

Celebrating Australia

identity by design



Peace Roo (detail), Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Poster, 1999. David Lancashire for SOCOG, Melbourne/Sydney. Gift of SOCOG 1999.

Introduction

This exhibition considers how artists and designers have expressed notions of Australian national identity in their graphic design, artwork, photography and film.

In the first part of the 20th century, Australia was most popularly depicted as part of the British Empire, with a largely outdoor lifestyle and a rural, primary industries-based economy. Gradually artists began to present the nation as an increasingly urbanised and cosmopolitan part of the world with an ancient cultural history.

These teachers notes include the themes of the exhibition, focus questions and classroom activities and a list of further resource materials. Please select the most relevant sections for your group. Some modification may be required for K-6 students.

Curriculum links

This exhibition is relevant to primary school students (Creative Arts: Visual Arts K–6), secondary students of Design and Technology, Visual Arts, (years 7–12), History, Studies in Society (years 7–10), and English (years 7–10), as well as tertiary students of fine arts, design, graphic design and industrial design.

An exhibition developed by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia,
for the Embassy of Australia, Washington DC

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Theme 1: Federal Capital Competition

Federal Capital Competition

In 1911 an international competition was held to design a national capital for Australia. It was won by the Chicago architects, Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin. The Griffin's drawings presented a vision of a city unlike any other in the world, 'not just a new city for a new nation, but a democratic city for a democratic nation'.

They visualised a cosmopolitan city with a capitol building in the form of a stylised oriental pagoda and medium-density residential quarters at its heart. Named Canberra in 1913, from a local Aboriginal word meaning 'meeting place', the city remains relatively small today, with a population of about 300 000. The city centre is, as the Griffins planned, pleasantly and theatrically aligned to the natural landforms of the surrounding Australian environment.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ K-6

Teacher-led discussions for Griffins' drawings:

- Why are drawings of this kind made? What kinds of professionals would make them (eg architects, designers) and what other kinds of people might look at and use the drawings (eg general public, builders, engineers, planners, politicians)
 - What materials are used to make these drawings? (paper, ink, watercolours, gouache, gold leaf, oil paint)
- Discuss the different perspectives used in architectural drawings such as side and aerial views. Look for another poster in the exhibition that shows an aerial view.
 - Find the following in the Griffins' drawings:
 - roads
 - buildings
 - lakes
 - hills or mountains
 - rivers
 - trees or forests.

★ 10-12

- Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony's plans for Canberra envisaged the new Australian capital as a democratic society living in harmony with the natural environment. Research the work of Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin and consider elements in their urban design proposals which conveyed democratic ideals.

Hints

- Where do all the roads lead?
- What does the name Canberra mean?
- Compare Canberra with non-planned cities.
- Compare the Griffins' plan with a contemporary map of Canberra.
- Which is the largest and most prominent building?
- Why was Canberra chosen as the Australian capital?
- Look for patterns in the road structures.

Theme 2: Australia's unique environment

Australia's unique environment





Sydney-based artist and designer, Douglas Annand (1903–76) was a strong advocate of using Australia's flora and fauna as representative of Australian identity. Annand, and other Australian designers, extended this imagery from the more traditional uses (on the coat of arms, state and territory emblems and postage stamps for example) to coinage design and popular media including posters and magazine covers.

Since the 1970s and '80s, graphic designers' depictions of Australian flora and fauna evolved to show an understanding of the need to preserve and respect the natural environment.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ K-6

- List all the animals depicted in the exhibition. Which animals are introduced and which animals are native to Australia? Which animal is featured most often?
- What kind of fish are shown in Gert Sellheim's *Great Barrier Reef* poster and where would you normally find these? What other natural features can be found in this poster?

Animal	Name	Make a tick when you see one	Now count your ticks to work out the total number you found
	koala		
	kangaroo		
	sheep		
	fish		

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★ 7–12

- Look at the 1968 Henry Talbot photograph for the Simplicity Patterns advertisement, photographed at Werribee Station, Victoria, and published in *Vanity Fair*. It shows two female models surrounded by sheep. What might this image communicate about life in Australia?
- Collect contemporary advertising or promotional images which reflect rural or outback themes.
- The 1980 poster *Stray Dags* depicting a flock of sheep painted in black and white with pink faces, featuring trees on the horizon and a pink galah was produced by a feminist-lesbian political band which played mainly at women's dances and concerts. What symbols are used to convey political and social ideas?
- Locate the four Uluru (Ayers Rock) postcards (1985–91) designed by Paul Worstead in collaboration with the Mutitjulu community, and list the types of food presented. What are these posters trying to communicate about the site and its traditional inhabitants? Who would be the target audience for these posters?
- Describe some stylistic conventions used by Gert Sellheim in both the *Great Barrier Reef* and *Corroboree Australia* poster designs (repetition, pattern, bold and symbolic use of colour, stylised motifs, simple shapes, diagonal composition).

Theme 3: Festivals and celebrations

Festivals and celebrations

Commemorative occasions provide an ideal opportunity for self-reflection and self-projection. Graphics created for these events are good indicators of how a nation sees itself. For decades, the image Australia presented of itself was one of a sun-drenched, sunburnt and satisfied white Australia.

Protest posters generated in response to the Bicentennial of European settlement in 1988 presented alternative views of Australian culture and society. Today, the country's Indigenous history is acknowledged and celebrated. Festivals are deliberately inclusive of Australia's diverse communities — a shift that has occurred since the mid-1960s with the abolition of the White Australia Policy that had dominated national identity since 1901.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ K-6

- Find the following in Martin Sharp's *The Festival of Sydney* poster:
 - face (ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hair)
 - ocean
 - streamers and fireworks
 - sailing boat
 - the Sydney Opera House
 - the Sydney Harbour Bridge
 - Luna Park
 - musical notes
 - birds.

★ 7-12

- List the items in the exhibition that show stereotypical images of Australia and/or Australians. Explain why?
- Look at the 1973 festival poster and explain how it encapsulates notions of Australia? Compare with contemporary festival promotional material such as the 2000 *Olympics Arts Festival* poster.
- Select a poster in the exhibition which best fits the following brief:
 - must be fabulous, attention grabbing, energetic, beautiful and uniquely Australian
 - must appeal to national and international markets
 - must capture the spirit of Sydney and the Olympic Games
 - must represent all of the arts, from music, to dance and theatre
 - must be simple and non-literal
 - text must be highly legible
 - must be non-gender specific
 - must be culturally inclusive and make specific reference to Australia's Indigenous peoples.
- Design your own poster based on the above brief.

John Coburn

Born: 1925, Ingham, Queensland;
painter, teacher, tapestry designer

John Coburn studied the arts of India, Burma and China during war service in those countries. In 1953 he married silk-screen printer Barbara Woodward, who was to be an important influence on his work. His paintings and tapestry designs favour large, stylised shapes, simply designed and painted in glowing colours. 'My aim', he wrote, 'is to create formal harmonies of shapes and colours that exist in their own right and at the same time distil the essence of a place, a thing or an incident. Vital art must be a natural outpouring of one's experience disciplined by form.' Among other sites, John Coburn was commissioned to design tapestries for the Sydney Opera House.

The 1973 *Opera House Festival* poster celebrates the opening of the Sydney Opera House and features John Coburn's design for the Opera House's curtains with a large golden sun above a graphic illustration of the Sydney Opera House. While the Sydney Opera House went on to become one of the most instantly recognised symbols of national identity, this poster was one of the first images to feature the building iconically.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ 7–12

- Research the controversy surrounding the building of the Sydney Opera House and discuss reasons why an image of the building itself was not a central feature of the official poster selected to promote its inaugural festival?

Theme 4: Cosmopolitan Australia

Cosmopolitan Australia

*We must get rid of the idea — that Australia only stands for sheep farming, the life of the open air and sports — especially cricket. Slowly and surely there are influences at work introducing other aspects of what might be called a more intellectual life.**

Depictions of Australia as a cosmopolitan centre ran parallel to presentations of the nation as an outpost of the British Empire, with a rich primary-industries and rural-based economy.

The Griffin's drawings for a new Australian capital, depictions of Sydney as a burgeoning metropolitan centre, posters promoting Australia's manufacturing sector and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras 1988 poster showing Australia at the top of the globe, are examples of this cosmopolitan imagining of an independent identity.

* E McKnight Kauffer, 1938

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ K-6

- Look at David McDiarmid's 1988 *Sydney Gay Mardi Gras* poster, and locate the Harbour Bridge. Guess what time of the day is shown in this image? Discuss what kind of view is used and where you would stand to take a picture like this.

★ 10-12

- Research the international modernist movement. Outline the characteristics of this style and find examples in the exhibition.

Theme 5: Indigenous contribution to Australian identity

Indigenous contribution to Australian identity

Indigenous art is widely acknowledged in Australia as an important and unique aspect of our culture but this recognition is relatively recent.

Before the late 1960s, most mass-produced commercial 'Australian Aboriginal designs' were created by non-Indigenous artists and designers, without consultation, authorisation or consent by the Indigenous custodians of the designs. The most prominent examples are posters that were produced by the Australian National Travel Association (from the 1930s to the 1950s) and Australia's first one-dollar decimal-currency note (1966), on which the painting of an Indigenous artist was reproduced without consultation or attribution (the artist was later remunerated).

The referendum of 1967 gave all Indigenous Australians the right to be included in the census, changing forever Australia's relationship with its Indigenous people. Indigenous Australians have also reclaimed the right to control the use of their artistic and cultural traditions.

Gert Sellheim's, *Corroboree Australia* poster was designed in the early 1930s for the Australian National Tourist Association to market Australia as an appealing travel destination for Australians and international tourists. The design of the poster is deliberately constructed with a diagonal composition — the word Australia appears below the dancers. It suggests Australia's ancient past. Gert Sellheim's designs contributed significantly to the evolution of Australian identity during the 20th century by evolving and developing signs and symbols which he felt characterised his new home, Australia. His work was widely distributed both nationally and internationally, and while projecting what now may be considered stereotypical images of Australia, were indeed quite revolutionary when there were being developed. At the time, especially from the 1930s through to the 1950s, Sellheim was looking for the images which could present culturally and environmentally specific aspects of Australia and the Australian way of life — as distinct from the European identifies of most of its more recent inhabitants. His emphasis on Australian identity, as a shared identity with the indigenous inhabitants of Australia, should not be overlooked.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ **K-6**

- Look for the poster *You are on Aboriginal land*, designed in 1984. What does this poster communicate?
- List all the colours in the poster.
- How many different patterns can you find in this image?

★ **10-12**

- Research the history of Australia's first \$1 decimal-currency note (1966), on which the painting of an Indigenous artist was reproduced without consultation or attribution. What was the artist's name and how were the copyright violations resolved?
- Look at the 1985 *Australian flag design* designed by the 'Great Artist of Warmun' (name withheld for cultural reasons), Warmun (Turkey Creek), WA. Discuss some of the reasons the artist's name might be withheld.

Theme 6: Selling significant sites

Selling significant sites

The Great Barrier Reef, Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney Opera House, Uluru (Ayers Rock) and the Blue Mountains are frequently depicted in marketing and advertising imagery that 'sells' Australia's natural and man-made sites.

Impetus for change in the way such sites were promoted came after Australia signed the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1974. This heralded the beginning of a broader environmental awareness, as public interest in heritage and conservation issues gradually developed. During the 1970s, the wider Australian community was made aware that certain sites had sacred and spiritual significance to specific Indigenous communities. The Ayers Rock postcard series of 1985, for example, commemorates the handing back of Ayers Rock (Uluru) to the Mititjulu community of Central Australia.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ K-6

- Look at Ken Done's 1999 *Sydney Design* poster. What are the three shapes shown? Look for the same shapes in Martin Sharp's 1981 *The Festival of Sydney* poster. Research the work of Henri Matisse who also used simple cut-out designs in his later work.

See the related colouring-in activity on page 15.

- Design a poster for your school using three simple shapes and text. Consider the colours and shapes in your school's official emblem, objects in your playground, local landmarks or important people.

★ 7-12

- Design a poster for your school using three simple shapes and text. Consider your school's local community, official colours, school emblem, its motto or mission statement and any relevant local landmarks or prominent historical or contemporary figures.

Theme 7: Enduring popular identities

Enduring popular identities

Enduring symbols of Australian identity include the kangaroo, an outdoor lifestyle involving sports and surf culture, vast open spaces where merino sheep graze, bronzed 'Aussies' (male and female), sandy beaches, beer and football culture, and the humble meat pie.

As well as such popular icons, specific colours have also emerged in Australian graphic design as having particular significance to the Australian environment and way of life — red for the earth, yellow for the sun and beaches, orange for warmth and vitality, blue for the water and sky.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ K-6

- Look at Douglas Annand's *Australia x Qantas* poster, 1972. What do you think the bands of blue, orange-yellow and green represent?

★ 7-12

- What information and ideas are conveyed by Le Guay's photograph of a model on a Sydney beach for the *Vogue Supplement for Australia*, Spring-Summer 1956?
- The *Vogue Supplement for Australia*, Spring-Summer 1956 was distributed in Australia as part of the regular issue of *Vogue* published in Great Britain. The Australian supplement was only sold in Australia. The caption found on the inside cover reads:

'Cover: For this important summer: a sheath swimsuit by Scamp of dazzling, flattering white delustered nylon by John Heathcoat. The colourful pleated turquoise cummerbund unbuttons for serious swimming. Around nine guineas, at Mark Foy's, Sydney; Georges, Melbourne; Myer Emporium, Adelaide; Ahern's Perth; and at Finney Isles, Brisbane. Lipstick is Elizabeth Arden's new Summer Time. Photograph by Le Guay taken at Tamarama Beach, N.S.W.'

- Compare the cover image and caption with the following contemporary caption (from *Vogue Australia*, September 1999). What are the similarities and differences?

'Cover look: Make-up by Estée Lauder. On Kylie: starting with Enlighten in Gentle Ivory, Disappear Crème Concealer in Light and Lucidity Translucent Loose Powder in Light; on cheeks, Blushing Natural Cheek Colour in Rose Desire; on eyes, Two In One Eye Shadow Duo in Bordeaux, Signature Auto Eye Pencil in Seal Brown, Signature Auto Brow Pencil in Soft Brown and Individualist Mascara in Black/Brown; on lips, Lip Defining Pencil in Tawny, True Lipstick Lipstick in Naïve Rose, and High Shine Lip Lacquer SPF15 in Candy Glaze. On Elle: starting with Double Matte Foundation in Cameo, Quick Concealing Pencil in Medium, Lucidity Translucent Powder in Light/Medium; on cheeks, Blushing Natural Cheek Colour in Sepia Passion; on eyes, Two in One Eye Shadow Duo in Linen, Eye Defining Pencil in Soft Smudge Black, Signature Auto Brow Pencil in Soft Brown and Pure Velvet Mascara in Black; on lips, Auto Pencil for Lips in Fig,

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Duo Lipstick in Heather, and High Shine Lip Lacquer SPF15 in Silver Cloud Petal. Kylie wears Jonathon Ward Couture silk dress, \$2,100. Elle wears Nicola Finetti silk dress, \$770. *Fashion Editor* Janye Pickering *Photographer* Wayne Maser *Fashion Coordinator* Wayne Gross'

Hints

- Acknowledgement of professionals and products.
 - Cult of celebrity and 'supermodel'.
 - Promotion of new fabric technologies.
 - Product cost.
 - Distribution and acknowledgement of products.
 - History of product brands.
 - International vs domestic fashion.
 - Scale of model and background.
 - Use of text and advertising.
 - Investigate the *Vogue* masthead; has it changed?
 - How do you instantly know it's a magazine cover? What are the basic characteristics?
 - Why was 1956 considered an important summer (Olympics)?
- Look at Reg Mombassa's poster *Australian Jesus* which uses laconic humour designed to shock and appeal simultaneously. Select a popular religious story, fable or myth and 'Australianise' it using bold graphic images and text.
 - Research other products that use shock-tactic advertising. Outline some of the reasons why this form of advertising is effective?

Theme 8: Towards the future

Towards the future

The peace and reconciliation kangaroo is just one of the many new symbols of identity to emerge as contemporary Australian artists and graphic designers look towards the future. Simultaneously, traditional symbols of identity, such as the Southern Cross constellation, are being invested with new meaning and significance — for example in the designs for a new flag.

As Australia enters its second century of nationhood, issues of identity continue to engage the Australian public. Designers and artists are revisiting the recent past, acknowledging Australia's ancient cultural history, and anticipating the future.

Focus questions and classroom activities

★ K-6

- What is David Lancashire's peace and reconciliation kangaroo (*Peace Roo*) holding in its paw? What does this symbolise and how does it connect to the Olympic Games?

★ 7-12

- Look at David Lancashire's peace and reconciliation kangaroo (*Peace Roo*). What stylistic devices and symbols are used to represent Australian identity, peace and reconciliation? The work was produced by the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games; who would be the main target audience for this kind of imagery?

Codes, symbols and conventions

Codes, symbols and conventions are things used or regarded as standing for, recalling or representing other things, especially an idea, quality or emotion. Symbols can take the form of emblems, tokens or signs, letters, figures or other characters. Many visual symbols, codes and conventions form a commonly understood visual language that acts as a referent to the world and assists artists and viewers in constructing meaning.

The Southern Cross

The Southern Cross, also known as Crux, is the smallest of all 88 constellations, covering just 68 square degrees. Visible to all countries above the tropics, it is a feature of the Australian flag as well as the flags of Brazil, Western Samoa, New Zealand and New Guinea. To Aboriginal communities throughout Australia it represents many different things. One interesting view is that held by the Anangu people of Uluru (Ayers Rock) in the Northern Territory. They believe the cross is the footprint of a giant wedge-tailed eagle, second biggest in the world, called Warluwarru. The nearby Coalsack is the eagle's nest and the pointers are a throwing stick used to hunt the eagle.

- See the design for an Australian flag by the 'Great Artist of Warmun' and suggest why the Southern Cross might be considered an appropriate image to represent Australia.
- Using the information above, design a flag or poster that uses the Southern Cross as its primary image.

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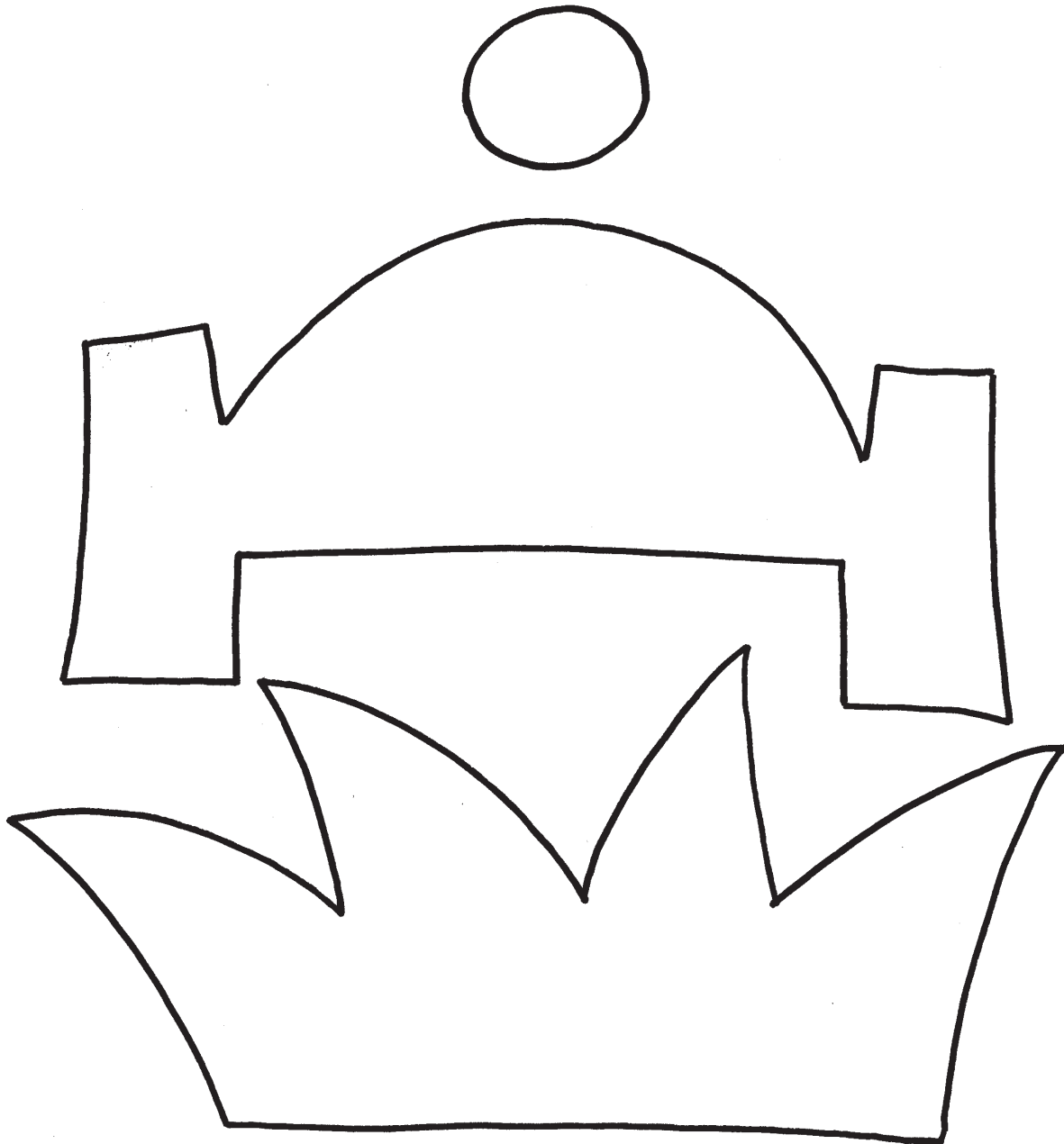
Worksheet for upper primary students

Visit the *Celebrating Australia: identity by design* exhibition in person or on line (<http://172.16.8.97/exhibits/touring/celebrating/celebrating.htm>). Many of the exhibits in this exhibition deal with various social, environmental or political themes. Use the following table to identify them.

Theme	Name of example in exhibition	Make a quick sketch
racial		
social		
environment		
peace		
celebration		
protest		
gay rights		
tourism		
Indigenous		
other		

Worksheet for lower primary students

A picture to colour in.



References

Further reading

Butler, Roger. *Poster art in Australia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1993

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Johnson, Vivien. *Copyrites, Aboriginal art in the age of reproductive technologies*, National indigenous Arts Advocacy Association (NIAAA), Sydney, 1996

Hetherington, Michelle. *Follow the sun*, exhibition catalogue, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2001

Holden, Robert. *The art of magazine covers in Australia*, Hodder & Stoughton, Sydney, 1995

Horton, David (ed). *Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia*, vols 1 & 2, AIATSIS, Canberra, 1994

Kelly, Paul. *100 years: the Australian story*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia, 2001

Nicoll, Fiona. *From diggers to drag queens: configurations of Australian national identity*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 2001

O'Callaghan, Judith (ed). *The Australian dream: design of the fifties*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 1993

Shiell, Annette and Stephen, Ann (eds). *The lie of the land*, National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, Melbourne, 1992

Weirick, James. 'Spirituality and symbolism in the work of the Griffins', *Beyond architecture: Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin in America, Australia and India*, Watson, Anne (ed), Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 1998

Websites

Southern Cross: www.southernskies.com.au/crux.htm

Travelling exhibition, *Belonging: a century celebrated*, National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/travelling.html>

Travelling exhibition, *All the rage: the poster in Victoria 1850–2000*, State Library of Victoria: www.slv.vic.gov.au/slv/exhibitions/alltherage

Make a Cybersmart poster at Cybersmart Kids: <http://www.cybersmartkids.com.au/> An initiative of the Australian Broadcasting Authority, Cybersmart Kids features a range of material, including brochures, posters, tools, information for adults supervising children, and friendly tips for children to be Internet savvy. Included is an interactive quiz for children, designed to test their knowledge of smart Internet use, and a drawing activity that allows children to post pictures to the site. The site also provides lesson ideas for teachers, and links to sites recommended for children and teenagers.

EdNA Online's Australian Identity Resources for Schools <http://www.edna.edu.au/schools/themes/australia.html> The aim of this page is to provide a service to the educational community by aggregating a useful and comprehensive collection of resources for teaching and learning about the Australian identity. It includes links for national symbols, flags, national heritage, bank notes, celebrations and famous Australians.

Prints and printmaking in Australia and the Australasian region, National Gallery of Australia, <http://www.australianprints.gov.au/Ausprints/Default.cfm>

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The Embassy of Australia, Washington DC



For more information on the exhibition *Celebrating Australia: identity by design*, visit the Powerhouse Museum's website <http://www.phm.gov.au>

For more information about education support or your booking, contact Education and Visitor Services at the Powerhouse Museum:
Telephone — (02) 9217 0222
Fax — (02) 9217 0441
Email — edserv@phm.gov.au



500 Harris Street Ultimo
PO Box K346 Haymarket 1238
www.phm.gov.au