

I'm in the midst of preparing a unit on "What does it mean to be Australian" for my year 9 English class – and this book could not have landed on my doorstep at a better time! We've all done this unit many times, but my resources were still in need of a shake-up and now I have more than a few texts to draw on. As English teachers we always look for a variety of texts to use, often trawling through countless textbooks, newspapers, websites and old filing cabinets of resources from the 1980s to engage students. The beauty of this book is they are all here ready for use – speeches, newspaper articles, photographs, film stills, cartoons, poems - and provide a fantastic exploration of what it is that makes Australian's unique and what binds us together no matter what colour, shape or size we are!

True Blue? is a diverse collection of texts from well-known (Michael Leunig, Bruce Dawe), and not so famous Australians (I can already hear some students' cries of 'Who is this guy, Miss?'). The advantage of the book is the accessibility of the texts thanks to the many short, yet relevant musings on what Australian means. Options are endless with so many texts, which will provide a great springboard for student discussion on ideas such as; Does 'Australian' mean you surf on weekends, eat snags for every meal and have a pet kangaroo? Or is 'Australian' an attitude, a state of mind, an understanding?. Topics explored in the book branch even further into the realms of stereotypes, image, heritage, myths, multiculturalism, politics, entertainment, sport, racism and technology.

For my unit of work, I will be drawing on several texts including 'National Insecurity', 'I'm a Whiteman now!' and the visual text 'Reflecting Ourselves?'. The texts are inspiring, honest reflections that should generate useful banter – and the occasional laugh from students (Try the 'Encyclopaedia of Australian Life'!). A great resource for any staffroom especially English, History and Society & Culture collections.

Emma Stevenson, NSW

For so long we have identified larrikinism, egalitarianism, championing of the underdog, etc as quintessentially Australian traits. We have accepted that these traits are typically embodied by a VB drinking, meat pie eating, stubby wearing, Croc Dundee ocher hero. But is this an accurate reflection of Australian identity? Now it is time to examine who the True Blue Aussie really is. And this collection of narratives, from some of Australia's finest writers, goes a long way in conveying what makes us ALL Australian - no matter how one may hyphenate!

True Blue? is a collection of narratives (or yarns) that examines Australian heritage, the ever-evolving Australian identity, and what it means to be True Blue in this diverse land. This book is an immensely useful resource that reaches across several subject areas.

Selected content lends itself towards many units of work and areas of study that deal with topic areas and issues such as:

- Representations of the Australian bush
- Australian icons and symbols
- Identity
- Cultural barriers
- Racial barriers
- Belonging
- Telling Stories
- The Aboriginal experience
- Change
- Prejudice
- Stereotypes
- The Australian war experience
- Australia and sport
- Gender in sport

At times historical, at times humorous, at times sentimental, but essentially *True Blue?* is informative and thought-provoking. The diversity of the Australian identity is beautifully summed up by Hugh Mackay: "The main thing about us is that we're all here and we all count" - a sentiment echoed throughout this "beaut" of a book.

Lauren Sims, NSW

With an introduction to the range of peoples that make up Australia today, Goldsworthy has drawn together excerpts from books, speeches, newspaper articles as well as poems and short stories to show us what it means to be an Australian. Ranging from David Malouf to Michael Leunig and John Clarke to High McKay, the pieces included here will engender some debate. Produced by Allen and Unwin with the support of the Curriculum Corporation, Australia Day Committee and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, the book has the feel of a text for schools, but is enjoyable reading for a range of interests. Many of the stories are unforgettable, as people struggle on with their lives, despite all adversity. One of the most endearing is that of Hieu Van Le, now the Lieutenant Governor of South Australia. His first sight of Australia escaping from Vietnam in 1975 is one that will live with the reader for all time, and is in sharp contrast to the 'welcome' dealt out decades later to people in a similar plight escaping from the Middle East. This one is a stand out for me, but all add to the vast range of people that make up Australia, and give it its broadness. For students in the classroom, that favourite topic, *What it means to be Australian*, will be well served with a class set of this book. Students will be able to dip in to read authors they have heard of and many they have not seen before, and argue with their class mates about what is an Australian, what should have been included or not included, what best describes us. Some may notice the lack of children's voices or the dearth of women's voices, some may question the Anglo Saxon predominance, some may want a greater representation from expatriate Australians, but all will bring their own views and values to the book, adding space for discussion and debate. Students will be invited by an astute teacher to put together their own list of what could be included in such a book, sending them to a wider reading and selection of Australian writing, and photos and films will be watched to tease out other quotes and mythologies.

Fran Knight, SA

True Blue? is a collection of pieces reflecting in some way on what it means to be Australian and what makes up the Australian Identity. It differs from many other collections in that it not only includes prose from different authors, but also poems, anecdotes, artwork and photographs which add to the whole debate over what exactly forms the Australian identity. Underlying the examination is a concern about what is included and excluded from ideas of "Australian-ness" and an examination of the current trend towards labelling things as 'un-Australian'.

This is a thought provoking text which, though focused on Australian life, explores a wide range of aspects of life from a number of different perspectives. The collected opinions on the Australian people, symbols, place, and even the Australian love of sport provide the opportunity for discussion and reflection. Some pieces are the work of eminent and well known Australians, others from lesser known sources, but all add something to the debate. Some contributors make their points with facts and historical example, others through humour or artistic representations.

The text would be very useful for classroom use at a variety of year levels. The individual pieces are relatively short and most could be used with junior students as the stimulus for issues or personal writing. Our ANZAC legend is touched on several times, most eloquently in Paul Keating's "The Unknown Australian Soldier" which would make an excellent basis for ANZAC day activities. Senior students in Victoria could find ample information and viewpoints to add to their work on their key contexts, particularly "Exploring issues of Identity and Belonging" and "Encountering Conflict". Overall, the potential applications of the text in Secondary schools are many.

Anne Sim, Dromana Secondary College, VIC

True Blue? includes 140 contributions selected by Peter Goldsworthy and the national Australia Day Council that are mainly prose, but also poems, cartoons, photographs and paintings, from a wide range of twentieth and twenty-first century contributors. The length of the prose contributions varies from very short (Priorities: Bob Hawke's one line comment after that famous America's Cup victory) to three pages (Robert Manne, "A Turkish Tale" – about World War One): all a good length to use with students. The contributions are meaty, colourful, and thoughtful. They are organized into five groups: People, Symbols, Place, Sport and Words. Each section includes a short introduction and the occasional comment as well.

A quick listing of some attention-grabbing contributions include "Secret Men's Business", "The Next Big Thing", a poem on 'A Short History of Immigration', Michael Leunig's "Preamble", "Application for Australian

Citizenship”, and “The Unknown Australian Soldier” (Paul Keating). The positioning of the photograph of footballer Nicky Winmar and the Australian’s cartoon on the topic on opposite sides of the page is excellent. My only complaint: no quick biographies of all contributors. A two line biography of each contributor would be good for those of us not familiar with a particular contributor. (The description of Bob Hawke that goes with his America’s Cup comment would be perfect if provided for all contributors.)

Overall, this is pretty well balanced selection of materials that should get students thinking. This is an excellent resource for Australian Studies teachers and students – a class set would be a good addition to any school’s bookroom collection.

Jan Brown, Craigmore High School, SA

This book is a collection of fiction and opinionative writings and pictures from a variety of Australians. It is separated into five main categories: People, Symbols, Place, Sport and Words.

I found this book very interesting. Each section presents differing views of Australian life and values. The contributors come from a variety of areas of life – literature (Patrick White); humourists (Michael Leunig); historians (Geoffrey Blainey); politicians (Bob Carr); photographers (Liu Xiao Xian); scientists (Tim Flannery); musicians (John Williamson); comedians (John Clarke); artists (Sidney Nolan); poets (Bruce Dawe); sportspeople (Kieren Perkins) and many more!

The middle few pages are coloured and dedicated to reproductions of paintings and photos (including ‘Suburban Girls’ Dame Edna Everage and Kylie Minogue!) One of my favourite extracts was an ‘Encyclopedia of Australian Life’ which was written by several people (Richard Castles, Kelly Chandler, Pete Cruttenden et al).

One of the definitions is – “VIBE: The general feeling in the Constitution that a man’s home is his castle.”

Being a person who enjoys the humour in things I also liked the extract from Les Carlyon’s ‘The Great War’: “A British soldier once rebuked an Australian for failing to salute him.

‘I’m a colonel!’ he said.

‘Best job in the army,’ said the Australian. ‘You keep it.’

If a class set could be bought this would be an invaluable text for English and Social Studies lessons. The short extracts and pictures could surely encourage all students to study them, and the differing views allow students to form their own opinions. Students could use this as a supplement to studying a specific category (e.g. sport in Australian culture, or life in the city versus life in the bush etc). It would also be a good introduction to some of the famous people in Australian life, especially those who are not sportspeople – they could study an extract, then research the person. Study notes are available on the Allen & Unwin website:

<http://www.allenandunwin.com/uploads/BookPdf/TeachersNotes/9781741750591.pdf> . I have not had time to look at them yet but they look quite comprehensive.

Anne Fry, Grant High School, SA

This is an excellent book because of the well known Australian writers who have contributed to the text. It gives students the opportunity to sample writer’s styles and understand different the complexity of the issue as to what it means to be Australian.

The variety of the types of texts is useful for students to meet the syllabus requirements for stage 6. Students must analysis a variety of different types of texts and this text allows them to achieve this without having to read large amounts of material or search for appropriate texts themselves. This is a wonderful benefit for students particularly in Standard English who find the course especially difficult.

On reading the book I have found some extremely useful texts on the idea of the “Australian Image”. Image is Elective 3 in Module A of the Standard English course. Firstly the text “*Reflecting Ourselves*” by John Tiedemann (page 84) is very useful as an opening for a discussion on the idea of image. Then it is possible to extend the ideas raised to include the concept of image a nation has of itself.

Thirdly the text called “*ANZAC Day*” by Inga Clendinnen (Pg. 91) is great to show students how an event can become a symbol of a nation’s identity and then shape the image that a country may have of itself to the rest of the world.

Another text that I found to be useful for the concept of image to students in this elective is written by Ken Boundy called “*Brand Australia*” (Pg 85). This text concentrates generally on the idea of an “Australian” image and the different facets that construct the image a nation as of itself.

This book can also cater for Elective 2: Dialogue (also in Module A). I found the text “*The 7:56 Report On Anzac Day*” by John Clarke (Pg 92) to be an extremely good supplementary piece to use. John Clark implies that the Prime Minister John Howard is trying to embellish the use the issue of Anzac Day as an emotion event. Clark then cleverly uses the dialogue of the interviewer (Brian Dawe) to interject with facts about the Gallipoli campaign. This serves to highlight the idea of satire and provides an unusual technique for students to discover in their study of dialogue.

This book is essential for the library and resources for any stage 6 English course.

Vanessa Wickens, NSW

Year 8 teachers at my school were thrilled to see this book that fits perfectly with our English unit “Hey True Blue: Australian Media”. The support texts of speeches, cartoons and television excerpts provide a much needed revitalising of old related texts. The variety of texts allow students a necessary range for discussion of text types including structure and formatting as well as chance to delve into satire and irony.

The 2009 Year 12 cohort is well served with the chapter, ‘Place’. The Area of Study ‘Belonging’ will require a fresh approach by teachers and students to access related texts. Inclusions such as ‘Not a Village?’ and ‘Inner Cities’ provide a backdrop of urban belonging that juxtaposes with ‘Space’ and the idealised vision of Australia as ‘the wide brown land’. The indigenous visual text ‘Napperby Death Spirit Dreaming’ again allows an exploration of the sense of belonging of a particular group just as ‘Of Middle Eastern Appearance’ does for a more recently arrived group to Australian shores.

An excellent resource text but as well *True Blue? On being Australian* is a great read with snippets of Australia and how we live. Highly entertaining and very pertinent to anyone interested in snapshots of Aussies and the ubiquitous question ‘Who are we?’

Sally Spurr, Our Lady of the sacred Heart College Kensington, NSW

True Blue? was excellent! I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, partly because I am Australian, partly because I migrated here to Australia in the 1980’s and mostly because it has been brilliantly put together!

True Blue? is so far from boring: with such interesting stories as ‘Neighbours’ by Tim Winton, and ‘My first sight of Australia’ by Hieu Van Le.

Aussie people, symbols, place, sport and words are depicted as only our unique culture can be – multi-cultural, ancestral, suburban, modern – just plain Aussie!

I laughed out loud so many times. I recommend *True Blue?* to more mature readers and those wanting a good read.

Linda Marx, Mountain District Christian School, VIC