

# The Objectivity of History

## Lesson 3: Listening Task

**Focus:** *How does Indigenous agricultural knowledge — recorded through oral tradition, land practices, and colonial journals — challenge dominant written histories and expand what counts as valid historical evidence?*

Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Analyze how oral knowledge challenges colonial portrayals of history.</b></li><li>● <b>Evaluate how non-traditional forms of evidence (e.g., environmental evidence, settler journals) can be used to reshape dominant historical narratives.</b></li><li>● <b>Reflect on the ethical responsibilities of historians and educators in including marginalized perspectives.</b></li></ul>
Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Introduction (5 mins)</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Guiding Question: <i>"Does privileging written history silence other ways of knowing the past?"</i></li><li>● Brief recap of key concepts:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Historical objectivity: The idea that history can be neutral, fact-based, and free from bias—debated in Lesson 1.</li><li>○ Historical gatekeeping: How dominant groups control which histories are documented and taught—explored in Lesson 2.</li><li>○ Indigenous knowledge systems: Ways of knowing grounded in oral tradition, land stewardship, observation, and community practice.</li></ul></li><li>● Ask students:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ If history depends on written records, whose stories get left out?</li><li>○ Can oral tradition and lived practice be considered “evidence” in the same way as written documents?</li><li>○ What happens when knowledge systems are excluded from official history — intentionally or otherwise?</li></ul></li></ul></li><li><b>2. Listening Task</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Video: <a href="#">Bruce Pascoe: The Truth About Aboriginal Agriculture (approx. 13 mins)</a></li><li>● Students should actively map Bruce’s key arguments, counterarguments, and ethical claims.</li><li>● Key Points to Listen For:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ How does Pascoe challenge the label of “hunter-gatherers” for Aboriginal Australians?</li><li>○ What kinds of evidence does he use — and why is that evidence often overlooked?</li><li>○ How do colonial explorers describe the land use and agriculture they witnessed?</li><li>○ What role does language (e.g., “stooped,” “tilled,” “terraced”) play in reframing Aboriginal history?</li><li>○ Why has this version of history been omitted from mainstream education?</li></ul></li><li>● <b>Note-Taking Framework:</b></li><li>● Main Arguments</li></ul></li></ol>

- What is Pascoe's central claim about Aboriginal agricultural history?
- How does he argue this history has been erased or ignored?
- Supporting examples:
  - Which explorers' journals does he cite?
  - What specific examples of Aboriginal farming and land management are provided?
- Counterarguments:
  - Why were academics or institutions resistant to his findings?
  - How does Pascoe address doubts or opposition about oral or non-Western knowledge?

### 3. Kialo Discussion (30 mins)

- In small groups, students create a new Kialo discussion around the guiding question.
- Alternatively, if students require more structure, clone and share [this ready-made discussion](#), based on the theses below, and use the suggested claims as prompts for students.
- Students should use their analysis to ensure they select the strongest arguments from the listening task.
- They should add these to the Kialo discussion as arguments, counterarguments, examples, and evaluations.
- Encourage students to refer to the concepts of responsibility, perspective, and evidence in their arguments.

Example Claims:

**NAME: Does privileging written history silence other ways of knowing about the past?**

**THESIS: Privileging written history silences other ways of knowing about the past.**

**Starter Claim: Oral or land-based knowledge doesn't fit written formats and is devalued.**

- PRO: Indigenous knowledge, like reading the land, fire-stick farming, and water use, is often dismissed because it's practical and not written down.
  - Example: The video shows Aboriginal communities farming through observation and connection to land, not written instructions.
- CON: Some oral traditions aren't meant to record facts, so they can't always be judged like written history.
  - Example: Critics of Dark Emu say using symbolic stories as historical proof can wrongly apply modern farming ideas to older traditions.

**Starter Claim: Colonial written history deliberately erased Indigenous knowledge.**

- PRO: Settlers used written history to make the land seem empty and uncultivated, silencing oral knowledge of Indigenous farming.
  - Example: Colonial texts left out words like "tilled" and "terraced" to support the myth of terra nullius.
- CON: Some colonial writings did record Indigenous farming but were ignored or misread later.
  - Example: Thomas Mitchell described "nine miles of stooped grain," but these records weren't taken seriously until recently.

**Starter Claim: Written history can be used to amplify oral traditions.**



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PRO: Writing can help spread and protect oral knowledge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Example: Pascoe's Dark Emu shared stories of Indigenous farming that had only existed in oral form, leading to wider awareness and change.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• CON: Writing down oral stories can change or reduce their meaning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Example: In the video, scholars warn that calling Aboriginal people "first farmers" may misrepresent their traditions through Western farming ideas.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Starter Claim: Writing preserves oral knowledge at risk of being lost.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PRO: Writing helps save oral traditions for future generations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Example: When elders pass away, writing down songlines, farming methods, and calendars helps keep this knowledge alive.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• CON: Using writing to preserve oral stories still puts it above other ways of knowing.</li> <li>• Example: The video notes Aboriginal knowledge was ignored until backed by written sources, showing that writing often decides what's seen as real history.</li> </ul>
<b>Reflection</b>	<p>Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What surprised you most about Bruce Pascoe's account of Aboriginal agriculture? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ How does this challenge the hunter-gatherer stereotype?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What historical evidence did Pascoe use, and how did it change the narrative? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Why do you think this evidence was ignored or excluded from mainstream history?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the suppression of Indigenous agricultural knowledge relate to cultural appropriation in fashion and other industries today? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ What patterns of erasure or exploitation are repeated across sectors?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Should the way we define "history" change to include oral traditions and Indigenous sources of knowledge? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Who decides what counts as historical truth?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What responsibilities do educators, governments, and media have in correcting historical omissions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Can reclaiming Indigenous history influence current conversations about land, sustainability, and identity?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kialo Discussion: <a href="#">Does privileging written history silence other ways of knowing about the past?</a></li> <li>• Lesson Slides</li> <li>• Debate video: <a href="#">Bruce Pascoe: The Truth About Aboriginal Agriculture (approx. 13 mins)</a></li> </ul>
<b>TOK Concepts</b>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> Historians and knowledge producers have a duty to represent diverse perspectives and avoid erasing marginalized voices.</p> <p><b>Evidence:</b> What we accept as evidence in history depends on cultural norms, and can include not just written records but oral accounts, artifacts, and lived practice.</p>

	<p><b>Certainty:</b> Our confidence in historical knowledge often depends on the form of the evidence — but is written documentation truly more certain than other sources?</p>
<b>Critical Thinking Concepts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Confronting Biases and Assumptions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying Perspective Bias: Students examine how dominant historical narratives (e.g., “hunter-gatherer” stereotypes) reflect Western assumptions and obscure Indigenous achievements like agriculture and land management.</li> <li>Questioning Objectivity: Students explore whether national histories are ever neutral, especially when built on selective colonial sources.</li> <li>Challenging Authority Bias: Students reflect on how state institutions, textbooks, and academia have ignored or downplayed Indigenous innovation despite credible historical evidence.</li> </ul> </li> <li> <b>Exploring Contexts and Expert Opinions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Power and Cultural Voice: Students analyze how colonial and institutional power shaped which histories were recorded and which were erased — and who benefits from that erasure.</li> <li>Case Study Evaluation: Using Bruce Pascoe’s research, students evaluate explorers’ journals as primary sources and discuss how their accounts have been historically disregarded.</li> <li>Assessing Credibility: Students consider what makes a source “legitimate” and challenge why oral knowledge or Indigenous perspectives are often excluded from formal history.</li> </ul> </li> <li> <b>Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapting Arguments: Students reflect on how new evidence (e.g., explorer journals) may shift their beliefs about Aboriginal Australians and the nature of pre-colonial society.</li> <li>Weighing Contradictory Perspectives: Students compare traditional historical narratives with Pascoe’s revisionist perspective and assess the motivations behind both.</li> <li>Recognising the Role of Context: Students explore how colonial ideology influenced the classification of Aboriginal societies and why the term “hunter-gatherer” persists.</li> </ul> </li> <li> <b>Extrapolation and Reapplication of Principles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applying Concepts to Current Events: Students connect the historical erasure discussed by Pascoe to ongoing issues of cultural appropriation and representation in media, education, and politics.</li> <li>Transferable Skills: Students practice critically evaluating narratives in textbooks, documentaries, and policy statements with attention to power and omission.</li> <li>Ethical Reflection: Students consider the implications of correcting historical records: What do we owe to misrepresented communities? What does “reparation” mean in knowledge systems?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>