

Chapter 4: Australian identity and diversity

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Chapter 4: Australian identity and diversity

Overview

As part of the Miss Universe beauty pageant, contestants must wear their country's national dress. The Indian contestant usually wears a sari and the entrant from Japan a version of a kimono. In the 2010 Miss Universe pageant, the Australian contestant chose to wear the costume shown in figure 1, complete with Ugg boots. There are iconic pieces of Australian clothing such as the Anzac slouch hat, the jackaroo's Akubra hat or even the humble pair of thongs, yet there is no distinct Australian national dress and nor is there an Australian national food. These cultural items may appear unimportant at first, yet they represent our national identity and our shared values. As Australia is a country rich in cultural diversity, it is no surprise that finding one item to represent all of us is so difficult.



FIGURE 1 The 2010 Australian Miss Universe contestant in her 'national dress'

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Our national identity

Watch this video to learn more about our national identity.

Searchlight ID: ELES-2079

STARTER QUESTIONS

1. What is national identity?
2. How can national identity change?
3. What role do values play in Australian society?
4. What values are expressed in Australian society?
5. How do you think Australian identity will change in the future?
6. Name three examples of Australian values.
7. Do you believe the costume shown in figure 1 accurately reflects Australian identity?
8. Describe a typical Australian person — draw a sketch to help your description. Consider the drawing you just made. Where do you think your ideas of Australian identity have come from?

4.1 Key features of Australian society

Modern Australian society reflects the combination of a diverse range of cultures. It recognises our country's rich history as well as the influence of new traditions and customs. Our communities are tolerant and welcoming. Cultural differences are understood and used to bring people together rather than drive them apart. The features of Australian society that enable this sense of unity will be discussed in this chapter.

'From all the lands on Earth we come'

Imagine your classroom is a mini version of Australian society. At least six of your classmates are likely to have been born overseas and ten people in your class will have at least one parent who was born outside Australia. This is an example of **multiculturalism**. A society in which a range of cultural and religious backgrounds exists is said to be culturally diverse or multicultural. Australia is an excellent example of a multicultural society with people from almost 200 nations represented in our country.



FIGURE 1 European immigrants arriving in Australia in 1958



FIGURE 2 Vietnamese immigrants rescued from the sea in 1989

Look around your classroom. Only those people with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander heritage can truly call themselves Australians. All other people have, at some stage of their family's history, migrated to Australia from another country. From the first European settlers to more recent arrivals, there have been several different waves of **immigration** to Australia. Table 1 provides a brief summary of Australia's immigration history.

Table 1 Australia's immigration history

Period of immigration	Main countries/regions of origin	Types of migrants
European settlement (1778–1868)	Britain (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and some people from other parts of the British Empire	Convicts, officials and free settlers
Gold rush (1851–1901)	Britain, Germany, France, Italy, eastern Europe, China and United States of America	Prospectors (those seeking gold) and merchants
Post–World War II (1945–1970)	Eastern Europe, Britain, Germany, France and Italy	Political refugees and skilled migrants
Modern Immigration (1970–present)	China, Vietnam, South-East Asia, eastern Europe, Russia and the former Soviet Union, Southern and Central Africa, India, Afghanistan and the Middle East	Political and economic refugees and skilled migrants

With so many different cultures and traditions present, multicultural societies like Australia are often very friendly and understanding. However, there have been times in Australian history when these differences have led to conflict and division, including

- the treatment of Indigenous Australians by European settlers (1778 onwards)
- the White Australia Policy (1901–1973)
- the race riots in Cronulla, New South Wales (in 2005).

These are all examples of **cultural intolerance**. It is important for us to learn from these events and ensure that cultural differences are understood, celebrated and embraced.

Religion and Australian society

Throughout history, religion and governments have been closely linked. In ancient Egypt, people saw the pharaoh as both a god and a ruler. For centuries, the kings of Europe claimed they had been chosen by god to rule their lands — a concept known as 'divine right'. Yet as society developed, people began to see problems when governments had strong ties to a particular religion. One of these problems is that other religions were often ignored and their followers felt left out of society.

A secular nation is one that separates religion and government. This means that religion is not allowed to influence the laws of a country. All citizens are considered equal, regardless of what

religion they follow or whether they follow a religion at all. Secular governments can benefit religion in society because they encourage religious freedom. Without the government telling its people what religion they should follow, people are allowed to choose their own religious beliefs.

Australia is a secular nation, with secularism even written into our Constitution:

the Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion (section 116, Australian Constitution).

By using these words, the writers of the Australian Constitution allowed for all religions and cultures to safely and actively participate in Australian society. This laid the foundation for the religious freedom that we now experience.

Freedom of religion

Communities in which different religions coexist are said to be 'multi-faith'. Look for different religious symbols and buildings to see if you live in a multi-faith suburb. You may see churches, mosques, synagogues or temples. You will find that there is more religious diversity now than was present in your parents' generation. This diversity has been encouraged by Australia's secular government and our multicultural society. Without an official Australian religion, people have been free to express their own religious traditions and customs. This freedom also includes atheists – people who do not believe in any god or religion. Table 2 shows the major religions observed by Australians in 2006 and 2011.

Table 2 Religious affiliation in Australia, 2006 and 2011

Religion	2006	2011
Buddhism	418 800	529 000
Christianity	12 685 900	13 150 600
Hinduism	148 100	275 500
Islam	340 400	476 300
Judaism	88 800	97 300
Other religions	109 000	168 200
No religion	3 706 500	4 796 800

Source: Data derived from ABS 1301.0 – *Yearbook Chapters, 2009–10 and 2011.0 – Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, 2012–2013*.



FIGURE 3 The holy city of Jerusalem is an example of a multi-faith society. Here, the Dome of the Rock (a sacred Muslim mosque) can be seen behind the Western Wall (one of the holiest sites in Judaism).

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. What concept did some European kings use to claim the throne?
2. What is the main benefit of a secular nation?

EXPLAIN

3. Describe the two photographs shown in figures 1 and 2.
4. Use the information in table 1 to explain two ways in which Australian immigration has changed over time.
5. Use the data in table 2 to determine which religions experienced large growth between 2006 and 2011, and suggest reasons why you think these trends occurred.

Note: To answer this question, you need to calculate the percentage change between the two years for each religion. You would do this by subtracting the 2006 data from the 2011 data, dividing the result by the 2006 data, and then converting to a percentage by multiplying by 100. (For example, using Buddhism as an example, you would subtract 418 758 from 528 977 to give 110 219. Divide 110 219 by 418 758 to give 0.2632. Multiplied by 100, this becomes 26.3 per cent.)

DISCOVER

6. Research your family history (parents and/or grandparents are excellent sources of information). Write a brief summary of their stories.
7. Walk around your neighbourhood and record the types of religious symbols and buildings you see. (You may like to do this part of the activity with a friend or family member.) Compare your list to the religions listed in table 2. Which religions from the table were represented in your neighbourhood and which were not?

THINK

8. One of the photographs in figures 1 and 2 shows voluntary migration (the people chose to leave their own country) and the other shows forced migration (the people were forced to leave their own country). Match the photograph with the type of migration and explain your choice.

4.2 Australian values

Were you ever told the story of the tortoise and the hare? The two animals raced each other by using different tactics. The hare sped away and then took a rest, confident that he would win. Yet the tortoise, slowly plodding along, passed the resting hare and won the race. Stories like this, and others you were probably told when you were younger, had morals — hidden messages explaining what was right and wrong. These stories describe what values are seen to be important and explain how people should live their lives. Go back and read these stories now and those values will become apparent.

What are values?

Values are like a set of instructions — if you follow a particular value, it will lead to a particular outcome. So if you were to demonstrate the value of compassion, you would try to feel the emotions someone else is feeling. If you were to demonstrate the value of honesty, you would be truthful and avoid telling lies. Usually, these outcomes involve treating people in a fair and respectful manner.

How do values influence society?

People may place different amounts of importance on individual values. One person might think that honesty is the most important value, while someone else may think it is creativity. Differences in values can sometimes drive people apart. We see this frequently in society and on a variety of scales. Consider two politicians debating each other in parliament. They are doing so because they have different values. On the other hand, shared values can unite people. It is likely that you chose your friends because you share things in common. This may be a football team or a favourite band, but it can also be a value. In the same way that shared values can bring friends together, they can also unite entire countries.

What are Australian values?

Australian Values Statement

You must sign this statement if you are aged 18 years or over.

I confirm that I have read, or had explained to me, information provided by the Australian Government on Australian society and values.

I understand:

- Australian society values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion, commitment to the rule of law, Parliamentary democracy, equality of men and women and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good
- Australian society values equality of opportunity for individuals, regardless of their race, religion or ethnic background
- the English language, as the national language, is an important unifying element of Australian society.

I undertake to respect these values of Australian society during my stay in Australia and to obey the laws of Australia.

I understand that, if I should seek to become an Australian citizen:

- Australian citizenship is a shared identity, a common bond which unites all Australians while respecting their diversity
- Australian citizenship involves reciprocal rights and responsibilities. The responsibilities of Australian Citizenship include obeying Australian laws, including those relating to voting at elections and serving on a jury.

If I meet the legal qualifications for becoming an Australian citizen and my application is approved I understand that I would have to pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people.

Signature of Applicant

FIGURE 1 All new visa applicants are required to sign the Australian Values Statement.

All people who apply for an Australian **visa** are required to sign the Australian Values Statement (see figure 1). By signing this document, visa applicants commit to following the shared values of the Australian community. These values include:

- respect for individual freedom (including religious freedom)
- commitment to the rule of law, democracy, the equality of men and women and pursuit of the public good
- tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need.

These values are linked by a common theme — **diversity**. By respecting individual freedom, we allow different groups to express their particular cultural backgrounds. By expressing the value of

tolerance, we demonstrate our understanding of cultural differences. In this way, Australian values protect the multicultural composition of our society and encourage cohesion in our communities.

How do we express Australian values?

Australian values can be expressed in many ways. Public rallies are common in cities across Australia (see figure 2). These large-scale gatherings raise public awareness and provide people with an opportunity to show support for different causes. Some of our public holidays also represent Australian values. As well as commemorating the lives of fallen servicemen and women, Anzac Day (25 April) celebrates values such as sacrifice and perseverance. Australia Day (26 January) marks the arrival of the First Fleet on Australian shores and, for this reason, this date does not sit well with many Indigenous Australians. Yet Australia Day has evolved to represent a celebration of diversity, with some migrants choosing this date to complete their citizenship ceremonies (see figure 3).



FIGURE 2 Examples of public protests in Australia

Every day you demonstrate Australian values at school. You demonstrate democracy when you elect representatives for your student council. You demonstrate compassion for others when you stand up for someone being bullied. Following a set of shared values is crucial for any society. Values can unite communities and show people how they should live their lives.



FIGURE 3

A citizenship ceremony. Australia Day is a popular day for migrants to formally become Australian citizens.

Activities

REMEMBER

1. Who is required to sign the Australian Values Statement?
2. Which public holidays represent Australian values and what values are they?

EXPLAIN

3. List and explain the three values which are most important to you.
4. Share your answer for question 3 with the person sitting next to you. Describe any similarities or differences between your answers.

THINK

5. Choose any three values from the Australian Values Statement and describe what you think these values mean. Try to use examples from your everyday life in your answers.
6. Which value would you remove from the Australian Values Statement?

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Interactivity

The road interactivity

Searchlight ID: INT-5431

4.3 Is there such a thing as an Australian identity?

You wear a school uniform to help identify you as being part of your school. Without this uniform, there would be no way to tell to which school you belong. But what if your school was known for not having a uniform, instead allowing its students to wear their casual clothes to school? This freedom of choice and diversity of dress would then become a way in which your school could be identified. Australia society is exactly like this kind of school. Our identity is characterised by its diversity, and our differences bring us together.

What is national identity?

National identity is much more than a national cuisine, costume or anthem. It is a way for people to identify with others and feel a sense of community. When a country is made up of people from only one cultural group, it is easier to see examples of their national identity. Such is the case with many of the smaller eastern European nations such as Slovakia, Serbia and Croatia. However, when countries have a more multicultural population, like Australia, it can be harder to define a singular national identity.



FIGURE 1 Serbian men demonstrating traditional dress and dance

To integrate or to congregate?

Upon arrival in Australia, new migrants may face a range of difficulties. They need to find somewhere to live and somewhere to work, and often need to learn English as well. Migrants are also faced with a cultural challenge — they must find a balance between their existing national identities and their new Australian identity. With close to 200 nationalities already represented in Australian society, new migrants can usually find existing communities of people sharing the same background. But should they **congregate** in these communities and follow their existing traditions and customs, or should they **integrate** into multicultural communities? This question is fiercely debated by both politicians and members of the general public. Without displays of migrant

culture, we would not have the diverse society we see today. However, if new migrants only associate with own communities, they will not gain exposure to Australian culture and values. Therefore, a balance between these two choices is needed to ensure the protection of traditional identities and the development of new ones.



FIGURE 2 Melbourne's Chinatown reflects the diversity of Australian society.

Indigenous identity



FIGURE 3 Cathy Freeman's controversial celebration at the 1994 Commonwealth Games

At the 1994 Commonwealth Games, Indigenous athlete Cathy Freeman controversially draped herself in both the Australian and Aboriginal flags upon winning the 200 m sprint. Freeman's celebration caused much debate because the Aboriginal flag was not considered an official flag of Australia. Freeman chose her victory as an opportunity to demonstrate and celebrate her Indigenous identity. For her, there was no difference between being Australian and being Aboriginal.



FIGURE 4 A traditional Indigenous smoking ceremony

At the beginning of school assemblies around Australia, we read the ‘Welcome to country’ — an acknowledgement of the traditional Indigenous land owners. At state and federal government events, Indigenous leaders are in attendance and appropriate customs, such as smoking ceremonies, are conducted. These acts recognise Indigenous culture and foster Indigenous identity. However, it is important for us to remember why we do these things. If we do not, these actions lose their meaning and become only tokens of Indigenous culture and identity. The impact of **tokenistic** cultural performances is serious. If the meaning behind these and other customs is lost, then so too is a part of Indigenous identity.

ACTIVITIES

EXPLAIN

1. How is national identity important to a country?
2. Draw your idea of a typical Australian.
3. Choose two features of your drawing and explain why you included them.

DISCOVER

4. Write a brief history of the Australian Aboriginal flag in one short paragraph. Include information such who designed it, what it represents and any other aspects you consider interesting.

THINK

5. Why do you think Cathy Freeman's celebration at the Commonwealth Games caused such controversy?
6. In groups of two or three, create a Student Action Pledge — a list of values and subsequent actions that you believe will contribute to a fair and cohesive school environment.

SkillBuilder: Developing argument paragraphs

Tell me

What is an argument paragraph?

Many times in your academic career at school and beyond, you will be asked to write essays. An effective essay has several characteristics. It clearly explains the background of an issue, contains evidence and examples of the issue and, perhaps most importantly, it discusses the positives and negatives of an issue. This latter characteristic is best demonstrated through argument paragraphs.

An argument paragraph is a section of an essay that presents a point of view. Beginning with a topic sentence, the paragraph will then explain the point of view and support it with evidence. Finally, a linking sentence will draw the reader's attention back to the key questions being discussed. In this way, an argument paragraph follows the TEEL structure:

- T**opic sentence — describes what the argument paragraph addresses
- E**xplanation — explains your main argument in detail
- E**vidence — supports your argument with at least one piece of evidence
- L**inking sentence — links the paragraph back to the main question

Show me

Imagine that, after completing this topic, you have been asked by your teacher to write an essay focusing on the following statement: 'That the Aboriginal flag should be the only national flag of Australia'. The paragraph below is an example of the kind of paragraph that you would find in this essay. The paragraph was written using the TEEL structure. The different parts of the paragraph can be colour coded to make it easier to see TEEL in action (**Topic**, **Explanation**, **Evidence**, **Link**).

National flags are the most simple and most powerful representations of a country and its people. They commonly contain symbols of culture, values and history. As Indigenous Australians are the true owners of this land, it should be their culture, their values and their history which are represented in Australia's national flag. The background of the Aboriginal flag is divided horizontally into a black half and a red half. The black section represents the Indigenous people of Australia and the red section represents the Aboriginal connection to the land. The middle of the flag is a yellow disc which represents the provider of life, the sun. The Aboriginal flag reflects much about the Aboriginal people, and thus Australia itself. For this reason, the Aboriginal flag should be the only national flag used in Australia.

Let me do it

Use the information and tips in this SkillBuilder to practise writing your own argument paragraphs. Be sure to use the TEEL structure as it will help you logically organise your thoughts and arguments.

Here are some essay topics which you can use to form the basis of your argument topics. You will need to do some research before writing your practice paragraphs.


1. No singular form of Australian identity exists.
2. It is not important for a country to have a national identity.
3. The Aboriginal flag should be the only official flag of Australia.
4. Religion and government should also remain separated.
5. It is impossible for people from different backgrounds to share common values.
6. New migrants should abandon their traditions and customs and adopt an Australian way of life.
7. New migrants should not be allowed to speak their native language after they arrive in Australia.

Review and reflect

Review

Identifying and defining Australian identity is a challenging task. Our communities are characterised by their multicultural nature and, because of this, looking for a singular Australian identity can be hard. While Indigenous Australians remain strongly connected to their culture and traditions, other parts of Australian society are characterised by their cultural diversity. As a secular society, cultural and religious freedoms are fostered and encouraged in Australian communities. Based on shared values, these open and inclusive communities make it easier for migrant groups to feel at home in Australian society.


- Representations of Australian identity are diverse.
- Australia is a multicultural and secular society in which cultural differences are celebrated.
- Communities are based on shared values.



Interactivity

Multiple choice


Searchlight ID: INT-3902



Interactivity

True/false

Searchlight ID: INT-3903



Interactivity

Crossword

Searchlight ID: INT-5315

Reflect 

The SBS website contains hundreds of stories from Australian migrants. It covers broad topics such as politics, design and transportation, and describes the role played by migrants in building our nation. Use the **Immigration nation** weblink in your eBookPLUS to learn more about the stories of Australian immigrants. Choose one category and watch the relevant videos, then summarise your information in a table with the headings shown below.

Plus	Minus	Interesting