



Reflection teaching resource for F–10 students (Learning 5–6)

This resource was created to educate students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history through the website reflection.servicesaustralia.gov.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised the website contains names, images and words of people who have passed away.

What is Reflection?

Reflection: Experiences of First Nations people with social security and services from 1947 to 1997 (Reflection) is a collection of over 100 primary sources (artefacts). It shows how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people fought to get social security payments over a 50-year period.

The collection includes a range of images, videos, letters and government documents. It shows the government decisions and public advocacy that helped change our society.

Historical language and views

Some artefacts on the website use harmful language and express offensive views. Material from the past can continue to be harmful in the present. We ask viewers of this site to proceed with caution. The language and views of people in positions of power influenced their treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The information provided about each artefact helps to explain these sources in historical context.

What is social security?

In Australia social security is a system supporting individuals and families who are facing financial difficulties. It's also known as social services or welfare. The Australian Government manages and funds social security through the program, Centrelink.

Social security is crucial in providing a safety net for those experiencing financial hardship. It helps ensure all Australians have essential supports to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life.

Who gets social security payments?

Social security payments are given to people in need. People who may get payments include:

- families
- older Australians
- people with disability
- carers
- youth and students
- job seekers
- those affected by a crisis.

History of social services

Reflection explores how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people advocated to get social security payments in the past. For more than half of the 20th century, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were excluded by law from getting social security payments.

Changes to the *Social Services Act* granted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people eligibility for some payments in 1959. The government changed the *Social Services Act* again in 1966, removing race-based exclusions in law. In this way, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were technically granted equal rights to government payments.

However many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people encountered difficulties when trying to get payments. Older people often had no official records of their birth and struggled to prove their age to show they were eligible for Age Pension.

Governments didn't tell these communities what payments they were eligible for or help them if they didn't understand English. In some communities recipients didn't get all of their payments. Non-Indigenous managers would control pension funds and distribute smaller amounts as 'pocket money'. State government authorities saw Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's federal government payments as a source of income and continued to try to control this money.

Sources in the collection show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people didn't have equal access to government payments for a long time. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also faced exclusion from education and from getting equal wages for their work. These exclusions were interconnected.

The collection also sheds light on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people advocated for themselves, their families and their communities to get payments. It shows how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people took on leadership roles and pushed government services to proactively meet the needs of diverse communities.

Government transitions

The government agency managing social security changed its name twice over the 50-year span of the collection. The names you'll see in the collection are:

- Department of Social Services (in use from 1939 to 1972)
- Department of Social Security (in use from 1972 to 1998).

Today Services Australia is the agency managing service delivery, including Centrelink and Medicare. The present-day Department of Social Services manages social policies, programs and research.

Public perceptions of social security

In the past there were strong ideas about who was 'deserving' of help and who wasn't. Some Australians continue to hold negative opinions about people who get social security payments.

A study by Schofield and Butterworth (2015) found that a minority of the population held negative views towards the social security system. However many people held much stronger negative attitudes towards welfare recipients themselves. Some respondents believe that welfare recipients need 'to have greater obligations to look for work ... that [they] could find jobs if they really wanted to ... [and that] benefits make people lazy and dependent'.

Some further negative stereotypes of welfare recipients include that they're 'dole-bludgers' and 'do not contribute to society'. These views can add to stigma which can be harmful to people who get payments. Media discourse can also exacerbate negative views, focusing on the few who aren't eligible or appear to misuse social security.

Most recipients are in need of the system that's in place to help them.

Social security after the pandemic

Recent estimates suggest of Australians aged 15 and over getting a government pension or allowance as their main source of income, 46% identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Venn, Biddle and Sanders 2020).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people accessing social welfare payments increased.

In June 2021, of Australia's working age population (people aged 15–64), 6.5% were getting unemployment payments, 4.0% were getting disability and sickness payments and around 3.5% were getting a payment for their caring and/or parenting responsibilities (Parliament of Australia 2022).

The experience of COVID-19 and increase in people getting payments may support a deeper understanding of the value of social security and potentially foster empathy towards welfare recipients. Learning about the history of social security and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy for government services may also strengthen this understanding.

Resources

Other teaching tools

Before using sources from the collection it's important for educators to ensure they are prepared to teach histories and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a culturally safe way.

Educators are recommended to review relevant guidelines, such as the SBS Learn resource '[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols Guide – for Teachers](#)', written by Shiralee Lawson and Jarin Baigent with Aunty Norma Ingram.

There are other online educational resources which can be used alongside *Reflection*. Some include:

- The National Museum of Australia hosts Digital Classroom which covers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories at different year levels. For more information, head to their website [here](#).
- The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has a range of curriculum resources to help educate students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. For more information, see their list of resources available [here](#).
- The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has a wide range of online educational resources and videos related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures available [here](#).

References

Australia Bureau of Statistics (2016) *4714.0 – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014–15*, Australian Government, accessed 4 July 2023.

Parliament of Australia (2022) '[Social security and family assistance](#)', *Parliamentary Library Briefing Book: Key Issues for the 47th Parliament*, Australian Government, accessed 4 July 2023.

Schofield TP and Butterworth P (2015) *Patterns of Welfare Attitudes in the Australian Population*, PLOS ONE 10(11): e0142792, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0142792, accessed 4 July 2023.

Venn D, Biddle N and Sanders W (2020) '[Trends in social security receipt among Indigenous Australians: Evidence from household surveys 1994–2015](#)', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, accessed 4 July 2023.

Learning outcomes

Curriculum mapping

The [Australian Curriculum](#) sets the national standard for improving learning outcomes for young people.

The curriculum has identified ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures’ as one of 3 cross-curriculum priorities. There are 2 distinct needs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the curriculum of each of the learning areas, can fully participate in the curriculum and can build their self-esteem.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority is designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world’s oldest continuous living cultures.

In studying *Reflection*, students will gain some essential knowledge, understanding and skills outlined as part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.

State-level learning

New South Wales

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) incorporates learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history as part of its Human Society and its Environment (HSIE) learning areas, in the History K–10 and 7–10 Aboriginal Studies syllabi.

Studying *Reflection* will support students in achieving the following outcomes:

Stage 3 outcomes	A student:
HT3–2	Describes and explains different experiences of people living in Australia over time.
HT3–4	Describes and explains the struggles for rights and freedoms in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Queensland

The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) incorporates learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history as part of its P–10 Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) and 7–10 History courses.

Studying *Reflection* will support students in achieving the following outcomes:

Years 5 and 6	Skills
AC9HS5S02, AC9HS6S02	Locate, collect and organise information and data from primary and secondary sources in a range of formats.
AC9HS5S04, AC9HS6S04	Evaluate primary and secondary sources to determine origin, purpose and perspectives.
AC9HS5S05, AC9HS6S05	Develop evidence-based conclusions.
AC9HS5S07, AC9HS6S07	Present descriptions and explanations, drawing ideas, findings and viewpoints from sources, and using relevant terms and conventions.

Year 6	Knowledge and understanding
AC9HS6K02	Changes in Australia's political system and to Australian citizenship after Federation and throughout the 20th century that impacted First Nations Australians, migrants, women and children.

Victoria

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) incorporates learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history as part of its History course.

Studying *Reflection* will support students in achieving the following outcomes:

Levels 5–6	Historical knowledge
Australia as a nation	The different experiences and perspectives of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants, women, and children.
	Significant contributions of individuals and groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and migrants, to changing Australian society.

Western Australia

The School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) incorporates learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history as part of its Humanities and Social Sciences course.

Studying *Reflection* will support students in achieving the following outcomes:

Year 6	Knowledge and understanding
ACHASSK135	Experiences of Australia's democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, migrants, women and children.

Year 6	Analysing
WAHASS56	Interpret information and/or data collected (e.g. sequence events in chronological order, identify cause and effect, make connections with prior knowledge).

Year 6	Communicating and reflecting
WAHASS61	Present findings, conclusions and/or arguments, appropriate to audience and purpose, in a range of communication forms (e.g. written, oral, visual, digital, tabular, graphic, maps) and using subject-specific terminology and concepts.
WAHASS63	Reflect on learning, identify new understandings and act on findings in different ways (e.g. suggest additional questions to be investigated, propose a course of action on an issue that is significant to them).

Educator guidelines

Reflection explores difficult parts of Australian history, with stories detailing discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Before you share the *Reflection* website with your students, make sure they're ready to explore the content. Please take care to ensure your lessons use appropriate and respectful language.

Check in with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Be mindful that some of your students may have family members getting social services payments.

Teacher check-in	Reflect on your own personal understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Assess your pre-existing biases and privileges.
Preparation of the material	Review the content before sharing it with your students. Some students may become distressed or the content may be re-traumatising.
Understanding protocols	There are several protocols you must abide by when observing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and practices. Please familiarise and educate your students about their importance.
Country & Kinship	Review how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of Country and Kinship work. Make sure you can explain these concepts to your students.
Relationships	We recommend you build relationships with your local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. Offer them the opportunity to share their history and cultures to your students.
Student wellbeing	Some of the content included in <i>Reflection</i> is distressing. Debrief with your students before they leave your classroom. They may need help processing any emotions and reactions.
Two-way learning	Use a two-way learning process to connect with your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Be respectful and recognise their knowledge of their cultures and traditions.
Language and terminologies	<i>Reflection</i> features many harmful and outdated terms to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. You must teach your students what language is and isn't acceptable.

Example worksheets

Included are example worksheets based on each decade in *Reflection*.

We recommend you refer to your syllabus and choose questions and activities that suit the learning capabilities of your students. You may want to explore the website with your class and workshop a couple of questions.

1940s and earlier

Key information

The *Social Services Consolidation Act 1947* shifted social services from being a state responsibility to being a federal responsibility. It also consolidated government payments under one Act.

However the Act explicitly excluded most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from payments.

These artefacts show Aboriginal activists challenging racial discrimination set out in law.

Questions

Read the [article](#) on the *Social Services Consolidation Act 1947*.

- How were these payments managed before this Act?
- What payments were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders excluded from?

Activities

Activists

Look through the different artefacts about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people protesting and advocating for their rights.

Choose one of the people and research them further. Write a page-long summary of their life and continued advocacy.

'Our ten points'

Read the [article](#) about *The Australian Abo Call* from 1938. Note down some key points about who wrote this source and who they hoped would read it.

Create your own newspaper front cover and include an article about the 'ten points' included in *The Australian Abo Call*, using modern language and style conventions. What are some other important issues you would include in your front cover?

1950s

Key information

In the 1950s the states tightly controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives. Many people couldn't access government payments and those who could were often paid indirectly.

The law changed in 1959, however accessing payments remained challenging and the *Social Services Act* continued to discriminate based on race.

These artefacts show the impacts of living with the *Social Services Consolidation Act 1947* and the work of activists campaigning for wider eligibility.

Questions

Read the [article](#) on the *Social Services Act 1959*.

- What has changed from the *Social Services Consolidation Act 1947*?
- What were the new clauses added? What did this mean for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- What new issues did Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face when trying to apply for payments?

Activities

Torres Strait Islander workers

Look through the article on Torres Strait Islander people's access to Unemployment Benefit. Read the artefact to learn more about why the men were unable to get benefits.

Write a letter to the Prime Minister explaining the factors making these Torres Strait Islander men eligible to get benefits.

Biographies

The **1950s** includes several autobiographies. Choose one and read the article and artefact about how that person fought against discrimination. Try and research more about that person outside of the website.

Write a short reflection on how their life was different to yours and your family's today.

1960s

Key information

The 1960s included landmark moments such as changes made under the **Social Services Act 1966** and the outcome of the 1967 Referendum.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were now eligible for government payments for the first time. However eligibility was confusing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still had their finances controlled and they were often expected to accept low wages.

These artefacts show activists fighting for fair wages and direct payments amidst a continued government push for assimilation.

Questions

Read the [article](#) on the *Social Services Act 1966*.

- What changed from *the Social Services Consolidation Act 1959*?
- Which payments were still difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access?

Activities

Different laws apply

During the **1960s** debates continued between state and federal government bodies. Before the outcome of the Referendum in 1967, states held the power to make laws about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Read about the 1962 leaflet '[A summary of their situation in all states](#)'. Download the artefact and look in the column that is about the state or territory you live in (if your state or territory isn't there, look at the closest state to you).

In your own words, describe 3 rules made about how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people could live. Write a short reflection about how this may have affected people at the time.

Aboriginal people's experiences

As the laws changed in the 1960s, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were eligible to get payments for the first time. However it wasn't always clear how to get them.

Look at 2 examples of Aboriginal people's experiences of payments in this decade. You might review:

- [Letter](#) signed by 'Pensioners of Cherbourg'
- Jack Gibbs' [autobiography](#)
- [Photograph](#) of and letters by Norman Bilson/Walaru
- [Letter](#) by Les Foster
- Vai Stanton Mimminggal's [oral history](#)
- [Article](#) about workers from Cabbage Tree Island.

Write down some details about the 2 artefacts. Who wrote or said it? When did they write or say it? What do you think their purpose was in making this artefact?

Next, compare similarities or differences between these people's experiences of government payments. You might consider where the person lived, their age and what they did in daily life.

1970s

Key information

Throughout the 1970s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activists fought for self-determination for their communities and continued to highlight discrimination in government policies and servicing. As some civil rights had been achieved, the focus of many activists was drawn to land rights.

The government began to introduce targeted programs to meet Aboriginal people's needs, including ABSTUDY, Aboriginal Liaison Officers and the Community Development Employment Program. However access to Unemployment Benefit was contentious.

Questions

The **1970s** saw the introduction of ABSTUDY payments.

- What were the new payments originally called? Who was it intended for?
- Why was this payment so important?
- Does this payment still exist today? What's different about it now?

Activities

Research reports

There were a few reports written in the 1970s. Pick one and read the full artefact.

- What were the key findings?
- How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in the research?

Write a summary covering the reason for the research and who the authors were. Include your answers to the questions above as part of your summary.

Oral histories

Pick one of the oral histories included in this decade.

Research the person who it's about. Consider:

- When and where were they born?
- Where is their Country located in Australia?
- Where are the communities they chose to live?

Create a profile about this person, highlighting key events and experiences they discussed in their oral history. Make sure to include your answers to the question above.

1980s

Key information

In the 1980s the Department of Social Security established new remote offices and expanded the Aboriginal Liaison Officer program. These artefacts include early examples of the department communicating in language and through videos.

In this decade key reports evaluated the effectiveness of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Researchers found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and family structures remained unaccounted for in policy.

Questions

The influential **Miller Report** was published in the 1980s.

- Why was the Miller Report so significant?
- What were the recommendations included in the report?
- What were the key findings of the report?

Activities

Promoting payments

Several promotional videos about social security payments were created in the **1980s**.

Choose a payment that's available in the 1980s and create a storyboard for a promotional video in the same style.

You can draw key shots of the video or write a script. Consider who might be best suited to talk about this payment to your intended audience.

Marriage practices

Read the **NADU report** about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander marriage practices.

Write a summary of the report's findings. Include a comparison between some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander marriage practices and your own culture's practices.

1990s

Key information

In the 1990s the Department of Social Security reflected on its history and further researched the effectiveness of its programs. These artefacts show the broad changes were happening to social security policy at the time. The government made many changes to social security programs and payments, including replacing Unemployment Benefit with Newstart, setting up the Support Network for Aboriginal Parents Program and establishing Centrelink.

This decade includes artefacts which show how the department communicated using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led videos and designs.

Questions

Read the [article](#) on the *Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Act 1997*.

- What was the major development that resulted from this Act?
- What did this Act say about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- What continued impacts has this Act had today?

Activities

Comics and posters

To help better communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the Department of Social Security developed many comics and posters during the **1990s**.

Create your own promotional comic or poster to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to check whether they're eligible for payments.

Timeline

Over the 50-year period covered in *Reflection*, the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people changed significantly.

Construct your own timeline of major developments during the period covered by *Reflection*.

Reflection

Reflecting on the collection

Write a short reflection on how important equity and fair access to government services is. Your reflection should be at least 3 paragraphs. Remember to use culturally sensitive language.

To guide your response consider what kind of valuable services government provides to people. You might wish to focus on specific artefacts from the collection. You could compare events from some of the decades to your present-day experiences. You might also make some suggestions about how government services could better help people in Australia in the future.

