



Youth Speak Out 2026

Guide for teachers

Hello and welcome

Thank you for your interest in participating in Youth Speak Out, Reconciliation Tasmania's annual statewide education initiative for students in Grades 5–12.

This guide has been designed to help teachers understand the program, explore the 2026 theme and support students in preparing their submissions.

We hope Youth Speak Out inspires meaningful classroom conversations and empowers young people to share their perspectives on reconciliation, truth-telling and Lutruwita/Tasmania's future.

What is Youth Speak Out?

Youth Speak Out is Reconciliation Tasmania's annual statewide education initiative, providing students in Grades 5–12 with an opportunity to explore reconciliation through creativity, critical thinking and respectful dialogue.

Now in its ninth year, Youth Speak Out encourages students to share their perspectives through a range of media, including art, writing, photography, mixed media, collaborative projects, and more.

Selected finalists are invited to Parliament House, where they have the rare opportunity to present their work directly to Members of Parliament, Aboriginal community leaders and other key decision makers - giving young people a genuine opportunity to speak truth to power.

Student submission by Ivy Pettit of Dominic College.
Youth Speak Out, 2025.



Why Youth Speak Out?

Young people are the future, and as we know, can sometimes feel powerless to influence the world around them. Youth Speak Out provides an opportunity for young people to speak truth to power and influence key decision makers and leaders. Other positive benefits include the ability to build confidence, meet and engage with Tasmanian Aboriginal people and culture, and enhance learning about Tasmania's civil and democratic systems.

Who is eligible to apply?

Youth Speak Out is open to all Tasmanian students in Grades 5-12, including those attending government, Catholic, and independent schools.

Students need not be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander to apply.

Key dates

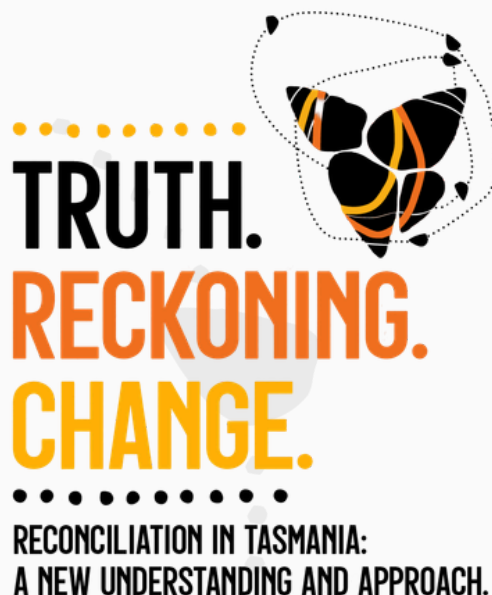
Submissions for Youth Speak Out open on Monday 17th August, and close on Friday 18th September. The final showcase event at Parliament House will be held on Tuesday 27th October. See below for a summary of dates:

Entries open	17 August 2026
Entries close	18 September 2026
Finalists notified	25 September 2026
Showcase at Parliament House	27 October 2026



2026 Theme - Truth. Reckoning. Change.

In previous years, Youth Speak Out has responded to national themes for NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week. However, in 2026, we decided to go with our own theme: *Truth. Reckoning. Change. Reconciliation in Tasmania: A new understanding and approach.* This theme reflects ongoing conversations taking place across Lutruwita/Tasmania and acknowledges that there are diverse perspectives about what reconciliation means today and how it should be understood in the Tasmanian context.



What should submissions look like?

Students can submit responses in any creative format – painting, writing, dance, photography, woodwork, textiles, film – whatever works for them.

As long as the work engages with the above theme, it will be considered.

Individual, small group, and whole class projects are welcome.

See below for examples of submissions from previous years:



Class submission from Grade 5/6 at the Cottage School, Bellerive. YSO, 2025.



Whole school submission from Elizabeth College, responding to Reconciliation Week theme "Bridging Now to Next." YSO, 2024.



Diorama by Grade 7 and 8 students at Parklands High, Burnie. YSO, 2025.

The Weight I Carry

The weight I carry on my back,
the weight of the stolen generation,
the weight of my innocent ancestors that
were killed in cold blood.

The weight I carry, gets heavier every slur,
and every racist comment you say

The weight I carry on my back,
Gets lighter every time I realise that I should
be grateful to have my beautiful tan skin.

The weight I carry,
Doesn't weigh me down anymore.

The weight I carry,
Has turned into pride.
I carry the pride everywhere I go,
I wear the name 'Aboriginal' with pride.

I am grateful for the fact that I am
Aboriginal,
And for the fact that my children and their
children will be Aboriginal.

The pride is what I need to survive.

Poem by Sydnie Caville, Mountain Heights High, Queenstown. YSO, 2025.



Reconciliation Stingray by Lucie Hall and Stephanie Gardner, St. Patrick's College, Launceston. YSO, 2025.

How will submissions be assessed?

Submissions will be assessed by an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal judging panel convened by Reconciliation Tasmania.

A winner will be selected for each of the following categories:

- Primary School (for submissions from Grades 5-6)
- High School (for submissions from students Grades 7-10)
- College (for submissions from students Grades 11-12)
- Visual art (for the best visual art submission, could include painting, drawing, photography, sculpture or any other kind of visual art)
- Writing (for written submissions, e.g. poetry, essays, speeches)
- Collaborative art (for group or whole class projects)

To select winners, judges will consider:

- Engagement with the 2026 theme
- Originality and creativity
- Depth and quality of reflection
- Quality of communication
- Age appropriateness

Judging will consider the age of participants, recognising that entries from younger students will differ in complexity from those of older students.



YSO 2025 winners with Jo Palmer, Minister for Education, and RecTas CEO Pauline Cook.

What makes a great submission?

Great submissions are original, unique, and reflect deeply on themes of reconciliation, truth, and change.

Prompts for students

Consider asking students some of the following prompts to support their submissions. Of course, these are just ideas - students are also encouraged to interpret the theme in their own way.

Reconciliation

- What does reconciliation mean to you?
- Is reconciliation still relevant in Lutruwita/Tasmania today?
- What role do young people play in reconciliation?

Truth

- Why is truth-telling important?
- Can reconciliation happen without truth?
- Why is it important to understand our shared history?

Change

- What needs to change in Lutruwita/Tasmania?
- What would a reconciled future look like?
- How can young people make a difference?

Prizes and recognition

All students who participate will receive a participation certificate, designed by a Tasmanian Aboriginal artist. Winners will receive prizes from Aboriginal-owned businesses (e.g. Clothing the Gaps, Lutruwita the Label).

I'm a teacher. What do I need to do to support my students in this program?

As a teacher, you play an essential role in supporting this program.

We encourage teachers to:

- Introduce students to the 2026 theme
- Lead a class discussion to get students to think about how they could respond to the 2026 theme in a creative and original way
- Support students to develop their creative response
- Submit entries on behalf of students (to submit, visit <https://rectas.com.au/education/youth-speakout> or email youthspeakout@rectas.com.au)
- Accompany finalists to the Parliament House showcase

Grade 5/6 students from the Cottage School with their certificates. YSO, 2025.



2025 YSO winner Adeline Robers with Meg Webb MLC.



Frequently asked questions



Will the event be held at Government House this year?

No. Due to feedback from teachers, we have decided to host the event at Parliament House only. This will give students a greater opportunity to present their work to politicians and key decision makers, and reduce the logistical challenges that come with ferrying students between locations.

Can family and friends attend the Parliament House event?

Yes, family and friends of finalists are welcome to attend. We encourage students to share this important day with their loved ones. RSVPs essential.

My school is based in the north or north-west of the state. Is there funding available to cover our transport costs to Parliament House?

Yes, funding will be available for some schools unable to cover public transport costs. To see if your school may be eligible, email youthspeakout@rectas.com.au.

When will students receive their prizes?

Students attending on the day will be presented with their prizes. Students unable to attend will have their prizes mailed to them after the event.

When will I know who the finalists are at my school?

Reconciliation Tasmania will let you know if any of your students are finalists by 25th September 2026. From there, arrangements can be made for transport to Parliament House on the day.

How do I submit an artwork on behalf of my students?

Visit the Youth Speak Out page on our website and add your submission, including the title and some info about the artwork. Alternatively, submissions can be made by emailing us at youthspeakout@rectas.com.au

Can students submit more than one entry?

No. Entries are limited to one per student. This could be an individual, group, or whole class submission - the important thing is that the student's name appears on only one piece of work.

Need further support? Get in touch at youthspeakout@rectas.com.au.

Reconciliation Tasmania's vision, purpose and values



Our purpose is to work with Tasmanian Aboriginal people for truth, justice, and a better future. We do this through education, leadership, and advocacy across the wider community.

Our vision is for a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Tasmania, where all can thrive.

Our values are RESPECT, COURAGE, and COMMITMENT.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Erin Deverell

Education Officer
erin@rectas.com.au

Cassie Stevens

Event and Engagement Manager
cassie@rectas.com.au

Reconciliation Tasmania acknowledges and pays respect to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as the traditional and ongoing custodians of Lutruwita/Tasmania. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community who have protected and cared for Country for thousands of generations.

