

Chapter 5: Australia's national identity

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Chapter 5: Australia's national identity

Overview

Casual day is always an interesting day at school. Given a day of freedom from uniform, students take the opportunity to demonstrate their identity through fashion. While many students simply choose their clothes for comfort or style, for others fashion is a deliberate statement. For these students, fashion indicates their membership of a particular social group. These groups provide students with a sense of belonging — a feeling that they are part of a larger community with shared values. A group's identity is how the members of that group present themselves to the rest of the world. In our casual day example, this representation occurs through fashion. Yet if we extend this example to an entire country, we will see many different representations of national identity.

In Australia, our national identity has always been complex. Our country is a diverse collection of nationalities and cultures. Because of this, isolating individual aspects of an Australian national identity is a challenging task. In this topic we investigate Australia's national identity, how it was formed, how it continues to evolve and how it creates a sense of belonging for the people who call this country home.



eBook plus

eLesson

What is national identity?

Watch this video to learn more about Australia's national identity.

Searchlight ID: ELES-2291

STARTER QUESTIONS

1. How has Australia's national identity been formed?
2. How does Australia's national identity continue to change?
3. What impact does national identity have on society?
4. How are Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander cultures represented in Australia's national identity?
5. What impact have migrants played in the development of Australia's national identity?
6. Do you show part of your individual identity through fashion? If so, describe how.

7. Choose a group to which you belong (for example, a youth group, friendship circle or sporting team) and describe how belonging to this group makes you feel.
8. Design a flag that you believe represents Australia's national identity.
9. Write a list of the elements of Indigenous society that you know about.
10. Discuss your family's migration history with the person next to you.

5.1 Australian identity – traditional v. changing views

A singular Australian identity is hard to define. Since European settlement began, different countries have contributed aspects of their culture to form the multicultural identity we see in Australia today. Changes in Australian identity have been, and continue to be, reflected in our relationship with other countries. In colonial times, Australian identity closely mirrored that of Britain. When Australia moved away from British influence and towards the United States of America (directly after World War II), aspects of our national identity changed as well. Our identity now faces an interesting stage in its development as our focus turns toward our Asian neighbours. Australia's national identity continues to evolve as people from a vast array of nations make their contributions to our diverse and multicultural nation.

'We don't like cricket, we love it'

Love it or hate it, cricket is big part of Australian culture. Every weekend in summer, thousands of men, women and children around Australia hone their skills with the bat and ball. Yet how did this strange game find its way into our country?

Like many other aspects of Australian identity, our country's love of cricket is a legacy of our British roots. This connection was forged by early British settlers who introduced elements of their existing identity and traditions to their new Australian home. The British failed to understand or recognise the long-standing cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. They simply ignored Indigenous identity and replaced it with their own. The British did so because they felt no connection to Indigenous culture. Introducing their own culture made them feel more comfortable in the new surroundings and increased their sense of belonging.



FIGURE 1 Children playing cricket in 1925 (left) and 2013 (right)

The mother country

The close relationship between Britain and Australia continued well into the twentieth century, despite **federation** in 1901. Evidence of the British influence on Australian identity can be seen in the culture, fashion and even foods which were popular at the time. Perhaps the clearest piece of evidence, however, was Australia's willingness to follow the 'mother country' into World War I. When that war began in 1914, British Australia was still a relatively young country. Without an official **foreign policy** of its own, Australia adopted the policies of Great Britain and also declared war on Germany.

Australia's involvement in World War I had an enormous influence on our national identity. This conflict saw the birth of the Anzac legend with its values of determination, sacrifice and mateship. These values have now become cornerstones of Australian nation identity. The British influences on Australia can also be seen in our adoption of the British Westminster system of parliament, or in the simple fact that the Queen is still Australia's official head of state.

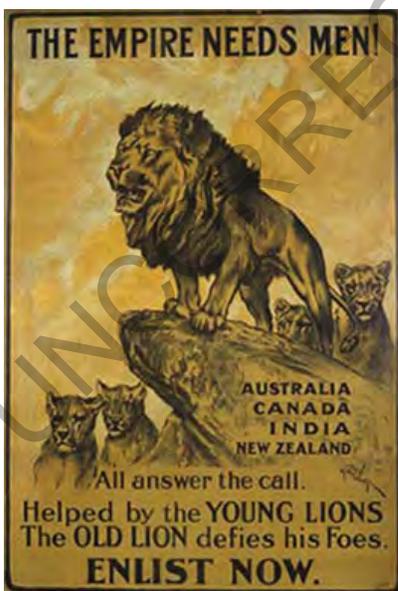


FIGURE 2 A World War I enlistment poster

Multicultural Australia

After World War II, Australia's relationship with foreign countries changed as we lessened our political connections with Britain. Though formal ties with the mother country were maintained, Australia sought to strengthen its alliance with the United States of America. This new direction was shown in Australia's willingness to support America in a number of global conflicts including the Korean and Vietnam wars. American popular culture also began replacing that of the British, with new genres of music, fashion and cinema introduced into Australian society.



FIGURE 3 Australian soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War in 1967

Australia's foreign policy has recently changed again, this time with a focus on closer relationships with China, Japan and other Asian countries. The gradual removal of Australia's White Australia policy has enabled these new relationships to develop. These changes can be seen in schools such as your own. The option to study Asian languages in school is much more common now than it was in your parents' era. In their time, the study of languages still had a significant **Eurocentric** focus. You may study a language to allow you to communicate with people if you ever visit that country. However, knowing a language will also help you to communicate with people within your own country. In this way, the languages taught in schools say a lot about a country's identity and where it is heading.

Changes in Australian identity are reflected in changes to our government's foreign policy. When the separate stages of Australia's foreign policy developments are viewed as one, we see the origins of our multicultural identity.

一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九	十	百	千	東	南	西	北
one	two	three	four	five	six	seven	eight	nine	ten	hundred	thousand	east	south	west	north
神	魔	聖	鬼	動	靜	春	夏	秋	冬	明	暗	分	合	悲	歡
deity	evil	holy	ghost	moving	quiet	spring	summer	autumn	winter	bright	dark	divide	close	sadness	cheerful
你	我	他	妳	您	她	牠	它	龍	虎	豹	馬	獅	鹿	兔	象
you(m)	I,me,my	he	you(f)	you	she	it	it	dragon	tiger	leopard	horse	lion	deer	rabbit	elephant
高	低	大	小	長	短	寬	扁	粗	細	厚	薄	美	醜	勝	負
high	low	big	small	long	short	wide	flat	coarse	thin	thickness	flimsy	beauty	ugly	win	lose
死	活	日	月	星	久	酒	金	木	水	火	土	走	跳	躍	飛
death	live	day	month	star	lasting	alcoholic drink	gold	wood	water	fire	soil	walk	jump	leap	fly
吃	喝	麵	食	華	乾	濕	料	理	湯	飯	杯	碗	盤	匙	筷
eat	drink	noodles	food	Chinese	dry	wet	material	reason	soup	rice	cup	bowl	tray	spoon	chopsticks
愛	恨	情	仇	離	年	喜	樂	新	舊	曆	士	農	工	商	網
love	hate	love	enemy	leave	year	happy	joyous	new	former	calendar	person	agriculture	worker	business	net
服	裝	路	速	苦	甜	酸	辣	醋	醬	哥	弟	姊	妹	兄	妻
clothes	dress up	route	speed	bitter	sweet	sour	peppery hot	vinegar	sauce	elder brother	younger brother	older sister	younger sister	brother	wife
快	慢	父	母	早	晚	內	外	午	武	雨	雪	霜	冷	暖	天
quick	slow	father	mother	morning	late	internal	external	noon	military	rain	snow	frost	cold	warm	sky
上	下	左	右	男	女	收	放	電	冰	今	昨	車	腦	病	痛
up	down	left	right	male	female	receive	set free	electricity	ice	present	yesterday	car	brain	ill	pain
輸	贏	力	心	錢	樓	店	皇	家	敵	友	助	危	好	壞	煩
lose	gain	force	heart	money	multi-story building	shop	sovereign	home	enemy	friend	help	danger	good	bad	annoyed
惡	孩	出	入	人	犬	貓	風	雲	強	弱	手	腳	眼	鼻	口
wicked	child	exit	enter	human	dog	cat	wind	cloud	strong	weak	hand	foot	eye	nose	mouth
耳	齒	族	嫁	喪	萬	前	白	紅	黑	藍	橙	紫	灰	筆	鼠
ear	tooth	clan	marry	funeral	ten thousand	front	white	red	black	blue	orange	purple	grey	pen	mouse
法	牛	雞	竹	羊	兵	老	少	說	聽	怒	寫	讀	思	吻	性
law	cattle	chicken	bamboo	sheep	soldier	old	young	say	hear	anger	write	read	think	kiss	sex
山	廟	燈	紙	睡	哭	煙	聲	餐	田	市	方	圓	握	笑	臉
mountain	temple	lamp	paper	sleep	cry	smoke	sound	meal	farmland	city	square	round	grasp	smile	face

FIGURE 4

Greater numbers of Australian students have the chance to study Asian languages today, one result of Australia becoming less focused on Britain and Europe generally.

ACTIVITIES

EXPLAIN

1. Why did the British feel the need to introduce their national identity to Australia?
2. Why is it so difficult to define Australian national identity?
3. During both the Korean and Vietnam wars, the people of Australia were under no direct threat or danger. Explain how Australia became involved in these conflicts.
4. Look at figure 2. Who do the lions in this poster represent?

PREDICT

5. How do you think Australian national identity will change in the next 50 years? For example, where do you think the next wave of immigration will come from?

THINK

6. List aspects of Australian national identity that have British origins.
7. Describe what being Australian means to you.

5.2 Reconciliation — contribution to national identity

The original inhabitants of Australia suffered greatly from the British colonisation of their country. Years of conflict, disease and mistreatment have caused pain and suffering for Indigenous peoples and their cultures. In recent years, efforts have been made to mend the damage caused by previous governments. The **reconciliation** movement can be seen as an attempt to restore the importance of Indigenous culture in Australian society. Before we discuss how reconciliation contributes to Australian identity, we need to learn what reconciliation is and why it is necessary.

What went wrong?

Although the first interactions between Indigenous people and the British were positive, relationships quickly deteriorated and conflict erupted. Using their resources and weaponry, the British expanded their settlement and pushed further into Aboriginal lands. The Indigenous owners of these lands saw this expansion as an act of aggression and responded with violence. A lack of understanding and respect for each other's culture fuelled the so-called Frontier Wars. However, this conflict was only the first event in a series of hardships faced by Indigenous Australians following the arrival of the British in 1770.



FIGURE 1 A friendly first interaction between Indigenous Australians and the British

The Stolen Generations

From as early as the 1860s, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their homes and families by various Australian governments. Some historians argue that this program of removal had good intentions, and that the governments involved were motivated by the welfare of Aboriginal children. On the other side of the debate, historians claim child removal was a deliberate policy intended to weaken Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities. Removed from their families, these children were also removed from their culture and identity. Children removed during this period of time have become known as the Stolen Generations.

Despite the reluctance of previous leaders, an official apology for this policy was eventually provided in 2008 by the then-prime minister, Kevin Rudd. It symbolised a major step in the journey towards reconciliation.



FIGURE 2 Homes were sought for these Aboriginal children after they were forcibly removed from their families.

Whose land is it?

One of the most important aspects of Indigenous culture and identity is a connection to the land. Representing the past, present and future of Indigenous Australians, this relationship is deeply spiritual. Upon arrival in Australia, the British failed to officially recognise Indigenous land ownership. They claimed the land as their own using the concept of *terra nullius*. The subsequent battle for Indigenous **land rights** lasted more than 200 years. During this time, several legal actions were launched by Indigenous Australians with the goal of securing ownership of their traditional lands. This goal was finally reached in 1992 when the High Court of Australia officially rejected the concept of *terra nullius*, paving the way for Indigenous peoples to legally reclaim their land.



FIGURE 3 Indigenous land rights campaigner Eddie Mabo

The path to reconciliation

As recently as the early twentieth century, Aboriginal people were not considered citizens of Australia. They could not vote in elections, and were not even counted in the population of the country when the census was taken. Over the next few decades, the rights of Indigenous people became increasingly important to all Australians. Their cause was assisted by other civil rights movements from around the world, which were also gaining popularity.

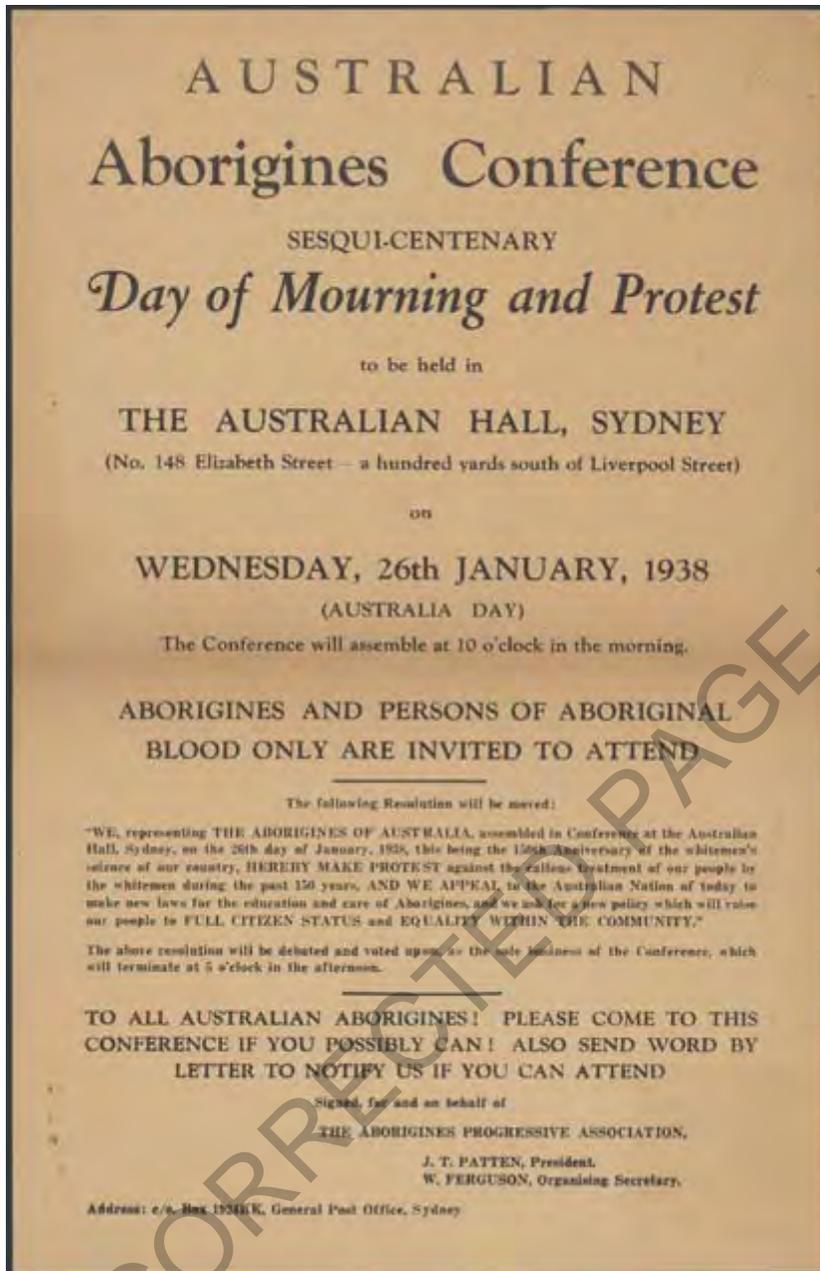


FIGURE 4 On the sesquicentenary (150th anniversary) of British colonisation in 1938, the Australian Aboriginal Conference declared a 'national day of mourning'.

In 1948, Indigenous people officially become British subjects and Australian citizens, although they were only granted voting rights in 1962. Perhaps the most famous of these victories was the 1967 [referendum](#), after which Indigenous Australians were finally recognised as part of the population. The referendum was a formal statement announcing that Indigenous culture and Australian culture were one and the same. This event had a significant impact on Australian identity.

Reconciliation began as an official movement in 1991 with the formation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. The term 'reconciliation' refers to repairing the damage of past events

through better understanding of, and respect for, Indigenous culture. The inclusion of 'Welcome to country' speeches and smoking ceremonies are small-scale examples of what reconciliation looks like. Larger scale examples include a higher priority for Indigenous health and education programs, and a focus on the welfare of Indigenous children. Symbolic acts such as the 2000 Sorry Day march, and the official apology to the Stolen Generations offered by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, are other important events along the path to reconciliation.

Serious offences were knowingly committed against Indigenous peoples by a sequence of Australian governments. Our identity as Australians should not be shaped by our guilt for these actions. Instead, we should help mend the damage of the past by celebrating Indigenous culture and identity as our own. In doing so, we can also increase the sense of belonging felt by the Indigenous community.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. Why did the relationship between British settlers and Indigenous Australians turn sour?
2. Who were the Stolen Generations?

EXPLAIN

3. How did declaring *terra nullius* allow the British to claim the land of Australia?
4. What is reconciliation?

DISCOVER

5. Use the **Indigenous rights movement timeline** weblink in your eBookPLUS to create a timeline of the major events that occurred in the process of reconciliation

THINK

6. What do you believe to be most important for Indigenous Australians?
 - A. Becoming citizens in 1948
 - B. Being given voting rights in 1962
 - C. Being included in the population count in 1967
7. Use the **National apology** weblink in your Resources section to watch the video of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations. Imagine you are the relative of a member of the Stolen Generations and write a brief response to this speech.

eBookplus

5.3 Belonging to a new country — migrant experiences

Consider what you would do for the sake of your family. Now consider what you *wouldn't* do for the sake of your family. It is a sad truth that, every day around the world, families encounter terrible problems. Some are faced with hunger, poverty and disease; others must deal with violence, brutality and fear; and some are confronted with all of these challenges. Many families in these types of situations choose to leave their countries or traditional homelands in favour of the peace and freedom offered by Australian shores. Throughout Australian history, people from nearly every nation in the world have relocated to this diverse country in search of new opportunities. The experiences of these **migrants** is discussed in this section.



FIGURE 1 A Vietnamese brother and sister arriving in Australia, 1974

Migrant identity

Migrants are forced to quickly adapt to the national identity of their new homes. This is something they need to do without losing their connection to their own identity. In this way, their sense of **belonging** is split in two. Migrant groups cannot live in isolation of the new laws, customs and language of their adopted country, but neither can they forget the elements of their original culture and identity. Australia's well-established tradition of acceptance and diversity makes the balancing of identities easier for new migrants. As they celebrate their existing identity, migrant groups also reinforce Australia's multicultural identity. This helps new migrants to feel a sense of belonging to both their old and new communities.



FIGURE 2 Migrants must balance two cultures: their own and that of their adopted country.

As well as feeling emotionally connected to their old and new countries, migrants can be officially part of both countries through dual citizenship. This is possible in Australia and many other countries. Holders of dual citizenship have legal and moral responsibilities in both countries. These responsibilities include voting in elections. For example, a person who lives in Australia can be both a citizen of Australia and Greece. This person is required to vote in both Australian and Greek elections.

The federal government does not have statistics regarding the number of dual citizens, although it estimates the figure to be around 4 million Australians. Dual citizenship is another way in which people can maintain a sense of belonging to two separate nations and cultures.

Migrant case studies

The best way to learn about the challenges faced by Australian migrants is to read and listen to their experiences. The weblinks in figure 3 contain fascinating stories from a diverse range of migrants. Read articles and watch video clips from a variety of migrants in order to get a more complete understanding of the challenges they have faced. Have a pen and paper handy while you read the stories and watch the videos so you can write down any information you find interesting and areas you want to investigate further.

eBook plus

Weblink

Live in Victoria case studies

eBook plus

Weblink

National Maritime Museum

Migrant Stories



James and Lucy's Story

Occupation: Registered Nurses

Immigrated from: People's Republic of China

Settled in: Portland, Victoria

“*We have a very good life in Victoria with good opportunities. This is the best place for us.*”

Since the First Fleet dropped anchor in 1788, close to 10 million settlers have moved from across the world to start a new life in Australia. They have arrived in waves, encouraged by developments like the 1850s gold rushes, or to escape adverse conditions at home such as the Industrial Revolution's social upheavals in 19th-century Britain, the two world wars and the aftermath of the Vietnam War in the 1970s. Collectively these migrants have helped shape a unique British-based and now multicultural society on the perimeter of Asia.



Image: Group of migrants on MV *Toscana* at Trieste, 1954. ANMM Collection Gift from Barbara Alysen

FIGURE 3 Two websites telling stories of the migrant experience in Australia

ACTIVITIES

EXPLAIN

1. What is dual citizenship?
2. How can dual citizenship influence a person's sense of national identity?

DISCOVER

3. Use the **Department of Immigration case studies** weblink and the **SBS case studies** weblink in your Resources section to discover the stories of a diverse group of Australian migrants. Summarise the reasons why the people you learned about chose to migrate to Australia.



THINK

4. 'New migrants should abandon their existing national identity and adopt that of their new country.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
5. Why is it important for people to feel a sense of belonging to their country?
6. Do you believe all people, regardless of reason, should be allowed to migrate to Australia? Justify your answer.

SkillBuilder: Investigating national identity in another country

Tell me

A successful oral presentation starts before a single word has been spoken:

- *Preparation.* It is crucial that you research and plan your speech properly. Being organised and prepared will give you confidence in yourself and in your subject material.
- *Proper use of visual aids.* Are you going to use PowerPoint, Keynote or any other visual aids? If so, you need to consider the proper use of these tools. Avoid making the mistake of overloading the audience with a cluttered combination of visual and audio information.
- *Delivery.* The final key to a successful presentation is the delivery. Sustained eye contact and a confident, well-projected voice will help you deliver your intended message.



Show me

How to give an oral presentation

Preparation

The following table will help you plan the elements of your presentation:

Table 1 Preparing for your presentation

Purpose of presentation	To explain how to deliver successful oral presentations
Key message	That through proper practice and planning, students can overcome their potential fear of public speaking
Secondary message	Explain the elements of successful oral presentations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparation — research and planning

- proper use of visual aids
- delivery — sustained eye contact and confident delivery of the speech.

Proper use of visual aids

Visual information can add to your presentation. However, it can also decrease the effectiveness and clarity of your message if used incorrectly. Make sure that any visual aids serve a clear purpose. Do not commit any of the mistakes shown in the **How not to use PowerPoint** weblink in your Resources section.



Delivery

The effectiveness of your speech often relates to the connection you make to your audience. Eye contact and a confident delivery of your speech are two ways to boost this connection. Sustained eye contact requires more than simply looking up from your notes every now and then. You need to make and hold eye contact with members of your audience. This will only be possible if you have practised your speech often and know the content extremely well. Sustained eye contact will also improve your delivery of the speech itself. Remember not to rush your speech, and be sure to explain your points clearly and carefully.



Let me do it

You have just learned about the skills required to successfully deliver an oral presentation. Now it is time to put these skills into action by investigating the national identity of a nearby Asian country. Working either individually or in pairs, you will need to deliver a five-minute oral presentation in which you discuss your chosen country and how its national identity is displayed.

Draw up a table (similar to table 1) to help you prepare and plan your speech. Then use the procedure discussed in this SkillBuilder to ensure that your presentation is successful.

Review and reflect

Review

Australia's national identity is known for its diversity. Our communities are comprised of people from a large range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This cultural diversity unifies Australian society and creates a sense of belonging. Many of our laws and values have their origins in the religious traditions of European settlers. However, due to the secular nature of Australian government, religious freedom is still allowed and encouraged. In recent years, the mistreatment of Indigenous Australians has been formally recognised and steps to true reconciliation have begun.

- The diversity of Australian identity can be used to unify communities and create a sense of belonging.
- Judeo-Christian traditions have influenced the society in which we live.
- Proper understanding and respect for the culture and traditions of Indigenous Australians are important parts of modern Australian society.



Interactivity
Multiple choice
Searchlight ID: INT-4309



Interactivity
True/false
Searchlight ID: INT-4310



Interactivity
Crossword
Searchlight ID: INT-5320

Reflect

Congratulations! You've just been appointed as the prime minister's new immigration advisor. It is an extremely prestigious position and one that is taken very seriously. The prime minister is under pressure because some people believe that Australia allows too many immigrants to enter Australia. You know this is not true and so does the prime minister. Your task is to create a short five-minute presentation (in any format) that explains the positive role that immigrants play in Australian society and why they should continue to be allowed to enter Australia. Use the knowledge and skills you have learned in this topic to help you complete this task. Good luck!