



# WHO WRITES HISTORY?

## PANEL

EXTEND THE EXPERIENCE – *CROSSING THE DIVIDE*

### BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Thursday, 19 February 2026 | 11.00am

Duration: 60 minutes

**Briefing for Students pre panel: This briefing document is to provoke thinking for the panel and set up the context. Any questions, please contact [education@qpac.com.au](mailto:education@qpac.com.au).**

## Who Owns History and Who Gets to Tell It?

### Panel Overview

This panel explores how history is written, interpreted, and contested in both fiction and non-fiction. It asks critical questions about power, perspective, truth, and representation, particularly whose stories are prioritised and whose are marginalised.

### Key questions include:

- Who gets to tell history?
- Who decides what is remembered or forgotten?
- How do power, culture, and media shape historical narratives?
- Why does this matter today?
- When is it important to ask permission?
- What responsibilities do fiction writers have?
- What impact has social media and AI had?

## Panel Moderator and Guests

### Moderator:

**Rebecca Levingston** – (ABC Radio)

### Panelists:

**Benjin Maza** – Co-writer, Co-director, Performer (*Crossing the Divide*)

**Vidya Makan** – Performer, Writer, Director (*Lucky Country*)

**Claire Christian** – Author, Playwright, Theatremaker (*Beautiful Mess*)

**David Burton** – Writer, Director (*April's Fool*)

## Curriculum Links

This panel connects to the following learning areas:

### English

- English General Senior Syllabus
- Australian Curriculum v9.0 – AC9E9LY01

### Humanities and Social Sciences

- Australian Curriculum v9.0
- Modern History General Senior Syllabus

## The Arts

- Australian Curriculum v9.0
- Drama General Senior Syllabus

## Student Preparation Tasks

### 1. Read About the Panelists

- Students should be familiar with the backgrounds and creative practices of the panel members. Consider discussing:
  - What kinds of stories they tell
  - Whose voices they centre?
  - How their work engages with history or lived experience?

### 2. Prepare Questions

- The panel will include an interactive Q&A at the end. Students should consider some questions in advance.
- Prompt to begin with:
  - Who can tell whose story?
- Encourage students to think about:
  - Ethics of storytelling
  - Cultural authority and lived experience
  - Collaboration vs appropriation

## Key Ideas to Stimulate Thinking

### 1. History, Power, and Perspective

- Across time, many thinkers have argued that history is shaped by those in power.
- Selected ideas (paraphrased and contextualised for students):
  - History often reflects the viewpoint of the powerful, not necessarily the full truth.
  - Those who win conflicts frequently control how events are remembered.
  - Historical records can be shaped, edited, or erased to support dominant narratives.

A well-known expression of this idea appears in George Orwell's *1984*:

"Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."



## 2. Media, Platforms, and Narrative Control

In the past, books, governments, and institutions shaped history. Today, media platforms, social media, algorithms, and personalities play a major role.

### Key ideas for discussion:

- Who controls what stories circulate widely online?
- How do algorithms influence what we see, remember, or forget?
- How does speed, virality, and emotion affect truth?
- Students may consider how social media can:
  - Amplify some voices while silencing others
  - Reward simplified or sensational versions of history
  - Blur the line between fact, opinion, and performance

## 3. First Nations Perspectives

- First Nations perspectives strongly emphasise self-representation and story sovereignty.

### Core ideas:

- Indigenous stories belong to Indigenous people
- Storytelling is tied to culture, identity, and survival
- Historically, many Indigenous stories were distorted or taken by non-Indigenous writers
- Contemporary Indigenous writers and artists advocate for:
  - Indigenous-led storytelling
  - Collaboration rather than extraction
  - Many voices, not a single "representative" story

## 4. AI and the Future of History

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly shaping how history is recorded, accessed, and remembered.

### Key points for students:

- AI can help preserve archives and uncover patterns
- But it can also reproduce bias or generate misleading narratives
- AI systems prioritise speed, scale, and engagement, not wisdom or ethics

### A growing concern among scholars is that:

- AI should support historians and artists, not replace them
- Human oversight, context, and accountability are essential

### Big question:

If machines help decide what is remembered, who programs the memory?

### In conclusion

History has always been contested. Today, the struggle is no longer just over who tells the story but also how, where, and through what systems it is told.

As you watch the panel, consider:

- What responsibilities come with telling someone else's story?
- Do you own your stories?
- How can artists challenge dominant histories?
- What role do you play, as readers, viewers, and creators, in shaping the stories that last?

### Some key quotes:

**"Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."**

— George Orwell, 1984

*What does this suggest about the relationship between history, power, and truth?*

**"History is always written by the winners."**

— Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*

*Whose perspectives might be missing from the "official" record?*

**"What is history, but a fable agreed upon?"**

— Napoleon Bonaparte (often cited in discussions about historical narrative)

*Who agrees on the "fable," and who is excluded from that agreement?*

**"Stories are not neutral. They either uphold power or challenge it."**

— Arundhati Roy

*What responsibilities do writers and artists carry when telling historical stories?*

### Useful references

[TOP 25 MEDIA CONTROL QUOTES | A-Z Quotes](#)

[50 Best Quotes for Storytelling – The Storyteller Agency](#)