

National Trust of Australia (WA): Education & Learning Teaching Aboriginal History - Values and Sensitivities

Matters of history need to be taught with increased sensitivity in the Pilbara. This is due to the continuing impact of the way European settlement occurred and the dislocation and treatment of Indigenous people during this period.

The following pointers will assist in ensuring this sensitivity:

1. Terra Nullius- References to the Pilbara being uninhabited must be avoided as the Pilbara was settled by Indigenous people prior to European settlement. Historical material that suggests or represents the concept of terra nullius may be used and the incorrect facts discussed with students.
2. Factually based historical perspectives- Historical information and discussions need to be factually based rather than emotive. This ensures students are free to develop their own emotional response to the events of the past, based on facts rather than based on any other person's emotional response.
3. Deceased images- Photographs, recordings and references to deceased Indigenous people may cause discomfort or distress to Indigenous students and staff. All material to be used should be checked with an Indigenous staff or community member before use, to ensure it can be used. Increasingly, material containing deceased person's images is being used, after approval by Indigenous Elders and this approval being made clear to students and parents.
4. Exploration and Settlement- References to explorers and settlers need to be dealt with sensitively as they imply the Pilbara was not explored or settled by humans. This is not the case as Indigenous people had been settled in the Pilbara for many thousands of years. Prefacing statements with the term 'European' as in 'European exploration' and 'European settlement' clarifies this and reduces distress to Indigenous people in this matter. The same sensitivity exists with terms found in historical material such as 'first woman in the Pilbara' and 'first baby born in Cossack'. Open discussion with students about this factually incorrect historical perspective is encouraged.
5. Race References- Any references to people by their skin colour must not be done by teachers or students. Visiting speakers should also be asked to comply with this point. If reference to a person's race is



necessary, the race name should be used such as 'European', 'Indigenous' or 'Asian'. Terms such as 'blackfella', 'yellow fella' and 'white people' must never be used.

6. Mixed Race Reference- Much historical material contains reference to people with a mixed heritage in ways that are considered offensive today. Open discussion on this fact is encouraged and more positive terms provided for students to use such as 'mixed heritage' or 'mixed racial background.'
7. No-Blame History- Teachers should avoid judging or allowing judgement of historical events to occur from the more enlightened modern perspective. Rather, presenting a factual recount of history ensures a 'no-blame' view of events, which complies with good principles of reconciliation.
8. Nomads- References to Indigenous people being 'nomads' or 'nomadic' should be avoided as this is incorrect. Indigenous people lived on clearly defined parcels of land which they traversed at clearly defined times of the year, hence the incorrectness of the 'nomadic' term. A form of farming called 'firestick farming' or 'arid land farming' was also used by Indigenous people to cultivate the land.
9. Asian and Afghan History- Historical material rarely documents Asian and Afghan people's significant history in the Pilbara. This historical area is under-researched and presented in current materials. It is worth being aware of this and encouraging students to be aware of Asian and Afghan people's involvement in the Pilbara's history.
10. Indigenous- There are many Aboriginal cultures in the Pilbara. An historical perspective has been to see all Aboriginal people as belonging to one cultural group called 'Aboriginal'. However this point is incorrect as there are over 30 distinct different Indigenous cultural groups in the Pilbara. Reference to the 'Indigenous peoples' and 'Indigenous cultures' (plural) of the Pilbara acknowledges this fact and stops the perpetuation of the incorrect fact.

