

Understanding Australian culture



Learner guide

Ready for work

Pre-employment skills

Understanding Australian culture

Version 1.2



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Who are Australians?

To understand Australian culture you need to know about Australia's history. A brief history is provided here.

The first Australians

Aboriginal Australians were the first Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are Australia's Indigenous people. Indigenous means the first people to live in an area. They have been living here in Australia for more than 40,000 years. The Aboriginal culture is the oldest living culture in the world.

Aboriginal people of the past lived in small groups. They were hunters and gatherers who moved from place to place in search of food and water. Each group had their own land, which was divided by natural features like rivers, lakes, trees, rocks or hills.



The Dreaming

In Aboriginal culture, adults pass what they know on to their children through speech, songs, art and dancing. A very important part of Aboriginal culture is the Dreaming (or Dreamtime). This is a belief system. It is the belief that the ancestor spirits created the world and everything in it. These spirits stayed in various places. These are the places that are very sacred to Aboriginal people today. Usually only Aboriginal people know the sacred places. However, one very well-known sacred place is Uluru.



Activity 1

1. Write down what you know about any of the Dreamtime stories. For more information about Dreamtime stories, visit these websites:

- <http://aspirelr.link/aboriginal-art>
- <http://aspirelr.link/the-dreaming>

2. Most cultures have old stories that are passed down to children. They are often called folktales or myths and are an important part of a culture. Write down a short version of one story, folktale or myth from your culture that you know about.

[Click to complete Activity 1](#)

Explorers, convicts and immigrants

The next people to settle in Australia were explorers, convicts and immigrants.

Here is some more information.

Explorers

About 300 years ago explorers from Europe began to sail out to Australia and New Zealand.

A Dutch explorer, Dirk Hartog, and an English explorer, William Dampier, sailed to Western Australia in the 1600s.

Then in 1770, Captain James Cook (pictured) landed on the east coast of Australia. He claimed the land for Britain, so Australia became a British colony.



Convicts

In the 1700s, Britain's prisons were very crowded, so the government there decided to send some of the convicts to Australia.

Some convicts had committed serious crimes. Others had only stolen things like food to feed their families.

The settlements they built were called penal colonies. From 1788 until 1823 most of the people living in New South Wales were either convicts or soldiers.

Immigrants

Around the year 1800 free settlers began to arrive from Britain. They came to start a new life in Australia. British laws and culture began to shape Australian life.

Later, people arrived from other countries. For example, many men came from China to work in the goldfields.

After the two world wars many people from European countries moved to Australia. They were looking for a peaceful life. The largest numbers of people began to arrive after 1960, coming from Europe and Asia.

Now Australia is a very multicultural country. Over 200 languages are spoken in Australia. English is the official language. The next most common languages are Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic, Vietnamese and Mandarin.



Activity 2

1. When did your family or ancestors arrive in Australia – quite recently or many, many years ago?

2. What language or languages do you speak at home? What language did your great-grandparents speak?

3. Do you know many people who come from a culture different from your own?

4. How many cultures are represented in your classroom or workplace?

[Click to complete Activity 2](#)

A clash of cultures

The early British settlers did not understand the Aboriginal people's way of life. They did not value Aboriginal beliefs or care for land in the same way Aboriginal people do. They also did not see that the Aboriginal people had survived because of the way they had lived on the land.

At this time the Aboriginal people were not thought of as citizens of Australia. Aboriginal people were treated very poorly. For example, from 1909 to 1969 many Aboriginal children were taken from their parents and sent to live in orphanages, foster homes or with white people. The people in power thought the children would be cared for better in these places. However, this was not true. These children are known as the stolen generations.

It was not until 1965 that all Australian states and territories gave Aboriginal people citizenship and the right to vote. Then on 13 February 2008 the Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd, made a formal apology. He said 'sorry' to the stolen generations for what had happened in the past.



Story

One of the most famous Aboriginal people was Sir Douglas Nicholls. He was born in 1906 and became a well-known AFL player. He was also a pastor in a Christian church and a social worker who worked hard for the rights of Aboriginal people. Sir Douglas was named Victorian Father of the Year in 1962 and was the first Aboriginal person to be knighted by the Queen in 1972. Then, in 1976 he became the first Aboriginal person to be appointed the governor of an Australian state – South Australia. Sir Douglas died in 1988 and was given a state funeral to honour him and his achievements.

For more information on Sir Douglas Nicholls visit the following website: <http://aspirelr.link/sir-douglas-nicholls-biography>

A place of many cultures

Today Australia is made up of many different cultures, including many Indigenous cultures.

So what is culture? Culture is the way a group of people live. It refers to the things that make the group the same, such as their habits, beliefs and traditions.



Australian values

Like culture, people also have a set of values. Values are beliefs about the things that are important to you in life.

Today, if people want to live permanently in Australia they must sign a values statement for the government. This is a list of things that are important for living successfully and peacefully in Australia. The values include:

- respecting the freedom and dignity of others
- understanding that men and women have equal rights
- having the freedom to practise your chosen religion
- understanding that you must follow the law
- supporting parliamentary democracy
- understanding that all people are equal
- showing mutual respect, tolerance and compassion for those in need
- respecting equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, religion or ethnic background.



Being a good citizen

Here is a list of some of the values that are expected of a good Australian citizen:

- Obey the laws of the country.
- Respect all nationalities.
- Respect people's right to practise their beliefs and religions.
- Regard men and women as equal.
- Stand up for the rights of other people.
- Know your neighbours.
- Respect the environment.
- Contribute by doing things such as volunteering or donating blood.
- Understand the cultural values of the country.

Activity 3

Choose one value from the previous list.

- _____
1. Why do you think it is important for a person living in Australia to have this value?

- _____
- _____
- _____
2. How could you show this value in your own behaviour?

[Click to complete Activity 3](#)

Australian democracy

Australia is a democracy. This means the people of Australia vote to elect the government. All Australian citizens over 18 years of age must vote in federal (Australia-wide) and state elections. They vote for the person they want to represent them in parliament. Who you vote for is private. This is an important part of a democracy.

Here are a few facts about democracy in Australia:

- 1901 – The first federal parliament was held in Melbourne.
- 1901 – The first prime minister, Edmund Barton, was elected.
- 1902 – Women were allowed to vote in federal elections. Australia was the second country in the world, after New Zealand, to allow women to vote.
- 1971 – Neville Bonner became the first Aboriginal member of parliament.
- 1988 – The new parliament house opened in Canberra (pictured).
- 2010 – Julia Gillard became Australia's first female prime minister.



Activity 4

Find out more about Australia's government by accessing this website: <http://aspirelr.link/peo>

Click on the 'Learning' tab at the top of the page to access fact sheets or games in the 'Kidsview' section.

Click to complete Activity 4

Symbols of Australia

Most countries have a national flag, a coat of arms and a national anthem. These things tell us something about the country. For example, when a country chooses a flag, the colours and the symbols all have meanings.

The Australian flag



This is the Australian national flag. On the flag, the five small stars are the Southern Cross. These are stars that can be seen in the sky over Australia at night. On the flag, this shows that we are in the southern hemisphere.

The large star on the left has seven points. There is one point for each of the six states of Australia and one for the two territories combined. In the top left-hand corner is the Union Jack. It is actually the flag of the United Kingdom. It shows that Australia is part of the British Commonwealth.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

Australia has two other recognised flags.

One is the Aboriginal flag. On this flag, the black is for the people, the red is for the land and the yellow is for the sun.



The other flag is the Torres Strait Islander flag. On this flag, the green is for the land and the blue is for the sea. The black line and the headdress in the middle represent the people. The points on the star are for each of the five Torres Strait islands.



The coat of arms

The Australian coat of arms is the official symbol of the Australian government. It is on all Australian passports and official documents.

The shield in the middle contains the badges of the six states. The star represents the states and the territories combined. The red kangaroo and the emu that hold the shield are native to Australia. They were chosen as they cannot walk backwards, so they are a symbol that Australia will move forward into the future. The flower in the background is the wattle, which is Australia's national flower.



The national anthem

Most countries have an anthem or song about their country. Here is the first verse of Australia's national anthem, 'Advance Australia Fair'.



Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are young and free,
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare,
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.

Activity 5

1. The Australian flag has great meaning for a lot of people because it represents their country and its culture. How do you feel when you see people at an event, like the Olympic Games, waving the Australian flag?

2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags both have something that shows an important part of their culture. What are they?

[Click to complete Activity 5](#)

What you have learnt

Put a ✓ in the box when you have learnt these things.

- The first cultures in Australia were Aboriginal cultures. The Aboriginal people have been in Australia for more than 40,000 years. Many parts of Australia are sacred in Aboriginal culture.
- For the last 200 years people have arrived in Australia from all over the world. Australia is a multicultural country.
- Even though there are many cultures in Australia, all Australians are expected to have certain values including:
 - respecting other people
 - treating everyone as equal
 - valuing the democratic government
 - caring for others.
- Australia has symbols that represent the country and its culture. The symbols are the flags, the coat of arms and the national anthem.

Check your learning

Your task is to create a poster or pamphlet for schoolchildren.

Your poster or pamphlet should inform others about Australia and its culture.

Use what you have learnt in this book. Include what you think are the most important parts of Australian history and culture.

You can add drawings or photographs. Make your poster or pamphlet as interesting as possible.

[Click to complete](#)

Answers

Answers to activities

Activity 1

Answer to Question 1

Answers will vary. Visit the websites for more information.

Answer to Question 2

Answers will vary. One example is the story about the Pied Piper of Hamelin. This is a story about a man with a magic flute. He uses the music from his flute to rid the town of Hamelin of rats. When the townspeople do not pay him, he also uses his flute to lure the children of the town away. The children are never seen again.

Activity 2

Answer to Question 1

Answers will vary, but may include within the last 50 years, or prior to that time.

Answer to Question 2

Answers will vary, but may include German, Cantonese, Arabic, Urdu.

Answer to Question 3

Answers will vary, but may include, yes, from many cultures including Asian, Russian, Indian and European.

Answer to Question 4

Answers will vary according to the classroom or workplace.

Activity 3

Answer to Question 1

For example: 'Respect the environment'. It is important so the environment stays clean and everyone is able to live happily and healthily in it.

Answer to Question 2

For example, I could reduce, re-use and recycle; ride or use public transport instead of driving everywhere; take part in community events such as Clean Up Australia Day.

Activity 4

No answer is required.

Activity 5**Answer to Question 1**

Answers may vary; however, people may feel proud to be Australian, or feel patriotic.

Answer to Question 2

The Aboriginal flag shows the sun and the land, which are very important to Aboriginal people and their way of life.

The Torres Strait Island flag shows the land and sea, which are very important to Torres Strait Islander people and their way of life. It also shows a headdress, which represents part of their culture.

Answers to check your learning

Answers will vary greatly. The poster or pamphlet created should include information about Australia, its history and culture. It should be presented in an interesting way and use pictures or photos.