



Harmony Day

Facts for Students

Harmony Day is celebrated on 21 March every year. It is organised by the Australian Government and is a day to celebrate our culturally diverse society.

Diversity in Australia

Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived in Australia for thousands of years, most of Australia's population is made up of people whose families only arrived in the country within the last 200 years.

When European settlers arrived there were around 600 Indigenous nations (*groups or communities*) living all around Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a vast and rich heritage, with sacred sites around Australia and many dreamtime stories. Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 2.5% of the Australian population.

Because the majority of Australia's population is made up of people who were born here or moved here only one, two or three generations ago, everyone has different and varied backgrounds: Italian, Greek, English, Vietnamese, Irish, Korean, Canadian etc.



Walking down the street you might pass a Japanese sushi bar, a fish and chip shop, a Greek kebab house and an Indian restaurant, all next to each other. If it weren't for all the nationalities and cultures that exist side by side in Australia, can you imagine how uninteresting our streets (*and food*) would be?

All the different cultures that come together in Australia bring many things with them: different foods, ways of dressing, languages, customs and beliefs. Harmony Day is about celebrating these differences, embracing new cultures and making sure that everybody is included in society, as well as celebrated for their uniqueness.



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Immigration and Australia

When people leave their home country to live in another country we call it immigration. Immigration began in Australia in 1788, with the arrival of the First Fleet. The First Fleet was made up of 11 ships carrying English convicts and officers. Although Australia was originally used as a place to send criminals from the overflowing jails in England, free settlers soon began moving here too.

The first immigrants who came to Australia were mainly from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In 1860 over three quarters of Australians were from these places. However, there were also people arriving from other parts of Europe, such as Italy and Greece.

Afghans began arriving during the mid-to-late 1800s, bringing with them camels to explore the outback and transport goods into the desert. During the gold rush in Victoria, many people were attracted from Britain, Germany, China and Ireland by the promise of wealth and riches awaiting them in the soil of the goldfields.

Between World War I and World War II, people who arrived from overseas brought many new skills and ideas with them, allowing Australia to grow into a modern country. Here are just a few examples:

- Stonemasons from Italy contributed to building much of Australia's most magnificent architecture.
- Greek immigrants opened cafés and restaurants.
- Japanese, Malay and Filipino immigrants worked as pearl divers.
- Soccer came to Australia with the British.
- Europeans brought their folk music which inspired generations of Australian country musicians after them.
- Many immigrants worked to build roads and railways.
- Many women from Ireland and Britain worked as maids or servants.

During and after World War II many refugees from throughout Europe came to Australia. In fact, in the following decades there was mass migration. By the middle of the twentieth century, people from all over Europe, the Middle East, Asia and South America were immigrating to Australia.





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After 1977, almost all migrants to Australia travelled by air instead of by ship. In modern times, many people who come to Australia are escaping war and violent conflicts in their home countries.

Living together in harmony

To live harmoniously in Australia, it is essential that we ensure that everyone from different backgrounds is made to feel equal and involved, and is treated with fairness and respect.

Some people might look or dress differently from you. Learning more about the cultures and customs of those around you will help you to better understand these differences. Remember, differences are not a bad thing. They are what make us unique and special. Harmony Day is a day to celebrate and learn more about the things that make us different.

Australia by numbers

Many people from different countries, some of whom speak different languages, and hold various religious beliefs, live side by side in Australia. The top five languages spoken in Australia are:

1. English
2. Mandarin
3. Arabic
4. Cantonese
5. Vietnamese



Approximately 70% of Australians were born here. The rest have moved here. The top five countries from which people have immigrated are:

1. England
2. New Zealand
3. China
4. India
5. Philippines



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These are only the most common languages and birthplaces in Australia, and there are many more, all of which are very interesting to learn about.

The future

Sometimes it can be difficult to reconcile what you learn in the classroom with what you see on television and in the newspapers. We are taught that everyone is equal and not to judge anyone based on their nationality, religion or culture, but every day we see (*or hear about*) conflict that is based on religion, race or culture.

You might be asking yourself what you, as a child, can do to improve the world. Well you can do a lot. If you treat everyone with respect, ensure that people are included and take the time to find out about other cultures, you can help the world to become a more peaceful place.

Begin in your classroom and with your friendship group, then become a leader and take the values of compassion, respect, tolerance, inclusion and harmony out into the world with you. You can be responsible to help make the future better for all of us.



Harmony Day fast facts:

- Did you know that since 1945 over seven million people have migrated to Australia?
- Harmony Day takes place on the United Nation's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- Did you know that Harmony Day began in 1999 and since then more than 25,000 Harmony Day events have been held?
- Australians identify with over 270 ancestral backgrounds.
- Often, before an event, function or meeting takes place, Australians will acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land they are on. This is called an 'Acknowledgement of Country' and it pays respect to Aboriginal culture and heritage.
- Events celebrating Harmony Day can be held at schools, sporting clubs or community groups.