

**YEAR 6 HISTORY: Introduction**

# Sikh and Indian Australians

**CONTINUITY AND CHANGE:  
MIGRANTS FROM ASIA 1901 TO 2015**

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## Immigration is vital to Australian history and citizenship.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century set the scene for powerful social and political debates on the composition of Australian colonial society. With the arrival of Federation the fears and propaganda brewing in the late 1800s were written into new Commonwealth acts of parliament such as the Immigration Restriction Act (1901), Pacific Islander Labourer's Act (1901) and the Naturalisation Act (1903). These were collectively termed the White Australia policy. The aim was to encourage predominantly British immigration and through a "Dictation Test" reduce the numbers of "Asiatic and African immigrants". John Watson, the first Labor Party Prime Minister in 1904 told the Commonwealth Parliament: "In each and every avenue of life we find the competition of the coloured races insidiously (dangerously) creeping in, and if we are to maintain the standard of living we think necessary, in order that our people may be brought up with a degree of comfort, and with scholastic advantages [to support] the improvement and general advancement of the nation, some pause must be made in regard to the extension of the competition of the coloured aliens generally."

But what was to happen to the many non-European Australians who already lived in the colonies and had contributed their labour and skills for decades? What became of the cameleers, Japanese and Malay pearl divers, Indian hawkers and shop owners, Chinese small businessmen and labourers and the Pacific Islanders working in tropical Queensland? Where did they fit in the newly Federated "white" nation?

This series of learning sequences will focus on the experience of immigrants to Australia predominantly from the Asian region during the 20th Century. The resources provide a framework for an inquiry on immigration using a case study of Indian, and especially Sikh, migrants during the 20th century. The changing Commonwealth Government policies affected the rights and status of non European immigrants, from carefully documented early in the century, to valued and influential citizens in a multicultural society in the last quarter of that century. The Learning sequences provide opportunities to explore both immigrant experiences and the changing policies of the Commonwealth Government. The stages of the changing migration policy can be divided into three time-spans, which form the basis of the learning sequences:

- 1901 - 1945
- 1946 - 1972
- 1973 - the present

These lesson ideas will also provide the context for an extended inquiry based on stories of groups of people who migrated to Australia, the reasons they migrated (e.g. push-pull factors) and their contributions to society. Activities will develop a range of HASS skills and while the focus of the resource is on Year 6 History it also includes knowledge and concepts from the following HASS subjects:

- Geography: The location of the major countries of the Asia region in relation to Australia and the geographical diversity within the region.
- Civics and Citizenship: Who can be an Australian citizen, the formal rights and responsibilities, and shared values of Australian citizenship.

The development of a timeline provides a useful overview of the origin of migrants and changing federal immigration policies from 1901 to 2015. Teacher Resource: Overview of Australian Immigration, provides a list of significant international events as well as Australian migration policies which can be used to create individual or group timelines either at the start or an early stage of the Learning sequences.

See [\*\*Teacher Resource: Overview of Australian Immigration\*\*](#)