

Last Update: Thursday, August 17, 2006.  
11:22am (AEST)



Stand-alone subject: Mr Howard says he is not pushing for an official version of history. [File photo] (ABC)

## Howard urges history curriculum revamp

Prime Minister John Howard has opened a history summit at Parliament House in Canberra by calling for a return to a more disciplined approach to Australian history teaching in schools.

Mr Howard first ignited debate on the subject during his Australia Day address.

Today eminent historians, teachers and social commentators have gathered in Canberra to discuss it.

Mr Howard wants history to be a stand-alone subject, with an emphasis on dates and facts.

"How you can just teach issues and study moods in history rather than comprehend and teach the narrative has always escaped me," Mr Howard said.

But he says he is not trying to influence what is taught.

"I want to make it very clear that we are not seeking some kind of official version of Australian history," he said.

"We're not seeking some sort of nostalgic return to a particular version of Australian history."

Vietnam veteran and Labor backbencher Graham Edwards says a greater focus on history might put an end to Australia's involvement in senseless conflicts.

"A good reason for teaching history in Australia - it might keep us from being involved in more follies and more wars," he said.

Mr Howard has also announced a new \$100,000 Prime Minister's prize for a substantial historical work.

### State ministers excluded

Education Minister Julie Bishop has identified Western Australia and Victoria as states which are not placing enough emphasis on Australian history in schools.

She has also defended her decision not to invite state education ministers to the summit.

"I have chosen a group of individuals who I believe have a great deal to offer in terms of providing advice to me and armed with that advice I'll be in a position to work with state and territory governments."

Ms Bishop says this afternoon's agenda will look at how much prominence the subject should receive.

She says those taking part agree history should be a core part of curriculum, but that may not mean making it compulsory.

"That's still under discussion - all participants agree that it should be a critical part," she said.

"The question is how to ensure that is the case, how to ensure that education authorities are prepared to embed Australian history in the school curriculum."



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