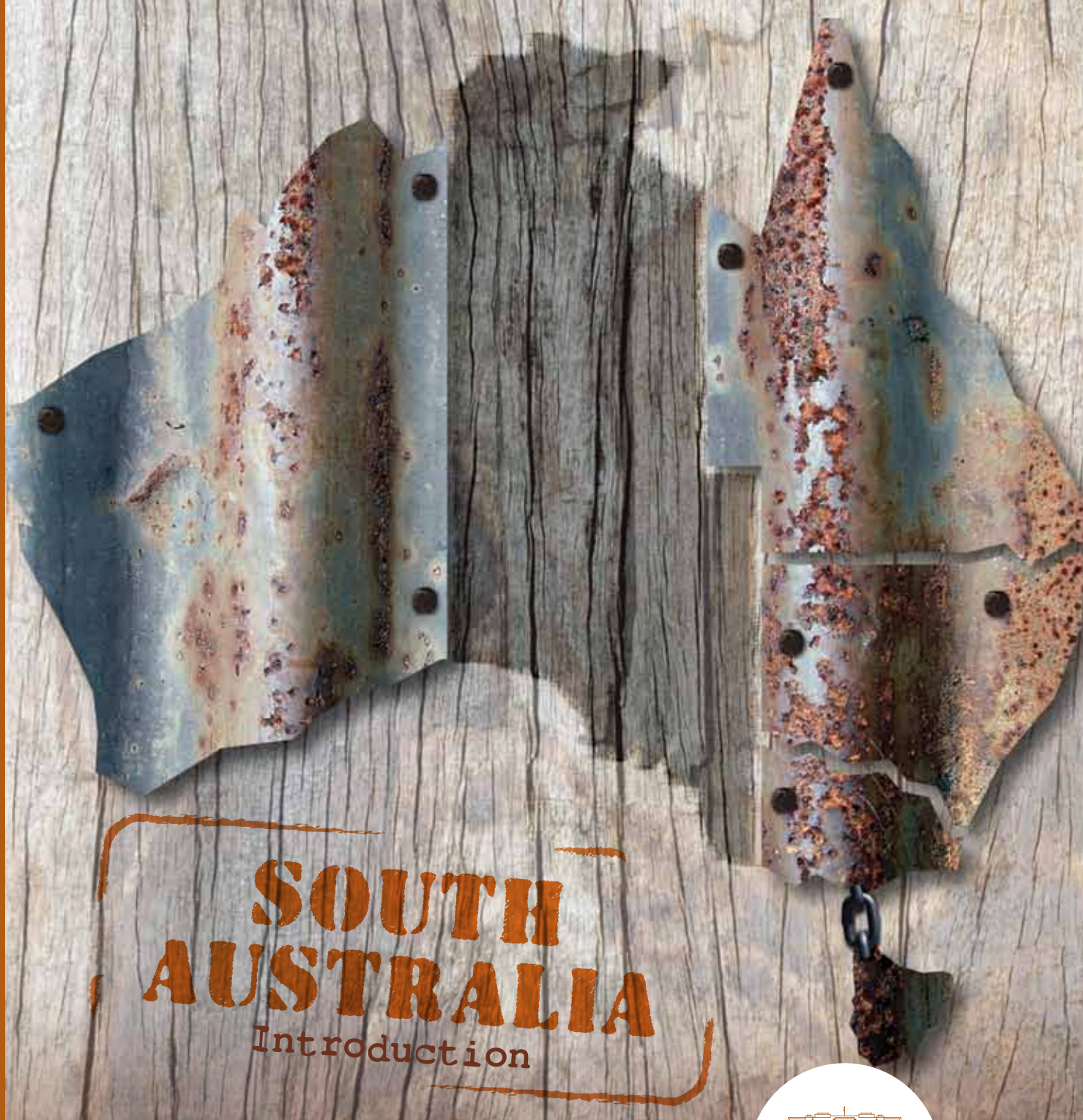


GETTING IT TOGETHER

From Colonies to Federation



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Introduction



INVESTIGATIONS OF AUSTRALIA'S JOURNEY TO NATIONHOOD FOR THE MIDDLE YEARS CLASSROOM

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LEARNING

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From Colonies to Federation

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia was established as a free settlement in 1836. Unlike the other Australian colonies, there were never any convicts transported from Britain to the shores of South Australia, which appealed to many people. Wealthy people purchased large areas of land and paid for workers to travel from Britain and other European countries. Free settlers also arrived from places such as Germany to work and set up businesses.

In 1857, South Australia achieved responsible government, which meant representatives would be elected by the people to make laws for the colony. Prior to that, a governor had ruled the colony. As the Australian colonies were part of the British Empire, governors were appointed by the British Government. South Australian women won the right to vote in 1894. They were among the first women in the world to have this right!

From 1863 until 1911, the Northern Territory was part of South Australia. At the time, Darwin was called Palmerston – a name it used until the Territory came under the control of the Commonwealth in 1911. Many people living in the Territory felt overlooked and neglected by the South Australian Government. A great many people in South Australia felt the cost of supporting the Territory was an enormous financial burden.

The completion of South Australia's Overland Telegraph Line in 1872 connected Australia with London through undersea cables to Java and then Europe. Even though the colony was small in population, it had an important role to play in keeping people in all of the colonies in touch with one another and with news from overseas. South Australia shared borders with every mainland colony – Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

In 1889, the Premier of New South Wales, Henry Parkes suggested that the time had come for Australians to create a united government for the continent. He believed that this could be done peacefully and without breaking connections with Britain. Parkes called for the leading men of all colonies to attend a conference to draw up the plans. Charles Cameron Kingston was a member of South Australia's Parliament at the time. He became a strong supporter of the plan for Federation, and later became Premier of South Australia.

South Australia had become prosperous through farming and copper mining, but during the 1890s, like the other eastern colonies, it was experiencing an economic depression. Many banks and businesses collapsed. A number of South Australia's politicians believed that Federation would bring financial benefits to the colony, particularly through the abolition of intercolonial tariffs. These were taxes that had to be paid on any goods being transported from one colony to another. Without them meant free trade with the other colonies. Other South Australian politicians believed that free trade would cripple the colony's industries as they struggled to compete against New South Wales and Victorian businesses.

Other issues that influenced people's opinions about Federation included the need for a national defence force, control of the nation's rivers, and the location of the new nation's capital. As the most geographically central colony, some South Australians argued that Port Augusta should be Australia's capital city. How the proposed federal government would work and whether colonies with larger populations should have more power to make decisions also provided plenty of debate. These issues were used as reasons for and against South Australians supporting Federation.

The issues were resolved by a series of meetings, called conventions, where politicians from each colony discussed the way forward and drafted an Australian Constitution. In 1898, a referendum, a vote by the people, was held in South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria, to adopt the draft Constitution. It was unsuccessful in New South Wales, so a second referendum had to be held. In 1899, the people of South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland voted to accept the draft Constitution. Western Australia held its referendum in 1900. Australians voted to accept Federation. On Commonwealth Day, 1 January 1901, all six colonies became States of the new Australian nation, welcoming Federation with special celebrations.



Your tasks

For you to investigate

There are three themes for you to investigate. Each has information and activities to help you dig deeper into the story of South Australia's journey from colony to Federation.

People and Places

Investigate aspects of life in South Australia in the years before Federation, especially the 1880s and 1890s when there were many changes taking place in the colony.

Road to Federation

Investigate issues influencing opinions on Federation, why there were different points of view in South Australia, and the colony's final vote.

Celebrations and Futures

Investigate how South Australia celebrated Federation when it began, and how being part of the Australian Commonwealth continues to be celebrated today.