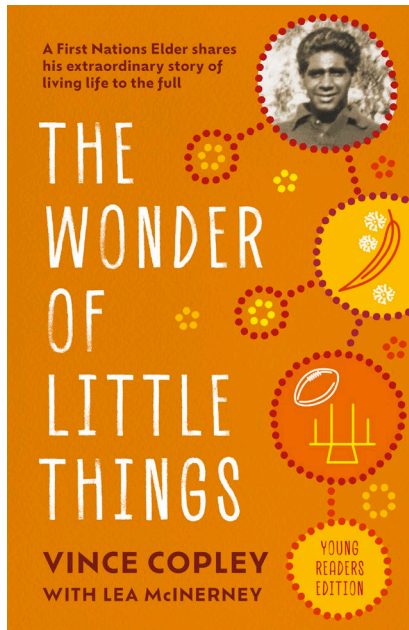


Classroom Resources



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The Wonder of Little Things Young Readers Edition Vince Copley with Lea McInerney

BOOK SUMMARY

A First Nations Elder shares his extraordinary story of finding kindness in the midst of prejudice, and joy in living life to the full.

Welcome to my story.

I didn't learn a lot in school, not in the classroom, anyway. But I learned a lot from life.

'Always remember you're as good as anybody else,' Vince's mother, Kate, often told him. And he was, becoming a champion footballer and premiership-winning coach. But change was in the air, and Vince wanted to help make life better for his people too.

At every step, Vince found light in the darkness, the friendly face in the crowd, the small moments that make the world go 'round.

Welcome to the wonder of little things.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- AC9E7LE01
- AC9E7LA03
- AC9E7LY03
- A_TSIP3

THEMES

- Family
- Identity
- Discrimination
- Resilience

Recommended Reading Ages: 10+

Resources Created For: Lower Secondary

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Before Reading

Prior to reading the book have students set up a reading journal using the following framework:

Chapter	Key events in Vince's life	Locations	What did you learn about Aboriginal culture?	What did you learn about Australian history?	Questions this chapter left you with
Ch. 1					
Ch. 2					
Ch. 3 (etc.)					

After reading each chapter, students should add a series of dot points to their reading journal using these headings.

At the conclusion of the book, students should review the 'Questions' column on the far right. They can answer any questions that were addressed within the book as they continued reading. With the remaining questions, students should select five from their list and conduct a self-directed investigation to have these questions answered. Some of the questions may be answered through research, others may require a different method of problem-solving.

Once students have found the answers to their five questions, these can be shared within the class as a whole-class or small-group discussion, or could be displayed on posters in the classroom.

During Reading

Voice and style

1. What do you learn about Vince Copley in the prologue?
2. What words would you use to describe his voice?
3. What tone is established in the prologue?
 - a) Does this continue throughout the book, or does it shift at times. Use textual evidence to support your response.
4. This book was written by Vince Copley, in collaboration with his friend Lea McInerney. How do you think this collaborative approach may have impacted the creation of the book?

Setting

1. What does the reader learn about Point Pearce in Chapter 2?
 - a) Using the description from this chapter, create a visual representation of Point Pearce.
 - b) What do you think it might have been like to live on a mission like Point Pearce?

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- Vince says, 'One time we'd been to Adelaide and we had the baby with us. We were in Allan's old ute and it was stinking hot. On the way home the ute broke down just outside of Copley, which in those days was south of Leigh Creek, before they moved the town in the 1980s.' (pp. 57-58)
 - Have you ever heard of a whole town being moved?
 - Why do you think they might have done that?
 - What effect might it have had on people living there?
 - How might it affect the environment?
- Using the 'locations' column from your reading journal, create a map that identifies the key places of significance in Vince's life.

People

Mind map Vince's family members as we are introduced to them in the prologue. Add to this mind map as the book progresses, including Vince's family, his friends and key mentors. This can be completed as an ongoing activity in pairs or small groups.

Select one of these people who Vince met:

- Charlie Perkins
- John Moriarty
- David Gulpilil
- Gordon Briscoe
- Mandawuy Yunupingu

Write a short biography of this person, noting their language group and Country, key events from their childhood and adolescence, achievements and awards, and any other interesting information you learn about them.

History

Consider the aspects of Australian history Vince Copley refers to, and the impact of these racist government policies on Vince and his family. Select one of the topics below:

- Chief Protector of Aborigines (Chapter 2)
- Exemptions (Chapter 3 pp. 29-30)
- The classification of Aboriginal people (Chapter 6 pp. 66-67)
- *Summary Offences Act* of South Australia (Chapter 14 & Chapter 19)
- Assimilation (Chapter 18 p. 204)

Revisit the portion(s) of the text where this policy is addressed and answer the following questions:

1. What is the policy intended to do? (Conduct additional research as needed.)
2. What impact did this have on Vince and his family and friends?
3. What have you learned about Australian history that you weren't previously aware of?

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Racism

1. In Chapter 7, Vince talks about how it was hard in the 1940s for young Aboriginal people to get a good education.
 - a) Why do you think that might have been?
 - b) How do you think the mums of Vince and the other boys might have felt about having to send their sons to Adelaide for them to be able to go to school?
 - c) How might the difficulty young First Nations people had in obtaining an education have an ongoing impact today?
2. Vince's wife Brenda has a Welsh-Australian background. Vince writes about what a strong woman she was and how she knew her own mind. In Chapter 21 he tells a story of how she's shopping with her Aboriginal friend Colleen, and Colleen is treated very rudely.
 - a) What do you think of the way Brenda responded to this?
 - b) How do you think it might have felt for Colleen to be treated like this?
 - c) What do you think about Brenda's decision to ask Colleen to be her bridesmaid?
3. Using notes from your reading journal, consider how Vince was impacted by racism throughout his life. Find four examples of racism in the text and address the following questions:
 - a) What happened?
 - b) How did Vince respond?
 - c) How did the people around him respond?
 - d) Select a quote from the text that reflects this experience.

Friendship

In Chapter 9, Vince says 'These kids were my best mates and my family... All the boys had the same feeling about each other. It started at the home and stayed all of our lives.' (p. 101)

1. What ongoing impact did these friendships have on Vince's life?
2. What are some of the key experiences he shared with this group of friends after their days at St Francis had ended?
3. Why do you think these friendships endured? Use evidence from the text to support your response.

After Reading

Discussion questions

Chapter 1: What does Vince say about the concept of learning? (p. 4)

Chapter 2: What are some of the differences between the Western and Aboriginal belief systems explored here? (pp. 24-26)

Chapter 3: What is an exemption? (p. 22)

Chapter 4: Why was Vince's mum's relationship with Allan controversial? (pp. 44-45)

Chapter 5: What is the significance of the family connections made during this time?

Chapter 6: Why does Vince's mum tell him 'You're as good as anybody else'? (p. 67)

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Chapter 7: How does Vince meet Charlie and Ernie Perkins? (p. 76)

Chapter 8: Why did the parents at Ethelton protest? (p. 84)

Chapter 9: What is tuberculosis and what is polio?

a) How was Vince impacted by these two diseases?

Chapter 10: How are the factors leading up to Vince starting to play football at Port Adelaide beginning to be seen in this chapter?

Chapter 11: Why is this chapter called 'A Different Sort of Family'?

Chapter 12: How did Mr Vickery show empathy and compassion to Vince?

Chapter 13: Why did Vince feel 'all alone' despite his achievement?

Chapter 14: How did football continue to play a big part in Vince's life?

Chapter 15: How was Vince shown hospitality in this new town?

a) What impact did this have on him as a young man?

Chapter 16: Who was Sir Doug Nicholls? Conduct some brief research.

Chapter 17: How does Vince come to be the coach?

Chapter 18: Describe the social dances that were popular with young people in this era.

a) What did Vince enjoy about these dances?

Chapter 19: How are anger, racism and football connected? (pp. 211-214)

Chapter 20: What was the 1967 referendum for?

a) What was the outcome?

Chapter 21: What joke did Brenda's dad and brother play on Vince?

Chapter 22: What did Brenda find confronting about the early days living in Adelaide after she and Vince were married?

Chapter 23: What did David Gulpilil say to Brenda that shocked and surprised her?

Chapter 24: Why was Vince saddened by the embargo?

Chapter 25: How many boys went through St Francis and which years was it in operation?

Chapter 26: What does Vince mean when he says, 'I'm pinning my faith on young people...'?

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Activities

1. Vince talks about the town of Yirrkala, on Yolngu Country, and the bark petitions that Yolngu leaders gave to the government in 1963 (p. 248).
 - a) See what you can find out about the Yirrkala bark petitions, as well as photos of them.
 - b) They look very different to the usual petitions that people send to parliament when they're seeking action from the government about something that matters to them. Why do you think the Yolngu people chose to present their petitions in this way?
 - c) Find images of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. How and why do you think this document may have been influenced by the Yirrkala bark petitions?
2. Towards the end of the book, Vince reflects on how he wishes that when he was younger he'd spent more time with his aunts, especially his dad's sisters. He felt very loved by them as a child but didn't see much of them when he was a young man. By the time he thought to talk to them to learn more about his dad, who had died when Vince was one year old, his aunts had all passed away.
 - a) Every family is different, of course. Is there anyone in your family or wider community who you'd like to talk with to learn more about your own history or stories?
 - b) If so, what would you like to ask them about?
 - c) If you decided to ask them if they'd answer some of your questions, how might you go about it?
3. Vince was in his eighties when he told his stories to his friend Lea for this book. Towards the end of the book, he talks about all the little things in his life that he appreciated, and how they all added up to make his life wonderful.
 - a) After finishing *The Wonder of Little Things YRE*, how have you reflected on the 'little things' that make you happy?
 - b) What are some of the little things in life that you find wonderful?
 - c) As a class, brainstorm all of the little things that make you feel good. Come up with a way to celebrate these things; for example, posters, short stories, letters or collages.

Resource

On the following pages you will find an appendix which comprises the timeline of events that influenced Vince Copley's life that appears at the end of the adult edition of *The Wonder of Little Things*.

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About the Authors

Vince Copley AM, a proud Ngadjuri man, was born on an Aboriginal mission in South Australia. As a young boy he attended the St Francis House in Adelaide, a home for First Nations boys that produced many future leaders, including civil rights activist Charlie Perkins. A star footballer and cricketer, Vince later devoted his life to advancing the rights and improving the lives of First Nations people. He worked closely with Charlie, and with everyone from community leaders to premiers and prime ministers. Along with other Ngadjuri people, he was also active in recovering and protecting Ngadjuri cultural heritage. Vince died in 2022, aged eighty-five.

Lea McInerney grew up on Ngadjuri Country, in the Clare Valley. Her ancestry is Irish-Australian. Lea's writing has been published in *Griffith Review* and other literary magazines. Lea met Vince in 2016. As well as this book, she worked with Vince on several Ngadjuri projects he led, and she continues this work with his family.

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Appendix

Please note that what follows is only part of the 'Further Reading' section that appears at the end of the adult edition of *The Wonder of Little Things*. The book list that is referred to in Lea McInerney's letter to the reader below has not been included. A list of all the St Francis House boys can be found on p. 278 of the Young Readers Edition that these resources have been created for.

Further reading

Dear reader,

Vince thought you might like to have some more details at your fingertips about the laws and famous events he talks about in his story. We've put together a few things here for you: a timeline and potted history, books that Vince and I read and talked about and referred to, a little bit more about a few other people who feature in the story, and the names of all the boys who went through St Francis House.

Lea McInerney, July 2022

Timeline

This summary of events and laws that affected Vince's life and the lives of his people is centred mainly on South Australia, but it also touches on national events. The early 1900s through to the 1970s in particular was a time when many laws and government policies were being made that deeply affected, and often harmed, First Nations people. In the face of this, as Vince's story shows, their immense courage and strength shone through.

As you make your way through these pages, you might find it helpful to see the 'big picture' of Australia's long history shifting and changing across overlapping stages or eras:



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The Wonder of Little Things

- Before 1770
- Colonisation
- Protection
- Assimilation
- Self-determination

YEAR	WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE TIME
BEFORE 1770	
For tens of thousands of years	Vince's ancestors, among them the people of the Ngadjuri and Narungga Nations, hold sovereignty of their lands, and live under their own laws and culture.
1600s and 1700s	<p>People from Britain and Europe are sailing the world's seas. Some sail along parts of the coast of Australia, no doubt noticed by the people already living there. They possibly have contact with each other. Some of the visitors travel in a spirit of curiosity and adventure, but some come looking to seize land on behalf of their own nations. The people already living here wouldn't necessarily have been aware of these intentions.</p> <p>Makassar people, from what is now eastern Indonesia, sail annually to Arnhem Land to trade goods with the Yolngu people.</p>
COLONISATION	
1770	A British man sails a ship along the east coast of Australia, charting it for the British Crown.
1788	Another British man steers his fleet of eleven ships into a bay on the east coast of the Australian continent. On board those ships are about 1500 people, 700 of them convicts. They are expecting to come across local people and have been told by their king's representative back in Britain to open talks with these people and 'conciliate their affections'. The British see this land as <i>terra nullius</i> – Latin words for 'land belonging to no one', which the British interpret as 'owned by no one' – so they establish a colony and run it according to British law. There is no attempt to find out about the laws of the people already living here, or to negotiate a treaty with them.



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Early
1800s

After the place now known as Sydney is founded in 1788 on the lands of the Eora people, other European settlements follow and are also given European names: Risdon Cove (Hobart) in 1803, Brisbane in 1824, Swan River (Perth) in 1829, and Port Phillip (Melbourne) in 1836. Darwin will come a bit later, in 1869. All these places already have names and stories connected to the people already there.

More and more Europeans are arriving in boats and ships. A number of them sail along the coast of what will become known as South Australia. As well as more adventurers and more colonisers, seal hunters from Europe and America are setting up camps on that same coast.

There's contact between the people already living here and all the different groups arriving. Sometimes it's friendly, at least to start with, but often there is conflict and violence.

1834

The British Parliament passes what it calls the *Foundation Act*, also known as the *South Australia Act*. It's described as 'an Act to empower His Majesty to erect South Australia into a British Province or Provinces and to provide for the Colonisation and Government thereof' and is dated 15 August.

1836

Nine ships leave England and sail for South Australia with about 600 people on board. The last of the ships, carrying the person the British have appointed governor, arrives at a place the newcomers call Holdfast Bay on 28 December, joining the other eight ships that arrived in the preceding months. The governor proclaims the Colony of South Australia, to be controlled by the British Crown.

As well as the *South Australia Act*, two other documents relevant to First Nations people set the terms for what the British are up to: the *Letters Patent* of February 1836 and the proclamation read out by British officials when they land in December. The documents are all a bit contradictory. On the one hand 'the native inhabitants' are recognised as having occupation of the lands and the right to continue to occupy and enjoy them. On the other, the territory marked out for settlement is said to consist of 'waste and unoccupied lands ... fit for the purposes of colonisation'. Land isn't meant to



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- 1836 be taken up by colonists unless its original owners voluntarily cede ownership and are awarded compensation. But early settlers who have bought preliminary land orders in Britain claim they have first choice over the original inhabitants.
- What the local people call this influx of settlers spreading over their land isn't readily available in written records. But the disruption of First Nations sovereignty, law and culture is now well underway in this part of the continent, and soon reaches beyond the Adelaide settlement.
- While the colony officials talk about how the land will be surveyed, carved up and sold, they also talk about setting aside areas of land to keep for the people already living here. It happens, briefly. But it never quite holds. There's also talk of taking care of the people already living here and protecting them from harm. The year before, officials had created a position called 'Protector of Aborigines', who is expected to learn the local languages, and the first formally appointed one does. The role of protector will continue intermittently, in changing and often malevolent forms, for more than 120 years.
- 1837 While there is no government policy to move Aboriginal people off their lands, from 1837 onwards they find it increasingly difficult to access places where they've always sourced water, food and shelter. Blankets and rations of flour and sugar are provided to some, but many get sick and die, and others are killed in violent conflicts. Some humanitarian colonists complain about the way Aboriginal people are being treated.
- 1838 The second governor of the colony, in power from 1838 to 1841, swings between defending the rights of Aboriginal people to their land and regarding them as inferior and not capable of entering into treaties.
- 1839 Rations continue to be distributed to Aboriginal people at selected sites.
- A couple of English men separately explore the lower north and mid-north of South Australia, looking for suitable grazing and agricultural land. They travel through the lands of some of Vince's ancestors.



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- 1840s and 1850s** Increasing numbers of the Europeans now living in South Australia are leasing large areas of land through occupation licences and, after 1851, pastoral leases. European-style villages and towns are being set up in the colony's fertile districts. Some local Aboriginal people make requests to the government for their land to be returned, or for them to be given other land to live on and farm. Some of the new incomers publicly complain about the way Aboriginal people are being treated. Within a few years of European occupation, many Aboriginal people are working on stations and farms as shepherds, shearers, labourers and domestic help. They're often paid in rations. Sometimes they're offered wages but then not paid.
- 1844** The *Aboriginal Orphans Act 1844* allows the Protector of Aborigines to apprentice out Aboriginal children who are orphans and, with parental consent, other Aboriginal children. It also gives the protector the right to visit children and to penalise employers who mistreat the apprentices.
- 1848** In January, the first legal marriage takes place between an Aboriginal and a European person, **Kudnarto** and **Tom Adams**. Kudnarto was born in what is now known as Crystal Brook in about 1830. **Vince** is descended from Kudnarto through his grandmother **Maisie May Edwards** (née Adams). Kudnarto and Tom will soon have two sons: **Tom Jnr**, born in 1849, and **Tim**, in 1852.
- 1850s** Influential Christians set up the Poonindie Native Training Institution on the Eyre Peninsula, while the Aborigines' Friends Association open the Port McLeay mission in the lower Murray River region, on a site the locals know as Raukkan.
- 1856** South Australia's *Constitution Act 1856* is passed. All men over twenty-one can vote, including Aboriginal men.
- 1860** A select committee appointed by the state government investigates the conditions Aboriginal people are living in. Its report notes that, as a result of colonisation, they have 'lost much, and gained little, or nothing'.



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- 1868 The townspeople of Moonta, Wallaroo and Kadina work with Moravian missionary Julius Kühn and **'King Tommy'** and other Narungga people to set up the Point Pearce mission on the Yorke Peninsula. Run by a committee made up of representatives from the three towns, it never becomes a single denomination mission and is not controlled by any missionary organisation.
- 1877 **Joe Edwards**, Vince's grandfather on his mum's side, is born at Point Pearce, on Narungga Country.
- 1878 **Mary (May) Wilson**, Vince's grandmother on his dad's side, is born at Encounter Bay, south of Adelaide.
- 1879 **Barney Warrior**, Vince's grandfather on his dad's side, is born at Orroroo, on Ngadjuri Country.
- 1882 **(Maisie) May Adams**, Vince's grandmother on his mum's side, is born at Poonindie.
- 1894 Poonindie mission closes. Some of the people living there are moved to Point Pearce, among them **Tom Adams Jnr** and his family. Others are moved to Point McLeay.
- 1895 South Australia's *Constitutional Amendment (Adult Suffrage) Act* becomes law. All women over twenty-one can vote, including Aboriginal women.
- 1901 In January, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passes the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1901*. It brings together the existing states and territories under one federation. According to Westminster law, the nation of Australia has come to be. The written Constitution is a set of rules for governing the country. It can only be changed through a referendum in which a majority of citizens and a majority of states vote for change.
- One clause in this new Constitution says 'in reckoning the numbers of people ... Aboriginal natives shall not be counted'. Another clause says that the Commonwealth will pass laws for any race except Aboriginal people. This leaves the power to make laws affecting Aboriginal people in the hands of the state governments.



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- 1901 In December, the Commonwealth government passes a law called the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*. It effectively bans any person who isn't Caucasian from entering the country and becomes known as the White Australia policy.
- 1902 The federal government passes the *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902*. This gives women, as well as men, the right to vote in federal elections – unless you're what is classed as an 'aboriginal native' of Australia, Asia, Africa or the islands of the Pacific. This is a backwards step for South Australia and the local Aboriginal people.
- 1907 Vince's parents, **Fred Warrior** and **Kathleen Edwards**, are born at Point Pearce mission.

PROTECTION

- 1911 *The Aborigines Act 1911* creates the positions of Chief Protector and regional protectors. A government department is set up to provide for the custody, maintenance and education of the children of Aboriginal people and to supervise 'all matters affecting the wellbeing' of Aboriginal people.

The Chief Protector is the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child until they are twenty-one years old, even if a child has a living parent or other relative. Each regional protector is the local guardian of every child within their district. The Chief Protector has control of where adults and children live, and can confine them to a reserve or institution, and move them to other reserves or institutions. If an Aboriginal person refuses to be moved, they can be charged with committing an offence.

- 1913 A Royal Commission on the Aborigines is set up by the South Australian government 'to inquire into and report upon the control, organisation and management of the institutions in this state set aside for the benefit of the aborigines, and generally upon the whole question of the South Australian aborigines.'

Joe Edwards, Vince's grandfather, is one of five Point Pearce men who appear before the commissioners to speak about conditions where they live. The topics they cover include



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- 1913 land use, farming, wages, rations and education for their children and young people. Vince's mum, **Katie Edwards**, is six years old. The transcript records this exchange between Joe and one of the Commissioners:
- Commissioner:* Is there anything to prevent you going away and securing employment elsewhere?
- Joe Edwards:* We always understood this as our land, and looked upon it as our home.
- Commissioner:* Do you look upon this reserve as your own, and that it must provide for you for all time?
- Joe Edwards:* I have always understood that.
- Commissioner:* Your impression is quite wrong.
- 1915–1916 The South Australian government takes over the running of Point Pearce mission (September 1915) and Point McLeay mission (January 1916).
- 1918 Under the *Aborigines Act 1911*, an Advisory Council of Aborigines is set up to advise the government on 'any matter ... affecting the interests of' Aboriginal people.
- 1923 The *Aborigines (Training of Children) Act 1923* is passed, which says Aboriginal children can be removed to institutions and detained there until they are eighteen if – in the opinion of the Chief Protector – a child is being neglected.
- 1924 The Oodnadatta Children's Home is set up in far north South Australia by the United Aborigines Mission, an organisation of different Christian denominations. Twelve children live there; most have been taken from their families. The building is very basic.
- 1927 In Quorn, the United Aborigines Mission opens Colebrook Home as an institution for Aboriginal children. The children from the Oodnadatta Children's Home are moved there, further away from their families. Over the years, many others are taken there.
- 1931 Nepabunna Mission is set up in the northern Flinders Ranges by the United Aborigines Mission.



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- 1933 In Victoria, the Australian Aborigines' League is set up by Yorta Yorta leader William Cooper. The following year, he draws up a petition calling for improved living conditions for Aboriginal people, and for Aboriginal representation in parliament. In 1937, he sends it to Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, expecting it will be sent on to the British king for his attention. It isn't.
- Early 1930s and 1940s Adelaide-based medical doctor Charles Duguid and his wife, Phyllis Duguid, are involved in various organisations advocating for Aboriginal people to have their own land and govern their own lives. In 1935, Charles becomes president of a group known as the Aborigines' Protection League. Ngarrindjeri man David Unaipon, inventor, author and advocate for his people, is a member. In 1939, Phyllis becomes the leader of a women's Christian group and they set up the League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women. In 1946, these two organisations merge and form the South Australian Aborigines Advancement League. This signals a philosophical shift from protecting Aboriginal people to supporting their advancement. Gladys Elphick moves to Adelaide around 1940 and will go on to work alongside the Duguids for many years.
- 1934 In South Australia, the *Aborigines Act 1934* brings together the 1911 and 1923 Acts. It takes effect in 1937. There are no significant changes to the powers of the Chief Protector, who still has full control over where Aboriginal adults and children live.
- 1936 Vince is born at Wallaroo hospital, north of Point Pearce. He is the youngest of Fred and Katie Warrior's five surviving children.
- Barney Warrior, Vince's grandfather, begins sharing some of his Ngadjuri cultural knowledge with three anthropologists: Norman Tindale, Charles Mountford and Ronald Berndt. He will meet up with them regularly over several years.



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- 1937 Charles Duguid leads the setting up of Ernabella mission on Pitjantjatjara Country, in far north-west South Australia, by the Presbyterian church. Children are taught in their own language and Pitjantjatjara ceremonies continue with support of the missionaries. On some of the other missions, Aboriginal people are banned from speaking their own languages. Among the exceptions are the German Lutheran missions, which respect and advocate for local languages to be retained, and even teach in them.
- A national conference of chief protectors and boards controlling Aboriginal people in states and territories is held. They pass resolutions on some twenty areas, including how Aboriginal people are to be defined or 'categorised'. They also resolve to aim for uniform legislation across the country.
- 1938 Following years of campaigning by the Australian Aborigines League and other activist groups, a 'Day of Mourning and Protest' gathering is held on 26 January at Australia Hall in Sydney. Its purpose is to protest 'the callous treatment of our people by the whitemen', and to call for full citizen status and equality for Aboriginal people.
- With support from many religious groups, the League declares the Sunday before 26 January to be 'Aboriginal Sunday'. It is first celebrated in 1940 and continues annually until 1955, when it is moved to the first Sunday in July, eventually giving rise to the now annual NAIDOC Week.
- In June, Fred Warrior, Vince's father, dies.
- 1939 In South Australia, the *Aborigines Act 1934* is amended and becomes the *Aborigines Act 1934-1939*. An Aborigines Protection Board replaces the Chief Protector, the regional protectors and the Advisory Council of Aborigines. The board's stated duty is to control and promote the welfare of Aboriginal people. Board members become the protectors and legal guardians of Aboriginal children, even where children have parents or other relatives. Legally, Aboriginal people can be board members, but they are considered unsuitable because they don't have what the government and its advisors see as acceptable education, training or professional qualifications.



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- 1939 One section of the Act rules that marriage between an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal person needs ministerial approval. Another section rules that a non-Aboriginal man with an Aboriginal woman must be married or they will be charged with consorting. The stated intent of laws like these is to protect Aboriginal people from fraudulent non-Aboriginal people and also to protect Aboriginal women from sexual assault. But, in reality, the powers given to the Aborigines Protection Board are easily misused and abused.
- The Act also brings in the exemptions system, which states that, 'Where the board is of the opinion that any aborigine by reason of his character and standard of intelligence and development should be exempted from the provisions of this Act, the board may ... declare that the aborigine shall cease to be an aborigine for the purposes of the Act.' Exemptions could be conditional and revocable for three years, or unconditional and irrevocable. The first exemption is granted in 1941.
- 1940s The people of Point Pearce send petitions to the government to protest about their living conditions, such as overcrowding and exploitation, and their lack of control over their lives.
- Assimilation is happening in practice, although not yet spelled out in policy. People are being moved off missions, where they've been living controlled yet regulated lives, into cities and towns. They're often separated from family and the community they've been part of their whole life. Their connection to culture and language is further disrupted. They face discrimination and financial hardship. Their lives are closely monitored and assessed against cultural standards that aren't their own. Children are being removed in increasing numbers.
- 1942 Darwin is bombed by the Japanese military. Aboriginal missions in the Northern Territory are evacuated and many children are removed to other parts of the country, mostly without their parents' consent. The mothers of some children go with them. Some children from South Australia and Queensland are also removed to missions during the war's disruptions. A large group is taken to Mulgoa mission, west of Sydney, at the foot of the Blue Mountains.



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- 1942 Colebrook Home moves to Eden Hills on the outskirts of Adelaide. About fifty children live there.
- 1944 On 1 February, a letter written by **Barney Warrior** is published in *The Advertiser*. It says, in part: 'People are too ready to judge without understanding, and most of them like to think that anyone with dark skin can't be as good as they are themselves.' Then he writes, 'On one hand, white people talk of all races being treated the same way, but on the other hand they do not want to treat "dark" people as equals. We have found this to be true. If we are to be accepted as citizens of this community, we should not be treated differently from others, and we should not be debarred (as we are now) from so many aspects of life in the community.'
- On 5 February, **Colin Warrior**, Barney's grandson and Vince's brother, dies in the Royal Adelaide Hospital.
- 1945 A small Anglican children's home is set up in a private house in a suburb in Adelaide called Marryatville, to be run by Anglican priest Father Percy Smith and his wife, Isabel. They bring six young boys there from Alice Springs for schooling, something not readily available to Aboriginal children in Alice Springs. The boys' mothers give their permission for this to happen. Later the home will become known as St Francis House.
- 1946 **Vince** and his family leave Adelaide and head north to Leigh Creek and later to Alice Springs.
- 1947 St Francis House takes in more boys. The Smiths move them to a larger building and grounds at Semaphore, another Adelaide suburb. Vince is living in Alice Springs and, during the Christmas holidays that year, he meets some of the St Francis boys.
- 1948 **Vince** leaves Alice Springs and becomes a boarder at St Francis House.



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ASSIMILATION

- 1951 While practices intended to assimilate Aboriginal people into the white world have been going on since colonisation began, the Aborigines Protection Board now formally adopts it as policy. The intention is to absorb Aboriginal people over time by removing children from their families and placing them in institutions where they can be 'trained' to take their place in white society.
- 1952 **Vince's mum, Katie**, dies in the Royal Adelaide Hospital.
- 1953 **Vince** starts his apprenticeship as a fitter and turner. He is still living at St Francis House.
- An amendment to the South Australian *Summary Offences Act 1953* means that if a white person 'consorts with' an Aboriginal person 'without a reasonable excuse', they have committed an offence. This is a different Act from the *Aborigines Act 1934–1939*, and gives further reach to police powers on who can and can't associate with each other. The government states the amendment is meant to protect Aboriginal people from exploitation by white people, but the way police interpret it varies widely.
- The British government conducts atomic tests at Emu Field. The local people call the explosions and their aftermath the Black Mist.
- 1954 **Vince** leaves St Francis House and his apprenticeship, and moves to his sister **Winnie Branson's** home at Pine Point.
- 1956 The British government conducts atomic tests at Maralinga.
- Labor MP Don Dunstan is in the state opposition and speaks in parliament about the conditions at Point Pearce. He also questions the government on the policies and practices of the Aborigines Protection Board.
- A group of young women from Colebrook Home graduate as nurses from the Royal Adelaide Hospital, after having been refused entry for years because they are Aboriginal. Among them are Lowitja O'Donoghue, who goes on to be a much-admired leader of her people, and Faith Coulthard, who will play cricket at state level and for the Australian women's team.



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1958 The section in the *Summary Offences Act* on consorting between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is repealed after an intense campaign by Aboriginal people and their supporters.

The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines (FCAA) is set up as a national body, bringing together state activist groups of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Its first meeting is in Adelaide. In 1964 the name will change to the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, known as FCAATSI.

1959 St Francis House closes.

1962 The *Aborigines Act 1939* is repealed by the *Aboriginal Affairs Act 1962*. The Aborigines Protection Board is replaced by the Aboriginal Affairs Board. The new board is no longer the legal guardian of Aboriginal children.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for Aboriginal reserves, and general supervision and care of the welfare of Aboriginal people. The minister is expected to provide for the maintenance and education of Aboriginal children, and 'to promote the social, economic and political development of [Aboriginal people] until their integration into the general community'. Aboriginal children are still being removed from their families, under a different child welfare law.

The Act has new powers to set up a Register of Aborigines. The names of people who, in the board's opinion, 'are capable of accepting the full responsibilities of citizenship' – that is, people with exemptions – can be removed from the register. In 1968, this power will be abolished.

SELF-DETERMINATION

1963 A new Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Board is set up. It marks an official shift in South Australia from assimilation policies to self-determination. Aboriginal people are on the board, among them Gladys Elphick. In 1970, the board's functions will be taken over by a new state government department of Social Welfare and Aboriginal Affairs.



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- 1963 In the Northern Territory, Yolngu people in Yirrkala send a bark petition to the House of Representatives in Canberra to protest against a mining lease granted without their permission. The government runs an inquiry, then goes ahead with the mine anyway.
- 1964 In South Australia, a group of mainly Aboriginal people, among them some of the St Francis boys, sets up the Aboriginal Progress Association. Members feel strongly that there needs to be an 'Aboriginal voice' within the community. They also plan to campaign vigorously at a parliamentary level 'to improve the lot of Aborigines everywhere.' The association is controlled and run by Aboriginal people. Soon its membership will be solely Aboriginal people.
- 1965 In New South Wales, the Freedom Ride led by **Charles Perkins** and other University of Sydney students brings attention to discrimination against Aboriginal people. Meanwhile, the students' staged kidnapping later in the year of Fijian-Australian five-year-old Nancy Prasad brings attention to the deeply flawed White Australia policy.
- A new Labor government is elected in South Australia. Don Dunstan becomes attorney-general and Minister of Community Welfare and Aboriginal Affairs. In 1967 he will become premier and treasurer. Dunstan begins an era of significant legal and social reform.
- 1966 **Gladys Elphick**, along with **Maude Tongerie** and others, is setting up the Council of Aboriginal Women of South Australia. Its purpose is to provide welfare and support services to Aboriginal people, and also to lobby for social change. Gladys, by now in her sixties, is in regular contact with Don Dunstan.
- South Australia enacts two significant laws. The *Aboriginal Lands Trust Act 1966* transfers the titles of Aboriginal reserves to Aboriginal people to hold and manage. The *Prohibition of Discrimination Act 1966* bans all types of race and colour discrimination in employment, accommodation, legal contracts and public facilities.



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- 1966 The Wave Hill Walk-off by Gurindji people working on a cattle station in the Northern Territory begins and will last nine years. The workers strike over unfair wages and demand the return of a portion of their homelands from the people who hold the pastoral lease. In time it brings the issue of land rights to the attention of the wider Australian public.
- 1967 On 27 May, following a concerted campaign by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their allies over many years, Australians vote in a referendum to change two clauses in the Constitution. Aboriginal people are no longer to be left out of the census, and the Commonwealth can now make laws for Aboriginal people, instead of there being myriad state laws across the country.
- 1969 In Canberra, the federal Liberal government sets up an Office of Aboriginal Affairs. **Charles Perkins** is recruited to work there.
- 1971 In July, on National Aborigines Day, the Aboriginal flag designed by **Harold Thomas** is flown for the first time, in Adelaide.
- 1972 In South Australia, the *Community Welfare Act 1972* is passed, repealing several Acts including the *Aboriginal Affairs Act 1962–68*. Its stated intent is to promote the cultural, social, economic and political welfare and development of Aboriginal people. It recognises that Aboriginal people have their own languages, traditions and arts, and that they should be supported to preserve and develop them. Aboriginal organisations and industry are to be supported and fostered.

The law also marks a philosophical shift in how children are viewed: when there is any question of a child being removed from their family and placed in care, the interests of the child are to be considered paramount. Many Aboriginal children, however, continue to be assessed as 'neglected' by those in charge, and are removed.

In January, in response to years of demands by Aboriginal people for land rights, the federal Liberal government announces that, instead of land rights, it will give some



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- 1972 Aboriginal people fifty-year leases to some of their traditional Country. The day after, Aboriginal activists set up the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in front of Parliament House. In December, a federal Labor government is elected. The new prime minister, Gough Whitlam, says Aboriginal people are no longer to be denied 'their rightful place in this nation'. Commonwealth policy shifts from assimilation to self-determination. Land rights are now firmly on the agenda. Whitlam sets up a federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs, with its own minister. The government officially brings the White Australia policy to an end.
- 1973 The federal government commits to having a National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) to advise the government on issues concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is to be set up and run by Aboriginal people.
- 1974 An Aboriginal Land Rights Commission recommends 'basic compensation in the form of land for those [Aboriginal people] who have been irrevocably deprived of the rights and interests which would otherwise have been inherited from their ancestors.' Work begins on an Aboriginal land rights bill for the Northern Territory. For the first time, NAIDOC is run by a committee made up solely of Aboriginal people.
- 1975 The Labor government is dismissed by the governor-general. At the subsequent election, a Liberal government led by Malcolm Fraser is elected. Many of the programs set up under the Labor government continue although have their budgets cut. Law reform work continues.
- 1976 In South Australia, Yorta Yorta man **Sir Douglas Nicholls** is appointed state governor, becoming the first Aboriginal person in such a role. The Commonwealth *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* is passed. First Nations people in the Northern Territory can now legally claim land rights for Country where traditional ownership can be proved.



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- 1977 The federal government replaces the NACC with the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC). While its members want to take on a more direct role in creating policy, it remains mainly advisory. They have little political power; however, they persist and over time influence policy and shape the thinking of both parliamentarians and the public on fundamental issues such as self-determination and treaty-making.
- 1980 The Aboriginal Development Commission is set up in Canberra to promote the economic and social wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 1985 The Hawke Labor Government winds up NAC, and begins work on creating a different body.
- Uluru is handed back to its traditional owners, the Anangu.
- After sustained advocacy by Aboriginal communities led by people like Yankuntjatjarra man Yami Lester, the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia releases its report. Among its recommendations are compensation for traditional owners, and that Emu Fields and Maralinga be rehabilitated and this be paid for by the British government.
- 1988 The Barunga Statement is presented to Prime Minister Hawke by leaders from Arnhem Land and the Central Desert. In the statement they call for land rights and self-management, and emphasise their desire to make policy and decisions that affect their people.
- 1990 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, commonly known as ATSIC, is set up by the Hawke Labor government, in place of the NAC and the Aboriginal Development Commission.
- 1991 The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is released and makes 339 recommendations.
- 1992 The Mabo decision is handed down by the High Court. The colonial concept of Australia as terra nullius – land owned by no one – is overturned.
- 1993 The Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* is passed in response to the Mabo ruling.



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- 1997 The *Bringing Them Home* Report is released by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. It tells many stories of Aboriginal people taken from their families and communities, and the suffering they experienced. It calls for a formal apology and compensation to support communities to heal.
- 1998 The *Native Title Amendment Act 1998*, also known as the 'Ten-point Plan', is brought in by the Howard Coalition government. The Amendment Act makes it more difficult for Aboriginal people to be granted native title, and restricts the land that can be claimed.
- 2004 ATSIIC is abolished by the federal Coalition government.
- 2005 Professor Tom Calma releases a report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that shows the stark differences in their health and how long they can expect to live, compared to the rest of the population. In response, all governments across the country agree on a national strategy to 'close the gap' within twenty-five years.
- 2008 The Australian Parliament, under a new Labor government, apologises to Aboriginal people who were taken from their families during the 1900s. In the years to come, various states and territories will offer reparation payments and the opportunity for people to tell their stories.
- 2010s The federal government sets up different processes over the decade to advance constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 2015 In South Australia, Labor politician Kyam Maher, a First Nations man, is elected to state government. He guides reforms to begin treaty negotiations with local Aboriginal nations.
- 2017 First Nations people from across the country present the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart' to the Australian people. In it, they invite their fellow citizens to recognise the unique place of First Nations people, and 'to walk together in a movement of the Australian people for a better future'. They set out three areas of attention, summarised as Voice, Treaty, Truth: a First Nations Voice to Parliament, treaty making, and truth-telling about our shared history. The federal Coalition government rejects the Uluru Statement.



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- 2019 Liberal MP Ken Wyatt becomes Australia's first First Nations person to be Minister for Indigenous Australians.
- 2022 A new federal Labor government is elected and the prime minister commits to implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full.
- Labor MP Linda Burney becomes the second First Nations person to be Minister for Indigenous Australians, and the first woman in the role.

The information in this timeline has come from many different sources, among them:

- overviews of Indigenous Affairs created by the Australian Parliamentary Library
- Find & Connect, a website of historical resources relating to institutional 'care'
- South Australian government timelines created by the health and education departments
- collections in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
- the Museum of Australian Democracy
- the History of Aboriginal Exemption website

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