unAustralian: reimagining national identity

education resource
years 8–9
A guide to this resource

*UnAustralian* Education Resource and Activities provide valuable support for educators and students. This resource includes easy to read notes that can be used directly in the classroom along with activities for students designed to assist in learning before, during and after a visit to the exhibition.

These resources have been developed in alignment with the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework for Visual Art (Queensland Studies Authority, 2008) addressing outcomes for Year 9 and focussing on the Essential Learnings: *Knowledge and Understanding, Creating, Presenting, Responding* and *Reflecting*. These relationsips are clearly labeled through abbreviated codes listed below.

This resource encourages students to:

- Develop an aesthetic and theoretical knowledge of specific concepts, facts and procedures
- Enhance understanding of arts elements, techniques, skills and processes
- Respond to artworks in an informed way
- Critically analyse and reflect on the processes of learning
- Value cultural and ethnic diversity as key to the presentation of identity
- Consider the role of the Visual Arts in reinforcing and challenging experiences and identities
- Recognise and appreciate the arts as a resource for the development of a successful recreational and professional life.

Although these resources are developed with Visual Arts students in mind, there are many aspects relevant to other *Key Learning Areas* such as *English* and *Studies of Society and Environment*.

Cover image: Marian Drew
*Pelican with turnips*, 2005
Colour giclée print
Purchased 2006 through the Betty Quelhurst Fund

**KU** > relates to Knowledge and Understanding  
**CR** > relates to Creating  
**PR** > relates to Presenting  
**RS** > relates to Responding  
**RF** > relates to Reflecting
Introduction

The exhibition

“There is no ‘real’ Australia waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention.”
Richard White, 1981

Since the late 1990s the term un-Australian has been used freely, appearing everywhere from front bench politics to the sporting arena. But what does it mean to be unAustralian? The term implies that there are fundamental characteristics shared across our society that bind us as Australians regardless of our diversity, and to be un-Australian is to challenge this. However, cultural stereotypes aside, is there a national identity that reflects the reality of our everyday lives or is it simply a myth?

Utilising works drawn from the QUT Art Collection, UnAustralian: Reimaging National Identity reflects on the role that art plays in confirming and challenging ideas of national identity and how we revisit, retell and repurpose enduring national stories.

What is national identity?

National identity is a concept that attempts to connect the population of a country by promoting national stories and ideas that make everyone feel as if they have a shared sense of history and destiny. National identity encourages them to act in ways that benefit the community, not just themselves.

When trying to define what it means to be Australian we discover more questions than answers. This is because each one of us could describe ourselves as having various different identities that depend on things such as ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexuality or class. We could even say that our identity changes many times throughout our life as we experience new things.

Art shares a very close relationship with nationalism. It can confirm and challenge our national stories. Some artworks visually present important events in our history to commemorate and record them. Other artworks present new stories that aren’t well known, or a different version of an existing story.
UnAustralian

Without really thinking about it we all really know what it means to be Australian. Positive stories about being Australian are all around us. If we know what it means to be a ‘good’ Australian then what is the opposite of this?

The term that is used to describe this is unAustralian. It was first used during the 1850s however it became very common from the mid 1990s. The term has changed in meaning over this time. Firstly, it was used in the areas of art and literature for defining something that wasn’t Australian in character. Throughout the 1990s the term became more negative, suggesting behaviour, belief or policy that was against the Australian way of life. As the term has become more common over the years, it has become less offensive and more sarcastic.

Bashir BARAKI 1943-98

Footballers in scrum with the horses (from the Australian football series) 1996-98
Six colour laser prints
Purchased 1997-1998
Ned Kelly

Edward ‘Ned’ Kelly was a notorious Australian bushranger; he was arrested several times in his youth for assault, and was later caught after playing part in a cattle-rustling operation. Eventually Kelly and his gang attempted bolder crimes: robbing banks and taking hostages. After an acquaintance of the gang was found to be a police informant and killed, the Kelly gang took around seventy hostages at the Glenrowan Inn, knowing that a train loaded with police was approaching. The gang donned their famous armour in preparation for the attack, but were overwhelmed by the police after a plan to derail the train failed. All of the members of the Kelly gang were killed in the incident except for Ned Kelly himself. He was tried and hanged on November 11, 1880.

The myths and stories associated with outlaws or ‘social bandits’ are important to building national identity. Long after his death, Kelly has appeared in various cultural situations including visual art, literature and film. He also made a public appearance at the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. He is portrayed as a positive symbol of Australian identity, standing up for the ‘underdog’ regardless of the fact that he was a criminal.

Wandjina

Traditionally found in the Kimberley region in northern Western Australia, the Wandjina figure, which are believed to be spirit ancestors, are primarily characterized by their imposing size, large eyes and nose, but no mouth. Traditional rock paintings featuring Wandjina are believed to be marks placed by the spirit ancestors themselves and it is the Indigenous custodians’ responsibility to repaint these images again and again to keep them fresh.

In Perth during 2006 Wandjina figures began appearing in the form of graffiti. These images engaged the local community, with Perth people taking up ‘Wandjina Watching’, documenting the phenomena by photographing the graffiti and uploading it onto a community website.

The use of this sacred Indigenous image in contemporary street art angered elders from the Kimberley and raised questions about what is considered vandalism and what is considered culture. Today, some contemporary artists who are descendants from the Kimberley region are allowed to produce Wandjina images as art, however unauthorised use of these images is not looked upon kindly by the Kimberley elders and other members of the community. In the end, the individual graffiti artist who was painting the Wandjina revealed his/her identity to the Kimberley elders, who requested the artist stop painting the figures.

Myths, icons & legends
Our relationship with land and space is very important to our understanding of national identity. Our natural environment is what tells us apart from other nations and therefore is regularly used as a metaphor for uniqueness. In the case of Australia, the outback and the beach are popularly seen as our most defining features.

**Outback**

*Outback: Australian: the remote and usually uninhabited inland districts.*

In many ways the outback is presented as the ‘real’ Australia regardless of the fact that most Australian’s live and work in cities, suburbs and regional centres. It is mythologised in many non-Indigenous stories in two ways. Firstly, as a pure and authentic place, untainted by Western influence and secondly, as a site of fear, terror and hardship.

**Terra nullius**

*Terra nullius is Latin for “land belonging to no one”. It refers to the legal concept that when the first Europeans arrived in Australia the land was owned by no one and therefore open to settlement.*

Indigenous imagery is all around us today, yet it took until 1967 before Aboriginal people were accorded basic citizenship rights and were counted in the National Census of the Australian people. Prior to this, Aboriginal people were not even counted as citizens. It was not until the High Court’s Mabo v Queensland decision in 1992, that ‘terra nullius’ was not recognised by the common law.
The beach

Most of Australia’s population lives close to the coastline and the beach has long occupied a special place in the Australian identity. All Australian beaches are public places and for many it is a desired recreational destination for sun and fun. However throughout recorded history and even in the recent past the beach has also seen disaster, tragedy and conflict.

The suburbs

Earlier representations of Australian national identity centred on the rural, country and bush environments. Given that some 85% of Australians live in urban areas, it is not surprising that over time representations of people and place have changed to focus on suburban Australian life. Suburbia is one of the ways that Australia is internationally known given that a lot television programs that are exported overseas focus on life in the suburbs [Kath and Kim and Neighbours].

The suburbs are seen in different ways by different people. They are places of great aspiration; to own a land and house brings a feeling of security and belonging to the owner/s. They are also criticised as being repetitive, ordinary and boring; not reflective of the diversity of the people that live there.
### List of works

**Tony ALBERT** born 1981
Girramay/Kuku Yalanji language groups
*Welcome to Australia* 2009
Archival digital print on 300gsm splendorgel digital paper stock with hand coloured title page and 10 piece texta set
Purchased 2009

**David ALLEN** born 1951
Anna head, still life and Boonah painting no. 2 1980
Oil on canvas
Purchased 1981

**Bashir BARAKI** 1943-98
Australian football series 1996-98
Six colour laser prints
Purchased 1997-1998

**Gordon BENNETT** born 1955
Big baroque painting (*The inland sea*) 1995
Synthetic polymer paint and oil on canvas
Purchased 1995 with the assistance of the Vice-Chancellor's Special Initiatives Fund in celebration of the Collection's fiftieth anniversary

**Lesley DUXBURY** born 1950
Of skies tolerably large

**Marian DREW**
*Magpie with Paw Paw*
*Pelican with turnips*

**Jillian NAMATJIRA** born c1945-91
Arrernte language group

**Margaret OLLEY** born 1923
*Marlene and allamanda* 1964
Oil on composition board
George Daughtrey Bequest Fund, 1964

**Glenn O’MALLEY** born 1948
*Soluble salt* 1995
Silver gelatin photograph
Purchased 1996

**Claude PANNKA** 1928-72
Luritja language group
*Central Australian landscape* c1963
Watercolour
Purchased 2006

**William YANG** born 1953
Self portrait no. 5 (From the series ‘Life lines’) 2008
Colour inkjet print
Purchased 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birth Year</th>
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Activities in the classroom

- What are some positive stories about being Australian that you can think of?
- Look around your home. What are some images/icons that you associate with being Australian?
- Research Australian myths. Find a myth that you like and describe why you like it.
  HINT: Is there a moral to the myth, do you find the character/s in the myth entertaining or sympathise with their story?
- Describe where you live. Is it urban, suburban, costal or country? What are some of the outstanding features of the place you live.

Australian Self-Portrait
- Write down what being Australian means to you.
  HINT: Think about what you love about Australia; activities that you enjoy, places you like to visit, the people that surround you.
- Find images and/or words from magazines and newspapers that represent what you have written down.
- Create a collage using these images and words.
- Present your artwork to the class. Talk about how the pictures and the words that you have used tell your story.

NOTE: This exercise could be completed again after a visit to the exhibition. Students then compare and contrast the two works that they have created.
Myth Making

- Create a mythical Australian character. This character can take on any form you wish. Describe the physical attributes of your character keeping in mind ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and class.
- Create the story of how your character became a legend. Briefly explain the story:

Thinking about the story you have written, illustrate how your character came to become a myth in seven pictures using the comic board. You can include text in the pictures if that helps to tell your story.
Activities during your visit

* Look around the exhibition. List all the **Australian icons** you can see represented in the artworks.

* Find the artworks that depict **Ned Kelly**. Complete the following details:
  
<table>
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<th>title</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>year</td>
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* Find the artworks that depict **Wanjina** figures. Where are Wandjina traditionally found? Describe what they look like.

* Name the items of **flora** and **fauna** that are depicted in the two artworks by **Marian Drew**? Are they **native** to Australia?

* Find an artwork that *depicts* a view of the **Australian landscape**. Write down **details** of the artwork (artist, title, year) and **describe** it.

* Which artwork in the exhibition looks the most **Australian** to you? Explain.
Resources and further information

Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity
Catriona Elder, 2007 [Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest]
Being Australian explores the origins, meanings and effects of the many stories we tell about ourselves, and how they have changed over time.

White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art
White Aborigines is an investigation of how identities have been constructed in Australian art from 1788 to the present.

Homesickness: Nationalism in Australian Visual Culture
Traudi Allen, 2008 [Macmillan Art Publishing, South Yarra]
Homesickness explores the relationship between visual culture and national myths in Australia since 1940.

Artlink: Art history: go figure
Joanna Mendelssohn (ed) [Volume no.26 No 1 2006]
Topics covered: revisiting Australian myths, post-media world views and indigenising culture.

Australia’s Citizenship Test
The test covers topics such as Australia’s democratic beliefs, laws and government, as well as the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship.


A Short Introduction to UnAustralian Art
Rex Butler, 2003 [Broadsheet, 32 4: 17]

Australian Screen [Australia’s audiovisual heritage online]
Selected clips from Australian films and other screen based media that deal with the topic of identity and culture including national identity.


We are all boat people
A group commenting on the treatment of refugees in Australia through public interventions and displays.
http://www.boat-people.org/

Celebrating Australia: identity by design
An exhibition developed by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney that looked at how concepts and symbols of national identity have been used and developed by Australian graphic designers throughout the 20th century.
http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/previous/celebrating_australia.asp

Australia’s un-doing
Judith Ireland [Sydney Morning Herald, 15 March 2005]
The term “un-Australian” has become so widely used that the Macquarie Dictionary is revising its definition.

UnAustralian Lamb Ad
‘We Love Our Lamb’

Popular understandings of ‘UnAustralian’: an investigation of the un-national
In social science the ‘national’ has been studied extensively, but comparatively little attention has been given to the ‘un-national’. The article takes up this challenge in an Australian context.

Marian Drew
A film by Alix Chomiz on the making of Marian Drew’s Australiana series.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VKZNJKYEIE

Wandjina, graffiti and heritage: The power and politics of enduring imagery
Ursula Frederick and Sue O’Connor
This article explores the re-purposing of rock art imagery in contemporary graffiti by examining a particular case study from Perth, Western Australia.

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[9 February - 4 July 2010] is part of QUT Precincts Identity10 programming.
For more information visit www.qut.edu.au/identity10
Curated by Megan Williams
Presented by QUT Art Museum

Opening Hours
Tuesday - Friday 10am-5pm
Wednesday 10am-8pm
Saturday and Sunday 12pm-4pm
Closed Mondays and public holidays

UnAustralian: Australian Icon
Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, 2008
Ned Kelly has symbolic importance for a majority of Australians, although attitudes regarding his status as hero or villain vary considerably.


Ned Kelly by any other name
Anne Marsh, 2002. [Journal of Visual Culture; 1; 57]

http://vcu.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/1/1/57

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