

# First Day

Learning guide

# About the History Trust of South Australia

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Level 2, 233 North Terrace  
Adelaide SA 5000

GPO Box 1836 Adelaide  
South Australia 5001  
Telephone: + 61 8 8151 3200

[history.sa.gov.au](http://history.sa.gov.au)  
[team@history.sa.gov.au](mailto:team@history.sa.gov.au)



South Australia's  
**History  
Festival**



# About the game

*First Day* is an interactive historical fiction game developed by the History Trust of South Australia and research student Sophia Booij. *First Day* was inspired by the 50th anniversary of the dismissal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam.

*First Day* is a text-based game that provides opportunities for students to practise literacy skills in a fun and engaging setting. Audio tracks are also included to provide greater accessibility for all students.

## A note regarding historical accuracy

### Historical Fiction

(noun)

A genre in which a fictional plot takes place in the setting of particular real historical events.

While based on the events of November 11th 1975, *First Day* is a work of historical fiction and contains fictional events and people to help teach key concepts and understandings. The game aims to explore the complexity and impact of democratic processes in a way that challenges perceptions of Australian civics education as 'dry' and 'boring'.

At times choices were made in support of the story rather than strict historical accuracy. In addition, some facts support parliamentary process as it is enacted today in order to provide students with a clearer understanding of how parliament works and affects their lives now.




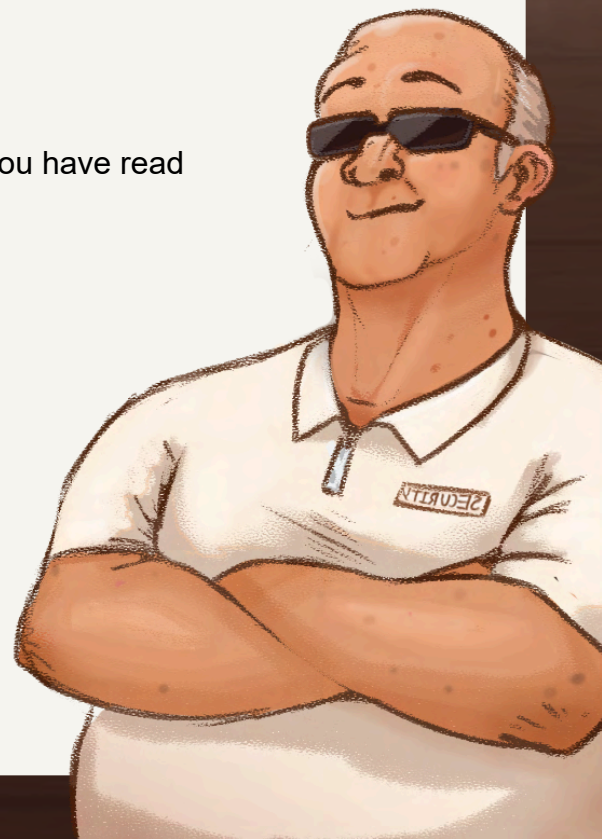
# How to play the game

## Game menu

<b>Start</b>	Start the game
<b>Load</b>	Open previously saved games
<b>Preferences</b>	Adjust settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Display - choose between fullscreen and window</li><li>• Test speed - adjust the speed at which text is displayed on screen</li><li>• Auto-forward Time - progress through story without needing to interact with screen, stops at choices</li><li>• Voice Volume - adjust how loud the voices of characters are</li><li>• Mute all - ensure there are no character voice overs</li></ul>
<b>About</b>	Learn more about the game
<b>Help</b>	Learn the functions of keys and the mouse
<b>Quit</b>	Quit the game without saving
<b>Return</b>	Return to the game

## Screen orientation

<b>Back</b>	Load the previous screen
<b>History</b>	Open a transcript of all the previous text you have read
<b>Skip</b>	Load the next screen
<b>Auto</b>	Progress the story automatically
<b>Save</b>	Save the game at specific point
<b>Pref</b>	Open the preferences menu
	Toggle narration/voices on and off



# How to Play the Game

## Screen navigation

<b>Current time</b>	Track your progress as the game moves through four distinct phases of time over the course of the day
<b>Pockets</b>	Access the notebook, inventory, org chart and map
<b>Notebook</b>	Read key information the player has collected throughout the game
<b>Inventory</b>	View items and documents collected throughout the game
<b>Org Chart</b>	A list of all characters the player has met throughout the game. Players may wish to re-play the game to meet all 16 characters
<b>Map</b>	A map of Parliament House (now Old Parliament House) as it was in 1975

## Possible outcomes

During the course of the game, students will make choices about the cause of the crisis that will determine which outcome they receive. Students are encouraged to replay the game to make different choices in order to trigger a different ending and learn more about the events of November 11, 1975.

Clues students find are colour-coded and relate to the eventual outcome. Players must find at least three clues to unlock an outcome.

Outcome 1 - The Labor government's mishandling of the supply crisis

Outcome 2 - Undue influence from the Palace, including the Governor-General

Outcome 3 - Influence by the government of the United States of America via the CIA

Outcome 4 - A prawn farming conspiracy

# Glossary

House of Representatives	The House of Representatives is also known as the lower house and is where bills are introduced. Whichever party holds the most seats in the lower house is the party which forms government. There are currently 150 members in the House of Representatives. Each person represents a group of Australian voters called an electorate. All electorates have roughly the same number of voters. The lower house meets in a chamber in Parliament House that is green in colour.
The Senate	Also referred to as the upper house, the Senate forms the second house in Australia's bicameral government. The Senate is needed to pass bills in order to make them law. The Senate currently consists of 76 senators, 12 senators from each state and 2 senators from the territories. The Senate meets in its own chamber in Parliament House which is red in colour.
Coalition	The Coalition is a formal arrangement between the Liberal Party of Australia and the National Party of Australia. The National Party of Australia is often considered the "junior" partner in the arrangement with the leader of the Coalition drawn from the Liberal party. This agreement is not permanent and at times the coalition has split. In November 1975, the National Party of Australia was known as the National Country Party.
Double dissolution	A double dissolution is when both House of Representatives and the Senate are dissolved and a new election is called.
Joint sitting of parliament	A joint sitting of parliament is when the governor-general calls for the Senate and the House of Representatives to meet to pass a bill or set of bills after a double dissolution and after the bill fails to pass the Senate once more. This has only occurred once in Australia's parliamentary history.
Pine Gap	A military base belonging to the United States of America's government located near Alice Springs. Originally presented as a joint space research facility, Pine Gap was and continues to be used for intelligence gathering and is now known as the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap.

# Glossary

## Loans Affair

A secretive and failed attempt by Whitlam's Minister for Minerals and Energy, Rex Connor, to secure a loan on behalf of the Australian government through foreign financiers. Rex Connor would eventually resign due the accusation that he had misled parliament. Whitlam's Treasurer, Jim Cairns, was also involved in the scandal and was removed to the backbench.

## Supply

The method in which the government is "supplied" with money in order to provide services. Supply is funded through appropriation bills that pass through the Senate before they can be spent.

## Telex

A portmanteau for teletypewriter exchange, a method that allows the international transmission of text-based messages using specialised machines. Used before the widespread adoption of fax machines and later computers.

## Aboriginal Tent Embassy

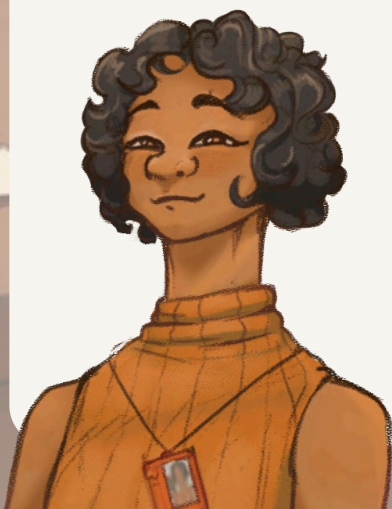
An ongoing protest started by Michael Anderson, Billy Craigie, Bertie Williams and Tony Coorey on the lawns of Old Parliament House demanding recognition of Indigenous land rights. Started in 1972, the embassy still stands today as a continuous protest and reminder.

## Wave Hill walk-off

A strike action by Gurindji stockmen, domestic workers, and their families at Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory, led by Vincent Lingiari. It lasted more than nine years and helped lead to Australia's first laws that allowed First Nations peoples to claim ownership of some of their traditional lands.

## Press Gallery

The press gallery refers primarily to a group of journalists and media professionals whose workspaces are found inside Parliament House. These media professionals represent a variety of organisations and report on the business and activities of parliament and politicians.



# Learning objectives and success criteria

## Learning objectives

Students will learn about:

- how Australia's parliament is structured and some of the key roles within it
- the powers of the governor-general
- the events leading to the 1975 constitutional crisis
- what happened on 11 November 1975

## Success criteria

Students can explain:

- how the two houses of parliament work together
- the role of the governor-general in the dismissal
- what happened on 11 November 1975 and why it was significant
- what triggered the dismissal

# Australian curriculum

## **Civics and Citizenship**

### *Knowledge and understanding*

AC9HS6K06

The key institutions of Australia's system of government, how it is based on the Westminster system, and the key values and beliefs of Western democracies

### **Year 6**

### *Skills*

AC9HS6S02

locate, collect and organise information and data from primary and secondary sources in a range of formats

AC9HS6S04

evaluate primary and secondary sources to determine origin, purpose and perspectives

AC9HS6S05

develop evidence-based conclusions

# Australian curriculum

## Year 7

### Civics and Citizenship

#### *Knowledge and understanding*

AC9HC7K01

the key features of Australia's system of government, including democracy, the Australian Constitution, responsible government and federalism

#### *Skills*

AC9HC7S02

locate, select and organise information, data and ideas from different sources

AC9HC7S03

analyse information, data and ideas about political, legal or civic issues to identify and explain differences in perspectives and potential challenges

AC9HC7S05

create descriptions, explanations and arguments using civics and citizenship knowledge, concepts and terms that reference evidence

## Year 8

### Civics and Citizenship

#### *Knowledge and understanding*

AC9HC8K02

the role of political parties and independent representatives in Australian democracy, including elections and the formation of governments

#### *Skills*

AC9HC8S02

locate, select and organise information, data and ideas from different sources

AC9HC8S03

analyse information, data and ideas about political, legal or civic issues to identify and explain differences in perspectives and potential challenges

AC9HC8S05

create descriptions, explanations and arguments using civics and citizenship knowledge, concepts and terms that reference evidence

# Australian curriculum

Year 9

## Civics and Citizenship

### *Knowledge and understanding*

AC9HC9K01

the role of the Australian Constitution in providing the basis for Australia's federal system of government and democratic processes, including institutions, and the process for constitutional change through a referendum

### *Skills*

AC9HC9S02

locate, select and compare information, data and ideas from a range of sources

AC9HC9S03

analyse information, data and ideas about political, legal or civic issues to identify and evaluate differences in perspectives and interpretations

AC9HC9S05

create descriptions, explanations and arguments using civics and citizenship knowledge, concepts and terms that incorporate evidence

Year 10

## History

### *Knowledge and understanding*

AC9HH10K07

the effects of significant post-Second World War world events, ideas and developments on Australian society

AC9HH10K18

continuities and changes in perspectives, responses, beliefs and values that have influenced the Australian way of life

### *Skills*

AC9HH10S05

analyse cause and effect, and evaluate patterns of continuity and change

AC9HH10S06

compare perspectives in sources and explain how these are influenced by significant events, ideas, locations, beliefs and values

AC9HH10S07

analyse different and contested historical interpretations

AC9HH10S08

create descriptions, explanations and historical arguments, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms that incorporate and acknowledge evidence from sources

# Key people

## Gough Whitlam

(Edward) Gough Whitlam was Australia's 21<sup>st</sup> prime minister. As leader of the Labor Party, Whitlam led his party to victory in 1972, and again in 1974 after previously calling for a double dissolution election.

During his term in parliament, Whitlam introduced many new and progressive reforms, including:

- abolishing tertiary fees
- ending military conscriptions
- recognising China
- establishing Medibank (later Medicare)
- lowering the voting age to 18
- promoting Aboriginal rights including the Aboriginal Lands Rights Act
- establishing 2JJ (evolved into triple J).

After a parliamentary stalemate in which the Senate refused to fund Labor's budget, Whitlam was dismissed by the governor-general, Sir John Kerr, on November 11, 1975. Whitlam's Labor government failed to win re-election and was replaced by the Liberal-National Country Coalition led by Malcolm Fraser.

## Malcolm Fraser

Malcolm Fraser followed Whitlam as Australia's 22<sup>nd</sup> prime minister. Leader of the Liberal-National Country Coalition, Fraser used the party's majority in the senate to block supply to the government's budget and force an election. Fraser was also re-elected in 1980.

## John Kerr

Sir John Kerr was Australia's 18<sup>th</sup> governor-general and was selected by Whitlam during his term as prime minister. His role as governor-general was to represent the Queen in constitutional matters and perform ceremonial and civic duties. The governor-general represents the monarch of the day but acts on the advice of the government.

Sir John Kerr stepped in to solve the 1975 constitutional crisis caused by the Senate's blockage of supply to the budget by removing Whitlam from his role as prime minister and appointing Malcolm Fraser in his place. Many thought Kerr had overstepped his boundaries as the governor-general and his actions remain contested to this day. This event became known as "The Dismissal".

# Key people

## Gordon Scholes

Gordon Scholes was the Speaker of the House of Representatives under Whitlam. In his role as the speaker, Scholes acted as the House's spokesman. Chosen from amongst the lower house's elected members, Scholes as the speaker also ensured rules and procedures were correctly followed.

Following the events of the morning of the 11 November, which saw Whitlam removed from his role as prime minister and Fraser appointed in his stead, Scholes was asked by parliament to advise the governor-general that a resolution of no-confidence had been passed in Fraser and that Whitlam was to be recommissioned to form government.

While Scholes waited for his appointment with the governor-general to pass on the official views and motions of the government, the governor-general dissolved both houses of parliament.

Scholes deeply believed that the governor-general's actions had been a "danger to our [Australia's] parliamentary system" and would be damaging to the role of both the governor-general and to the monarchy itself.

## Sir Martin Charteris

Lord Charteris of Amisfield was the private secretary of Queen Elizabeth II. He was also the keeper of the Queen's archives and was responsible for writing part of her speeches, providing advice, and responding to letters on her behalf.

Between 5 August 1974 and 5 December 1977 more than 212 letters were exchanged between Kerr and the Palace. This long series of letters between Charteris and the governor-general are now referred to as the Palace Letters. These letters were given to the National Archives of Australia in 1978, and were not made available to the public until 2020. The Palace Letters have provided historians greater insight into the role the Palace may have had in the dismissal.

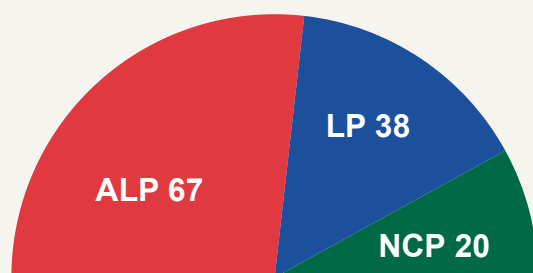


# Key events

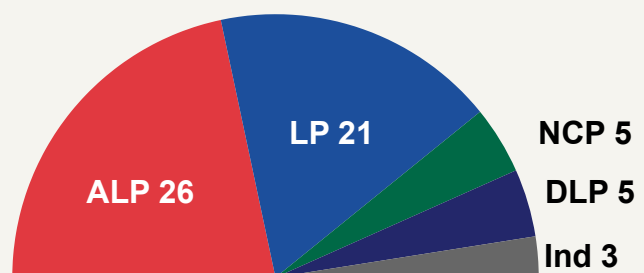
## “It’s Time” – Labor wins power after 23 years

Using the slogan “It’s Time” Labor campaigned for progressive change after 23 years of conservative government. On 5 December 1972, Labor formed government and Gough Whitlam became Australia’s 21<sup>st</sup> prime minister. While Labor was able to win enough seats in the lower house to form government, they were not able to win control of the Senate. This would become an ongoing problem for Whitlam.

### 1972 Election results



House of Representatives



The Senate

ALP - Australian Labor Party

LP - Liberal Party

Ind - Independent senators

DLP - Democratic Labor Party

NCP - National Country Party

## Night of the Long Prawns

In early 1974, Labor was seeking a way to gain control of an uncooperative senate, and by March of that year, Whitlam thought he’d had found a solution in the form of Democratic Labor Party member from Queensland, Vince Gair. The events that followed became known as the *Gair Affair* or the *Night of the Long Prawns*.

- A half-Senate election was due in June 1974, with half the senators’ seats in the upper house up for election.
- In order for an election to be called, each state’s governor needed to issue a writ on the advice of the state’s premier. This was usually a simple formality.
- In 1974, each state had ten seats in the Senate, meaning that five senators from each state would need to contest their seat at the next half-Senate election. Gair was not one of these senators, however, he was looking to leave politics.
- If Gair resigned before his term was up, he would be replaced by another member of the Democratic Labor Party (it is important to note that this was not the same party as the Australian Labor Party). If he resigned before the writ was issued, then his seat would be contested in the upcoming half-Senate election.
- Labor was confident it could secure two of the five seats up for election and if Gair retired, his seat too. They hoped that this extra seat would shift the balance of power in the Senate towards Labor.

# Key events

- Labor offered Gair the role of Ambassador to Ireland, he accepted, and the plan was for him to resign before the writs were issued for the half-Senate election. This meant six seats instead of five would be up for grabs.
- The opposition, then comprised of the National Country Party and the Liberals, realised what was happening and came up with a strategy to derail Labor's plan. If they could delay Gair from resigning until after the writ was issued, then Labor would not be able to contest a sixth seat.
- On the evening of Tuesday 2 April, Senator Ron Maunsell of the National Country Party distracted Gair by offering him fresh prawns and alcohol. He also made sure to stay by his side throughout the night and keep him away from Labor's senators. Maunsell's ploy worked: Gair was kept busy with prawns and alcohol until the early hours of 3 April and did not resign. Meanwhile Queensland's premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, also a National Country Party member, instructed his governor to issue the election writs. This was achieved by 1:30 am on 3 April. Labor's attempt at manipulating the election process to their advantage had failed.

## 1974 double dissolution

The 1974 double dissolution election was called 17 months after Whitlam's Labor party formed government. The Senate refused to pass six bills that formed part of Labor's core policy. After the election, Labor was returned to office with an even smaller margin than before and still failed to win enough seats in the Senate to pass the bills. In response, a joint sitting of parliament was called, and all six bills were eventually passed. This was not the last time the House of Representatives and the Senate would form a stalemate.

## Senate block the supply bill

In order to function, the Australian Government needs to create an annual budget and submit it to parliament. The "Budget" takes the form of supply bills and ensures government services keep running and public servants are paid. If the Budget is not approved or the "supply is blocked", the government and its services cannot run.

On 15 October 1975, Fraser's opposition government announced they would block supply using their majority in the Senate. By doing so the government would soon run out of money and would in all practical terms be unable to govern. Fraser was hoping to force an election while Whitlam was trying to avoid calling another one. This tension continued well into November with increasing pressure being placed on all sides to resolve the stalemate before the Christmas break.

# Key events

## The Dismissal

By the morning of the 11 November, Whitlam had decided to resolve the supply block in parliament - he would, as he had done before, call a half-Senate election. With agreement from his party Whitlam made an appointment with the governor-general, Sir John Kerr, to seek his approval.

Little did Whitlam know that the governor-general had also been devising a strategy to end the supply blockage. Upon Whitlam's arrival, Kerr handed him a letter dismissing him and the Labor party from office. The Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Fraser, was sworn in as caretaker prime minister on the condition that he pass the Budget. Whitlam, believing that only the House of Representatives had the power to form government as per the Constitution, went to lunch thinking he would be restored to his role before the day was out.

Whitlam was partially correct. Fraser had passed the bills and informed the House of Representatives that the governor-general had asked him to form a government. With Parliament in uproar, Fraser tried to adjourn the meeting, but this was rejected. Labor still held a majority and instead brought a motion of no confidence against Fraser and reinstated Whitlam. The Speaker of the House was sent immediately to inform Kerr of the motion of no-confidence and the reinstatement of Whitlam. Kerr agreed to meet the Speaker at 4:45 pm. In the meantime, Kerr used his reserve powers to both sign the supply bills, as passed by Fraser, and a proclamation calling for a dissolution of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Speaker did not get his meeting; Whitlam and his government had been officially dismissed. At 4:40 pm the governor-general read out the proclamation on the steps of Parliament House in front of the waiting media and crowd. Whitlam would follow this up with a speech including the now iconic line "God save the Queen, because no one will save the Governor-General."



# Learning activities

## Debate

The unprecedented nature of Whitlam's dismissal has led to the development of many theories explaining the event. Some are explored through the game, including an entirely fictional scenario involving prawn farming. The two most prevalent have included conspiracies involving interference from the Palace and the involvement of the United States of America's foreign intelligence agency the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency).

Choose one of the theories or conspiracies unpacked below and ask students to research whether they agree with the premise or not.

As a class, debate the theory using whichever method you prefer, including a more formal four-per-side team debate or a less formal style, splitting the class in half and allowing anyone to put forward or respond to an argument in turn.

### CIA

Gough Whitlam and his government had an uneasy relationship with the government of the United States of America under the leadership of Richard Nixon. Whitlam had withdrawn Australia's troops from Vietnam early, threatened to close Pine Gap, and was building a relationship with China. In addition, many felt that the government of the United States was hostile to "left wing" governments globally. This tense relationship led many to ask whether the CIA was involved in helping to remove the progressive Whitlam government from Parliament in favour of the more conservative Fraser government.

### Interference from the Queen

In the decades following the dismissal, discussion centred on how much the Palace knew or were involved in the removal of Gough Whitlam and his government from power. Whitlam was pushing for a republic, and the governor-general was the Queen's representative in Australia. This combined with Kerr's frequent correspondence with the Palace and the lack of transparency led to many people questioning just how much Queen Elizabeth II was involved.

## Discuss

Show the following questions to students. Allow them some time to think about their responses before discussing as class.

- Why do you think Whitlam was initially so popular?
- What is the purpose of the governor-general in Australia's democracy?
- After 1975, should Australia have become a republic? Why or why not?

# Learning activities

## Discuss – continued

- Did Sir John Kerr make the right decision? Why or why not?
- Why do you think “The Dismissal” still resonates more than fifty years later?
- Do you think Whitlam could have made different decisions to avoid being dismissed?

## Research

Ask students to research one of the topics below. Allow students to respond using a variety of methods, ensuring that they can support their research with reliable resources.

- How do the different houses and roles within parliament function in Australia’s democracy?
- How does the Senate work? What is its role? And why is it important to have two houses of parliament at the federal level?
- What do the different houses do? How would our government change if we abolished the Senate as New Zealand did in 1951?
- What are some of the key roles in Parliament? Explain what they do and how they work together. For example, what does the Speaker of the House do and what are their powers?
- What was the legacy of Gough Whitlam’s dismissal on Australian society?
- What was the legacy of Gough Whitlam’s government?

# Learning resources

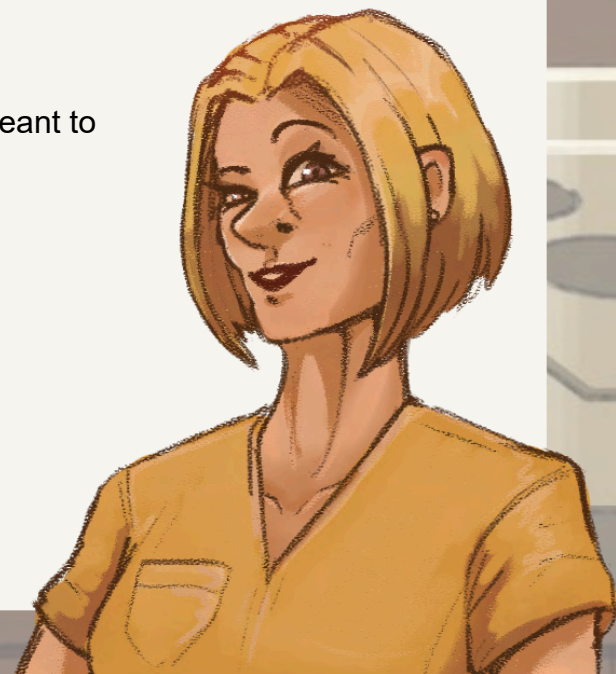
There are many resources available exploring Gough Whitlam in detail, and the events leading up to and including the dismissal. Listed below are a few to help you get started. Please review before using in class, as they may not be suitable for your students.

## Books

- The Dismissal Dossier: Everything you were never meant to know about November 1975 - *Jenny Hocking*
- The Palace Letters - *Jenny Hocking*
- The Truth of The Matter - *Gough Whitlam*

## Podcasts

- The Eleventh - *ABC, presented by Alex Mann*  
<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/the-eleventh>



# Learning resources – continued

## Websites

- Australian Prime Ministers - *Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House*  
<https://apm-origin.moadoph.gov.au/>
- Defining Moments: Whitlam Dismissal - *National Museum of Australia*  
<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/whitlam-dismissal>
- The Dismissal: Everything you need to know about the 1975 dismissal - *Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House*  
<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/explore/democracy/the-dismissal>
- Parliamentary Education Office - *Parliamentary Education Office*  
<https://peo.gov.au/>
- Whitlam Institute - Whitlam Institute, Western Sydney University  
<https://www.whitlam.org/>
- The Kerr Palace Letters - *National Archives of Australia*  
<https://www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/kerr-palace-letters>

## Video

- The Dismissal Anniversary - *Behind the News*  
<https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/the-dismissal-anniversary/105993942>
- I Was Actually There, S2: Gough Whitlam's 1975 Dismissal - ABC iView  
<https://iview.abc.net.au/show/i-was-actually-there>
- Whitlam Dismissal: 50 Years - *ABC News*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETINV7toy9Q>
- Gough Whitlam's dismissal speech, 1975 - *Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyyuRFEmQ1Y>





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