

Reconciliation Stingray

‘Youth Speak Out’ 2025

By St Patrick’s College Year 9 students, Lucie Hall and Stephanie Gardner - Teacher Mr Paul Thomas

This piece is designed to sit on a table or hang as wall art. Through laminating plywood, its form is inspired by the body of a stingray, whose outline can also be traced in between the stars, reminding us of the deep connection between the sky, sea, land, and people.

The work invites conversation. The stingray moves with quiet strength, gliding smoothly, often unseen until it rises as a symbol of protection, balance, and spiritual flow. Its presence teaches us to live in harmony with Country, to observe, and to move gently through life.

Lucie and Stephanie have used the stingray as a mode of storytelling, embedding their own experiences as young Aboriginal women. Their work speaks to the challenge of holding on to culture after it was disrupted by colonisation, and carries a key message of resilience. It is an invitation: for others to walk alongside them, to begin and continue a journey of learning about Aboriginal culture, in the spirit of Reconciliation - Bridging Now to Next.



The Stingray is in 3 sections:

(Top section)

'Bridging Now to Next' - Reconciliation Week

To all who walk the path of life,

We invite you through the power of this art, story, and poetry, to share in our continuous journey:

Of lived experiences of Reconciliation and the significance it holds within us.

Below are the stories of two young and proud Aboriginal women, navigating our way through the 'Now',

Building our bridge for the present, for a stronger pathway for the 'Next'.

(Middle section- Left side)

'Being Aboriginal'

Being a young Aboriginal person feels different and special: it feels like touching trees

and plants, and feeling the connection, bringing you closer to Country.

Being around nature and touching plants feels like rebuilding a relationship with my ancestors,

connecting with my culture and living through their memories.

Being Aboriginal looks like walking on country and looking at trees swaying with the gentle wind,

letting the trees dance along with the plants as animals thrive below.

It looks like baby trees growing into their roots, strengthening their connection with the land,

growing their roots in the hopes that they will never move from their home in the dirt.

Being Aboriginal tastes like flavour on your tongue, with a new experience being a new flavour sensation,

letting you experience the rainbow of life.

Aboriginal heritage tastes like being free, but conversely, it tastes better on my tongue,

like someone spoiled what should have been sacred.

It tastes like disrespect and like my culture was treated like trash, which was almost thrown away.

I'm grateful for these roots my culture lived through, which allow me to still connect to my culture.

Being Aboriginal sounds like a whisper in the back of my mind, guiding me to heal the environment around me

and to find out who I am and who I can become.

However, being Aboriginal also sounds like silence: no one is educating me on the teachings of my ancestors.

I know this is the same for most of my family line, starting with my Great-Grandmother,

who was part of the Stolen Generation, and very little was talked about from her.

This meant that a very small amount of knowledge of who I am as an Aboriginal descendant was passed down.

I don't think I'll ever be able to learn the depths of what our culture was,

because it is now lost with my Great-Grandmother, which is truly upsetting to me.

Being Aboriginal smells like Freedom, with the wind on my back, guiding me to my place in life.

It smells like freshly cut grass and the smell of nature and openness

Being Aboriginal is so freeing, being able to walk with my ancestors and to be myself and my spirit,

independent in nature to choose what I choose to do.

Stephanie Gardner 2025

(Middle section - right side)

'Healing what was lost'

I grew up knowing I was an Aboriginal person, but that's all I knew.
Many stories were left untold, traditions I'd never get to experience, the language broken,
and I never knew the names of my ancestors.

That was a part of me and a connection I might never get to experience,
but there was always an itch, a curiosity to learn more.

Unfortunately, this is common among First Nations people,
as they try to work through loss and connect with who they are.

How do you heal from a disconnection you didn't choose?

I used to think healing was big and loud, but now I think it can be small and quiet.
It's really important to start the conversation about what it means to be Indigenous
and bring back the broken pieces of the puzzle one by one.

The parts of culture that were taken away before I was even born.

The past holds a lot of grief for many, but not all was lost.

I think the land needs healing, just like many people do,
by making small promises to listen and understand,
rather than leaving it behind in a permanent shadow, always trailing behind.

In many ways, Western society has come a long way from where it started.

Now, it is beginning to understand and learn from Aboriginal knowledge,
such as fire stick farming, and is starting to name places in Palawa Kani, while also protecting Country.

To heal is not only to the land but the culture, as they are one.

And forever tell the stories of the scars that cut so deep.

For me, being a young Aboriginal person feels like some days the land and the wind know my name,
and other days I feel as if I'm looking in on a culture I belong to, that I just can't reach.

Sometimes I imagine the land speaking to me. Not in words, but in memories.

It would tell me about the fires, both the good ones and the ones that weren't meant to come.

It would talk about the songs that used to echo through the trees,
sung by people who knew every track, every plant, every spirit and every part of culture.

I'm beginning to understand more and more, and become more connected with both sides of my history.

Some areas are harder to communicate with, but bridging the gap has helped me
become a lot closer and heal, therefore knowing myself better.

I am connected and always will be.

Lucie Hall 2025

(Bottom section)

'Voices Beyond the bridge'.

We build today's Bridge of Fire, so tomorrow can have hope,
Woven together with our ancestors, we walk up the slope.

Treading carefully, our voices spread like the river stream flows.
Rain dripping on each leaf guides our community as it glows.

Every step becomes a seed sown, a fearless forest will thrive,
Featuring the Glorious history found within the hive.

The stories we create hold the power of community,
Bridges raise as lanterns, lighting the path, forging unity.

Beneath the stars and tides a Stingray guides forevermore,
It whispers stories of protection and bonds freer than before.

Fire and water, alike in beginning, hold great power,
As do the weight of your voice, heard so often every hour.

Remembering and restoring, the soil heals a lush, proud pride,
The bush chimes, echoing old traditions along far and wide.

Now that you've heard our strong voice, we ask you to see our talents,
of creativity and nature, we pursue the balance.

We ask you to join us to share your inner flame, reach your best.
As the bridges we start today binds the link between now and next .

Lucie Hall & Stephanie Gardner, 2025

