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Statue Wars

Paul Ashton

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Protest

Sydney, Friday 12 June 2020, 6pm

It was cold and raining lightly. A crowd of over 300 people had gathered around Sydney Town Hall. Most of them were wearing face masks. It was surrounded by some of the 600 police on special duty in the city. They were standing in front of a temporary orange and yellow plastic road barrier. All of them had face masks on.

The crowd was displaying placards. Written on these were catchphrases such as:

Aboriginal Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter
We Live on Stolen Land
No More Black Deaths in Police Custody
434 deaths since 1991 Royal Commission into
Indigenous deaths in custody

One large placard read:

David Dungay Hill Jr
26-year-old Dunghutti man
Killed in Long Bay Jail
29 December 2015
Lest We Forget

Wide banners displayed the names of some of the organisations involved:

Indigenous Social Justice Association
Autonomous Collective Against Racism
Anticolonial Asian Alliance

One of the organisers raised a megaphone to her mouth. ‘Attention everyone... please.’ The protestors quietened down.

‘The police have informed us that this demonstration is illegal.’

The protestors got a little agitated.

'Hang on,' said the organiser. 'They're actually right. We didn't lodge an application to hold it. But it's not illegal to walk around Hyde Park. So let's all go there. And don't forget to social distance at least 1.5 metres apart. You can be arrested under the COVID-19 regulations for getting too close to other people.'

Jaya and Asha were sisters. Jaya, the older one, was doing cultural studies and history at university. Asha was studying law and politics. They were standing with the other protestors in the drizzle.

'Should we go to the park?' asked Asha.

'Why not,' said Jaya. 'As long as we don't break any laws the police can't arrest us.'

'But what if something goes wrong?'

'Don't worry Ashie. Aunty Pauline gave me fifty bucks. She said if things go bad we should jump in the first cab we see and go home.'

Hyde park was two blocks east of the town hall. The crowd started moving towards it.

'Let's go to Hyde Park south', said Jaya. 'And see what happening around the Cook statue.'

The larger-than-life statue of Captain James Cook stands on a huge granite pedestal. He holds out a telescope in his left hand. His right arm is extended upward. He gazes over to the harbour.

In the mid 1860s some rich Sydney society people decided that the city needed a statue of Cook. When they found out that Queen Victoria's second eldest son – Prince Albert – was coming to Australia they got very excited. This was the first royal visit to the colonies. Perhaps the prince could unveil the statue?

But there was a problem. No one in Australia could make the bronze sculpture. So it had to be cast overseas and shipped to Sydney. But there wasn't enough time.

The Sydney society people had an idea. They could commission a foundation stone for the statue. And the prince could unveil that. Brilliant!

Prince Alfred unveiled the foundation stone on 27 February 1868 in front of a huge crowd. Two weeks later he was shot in the back at Clontarf by an angry Irish Catholic, Henry O'Farrell. The prince didn't die. He sailed home on 4 April 1868. Henry O'Farrell was hanged in Darlinghurst jail 17 days later.

Another problem arose. A committee was formed to raise money for the statue from the citizens of Sydney. It put adds in the papers asking for contributions. But hardly anyone gave money.

The committee got annoyed. It had nowhere near enough money to commission a statue. So it decided to get someone to make a huge granite pedestal out of polished granite from Moruya. They could engrave things on it like:

Discovered this Territory, 1770

Born at Marton in Yorkshire, 1728

Killed at Owyhee [Hawai'i], 1779

But they didn't even have enough money to do that. So the centenary of Cook's 'discovery' of eastern Australia came and went – statueless.

Eventually the Colonial Secretary Sir Henry Parkes – who later became premier – got fed up. He wrote to the English sculptor Thomas Woolner and commissioned him to send a design for the statue.

The statue was unveiled on 25 February 1879. Twelve thousand people marched in a procession from the Domain to the Town Hall and then to Hyde Park. Sixty thousand people watched the event from the footpaths along the way.

The Cook Statue

Asha and Jaya walked down Park Street in a stream of protestors. Police were everywhere. They crossed Castlereagh Street, then walked along Elizabeth Street to traffic lights halfway down the block, then over a zebra crossing to some stairs. They climbed them into Hyde Park South.

They stopped at the top of the stairs.

‘Oh my God!’ said Jaya with surprise.

Around 100 protestors were scattered across Hyde Park South. But there were just about as many masked police. A dozen of them formed a ring around the Cook Statue.

‘I’m not surprised,’ said Asha. ‘Statues like this have been trashed everywhere. Like the one of Edward Colston – the slave trader. His statue got pushed into Bristol Harbour last week.’

‘Yeah. I saw footage of that on a BBC broadcast. And there’ll be tonnes of other statues targeted here.’

‘Yep. That’s why they’re here. Though we couldn’t get Cookie into the harbour. He’s too big and it’s too far away.’

‘True. But someone might spray paint him.’

‘Wouldn’t be surprised. But not while all those cops are there.’

‘Let’s have a wander around the park,’ said Jaya. ‘But don’t forget to keep apart. Those police don’t look to happy.’

After walking for a few minutes they came across a young woman having an argument with a policeman.

‘That’s Rachael,’ Asha whispered to Jaya.

The policeman was angry. ‘Listen,’ he said glaring. ‘It was made clear during the week that this protest is unauthorised. You shouldn’t be here. And I’ve directed you to move on.’

‘I don’t care,’ Rachael replied. ‘Someone has to make a stand about Black deaths in custody.’

‘I know you don’t care. But what you also don’t care about is other people’s health.’

‘What?’ snapped Rachael.

‘You’re breaching a public health order about not meeting in big numbers. The pandemic’s still a serious risk. And you’re endangering the lives of members of the public – not to mention police officers. And now you’re refusing to follow my instructions. Do you want to be arrested?’

‘No!’

‘Are you going to move on and go home?’

‘No!’

‘Well that’s too bad.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I need to inform you that you are under arrest for failing to comply with a move on direction. You’ll be taken to Central Police Station, charged for breaching a public health order and issued with a penalty.’

‘Do I have to go to jail?’

‘No. After the notice has been issued you’ll be free to go. But you’ll have to appear in court later over the matter. Okay. Come with me.’

The officer lead Rachael away.

‘Bloody hell,’ said Asha. ‘I’ve never seen anyone arrested before – except in movies or on TV.’

‘Me either,’ said Jaya.

‘What should we do?’

‘Well we’ve been here a couple of hours. And the weather’s not too good.’

‘Maybe we should use Auntie Pauline’s money and get a uber home?’

‘I think you’re right, Ashie,’ replied Jaya. ‘The last thing an undergraduate law student needs is a criminal record.’

Very early the following morning two other young women caught the train from Panania to Museum Station – under Hyde Park South. They crept into the park and made their way silently to the Cook Statue. They were carrying a grey backpack.

The protestors and police had been long gone. And it was still drizzling.

‘There’s the statue,’ said one of them. ‘Be quick. I saw a police car driving along College Street a moment ago.’

The other young woman unzipped the backpack and pulled out two cans of black spray paint. ‘Here,’ she whispered, shaking one can and passing it to her friend. ‘You know what to do.’

Over some of the inscriptions on the pedestal they sprayed:

Change the Date
No Pride in Genocide

To Spray or Not to Spray

Asha and Jaya were having breakfast in the kitchen of their little flat in Erskinville.

‘Anything interesting in the paper?’ asked Jaya.

Asha passed the newspaper to her. ‘There’s a front-page story about the protest. And a picture of the police surrounding the Cook Statue.’

Jaya scanned the article. ‘Hey. It says that two women – aged 27 and 28 – were arrested near the park early this morning. The statue had been graffitied. And they were caught with a bag containing two spray cans of black paint.’

‘What did they spray on the statue?’

‘It doesn’t say.’ She read out part of the article. ‘Council workers moved quickly this morning to clean the statue, according to a City of Sydney spokesperson.’ She kept reading.

We are not aware of any other statues having been vandalised. The women have been refused bail and will appear at Bankstown Local Court today... Police said they would continue “proactive patrols” in the Hyde Park area. Historical statues all over the world have been defaced, damaged or pulled down by protestors or removed or boarded up by authorities for protection. This followed the death of African American man George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25 May. Protests have been held globally against racism and police brutality.

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said “Let’s not forget that those who are disrespecting these statues or monuments are a very small number of people and I think the vast majority would be very upset at what’s occurred.”

‘I don’t think that’s right,’ said Asha.

‘Neither do I,’ Jaya replied. ‘This article even said that this is happening all over the world.’

‘And it’s happening all over Australia,’ said Asha. ‘Someone put red paint on the hands of a statue of Robert Towns in Townsville. It was on the news. He was involved in the slave trade. His ships brought people from Pacific Islands to work on plantations in Queensland.’

‘Wasn’t he one of the founders of Townsville?’

‘I think so.’

‘I’ll google him.’

Asha picked up her phone. ‘Um. Let’s see. Robert Towns. Here it is. It says that he *claimed* that he was not involved in kidnapping Islanders or forcing them to work on plantations. But people working for him were.’

‘That’s ridiculous.’

‘I know.’

‘So what bad things did Cook do?’

‘Let’s look on your laptop.’

Jaya got her computer from her bedroom. ‘There’s an entry on him in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.’

She ran her eyes quickly over it. ‘It really doesn’t say anything bad about him. Apart from opening up the way for the British colonisation of Australia.’

‘Does it say anything about what he did while he was here?’

‘Not really. Just that he reached the east coast in April 1770 and sailed up it. But it does say

He was... severe on uncompliant natives whom he met on his voyages, and his readiness to use force contributed to his untimely death.

‘How did he die?’ asked Asha.

‘It doesn’t say. I’ll check Wikipedia.’

‘Ah,’ she said moments later, ‘he was killed on 14 February 1779 at Kealakekua [Karakakooa] Bay in Hawai’i after he tried to kidnap the island’s king to get back a boat that had been taken by ‘natives’ from one of his ships. And it mentions that he wrote detailed daily entries in his journal.’

‘Can you find it online?’

‘Let’s see.’ She typed in James Cook’s journal. ‘Here it is.’

Asha moved her chair next to Jaya’s. ‘Cool. It’s a web edition of Cook’s Endeavour journal. His ship was called the Endeavour. Find the entries for April.’

Jaya started skimming through the daily entries for April. She was a fast reader. ‘Sailing west from New Zealand. No land sighted. Gentle breezes. Swells. More breezes. Still sailing west.’

She got to 19 April. ‘Land ho, Asha!’ She read from the entry.

The Southermost Point of land we had in sight which bore from us W1/4S I judged to lay in the Latitude of 38°.0’ South and in the Longitude of 211°.07’ West from the Meridion of Greenwich. I have named it Point Hicks, because Leui’ Hicks was the first who discover’d this land –

‘There’s that word,’ said Asha. ‘Discovered.’

‘Yeah. Funny that Cook writes about seeing smoke rising from lots of places along a beach. They would have been lit by Aborigines to cook fish.’

‘Where did they first land?’

Jaya kept scrolling through the journal. ‘Here it is, Asha,’ she said reading out part of the entry.

Saturday 28 April in the PM

Being now not above two Miles from the Shore Mr Banks, Dr Solander, Tupia and myself put off in the yawl [boat] and pull'd in for the land to a place where we saw four or five of the natives who took to the woods as we approached the Shore which disappointed us...

'Does it say where?'

'Not on this page.' Jaya scrolled to the next entry. 'But I'm pretty sure it was Botany Bay. Listen to this.'

Sunday 29 April in the PM

Saw as we came in on both points of the bay Several of the natives and a few hutts, men, women and children on the south shore abreast of the Ship to which place I went in the boats in hopes of speaking with them accompanied by Mr Banks Dr Solander and Tupia – as we approached the shore they all made off except two Men who seem'd resolved to oppose our landing... we then threw them some nails, beads etc a shore which they took up and seem'd not ill pleased in so much that I thout that they beckon'd to us to come ashore but in this we were mistaken for as soon as we put the boat in they again came to oppose us upon which I fired a musket between the two which had no other effect than to make them retire back where bundles of their darts [spears] lay and one of them took up a stone and threw at us which caused my firing a second Musquet load with small shot and altho' some of the shot struck the man yet it had no other effect than to make him lay hold of a shield to defend himself...

'He *was* quick to use force,' said Asha.

'Yeah. And he certainly knew they weren't welcome. Look at this bit.'

Monday 30 April

... in the afternoon 16 or 18 of them came boldly up to within 100 yards of our people at the watering place and there made a stand – Mr Hicks who was the officer ashore did all in his power to entice them to him by offering them presents... but it was to no purpose all they seem'd to want was for us to be gone – after staying a short time they went away they were all arm'd with darts and wooden swords, the darts have each four prongs and pointed with fish bones and those we have seen seem to be intend more for striking fish than offensive weapons...

Jaya moved on to the next page. 'Do you want to know how Sutherland Shire got its name?'

'How?'

'Listen to this.'

Tuesday 1 May

Last night Torby Sutherland seaman departed this life and in the morning his body was buried ashore at the watering place which occasioned my calling the south point of this Bay after his name. This morning a party of us went aShore to some hutts not far from the watering place where some of the natives are daily seen, here we left several articles such as Cloth, Looking glasses, Combs, Beeds, Nails & etc...

'So it is Botany Bay,' said Asha.

'Definitely. But it must have been renamed that. Listen to this.'

Sunday 6 May

In the evening the yawl [boat] return'd from fishing having caught two Sting rays weighing near 600 pounds [272 kilos]. The great quantity of this sort of fish found in this place occasioned my giving it the name of Sting-Ray Harbour...

Asha typed something into her phone.

'What are you looking for Asha?'

'Remember that rhyme we used to say in primary school?'

'Which one?'

'Captain Cook chased a chook.'

'Vaguely.'

'I just found it.' She read from her phone.

Captain Cook chased a chook
All around Australia
When he got back he got a smack
For being a naughty sailor

'Well a lot of Indigenous people would've liked to have smacked him,' said Jaya.

Statue Tour

'Are you doing anything this afternoon?' asked Asha as she washed the breakfast dishes.

'Nothing much,' replied Jaya. 'Got any plans?'

'There's a tour of city statues at three o'clock advertised in the paper. Do you want to go?'

'Okay.'

'Are you sure? It looks like it might rain.'

'A bit of rain won't hurt us. We'll can take our storm sticks.'

'What's a storm stick?'

'Our brollies.'

'Oh. Very funny. I'll book a couple of tickets online.'

Asha and Jaya caught a bus to Central Station and walked to the Town Hall. The tour guide was waiting at the bottom of the front stairs. Her name tag read 'Vij'. She was carrying a red umbrella.

'Hi there,' said the guide. 'I'm Vij. And you guys must be Asha and Jaya.'

'How did you know?' asked Asha.

'You're the only ones taking the tour today. All the others cancelled due to the weather.'

'That's great for us,' said Jaya. 'It'll be like a private tour.'

'Sure will,' said the tour guide. 'Well, we might as well get started. We don't have to wait for anyone.'

'What's up first?' asked Asha.

The guide pointed across the road. 'Queen Victoria's statue.'

The guide pushed the walk button on the traffic light. While they waited she pointed out a small bust of a man on a sandstone plinth on the edge of the footpath. 'He's not on the tour but that's Llyod Rees. He was a famous artist. And he loved Sydney.'

'I've heard of him Vij,' said Jaya.

'Me too,' said Asha.

'Most people haven't,' said the guide. 'And it's amazing how many people walk past the sculpture without noticing it. For some people it's sort of invisible.'

The lights changed. They walked across Druitt Street to the large bronze statue of Queen Victoria.

'Okay,' Vij began. 'You need to know something about the building behind it to understand this sculpture. It opened in 1898 to commemorate the Queen's diamond jubilee and was know as the Queen Victoria Market Buildings. It was a produce market. You could buy fruit and vegies, flowers, chooks and rabbits – all sorts of produce. Over the years it got run down and in the 1980s a developer – Ipoh Gardens – restored it. But they wanted to put an old statue of the Queen in the square in front of the building... How am I going girls?'

'Great,' they said.

'Good. The hunt for a suitable statue began in 1983. The guy in charge was Neil Glasser. He travelled through India, Pakistan, South Yemen and Turkey looking for a statue. He found a few good ones. But nobody wanted to part with them. Finally he found one dumped in a farmhouse in Ireland. It had been removed from the front of the Irish Parliament in Dublin after the granting of Irish Independence from the British.'

'Fascinating,' said Jaya. 'The Irish connection is really interesting.'

'Our family name is Keaney,' said Asha. 'It's Irish.'

'Yes, I noticed,' said the guide. 'There are lots of layers to these statues. You have to know a fair bit about them to read them properly. Otherwise you can't really understand them.'

'I see,' said Jaya.

'Have a look at the plaque here at the front,' said the guide walking over to it. 'Why don't you read it to us Asha.'

'Okay,' said Asha.

At the request of the City of Sydney
this statue was presented by the
Government and people of Ireland
in a spirit of Goodwill and Friendship
Until 1947 it stood in front of Leinster House Dublin
the seat of the Irish Parliament
Sculptured by John Hughes RHA Dublin 1865-1941
Unveiled on 20th December 1987 by
Sir Eric Neal Chief Commissioner
L.P. Carter OBE Town Clerk
Sir Nicholas Sheadie [Sha-hay-dee] OBE Deputy Chief Commissioner
M. Norman Oakes AO Commissioner

'So, Vij, what does this mean?' asked Jaya.

'Well it's like a potted history of the statue. And a record of all the important men who unveiled it here. But there are some other clues.'

'Like what?' asked Asha.

'Look at the first line. It says City of Sydney.'

'Yes,' said Asha.

'That's a council, isn't it.'

'Yeah. The Sydney City Council.'

'Okay. Who's the head of a council?'

'The mayor?'

'Yes. And in Sydney's case it's a lord mayor.'

'So?'

'So where's the lord mayor's name?'

Asha and Jaya looked at the plaque again.

'There's no lord mayor,' said Asha.

'That's right! In the lead up to the Bicentenary in 1988 the state government wanted the Sydney City Council to approve a huge amount of development in the city – mainly hotels. But it wouldn't. It was controlled by Independent councillors. One of them was Jack Munday. He was the famous trade unionist who was involved in the 1970s Green Bans in Sydney. So the state government sacked the council and replaced it with commissioners. This was the fourth time in its history that the council had been sacked by the state government.'

'So this statue's really about politics,' said Asha.

'All statues are about politics,' replied the guide.

'We better get moving,' said the guide. 'We've got a lot of ground to cover.'

They walked through the centre of the city for over an hour visiting Captain Cook's statue in Hyde Park South; the Archibald Fountain; another statue of Queen Victoria and of her husband – Albert the Good – near Hyde Park Barracks; down Macquarie Street to the statue of Matthew Flinders at the State Library – and his cat, Trim; to the statue of Governor Bourke – who approved a new settlement on the Yarra River in 1835 and named it Melbourne; then to the Shakespeare statue; and finally to a statue of Henry Lawson in Mrs Macquarie's Road.

'Well, Asha and Jaya,' said the guide, 'this is the last one.'

'Henry Lawson,' said Asha gazing up at the life size bronze statue. 'Is that a sheep dog Vij?'

'Yes, Asha,' the guide replied. 'And that's a swagman sitting down just behind him.'

'So what does this tell us?' asked Jaya.

'It tells us a few obvious things. His years of birth and death – 1867 to 1922; the things that he wrote about – bushmen, the bush, mateship, ordinary people and the important roles that animals have played in Australia history – and that he stood up for ordinary people.'

'I can see that,' said Jaya walking slowly around the statue.

'But you have to ask yourself a question.'

'What question?' asked Jaya.

'Which people?'

'I don't get it?' said Jaya.

'These monuments are often silent about many things. For example, it doesn't tell you that Lawson was an alcoholic. He wrote a short story called *The Boozer's Home*. It was about a place that Lawson was sent to dry out. In it he talks about the superiority of white people.'

'So was he racist?' asked Asha.



Henry Lawson Memorial, Mrs Macquarie's Road, Sydney
(Photograph Paul Ashton)

'Yes. And it's scattered through his writing. During the nineteenth century some people went around digging up Aboriginal skeletons.'

'Why?' asked Jaya.

'They'd sell them to museums and collectors. Lot's of British and European museums had – and still have – Aboriginal skeletal collections.'

'What's that got to do with Lawson?' asked Asha with great interest. 'Did Lawson dig up Aboriginal bones?'

'I don't think so. But he wrote about it in one of his stories – *The Bush Undertaker*. And the way he wrote about it made it look as if there was nothing particularly wrong with doing it.'

The guide took her phone from her back pocket. 'I've got some notes here. Let's see. These are a few lines from the story. It's Christmas day. And an old shepherd and his sheep dog are living in a slab-and-bark hut near a creek on an isolated property. He says to his dog: 'I'll take a pick an' shovel with me an' root [dig] up that old blackfellow':

He set to work to dig it up and sure enough in about half an hour he bottomed on payable dirt...
When he had raked up all the bones he amused himself by putting them together on the grass...

'You can understand why people get so furious with some of these statues,' said Asha.
 'That's true Ashie,' said Jaya. 'But I'm not sure how many people would know this stuff about Lawson.'
 'So how did you get to know all this stuff, Vij,' asked Asha.
 'Research.'

Acknowledgements

This short story has been primarily written for students in upper primary school to junior high school. The main sources drawn on are Louella McCarthy and Paul Ashton (eds), *Sydney Open Museum Historical Survey*, Sydney City Council, Sydney, 1994 and James Cook's journal daily entries available at <http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17700428.html> (accessed 19 October 2020). Thanks to Naomi Crago, archivist at the Sydney City Council Archives, for assistance regarding the Cook statue.

Teacher Notes

This story is one of the titles in the forthcoming young people's book series published by Halstead Press (Sydney and Canberra). The following teacher notes and activities for students are based on the Australian National History Curriculum.

KEY THEMES

Australia and the world
 Australia in the nineteenth century
 Australia in the twentieth century
 Civics and citizenship
 Colonial Australia

SUB THEMES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
 Crime
 Democracy
 Heritage
 Law
 Monuments and memorials
 Nation and nationalism
 Racism

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

History Year 5 Inquiry questions

What do we know about the lives of people in Australia's colonial past and how do we know?
 What were the significant events and who were significant people that shaped Australian colonies?

Humanities and Social Sciences Year 6 Inquiry questions

How did Australian society change throughout the twentieth century?

English: Literature Year 5

Literature and context

Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts.

Responding to literature

Present a point of view about particular literary texts using appropriate metalanguage and reflecting on the viewpoints of others.

English: Literature Year 6

Literature and context

Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts.

Responding to literature

Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots.

Examining literature

Identify, describe and discuss similarities and differences between texts, including those by the same author or illustrator, and evaluate characteristics that define an author's individual style.

ACTIVITIES

- Use information in section 1. Design a placard or a banner for the protest march.
- From section 1. Make a timeline about the planning and building of the Captain Cook statue.
- From sections 1 and 3. Where was Captain Cook killed? Why was he killed?
- From section 2. Who was Edward Colston? Use the internet to find out more about what happened to the statue of him in Bristol.
- From section 3. Who was Robert Towns? Find out more about him.
- From section 3. Pretend you are an officer on board the Endeavour. Write a journal entry for one of the days you were in Botany Bay. Use some of Cook's journal entries to do this.
- From section 3. Cook's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* says that he was quick to use force on natives who did not do what he wanted. Can you find evidence in one of his diary entries to support that claim?
- At the end of section 3 Asha read out part of rhyme called 'Captain Cook Chased a Chook'. Write a verse of your own.
- From section 4. Write a paragraph about Henry Lawson.
- Find a statue somewhere in Australia. Do a PowerPoint presentation on it.
- Write a paragraph about the following question. What would you do with an old statue that has now become offensive to some people? Present your answer to the class.
- What were the Statue Wars? Write three paragraphs or design a poster about them.