



Western Australian Curriculum

Humanities and Social Sciences: History

Pinjarra Apology Curriculum Project
Classroom Video | Transcript

Acknowledgement of Country

Welcome. The School Curriculum and Standards Authority (the Authority) acknowledges that our offices are on Whadjuk Noongar boodjar and that we deliver our services on the country of many traditional custodians and language groups throughout Western Australia. The Authority acknowledges the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We offer our respect to Elders past and present.

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His Excellency the Honourable Chris Dawson AC APM

Governor of Western Australia

&

Mrs Darrilyn Dawson

for

Pinjarra Apology Curriculum Project

Classroom Video

TRANSCRIPT

NARRATOR: On-screen narration

In 1834, near Pinjarra, Governor James Stirling led an attack on the Bindjareb Noongar people, where many Aboriginal men, women, and children lost their lives.

On the 28th of October 2025, the Governor of Western Australia offered an apology, acknowledging this history and its lasting impact.

Through the work of the State Records Office and State Archive, original letters and records helped us uncover what truly happened, enabling Governor Chris Dawson to formally apologise to the Bindjareb Noongar people as a step toward reconciliation.

GOVERNOR CHRIS DAWSON AC APM: Governor of Western Australia

Most Western Australians, I put, would've heard of something that's occurred down at Pinjarra, but it has been described in different ways.

I wanted to understand what was the truth of this matter, and I, in fact, asked researchers to do further work so I could better understand what had taken place.

MRS DARRILYN DAWSON: Former school principal, Wife of Governor Dawson

I had no idea about any of this, and I'm only learning more about it now. It did surprise me because it's critical, especially in Western Australia.

It's an example of something that happened, and I, as a teacher and a principal, thought it would be something that we would've learnt, and it could've been part of our shared history, which could've actually been addressed and discussed and could've been part of reconciliation a lot earlier.

DAMIEN HASSAN: State Archivist, State Records Office

When the Governor came to visit the State Records Office last year, he looked at the primary source records that we hold relating to the Pinjarra Massacre. There are five key records we hold in relation to that.

Primary source records are the original records — like this one — that someone made at the time that things happened. Something like a book that someone writes is their view on things, their interpretation. So, that's great. Books are very important, but we need to often go back to the original records to understand these events from those times.

TIM CLARKE: Lead Speech Writer and Researcher, Government House, Perth

I was being tasked by the Governor to go and find the evidence — go and find as close to the evidence as we could find about what happened in Pinjarra. And so it was amazing to me that this firsthand evidence, this primary source material, even still existed. But not just existed — was accessible to someone like me, but also to anyone who wants to come and see it.

MARK CHAMBERS: Researcher, Aboriginal History Unit

I decided that I would embark upon a project without looking at secondary sources to any extent, and then I visited them on completion of the research to see what others had made of the situation.

DAMIEN HASSAN: State Archivist, State Records Office

There are five main records that we hold relating to the Pinjarra Massacre. There's journal entries made by John Septimus Roe. He was a man who was the Surveyor General at the time, in 1834.

TIM CLARKE: Lead Speech Writer and Researcher, Government House, Perth

That is probably as close to primary source material as you ever get.

Roe was one of the 25 men in Stirling's party that travelled down from Perth. He was the only unarmed member of that party.

He was armed with a pencil, and what he did was recorded, not only tracked the route that Governor Stirling and his party took, but then he wrote quite at length about what happened on October the 28th. So, that was a key piece.

GOVERNOR CHRIS DAWSON AC APM: Governor of Western Australia

In the words of Surveyor General Roe, I quote:

'In a few minutes, the loud shouting and yelling of the natives told us the whites were discovered, and firing immediately commenced on the left bank. Not having a gun, I was directed to take charge of the ford with the baggage and four soldiers, while the remainder of the force followed the Governor upwards.

The firing continued upwards and followed the retreating voices of the natives for upwards of an hour.'

DAMIEN HASSAN: State Archivist, State Records Office

Then there's also letters written by Governor Stirling. Some of these letters were back to the United Kingdom, so, he's reporting to England what had happened, and then England's writing back to him with a little bit of concern about what had just happened as well.

GOVERNOR CHRIS DAWSON AC APM: Governor of Western Australia

In a letter to British authorities, Stirling wrote of the incident, and he wrote this:

‘They were forced back into the bed of the stream. The upper ford also being occupied by Mr Roe, as well as the two banks, they were thus completely surrounded and overpowered. The number killed amounted probably to 15 men.

The women were kept after our company had collected around the two wounded men. They were then informed that the punishment had been inflicted because of the misconduct of the tribe and that the white men never forgot to punish murder.’

TIM CLARKE: Lead Speech Writer and Researcher, Government House, Perth

Two of the main men in that party — you had firsthand accounts written in their own hand, and we can still see their writings. It takes you back to the moment, and it really brings it home.

DAMIEN HASSAN: State Archivist, State Records Office

Governor Dawson wanted to look at the primary source documents, such as these, so he could form his own view on what had happened. So, I think it was quite important for what then followed in terms of the Pinjarra apology.

GOVERNOR CHRIS DAWSON AC APM: Governor of Western Australia

Once that research was conducted, it really affirmed to me what my initial thoughts were, that this was no skirmish, and I came to the very firm view it was also not a battle. This was a massacre, and the truth needed to be told.

I reflected on this a long time. I thought it needed deep consideration. I needed to do this in a culturally safe and appropriate way.

Once that dialogue had occurred, and I was advised that the traditional owners, in fact, wanted me to go down and speak with them, then and only then was it proper for me to then approach the Pinjarra Aboriginal people and say to the Bindjareb mob: ‘Thank you for the invitation. I feel ready to talk to you.’

GOVERNOR CHRIS DAWSON AC APM: Governor of Western Australia

This is an important waypoint in our history, and it’s a shared history.

As Governor of Western Australia, I come to you today to say I am deeply sorry for the actions of my predecessor and for the pain and suffering he caused. I say sorry to the Bindjareb people who still feel the trauma of the punishment inflicted on their ancestors that day when so many innocent lives were taken.

The time has come, and the time is right, for the Governor to acknowledge the truth of the past actions of a predecessor. I have a deep hope and faith that a process of healing and growth will follow. I believe this action will be a significant step along the pathway to meaningful reconciliation.

KARRIE-ANNE KEARING: Traditional Owner, Bindjareb Noongar Country

Saying sorry is never easy, but it is growth, and any growth has some discomfort and pain associated with it. That shows how long it has taken for someone in your position to recognise the truth of what happened here, and the impact it has on all Aboriginal people.

I would say the real characteristic that has got us to where we are today is courage — and Governor Dawson, I would like to thank you for displaying that.

MRS DARRILYN DAWSON: Former school principal, Wife of Governor Dawson

There were fellow principals who came because they were principals of local schools there, and their first impression was this information had to be shared with the schools and the children in Western Australia in particular. That was fantastic because it showed an example of people working together, moving forward, and accepting each other.

GOVERNOR CHRIS DAWSON AC APM: Governor of Western Australia

We shouldn't be scared of our history. We should be well-informed, understand it. How then can we not move forward in a better way? And this is a way in which we can actually say: 'That should not have happened. This is what happened — but this is how we can move forward.'

DAMIEN HASSAN: State Archivist, State Records Office

2029 will mark 200 years of colonisation of Western Australia, so it's an important time for us to look back and reflect and consider Western Australian history and what's happened.

And I think that's why the Governor's Pinjarra apology is so significant — because it's really marking this moment where we've got this very different view of WA history than perhaps from 50 years ago, and it's important that we get this fuller understanding of Western Australian history and what has happened to Aboriginal people over that time.

GOVERNOR CHRIS DAWSON AC APM: Governor of Western Australia

White people of Australia share a country with our Aboriginal Australians, and if we are going to further mature and grow as a nation, we must accept as a nation that this shared history is one that we can strengthen each other, as opposed to pull each other apart.

In my time of reflection here at Government House, I walked the gardens and walked around a very old olive tree — planted in 1835 by Governor Stirling, a year after this massacre.

And the more I considered what to say, and when to say it, and how to say it, I thought: 'Well, what then? What could take place from there?' And it dawned on me that an olive branch, of course, is an international sign of peace.

Why would I not then provide an olive branch? Better than that, I saw little olive trees propagated from the olive seed itself growing. Why would we not then offer a living tree as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation?

I was then really overwhelmed by the response of the Bindjareb Noongar people who, in reciprocity, said: 'Well, we will give you a jarrah tree — a local Australian tree — and we will be planting them.' The eucalyptus jarrah tree will be planted next to the olive tree here at Government House in Perth, and the olive tree will be planted at Pinjarra.

[The] beauty of this symbolism — the roots go down into the same Australian soil. They get watered by the same rain clouds over Western Australia. They share the same sunlight as our eucalyptus trees. We live together. We're sharing the same soil together. We can grow together, and we can strengthen as these trees grow.

I believe this is a really pragmatic and also visible symbol of how we can — with both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Australians — grow together and keep going forward together with our shared history.

And we can and will get better by this process, where we can better understand where we come from respectfully and how we can move forward purposefully.

NARRATOR: On-screen narration

The apology marks a moment shaped by truth, drawn from original records carefully preserved and brought to light. It reflects a growing understanding of the past and a step forward in reconciliation.