Teacher Resource

First Nations Veterans

EPISODE 32
10 November 2026

KEY LEARNING
Students will learn about First Nations military service in Australian history.

CURRICULUM
HASS – Year 5 and 6
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.

Develop questions to investigate people, events, developments, places and systems.

Locate, collect and organise information and data from pri mary and secondary sources in a range of formats.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people please be aware that this resource contains images and names of deceased persons

Focus Questions

Discuss the BTN story as a class and record the main points of the discussion. Students will then respond to the following:

1. What was Leonard Waters' role during WWII?
2. Who was the first Aboriginal Australian to be commissioned as an officer?
3. What skill did a special unit of mostly Yolngu people use to help patrol Australia's northern coastlines during WWII?
4. What challenges and discrimination have First Nations veterans experienced? Give an example.
5. Name three things you learnt watching the BTN story.

Activity: Personal Response

Respond to the BTN First Nations Veterans story as a class. Students will complete one or more of the following incomplete sentences:

- What was the first thought or feeling you had when the BTN First Nations Veterans story ended?
- How did you feel learning about Indigenous war veterans?
- What surprised you about the story?
- Why is it important to learn about Indigenous war veterans?

Activity: Class Discussion

Discuss the BTN story as a class. Ask students what they know about Indigenous war veterans. Use the following questions as a guide:

- What rights did Indigenous people have when Australia was involved in World War I and World War II?
- Why do you think some Indigenous soldiers chose not to tell others about their cultural background while serving?
- Why do you think it took so long for many Indigenous veterans to receive recognition for their military service?
- What questions do you have about the story?



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Activity: Indigenous Service

Students will learn more about the contributions First Nations peoples who served in the Australian military. They can use the following questions to help guide their research or develop their own questions.

Joining the military

- Which wars and conflicts have First Nations peoples served in?
- Why did First Nations peoples choose to enlist in the military?
- Were Indigenous Australians always allowed to join the armed forces? Explain.
- Did Indigenous soldiers face different rules or restrictions when enlisting?
- Find examples of Indigenous Australian soldiers who made important contributions?

Life during wartime

- What roles did Indigenous Australians have in the military?
- Did Indigenous soldiers experience discrimination or unfair treatment? Give examples.
- What challenges might they have faced while serving overseas?
- How might serving in the military have affected their families and communities back home?

Life after the war

- What rights did Indigenous Australians have during World War I? For example, could they vote or were they included in the census?
- What happened when Indigenous soldiers returned home?
- What entitlements did they have when they returned from war?
- How might returning to Australia have been difficult for some Indigenous servicemen and servicewomen?

Recognition and remembrance

- How have the contributions of Indigenous servicemen and servicewomen been recognised?
- Why is it important to remember Indigenous Australians who have served in the military?
- Are there memorials, monuments or ceremonies that recognise their service?
- How can we make sure the stories of Indigenous servicemen and women are included in Australia's history?

Share Your Learning

Students choose one of the following activities to present what they have discovered through their research.

- Write a postcard from the perspective of an Indigenous Australian soldier to their family. Describe what life might have been like during wartime. Include drawings, photographs or maps.
- Create a design for a memorial that recognises the contributions of Indigenous Australian servicemen and servicewomen. Include a short explanation of the symbols, images or words you have chosen.
- Imagine you are creating an exhibition for a museum. Design a display that shares the stories of Indigenous Australians who served in the military. Include photographs, important objects, captions and interesting facts.

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Reflection

Students reflect on the following questions when they have completed their research:

- What was the most interesting or surprising thing you discovered?
- What challenges did Indigenous Australian soldiers face?
- Why do you think their stories have not always been widely recognised?
- How has your understanding of Australia's military history changed?
- Why is it important to learn about the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Activity: Profile

Choose a First Nations person who served in the military. Create a profile that includes their background, military service, achievements and the challenges they faced.



Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Source: Australian War Memorial)



Leonard (Len) Waters (Source: Department of Veterans Affairs)



Captain Reginald Walter 'Reg' Saunders (Source: Australian War Memorial)

Case Studies – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anzacs (Source: Australian War Memorial)

Students will develop a biography of a First Nations person who served in the Australian military. Begin by discussing with students what a biography is. What information is included in a biography and what does it tell us about a person? Students can use the following questions to guide their research.

- When and where were they born?
- Who were their family members?
- When and why did they join the military? What was their role during their military service?
- What challenges did they face and how did they overcome them?
- What were their significant achievements?
- Why is it important to remember and recognise this person today?

Useful Websites

- Indigenous Service – Australian War Memorial
- Indigenous Veterans – BTN

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