 until 1955, the **National Day of Mourning** was held annually on the Sunday before Australia Day, and 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.

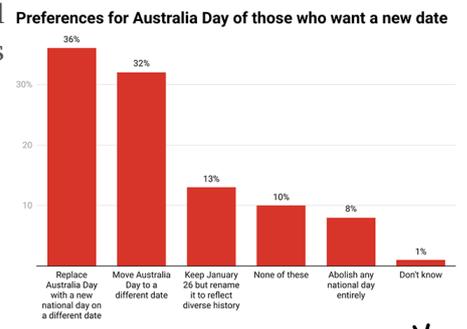


Australians hold many different views on what the 26th of January means to them. Watch this special **BTN report** (2017) and discuss with your students what this day means to them.

Consider why there is continuing debate and conflicting emotions about our national day. [The day I don't feel Australian? That would be Australia Day](#) by Chelsea Watego offers a personal perspective.

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

A class poll could be taken about 'Alternative days to celebrate Australia Day' with results analysed and presented as a graph.



*Agree - "strongly agree" + "agree", Disagree - "strongly disagree" + "disagree", Neutral - "don't know" and "neutral".
Chart: The Conversation - Source: Deakin Contemporary History Survey (2021, 2023, 2024) - Created with Datawrapper

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?

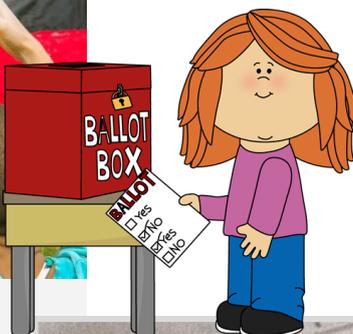


Australia Day: If we were to change the date, these are some of our options

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, social media, 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](#).

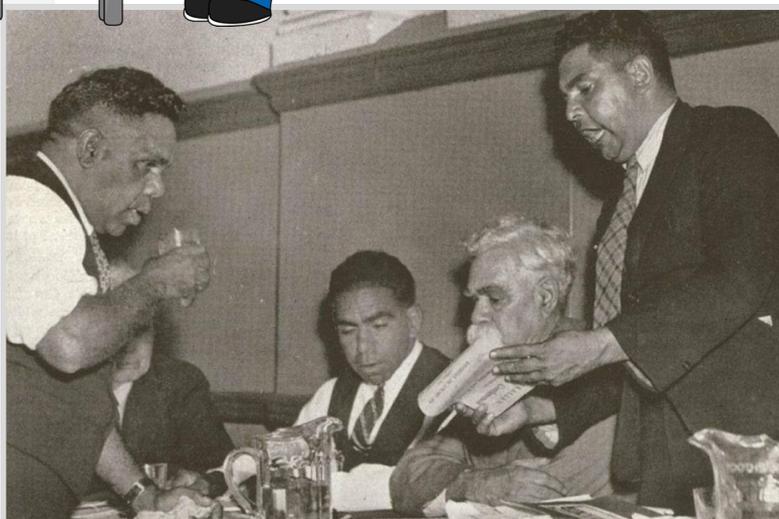
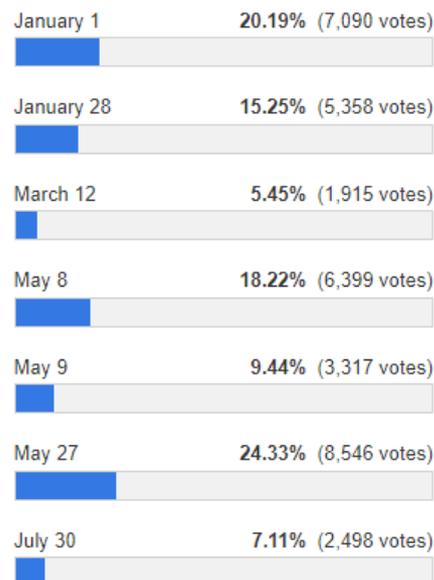


Photo SLV: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-24/aboriginies-day-of-mourning,-26-january-1938/9352774>



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: [\(VC2HH4K03/04\)](#)

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

Significant events, symbols and emblems that express Australian identity and diversity and how they are celebrated, commemorated or recognised, including Australia Day, Anzac Day, Harmony Week, the Australian flag, the Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander People's flag [VC2HH4K03](#).

The changing ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' knowledge, understandings and experiences are recognised, including Acknowledgement of Country, NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week and National Sorry Day [VC2HH4K04](#).



Victorian Curriculum

[VC2HH6K12](#) Different interpretations of a significant historical development in Australian society during the 20th century: *History > Levels 5 and 6 > Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Australia (1900–2000)*.

[VC2HH8S06](#) Analyse historical interpretations and debates: *History > Levels 7 and 8 > Historical Concepts and Skills > Historical sources as evidence*.

[VC2HH10K30](#) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' experiences and perspectives of colonisation and resistance between 1788 and 1938 *History > Levels 9 and 10 > Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Historical sources as evidence*.

[VC2HH10S06](#) Evaluate historical interpretations: *History > Levels 9 and 10 > Historical Concepts and Skills > Using historical sources*.

Australian Curriculum: [\(AC9HS3K02\)](#)

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.



[VC2E6LY01](#) Use interaction skills and awareness of formality when paraphrasing, questioning, clarifying and interrogating ideas; developing and supporting arguments; and sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions: *English > Level 6 > Literacy > Interacting with others*.

[VC2E7LY01](#) / [VC2E7LY02](#) Use interaction skills when discussing ideas and information, including evaluations of the features of texts / deliver structured spoken texts for a specific purpose and audience, employing formal language and using appropriate features of voice and multimodal or digital elements *English > Level 7 > Literacy > Interacting with others*.

[VC2E8LY08](#) Create different types of texts, written and spoken, that raise issues, report events and advance opinions, using deliberate language and textual choices, and print, multimodal and/or digital elements as appropriate : *English > Level 8 > Literacy > Creating texts*.