

Australia Day, our national day: What does it mean?

Tell students they will take part in a discussion about Australia Day, our national day. National days around the world tend to be public holidays and most of them celebrate the independence of the country from a colonial power (e.g. countries in Africa and South America), or of becoming a republic after revolution against a king or authoritarian ruler. Take a quick look at the Wikipedia map (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Independence_or_iki/National_day) and look at the reason given for Australia's national day, which is 'the Foundation of Sydney on 26th January 1788'.

We will look at how our celebrations represent our **Citizenship, diversity and identity** as a nation. The three words represent one of the strands of Civics and Citizenship. The following sequence has been developed to allow students to become used to the rules of civil conversation and accountable talk. (Please find information about these in Appendices). We will discuss 'citizenship' and 'diversity' in simple terms, but 'identity' brings up more opinions and often controversy, so it is suggested to follow the suggested sequence to ensure that students have become used to following the rules and can discuss topics with respect and civility.

DIVERSITY:

Firstly, talk about the definition of the word Diversity. Use the *Frayer model* to look at examples and nonexamples of the word. (If students are not used to it, find the model at <https://www.worksheetworks.com/miscellanea/graphic-organizers/frayer.html>. (Compare Diversity with Unity).

- Organise students to form into a pair with someone they do not know well, and follow the steps of the Think, Pair, Share strategy. (a) Think: All students are to think about what they did on Australia Day – by themselves, with their family or at a public event. (b) Pair: Each student shares their activities with each other, with each making a list as they go along so that all possibilities are covered. (c) Share: Teacher records activities for the class by asking for one response from each pair's list until no pair can add anything else. (Possibilities to suggest are: Nothing different; Attended an Australia Day public event or fireworks etc; had an Australia Day BBQ, picnic or outing with family; watched a program about Australia day on TV; Attended a citizenship ceremony; attended a ceremony to reward local citizens for their active citizenship activities; attended an indigenous event). Teacher says that all these activities demonstrate the diversity of ways the Australian population spends our national day.
- **N.B.** Check with students whether they followed the rules of Civil Conversation in their pairs, or whether they need more practice.
- As a class discussion, have students now think about the way the Australian population responded to the period of the bushfire disasters of 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the initial lockdown in 2020. During this period there were many different responses to the lockdown, but on the whole people followed the directions from emergency services, the government and health officials. We were urged to think that "We are one, but we are many" (From the song "I am, you are, we are Australians". See the ABC promos: <https://help.abc.net.au/hc/en-us/articles/360001451735--ABCyours-I-am-Australian-promos>). The first words of the song include "For forty thousand years I've been the first Australian" and the chorus says "We are one, but we are many, and from all the lands on earth we come". (Find all the words at

<https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/4901091/The+Seekers/I+Am+Australian>). What do students think this says about the Australian people? Explain the accountable talk rules, and ask students to try to use them in this discussion. (N.B. *It is possible that this information may encourage racial or cultural references that can be discouraged through the use of the rules, making people justify their statements*).

- Taking it Further: Australia is known as being the most successful multicultural nation in the world. We are a nation of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and maybe that is reflected in your class or school. To find evidence of this, look at Australian Bureau of Statistics resources at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/migration-australia/latest-release> and scroll down to *Table 1.2 Australia's population by country of birth, 2019 (a)*, to look the Australian-born population and the country of birth of recent migrants. Also, remind students that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are also very diverse. At the time of European settlement, there were over 500 different indigenous First Nations, all with different languages and cultural behaviours because they lived in different environments. See the map at <https://mgns.w.gov.au/sector/aboriginal/aboriginal-language-map/>. N.B. *Are there more examples of diversity to add to the Frayer Model, if you used it?*
- N.B. *Check with students whether they thought they and others followed the rules of Civil Conversation and Accountable Talk in this discussion, or whether they need more practice. There will be opportunities for more practice of accountable talk later.*

CITIZENSHIP:

There are two important events that happen only on Australia Day each year. (A) Each local area holds a citizenship ceremony on or around Australia Day, where people who were not born in Australia swear a pledge of loyalty to their new country and receive a certificate of citizenship; (B) A televised ceremony rewards the efforts of Australians of the Year for work that they have done for the “common good” of our society – i.e., demonstrating ‘good citizenship’.

1. **Citizenship ceremonies** provide an important opportunity to officially welcome new citizens as full members of the Australian community, and to allow them to formally receive full citizenship rights. The pledge takes two forms, but both say “*I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey.*” This acknowledges that citizenship provides privileges that non-citizens don’t have, but also implies certain responsibilities. Many migrants want to maintain their previous citizenship, and, if so, they are termed “dual citizens”. (However, dual citizens cannot stand for election as they must show total loyalty to Australia as members of a government). (See more details about the ceremony at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/citizenship/ceremony>)
2. Firstly, find out if any students have taken part in a citizenship ceremony. Ask them if they can say what the ceremony meant to their family. Other students need to realise that there are many reasons for migrants to come to Australia, including war, lack of democracy, religious persecution etc in their home country). Next, organise students into different pairs, and this time use Think, Write, Pair, Share strategy. Show students the information on the following page about the Responsibilities and Privileges of Australian citizens: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/citizenship-subsite/Pages/Learn-about-being-an-Australian.aspx>. This time they Think about any questions they have about the responsibilities and privileges mentioned and why they are important, and

Write them down. They then Share their ideas as before, and then the teacher asks all pairs for their ideas. This may lead to a discussion about other responsibilities that they themselves have – at home, in the school and in society - and how fulfilling those responsibilities assists the “common good”.

Australians of the Year - The Award ceremony will be over by the time school starts, but the people nominated by each state for each section can be seen on <https://pmc.gov.au/news-centre/government/introducing-2021-australians-year>. The site says that “*Each of the national finalists have been nominated for an Australian of the Year Award by the National Australia Day Council due to their impact and achievement in a range of sectors. These sectors include science and medicine, social and community projects, human rights advocacy, social entrepreneurship, sustainability and contributions to the bushfires and pandemic responses*”. There are four categories: Australian of the Year; Senior Australian of the Year; Young Australian of the Year and Australia’s Local Hero.

1. In each category there are a number of nominations, and they are for their contributions covering a variety of fields. This time we will use the Citizenship Thinking Compass to sort out the fields where people have made contributions. The Compass uses N, S, E and W as organisers, but here they stand for N-Natural (Environment); E – Economic (charity, raising money); S- Social (anything to do with people, including health); and W - Who decides (people advocating the government on the behalf of others in need).
2. Take two pairs from the previous exercise to form a group of four. Allocate a category (N,E,S,or W) to each person in each group, and ask them to read all the nominations and note the ones that fit their category. (e.g. all the environmental activities the nominees were involved in).
3. Put all Ns together to see if they agree, and similarly for the other categories.
4. Each group then tells the rest of the class about the activities for the nominees in their group. (If there are many who are e.g., advocates, simply list the types of people they are advocating for. Some may appear to be founders who raise money for a particular charity, so they could belong to E and/or S.)
5. Student reflection: Still in their groups they discuss which things they can do for the good of society in each of the four categories as good citizens at their present age. Discuss each category in turn – e.g. what can we do for the environment as an individual or as a class or school? List the suggestions and see if other groups have had similar thoughts.
6. Then each student makes a commitment to the area where they would like to volunteer their services in the future for “the common good”.
7. Late update! You could also refer to the Prime Minister’s wish for January 26 to be *a national day of thanks, calling on citizens to keep making their gratitude known*. See <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/national/thanksamillion/thanks-a-million-campaign-messages-of-thanks-from-around-australia/news-story/b06bb6e88286771a1f2bc871691a7573>.

IDENTITY

At the beginning of every year there is much discussion about the meaning of Australia Day and whether the day should be changed to another date because the 26th of January represents the day that Europeans came ashore to set up a colony that resulted in the indigenous population losing their land and much of their culture, and many of them continue to suffer disadvantage in our society.

A number of recent items have received comment, including the following dot points and articles. Select those that are appropriate to your students' level of understanding and start a class or group discussion that must be **civil and accountable to facts** (refresh from the Appendices if necessary). Each student could read one or two articles and respond to them.

- The Australian Prime Minister has announced that from January 1st 2021, there will be a change to the words of our national anthem from “young and free” to “one and free”. Do students know why the wording was changed? (<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/not-forever-young-australia-now-a-nation-that-is-one-and-free-20201231-p56r2x.html>)
- The Big Bash Cricket teams have decided to not use the term Australia Day, and just use “26th January” - “to make it more respectful”. What would they be concerned about? (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-21/big-bash-league-indigenous-strips-australia-day/13077082>)
- For a background to how long we have actually celebrated this day, find the heading: *What’s Australia Day and why do we celebrate it?* on <https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/australian-history/australia-day/>. You will discover that it has not been our national day for very long, and before that only celebrated in NSW, and called Foundation Day. Also see the timeline on the site <https://www.australiaday.org.au/about/history/> that shows that Australians were still British subjects up to 1984, though with symbolic citizenship from 1948. It has been specifically celebrated on the 26th January only since 1994.
- Aborigines often blame Captain Cook for their troubles and this recently led to cancel culture actions being taken against his statues. But perhaps Cook should be left out of the equation here. He arrived on the east coast in April, this was the Age of Empire and the Age of Exploration, and Europeans knew that the coast of the South Land had been explored by the Dutch and the French were interested, so it was inevitable that someone would arrive. Stan Grant has proposed the idea of “*The view from the ship and the view from the shore*” (<https://www.smh.com.au/national/between-the-ship-and-the-shore-the-captain-james-cook-i-know-20200427-p54ni3.html>). Perhaps this can be a basis for discussions about reconciliation?

Alternative dates have been suggested for a national day that will celebrate a safe, inclusive, democratic society. See these suggestions: <https://www.news.com.au/national/australia-day-2021-alternative-dates-for-our-national-holiday/news-story/d5c85f16163ded41e695f1c1134462e8>. However, apart from Federation on January 1st, these seem fairly symbolic, but not in the same way that Independence Day (US) or Bastille Day (French) raise the passions of people after ridding themselves of an autocratic ruler.

Commentator Michael Pascoe has suggested that our national day always fall of the fourth Monday of January, so that it is a long weekend, but only sometimes falling on the 26th.

Two other suggestions:

1. That the 26th be a day of celebration but also of reconciliation, with a special activity (like the Awards) devoted to accounting for advances that governments have made for indigenous welfare.
2. Perhaps we need to wait for the day that we inevitably become a republic with an Australian as our Head of State (but the Queen/King still as Head of the Commonwealth) to fit under the headings of the Wikipedia map? (i.e. Independence -related or Revolution -related).

N.B. Reflection on how much students appeared to be civil, respectful and accountable to facts.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Rules of Civil Conversation:

- *Make eye contact to show you are listening*
- *Know the name of the person you are talking to*
- *Listen actively in order to understand*
- *Clearly express your own point of view*
- *Do not talk over others*
- *Try to understand the perspectives of others*
- *Be prepared to politely challenge someone else*
- *Reject name-calling and stereotypes*
- *Disagree with the opinion but don't attack the person*
- *Get used to being wrong, or agree to disagree*
- *Be prepared to change your opinion*
- *Thank others for their contribution*

Appendix 2: The Phases and rules of Accountable Talk:

Phase 1: Discussion to understand all perspectives

Examples of question and response stems to use:

Who? What? When? Where? and Why? What do you think? I don't understand – can you explain further? Can you give me an example? Clarify what you mean by ____ . My evidence suggests that ____ . What evidence do you have? I partly agree (or disagree) with X, but I am having trouble understanding ____ . Define "x" . What values are evident here?

Phase 2: Dialogue to expand understanding based on all the perspectives presented

Examples of question and response stems to use:

Where did you get your evidence? Why is that a reliable source? I still have a question about ____ . I want to add to X's statement about ____ . Have you considered all parts of the Thinking Compass? Can you tell me why you think that this is true? X and Y present similar opinions, but need more evidence to back them up. I now agree with X, because of ____ . Is this consistent with your core values?

Phase 3: Dialogue to analyse previous statements, and try for agreement

Examples of question and response stems to use:

Have we sorted fact from fiction? Have we explored all assumptions? How can we summarise the perspectives of group members? What are the areas of agreement and disagreement? How do we feel about the evidence? Based on the evidence presented, I now think ____ . Have we covered all the perspectives of the Thinking Compass? What solutions are suggested? What is the most ethical solution – for people and the environment? What could be the effect of that solution on (e.g.) the environment? society? Can we find a compromise solution that all agree to?