

How have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literary texts emerged in Australia?

GLOSSARY

Assimilate/assimilation: the idea of abandoning your culture and language and taking on all aspects of a new culture and language.

Black Power: a movement in the United States of America that argued African Americans should show pride in their shared history and unique culture. This contrasted with Martin Luther King's more assimilationist, respectable approach.

Decolonisation movements: during the 20th century, many colonised people around the world campaigned for independence, through learning, writing, protesting and military action.

Derogatory stereotypes: ideas about a group of people that assume that they are less intelligent or more likely to commit crime.

Dreaming stories: stories from traditional Aboriginal cultures that teach about the past, and often contain ideas and lessons about expectations and behaviours.

Elder: a person in Aboriginal society who has gained recognition for their knowledge of culture.

Europeans/British/early settlers/colonisers/occupiers/invasers/convicts/free settlers/First Fleet: various terms used to describe Europeans who came to live in Australia.

Inferior: having a lower status.

Missionaries: people who come to live in a different culture to their own with the aim of sharing and promoting their religion.

Primitive/primitivism: a society that is less developed, less advanced or less modern.

Protection: the set of rules brought in to try and end the Frontier Wars. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were under control of the Protector in their area, who had the responsibility for their welfare.

Traditional knowledge/traditional culture: ideas and learning that existed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures before European occupation.



The Wound

Derogatory stereotypes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – for example, depicting them as **primitive** – have existed since colonisation began.

Indigenous cultures have been largely misinterpreted in texts by non-Indigenous peoples. For generations, this discriminatory view has led to misunderstanding, and racist policies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers are attempting to redress this problem.



Our History

Since before colonisation, **Europeans** have been fascinated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures and ways of living. Books and other texts that made observations about colonised peoples in other parts of the world were extremely popular in Europe.

Many of these observations assumed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were **inferior**. This created and reinforced negative perceptions.

Because of the European system of **protection**, and the policy of **assimilation**, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were expected to abandon their languages and cultures. Despite this, there is much evidence of **Elders** informally or secretly passing on **traditional knowledge** to younger generations.

Away from the influence and interference of Europeans, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintained personal pride in their cultural practices and **Dreaming stories**. For example, the mission at Cummeragunja in Yorta Yorta Country maintained an organised system of educating children about culture in addition to the government schooling. Sometimes, as in the Torres Strait Islands, Indigenous communities combined the new culture imposed on them by **missionaries** with aspects of **traditional culture**.

Due to ongoing disadvantage and the rules of protection, jobs were limited for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people except the most low-paid and menial. The first Aboriginal person to graduate from an Australian university was Charles Perkins in 1965, almost 200 years since colonisation. Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were educated to a high level in the European education system in Australia were not encouraged to learn about Indigenous cultures or peoples. They were expected to show that they could **assimilate** effectively.

In the 1960s, a younger generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were influenced by **decolonisation movements** overseas, and the concept of **Black Power** from African American soldiers. A distinctive Indigenous film, theatre, television and literature genre emerged.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal, an Aboriginal poet from Brisbane, is considered to be the first of the Aboriginal protest writers. Her first book of poetry was published in 1964 and was the first publication of an Aboriginal woman's writing.

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors, storytellers, songwriters and performers have increased in number and prominence, more complex representations have emerged and are challenging European-led preconceptions.