

Life at the time of Federation

Exploring a
'time capsule'
of evidence

From the
National Museum of Australia

**NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF
AUSTRALIA**

Produced by
Ryebuck Media
for the National
Museum of Australia

By
His Excellency the Governor General

Life at the Time of Federation
Exploring a 'time capsule' of evidence
From the National Museum of Australia

Written by
Robert Lewis
Tim Gurry
David Arnold

ISBN 0-949380-29-6

© 2001

National Museum of Australia

Phone 02 6208 5345

Fax 02 6208 5398

Website www.nma.gov.au

and

Ryebuck Media Pty Ltd

31 Station Street Malvern

Victoria 3144

Phone (03) 9500 2399

Fax (03) 9500 2388

Email ryebuck@ryebuck.com.au

Website www.ryebuck.com.au

Designed by Polar Design Pty Ltd, Melbourne

Printed by Impact Printing Pty Ltd, Melbourne

All efforts have been made to find copyright ownership of materials used in this magazine. Any contraventions are accidental and will be redressed. For any copyright matters please contact Ryebuck Media Pty Ltd.

Life at the time of Federation

Exploring a 'time capsule' of evidence

Imagine this . . .
It is 2101, the Bicentenary of Federation.

You are no longer alive, of course, but your grandchildren are learning in their history class about the Centenary of Federation, 100 years ago in 2001. Unfortunately, it's getting a bit boring. 'Where are the real people?' they keep thinking. What was life like for our grandparents of 100 years ago? What did they wear, how did they live, what did they believe, what were their hopes and fears? How did they travel? What were work and family life and school and entertainment like?

Suddenly – they remember that you left them a time capsule back in 2001, to be opened today, 100 years on!

They rush home, drag out the time capsule, and find . . . what?

What objects that best represent a day in your life would you include for people in 100 years' time?

Discuss this in a group, and choose five objects – explaining why you think they would be appropriate, and what they would tell the people of the future about you and your life today.

This is all just imagination, you say. Well, yes . . . and no. There are 'time capsules' like the one we have imagined here, and in the rest of this unit you will be looking at objects left for you in a form of time capsule by the people of 100 years ago. So you are the finder and interpreter, not the leaver of the objects.

This 'time capsule' is in fact a museum display. The objects you will be looking at are from the Federation era, and are displayed in the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. But the principle is the same:

- working out what objects from the past can tell us about the people who created and left them;
- critically analysing them to decide if only the positive aspects are being presented;
- deciding if they are equally representative of everyone's life;
- listening carefully to the stories that are behind the objects.

Curriculum Guide: Student Learning Outcomes

This article is useful in exploring aspects of **Time, continuity and change, Place and space / Resources, and Culture**. By the end of this article students will be better able to achieve these learning outcomes:

Time, continuity and change

- Describe and explain lasting and changing aspects of Australian society and environments;
- Explain how causes, motives and consequences may be related;
- Use knowledge of the past to explain contemporary events;
- Critically analyse representations of people, events and issues.

Place and space / Resources

- Explain consequences of human modifications of natural and built features of place.

Culture

- Analyse some core values of groups and societies.



National Museum of Australia 2001

Your main task is to complete a table like the one shown below for the seven objects and documents in this unit chosen from the National Museum of Australia's collection about life in Federation times.

Federation period object:	What does this object tell us about life in Australia at Federation times? This object helps me to understand that:	An equivalent object today would be:	The caption I would give to today's object to help explain its meaning and significance to the people of 2101, and to help tell my story is:

A s t a r t i n g p o i n t . . .

1 Create a table using the column headings above and with room to comment on seven objects

2 Draw a picture.

On a separate sheet of paper draw a picture of what you think is a typical 1901 scene. It doesn't matter if you can't draw well – stick figures are OK! The key thing is to include as much detail as you can about what life was like then.

Your sketch might include some of these themes:

- Home
- Work
- Attitudes
- Fears
- Communication
- Beliefs
- Values
- Clothing
- Hopes
- Loyalties
- Entertainment
- Citizenship
- Technology
- National identity
- Religion
- Health
- Sport
- School
- Family

The themes are useful guides for finding out about many aspects of life in other times. You may also want to add some other ideas or themes to that list for you to investigate.

You can now test some of these ideas by looking at the rest of this unit – but to do that you will need to know how to 'interrogate' the objects and documents in the time capsule to discover the stories behind them.

How do we 'interrogate' objects and documents?

Here are some useful questions to use to interrogate a museum exhibit. There are two sorts of questions: those for objects, and those for documents such as photographs and letters. (Sometimes a document can also be an object.) Not all questions always apply to every object or document, but you will soon work that out as you apply the questions to the exhibits on the next pages. You will find a checklist with every object and document, just to help you make the most of them.

Useful questions for 'interrogating' an object

- What is it?
- What is its purpose?
- What is it made of?
- Who made it?
- Who would use it?
- How would it work?
- Would it last?
- Would anyone deliberately choose not to use or to reject it?
- Would it be generally available or only available to a special group?
- Was it widespread or rare?
- Is it important?

Useful questions for 'interrogating' a document

- Who wrote it?
- When did they write it?
- Why did they write it?
- What is its message?
- Is it reliable?
- Who was it written for?
- Whose 'voice' or point of view does it represent?
- Who might agree with it?
- Who might disagree with it?

Now look at the seven exhibits and see how well you can analyse them to gain information and ideas about life at the time of Federation in 1901 or soon after.

For each exhibit we have included this list of object or document questions, and a list of the possible themes that the exhibit might help you better understand.

You might like to look at every object or document yourself, or share the task in a group.

Time capsule object 1:

Australia's first national stamp

- The Australian Government issued its first stamp in 1913.
- It featured a kangaroo and a map of Australia.
- Some criticised it for not having the traditional portrait of the reigning British Monarch.
- It was replaced in 1914 with a stamp depicting King George V.

Object Checklist

- Purpose
- Made of
- Who used it
- How works
- Likely to last
- Rejected by any
- All or special?
- Common or rare



National Museum of Australia

- 1 What is your impression of the stamp? For example, do you like it? Do you think it is attractive?
- 2 What do you think a national stamp should achieve? (For example, what ideas or messages might it convey?)

Discovering the story

Before 1901 each colony had its own postal service, and issued its own stamps.

In 1901 power over postal, telegraphic and telephonic communication was given to the new Commonwealth Parliament. For the next 10 years, however, each State kept its own stamps.

On 1 May 1911 uniform postal rates were introduced, and there was a competition among 'skilled artists' for the design of a new Australian stamp.

The designs had to 'contain features characteristic of Australia' and the treatment 'should not be too photographic or realistic'. 1051 designs were entered.

Here is the winning design (on the left) and the two runners up. The Postmaster-General, however, rejected it. An artist, English-born Blamire Young, was chosen to design the first stamp. He submitted several designs, but not the one that was eventually used in 1913 – this was made up of bits from several of Young's designs.



Some comments on the first Australian national stamp were:

'... it is very annoying to find that our country is to be represented ... by a grotesque and ridiculous symbol.'

Every artistic sense revolts at it. I can only conceive it to be the result of some abnormal vicious two-year-old's precocity.

The design is delightfully truthful – an empty land with nothing but kangaroos in it.

Is the kangaroo ... supposed to represent Australian feeling? If so, the person responsible for the poor dejected animal ... overlooked the temperament of the average Australian, especially after a successful cricket match, or a win on the turf.

It is certainly emblematic of the present position of the Commonwealth and different States, in showing by the expression of the poor beast that it is suffering from what cannot be other than 'financial constipation.'

A rubbishy label advertising some particular brand of kangaroo tail soup.

'What else could you get to represent our continent more thoroughly than a kangaroo?'

To which the Postmaster-General replied:

Australia's Yesterdays, Readers Digest, 1974, pages 22-23

3 Look back at your answer to question 2. Do you think the 1913 stamp achieves these things?

4 What does this object suggest to you about these aspects of Australia at the time of Federation:

- Attitudes to Australian native symbols?
- Australians' loyalties?
- Creating national identity?
- What people saw as the 'spirit' of Australia?

5 Complete this statement in the second column of your Summary Table: This object helps me to understand that ...

6 Decide what equivalent modern object you might put in your exhibit for the people of 2101, and the caption you would give it, and add these to your table.

This object helps me find out about these aspects of life at the time of Federation

Themes Checklist

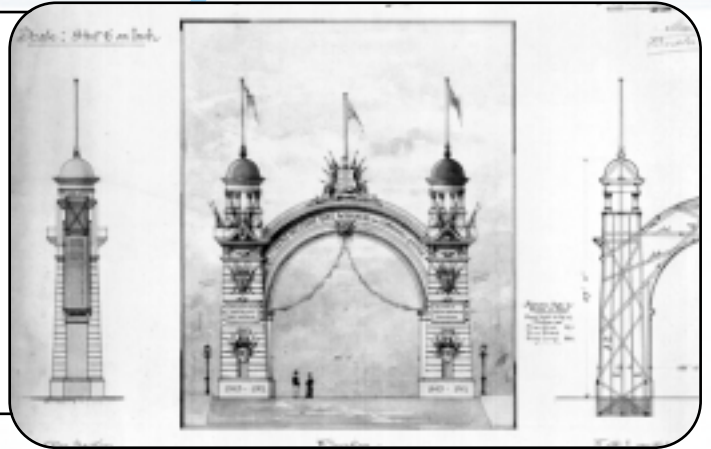
Home	Loyalties	Work
Values	School	Clothing
Family	Entertainment	Communication
Technology	Beliefs	Identity
Attitudes	Citizenship	Fears
Ideas of Nation	Hopes	

Citizens' Arch, Melbourne

This arch is a half-scale model of the Citizens' Arch which was built in 1901 to celebrate the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York to Melbourne for the opening of the new Commonwealth Parliament.

Object Checklist

- Purpose
- Made of
- Who used it
- How works
- Likely to last
- Rejected by any
- All or special?
- Common or rare



Tomkins, Share & Evans, Melbourne
(National Museum of Australia)

- 1 Record your first impressions of the Arch.
- 2 What do you think its purpose was?
- 3 Why do you think people might want to build an arch rather than some other memorial construction?

Discovering the story

This Arch was set up in a main city street along the procession route, and was over 11 metres wide, with a gilded cupola rising 18 metres.

It was decorated with medallions representing the six states and embossed portraits of King Edward V and the Duke and Duchess of York.

The main wording on the Arch said:

CITIZENS WELCOME THE DUKE & DUCHESS OF
CORNWALL AND YORK.

At the base of the towers were the dates: 1837–1901.

Money for the arch was raised by the public.

This was one of eight arches built in Melbourne for the occasion. There were also arches in Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Hobart, Adelaide, Albury and Ballarat as part of the Federation celebrations in 1901. Many of these were built by particular sections of society – there was an American arch, a Chinese arch, a butter arch, a wheat arch, a wool arch, an Aboriginal arch, a market gardener's arch, a coal arch (though people kept stealing bits of it, and it became unsafe!), and many more.

- In 1901:
- Australians were 'British citizens'
 - Males over 21 could vote
 - Only women in South Australia and Western Australia had the vote
 - Most Aboriginal adults could not vote.

- 4 What does this object suggest to you about these aspects of Australia at the time of Federation:

- Loyalties of Australians?
- Symbols of Australia?
- Who was a 'citizen' and what did this mean?
- People's beliefs and values at the time?

- 5 Complete this statement in the second column of your Summary Table: This object helps me to understand that . . .

- 6 Decide what equivalent modern object you might put in your exhibit for the people of 2101, and the caption you would give it, and add these to your table.

This object helps me find out about these aspects of life at the time of Federation

Themes Checklist

Home	Loyalties	Work
Values	School	Clothing
Family	Entertainment	Communication
Technology	Beliefs	Identity
Attitudes	Citizenship	Fears
Ideas of Nation	Hopes	

The *Bulletin* Magazine

Founded in Sydney in 1880, the *Bulletin* helped define a distinctive Australian identity in the years before Federation. Writers such as Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson created a distinctive style, celebrated in the *Bulletin*'s alternative title, 'The Bushman's Bible'.

Document Checklist

- Who wrote it
- Message
- Whose 'voice'
- When
- Reliable
- Agree
- Why
- Audience
- Oppose



National Museum of Australia

- 1 What are your first impressions of this document?
- 2 What do you think is meant by 'The Bushman's Bible'?
- 3 Why might the *Bulletin* have been so popular?

Discovering the story

The *Bulletin* was one of the few weekly newspapers in Australia that carried reports from all the colonies. By the late 1880s it was the biggest selling weekly in Australia.

It encouraged its readers to write in, and to address national issues. It also encouraged a school of nationalistic writers who saw the 'bush' as the typical Australia. It also included many traditionally 'British' type articles and stories. A motto of the *Bulletin* was: 'Australia for the White Man'.

4 How would you describe the contents of the *Bulletin*?

The distribution of the population of Australia at the 1901 census was:

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	TAS	WA	NT
Capital city	481 830	484 103	119 428	39 240	34 604	27 553	—
Other urban	371 330	163 294	228 029	113 289	21 180	69 254	4 509
Rural	495 616	552 207	151 760	201 472	116 691	87 317	—

- 5 Would you say that Australia was an urban or a rural community?
- 6 Some historians have said that the 'bush image' of Australia promoted in the *Bulletin* was what people wanted to believe about themselves, but was not what people were really like. What evidence is there above to support and to oppose this idea?
- 7 What does this document suggest to you about these aspects of Australia at the time of Federation:

- Symbols of Australia?
- Australian national identity?
- Who was a citizen in Australia?

8 Complete this statement in the second column of your Summary Table: This object helps me to understand that . . .

9 Decide what equivalent modern object you might put in your exhibit for the people of 2101, and the caption you would give it, and add these to your table.

This object helps me find out about these aspects of life at the time of Federation

Themes Checklist

Home	Loyalties	Work
Values	School	Clothing
Family	Entertainment	Communication
Technology	Beliefs	Identity
Attitudes	Citizenship	Fears
Ideas of Nation	Hopes	

Time capsule object 4:

Trans Australian Railway booklet

On 14 September 1912 Australia's Governor-General, Lord Denman, turned the first sod for the Trans-Australia Railway.

This commemorative booklet is an attractive reminder of the vast engineering achievement that spanned much of the Australian continent (between Port Augusta in South Australia and Kalgoorlie in Western Australia).

Object Checklist

- Purpose
- Made of
- Who used it
- How works
- Likely to last
- Rejected by any
- All or special?
- Common or rare



You can see a full colour image of this program on the back cover of this booklet

National Museum of Australia

A newspaper reported the speech ceremony made by former Western Australian Premier and now Federal parliamentarian, Sir John Forrest at the turning of the sod:

Before Federation was decided upon he told his friends in Western Australia that he was assured by leading public men of Australia that the railway would be built, and at last that long-delayed promise had been fulfilled. In his first speech in the Federal

Parliament, in May, 1901, he said – 'I look upon a railway to Western Australia as a great, necessary and urgent work, which will bind together irrevocably the people of the eastern and the western sides of this great continent.' ... If anyone objected to send a railway to that country they had no faith in that nation.

Report in *Adelaide Advertiser* 16 September 1912

1 Look at the images and symbols on the cover of the booklet.

- What is the impression given of the terrain to be covered by the railway?
- Most of the route covered between Port Augusta and Kalgoorlie is virtually desert. Why might the creators of the booklet have included a misleading image of the terrain?
- Why would all State symbols be included on the booklet?

2 Why do you think the railway was built?



3 Use a modern Atlas to work out the length of the railway.

4 Look at the map on the next page showing Australia's roads and rail lines in 1912.

- How would you describe the links between Western Australia and the rest of Australia?
- What other options for travel existed at the time?
- What would the advantages be of having a railway link?
- What might the disadvantages be?
- What parts of Australia did the railway actually link?

The main equipment available for building the railway was human muscle (3500 men), 750 camels and horses, trains able to run on the completed parts of the tracks, and very little mechanised earth-moving equipment. There were no roads, no permanent water supply, no local produce available.

Rabbits had beaten the workers into the area, but they did bring sparrows with them – to the disgust of Western Australians. The route also passed through areas where Aboriginal people had lived for thousands of years in virtual isolation.

5 Here are some problems that faced the builders.

How would you solve them?

- Accommodation for the workers
- Water supply
- Food for workers and animals
- Earth-moving equipment
- Health and sanitation
- Mail
- Entertainment

6 How were these problems solved? Here is some evidence – but you may need to do some more research to answer the question more fully.

Look at the documents (the memoirs and the photographs) and explain how each helps you to understand ways in which some of the problems of building the railway were solved.



National Archives of Australia D1717, 180/2X

Trans-Australia Railway Worker Bill Twilly:

Source 1

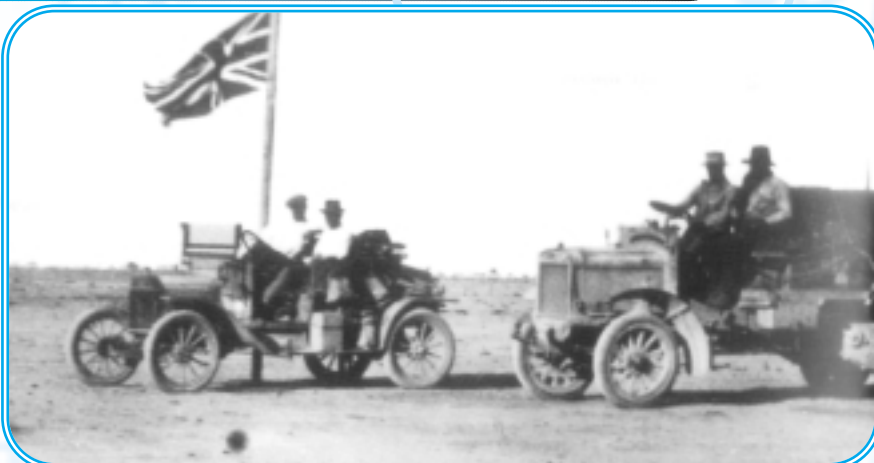
They lived in tents with an old wire stretcher for a bed, water in a kerosene tin, no shower but a 'half-and-half' bath each weekend. For this you got a kerosene tin of water. You put a bag on the dirt floor beside it, put your right leg in and washed that side of your body, then stepped out and put your left leg in and washed that side. Then you used the water to wash your clothes. That was Sunday work.

For the other six days of the week, the navy built a mile of railway each day, a feat unparalleled in construction work. He sat for dinner in the sun, with a billy of tea and a hunk of bread and salt beef for crib. After work he'd wash in a tin dish of water and go over to the ranch for tea. There'd be a kerosene tin of black tea on the end of the table, some poor greasy soup, boiled beef, cabbage, potatoes and rice. The ranch, or dining room, was made of bags sewn together.

(In Patsy Adam-Smith, *The Desert Railway*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1974 p. 8)

Photographs of the building of the railway

Source 2

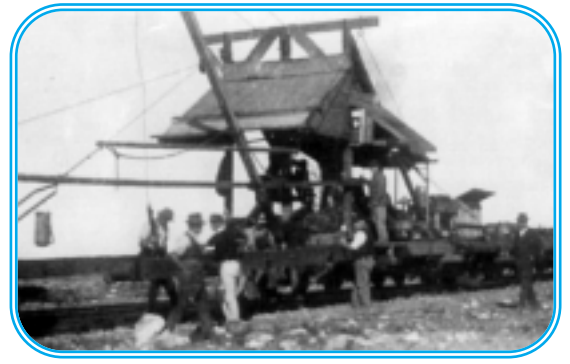


Aboriginal people were put in closer contact with Europeans by the railway.

Motor transport on the Nullarbor.



A camel train carrying containers of water.



The Roberts track-layer.



An early model oil tractor pulling a trailer.



Workers awaiting the arrival of a trailer load of sleepers.



Chefs rose at dawn to start preparing hundreds of meals.

The two parties working from east to west and west to east met at 1.45 p.m. on Wednesday 17 October 1917. Sir John Forrest said: 'From today Western Australia is in reality a member of the Australian family. The isolation that has hitherto existed is at an end.'

The first train arrived at Kalgoorlie at 2.50 p.m. on Wednesday 24 October 1917. The trip was supposed to take 31 hours and 20 minutes, but took 42 hours and 48 minutes.

7 What does the museum object on page 7 suggest to you about these aspects of Australia at the time of Federation:

- National identity?
- Communications?
- Environment?
- Trade?
- Aboriginal people?
- Work?

8 Complete this statement in the second column of your Summary Table: This object helps me to understand that . . .

9 Decide what equivalent modern object you might put in your exhibit for the people of 2101, and the caption you would give it, and add these to your table.

10 There is a proposal today for a north-south railway to link Darwin and Adelaide via Alice Springs.

- a List the arguments for and against the proposal (such as trade and commerce, the cost, access to the port of Darwin and Asian markets, etc.)
 - b Which of the problems faced by the builders of the west-east line between 1912 and 1917 might the builders of this north-south rail link also face?
 - c Compare the ways the west-east problems were solved with the likely solutions available to the north-south builders today.
- You may be able to research this proposed link further.

This object helps me find out about these aspects of life at the time of Federation

Themes Checklist

Home	Loyalties	Work
Values	School	Clothing
Family	Entertainment	Communication
Technology	Beliefs	Identity
Attitudes	Citizenship	Fears
Ideas of Nation	Hopes	

William Farrer's plough

William Farrer – a pioneer of the Australian wheat industry – undertook scientific experiments on a small farm near the present site of Canberra to breed new wheat varieties that were better suited to Australian conditions and resistant to disease.

This single furrow plough was used by Farrer in his work.

Object Checklist

- Purpose
- Made of
- Who used it
- How works
- Likely to last
- Rejected by any
- All or special?
- Common or rare



National Museum of Australia

1 What are your first impressions of this object?

Discovering the story

The first strains of wheat in Australia were English. They needed rich soils and long growing seasons, and produced the long straw needed for thatching roofs in England.

But they had disadvantages. Existing wheat types took a long time to mature, and so were subject to a disease called 'rust'. The baking quality of these wheats for making bread was high, they needed relatively heavy rainfall, and the long drooping stems made them unsuitable for harvesting with new machinery.

Alternatives existed:

- Indian wheat, which was early-maturing and therefore less likely to be affected by rust, poor in nutrition and low in yield, had a short straw which was good for mechanical harvesting, but the stem was weak and likely to break easily;
- Canadian wheat, with high productivity and food value, but which was late-maturing and therefore vulnerable to rust.

2 Suggest what combination of wheat properties and varieties might be needed to solve the problem:

Type

Property

Farrer proposed to solve the problem by crossing the wheats to get the required characteristics from them in a new strain.

To achieve this, Farrer worked every day in his research fields. 'People passing along the road must have been puzzled over the man in the long grey linen coat. His pockets bulged with field books, and he knelt on leather knee pads among the stalks of wheat, examining their ears, and tying coloured tapes to them. He wore boots with extra heavy soles and usually had a large handkerchief tucked under his brown felt hat in order to protect his neck from the sun.'

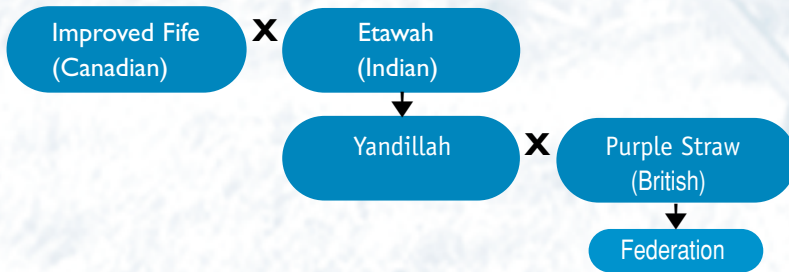
(E.J. Donath, *William Farrer*, OUP, Melbourne, 1962 page 14)

In order to be able to improve a plant ... it is only necessary that it should possess a tendency to vary in that direction. ... By means of selection ... man can work wonders.

William Farrer, 1890

Here is what Farrer did.

(X represents crossing two varieties, ↓ represents the outcome of the cross)



This resulted in Federation wheat with these characteristics:

- high yield so profitable for farmers to grow;
- short straw which meant that ears stood straight up and were therefore especially suitable for harvesting with the stripper;
- holding the grain after ripening allowing the use of a harvesting machine over a prolonged period;
- early-maturing so able to escape rust; low in moisture requirements so able to be grown in more marginal lands – opening up greater areas for farms;

- good quality for baking and nutrition.

This wheat changed the face of Australia by opening up more areas, and by changing the view from yellow heads to more bronze brown.

In New South Wales it helped increase the area under wheat from 1 million acres (404, 686 hectares) in 1901 to 3.5 million acres (1,416,400 hectares) in 1918, and across Australia from 4 million acres (1,618,744 hectares) to 8 million acres (3,237,488 hectares), with the amount of wheat produced more than doubling.

3 What might the consequences of this development have been for:

- health
- the environment
- Australian settlement patterns?
- trade
- wealth

4 A museum has a variety of options in its displays. For Farrer it could show:

- Farrer's own plough;
- a modern reproduction of the plough;
- a written description of the plough and Farrer using it;
- an historical film of it being used;
- somebody else's plough of that type;
- a photograph of the plough;
- a holograph of the plough with Farrer pushing it;
- a painting or sketch of the plough done at the time of Farrer using it.

a Discuss the differences between them.

b Which do you think is the most preferable to have and show, and why?

5 What does this object suggest to you about these aspects of Australia at the time of Federation:

- Identity?
- Work?
- Environment?
- Technology?

6 Complete this statement in the second column of your Summary Table: This object helps me to understand that . . .

7 Decide what equivalent modern object you might put in your exhibit for the people of 2101, and the caption you would give it, and add these to your table.

8 Today there is a lot of controversy about genetic modification of food crops. Is this different from what Farrer did? You may need to carry out more research to answer this question satisfactorily.

This object helps me find out about these aspects of life at the time of Federation

Themes Checklist

Home	Loyalties	Work
Values	School	Clothing
Family	Entertainment	Communication
Technology	Beliefs	Identity
Attitudes	Citizenship	Fears
Ideas of Nation	Hopes	

A Postcard

Postcards were highly popular in late nineteenth-century Australia because they were cheap, attractive, and cost only a halfpenny to send. Australians used postcards to send all types of messages, ranging from business communications to day-to-day information. From the 1880s an outline map of Australia became a popular image on many cards.

Object Checklist

- Purpose
- Made of
- Who used it
- How works
- Likely to last
- Rejected by any
- All or special?
- Common or rare?



National Museum of Australia

1 The outline map of Australia is a symbol. What ideas does this symbol put to people?

2 Who are the people on this postcard?

3 What might the main 'messages' of the postcard be?

4 These places were part of Australia during the 1880s and 1890s and into 1901 and beyond:

- Norfolk Island
- Lord Howe Island
- Torres Strait Islands such as Thursday Island, Mornington Island and others)
- Great Barrier Reef Islands such as Dunk Island and Keppel Island
- King Island
- Stradbroke Island
- Kangaroo Island

- a Using an Atlas, locate these on a map of Australia.
 b Why would these have been left off popular map images of Australia?

5 At the time of Federation the phrase 'A nation for a continent and a continent for a nation' was commonly used as a pro-Federation argument. How might the existence of postcards such as this have influenced people's thinking about Federation?

6 What does this object suggest to you about these aspects of Australia at the time of Federation:

- Identity?
- Work?
- Environment?
- Technology?
- Citizenship?

7 Complete this statement in the second column of your Summary Table: This object helps me to understand that . . .

8 Decide what equivalent modern object you might put in your exhibit for the people of 2101, and the caption you would give it, and add these to your table.

This object helps me find out about these aspects of life at the time of Federation

Themes Checklist

Home	Loyalties	Work
Values	School	Clothing
Family	Entertainment	Communication
Technology	Beliefs	Identity
Attitudes	Citizenship	Fears
Ideas of Nation	Hopes	

Chinese hand print

The Immigration Restriction Act was one of the first Acts passed by the new Commonwealth Parliament in 1901.

The Act provided that immigrants might be required to pass a Dictation Test of 50 words before being allowed entry into Australia.

The Dictation Test was used between 1902 and 1958.

Object Checklist

- Purpose
- Made of
- Who used it
- How works
- Likely to last
- Rejected by any
- All or special?
- Common or rare



National Museum of Australia

1 Here is a sample of an English-language Dictation Test passage. Try it on a class mate! Do you think it would be a fair way to decide who could migrate to Australia? Explain your reasons.

Europe imports great quantities of rice for food, and for making starch. Calicoes are stiffened with a paste of rice powder. Broken rice, the dust from rice mills, and the straw

and hulls all make good food for cattle. The straw is used in making bags, hats, and other wearing apparel.

National Archives of Australia A1/15: 1935/704

2 Why do you think such a test was used?

Discovering the story

The Dictation Test seemed to be a test of people's education standards and literacy, but was in fact a way of enabling the Government to bar non-Europeans from entry without actually saying that they were barred because of race.

Even if a non-European could speak and write English, the Act gave the authorities power to provide the test in any European language.

While mainly used against non-Europeans, it was also occasionally used to prohibit other 'undesirable' immigrants.

The exhibit above is connected with this Dictation Test. It is actually a document allowing the person named and hand-printed to be exempt from taking the Dictation Test.

Thousands of Naturalisation Certificates were issued to Chinese residents in Australia in the 1880s. Many of these Chinese returned to China. Their Certificates were often re-presented to immigration officials by different Chinese at entry ports in Australia. Many Chinese, despite having Naturalisation Certificates on arrival in Australia, were given the Dictation Test.

The number of Chinese-born people in Australia dropped from 29,907 in 1901 to 6,404 by 1947.

3 Why would such a document be issued by the Australian Government to a Chinese person?

4 Why do you think the document includes a hand-print?

5 Why might immigration officials have used a dictation test on Chinese who were presenting Naturalisation Certificates?

6 How successful does the Dictation Test seem to have been?

7 While we are talking about exclusion, the document on display seems to be one of inclusion? How can you explain this apparent contradiction?

8 What does this document suggest to you about these aspects of Australia at the time of Federation:

- Loyalties?
- Symbols of Australia?
- Identity?
- Who was a 'citizen' and what did this mean?

9 Complete this statement in the second column of your Summary Table: This object helps me to understand that . . .

10 Decide what equivalent modern object you might put in your exhibit for the people of 2101, and the caption you would give it, and add these to your table.

This object helps me find out about these aspects of life at the time of Federation

Themes Checklist

Home	Loyalties	Work
Values	School	Clothing
Family	Entertainment	Communication
Technology	Beliefs	Identity
Attitudes	Citizenship	Fears
Ideas of Nation	Hopes	

Coming to Conclusions

1 Look back at the sketch you made of life at about the time of Federation. What aspects would you now change?

- Which do you think is the best story that the objects you have now studied have revealed?
- Look at the collection of objects you have now assembled for your 'day in the life of you'. Do they cover all the themes?
- Compare your objects with others in your group. Select the best 10.
- Do you think a group of students in another school, or another town, or another State might choose the same objects? Or might there be big differences in some cases? Discuss this idea.
- You have created a collection of objects – which is what museums do. What do you think might be the strengths and the weaknesses of any museum's collection of objects as a representation of an aspect of the past?

Visiting the National Museum of Australia

The National Museum of Australia opened on 11 March 2001.

