

VCE Day



Tony Birch



Maxine Beneba Clarke



Alice Pung

At VCE Day, renowned local authors whose texts are frequently studied in VCE will inspire students to connect meaningfully with literature, storytelling, and their own creative potential.

Subject areas:

- English and English as an Additional Language
- Literature

English and English as an Additional Language Areas of Study:

- Reading and Exploring Texts (Unit 1, Area of Study 1 and Unit 2, Area of Study 1)
- Crafting Texts (Unit 1, Area of Study 2)
- Reading and Responding to Texts (Unit 3, Area of Study 1 and Unit 4, Area of Study 1)
- Creating Texts (Unit 3, Area of Study 2)

Literature Areas of Study:

- Reading Practices (Unit 1, Area of Study 1)
- Exploration of Literary Movements and Genres (Unit 1, Area of Study 2)
- Voices of Country (Unit 2, Area of Study 1)
- The Text in its Context (Unit 2, Area of Study 2)
- Developing Interpretations (Unit 3, Area of Study 2)
- Creative Responses to Texts (Unit 4, Area of Study 1)
- Close Analysis of Texts (Unit 4, Area of Study 2)

Session 1: Tony Birch: The Ethical Imagination

With a particular focus on First Nations texts, this interactive presentation by beloved Australian author, poet and activist Tony Birch (*The White Girl, Ghost River*) will explore how lived experience and cultural background shape textual meaning. Fostering deeper engagement, students will develop a curious and critical approach to reading and interpreting texts by authors whose perspectives differ from their own.

Education Resources for Session 1

1. Think-Pair-Share

- What does the phrase “ethical imagination” suggest to you?
- When you read a text from a culture different to your own, what responsibilities do you have as a reader?
- Can a text be “misread”? Who decides?

Encourage students to distinguish opinion vs informed interpretation, prompting them to support their views with evidence and ideas raised in the session, and to recognise when assumptions or personal biases may be shaping their response.

This activity supports students to develop ethical, evidence-based interpretations by distinguishing between personal opinion and informed reading. It directly aligns with **VCE English/EAL Units 1-4: Reading and Exploring/ Responding to Texts** and **VCE Literature Unit 1 Area of Study 1 (Reading Practices)** by foregrounding inferential reading, reader positioning, and awareness of how values and assumptions shape interpretation

2. Guided Class Discussion

- What key ideas did Tony Birch present about reading across difference?
- How does cultural background shape meaning in a text?
- Did the talk change the way you think about First Nations writing? How?
- What role does listening play in ethical reading?
- Where might well-intentioned readers still go wrong?
- How can curiosity coexist with respect for cultural boundaries?

Through collaborative discussion and active listening, students practise articulating and refining interpretations while engaging respectfully with differing viewpoints. This aligns with **VCE Literature Units 1-2 Reading Practices** and **Voices of Country**, and **VCE English/EAL** emphasis on discussion as a tool for meaning-making, particularly the examination of how context and cultural knowledge shape understanding

3. Reflective Writing Task

How will Tony Birch’s ideas change the way you approach unfamiliar or culturally distinct texts in your studies?

Ask students to:

- refer to specific moments during the session;
- use metalanguage (context, representation, perspective, positioning);
- and reflect on one concrete change they will make to their reading practices when encountering an unfamiliar or culturally distinct text.

This task develops students’ ability to produce reflective and analytical responses using appropriate metalanguage and textual evidence. It supports **VCE English/EAL Units 1-2** analytical and reflective writing outcomes, and **VCE Literature Unit 3 Area of Study 2 (Developing Interpretations)** by asking students to reconsider their reading practices in light of new ideas and perspectives.

Session 2: Reading and Writing Poetry with Maxine Beneba Clarke

Acclaimed poet, fiction writer and memoirist Maxine Beneba Clarke (*The Hate Race, Foreign Soil, How Decent Folk Behave, Carrying the World*) shares her approach to crafting poems, and offers tips for how students can interpret, analyse and engage with poetry on the curriculum, and cultivate a strong poetic voice of their own.

Session 3: Reading and Writing Fiction and Non-Fiction with Alice Pung

In this presentation, award-winning memoirist and novelist Alice Pung (*Unpolished Gem, Laurinda, One Hundred Days*) will discuss her creative career writing prose stories – both fictional and drawn from her own life. She’ll guide students in how to engage with fiction and nonfiction texts on the curriculum and share inspiration to generate their own ideas and get them onto the page.

Session 4: Ask Me Anything with Maxine Beneba Clarke and Alice Pung

VCE Day concludes with a no-holds-barred Ask Me Anything session bringing together the afternoon’s keynote speakers, Maxine Beneba Clarke and Alice Pung. Students will have the rare opportunity to speak directly with Maxine and Alice, asking their burning questions about their books, their respective processes and their extraordinary creative careers.

Education Resources for Sessions 2-4

1. Guided Class Discussion

- What similarities and differences did you notice between Alice Pung’s and Maxine Beneba Clarke’s writing processes?
- How did each writer describe finding their voice?
- What role do lived experience and imagination play in their work?
- How does form (poetry/prose/memoir) shape impact on readers?
- What advice, if any, did either author give about: revision, discipline, risk-taking, self-doubt.

This discussion develops students’ understanding of how voice, craft, form and process interact to shape meaning and reader impact. It aligns with **VCE Literature Units 1-2 Reading Practices** and **Exploration of Literary Movements and Genres**, and **VCE English/EAL** analysis of authorial choices, particularly the relationship between lived experience, imagination and form.

2. Ask Me Anything Follow-up

Students should devise and answer questions they wish they had asked, or didn’t get a chance to, such as:

- How do you know when a piece is finished?
- What do you do when the writing feels flat?
- Who are you writing “for”?

Then ask them to make some assumptions about what the answers may have been.

By generating and responding to their own questions, students consolidate key ideas from the session while practising oral expression and reflective thinking. This aligns with **VCE English/EAL** speaking and listening outcomes and **VCE Literature** emphasis on discussion as a means of refining interpretations, reinforcing metacognition about writing processes and creative challenges

3. Assessment-style Prompts for SAC Prep

- “Discuss how authentic voice is constructed through craft choices.”
- “How do writers transform lived experience into art?”
- “Analyse how either Alice Pung or Maxine Beneba Clarke uses form and language to create impact for readers.”

These prompts explicitly rehearse the analytical demands of SAC and exam writing, asking students to connect craft choices, form and language to meaning and impact. They align closely with **VCE English/EAL** analytical writing and language analysis skills, as well as **VCE Literature Units 3-4** focus on interpretation and authorial intent, positioning storytelling itself as a persuasive and meaning-making act.