



Voices

Blackbirding

Queensland History Week
22 - 26 May 2023

The Queensland History
Teachers' Association
presents



Queensland History Week

22 – 26 MAY 2023

QHTA

Above:

Image: Australian South Sea Islanders hoeing a cane field in the Herbert River region, Queensland, 1902. (Supplied: State Library of Queensland)
<https://collections.slq.qld.gov.au/viewer/IE2858500>

Right:

Image: Group of Australian South Sea Islander women labourers on a sugar cane plantation near Cairns, Queensland, ca. 1895 (Supplied: State Library of Queensland)
<https://collections.slq.qld.gov.au/viewer/IE364003>

Reference list:

Moore, C. (2013). Australian South Sea Islanders in Queensland. Retrieved from:
<https://blogs.archives.qld.gov.au/2016/05/27/australian-south-sea-islanders-in-queensland/#:~:text=Over%20a%20period%20of%2040,Islander%20community%20in%20Queensland%20today.>



Voices - Blackbirding

Over a period of 40 years from the early 1860s, over 62,000 indenture contracts were issued for Pacific Islanders to work on Queensland plantations. They were often underpaid, treated harshly and many died, yet they contributed greatly to the growing state and founded the Australian South Sea Islander community in Queensland today.

The terms 'South Sea Islander' or 'Kanakas' were used to describe the labour recruits who came from islands within present-day Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Loyalty Islands (New Caledonia), Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

Throughout the labour trade there were allegations of kidnapping and slavery... All of them were 'culturally kidnapped', meaning that Europeans took cultural advantage of their small-scale societies and enticed them to come to Australia under circumstances they did not understand.

Government records show that in excess of 14,564 Islander labourers died in Queensland between 1868 and 1906. This is by far the highest death rate for any group of immigrants in Australia. For those newly arrived in Queensland, the common cold, tuberculosis, pneumonia, bronchitis and pleurisy were major killers.

Thinking Activity

Here Now / There Then

Create a table with 2 columns:

Column A: List present stances, values and judgments about the topic – Imagine you could travel back in time when the attitudes about the fairness of 'blackbirding' were different.

Column B: List past stances, values and judgements about 'blackbirding.'

Compare the past and present perspectives in Columns A and B.

ASK: Why do you think things have changed? Why did people in the past not think the way we do today? How could we find out more about the way people thought back then?

Extra for experts

Create your own timeline to show key events in the arrival, work and deportation of Australian Pacific Islanders.

Contrast the experiences of the Pacific Islanders working on the sugar plantations in the late 1800s with the experiences of people taking part in the Australian Government's **Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Stream**. As background, read the ABC transcript **Australia and our Pacific neighbours**. Also read about training through the **Australian Pacific Training Coalition**.