

Understanding racism / Discussion starters

Reflections – What is ‘being Australian’?

 Suggested time: 40 minutes

Preparation

This activity is focussed on the viewing of the first video item from *Identity, Culture and Conflict* titled *Reflections*. *Reflections* promotes discussion of what ‘being Australian’ means through seven short segments.

- If necessary, view or review the *Reflections* video and read the notes.
- Copy the handout for each participant.

Whole group activity

Introduction (2 minutes)

- Use the Purpose and Overview from *Reflections* reproduced on page 2 to explain the purpose of this session.

Before the video (12 minutes)

- Ask each participant to identify three well-known people who they feel highlight attributes of ‘real Australians’ and to list a couple of reasons for each of their choices.
- After a few minutes, ask participants in small groups, to reveal their three choices and the reasons for each of their selections.
- Lead a whole group discussion (see page 3) about the attitudes, values and behaviours that emerged as common among the ‘real Australians’ identified by participants.

Preparation for watching the video (15 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of the discussion question handout for *Reflections* to each participant.
- Ask participants to note the answers to Questions 1–4 offered by speakers in the video. (This can be done during the video, in the pauses between segments or at the end.)
- View the seven segments of *Reflections* (12 minutes).

After viewing the video (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to make a personal response to the questions and then participate in a group discussion of the four questions.
- Ask 3–4 participants to share insights from their group about what teachers and educational communities can do to promote cohesion in Australian society, now and into the future.

Conclusion (1 minute)

- Understanding the importance and influence of cultural and linguistic heritage for every Australian is a foundation step in countering prejudice and racism.

From *Reflections*

Purpose

The purpose of *Reflections* is to promote discussion about: attitudes and values of 'real Aussies'

- the influences of cultural heritage on all Australians
- the diversity of cultural heritage that exists in Australian society and also among Australians themselves
- characteristics of Australian society in the future.

Overview

Reflections uses a range of comments from young people, teachers, educational professionals and social commentators to introduce seven key concepts about 'being Australian'.

These key concepts raise awareness and trigger discussion about:

- 'cultural identity' and 'personal identity'
- what contributes to individuals feeling Australian
- the influence of 'cultural heritage' on the attitudes, values and beliefs of all Australians
- 'cultural identities' that develop within families, communities and societies
- influences of group memberships in maintaining a feeling of belonging
- recognition and celebration of the diversity that continues to enrich Australian society
- the role that teachers can play in promoting acceptance of diversity in society
- directions for maintaining a cohesive Australian society into the future.

Before the video

It is important to ask participants to identify attributes of 'real Australians' not 'typical Australians'. Asking about 'typical Australians' prompts people to search for characteristics that are common to many Australians. Whereas, asking about 'real Australians' prompts responses based on qualities of 'special' individuals that participants value and would like to see more widely represented in the Australian community.

Initially some participants may take a light-hearted approach to identifying their choices. The more serious approach taken by others usually prompts a number of participants to want to have another chance to choose. Presenters can allow them to make new choices, or use the request to stimulate a discussion about the different qualities of people nominated as participants' first choices and the people they would make as their second choices.

Some participants may ask for a definition of 'well-known'. For the purpose of this activity, it is best to keep the definition broad, something like, 'people known by a lot of other people'. The idea of the activity is for most participants to recognise the nominated person and to assess whether they too perceive the qualities identified by the nominator.

Some participants nominate individuals who are 'well known' to them or their local community, but unknown beyond. This is fine, however, presenters should avoid using this definition within instructions as it can limit the impact of the activity.

In discussing individuals selected and reasons for choices, participants draw on some often unexpressed core values and attitudes they hold about being Australian. Individuals often assume that their values and attitudes are shared by others. In reality, some ideas may be shared and some may not. This discussion about values and 'Australian-ness' sets a good context for the material about Australian identity and personal identity that is presented in the video.

Handout discussion

Question 1: What is your cultural heritage?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the original inhabitants of Australia. All other Australians are the descendants of people who came to the country from overseas (United Kingdom, Europe, Asia, Oceania or elsewhere), or who came here themselves as migrants or refugees. Consideration of cultural and linguistic 'roots' can be an eye-opening experience for individuals, especially for 'Aussies' who did not previously acknowledge that their ancestors had established traditions and customs in their families that have lasted generations and that have influenced how they see their cultural identity as Australians.

Question 2: Do you feel Australian?

The factors that prompt people to feel Australian include being born here, being educated here, being accepted by the community here, feeling comfortable and free to be themselves, sense of belonging in Australia, valuing the Australian way of life, being proud of the achievements of Australians and agreeing with the values reflected in the saying 'a fair go for all'. The factors that can stop people from feeling Australian include feeling unwanted by other Australians, not receiving equal access or opportunities in employment, educational, health or other services, being excluded or ignored, being made to feel 'un-Australian', feeling harassed, humiliated or intimidated because they are perceived to be different. Some individuals say they do not feel Australian because they prefer to identify as 'citizens of the world' rather than maintain nationalistic boundaries that can induce patriotism and lead to conflict.

Question 3: What groups and sub-groups do you belong to? Which ones exert most influence on you?

All Australians are members of many groups and sub-groups. For example, male/female, married/not married, younger/older, females with children, males who speak Greek, women who play cricket, men who look after their children, women executives in business, community leaders, volunteers, employed/not in paid employment — and the list goes on.

In the video, social researcher and commentator Hugh Mackay suggests that the groups and sub-groups to which individuals belong exert powerful influences on development of their personal identities. Identifying possible influences is an important step in understanding our 'cultural identity' as individuals and Australians.

Question 4: What role can teachers and educational communities play in promoting recognition of personal identity, acceptance of cultural diversity and maintaining a cohesive Australian society into the future?

Teachers and educational communities can:

- monitor personal behaviours towards all students
- ensure that all students have a fair share of teacher time
- value individuals and diversity in the classroom
- develop student understanding of diversity in the class, staff, school/college, local community, Australian society and the world
- create opportunities for individuals to succeed
- model acceptance of differing perspectives during class discussions.

Reflections discussion questions

Speakers in the video	Your responses
Question 1: What is your cultural heritage?	
Question 2: Do you feel Australian? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If 'yes', list some of the things that help to make you feel Australian.• If 'no', list some of the things that stop you from feeling Australian.	
Question 3: What groups and sub-groups do you belong to? Which ones exert most influence on you?	
Question 4: What is the role of teachers and school communities in promoting recognition of personal identity, cultural diversity and maintaining a cohesive Australian society into the future?	