# Levels 9/10 Civics and Citizenship Activity

## Recognising Indigenous Rights and Closing the Gap for First Nations People in Australia

### Introduction to Numeracy in Civics and Citizenship

Civics and citizenship education involves building a deep understanding of Australia’s federal system of government and the liberal democratic values that underpin it. Learning about civics and citizenship enables students to become active, informed, and critical citizens who can participate in and sustain Australia’s democracy in their local, national, and global contexts (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], n.d.-a).

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (n.d.) explains that learning about civics and citizenship helps students to develop skills to investigate contemporary civics and citizenship issues, participate responsibly in Australia’s democracy, and engage in the civic life of their nation. Students require skills and knowledge to make judgements, form conclusions, and develop plans for action. As Goos et al. (2019) argue:

Numeracy is vital for critical citizenship, because almost every public issue depends on data for constructing arguments to inform, persuade, or shape decision-making. The news, advertising, and entertainment media are a rich source of opportunities to ‘see’ numeracy in community and civic life, and to question the ways in which issues are represented or argued. (p. 13)

One aspect of civics and citizenship education is building students’ capacity to understand the electoral system, enrol and participate as voters, and make reasoned choices when they decide how to vote, all which involve numeracy skills. For example, students need to understand the mathematics involved in the preferential and proportional representation systems of voting. However, numeracy goes beyond mathematical content: Goos et al. (2010, 2014) emphasise broader aspects of numeracy in their Model for Numeracy in the Twenty-First Century. They argue that students must build values, dispositions, and personal and social capabilities related to numeracy, such as confidence in making decisions and problem solving.

Being a critical citizen and voter involves far more than just marking the ballot paper in a sequential order during elections. Rather, the voter needs to make judgements about policies and programs advocated by parties and members of parliament, before they choose for whom to vote. Being a critical citizen also involves some elements of chance, since the numerical order that the voter chooses on a ballet paper can impact who wins in both the preferential and proportional representation systems. So, students need to understand the political aspects of these systems and why ‘how to vote’ cards are provided by parties and independent candidates on election days.

Understanding contemporary issues that are crucial for critical citizenship often involves making sense of statistical information, graphs, or explanations that involve financial literacy; thus, citizens need to employ mathematics in everyday life. Hence, there are many opportunities for making connections between numeracy and Civics and Citizenship in the curriculum and in classroom teaching and learning.

### Developing Numeracy Understanding in Civics and Citizenship

Through the study of Civics and Citizenship, students develop skills of inquiry, as well as values and dispositions that enable them to be active and informed citizens, so that they can question, understand, and contribute to the world in which they live. Using the skills of interpreting and representing data in tables and graphs (e.g., about changes over time) can add to students’ understanding of issues in society. Students can explore trends using percentages or other numbers that illustrate change or continuity.

In the Civics and Citizenship curriculum, students have opportunities to investigate political and legal systems, and to explore the nature of citizenship, diversity, and identity in contemporary society. Using quantitative data can enrich students’ investigations. For example, students can explore changing percentages of immigrant arrivals over time, as well as the percentages of different ethnic or national groups, to draw conclusions about the changing nature of diversity and identity in Australian society.

Students can investigate the impact of British colonisation and lack of equity for citizens using population statistics and other data related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ lives in regions across Australia over time. Statistics can be used to build students’ understanding of the continuing disadvantage that First Nations peoples continue to suffer through, for example, analysis of First Nations peoples’ ongoing socio-economic disadvantage, illustrated by statistics about unemployment, health, deaths in custody, and incarceration rates. Since 2008, the stakeholders who made recommendations in the Close the Gap program have aimed to close the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation. The campaigners aim to show significant improvements in the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by 2030. In the Close the Gap: Indigenous Health Campaign review (Human Rights Commission, 2021), policymakers examined why Australian governments had not succeeded in closing the health gap, and discussed why they will not succeed by 2030 if the current course continues. Students can conduct statistical analyses using data from this review and draw conclusions by analysing whether targets have been achieved.

The Civics and Citizenship curriculum includes developing understanding of how people, as citizens, choose their governments; how the system safeguards democracy by vesting people with civic rights and responsibilities; how laws and the legal system protect people’s rights; and how individuals and groups can influence civic life. Voting in elections is one way that citizens can engage in the democratic system and participate in Australia’s democracy, but in order for them to engage, numeracy skills are required. By developing these skills, students will be able to connect the mathematics learned at school with real-life situations such as voting that additionally involve problem solving, critical judgment, and making sense of the non-mathematical contexts.

In the explanation of numeracy in the Civics and Citizenship curriculum, ACARA (n.d.-b) states that students synthesise statistics and texts to communicate information and support conclusions about social, economic, and environmental issues. Furthermore, there are opportunities for students to learn to organise, interpret, analyse, and present information in numerical, tabular, and graphical forms about historical and civic events and developments to make meaning of the past and present.

## Lesson Plan: Recognising Indigenous Rights and Closing the Gap for First Nations People in Australia

In this lesson, students have the opportunity to learn about First Nations peoples’ rights and Australia’s obligations to adhere to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). After exploring and developing an understanding of statistics related to First Nations peoples, students interpret statistics about a range of key indicators related to Indigenous disadvantage. Finally, students apply what they have learned through drawing conclusions in a written report.

### Prerequisite/Corequisite Knowledge: Civics and Citizenship

Students need to have and/or develop the ability to:

* Understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and the uniqueness of their cultures
* Know who Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are and appreciate the diversity of their communities
* Understand the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how their rights have been denied
* (First Nations students) See their identities and cultures reflected in the curriculum

### Background Mathematical Skills and Understandings

Teachers of Civics and Citizenship are not expected to teach the mathematical knowledge and skills that students will draw upon when engaging with this activity. The students will have learnt and should be adept with the required mathematical knowledge and skills to complete the activity. According to the Victorian Curriculum: Mathematics, the required mathematical knowledge and skills should have been developed in earlier years of schooling, that is, by the end of Level 8.

For this activity, the background mathematical skills and knowledge are:

* Ability to interpret statistical data in context
* Ability to analyse and evaluate data from secondary sources
* Ability to interpret and compare data displayed in a variety of representations
* Knowledge of percentages, and ability to calculate and interpret percentage increases/decreases
* Knowledge of ratios and ability to interpret ratios
* Knowledge of the relationships between ratios, fractions, decimals, and percentages

## Lesson Description

In this inquiry-focused lesson sequence, students will be introduced to Australia’s obligations to First Nations Peoples according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Students will further build their understanding of the disadvantages that First Nations peoples face. Students will interpret statistical information in order to better understand what progress is being made to improve the situation of First Nations people. In the final activity of the lesson, students will synthesise their ideas in a written report.

### Activity 1: View and Discuss Video

In a short tuning-in activity, the teacher will play “Beyond the myths: learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (1:33), available at <http://www.shareourpride.org.au/sections/beyond-the-myths/index.html>. In this video, information and statistics are provided about First Nations peoples’ rights and the disadvantages that they face.

After playing the video, the teacher will ask students to discuss, as a class, and record what they learned from the statistics about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ rights and disadvantages. The teacher needs to ensure that the following topics are included in the discussion: health, education, life expectancy, and the likelihood of finding employment, finishing school, and being hospitalised or imprisoned.

### Activity 2: Learning about Australia’s Obligations, According to the UNDRIP

In order to learn about Australia’s obligations to improve First Nations peoples’ rights, students will watch a YouTube video in which the aims of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) are explained from the perspectives of Indigenous peoples seeking human rights globally <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LHfIcAUEs8> (5:03).

The students will then, as a class, discuss the following questions and record the responses in their notes:

* What obligations does Australia have, as a signatory to the declaration?
* What rights does the declaration include?
* Why is the declaration significant in Australia and globally?

### Activity 3: What is Included in the UNDRIP?

The teacher and students will discuss Indigenous peoples’ rights, as identified on the Australian Human Rights Commission website: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>. The list of rights is quite extensive, so to assist the discussion, an adapted summary list is provided below. In this discussion, students will be provided with the background knowledge that is necessary for the inquiry that students will undertake subsequently.

Indigenous peoples have the right to:

* All eight human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law.
* Be free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.
* Self-determination: By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
* The rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person, the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples. They shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing their children to another group.
* Control developments affecting them and their lands, to enable them to strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions.
* Recognition that indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contribute to sustainable equitable development and proper managing of the environment.
* Right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs.
* Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State, without discrimination, and education in their own culture and language.
* Right to improvement of their economic and social conditions, including employment, housing, mental and physical health and social security.
* The States will ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection against all forms of violence and discrimination.
* Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive relationship with their traditionally occupied and used lands, waters, seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations.

### Activity 4: Are First Nations Peoples’ Rights Being Achieved?

The teacher will explain that one way to find out if the UNDRIP is being implemented and First Nations peoples’ disadvantages overcome in Australia is to analyse and interpret statistics about percentage improvements in rights over time. In Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2020 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2020), the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is reported across a range of outcome areas. In the report, a strengths-based approach is used to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Further, the authors of the report identify the structural and systemic barriers that need to be addressed if outcomes are to further improve.

The teacher should download the report (<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/2020/report-documents/oid-2020-overview.pdf>), making copies of the key points (p. 1), so that students can read the introductory information and relevant statistics.

The teacher should then divide the class into four groups. Each group will explore their assigned questions:

Group 1: What outcomes have improved? What is the statistical evidence?

Group 2: What outcomes have not improved? What is the statistical evidence?

Group 3: What challenges and barriers are there to improvement?

Group 4: What approaches have been found to improve outcomes?

In a panel discussion, one student from each group will report their answers to these questions and the students will take notes.

### Activity 5: Exploring Further Evidence

The teacher will download the Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2021 (Productivity Commission, 2021) and provide copies of pp. 15–17 for students to explore. Students should individually take note of statistics related to these targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These notes will be used in the report that students will complete in Activity 6.

Target 1 Life expectancy

Target 2 Health birthweight

Target 3 Early childhood education and care enrolment rates

Target 10 Rates of incarceration

Target 11 Rates of youth detention

Target 12 Rates of children in out of home care

Target 14 Rates of suicide

### Activity 6: Drawing Conclusions and Student Reflections

To conclude the activity sequence, the teacher will remind students that the Australian government endorsed the UNDRIP in 2009. Since then, in international forums, the Australian government has committed to take actions to implement the UNDRIP and promote Indigenous people’s enjoyment of rights on an equal basis. The Australian government has not, however:

* taken steps to implement the UNDRIP into law, policy, and practice
* negotiated with Indigenous peoples a National Action Plan to implement the UNDRIP
* audited existing laws, policies, and practice for compliance with the UNDRIP

In this final activity, students will be asked to synthesise what they have learned about the UNDRIP and progress being made to overcome First Nations peoples’ disadvantage by writing a short report in which they answer the following two questions:

* What is the evidence to support the view that overcoming disadvantage for First Nations people in Australia is still unfinished business for the nation?
* What is the evidence to support the view that First Nations communities are achieving improvements through their community-based collaboration and actions?

The teacher can use this task as a summative assessment of students’ learning.

## Table 1: Links to the Victorian Curriculum – Civics and Citizenship

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| Strand and Sub-Strand  (if applicable) | Content Description (Code) | Elaboration(s) |
| Government and Democracy | Explain the Australian government’s roles and responsibilities at a global level, including provision of foreign aid, peacekeeping and the United Nations (VCCCG031) | Investigating Australia’s involvement with the United Nations, for example adherence to conventions and declarations that Australia has ratified |
| Law and Citizens | Explain how Australia’s international legal obligations shape Australian law and government policies, including in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples  (VCCCL032) | Researching the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  Identifying how international conventions and declarations have shaped Australian government policies with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples |
| Citizenship, Diversity and Identity | Analyse contemporary examples and issues relating to Australian democracy and global connections, including key aspects of citizenship in a pluralist society  (VCCC035) | Creating a report, argumentative essay, panel discussion or debate about a contemporary issue |

## Table 2: Links to the 21st Century Numeracy Model (Goos et al., 2014)

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| Aspect of the Model | How This Aspect is Addressed by the Lesson |
| **Attention to Real-Life Contexts**   * Citizenship * Work * Personal and Social Life | In this lesson, students have an opportunity to focus on developing understanding of the real-life issues and disadvantages that First Nations peoples, as citizens in Australia, continue to experience, in spite of the nation being a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). |
| **Application of Mathematical Knowledge**   * Problem Solving * Estimation * Concepts * Skills | Students will be able to draw their own conclusions about disadvantages that First Nations peoples in Australia experience through recognising and using data patterns. Students will interpret statistical data in context, evaluate data about various aspects of disadvantage, and calculate and interpret percentage increases and decreases. |
| **Use of Tools**   * Physical * Representational * Digital | Students will use the data resources and tools, including percentage tables and statistics (which are representational tools), available online in government reports. |
| **Promotion of Positive Dispositions**   * Confidence * Flexibility * Initiative * Risk | Students will gain confidence in reading and using statistics to respond to questions that require they take a risk. The risk is in data interpretation but also to their values and motivations. Non-Indigenous students develop understanding of Australia’s obligations regarding the UNDRIP through the use of statistical data demonstrating disadvantage. Students will develop positive dispositions and empathy for First Nations people as well as for the use of mathematics in their daily lives. |
| **Critical Orientation**   * Interpreting Mathematical Results * Making Evidence-Based Judgements | Through interpreting statistics, students can be informed and participatory citizens who can make evidence-based judgements about First Nations peoples’ disadvantages. They will be able to make critical judgments about which rights are being achieved. |

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