

Wartime internment

Experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islanders, migrants, women and children (ACHHK114)



Significant events in the history of internment and detention in Australia

- 1914 First World War begins
- 1914 *National Precautions Act 1914*
- 1915 Enemy aliens in Australia are rounded up and interned
- 1918 First World War ends
- 1939 Second World War begins
- 1940 British troop ship *Dunera* arrives in Australia with 2500 internees
- 1942 20 members of the Australian First Movement are arrested by security services
- 1943 507 political prisoners are moved to Australia from West New Guinea by Dutch authorities
- 1945 World War II ends
- 1946 The last internees in Australia are released
- 1980s The issue of WW II internees is highlighted with a view to a public apology
- 1990 John Panizza, Liberal senator, presents a motion for the wrongful internment of Italian migrants to be acknowledged. The motion is rejected
- 1992 Mandatory detention is introduced
- 2001 *Tampa* Affair and 'Pacific Solution'
- 2001 Thousands of islands are excised from Australia's migration zone
- 2001 *Migration Amendment Act 2001* allows indefinite detentions
- 2003 Woomera Detention Centre is closed
- 2005 Official inquiry finds prolonged detention can lead to mental illness
- 2011 Tony Piccolo, Labor MP, presents a motion for the wrongful internment of Italian migrants to be acknowledged. The motion is accepted

Teacher information

Elaboration

Investigating the reasons why some people in Australia's history have lost their democratic and human rights.

Key inquiry questions

How did Australian society change throughout the 20th century?

Who were the people who came to Australia? Why did they come?

Historical skills

- Use historical terms and concepts (ACHHS118) **AC**
- Identify questions to form an historical inquiry (ACHHS119) **AC**
- Identify and locate a range of relevant sources (ACHHS120) **AC**
- Locate information related to inquiry questions in a range of sources (ACHHS121) **AC**
- Compare information from a range of sources (ACHHS122) **AC**
- Identify points of view in the past and present (ACHHS123) **AC**
- Develop texts, particularly narratives and descriptions, which incorporate source materials (ACHHS124) **AC**

Historical concepts

- Cause and effect
- Significance
- Perspectives
- Empathy

B Background information

- In World War I, almost 7000 people were interned in Australia. More than half were of German origin.
- In World War II, internment was introduced for three reasons: to prevent 'enemy aliens' from helping Australia's enemies, to satisfy the demands of the Australian community who had turned against 'enemy aliens', to accommodate POWs and other internees brought to Australia by the British authorities.
- At the beginning of World War II, only those 'enemy aliens' considered to be a threat to national security were interned. As hostilities escalated, Germans and Italians were often interned based on their nationality.
- Over 20% of all Italians living in Australia were interned.

T Teaching notes

- 'The very ink with which history is written is merely fluid prejudice.'
- This quote from Mark Twain, the American novelist, reminds us that history books and articles are written from one point of view. *To gain a better understanding of historical events, always study every point of view.*

A Additional activities

- Research and dramatise the story behind the 'children overboard affair'.
- Hold a class debate on the statement, 'The Australian government was right to intern foreign migrants during World War I'.

R Resources

- Children in detention centres <<http://www.mapw.org.au/about-mapw/policies/children-detention>>
- Civilian internment <www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/timeline/factfiles/nonflash/a6651858.shtml>
- *Refugee: the diary of Ali Ishmail* by Alan Sutherland
- *The forgotten children in Australian detention centres before 2005. (Author abstract): An article from: Australian Journal of Early Childhood [HTML] [Digital]* by Susanne Garvis and Lindy Austin
- *The bitter shore* by Jacqui Everitt
- *From under a leaky roof: Afghan refugees in Australia* by Philip John Sparrow

Wartime internment - 1

Australia's attitude to migrants has changed a great deal since the early days of British colonialism. The nation has grown from a 'white Australia', keen for migrants to lose their cultural identities and assimilate into the Australian way of life, to a 'multicultural Australia', which embraces the cultures and traditions of the 200 nations it includes.

The Commonwealth of Australia is a representative democracy. Today, citizens are free to vote for who represents them in government and everyone enjoys the freedom of speech, actions and movement, within the law. The laws of equal opportunity protects people from any kind of discrimination.

But during the two world wars, there were people who lost their democratic rights and were victims of discrimination. These people were classed as 'enemy aliens'.

To begin with, 'enemy aliens' were those born in countries at war with Australia. But later, even those whose families originally came from enemy nations but who had been born in Australia, were given this tag.

The government was concerned that during hostilities, 'enemy aliens' would sympathise with their old home countries and be a threat to national security.

The war on our streets

June 1940



Shops and other businesses owned by people of German and Italian origin have been the target of many violent scuffles in our towns and cities in recent weeks. Windows have been smashed, premises set alight and occupants attacked.

Overnight, friends and neighbours have become enemies. People whose families have lived in this country for generations are being treated as spies and traitors.

Enemy alien restrictions

June 1940

We are at war with Germany and her allies. For national security, anyone of German or Italian origin is to be subjected to surveillance and restrictions.

- All aliens must register with the authorities and report to them each week.
- Aliens will be restricted in their movements around the country and within cities.
- Aliens will not be allowed to own or use firearms, any communication or recording devices or any form of transport.
- Individual aliens who are believed to be a greater risk to security will be interned in camps for the duration of the war, unless they can prove their allegiance to Australia.



Japanese internment

May 1941

With the threat of Japanese invasion of our poorly protected shores, all Japanese aliens will be interned.

The risk to our nation's freedom is too great to allow them the freedom of movement allowed by surveillance and restrictions alone.



Wartime internment - 2

Read the text on page 39. In a group, discuss the questions and conduct further research before writing your own answers.



1. The two main opponents in World War II, were alliances of nations. The 'Allies' included Australia, Britain and the United States. The 'Axis' powers were Germany, Italy and Japan.

What reasons do you think 'British' Australians might have given for attacking people of German, Italian and Japanese origin, many of whom had been born and raised in Australia?

AC

2. Write arguments for and against the enemy alien surveillance, restrictions and internment that were in force during World War II.

Arguments for	Arguments against

3. Why do you think the government saw the Japanese living in Australia as a greater threat than the Germans or Italians?

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4. For all 'enemy aliens', many of whom had lived and worked in Australia for generations, how do you think they would have viewed their treatment by the Australian government during the war?

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From March 1942, all enemy aliens were required to do work, for which they were paid. Their work projects included road building, construction sites and forestry work.

Mandatory detention

The plight of political refugees

May 2013

Since 1992, refugees from other nations who have come to Australia in search of political asylum, have been held in mandatory detention. They are forced to live in prison-like accommodation while the immigration department decides their fate. Can they stay or will they be forced to return home, to an uncertain future?

The government will argue that the detention centres are not prisons, but living behind high fences and razor wire, the refugee inmates may not agree.

The detainees are not free to leave and they have no idea how long they will have to remain there. Will it be for just a few weeks or for many years? This uncertainty creates great physical and emotional stress.

Under various international conventions, Australia is obliged to protect the human rights of



Refugees in detention desperate for a life of freedom.

all refugees, with or without visas. This includes the right not to be detained indefinitely with no knowledge of how their application for asylum is progressing.

When the first political refugees came to Australia seeking political asylum, they were not held in detention centres. Today, political refugees can be held in detention for years while they wait for clearance to remain in Australia.

Being held in captivity for so long can create great stress for people of all ages. Until they hear the verdict of the immigration authorities, they can not dream of their new lives in Australia.

1. (a) Research to discover what life is like in a detention centre. Create an explosion chart of questions to find out what life is like in a detention centre. Use the following headings to help you.
- (b) Use the information to write a narrative describing your life as a child refugee in a detention centre.

Accommodation	Recreation
Food	Religion/Culture
Clothes	Medical support
Education	Protection

As an introduction, include where you have come from and why you needed to leave your home, how you travelled to Australia and who came with you.



Australia has offshore detention centres on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, Manus Island north of Papua New Guinea and on Nauru in the South Pacific Ocean.