

SCHOOLS
RECONCILIATION
CHALLENGE 2025



Exhibition Catalogue





Acknowledgement of Country

Reconciliation NSW acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country across all lands and waters now known as New South Wales. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples who continue to nurture culture, community, and connection.

We honour the enduring sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose stories, languages, and knowledge systems have shaped this land for countless generations. Their custodianship is not a legacy of the past —it is a living, ongoing strength that guides our approach to reconciliation.

As an organisation committed to truth-telling, justice, and reconciliation, we recognise that meaningful change begins with listening, learning, and walking together. We stand in solidarity with First Nations communities and commit to amplifying their voices, protecting cultural integrity, and embedding First Nations leadership at the heart of everything we do.

May this acknowledgement be more than words, may it guide our actions, deepen our relationships, and strengthen our shared journey toward a just and reconciled future.

Message from our Co-Chairs

In 2025, the theme of the Reconciliation NSW Schools Reconciliation Challenge, 'Feeding Connection – Learning from Country', encouraged students to engage deeply with the notion of Country as our ultimate teacher.

The Challenge is now in its 16th year - and Reconciliation NSW is celebrating its 28th year - and it has been truly inspiring to witness the strong commitment to reconciliation in education from schools across NSW and the ACT. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the participants of this year's challenge—both the long-standing contributors and the many new schools joining for the first time.

There is a growing recognition of Country and the inherent relationship with our society and food systems, something Indigenous peoples have understood for eternity. When Country is healthy, we are all healthy. Country nourishes community and culture and holds the unique responsibilities First Nations peoples have for culture, family, and community.

It is essential that we continue to listen to the voices of First Nations peoples. But listening alone is not enough. We must actively learn from and prioritise First Nations knowledge embedded in land, sea and sky Country. We must take deliberate action to protect culturally important places and stories, connections and relationships, and sustainable ways to rebalance and regenerate our country, ensuring the continued survival of culture and Country for another 65,000 years.

We thank every student, teacher, and school for participating in the 2025 Schools Reconciliation Challenge. Through your involvement, you have helped expand the understanding of First Nations cultures and contributed to building a more reconciled future. We look forward to your participation in next year's challenge!

Wakulda, as we walk together as one.



Joshua Gilbert (Woromi)
Indigenous Co-Chair

Annie Tennant
Non-Indigenous Co-Chair

About the Theme

Feeding Connection – Learning From Country is a celebration of deep-rooted knowledge, ecological stewardship, and cultural resilience. At its heart lies the understanding that the land is not just a resource but a living, breathing entity, Country, that teaches, nourishes, and connects us all. Through the lens of reconciliation, sustainability, and education, this project invites students to explore how food and farming are more than just processes—they are cultural practices that hold stories, identity, and collective wisdom.

First Nations peoples have cared for Country for tens of thousands of years through sophisticated agricultural systems that align with the natural rhythms of the environment. These systems are not only sustainable—they are regenerative. Practices like native grain cultivation, cultural burning, and careful land stewardship support soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience. When we learn from these traditions, we begin to see that sustainability is not a new concept, but one that has long been embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

The act of growing food becomes a powerful metaphor for planting seeds of change. In classrooms, these themes become opportunities for young people to reflect on their relationship with the land and each other. They are invited to consider how food connects us to our past, nourishes our present, and shapes a more just and sustainable future. It encourages students to ask important questions: What can we learn from Country? How can we honour the knowledge of those who have cared for it for generations? And how can we grow together in reconciliation and respect?

By grounding these conversations in visual storytelling and thoughtful design, this project aims to spark curiosity, conversation, and connection. It sows the idea that reconciliation isn't a single act, but an ongoing commitment—rooted in listening, learning, and acting with care. Through this creative journey, students are encouraged to see themselves as active participants in a shared future, where diverse knowledge comes together to nourish both people and the planet.



Empowering Students through the Schools Reconciliation Challenge

The NSW Schools Reconciliation Challenge is always a highlight of the school year for us as Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School. The program provides a powerful and meaningful opportunity for our young learners to engage with different perspectives they may not encounter in their everyday learning.

The Reconciliation Challenge provides students with a safe, supportive space where they can ask questions, express curiosity and develop a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, culture and experiences.

As a Teacher, the Reconciliation Challenge allows me to share my deep passion for Aboriginal Education and guide students in exploring the rich culture and lived realities that exist beyond our school gates. It is an incredibly rewarding experience to watch my students engage with the annual theme and witness their growth in understanding and empathy towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as well as their ability to communicate complex ideas with sincerity and respect.

The NSW Schools Reconciliation Challenge has become a highlight of my teaching journey as I witness first-hand the remarkable artworks and written pieces that emerge, each filled with genuine care, thought and creativity.



Cameron Letta
Creative Arts Teacher
Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School





Reconciliation means ...

... that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people come together to share stories, experiences and journeys so that we may learn from one another and heal together.

... respect, acknowledgement, belonging and working together for a better future.

... to connect, to come together as one and join focus to work together. This doesn't just mean First Nations people it means everyone, First Nations, Mobs and all non-Indigenous people, so that we can join together and connect as one. Reconciliation is not just about listening, it is an important part of healing as we acknowledge each other.



Collaborative Art



Welcome to Our Dinner Table

PLUNKETT STREET PUBLIC SCHOOL

Years 3 to 6

Materials: mixed media

"Welcome to our Dinner Table" symbolises our local native garden and the First Nations peoples' knowledge that we access in our everyday lives here at Plunkett Street Public School. It represents First Nations peoples (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) cultures linked to both our school and community. Our school thrives on the connections we have with our community.

At Plunkett Street Public School, we have a gardening program that involves volunteers from our community who come in and share their knowledge of gardening with us. We can harvest the food we grow and cook it to share with each other.

In term 4 2023, our deadly Aboriginal Education Assistant, the community volunteers, teachers and students added to and replenished our already thriving Native Garden. Our Native Garden provides us with edible native foods, a place to play, a place to reflect and a place to gain valuable knowledge of the local custodians (the Gadigal people). It is a sustainable garden that keeps on giving and it is our way of honouring the knowledge of the Gadigal people who have cared for this land for generations.

Reconciliation means ...

... sharing all of the many cultures within our school and community and working together. Focusing on building knowledge and understanding of First Nations culture to encourage a sense of belonging for everyone in our school.



Tree of Wonder

SURVEYORS CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Cody A., Dexter K., Ryan K. (years 3-4)

Materials: mixed media



The name of our Aboriginal artwork is Tree of Wonder. It represents how the Aboriginal people look for food in the wild. The Tree of Wonder means the Aboriginal food is growing on this tree of life. It is about how the Aboriginal people lived and the Aboriginal tree of life provided food for them. The Aboriginal people lived near a lot of trees.

Reconciliation is...

... the process of bringing people with differences together and helping them understand each other.



Growing Together for the Future

MINMI PUBLIC SCHOOL

Year 4

Materials: mixed media

Our artwork shows how looking after and respecting the land, and everyone who lives on it, can help us create a better future. It shows people from many different cultures and beliefs working together to grow a eucalyptus tree, which represents the future of our country and our world. The roots and leaves include traits and values that we believe will guide us towards true reconciliation, as well as our hopes for the future. Everyone in our class added something unique, using different styles and materials. This shows that even though we come from different places, we can still work together to create something beautiful and meaningful.

Reconciliation means ...

... acknowledging the past and working together to build a better future.



Gathering of Group

EDGEWARE SCHOOL

Year 10

Materials: acrylic paint

“Gathering of Group” was created by Edgware students in the spirit of Aboriginal design, using the metaphor of planting seeds to represent growth. The artwork shows an aerial view of our school – our meeting place – where growing food becomes a symbol of cultivating knowledge, community, and the future.

At its centre stands the Fig Tree, found on our school grounds, representing safety, shelter, and connection to Country. The surrounding river, traditionally known as Goolay'yari (“place of pelican dreaming” in the Eora language of the Cadigal-Wangal people), links past, present, and future – a pathway of continuous learning and cultural connection.

Created by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, “Gathering of Group” celebrates renewal, growth, and the shared strength that helps our community thrive.

Reconciliation means ...

... understanding the past, acknowledging the impact of the past on the present and showing respect and empathy to the recovery and journey of Aboriginal peoples, reflecting on our relationships with Aboriginal peoples, culture and true history. Reconciliation is an ongoing learning that requires us to listen, and work together in ways that honour the stories, traditions, culture and rights of First Nations people. Growing awareness that informs our words and actions that need to continue to build respectful relationships and equality among us.



Panania - 'sun rising in the east and shining on the hills'. Where learning is above, below and all around every student every day

EAST HILLS GIRLS TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL

Year 7

Materials: acrylic paint

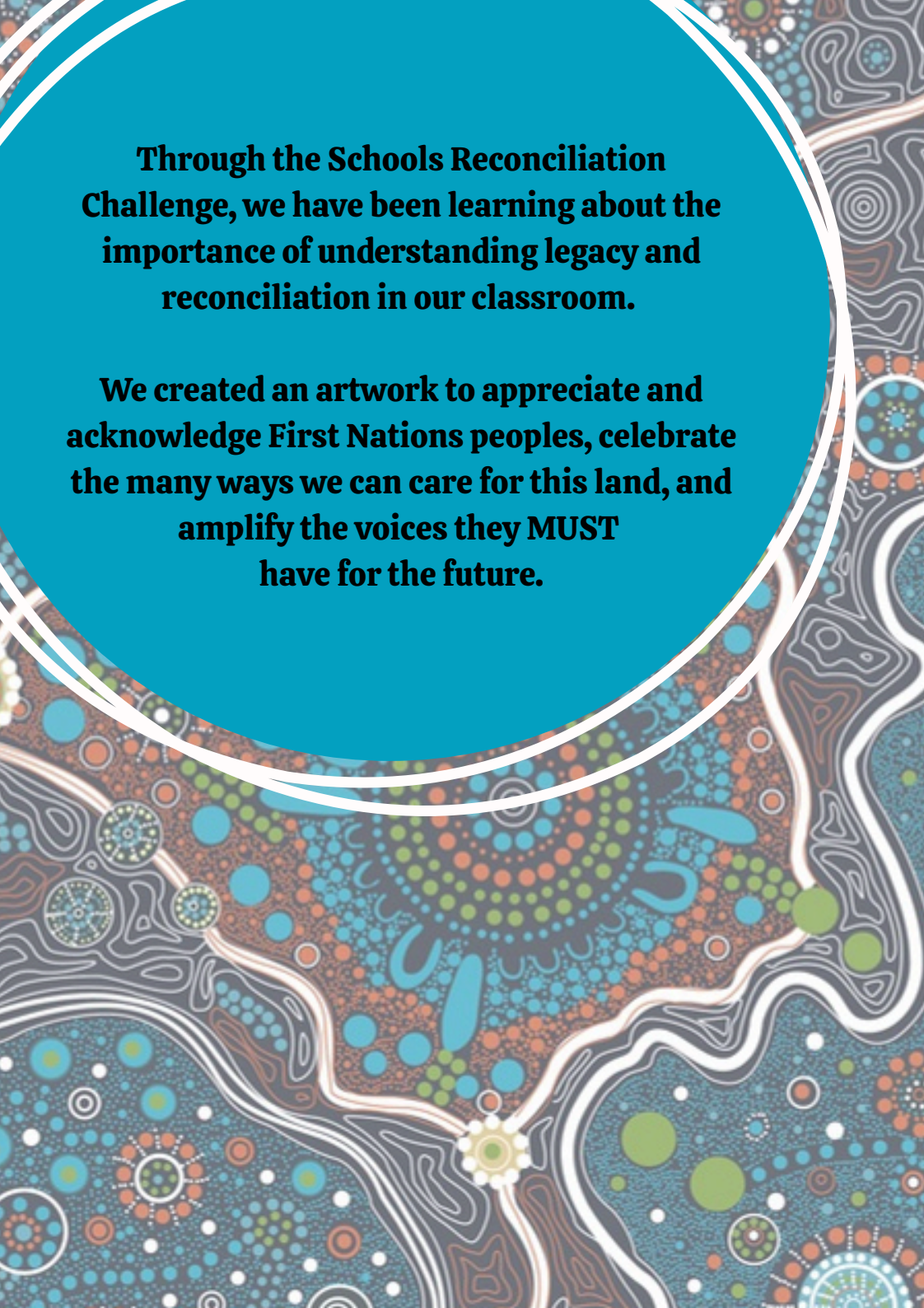
This artwork is a whole school collaboration exploring our connection to the unique and beautiful country that East Hills Girls Technology High School has grown from. It celebrates the success of our school as a place of learning for generations, while recognising that we meet and learn on the land of the Bidjigal clan. The students creatively explored the river, the bush, the suburbs and the school remembering the First Nations' histories, traditions and cultures which continue to provide rich cultural nourishment and lessons in life. Symbols for rivers, flora and fauna along with the recurring women's yarning circle represent girls past and present interacting and growing in knowledge.

Reconciliation means ...

... working together for a brighter future.



Primary School Art



Through the Schools Reconciliation Challenge, we have been learning about the importance of understanding legacy and reconciliation in our classroom.

We created an artwork to appreciate and acknowledge First Nations peoples, celebrate the many ways we can care for this land, and amplify the voices they **MUST have for the future.**



Hunter and Gatherer

ROSEMEADOW PUBLIC SCHOOL

Alexis W. (year 6)

Materials: mixed media

My artwork shows a windy day and a kangaroo is hunting for food for her kids as the sun is going up. I chose to do this image as a kangaroo is feeding from Country to survive and in the same way us as people might hunt or gather from the land to sustain ourselves. We can feed our bellies from Country but we can also feed our brains.

Reconciliation ...

... helps Aboriginal people to come together and celebrate their culture not only with each other but with the land and non-Aboriginal people too. We can teach non-Aboriginal people about our culture through dance, art and stories.



The Family

SURVEYORS CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Cyndianna F. (year 4)

Materials: mixed media

My artwork is inspired by a family of turtles. I chose this because it represents both strength and loss. The turtles show the importance of family, but also the sadness of not being able to see their mother, who gave her life for her children. Through this artwork, I wanted to express how families can carry both love and pain, and how the sacrifices of those who came before us are remembered. For me, this connects to Reconciliation Week because it is about honouring stories, recognising loss, and moving forward with respect and care for each other. The theme “Feeding Connection – Learning Through Country” is shown in my artwork through the turtles’ link to land, water, and family. Just like turtles rely on Country to survive, we also learn from Country about strength, resilience, and connection. My artwork shows that through family, culture, and the land, we are all nourished, guided, and connected.

Reconciliation means ...

... building stronger connections and relationships, and acknowledging the past wrongs to build a brighter future.



Drawing Pride

MANLY WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL

Clara G. (year 3)

Materials: mixed media

I decided to draw a desert with Uluru in the background because I know how to draw it, and while it seems easy, it is not so simple. Aboriginal people are very special, and I know that this land is, was, and always will be traditional Aboriginal land. In my drawing, I wanted to add a kangaroo and an emu because they are unique Australian animals that cannot walk backward. I also included a small pond for the amazing animals to drink from. I know some special things about Aboriginal people, their tools, and the land because I have an Aboriginal background that I am proud of. I want to show people how special Aboriginal people are and highlight the importance of this land.

Reconciliation ...

... is about respecting our country and remembering the Aboriginal people who were here first and lost their homes because of white people. It is about feeling sorry for their struggle to survive, but most of all, it is about caring for the land.



Teaching

ROSEMEADOW PUBLIC SCHOOL

Yasna B. (year 6)

Materials: mixed media

My artwork shows that the land is teaching Indigenous people's stories and pasts as we see the river flowing into her ear informing her of the truths. It makes the land a part of her.

Reconciliation means ...

... accepting the First Nations people. It also means that we should be thriving in happiness, it is about making a bright future for the traditional owners of the land.



Feeding Land Feeding Connections

MINMI PUBLIC SCHOOL

Bronte B. (year 5)

Materials: mixed media

Kaayi. My artwork is called Feeding Land Feeding Connections and it is all about an Aboriginal Elder showing someone from another culture everything about the turtle. Elders are some of the people in our world that help us. They teach the younger generations how to use the land, sky and water to live an amazing life on our land. One hand symbolises an Aboriginal Elder and the other hand symbolises the younger child. So the turtle popped out in my artwork, I used a cotton bud and some paint to dot paint the turtle. To get the sandy colour on the shore of the beach, I mixed watercolours. The movement of the water surrounding the turtle signifies the circle of life, having knowledge of this to follow with us and guide us through the lifetimes.

Reconciliation means ...

... that we are nice, kind and respect each other for who we are and what other people can teach us. Whether they come from a different culture, look different or aren't your friend (yet), you still respect them and accept them for who they are. Reconciliation means believing that people will understand and behave respectfully.



Reaching Knowledge

SURVEYORS CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Balin W. (year 6)

Materials: mixed media

My artwork is inspired by this year's Reconciliation Challenge theme, Feeding Connection, Learning from Country. I created an artwork that shows a person touching a rock, with Aboriginal symbols all over their arm. The background is light blue to represent the sky, and the black at the bottom represents the ground. I created this artwork to show what Feeding Connection, Learning from Country means to me. The person touching the rock is learning from the Country, and when they touch the rock, it is as if Australia is sharing knowledge about the Aboriginal symbols and their meanings.

Reconciliation means ...

... to me strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people.



Fixing Broken Generations

MINMI PUBLIC SCHOOL

Charlotte C. (year 5)

Materials: mixed media

The land, the hills, the sky. As we grow connections, we feed relationships and weave our ancestors' stories, creating a bond that can't be lost. It is a magical time at the Wiradjuri, as we chew on fresh burundi and listen to old oak's tales. Take my hand, my feel, my touch, and carry on our legacy. Forever as one, forever healing the land, forever feeding connections. My artwork is all about healing broken generations. I used art mediums such as paint pens, watercolours, and pencils to create a scenic, authentic look. Making this artwork was tricky, as I tried to blend stories beyond pencils and paint. I wiped oils and rainbows, drawing symbols of what feeding connections feels like to me. To me, reconciliation means to live and carry on the way our Elders taught us, thriving towards traditions and glory. It means to bond deeply with family, weaving beautiful stories and tales. Reconciliation is when we reconcile and ignore our differences, discouraging discrimination and lies, making an inseparable connection with the people and countries we face. We're like a tree. We feel together. We grow together, we drink, we eat together. But as we grow old, we grow branches. We create our own path and generation, teaching youngest to feed, to learn, to find and search. They become our seedling, making a new tree, a new generation, teaching others the way we always have.

Reconciliation means ...

... to live and carry on the way our Elders taught us, thriving towards traditions and glory. It means to bond deeply with family, weaving beautiful stories and tales. Reconciliation is when we reconcile and ignore our differences, discouraging discrimination and lies, making an inseparable connection with the people and countries we face.



Connections

SURVEYORS CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Dia P. (year 3)

Materials: mixed media

My artwork is made of four layers, each telling a story of connection and learning. The sky glows with an evening sunset, fading into the soft shimmer of stars, with Father Moon watching over us. In Indigenous culture, the moon is a guide and a storyteller, reminding us of wisdom that flows from the sky to the land below. The mountains rise strong and steady, grounding us in the place where we live and shaping the way we connect with the land. The water flows with life, showing my favourite animals, which are also my totem. They are strong, resilient, and remind me of the strength we carry within ourselves. Beneath it all, roots stretch deep into the earth, carrying symbols and animal tracks that speak of the knowledge, stories, and lessons passed down through generations. This artwork reflects the theme “Feeding Connection – Learning Through Country.” Each layer shows how Country nourishes us – with stories, wisdom, strength, and guidance. Through the sky, the mountains, the water, and the roots, I explore the invisible threads that connect people, animals, land, and ancestors. My hope is that this piece inspires viewers to see how we learn from the world around us, honouring the past while living respectfully in the present.

Reconciliation means ...

... learning from the past and showing respect so that everyone feels valued. It's about listening to Aboriginal voices, understanding their culture and history, and working together to create a fair future where we can all feel proud to live in the same country.



Stories in the Soil

RIVERBANK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Kimaya W. (year 4)

Materials: pencil

This artwork shows a wombat and kangaroo standing next to the waterhole. The colour palette has neutral, warm and cold colours all together in connection. There are many circles, dots and wavy lines mixed together in the wombat and kangaroo. Tidalic is near the waterfall driven by kangaroo tracks and comes to a meeting places. I made this artwork by using watercolour in the background, Tidalic and many Aboriginal symbols. The rest of the artwork is made up by markers and permanent marker.

Reconciliation means ...

... to me is the reforming the bond of friendly relationships with another. This means being kind and treating others fairly. Connection can also be with the land and animals, so we need to restore our relationships with them too. Reconciliation is restoring and making friendly relationships.



Deep Knowledge Roots

SURVEYORS CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Ariella S. (year 4)

Materials: mixed media

My artwork "Deep Knowledge Roots" shows how Elders are the beginning of sharing knowledge, like the roots of the tree, and then their knowledge is branched out through the branches and trees through generations. The leaves on my tree are bright green to show new life and to represent the beauty that the Aboriginal culture holds. Elders carry the knowledge and plant it into the ground to watch it flourish for generations to come. My artwork connects to this year's theme "Feeding Connection, Learning from Country" as it represents how the Elders' deeply rooted knowledge is shared through generations, and it feeds the connection of Aboriginal peoples.

Reconciliation means ...

... connection and not treating people differently. It is about sharing culture and tradition without judgement.



Our Generation

ST JOHN VIANNEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Lana R. (year 5)

Materials: pencil

Uluru is back in the hands of the traditional Aboriginal people. They fought for Uluru and won; it's part of their history, a sacred place. The yarning circle is where Aboriginal people gather to share culture over history through dreaming, songlines, and Elders sharing their stories. We listen to them, learn from them, and are prepared to pass these down to our generation, too. As a proud Aboriginal girl, I feel proud of my history and happily share it with others.

Reconciliation means ...

... to me as an Aboriginal person, it is for people to accept us, understand us, and our culture. In Australia, we want people to be united and forgive one another. Listen to them, learn from them, and be prepared to pass these claims to our generations too.



Sky Land Water

JOHN PALMER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Willow A. (year 5)

Materials: mixed media

When I learn my culture, I understand that our ancestors are in all the sky, the land, and the water. That Country provides us with food and water to fill us, but fill our hearts and minds because it holds our Dreamtime stories, songs, dances, and traditions as well.

Reconciliation means ...

... coming together to work hard at learning Aboriginal history and culture and making today a better place for everyone.



High School Art



Reconciliation means ...

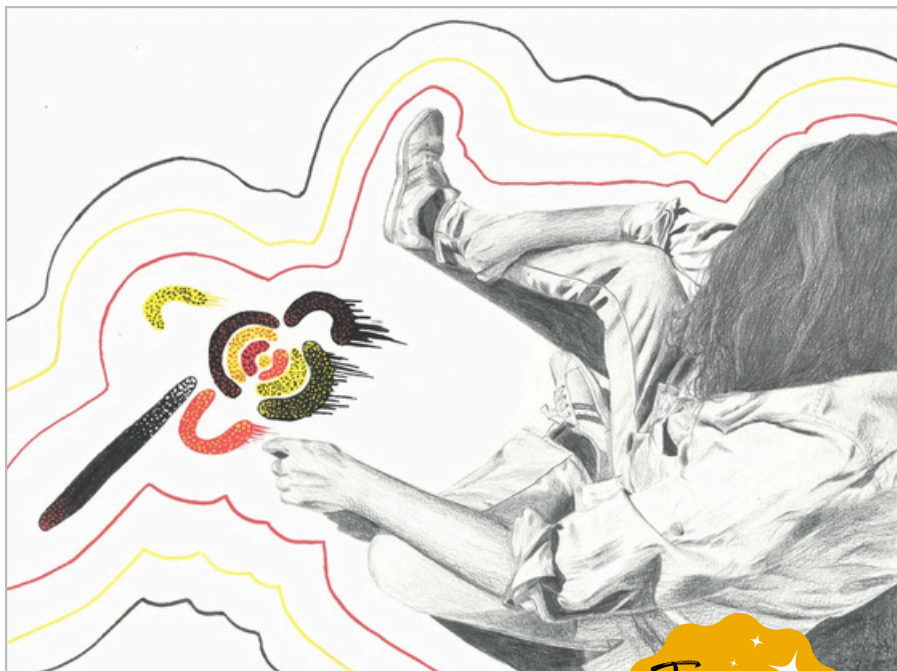
... to respect our home
and our joy of this country.

Also,
we must remember
the people who walked
on this land thousands of
years ago.

... acceptance,
courage and
unity.

... that all Australians
unite as one and can live together
in peace for a better future.

We do this at our school and in
our community by acknowledging
and respecting all the different peoples,
cultures and by
caring for Country.

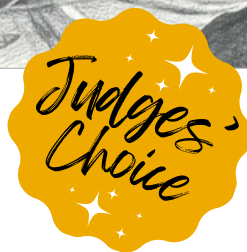


Drawing Pride

MODEL FARMS HIGH SCHOOL

Kaylene A. (year 9)

Materials: mixed media



The main idea of my artwork is to show pride in culture and how this pride is expressed through connection with nature. I chose a simple and direct design, using graphite pencil for detail and adding vibrant pops of colour with paint markers to symbolise reconciliation. Through this artwork, I wanted to share my belief in the importance of reconciliation and the need to celebrate and respect culture in ways that connect us all.

Reconciliation means ...

... learning from the past and showing respect so that everyone feels valued. It's about listening to Aboriginal voices, understanding their culture and history, and working together to create a fair future where we can all feel proud to live in the same country.



The Light of Reconciliation

MODEL FARMS HIGH SCHOOL

Madelyn S. (year 9)

Materials: mixed media

Reconciliation is represented by the sun as a symbol of healing, warmth and unity. The flowing colours show different cultures coming together - reminding us that although we are all different, we share the same light. The yellows and oranges symbolise hope and positivity, while the blues and purples represent strength and resilience. I created my artwork using watercolour and paint pens, combining warm and cool tones to create movement and harmony. Through layering and blending, I wanted to show how cultures and histories can unite in harmony despite their differences. My goal was to remind people that reconciliation is about coming together, respecting one another, and building unity for the future. I hope viewers feel a sense of warmth and hope when they see my artwork, and recognise that reconciliation is a shared responsibility.

Reconciliation means ...

... showing kindness and respect towards each other, acknowledging the past, and working towards a better, fairer future for everyone. It isn't about forgiveness or moving on, but instead about creating a space for honesty, mutual respect and justice. Whether it is between individuals, communities, or nations, reconciliation invites us to truly hear one another, reflect on our past mistakes, and work together to shape a future grounded in respect and compassion. Reconciliation is more of an ongoing journey than a goal - one that will challenge us to engage with empathy, take responsibility, and remain committed to growth and healing.



Learning Tradition

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Ivy B. (year 10)

Materials: mixed media

My artwork is depicting an elder Aboriginal teaching the younger generation how to hunt kangaroos. By demonstrating how to hunt for food, my artwork relates to the theme of passing on knowledge.

Reconciliation is ...

... important to inspire and teach young people about the past traditions and culture to acknowledge Aboriginal Elders.



Roots of Connection

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Flynn P. (year 9)

Materials: acrylic paint

My artwork is about how we all connect to our culture and how our culture brings us together, from the roots of our earth, to the land which we all walk on, to the sun in our sky connecting all the seasons combining us together as one. The dots above the strip in the sky are representing our ancestors watching over us and guiding us throughout our journey in life, the strip in the sky represents how we connect to each other through how and what in culture and how we connect through the seasons, the symbols around the outskirts representing people...everyone connecting with each other, human and goanna tracks (my totem) through the middle tells the story of how we all walk together as one and the roots in the soil of my artwork representing how not only I but also many other Indigenous people connect to our land, culture and people.

Reconciliation ...

... to me means a sense of belonging ... being the true and honest person that you are and not being afraid of where you come from, and being proud of where your heritage arises from.



Country Growth

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Violet W. (year 9)

Materials: pencil

My artwork 'Country Growth' visually explores native plant regrowth after traditional cultural burning fires. The native flora represents regeneration which symbolises the power of First Nations knowledges and the deep connection to Country that their knowledge holds. The resilient natives embody a journey of healing and a future of restoration. The native plants are framed within the silhouette of Australia in the respective states they are native to. This directly addresses the theme of Feeding Connection, Learning from Country as the native plants symbolise a deep rooted connection to Country and the lessons we can learn from traditional practices that have shaped the land.

Reconciliation means ...

... the strengthening of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians; to achieve an equitable and united nation. To me, Reconciliation means truly listening to Indigenous stories, hearing their culture and working together with respect and compassion. It means to heal the past so we can live in an honest and deeply connected future.



Wuu-gii (Sunset in Yuwalaaraay)

MELONBA HIGH SCHOOL

Tobias A. (year 8)

Materials: acrylic paint

I painted this to represent all the different lines and colours that are embedded into Aboriginal Land. When I paint Country like this it reminds me of how land and culture nourish my spirit.

Reconciliation means ...

... that we never stop fighting for truth telling and empowerment for Aboriginal people.



Kindling Culture

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

April B. (year 9)

Materials: mixed media

Within family, Elders and ancestors pass down knowledge, dreamtimes, lore and cultural practices. Being here since the dawn of time they keep culture burning and alive. When performing cultural practices a fire is used to bring mob together, for cooking and cultural burning both sustaining life and allowing new plants to thrive. Through this artwork you see Elders passing on knowledge to younger generations. The fire represents culture burning strong and is surrounded by different generations of people come together to learn and connect.

Reconciliation means ...

... connecting everyone back together, healing from the past and moving forward together as one.



Lessons from the Earth

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Mischa T. (year 10)

Materials: acrylic paint

My artwork addresses the theme 'Feeding Connection, Learning from Country' by depicting a child being taught cultural knowledge via symbols being drawn in the ground. My artwork explores how we can build connection through sharing our knowledge and connecting to the land.

Reconciliation means ...

... acknowledging wrongs and working to repair harm so people can live together on more respectful terms. Reconciliation is a process of healing and relationship building.



Yarrangany

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Ruby R. (year 9)

Materials: acrylic paint

My artwork 'Yarrangany', meaning roots of trees, is a symbol of my culture. The roots represent my cultural roots and how I am connected to the land and all the flora and fauna around. Each symbol inside the roots tells a story about me as I connect to each one in a different way. Lastly, the Goanna climbing the tree is special to me as it is my mob's totem and I learn lots from them and how they walk upon this land.

Reconciliation means ...

... acknowledging the past and working towards healing. It also means to strengthen the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.



Feeding Connection

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Gabrielle I. (year 10)

Materials: acrylic paint

My artwork is based on the process of grinding natural resources to be used for either medicinal purposes or food. My artwork addresses the theme 'Feeding Connection – Learning from Country' by highlighting the importance of learning from First Nations culture and traditions.

Reconciliation means ...

... keeping culture alive and strengthening the relationships between Aboriginal people and the broader Australian community.



Mitukit Ngurras

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Lilly H. (year 10)

Materials: acrylic paint

This artwork depicts the (Mitukit Ngurras) Emu in the Sky, an important feature of Aboriginal astronomy, and explores how Elders used the stars as a source of knowledge, guidance, and cultural teaching. In particular, the position of the emu constellation signalled the right time to gather emu eggs, showing the close relationship between the night sky and seasonal cycles on Country. Through this connection, Aboriginal peoples were able to sustain their communities while respecting and preserving natural resources. By representing this knowledge, my artwork reflects the theme of learning from the land and sky, emphasising the way stories, traditions, and survival skills were passed down through generations since the beginning of time. It demonstrates how the stars not only provided practical guidance but also strengthened spiritual connections, cultural identity, and community bonds. Overall, (Mitukit ngurras) the Emu in the Sky symbolises the enduring link between people, culture, and the environment, and my artwork seeks to honour and share this continuing legacy.

Reconciliation ...

... represents the process of acknowledging historical injustices while fostering mutual respect and understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. It is about creating opportunities for healing, truth-telling, and cultural exchange, while working towards a society that values equality and unity. Reconciliation is both symbolic and practical: it involves honouring the oldest living cultures on earth while ensuring that future generations can live together with fairness, respect, and shared responsibility.



Dhalbin

MELONBA HIGH SCHOOL

Finley A. (year 7)

Materials: digital art

Dhalbin means medicine in my people's language. I feel most connected to my culture and ancestors when I walk through the bush and learn about bush tucker. Every day I see plants that have been used for thousands of years by my people to heal and feed their tummies and feed their spirits. It makes me feel part of something very important.

Reconciliation means ...

... that we are always working towards a fair and safer world for Aboriginal people.



Primary School Writing



Country, My Teacher

RIVERBANK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Anona J. (year 6)

Learning, it doesn't just come from classrooms or Elders, but from what surrounds us. The quiet, yet empowering Country. Thus for the theme; Learning From Country, I decided to highlight how Country teaches us now and forever in its subtle but inspiring methods. Ending with how important it is to forever remember how Country has shaped us all.

Reconciliation means ...

... I believe that it holds many deep, moving meanings. To reunite after a barrier is lifted, to restore influencing relationships that have made you who you are, but the most important of all, understanding and acknowledging others' outlooks. No matter who they are, accepting what their mindset is for equality and fairness. Lending a hand, blossoming relationships, demonstrating unwavering support. That's what reconciliation means to me.

I amble across the river's edge,
the wavelets are my first classrooms,
'Hold on a tick,' Pop tells me,
'Listen to the water before you cast your line.'
So, I listen.
The ripples flow, it winds, it bends,
each movement curves a lesson that never ends.

I glance up,
the gum trees stand tall,
their roots hold timeless stories.
They demonstrate how strength,
is not only valued in height,
but in how deep you are rooted.

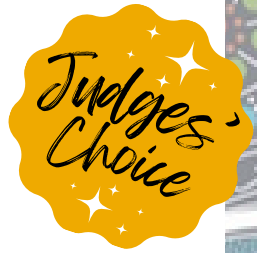
The yams slumber under the soil,
patiently waiting until their time,
reminding me,
that some knowledge develops slowly,
and the valuable lessons,
mustn't be rushed.

Kangaroo tracks etch the dusty, red land,
it only directs forward,
highlighting that every step,
leaves a mark, a story behind.

At night, the stars dance,
they resemble the previous mentors,
composing calendars in the sky,
directing when to fish,
when to gather,
when to rest.

By the fire, folks gather,
close folks, or unfamiliar folks,
but food is passed palm to palm.
story to mouth to ear,
memories flooding our minds,
teaching us that only the best memories,
are the ones that bind.

Country feeds us more than hunger.
It feeds collaboration and connection.
It teaches us to observe and listen,
to share,
to care,
and to remember.





Through Generations and Generations

RIVERBANK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Sanya J. (year 3)

The story 'Through Generations and Generations' expresses how Country teaches the First Nations people about culture, wisdom and connection. Passing on stories of past generations has always been a vital element of First Nation peoples' culture, though this story says that it's always your choice, while describing how Country is more than just land, but a way of understanding too. The lesson of rushing river currents also shows us that everyone has a limit; even stories. Aboriginal language was also included (wiyanga, meaning mother), which was done so that the theme could remain about the natives. This story was not only about valour, but the stories passed on and choices that many had to make in the past. I decided to write this story because I knew the theme 'Feeding Connection, Learning from Country' was more about options, not just red earth and flora. Decisions I made in this story included me talking about how stories end at certain points, but our culture will never, which is expressed in the 3rd paragraph. The text explores the theme 'Feeding Connection, Learning From Country' thoroughly with its description and way of words. Throughout writing this story, I realised that culture is more than traditions, stories and choices too, and that our hope and determination gives us opportunities in each step we take together. The story above teaches us that grit and rock weren't tools to our ancestors, but our heritage and land surrounding us.

Reconciliation means ...

... that our community, culture and family are all connected, in harmony in a place of belonging. Whether it's around a bonfire, or even just connecting with culture or community your way, to me, reconciliation is simply being together and respecting other's ways. This is what reconciliation means to me; a place where everyone belongs and knows that they are known for themselves and their community too.

A blazing fire. A story of valour. A story of culture. A story that had been passed on from her wiyanga to her children. It was a story that would be passed on to generations and generations; if her children chose to do so...

Flashbacks of memories crossed the young woman's mind, as she thought of a story to tell her young ones as they slept and dreamt of their long-lasting culture; one her wiyanga had once told her when she was young too. It was a story of courage, and it passed on wisdom of the ancient ones. She smiled as she thought of a lesson she had learnt long ago, when she was little. She remembered her wiyanga saying that rivers flow on and on, but some choose to stop flowing at a certain point after time. In the same way, sometimes our stories are not passed on, and there will always be a time like this. The young woman knew that her children were ready to be told the story, but it was their choice to either continue it; or let it fall to ashes forever. Knowing this, the woman smiled and began the story:

"As generations passed, and old customs grew old, the ancient past of the First Nations stayed strong, leading the way; through a journey of time, through a journey of courage. Fauna withered, and breezes faded, but the centre of our heritage didn't. Bonfires and dances, shared with wisdom, burning the midnight oil on the way; feeding connection and learning from Country. If the stars didn't glow, our culture did. If the sun didn't rise with a candescent spirit, our culture did. If the tide didn't rush in with the strong currents, our culture did." She repeated the phrase with a small smile.

"A living entity, a continuing generation; a forever guide to freedom. This is what Country means. Passed down through times of the past, present and emerging, one thing is for sure: our land of the brave never dies. May the brittle trees break, may the old wind sigh, but our knowledge is a burning light, which still has a long way to go. Country wasn't just red earth to us, but our identity, family and tapestry of life and existence. Country fed connection to our lands of the brave, and its flowing rivers and berries gave us strength and freedom on the way. This story doesn't just teach us of our culture, but our true heritages and lands." She continued to explain with a hint of pride in her voice.

The young woman smiled to herself. Her children had slept, and she too had passed her insight of her past. She knew that the same story would be passed down to others as well, and knowing this, a rush of warmth rushed over her, as it had done on the day her wiyanga had told the same, customary story near the raging bonfire. The bonfire that still held light inside it, waiting to be released once again to emerging descendants. This is what connection to culture truly was: a heritage full of hope. A heritage full of wisdom. A heritage to be shared with others on the way ahead. But then again, it was up to her children if they chose to feed connection once again to their descendants and burn their flame even brighter; unless they chose to let it fall to ashes. But she alone couldn't tell them to let the fire rage on, she needed to let them make their choice alone; and with time. She had tended to the fire for far too long already, and it was now their turn to learn more about Country, its ways; and its knowledge of passing on stories of their culture. One day it would be time. And one day, they would be ready; once and for all.



A Mother's Call

ROSEMEADOW PUBLIC SCHOOL

Cailey L. (year 5)

My writing represents the loving motherly care that the Earth has brought to us. I wanted people to understand how much things the Country has given to us, how much it has sacrificed to provide for our needs. And now, we are slowly corrupting the Earth, a large contrast from the Aboriginal old way of life, how they never wasted anything, how they only took what they needed. The first part of the poem shows how the Country took care of us, allowing us to roam, create and learn. The second half of my poem focuses on the repercussions of our actions, how our terrible methods affected the Country greatly. And now, we need to do what the Aboriginal peoples have done for thousands of years, and start undoing the wrong we've done.

Reconciliation ...

... is healing our actions. To not simply forgive and forget what we've done to the First Nations, but to truly apologise, heal what we've broken. To fix the pains we've done to the First Nations and the Country.

The children laughed and pranced.
The dirt and soil rumbled while they danced.
The children were joyful while they played.

The Country their stage.

The birds entertained them with their song.
The plants and grass swayed along.

The Country rumbled while it roared.
Sheltering the young from the storm.
The Country warmed us when we had no place
Like a mother's warm embrace.

They are the reason we have grown.
Oh how we should've known.

Now old and fragile.

Protecting the Country is worth the while.
The Country's hands have cleaned and nurtured us for our labour.
It is time we return the favour.
We must fix our past mistakes.
While the Country is at grave stake.

The seeds that have fed us are slowly dying out.
The seas and rivers that met our shores, slowly drying out.
The horizon corrupts into a dirty brown.
The clouds slowly turn into smog as they frown.

Plants unrecognisable as the sun and water that fed them are long gone.
Unique animals reduced to one.
As buildings take over the diverse green.
Millions of plants are nowhere to be seen.

Our Country's diverse flora and fauna is being led to devastation.
The animals and plants as we know it is being hunted and stomped on.
If this keeps up, the world will surely end in a cold and empty isolation.

The Country is our home, our mother, our father.
If we took care of it as it has taken care of us.
Is it so much harder?

We must take the hand that held us and hold it.
To be able to be alive is a blessing.
But is it if the world our eyes sees is lessening?

The plants and animals are our siblings.
So, we must learn how to stop doing such harmful things.



Song of the Flames


ROSEMEADOW PUBLIC SCHOOL

Chloe D. (year 6)

The fire heals the patches made by our history. It's nurturing and kind, but powerful and empowering at the same time. I've hinted about how important oral storytelling is to others to form a community of knowledge and practices of the past. It also proves that fire is very important for cultural practices, especially for the First Nations people. This short story includes how important the land and spiritual practices are to First Nations people.

Reconciliation means ...

... to me that we can all connect together with kindness and can learn from our mistakes from the past. It also means to me that no matter how different we are, we can still unite as a whole world-wide community, and not judge people based on how they look. Reconciliation also means that we should all ignore our differences, and come together as one to create a more peaceful and content world for the future and our present time. By meeting many different people from different countries and travelling across the world, I've learned that different cultures all have unique practices and that learning from each other makes us learn new practices and strengthen our community spiritually.



WOOSH! Flames burst up around me with other Elders lighting fires around the younger ones of the mob, telling stories under the star-light sky. I walked through the parched grass which tickled my feet with every step I took. I stood next to Uncle and watched as his shriveled but warm hands started to light the fire on the barren land. The heat slapped me in the face and I immediately stood back and hid behind a cabbage tree palm with fear spreading through my body as the fire roared. Chaos reigned in my body. My heartbeat pulsated rapidly, like it was a machine and someone had taken out a clog from it. My mind was telling me not to go any further and I started to sweat a waterfall. Uncle, however, gazed at the fire with comfort, like an old friend. I was in a state of calamity, until the fire invited me forward with open arms, like a loving grandmother inviting me forward and my mind gave in to its mesmerising feel. I slowly shuffled forward from my secluded, lonely, cabbage tree palm and sat cross-legged next to my Uncle, who was still observing every flicker of the spreading fire.

Every flicker and flame told the ancient stories of my ancestors. How they hunted, how they gathered berries, how they connected using Dreaming Stories... Every segment of every story was more precious than diamonds worth millions of dollars. I closed my eyes and listened. The crackle of the fire, bygone leaves slowly burning, the slow breathing of Mother Earth echoed through my ears like a soft melody. It called my name like a mother caressing her baby in her arms. "Kalina...Kalina..." the voice whispered with a melodious tune. Each orange and yellow hue and tone held the important power of rehabilitation and reproduction. Destructive yet kind, powerful yet gentle. I was immersed with this blessing and realised the fire was not just healing the land, but also healing me from the shards of glass piercing my heart. It slowly melted the shards and made it into a beautiful artwork of kindness and love. Like an angel in disguise. The land seemed to respond by murmuring a little "Thank you," with its endless winds and branches swaying softly and soundly in peace.

Uncle slowly got up and I realised he must've been thinking about the same things as me. His nostalgic memories of his childhood of playing in the bush with his friends and being cradled in his mother's arms whispering about the old Dreaming Stories of his ancestors and family. "Kalina, time to head back," he whispered softly. I got up reluctantly, not wanting to leave the warm grasp of the flames. As I walked back on the freshly burnt land, that was already replenishing, I thought about what I learned about my ancestors. Their voices echoed in my head, telling ancient tales about Dreaming, how important and deep the connection is to the land. I soon then remembered this was also going to be a tale to tell to the future generations. Then to the next... and the next...



The River Remembers

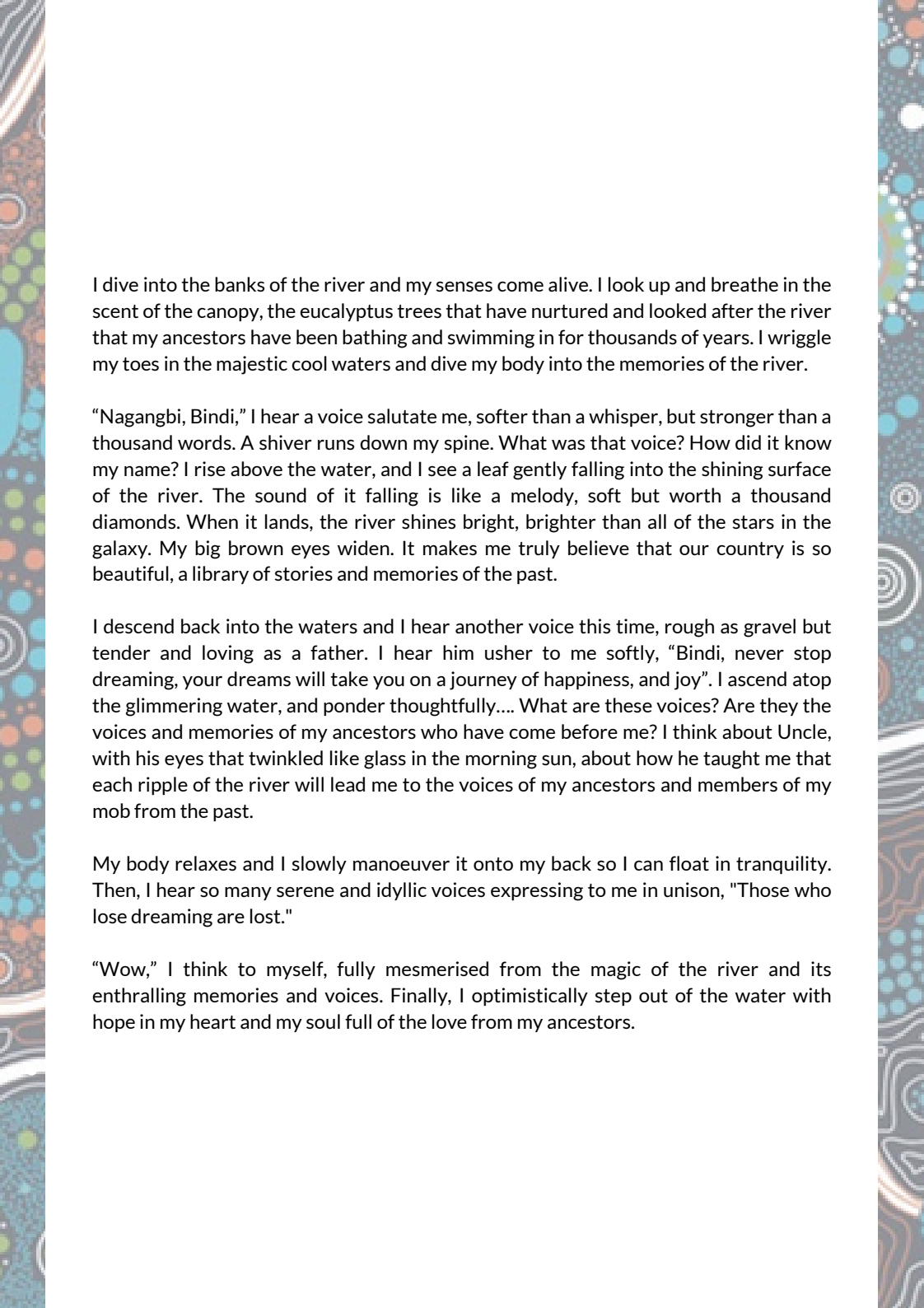
ROSEMEADOW PUBLIC SCHOOL

Isabella N. (year 6)

I want my text to show the importance of Dreaming, remembering our ancestors, and the spiritual concept of creation and the spiritual essence of Aboriginal cultures, and its crucial role in identity and connection to culture.

Reconciliation means ...

... the mutual respect and relationships that are shared between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people. I think it's essential to maintain the relationships so future generations can also respect the traditional owners of the land.



I dive into the banks of the river and my senses come alive. I look up and breathe in the scent of the canopy, the eucalyptus trees that have nurtured and looked after the river that my ancestors have been bathing and swimming in for thousands of years. I wriggle my toes in the majestic cool waters and dive my body into the memories of the river.

“Nagangbi, Bindi,” I hear a voice salute me, softer than a whisper, but stronger than a thousand words. A shiver runs down my spine. What was that voice? How did it know my name? I rise above the water, and I see a leaf gently falling into the shining surface of the river. The sound of it falling is like a melody, soft but worth a thousand diamonds. When it lands, the river shines bright, brighter than all of the stars in the galaxy. My big brown eyes widen. It makes me truly believe that our country is so beautiful, a library of stories and memories of the past.

I descend back into the waters and I hear another voice this time, rough as gravel but tender and loving as a father. I hear him usher to me softly, “Bindi, never stop dreaming, your dreams will take you on a journey of happiness, and joy”. I ascend atop the glimmering water, and ponder thoughtfully.... What are these voices? Are they the voices and memories of my ancestors who have come before me? I think about Uncle, with his eyes that twinkled like glass in the morning sun, about how he taught me that each ripple of the river will lead me to the voices of my ancestors and members of my mob from the past.

My body relaxes and I slowly manoeuvre it onto my back so I can float in tranquility. Then, I hear so many serene and idyllic voices expressing to me in unison, "Those who lose dreaming are lost."

“Wow,” I think to myself, fully mesmerised from the magic of the river and its enthralling memories and voices. Finally, I optimistically step out of the water with hope in my heart and my soul full of the love from my ancestors.



Connections to the Dreamtime

SURVEYORS CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Adam B. (year 6)

This story is based on the theme “Feeding Connection – Learning from Country”, and the reason why I chose to make a story like this is to represent connection and reconciliation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, even through dreaming to a far away place, and being able to learn the Aboriginal people’s history and culture, and to also learn from Country and appreciate it.

Reconciliation means ...

... that we all come together, Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal people, and even people from different cultures, to unite and be in harmony with one another. Even if our past actions weren’t the best, we can still all come together and treat each other with respect and unity.

Dear Diary,

Last night, I had a strangely peculiar dream I want to talk about.

When I began to shut my eyes, my body felt like it was lifting itself above, into the skies, my thoughts picturing themselves into a special place far away. Then, I realised I had dived deep into the Dreamtime.

I was sitting down on a stout log, in a meeting place. I darted my eyes at every position, observing what this Country truly has to offer. Birds, reptiles, trees, soil, rocks... I was soaking it all in, imagining living in such beauty like this.

Hello! You seem to have come to the Dreamtime! an Elder exclaimed. I swiftly turned my head to that voice, to find one of the wise, local Dharug Elders.

Would you like to stand up and walk with me? I followed his orders. We ventured out of the meeting place, to where he began to chat with me. He talked to me about the ways of *people connecting with each other and learning from their Country*. His words weighed upon me as I soaked in the fascinating surroundings, wishing one day I could permanently live here.

I saw familiar faces, that even I knew, having conversations with the Dharug people and learning from their culture and language, like a sense of reconciliation. Even the animals here looked happy and content as well, living in such a perfect and peaceful place.

We arrived at another empty meeting place at the opposite end, as he told me to *sit down on any log*. He began to tell me the importance of Country, how it *holds the Dharug stories, it being alive with spirits that guide us with our everyday lives, and how we can learn from it*. I looked down at the deep soil and felt a subtle connection to it, reminding me of a close relative, always there for you, and always there to learn more from.

As the sky grew darker, I was invited to join a sweeping ceremony nearby, which I accepted. People from all ages surrounded a meeting place, and one by one we were cleansed from our negative energy. The children next to me were talking to me about *the history of their Country, their stories and knowledge that passes on, and how we all still need to recognise and act upon the reconciliation and unity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people*.

Before I left, the same Elder came up to me and handed me a totem, with a dolphin carved onto it. His final message was, *I thank you for learning from us, and our Country, and connecting to us. Here is a gift to remind you to embrace your inner strength, and to enjoy life. Goodbye, mittigar*.

I woke up, in my bed, questioning myself about what just happened. I seemed to have remembered everything, and I really began to have more of an open mind to the hard-working Dharug people, their ways of connection, language, reconciliation, and even a more open mind to Country.

My parents are *definitely* going to get a huge lecture from me!



The Garden of Life, A Fruit of the Past

ROSEMEADOW PUBLIC SCHOOL

Rahma M. (year 6)

I wrote this piece to show how food and nature can connect us to the past, to our culture, and to the land. In my writing, I used native plants and ingredients to represent stories, memories, and the wisdom of First Nations people. I used the idea of a “garden of time” as a symbol for learning through nature. It’s a place where we can feel connected to Country, and where each plant teaches us something about the environment and culture. This connects to the theme of learning from the land and respecting its stories.

Reconciliation means ...

... to me building respect, understanding, and fairness between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. It’s about listening to the truth, learning from each other, and working together to create a better future. I attend a school with a high number of Indigenous students, and I’ve learned how important it is to respect different cultures and voices. Through my writing, I wanted to show that reconciliation can happen when we listen to Country and respect its teachings. By learning from native plants, traditional foods, and the stories they carry. We show appreciation for First Nations knowledge as it’s about learning, caring, and growing together.

In the garden of time
Ancient grains stand tall like Elders.
They whisper through the wind
One bite, one story.
Each leaf holds a date,
Imprinted in its veins
Like a secret code of ancestry.

History grows inside of him.
The past blossoms beside the present,
Like a time lapse in slow motion.
The soil remembers.
It holds footprints of ancestors,
And the roots stretch deep into memory.

The time of Earth is sacred.
Hands hold seeds,
And seeds hold stories.
With all those around,
We share, we learn, we listen.
Country teaches us through flavour,
Through texture,
Through biodiversity.

Moving swiftly across the land,
Turning left or right
Which one to choose?
Different years, different times,
Divergent flavours.
Each one a lesson
In ecology and culture.

He picks up the Illawarra plum,
Dark as midnight,
Glossy like a polished stone.
He tastes the air of centuries.
His spirit is transported
To realms of consciousness and kinship.
Different plums, different feelings,
Different times coming alive.

He chews slowly.
The taste lingers strong
Scarcely sweet, but full of meaning.
It's not just food.
It's a connection.
It's photosynthesis turned into memory.

Returning to the garden of cadence,
He sees lakes of lima beans,
Rivers of ribberries,
Mountains of muntries.
Each one a native treasure
A gift from Country.
Resolving the taste
One bite, one aspiration.

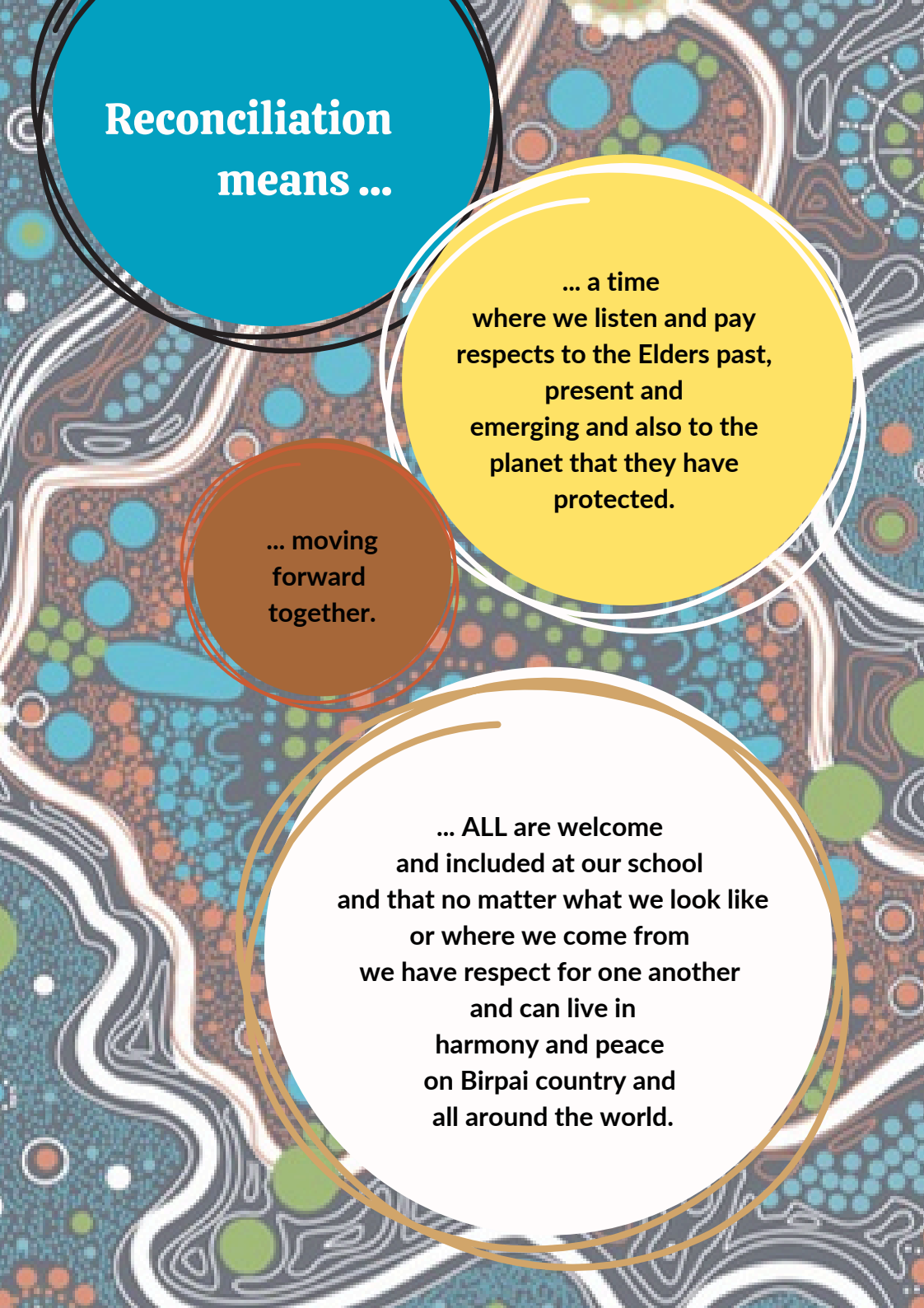
His mouth holds a lingering flavour
Like a song stuck in your head.
Different items, different savour,
Different pulses coming vigorously.
Transported to the garden of time once more,
He feels vibrant, aware, proficient.

He continues to eat,
Discovering modern herbs anew
Lemon myrtle, wattleseed, bush tomato.
Each one a teacher.
They speak in flavour, in texture, in scent.
They teach him about resilience,
About adaptation,
About the ecosystem he belongs to.

He learns from Country
Not just with his brain
But with his tongue, his nose, his fingertips.
He learns through taste,
Through touch,
Through curiosity.

Feeding connection is more than eating.
It's understanding. It's respect.
It's knowing that every plant,
Every berry, every grain has a role,
A story, a purpose.
He is a part of this cycle.
He is not above it. He is within it.
Country feeds him,
And he feeds it back
With care, with learning, with gratitude.

In the garden of time, I grow too.
Not just taller, but wiser.
Because when I eat from Country,
I don't just fill my stomach,
I fill my spirit.



Reconciliation means ...

... a time
where we listen and pay
respects to the Elders past,
present and
emerging and also to the
planet that they have
protected.

... moving
forward
together.

... ALL are welcome
and included at our school
and that no matter what we look like
or where we come from
we have respect for one another
and can live in
harmony and peace
on Birpai country and
all around the world.



High School Writing



A Bridge, A Path, A Way

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Liliana P. (year 9)

My writing piece is about showing history, what we are currently doing to keep culture alive and what we will do in the future to continue learning and appreciating culture. My poem focuses on pursuing the meaning and beginning of the land and how we will continue to educate and connect with each other.

Reconciliation means ...

... different cultures and generations coming together to learn from each other and the land.



Judges' Choice

Where I stand, there is history
Memories that we cannot ignore
A pull too strong to leave behind
Something we must acknowledge
A part of the land that we learn on together
We learn the history of the Land.
We learn the meaning of the Land.
We learn the beginning of the Land.
Bridging the differences we have made
So we know the story of where we stand, and what came before us
A land, that we were told was Terra Nullius
Lies strung by thread, a false foundation built for a country we call home.
A Home that was claimed before us
A Culture that was stolen

We keep it alive,
the Stories, the Connection, the Culture
Learning about their past,
Learning about how we came to be,
Learning about the Culture around us
From their hands to ours,
They pass on their culture to us
From their hands to ours,
We nurse the stories they've told.
From their hands to ours,
We open our eyes to a land we don't really know
A path to connecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples

We must continue speaking the truth
The legacy of the land tells the stories before us.
Tell the generations of how we came to be
How we became who we are. Be honest.
We do not downplay the past for the future generations
We make a way to continue the Culture
This is not limited to me, or you,
but to everyone who stands with us.
Around us.
We learn together, not as two, but one.
Feeding the connection the First Nations have created with the Land
Learning from the Country, that they first had



The Soil Beneath My Feet

NEPEAN CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Charlotte K. (year 9)

My poem is about the soil we live on being the very same soil our Elders also once stood upon and owned. In my poem I reflect on how our Elders once lived and how we follow their traditions and way of life. Through the repetition of soil I show how we feed connection, sharing stories and songs on the same soil our Elders have been telling stories and signing songs for hundreds of thousands of years before us.

Reconciliation means ...

... reflecting on the treatment of Aboriginal peoples and coming together as a nation to ensure that what occurred in the past never happens again.



The soil beneath my feet,
is the same soil the Elders
once stood upon.

The wind echoes their whispers,
telling their stories,
dancing their dances,
and exploring the land
they still called home.

This soil
isn't just what lies beneath my feet,
this soil lives, breathes, and follows
the years of traditions
alongside the Elders.

These same Elders once
taught, learnt, and shared
on this soil beneath my feet.
The soil we use now to
share their stories,
remember their bravery,
and uphold the legacies they built
while learning their way of life.

The sophisticated agriculture systems
working in their natural rhythms
to form the land
and shape this country.

This soil, once Terra Nullius,
unrightfully claimed,
now bringing people together
and sharing the battles
fought by those who came before us,
bringing stewardship upon this soil.

Through the spirit of these Elders
we unite on
Dharug Country.

Our Partners and Sponsors

We extend our deepest gratitude to all our sponsors and partners for your generous support and unwavering collaboration. Your contributions are instrumental to the success of the Schools Reconciliation Challenge, helping us honour and celebrate the creativity, passion, and achievements of the incredible students who take part.

Together, we are fostering a spirit of reconciliation, inspiring young minds, and building a future grounded in respect, understanding, and unity. Your commitment empowers students to express their voices through art and storytelling, and ensures their efforts are recognised and uplifted.

Thank you for standing with us in this important journey.



Aboriginal
Affairs



BHP



Narragunnawali
Reconciliation in Education

**NAKRA
GUNNA
WALI**



Participating Schools

Blaxland High School
East Hills Girls Technology High School
Edgeware School
Greta Public School
Gwandalan Public School
John Palmer Public School
Maitland Public School
Manly West Public School
Melonba High School
Middle Harbour Public School
Minmi Public School
Model Farms High School
Moruya High School
Narara Public School
Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School
Plunkett Street Public School
Riverbank Public School
Rosemeadow Public School
St John Vianney Primary School Morisset
Surveyors Creek Public School
Tullimbar Public School

Aboriginal Land

Gundungurra
Bidjigal
Dharug
Wonnarua
Darkinjung
Dharug
Wonnarua
Dharug
Dharug
Borogegal
Awabakal
Bidjigal
Yuin
Darkinjung
Mulgoa
Gadigal
Dharug
Dharawal
Awabakal
Mulgoa
Dharawal



The Impact of Early Education on Understanding First Nations Cultures

When children learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives from an early age, it helps them grow with empathy, understanding and respect.

Studies show that including Indigenous perspectives in early learning programs helps children feel a stronger sense of belonging and wellbeing, and that land-based and Indigenous-led activities encourage gratitude, care for Country and positive relationships with others (ERIC).

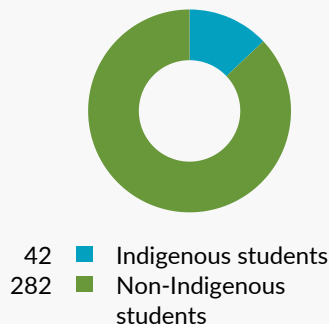
Australia's National Quality Standard also recognises how important this is – it encourages early childhood services to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as a key part of high-quality education (ACECQA).

Research from Australia and overseas shows that learning about Indigenous cultures in respectful, age-appropriate ways can reduce prejudice and build mutual respect among children (*Taylor & Francis Online*).

There's also strong evidence that quality early education makes a lasting difference for Indigenous children, improving their learning and development for years after attending these programs (*Centre for Indigenous Policy Research – ANU*).

Together, this research reminds us that early education isn't just about school readiness – it's about growing understanding, respect and reconciliation from the very beginning.

● students involved	2,500
● artworks submitted	324
● registered schools	33
● Indigenous countries	11

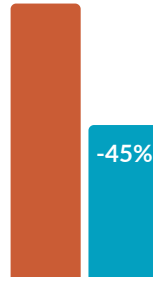




Children’s sense of belonging after cultural learning

Shows how including Indigenous perspectives in early learning programs can strengthen children’s sense of belonging and wellbeing.

**based on ERIC study findings*



Change in attitudes after learning about Indigenous cultures

Highlights how culturally respectful teaching about Indigenous peoples can reduce negative bias and build understanding.

**Negative bias index reduction in negative attitudes, Taylor & Francis Online*

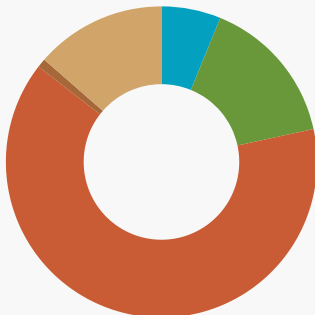


Developmental gains linked to early education participation (Indigenous children)

Draws from ANU longitudinal research showing lasting cognitive and developmental benefits for Indigenous children who attend quality early learning programs.

**Developmental index, 2-5 year improvement, ANU CIPR*

2025 Schools Reconciliation Challenge numbers



ENTRIES PER CATEGORY

- 20 Collaborative Art
- 50 High School Art
- 207 Primary Art
- 45 Primary Writing
- 2 High School Writing





Thank you

to all the students, teachers and
schools who took part in this year's
Schools Reconciliation Challenge!

About our Artworks



BUSH MEDICINE

This year, the Schools Reconciliation Challenge artwork has been created by Jason Douglas from Dalmarri. Jason is a proud Murri man, whose people belong to the tribal lands of the Kabi Kabi of south-eastern Queensland. Bush Medicine is the story of how our natural resources provide us with amazing remedies to keep us well and healthy.



BELONGING

Our stunning new artwork created by Dalmarri, and used throughout this report, reflects our connection to First Nations' culture and history. We all come from different cultures, and this beautiful country is a place where we all belong.

Find out more about Dalmarri at www.dalmarri.com.au.

schoolsreconciliationchallenge.org.au
schools@reconciliationnsw.org.au

