



THE SIMPSON PRIZE



SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 Students

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“Commemoration of the Anzac tradition has widespread support in Australia despite different historical interpretations and debates about the nature and significance of the Anzac legend.”

To what extent does your own research support this view?

‘We can’t see the war for the memorials.’¹ This sentiment is the title of journalists Leah Riches and James Bennett’s article on the delicate interplay between education and commemoration. This concept is especially pertinent within the context of ANZAC Day. It was over a century ago that the ANZACs (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) landed on the shores of Gallipoli, yet the battle that ensued has been of enduring consequence ever since. In these polarising times, ANZAC Day is one of the few things that brings Australians together. The conflict that occurred in Gallipoli has become entrenched in Australian history, culture, and education – it is at the core of the Australian identity.

Within just a decade of the Gallipoli campaign, every state and territory were observing some form of public holiday on ANZAC Day. By the mid-1930s all the traditions we now associate with the day – dawn vigils, marches, memorial services, reunions, two-up games – were firmly established.² Though in many ways its practices have remained the same over the years, ANZAC Day has seen a number of memory cycles throughout Australian history.³

By World War II, the ANZAC myth had gained widespread acceptance to the point where it seemed natural even to those less aware of its reality and significance. In the 1960s and 1970s, free thinking youth criticised the values of ANZAC Day as militaristic, misogynist, and anachronistic; it seemed that the dominance of the ‘ANZAC Legend’ was being eroded. In the 80s and 90s, however, it rebounded as part of a nostalgic ‘memory boom’ that swept across Australia and the world at large.⁴ Yet, by the

¹ Riches, L and Bennett, J. (2016). *We can’t see the war for the memorials: balancing education and commemoration*. [Web page]. Retrieved 17 October from [We can't see the war for the memorials: balancing education and commemoration \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/we-cant-see-the-war-for-the-memorials-balancing-education-and-commemoration-75551)

² *History of Anzac Day – The Anzac Day Tradition*. (2023). [Web page]. Retrieved 16 October from [The Anzac Day Tradition | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://awm.gov.au/anzac-day-tradition)

³ Source 9: Fathi, R. (2021). *Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years - It's time to reinvent Anzac Day*. [Web page]. Retrieved 20 October from [Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years. It's time to reinvent Anzac Day \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/crowds-at-dawn-services-have-plummeted-in-recent-years-it-s-time-to-reinvent-anzac-day-155551)

⁴ Source 7: Extract from historian Joan Beaumont’s *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, 2013, pp. 551 – 554. Retrieved 23 October from [The Simpson Prize 2024 | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://awm.gov.au/broken-nation)

time of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australians were more estranged from ANZAC Day than ever, with many dawn services across the nation being cancelled entirely.⁵

Reflecting upon these generational cycles allows for a nuanced appreciation of ANZAC Day. However, these diverging viewpoints also fuel intergenerational disputes over its exact significance. As Romain Fathi expressed it: ‘the meaning of ANZAC Day is increasingly contested space as a result of generational change and evolving values.’⁶

In recent times ANZAC Day has been the site of lively debate in Australia’s social and political landscapes as society has developed new attitudes towards commemoration. Whilst the portrayal of the ‘ANZAC Legend’ was right for the time, over the past century Australian culture has evolved. Commemoration, which is first and foremost for veterans, is now being re-evaluated in the wake of the last ANZAC’s death. This shift in collective sentiment suggests that for ANZAC Day to remain relevant, emphasis should also be modified.

Making the right changes in the right way will be a delicate endeavour. ANZAC Day holds deep cultural and historical significance in Australia, helping to honour the bravery and sacrifice of those who served in war, but also to bind us as a nation. As referenced in Last Post Ceremony, Official War Correspondent C.E.W. Bean⁷ describes the national pride that emboldened the ANZACs during battle, allowing them to persevere through the spectre of an untimely death:

‘Many a man lying out there at Pozieres or in the low scrub at Gallipoli,
with his poor tired senses barely working through the fever of his brain,
has thought in his last moments:

“Well – well – it’s over; but in Australia they will be proud of this.”’⁸

Whilst some might critique their reasons in distant hindsight, the ANZACs believed they fought for those back home, for their nation, and for what was right. Qualities that have now become recognised

⁵ Source 9: Fathi, R. (2021). *Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years - It’s time to reinvent Anzac Day*. [Web page]. Retrieved 20 October from [Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years. It's time to reinvent Anzac Day \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/crowds-at-dawn-services-have-plummeted-in-recent-years-it-s-time-to-reinvent-anzac-day-178484)

⁶ ‘Source 9: Fathi, R. (2021). *Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years - It’s time to reinvent Anzac Day*. [Web page]. Retrieved 20 October from [Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years. It's time to reinvent Anzac Day \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/crowds-at-dawn-services-have-plummeted-in-recent-years-it-s-time-to-reinvent-anzac-day-178484)

⁷ C.E.W. Bean- also referred to as Charles Bean- was an Australian Historian and Official War Correspondent during the Gallipoli Campaign, according to The Australian War Memorial Webpage at [Captain Charles Edwin Woodrow \(C E W\) Bean | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://www.awm.gov.au/people/captain-charles-edwin-woodrow-bean/)

⁸ Source 4: Extract from the Australian War Memorial’s Last Post ceremony, the words of C.E.W. Bean. Retrieved 23 October from [The Simpson Prize 2024 | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://www.awm.gov.au/last-post-ceremony/)

as national characteristics inherent to Australia, as French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe conveyed, were forged in "...a far away, foreign country which they defended inch by inch."⁹

The nature of this conflict shaped Australia's collective values for years to come. As former Prime Minister Julia Gillard proclaimed in her 2012 speech at ANZAC Cove: "this is a place hallowed by sacrifice and loss."¹⁰ The troops faced extreme hardship in the form of disease, isolation, trench warfare and fierce opposition in unfamiliar territory.¹¹ Nevertheless, the soldiers persevered, exhibiting remarkable courage, ingenuity and resilience in the face of adversity, from which the defining traits of mateship and good humour were established as motivational forces.¹² These displays of gallantry and valour serve as a reminder of the power that sacrifice has to inspire subsequent generations and encourage international relations. Hence, as Gillard went on to affirm, "it is, too, a place shining with honour – and honour of the most vivid kind."¹³

C.E.W. Bean remonstrated that before the events of Gallipoli, "Australia had never seen the one trial that all humanity still recognises - the test of a great war."¹⁴ Just as the First World War brought Australians together in order to defeat a common albeit abstract adversary, commemorating ANZAC Day has ever since brought people together, building a sense of community and shared identity across the nation. Defence personnel Catherine Wallis voiced: "we each have different connections, different stories, different reasons that bring us all together in the dark to wait for the Dawn."¹⁵ The familiar symbolism, shared traditions, and opportunity for reflection are just some aspects of ANZAC Day that have continued to draw attendees over the generations. Ultimately the understanding and recognition of such a consequential event is a crucial yet convoluted venture, and sometimes, as journalist Clive

⁹ *'The earth is his only friend': French prime minister's Anzac speech.* (2018). [Web page]. Retrieved 20 October from ['The earth is his only friend': French prime minister's Anzac speech – in full | Édouard Philippe | The Guardian](#)

¹⁰ *Prime Minister Julia Gillard's speech delivered at Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, Turkey.* (2012). [Video]. Retrieved 10 October from [Julia Gillard: 'So this is a place hallowed by sacrifice and loss', Anzac Day - 2012 — Speakola](#)

¹¹ 16,000 Australians and New Zealanders according to Australian Government – Department of Veteran's Affairs at <https://www.dva.gov.au/newsroom/media-centre/media-backgrounders/overview-australias-involvement-first-world-war#:~:text=Gallipoli,now%20known%20as%20Anzac%20Cove>

¹² *Quintessential values at the heart of the ANZAC spirit.* (2022). [Web page]. Retrieved October 15 from [Quintessential values at the heart of the ANZAC spirit \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

¹³ Prime Minister Julia Gillard's speech *'So this is a place hallowed by sacrifice and loss'* delivered at Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, Turkey. (2012). [Video]. Retrieved 10 October from [Julia Gillard: 'So this is a place hallowed by sacrifice and loss', Anzac Day - 2012 — Speakola](#)

¹⁴ Dunbabin, T. (1942). *When the First A.I.F. Won through to Victory, and Frustration* [Review of *The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied Offensive*, *The Australian Quarterly*, 14(4), 97–101. [Review: When the First A.I.F. Won through to Victory, and Frustration on JSTOR](#)

¹⁵ Catherine Wallis's speech *'We are young and old. We are men and women'* delivered at the Anzac Day Dawn Service RAAF Base, Wagga, NSW, Australia. (2018). [Web page]. Retrieved 10 October from [Catherine Wallis: 'We are young and old. We are women and men', Anzac Day Dawn Service, Wagga - 2018 — Speakola](#)

James¹⁶ put it “the only eloquence that fits is silence.”¹⁷ Conceivably, it is in silence that people truly allow themselves to hear the echoes of a multifaceted history.

As historian Henry Reynolds discussed in his book ‘What’s Wrong with Anzac’, ‘the landing on the Peninsula has been portrayed by commentators across the political spectrum as representing the place and time when Australia became a nation.’¹⁸ Perhaps the true moment Australia became a nation was not a moment at all but rather an intricate web of diverse contributions. Critics suggest that the emphasis on ANZAC soldiers can overshadow the more numerous and constructive peacetime contributions of civilians, excluding other equally important narratives. Whilst the ANZACs were a vital thread in this operation, to define the entire World War I experience by it could denote that, as Reynolds continues ‘...fighting is more important to the life of nations than farming or legislating, labouring, teaching, nurturing children or any other of the innumerable, unspectacular activities of civil society.’¹⁹

The point could be made that ANZAC Day may perpetuate a simplified or idealised version of Australia’s involvement in war, neglecting the complexities and negative aspects of conflict. The key line in the ANZAC commemorative process is ‘Lest We Forget’. As former United Kingdom Prime Minister Winston Churchill wryly stated, “those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”²⁰ Hence, the moment Australian society forgets its military history is the moment they effectively allow it to happen again. However, this begs the question of what exactly is being remembered.

“The memory is fading, even as the myth grows,”²¹ expounded Clive James. The way in which memorial practices hail back to a legend rather than a historical truth is what underpins so much of what Australia has worked towards in terms of commemoration. Reynolds extrapolated “in transforming ANZAC Day into a sacred myth, we have forgotten our rich and diverse history of nation-making and distorted the history of Gallipoli and its imperial context and consequence.”²² ANZAC Day is a vital thread in the fabric of Australian identity, but as our nation grows, so must our understanding of our

¹⁶ James Clive was a well-known Australian broadcaster, poet and television critic, who spoke at the Battersea ANZAC plaque commemoration in 1988. According to The Guardian at [Clive James, writer, broadcaster and TV critic, dies aged 80 | Clive James | The Guardian](#)

¹⁷ Clive James’s speech ‘*This was a harvest of our tallest poppies*’, delivered at the Battersea ANZAC plaque commemoration, London. (1988). [Web page]. Retrieved 10 October from [Clive James: 'This was a harvest of our tallest poppies', Battersea ANZAC plaque commemoration - 1988 — Speakola](#)

¹⁸ Reynolds, H and Lake, M. *What’s wrong with ANZAC?* (2010). p 25

¹⁹ Reynolds, H and Lake, M. *What’s wrong with ANZAC?* (2010). p 26

²⁰ Winston Churchill was an indomitable British statesman and wartime leader during the Second World War, according to Britannica at [Winston Churchill | Biography, World War II, Quotes, Books, & Facts | Britannica](#)

²¹ Clive James’s speech ‘*This was a harvest of our tallest poppies*’, delivered at the Battersea ANZAC plaque commemoration, London. (1988). [Web page]. Retrieved 10 October from [Clive James: 'This was a harvest of our tallest poppies', Battersea ANZAC plaque commemoration - 1988 — Speakola](#)

²² Reynolds, H and Lake, M. *What’s wrong with ANZAC?* (2010). p vii

history. James continues, “war is not glorious. They knew that. They fought the wars anyway, and that was their glory.”²³

Ted Baillieu, former Australian politician, suggested “if we are to pass the torch to future generations we have to ensure those generations can pick up these threads of connection for themselves.”²⁴ In order for this to transpire, diverse perspectives must be explored, despite them being outside the traditional militaristic framework of heroism and mateship.²⁵ Developing school curriculums, museum exhibits, memorials and digital archives, so as to encompass the efforts of the Homefront²⁶, Indigenous Australian troops²⁷ and medical personnel²⁸ as well as the ANZACs would ensure that ANZAC Day and World War I as a whole are appreciated for their intricacy of involvements. Furthermore, acknowledging nearly 150 years²⁹ of Frontier conflicts that occurred here in Australia, in the same way as ANZAC Day, would go a long way in reconciling a complicated and overlooked history. It is just as important if not more so for a nation to acknowledge and remember its faults as well as its more progressive chapters.

If truth really is the first casualty in war, then the memorials for that war must stand for a nuanced truth. The realities of conflict have been blurred and distorted and it would be an injustice to those who served

²³ Clive James’s speech *'This was a harvest of our tallest poppies'*, delivered at the Battersea ANZAC plaque commemoration, London. (1988). [Web page]. Retrieved 10 October from [Clive James: 'This was a harvest of our tallest poppies', Battersea ANZAC plaque commemoration - 1988 — Speakola](#)

²⁴ Ted Baillieu’s speech *'Imagine a blood red thread drawn from the poppies outside'*, Delivered at the Pharmacy College Commemoration, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia (2019). [Web page]. Retrieved 10 October from [Ted Baillieu: 'Imagine a blood red thread drawn from the poppies outside', Pharmacy College Commemoration - 2019 — Speakola](#)

²⁵ Riches, L and Bennett, J. (2016). *We can’t see the war for the memorials: balancing education and commemoration*. [Web page]. Retrieved 17 October from [We can't see the war for the memorials: balancing education and commemoration \(theconversation.com\)](#)

²⁶ The ‘Homefront’ encompasses all those who remained in Australia during the war- mainly women and children or men who were unable or refused to fight. They enabled the industrial and agricultural production in Australia to remain operating, and many bought war bonds in order to fund the campaigns such as Gallipoli. According to Zuber, L. of University of North Carolina Press at [WWI: Support from the home front | NCpedia](#)

²⁷ An estimated 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people served with the Australian Imperial Force in World War I, according to National Archives of Australia at [World War I: Indigenous Anzacs | naa.gov.au](#)

²⁸ Newly devised weapons caused complex wounds that needed new surgical techniques. The medical developments that occurred throughout WW1, such as blood transfusions, facial reconstructive surgery and amputations are still used today. According to British Library at <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/medical-developments-in-world-war-one>

²⁹ The Frontier Wars refer to all the massacres, wars and instances of resistances beginning from the arrival of colonists in 1788. Officially the Wars are said to have ended as late as 1934 however many acts of violence and oppression against our community continue today, as does our resilience. According to Deadly Story at [Frontier wars - Deadly Story](#)

both in Gallipoli and back in Australia to not paint the whole picture and set the image right. In order to profoundly commemorate, Australia must recognise these indispensable aspects of Australian history and appreciate the range of perspectives that are The First World War.

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