

YEAR 6 HISTORY: Learning sequence 2

Sikh and Indian Australians

**THE DOOR OPENS SLOWLY -
IMMIGRATION 1946 - 1972**

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YEAR 5 HISTORY: SIKH AND INDIAN AUSTRALIANS

Learning sequence 2: The door opens slowly - immigration 1946 - 1972

Activity 1: The Impacts of World War Two

1.1 The Second World War caused the deaths of over 60 million people, damaged homes and infrastructure across Europe and Asia and created millions of refugees or displaced persons.

For an excellent visualisation showing the extent of deaths in World War Two type the following into your search engine: “Huffington Post, Jaw dropping visualisation, sheer number who died in World War II”.

Other significant impacts of the war which caused further momentous changes included:

- The weakening of British, French and other European economies due to the enormous cost of the war.
- The emergence of two “superpowers” - the United States of America and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Communist Russia). Their predominance lasted until the early 1990s competing for allies (to establish the Western and Eastern Blocs), weaponry and supremacy in space. Their competition and propaganda were features of the Cold War.
- Improved technology in medicine and science - such as the use of penicillin, nuclear power and rocket propulsion. (What others can the students find?)
- The creation of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) in 1945 which aimed to encourage peace and security and cooperation on social, cultural, economic and humanitarian matters. The UNO Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, motivated by the horrific actions perpetuated by the Nazis during World War II.
- The independence of many British, Dutch and French colonies in Africa and Asia during the 1940s to 1960s such as India in 1947, Indonesia in 1949 and Vietnam during the 1950s.
- The partition of Palestine to create the independent state of Israel in 1948 with support from some nations but adding to war and instability in the Middle East.

Groups could be instructed to choose one of these impacts to research and develop an infographic or poster to expand on the dot point provided. This will establish the context for many world events during the post war years which influenced Commonwealth policy and the waves of immigration to Australia. The visual information could be displayed around the classroom.

1.2 Populate or perish

Believing that Japan came close to invading Australia in 1942, the Commonwealth Government initiated a program of mass migration to increase the population of Australia. Under the catch-phrase of “Populate or perish” a new policy actively promoted and assisted immigrants from Britain and continental Europe during the 1940s to 1960s. Following the Australian Commonwealth Government agreement with the UNO International Refugee Organisation, there began a resettlement programme for displaced persons, refugees from the war. Between 1947 and 1953 over 170,000 European refugees were accepted into Australia. There were also specific schemes to bring out British migrants, such as the assisted passage scheme which began in 1945. These “10 Pound Poms” formed the majority of the 1.5 million British Immigrants who settled in Australia from 1945 to 1975. British immigration was promoted by other schemes such as the 1957 “Bring Out a Briton” campaign. Agreements were also made to assist migrants from many European countries such as Italy, Poland, the Netherlands, Greece and many other European countries over the next 20 years. The migrants were usually called New Australians which reflected the policy of assimilation, where the new settlers were to quickly adopt the language and cultural practices of Australians and blend in.



Mr Arthur Calwell with the Kalnins family, the 50,000th “New Australian” to arrive. August 1949. Also appears on front cover. (*National Archives of Australia* Image Barcode: 8318052, [wikimedia commons](#))

Activity 2: The weakening of the White Australia policy

Although small groups of non-European migrants had been admitted into Australia under special categories since 1901, a changing world during the 1950s and 1960s began to corrode the hard line support for the White Australia laws. New nations in Asia, political pressure from Australia's allies and pressure from within Australia caused changing attitudes toward immigrants by the late 1960s. The following events can be used by students to create a cause-effect chart showing factors that weakened the White Australia policy.

Significant causes of the slow crumbling of the White Australia policy included:

1. The establishment of the Colombo Plan in 1951 was an early force for change. Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada. Initially signed by Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada, recipient nations included India, Pakistan and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Malaya and North Borneo. The program was later extended to 25 countries including non-Commonwealth Asian countries. As the White Australia policy was criticised for restrictive and racist nature the Australian government developed the Colombo Plan which aimed to:

- To strengthen Australia's political and social relations with Asia
- To increase stability and wealth through improved educational opportunities in the Asian region to weaken the influence of communism
- Encourage people to study in Australia but not stay permanently, hence was compatible with the White Australia policy
- To enable people from Asian countries to see how Australia's democracy works.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-22/an-colombo-plan-student-reunion-60-years-on/4386308>

A small number of Colombo Plan students married Australians and stayed in Australia, slowly bringing change to the nation. Academically talented Sikh students from the Punjab, Singapore and Malaysia were able to attend Australian universities through the Colombo Plan. One of these students was Sardool Singh, who arrived in Australia in 1954. See Singh's comments about his experience:

Teacher Resource 1: Sardool Singh and Australia in the 1950s

2. In 1952 Japanese wives of Australian soldiers who had been members of the occupation forces in Japan after World War Two were admitted into Australia. Before this time these wives and their children were not allowed to live in Australia.
3. In 1958 the Migration Act replaced the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 removing the Dictation Test. From 1956 non-Europeans, who had lived in Australia for 15 years, were allowed to apply for citizenship.
4. The Immigration Reform Group began at the University of Melbourne in 1960 and became a pressure group to promote change. It was supported by academics and energetic students, many of whom had Asian friends and believed that using race to control immigration was morally wrong. The Group developed and published a pamphlet *Control or Colour Bar* in 1960 which sparked a national debate and criticism of the White Australia regulations.
5. In 1966 Australia signed the International Convention on the *Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination* and there was a review of the immigration policy, weakening of the White Australia policy a little further.
6. The Commonwealth Government's Migration Act of 1966 decided that legal equality must exist between British, European and non-European immigrants. The 15 year residence requirement before non-Europeans could apply for Australian citizenship was reduced to 5 years. A new era began as in 1966 the Commonwealth Government allowed academic and professional non-Europeans to apply to enter Australia. Many teachers, doctors and other professionals arrived in Australia from Asia.

Activity: Using a graphic organiser or diagram, explain the key idea of each of the six suggested causes of the weakening of the White Australia policy and rank them from most to least important. Be ready to justify your choices.

OR

Show the cartoon "It will take years to get rid of all this" at the following site:

<https://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/websites-mini/immigration-timeline/1960s/>

Conduct a "See think wonder" activity about what the cartoonist is saying. Encourage the students to use some of the six causes of the crumbling of the White Australia policy to create their own cartoon or visual representation of the topic. Display these around the classroom or scan and share online.

Activity 3: Using interviews to learn about the story of a migrant

3.1 In 1947 India became an independent country and was partitioned into two nations, India and Pakistan. The majority of the population in Pakistan followed Islam, while India had a majority of Hindus. The partition also divided the Punjab between Pakistan and India, causing great disruption to the Sikh communities in this once independent country. Sikhs from East Punjab moved into India and during the violence that surrounded Partition many emigrated to other Asian nations. During the 1950s and 1960s many Sikhs also came to Australia to join families in established businesses. The town of Woolgoolga, in northern New South Wales, attracted many of these immigrants. Sikh farmers had worked in the banana industry from the early twentieth century and had also taken up opportunities to buy farming land in the region. By the 1940s Woolgoolga had a large Sikh community and Australia's first Sikh Temple (*gurdwara*) was built in the town during 1968.

[Teacher resource 2](#) provides information about the experiences of a Sikh family who lived in Bangalow, NSW, which is about 220 km north of Woolgoolga. The document is a primary source as it is based on memories of Harbhajan, the grand daughter of a very important member of the Sikh community in Australia, Baba Ram Singh. Apart from providing information on the story and contribution of Sikh migrants, the resource also demonstrates some types of interview questions. Interview questions are numbered and bolded in the document.

See [Teacher resource 2: A Sikh Migrant story](#)

See also 1984 ABC SPLASH video: Family life and traditions for Woolgoolga Sikhs

When researching migrant stories, reasons why people migrate, their experiences on their journey, their arrival and early years as well as contributions to their new country, interviews (also termed oral history) can be very useful. To support students to build these skills some tips for conducting an interview are provided below:

i. Developing the questions

A formal interview requires carefully planned questions.

Plan each question to build background, feelings and focus on the main requirements of your assignment. For example, the reasons why the person came to Australia, experiences on their trip, first impressions of Australia, life in Australia, information about their employment, friends and family. Write down your questions to keep on track. You may not ask all the questions in this exact order, but this is a guide on what to ask.

The questions must be open so that the interviewee will provide more than a single word response. For example: “*What job did you have when you first came to Australia?*” is a closed question as it can be answered with a single word. Whereas, “Please tell me about your working life when you came to Australia”, is more open and will provide information on the job as well as some experiences in the work place.

Give the list of questions to the interviewee before you conduct the actual interview so they can think about the answers and find some photographs or artefacts to show you.

Ask for the interviewees to bring photographs or artefacts relevant to their lives that they would like to share.

Make sure that your recording device is fully charged.

ii. Conducting the interview

Before beginning the interview ask for permission to record or video the interview. (If this is not given detailed notes will need to be taken)

Ask for clarification, spelling of unusual words or sketches to support the interviewee's explanations.

Don't rush or over-talk the interviewee.

Smile, show interest and encourage the interviewee to speak.

Carefully prompt or encourage the interviewee to add information to their answers.

Transcribe the interview and return it to the Interviewee to check.

Receive written permission to use the interview at school.

iii. Using the interview

Use short quotations from the interview as evidence, writing the interviewee's full name, date and location of the interview as a reference.

Remember that interviews provide the feel and colour of the past, but are not always precise on actual events or the order of events. Factual information from interviews will need to be supported by further evidence from primary or secondary sources.