

# NATIONAL SORRY DAY



**National Sorry Day on May 26**, 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, and has been commemorated nationally on May 26 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.

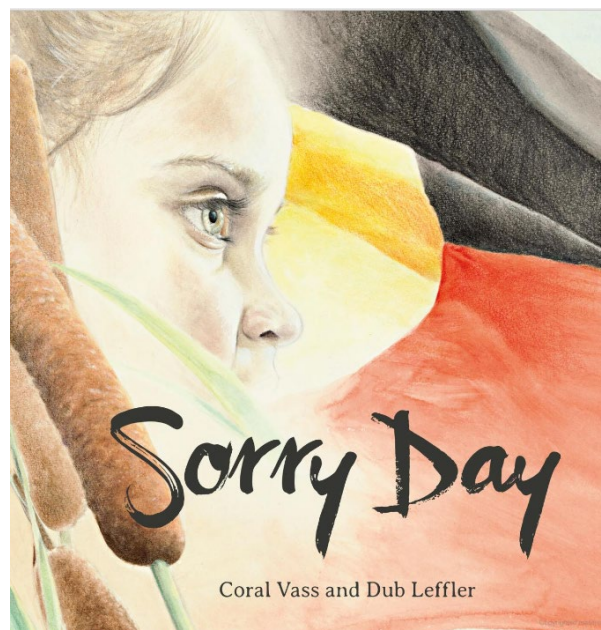
Over time, state and territory governments issued apologies for the laws, policies and

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

**Download** the [Learning about the Stolen Generation: the NSDC's school resource](#) for great classroom and whole-of-school activities. *Note some of the linked resources may no longer be available. \**

**Well-worth exploring** for deeper understanding, the website [Stolen Generations Testimonies](#) allows students to view and hear the personal stories of those taken from their homes and communities, and information about the subsequent National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.

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



*In a time long ago and not so long-ago children were taken from their parents, their sorrow echoing across the land. Sorry Day follows Maggie and her mother, who watch the Prime Minister give his apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Australian Government. In the crowd Maggie loses touch of her mother's hand and is lost. At the same time, some 60 years earlier, we see a group of young Aboriginal children play hide and seek by the creek on the fateful day they are taken from their families. As the Prime Minister's speech unfolds Maggie is reunited with her mother. But the faces and memories of the Stolen Generation are all around them. Two stories entwine in this captivating retelling of the momentous day when Australia acknowledged the sorrows of past.*

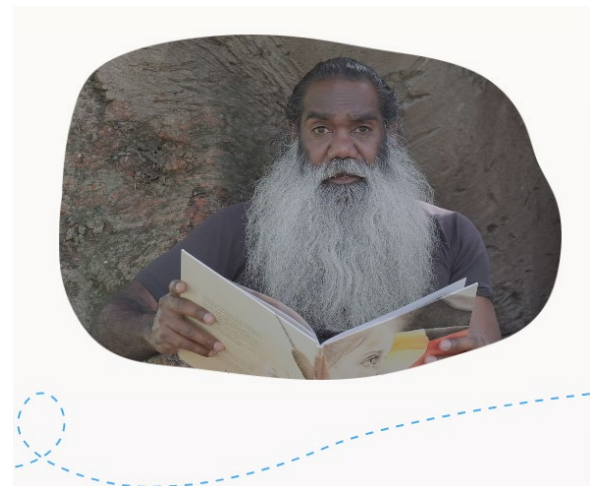
"For the average Australian [the Stolen Generation] is still a complex topic to address and a difficult thing for anyone, let alone children, to comprehend being forcibly taken from parents, family and community with lasting effects. Yet most children will know the feeling of being temporarily lost' or separated from a parent or loved one, whether it be at the supermarket, or at a carnival or just in a large crowd. As a parent, I have felt the utmost panic and desperation at the thought of losing' one of my own children, even just temporarily.

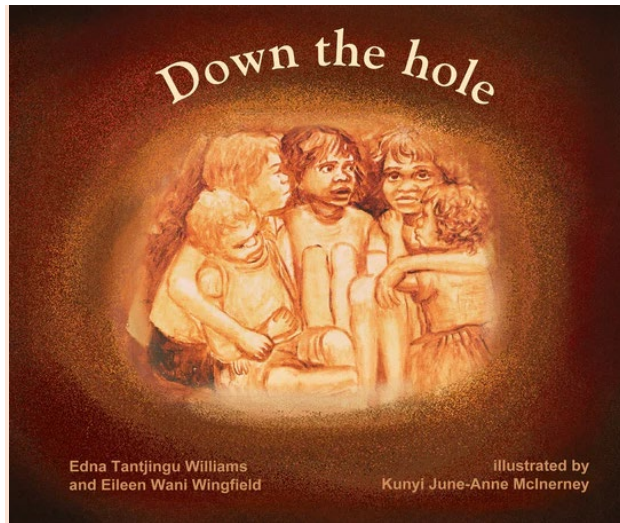
And so in Sorry Day, with a story of young Maggie, who feels fear and panic in the minutes she is separated from her mother in a crowd, I wanted to give children a tiny understanding of the devastation felt by the Indigenous children taken away from their parents and communities through no fault of their own." Coral Vass

Award-winning [Sorry Day](#) (2018) by Coral Vass and illustrated by Bigambul author Dub Leffler (SW QLD), tells two stories told side by side, a modern story set on the lawns of Parliament House on the day that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised for the Stolen Generation. The older story provides a window into what it felt like to be stolen. The Sorry Day book includes a foreword from Lee Joachim; Chair of Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative in Shepparton, and Director of Research and Development for Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation. Age range 7+

"Stories of the Stolen Generations and the auspicious National Apology are an integral part of Australia's past and present. They must be taught and shared with the next generation of Australian children if we are to grow and move forward as a nation."

In the video below ([click on the image](#)), watch and listen to a reading of **Sorry Day** by Trevor Jamieson, Pitjantjatjara/Noongar actor, didgeridoo player, guitarist, singer, dancer and storyteller while sitting at the base of a giant fig tree in Naarm, Melbourne, through [Story Box Library](#).





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 ...

[They went Home: racialised spaces in contemporary picture books](#) (2005) attests 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."



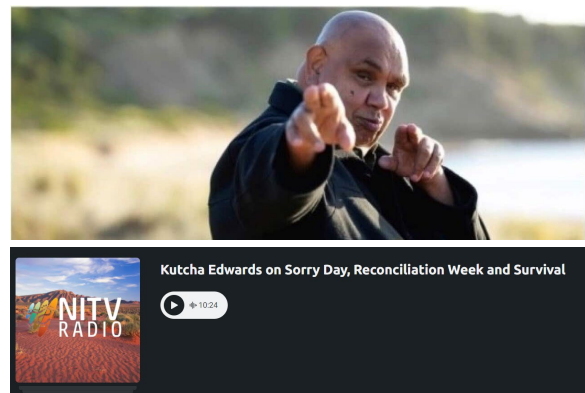
Sydney on Australia Day 2008, three weeks prior to the National Apology. The 'Sorry' writing was commissioned by a private individual. Photo: Michael Davies.

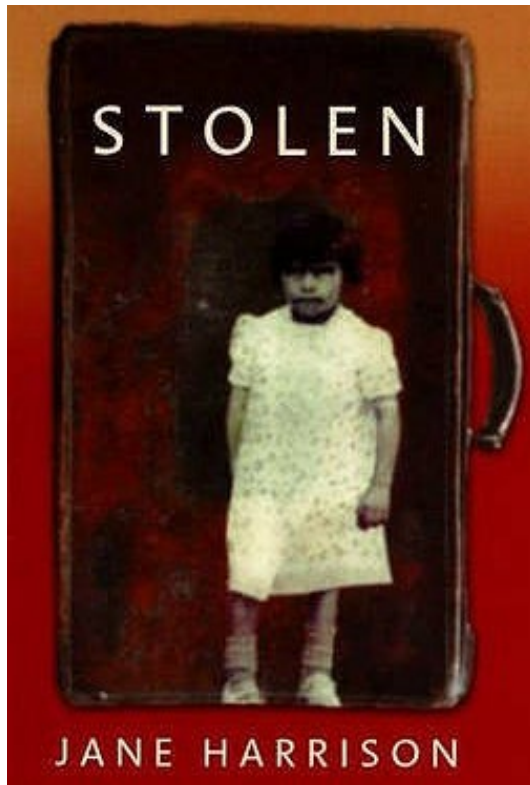
Plenty of songs, screen and stage-plays powerfully tell the stories of the Stolen Generations and can be explored with primary and secondary school students.

On winning the [2016 NIMA Song of the Year](#), for *The Children Came Back*, Yorta hip-hop and rap artist Adam Briggs told the crowd he wanted to "Pay respect ... a tip of the hat, a homage" to veteran performer, the late Archie Roach, who helped inspire *The Children Came Back*.

Discuss the place and role of this genre of music. Listen to and study the lyrics of songs by Koorie artists such as Victorian Mati-Mati singer **Kutcha Edwards**, a member of the Stolen Generations who sings about his and others' experiences; the late **Archie Roach's** legendary [They took the Children Away](#) which famously says it all, and the subsequent [The Children Came Back](#) by the award-winning **Adam Briggs** with the late Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and Dewayne Everettsmith.

To acknowledge Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week 2021, NITV Radio had a yarn with Kutcha Edwards - songwriter, activist and Stolen Generations survivor. [Click on the image or link to hear more from Kutcha Edwards on Sorry Day, Reconciliation Week and Survival.](#)





The acclaimed plays ***Stolen*** and ***Yibiyung*** come with [teacher notes](#). Since its 1998 debut, ***Stolen*** has become a mainstay in high school drama and English school rooms, and toured extensively.

By Murrawarri (NSW) writer Jane Harrison, ***Stolen*** 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.

In this [Blak Stage](#) interview, Jane Harrison talks from the heart about her influential play ***STOLEN***, which was commissioned by Ilbiger Theatre Company and debuted in 1998. Learn how ***Stolen*** was commissioned, the development process and her advice for anyone considering producing the play, including advice to schools.

***Yibiyung*** by Dallas Winmar is a Western Australian Noongar story of the playwright's nan who was forcibly removed from family, community and country. ***Yibiyung*** was Dallas Winmar's grandmother, and this is her growing-up story uncovered through archived government records. ***Yibiyung*** was one of hundreds of girls swept up in the forced removals of the 1920s and trained to become model domestic servants. But it's ***Yibiyung***'s break from this regime and her extraordinary flight across Western Australia which gives her story its rolling, expansive rhythm of survival.

***Yibiyung*** (*with teacher notes*) is about finding a way out of centuries-old cycles of anger and despair. It is a song of hope and change, a celebration of fronting up and finding place and family.

Company B  
presents  
in association  
with Malthouse Melbourne



Photograph: Alex Craig

## YIBIYUNG

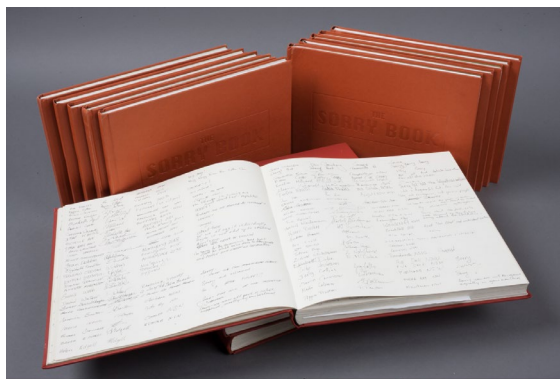
Written by Dallas Winmar  
Dramaturgy by Louise Gough

Directed by Wesley Enoch

Teacher's Notes

**Freehills**

EDUCATION PARTNER



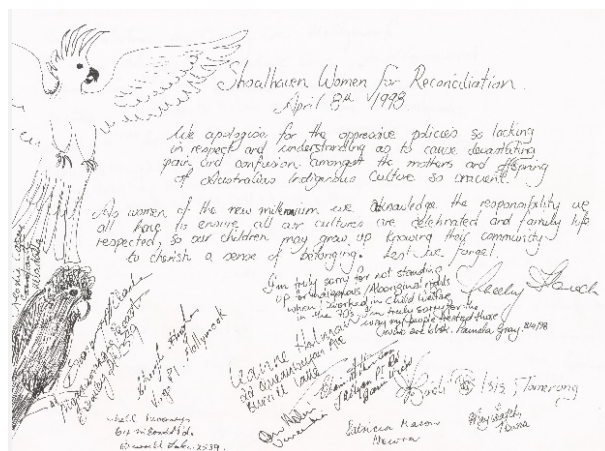
AIATSIS holds over [500 Sorry Books](#); 461 these have been placed on the [UN Australian Memory of the World Register](#).

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](#) (1997) 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.

In 2004, in recognition of their historical and social significance, the original collection of 461 Sorry Books were inscribed on the [UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register](#).



\*Developed by the National Sorry Day Committee (NSDC) 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 the **Learning about the Stolen Generations Resource** from the NSDC website. However, this program is no longer active, and the resource is no longer available on the archived site. Given the value of this resource to schools and the NSDC's original aims, VAEAI has in the made this resource directly available on our resources site. To download a copy, [click here](#).*



## Victorian Curriculum:

**VC2HH4K03** 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. *History 3-4 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Community, remembrance and celebrations.*

**VC2HH4K04** 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. *History 3-4 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Community, remembrance and celebrations.*

**VC2HH4K05** the significance of national, religious and cultural celebrations and commemorations in Australia and other places around the world. *History 3-4 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Community, remembrance and celebrations.*

**VC2HH6K11** continuities and changes in the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples during the 20th century. *History 5-6 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Australia (1900–2000).*

**VC2HC6K08** how citizens (members of communities) with shared beliefs and values work together to achieve a civic goal. *Civics and Citizenship 5-6 Knowledge and Understanding > Citizenship, diversity and identity*

**VC2CP6O02** behaviours and attitudes that demonstrate sensitivity to individual, social and cultural differences, and why sensitivity to difference is important. Personal and Social Capability 5-6 Social Awareness and Management > Relationships and diversity

**VC2CP6O03** the characteristics of respectful relationships and ways in which respectful relationships can be achieved, maintained and rebuilt. *Personal and Social Capability 5-6 Social Awareness and Management > Relationships and diversity.*

**VC2CP8O02** the nature of human rights and responsibilities and how respect for human rights and responsibilities contributes to social cohesion. *Personal and Social Capability 7-8 Social Awareness and Management > Relationships and diversity.*

**VC2HC8K06** how citizens can participate in and influence lawmaking, including through contact with their elected representatives, use of lobby groups, interest groups, direct action and submissions to parliamentary committees.

*Civics and Citizenship 7-8 Knowledge and Understanding > Laws and citizens.*

**VC2HH10S09** evaluate the significance of individuals, groups, movements, events, developments and ideas. *History 9-10 Historical Concepts and Skills > Historical significance.*

**VC2HH10K31** the significant events, developments, campaigns and movements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms. *History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms (1938–present).*

**VC2HH10K32** the experiences and perspectives of significant individuals and groups that contributed to or denied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms. *History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms (1938–present).*



National Sorry Day precedes National Reconciliation Week across the nation. Read [Reconciliation Australia's media release](#) about how Reconciliation Australia stands with The [Healing Foundation](#) in amplifying this year's clear call: **From Sorry to Action** and plans to act on Bringing them home (2026-2028).

The #NRW2026 theme, **All In for Reconciliation** reminds us that, reconciliation is not a spectator sport and that all of us must step away from the sidelines and take action to make change.



Bringing Them Home report inaction a 'failure', according to former ATSIC commissioner Mick Dodson. Watch more on [ABC News](#). A review found only five out of 83 actions have been implemented since it was tabled in parliament. A road map released by the Healing Foundation is urging governments to act within the next two years. (4m 21s)

*And a final word ...*

*We are always seeking to improve this bulletin and to make it useful, relevant and highly readable. We invite you to email through suggestions including how you as educators incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, especially Victorian ones in your teaching and curriculum.*

**Produced by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) May 2026.**

*Any enquiries, feedback and suggestions are welcome by contacting VAEAI on (03) 94810800 or by emailing the editor-curator [vaso@vaeai.org.au](mailto:vaso@vaeai.org.au).*

For more Koorie Perspectives see the VAEAI [Koorie Education Calendar](#).