The decade that had begun with dreams and schemes for prosperity and progress ended in a colossal economic crash in 1929. The crisis that followed is known as the Great Depression and it left its mark on the decade of the 1930s, with images of endless dole queues, shantytowns and swagmen who had hit the road in search of work. The misery of the Depression left people searching for better systems of government or ways of escaping the hardship. People found new ways of 'making do' and forgot their worries for a short time through the new forms of entertainment, such as radio and movies, and by cheering on their sporting heroes.

Photograph from the 1930s of two children on the streets of Sydney showing the extent of the poverty and suffering of the Depression years.
### Experiences of the Depression

#### Wall Street — the crash that shook the world

During the 1930s most countries of the world were hit by the economic crisis known as the Great Depression. This was the largest economic crisis in modern world history. The impact of this world economic collapse was first felt in the United States of America and was marked by:

- the collapse of the **stock market**. The value of shares plunged and confidence in the American economy was destroyed.
- the collapse of the banking system. People were no longer able to gain loans and so spending slowed. Some people lost all their savings when banks closed down.
- reduction in spending. People were no longer able to purchase goods at the rate that they were being produced.
- massive unemployment. The numbers of people employed in manufacturing rapidly decreased, triggering widespread unemployment reaching 25 per cent of the working population across America.
- reduction in trade with the outside world. In an effort to protect American business, the United States government charged high taxes on **imports** to encourage Americans to purchase only locally made goods. World trade was immediately threatened.

The Wall Street stock market crash on 24 October 1929 is regarded as the event that marked the beginning of the Great Depression. It is known as ‘Black Thursday’ because it shattered the economy of the United States, the most prosperous and confident nation in the world. On ‘Black Monday’, 28 October, the value of stock market **shares** fell even further. The collapse of the American economy spread panic abroad. Wall Street, in New York City, was the most important financial centre in the world.

![A photograph of the scene outside the Wall Street Stock Exchange during the crash of 1929](image)

**Source 4.1**

As a historian analysing the significance of Black Thursday 1929, describe:

(a) the scene in the photograph
(b) the evidence the photograph provides of the public response to this economic crisis.

In 1928 the newly elected American President, Herbert Hoover, had declared that the United States would soon see a time ‘when poverty will be banished from this nation’. The ‘Roaring Twenties’ had been a decade of prosperity, economic growth and optimism. In September 1929 the value of shares on the American stock market had been at an all-time high. At the beginning of October, they dropped a little as investors began to sell off stock. This selling pattern reached panic proportions on Black Thursday when 13 million shares were sold at dramatically reduced prices. Thousands of investors lost their savings and were ruined.
President Hoover tried to assure America that this financial crisis would quickly pass. However, the Great Depression that followed the crash would last for close to 10 years and strike at nearly every country in the world. Australia owed Britain and America millions of dollars and so was hard hit by the economic chaos.

Causes of the Great Depression

The 1920s generation was bewildered by the economic collapse of a politically stable nation with a high standard of living. Closer analysis of economic developments during the ‘Roaring Twenties’ revealed some worrying trends:

- **Speculation on the stock market.** Buying shares on the stock market during the 1920s had become a popular form of gambling, pushing share prices way beyond their real value.
- **Cycles of boom and slump.** Times of great growth, such as had occurred in the 1920s, were historically followed by cyclical downturns in the economy.
- **Overproduction.** During the 1920s more goods were being produced than could be purchased.
- **High levels of debt.** The rapid growth in business and building works was often financed by high-interest loans.
- **Unequal distribution of wealth.** The prosperity of the 1920s was not shared equally, allowing the wealthy even greater profits from the relatively low income of the working class.

Strategies to deal with the crisis failed as governments continued to make balancing the budget their priority, preventing the introduction of programs that could have stimulated their economies. Every country limited its imports and began to call in all the loans given abroad. High tariffs (duty or tax) were imposed on goods from overseas so, by 1932, international trade had slumped to 40 per cent of its 1929 value.

The Depression experience in Australia

As the 1920s drew to a close, Australia’s prosperity appeared increasingly fragile. In January 1929, Australia’s long-term borrowing from overseas came to an end when London refused further loans to Australia. In the months before the Wall Street Crash, the problems with the Australian economy were evident:

- the value of Australian shares was falling
- unemployment levels were rising
- the selling price of Australian agricultural produce was falling on the world market.

Source 4.2

Timeline of events in 1929 which led to the Great Depression in Australia

- London financial market ceases to issue new loans.
- Loans from overseas private sources contract.
- Trade union unemployment is 10.1 per cent.
- Share prices fall. Export prices collapse further.
- Retail prices fall.
- Wholesale prices fall. Trade union unemployment is 13.1 per cent. Wall Street Crash. Labor government elected. All loans cease.
- Bond prices fall. Trade union unemployment is now 12.1 per cent.
- Export prices decline almost 25 per cent below May 1928. Funds from Britain flow to the United States for speculative boom.

Source Question

Explain the causes of the Great Depression as set out in this timeline of events.
During the 1920s all the state governments had borrowed large amounts of money to finance public works programs in cities and rural areas. By 1929, Australia had huge debts and interest repayments. Australia had become dependent on overseas loans and investment for its prosperity and growth, and relied on agricultural and industrial exports for national income. Even without the crash on Wall Street, Australia faced uncertain times in 1929. The consequences of the world economic crisis would be catastrophic for Australia.

The novelist Colin Thiele recounts his memories of the Great Depression.

During the 1920s all the state governments had borrowed large amounts of money to finance public works programs in cities and rural areas. By 1929, Australia had huge debts and interest repayments. Australia had become dependent on overseas loans and investment for its prosperity and growth, and relied on agricultural and industrial exports for national income. Even without the crash on Wall Street, Australia faced uncertain times in 1929. The consequences of the world economic crisis would be catastrophic for Australia.

I was nine years old when the crash came in late 1929, and I was not quite fourteen when the crisis began to ease a little in 1934. My father had hesitated to sell his wheat for 4s 11d a bushel in 1929, holding out for the round 5s. His reluctance cost him dearly. In the end he sold part of that harvest for 3s 4d, and was later forced to accept 1s 3d — way below the cost of production.

As children we were only too well aware of the burden our parents bore. We sensed their fear and bewilderment, trapped by vast global forces which they didn’t understand and which were quite beyond their control. We heard their agonising discussions whenever my father had to make his periodic visits to the bank to discuss his mortgage — their fear of ‘losing the farm’ because they were ‘going backwards’. It is hard for urban residents to grasp what ‘losing the farm’ really means to country people who have had the land under the boots and in their blood for generations.

My mother became the rallying figure for our survival. Her dairy cows (hand-milked twice a day by all of us) helped to provide a trickle of income through the fortnightly ‘cream cheques’ from the butter factory. The sale of Christmas turkeys also helped, as did fowls with their eggs, and pigs with piglets.

Of course we were lucky to be living on a farm — providing we were able to hold on to it. We were unlikely to starve, and we suffered none of the scarifying effects of poverty in the cities. We were virtually self-sufficient...

My mother patched our work clothes with patches over patches, and my father soled and re-soled our boots with bits of old leather or pieces of rubber cut from worn-out tyres.

And so we survived. But because I had an older brother who was already working on the farm — which had difficulty supporting anyone, let alone another son — I was forced to look elsewhere. In a blind kind of way I was pushed in the direction of education, and a totally different way of life.


**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. In source 4.3, what were the ‘vast global forces which they didn’t understand and were quite beyond their control’?
2. Describe how the economic crash affected this Australian family.
3. Identify ways in which the family managed to survive the hard times.
4. What were the consequences of the Depression for the writer?

**Battling on — life for the unemployed**

For Europeans, Americans and Australians the decade of the 1930s began with a shared experience:

- huge unemployment
- low export prices
- struggling farms and low returns on agricultural produce
- generally depressed business.

Most governments reacted to the crisis with the same policies, all aimed at slashing government spending and paying back loans. People were told that their country was in a trade cycle soon to be replaced by another period of boom. The belief was that governments could do little to avoid the effects of the slump and the tough economic times just had to be endured.

As a producer of primary industry exports and a large borrower of overseas money, the impact of the Depression hit Australia hard and fast. The combination of overseas loan repayments and the sudden drop in earning ability from exports brought Australia close to bankruptcy in early 1930. The result was massive unemployment.

Thousands of Australians who had been accustomed to having jobs and some financial security suddenly found themselves facing the humiliation and poverty of unemployment. Suicide rates increased dramatically, whole families became destitute and it soon became

**primary industry**: any industry, such as farming, forestry and mining, which is involved in the producing or extracting of natural resources  
**destitute**: poor and without the means of looking after oneself
clear that the country did not have the resources to deal with this terrible crisis. In city suburbs and country towns, charity workers were faced with overwhelming numbers of families requiring support of the most basic kind. For the first time in many years, the sight of beggars and street pedlars became commonplace in cities and large towns.

![Graph of Australia's unemployment statistics between 1928 and 1939]

**SOURCE 4.4**

*Australia’s unemployment statistics between 1928 and 1939*


**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. From the graph in source 4.4, identify the three worst years of the Depression for unemployment.
2. How many times greater was unemployment in 1932 than in 1928?
3. Describe the change in the unemployment statistics after 1932.

No-one suffered more than the soldiers who had returned from the Great War. By the time of the Depression, they were in their mid-thirties and often still suffered the trauma of their wartime experiences. The Depression’s sudden and widespread unemployment hit them hardest of all. Hundreds could be found on any night, covered in newspapers and old army greatcoats, sleeping at Sydney’s Domain or at Salvation Army refuges. A 1933 government inquiry found that these young war veterans were dying at a rate of about 10 000 every year.

**SOURCE 4.5**

*Photograph of a dole queue at Circular Quay in 1931. After receiving a dole ticket, these men had to walk to Central Railway Station to collect their rations.*

**SOURCE QUESTION**

Imagine you are working for a trade union and you want to use source 4.5 to draw attention to the plight of the unemployed. Write a slogan to go with this photograph.

**trauma:** a frightening experience that leaves a lasting emotional effect

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**RETOFILE**

- In their efforts to make a living, hordes of men took to the road selling their wares door-to-door. Those homeowners who had the money could buy anything — from soap to fish and rabbits — from the itinerant salesmen who knocked on their door.
- The unemployed earned a little money in imaginative and back-breaking ways. In the Port Hacking River, men stood in water for hours digging tonnes of shell grit to be sold as an additive for chicken feed.
- One artistic group sold models of kookaburras that had been fashioned from pine-cones and painted pieces of discarded tin with bush scenes.
Describe how the cartoonist has portrayed the returned servicemen’s Depression experience in source 4.6.

Using source 4.6 as your evidence, identify the specific problems Australia had to face during the Depression.

Surviving on the ‘susso’

The image of the Great Depression in Australia is usually of the family breadwinner in his endless search for work. It was a society that saw a man’s major role as that of breadwinner. The unemployed were issued with coupons or ration tickets that they could exchange for groceries, milk and bread. The state governments called it a ‘sustenance payment’ but to Australians of the time it was known as ‘being on the susso’. Nothing was provided for rent, heating, lighting or clothing and only in Western Australia were cash payments given to the unemployed.

During the Depression, the unemployed were still regarded by governments as being responsible for their own misfortune. Governments claimed that giving money to the unemployed would open them up to the temptations of alcohol, tobacco and gambling. They were constantly made to suffer the indignity of queuing for handouts, being herded into camps, and having their privacy invaded and honesty questioned.

Yesterday — and it is a scene which is repeated day after day — about 5000 men assembled at No. 7 wharf, Circular Quay West to receive their relief ration tickets ... Men came quietly, lined up in their respective queues ... signed for their tickets, and went their way ...

Here one comes face to face with the type of men — married and single — ‘on the dole’.

There are youths who look as if they have hardly left school. There are elderly men whose working days seem to be almost ended. There are sturdy workmen of the reliable type who could sling a bag of cement across their shoulders as though it were a feather pillow. There are ascetic-featured men who might belong to the learned professions. There are men obviously of the clerk type. There are, of course, rough diamonds — but they are in the minority ...

So they come, once a week, for the little pink tickets that entitle them to groceries and other necessities, and they go back to their families, hoping that something will turn up.

*Sydney Morning Herald, 3 June 1931.*
I am embittered about the awful way things were done in Kintore Avenue. They had two rosters a day, five days a week. One parade on Saturdays. You would go there and there was a policeman, and he stood by the building while you sat on the forms. The men would pass around a cigarette. There was a lot of comradeship. You went once a fortnight to get your rations, and this policeman would yell out ‘the Js’ and ‘the Js’ would walk in. I was one of them. There was one fellow called Mack, who was a terrible fellow. Black Mack. He would sit behind a desk, and you would come in, and he would say ‘How much did you earn?’ ‘Nothing’ you would say. ‘Nothing’, he’d say, and look you up and down. He would make you feel really small. He would be getting paid to do his job, and he would frighten most men into saying ‘Yes’ they’d earned two bob, and if they said they’d earned this, they wouldn’t get any rations.


**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the evidence source 4.7 provides to suggest that unemployment hit a wide range of Australians during the Great Depression.

2. In source 4.8, how was the writer made to feel humiliated by the system and how do you think this treatment could have been improved?

The Commonwealth Government took no responsibility for providing unemployment relief. Applicants for the state governments’ casual relief work schemes had to prove they were unemployed and destitute to become eligible. During the first few weeks of unemployment, families would often pawn possessions of value to raise rent money and purchase basic goods. Pawnbrokers charged huge fees for outstanding loans, with interest rates commonly set at 150 per cent. It was only a short time before families went hungry.

**Work for the dole**

For married men, pick and shovel construction work was sometimes available. The cash payment they received for this was often below the basic wage. A wide range of public works was undertaken. Wheat silos and water towers, railways and roads, sewerage and water supply systems were built.

The trade unions were fearful of the work-for-the-dole schemes because of the threat to working conditions and minimum wages. Sustenance workers were given rates of pay that were lower than the award wage. Refusal to work on a relief project made a man immediately ineligible for the susso. Men could be sent to the bush, far from families and with inadequate living conditions. In the early years of the Depression, the best a man could hope for was one or two days a week relief work. By 1935–36, government spending on relief projects provided employment for only one-fifth of the 300 000 unemployed who still sought work.

**Going bush**

One of the major reasons for the severity of the Depression in Australia was the falling price of primary produce. As the value of wheat and wool plummeted in 1929, Australian farmers faced disaster. In the early months of the Depression many farmers were declared bankrupt, there were evictions from farms and goods were put up for auction. In Western Australia the newly formed Wheat Growers Union fought back by organising hundreds of farmers to attend auctions and buy up property at very low prices. Goods and farms were then handed back to the owner.

Many World War I soldier settlers were forced off their farms with nothing to show for a decade of hard work. Thousands of men ‘jumped the rattler’ as they took off in their search for seasonal work by jumping on board moving freight trains. Other men became ‘swaggies’. They would line their shoes with cardboard as they walked the bush roads of Australia seeking work for their ‘keep’. In the census (population count)
taken in 1933 it was estimated that there were 400 000 Australians living in makeshift dwellings on the fringes of towns or in public parks, and another 30 000 who were homeless and on the road in search of work.

Most large farming towns had camps that were set up with tin sheds, showers and toilets. It was from here that migratory workers could wait for the offer of some farm employment. If they did not accept the terms of employment, the unemployed could be jailed for vagrancy (being homeless or wandering). Local residents were not always sympathetic to the troubles of the unemployed. In North Queensland, police, farmers and local residents attacked the travelling unemployed with batons and bricks in what came to be known as the Battle of Cairns.

**SOURCE 4.9**
P: Photograph showing men ‘jumping the rattler’. This was a risky way of travelling around Australia during the Great Depression. Apart from the physical dangers of jumping on and off moving trains and falling under the wheels, men were constantly harassed by police and imprisoned if caught.

**SOURCE QUESTION**
Describe the image of life on the susso and ‘jumping the rattler’ in source 4.9.

**Mothers, wives and workers**

As with men, the experience of the Depression was a varied one for women. During the 1920s many women had entered the workforce, and their sudden unemployment had an equally shattering effect on their lives and their families.

For many families during the Depression, survival depended entirely on women having the dual responsibilities of breadwinner and home-maker. Employment for married women was restricted and exploitation of cheaper female labour in the name of competition and cost-cutting was common. Trade unionists claimed that women’s cheap labour took men’s jobs. In 1919, the Australian arbitration system had set the basic female rate of pay at 54 per cent of the male rate. This meant that women’s wages were not adequate to support a family.

In most cases, men and women did not do the same work. Women stood on the production lines of jam and pickle factories, were employed as ‘sweated labour’ sewing clothing, or lived in the homes of the wealthy as domestic servants. Employment in factories was noisy, dirty and dangerous but always in demand. In many homes, daughters, mothers and sisters came to provide the major source of income.

**SOURCE 4.10**
P: Photograph showing a woman trying to cope with the laundry, during the worst years of the Depression.
Keepin a roof over their heads

The loss of a job often meant the loss of a home. In 1932, the *Sydney Mail* reported that 5000 applications for evictions had been made in the previous 12 months. There was little help for the homeless beyond some charity funds. Evicted families with children found shelter in rough sheds constructed from corrugated iron, flattened kerosene tins and hessian bags.

In Sydney, these families established settlements in areas such as La Perouse, Botany and Brighton-le-Sands. The best known of the ‘susso camps’ was the La Perouse ‘Happy Valley’ community. More than 350 people lived there at any one time. Substandard living conditions and inadequate nutrition in these camps left residents prone to scurvy, lice, and the infectious diseases dysentery and whooping cough.

Inequality of sacrifice

Hardship was not equally shared during the Depression. The wealthy and many of the middle class remained remote from the suffering of long-term unemployment.

Humanitarian work, such as that of Reverend R. B. S. Hammond, was unfortunately rare. He established hostels for the destitute near Liverpool in Sydney, and a very successful self-help housing venture in 1932. To gain entry to the Hammondville cottages a family had to be unemployed with at least three children. Payments on their houses were deferred until after they gained employment. Nine cottages were made available when the scheme began, and more than 800 applications were received.

Sources 4.10 and 4.11 provide an understanding of the particular types of problems that women faced during the harsh Depression years. In a paragraph, describe what you think those problems were.
In New South Wales, unemployed people formed groups to fight against eviction orders. During 1931, eviction protests became violent. A major riot occurred when the McNamara family was due to be evicted from a home they had occupied in Redfern for 12 years. In a dramatic scene, documented in Sydney’s daily newspapers, police charged through barricades and a picket line and then stood guard as the bailiff dragged furniture out of the house and into the street. In evictions which followed in Newtown and Bankstown, police were met with sandbag barricades, barbed wire, axes, iron pipes and garden forks.

Politicians talked of the need to share the burden of a struggling economy, but the reality was that the working class took the worst of the record unemployment levels. Many employed Australians justified their own good fortune with the belief that extreme poverty was not due to a failed economy but to laziness and a lack of good character. For those who kept their incomes, leisure activities were unaffected by the Depression. Private parties, the racetrack, ocean voyages and fashion parades continued to be well attended.

Surely the authorities who control the Domain are lacking in a sense of fitness to allow its beautiful foreshores to be defiled by the presence of camps for unemployed people. In a few weeks the city will be in fete and dressed in its best for the opening of the bridge, and it is to be hoped that these hideous canvas humpies will be cleared away from the very doorsteps of one of the loveliest cities within the Empire. To allow them to remain there month after month, as they have done, is not only unseemly and falsely sympathetic, but is positively insanitary and unsafe for the general public. Surely the State is wide enough and empty enough for these men to find more suitable camping grounds; and, further, by what right do these people reside on the most desirable waterfrontage in Sydney?

SOURCE 4.13
Extract from a letter to the editor, Sydney Morning Herald, 29 February 1932

SOURCE QUESTIONS
1. Describe the attitudes expressed in source 4.13.
2. Write a letter of response to source 4.13, explaining why these men are residing on the most desirable waterfrontage in Sydney.
3. Explain what the primary source 4.14 is evidence of and how it would be useful to historians studying the Great Depression experience.
The stolen children

The Depression widened the gulf between rich and poor, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. During the twentieth century, thousands of Aboriginal children were taken from their families and placed in government and mission institutions such as the Moore River Native Settlement in Western Australia, and the Wellington Valley Mission in New South Wales.

Cultural and kinship connections were destroyed because the government did not maintain family records or keep family members together. There are few Aboriginal families who did not experience the brutality and grief of the removal of children. These children are now known as ‘The Stolen Generations’.

Australia has a long history of placing children who were regarded as destitute into foster care or orphanages. The removal of Aboriginal children from their homes began in the nineteenth century. During the 1930s the level of government intervention and control over Aboriginal families tightened even further with the introduction of new legislation aimed at assimilation of the Aboriginal population into the white community. Between 1915 and 1939 any station manager or policeman could take Aboriginal children from their parents, for the sake of ‘their moral and spiritual welfare’, by declaring that the children were neglected. Children who were of part-Aboriginal descent were referred to as ‘half-castes’ and targeted for removal. The government policy was aimed at limiting contact between ‘full blood’ and half-caste people so that eventually Aboriginality would be ‘bred out’.

**Source Question**

Propose how this photograph could be used as evidence against the government’s argument that Aboriginal children were removed from their families to ensure their moral and spiritual welfare.
I was at the post office with my Mum and Auntie [and cousin]. They put us in the police ute and said they were taking us to Broome. They put the mums in there as well. But when we’d gone [about ten miles (16 km)] they stopped, and threw the mothers out of the car. We jumped on our mothers’ backs, crying, trying not to be left behind. But the policemen pulled us off and threw us back in the car. They pushed the mothers away and drove off, while our mothers were chasing the car, running and crying after us. We were screaming in the back of that car. When we got to Broome they put me and my cousin in the Broome lock-up. We were only ten years old. We were in the lock-up for two days waiting for the boat to Perth.

SOURCE QUESTION

Synthesise the information from sources 4.15 and 4.16 into a brief explanation of [a] the causes and [b] the consequences of the policy of removing children from their families.

Government policy was designed to encourage Aboriginal children to ‘think white, look white, act white’ by:

• separating Aboriginal children from family and placing them in institutions located far away from home
• issuing children with new names and birth dates
• denying children the right to speak Aboriginal languages or have contact with relatives of full Aboriginal descent
• providing children with basic education in bible studies, literacy, numeracy and British history
• insisting children conform to the customs and traditions supported by Australian people of British origin
• training children to be domestic servants if they were girls, and farm workers if they were boys.

In the words of the Aboriginal Protection Board, Aboriginal people had to develop from ‘their former primitive state to the standards of the white man’. Aboriginal children were regarded as a potential servant class for white Australia. During the 1920s the idea of providing educational opportunity beyond the unskilled trades was considered a waste. It was not until 1938 that Aboriginal education in Australia progressed beyond Grade 3. Aboriginal children were not permitted to attend high schools until 1949.

In the 1930s all Aboriginal people lived with harsh government control and regulations dictating where they could live and work, who they could marry, how they could spend their money and whether they could keep their children. Having been taught inferiority and to reject their Aboriginal heritage, many members of the Stolen Generations found great difficulty in adjusting to life outside. (Their experiences are discussed further in chapter 7.)

SOURCE QUESTION

Source 4.17 expresses the lifelong grief suffered by the Stolen Generations. Write a short statement expressing an appreciation of the work of Link-Up and explaining the long-term impact of government policy on the Stolen Generations.

We may go home, but we cannot relive our childhoods. We may reunite with our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunties, uncles, communities, but we cannot relive the 20, 30, 40 years that we spent without their love and care, and they cannot undo the grief and mourning they felt when we were separated from them. We can go home to ourselves as Aboriginals, but this does not erase the attacks inflicted on our hearts, minds, bodies and souls, by caretakers who thought their mission was to eliminate us as Aboriginals.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1 True or false:
   a. The suffering of the Depression was an experience shared by all Australians.
   b. When the stock market ‘crashed’, the value of shares fell.
   c. During the 1920s there were insufficient goods being manufactured to meet demand.
   d. The decade of the 1930s began in Australia with high employment levels and high export prices.
   e. The Depression hit Australia particularly hard because the country had borrowed large sums of money from overseas.
   f. Returned soldiers were well looked after by the Australian Government and so did not suffer as much during the Depression years.

2 Match the sentence beginnings in the left-hand column with their correct endings in the right-hand column:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R. B. S. Hammond</th>
<th>assured Americans the economic crisis would be brief.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Wall Street Crash</td>
<td>were forced off their farms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Hoover</td>
<td>established hostels for the poor and self-help housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier settlers</td>
<td>were coupons or rations given to the unemployed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaggies</td>
<td>believed women’s cheap labour threatened men’s employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustenance payments</td>
<td>marked the beginning of the Great Depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Valley</td>
<td>was the most important financial centre in the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade unions</td>
<td>were unemployed men walking the country searching for work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scurvy</td>
<td>was a settlement for homeless people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street</td>
<td>was a disease suffered by people living in camps for the unemployed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Explain how governments justified not giving cash payments to the unemployed and how families paid their bills in the first few weeks of unemployment.

4 Describe the employment that was regarded as ‘women’s work’ during the 1930s.

5 Identify the evidence supporting the claim that the Depression was not a hard time for all Australians.

6 Explain how most governments reacted to the economic crisis and the common belief held about the Depression.

7 Draw a flowchart explaining the main events leading to the Great Depression and the immediate effects of this economic crisis on Australia.

USE SOURCES

8 Access some footage from the 1930s using the Great Depression clips weblink in your eBookPLUS. Choose a clip and write an analysis on its usefulness for historians seeking to understand the experiences of Australians in the 1930s.

RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATE

9 In groups of four or five, prepare questions and answers for a television interview program. Act out the interviews for the class with one person as the interviewer and the others taking the roles of people such as farmers, returned servicemen, factory workers and shopkeepers who have been hit hard by the Depression.

10 There are elderly people in our community who will have memories of their early life during the Depression. Interview a neighbour, family friend or grandparent who can share with you their personal recollections of those days. Present your interview as a biography that can be published as part of a class collection and tribute to the generation that lived through the Depression.

Explain means give reasons for something, especially in terms of cause and effect relationships.
Describe means state what something is like.
Identify means find and name a specific thing that is asked for.

Our Don Bradman

In the 1930s many Australians looked for distraction from the hardship of the Depression through their interest in cricket. Cricket matches attracted large crowds and extensive newspaper coverage as well as providing radio entertainment. Australia had many cricketing heroes: Woodfull, Ponsford, McCabe, O’Reilly, Fingleton and others. Above all of these ‘greats’ there was — in the words of the song — ‘Our Don Bradman’.

Donald Bradman was an Australian sporting hero whose achievements over a 20-year career in international cricket are legendary. As well as playing Test cricket for Australia from 1928 to 1948, he played for New South Wales, captained the South Australian Sheffield Shield team, captained the Australian cricket team for over 10 years and served as a selector for state and national teams.

He was an exceptional batsman. When Bradman retired in 1948, his Test series batting average was 99.94, the highest achieved by any first-class player. The next highest (correct as of July 2009) is 60.97. The best first-grade batsmen of any team are generally happy to achieve an average score of around 50 in their Test careers.

Bradman’s early life

Donald George Bradman was born at Cootamundra on 27 August 1908 and grew up in Bowral. He went to the local public primary and high schools and was a keen sportsman from an early age. Bradman often told the story of how he developed his cricketing skills by repeatedly throwing a golf ball against a brick water tank stand and then hitting it on the rebound with a cricket stump. He scored 55 in his first match as an 11-year-old and made his first century the following year. He left school at 14, was playing for the Bowral senior team at 16, and at the age of 18 was playing first grade cricket for St George in Sydney. In 1927 Bradman was chosen as a member of the NSW team and one year later was selected for Australia.

Bradman’s first-class and Test career achievements

Bradman played for New South Wales against England in 1928 and began his Test career in the 1928–29 Ashes series against England. He began this series poorly, scoring only 18 in the first innings and 1 in the second. As a result, selectors dropped him from the team in the Second Test. When they gave him another chance in the Third Test, he scored 79 in the first innings and 112 in the second. With scores of 40 and 58 in the Fourth Test and 112 and 37 not out in the Fifth Test, Bradman’s international cricketing career was under way.

SOURCE 4.18
An extract from Richard Mulvaney’s introduction to The Art of Don Bradman, published in 2003

Based on source 4.18, what is Richard Mulvaney’s attitude towards Bradman? What evidence does he provide to support his viewpoint?

Donald Bradman was selected for Australia. In 1927 Bradman was chosen as a member of the NSW team and one year later was selected for Australia.

Retrofile

To qualify for inclusion in a list of batting averages, a cricketer needs to have played 20 first-class innings.

SOURCE QUESTION

In late 1999, 100 cricketers, cricket writers and scholars of the game were invited by Wisden, cricket’s bible since 1864, to select the best cricketers of the twentieth century. At the top of the list with 100 votes was Sir Donald Bradman. This vote merely echoed the views of countless more who would probably add that he was the best cricketer of any century.

He made a remarkable contribution to the game as a player, selector, administrator and thinker . . . He was a unique Australian who, through his deeds on and off the field, provided inspiration and example well beyond his chosen field.

In 1930 Don Bradman asked Pelham Warner, a former England cricketer and one of the game’s top administrators, to write the introduction to his first autobiography, which was published when he was just 22. Warner gave his estimation of why Bradman was so good: ‘First — immense natural skill. Secondly — an idealism which urged him to learn everything he possibly could and to profit by the lessons learnt. Thirdly — tremendous concentration of mind. Fourthly — great physical strength. Fifthly — extreme fitness, and lastly, a cool calm temperament’ . . .

He carried these attributes and more throughout his life.


The Ashes: an urn said to contain the ashes of a burnt cricket bail given to the English captain the year after the 1882 Australian victory over England. The idea came from a notice in the Sporting Times, which said that the body of English cricket should be cremated and the ashes sent to Australia. Since then, ‘the Ashes’ has referred to the trophy awarded to the victor in the England–Australia Test series and to the series itself.
1929 to 1931

Bradman’s 1929–30 season playing for New South Wales saw him score 452 not out against Queensland — 15 higher than the previous highest first-class score. At the same time, he became the youngest batsman ever to score over 400 at this level.

Bradman’s performance in the 1930 Test tour of England was another triumph. His series total was 974 runs, including individual scores of 334, 254 and 232. Cricket enthusiasts consider his performance in the Third Test match at Leeds to be one of the all-time great innings. Bradman had scored a century by lunchtime, 220 by the tea break, 309 at close of play and was out for 334 after play resumed the next day. At the time this was the highest score in Test cricket.

English cricketers had begun to think they would have no chance of achieving victory as long as Bradman continued playing. The News Chronicle in London reported ‘As long as Australia has Bradman she will be invincible . . . It is almost time to request a legal limit on the number of runs Bradman should be allowed to make.’ In Australia, Bradman was a national hero.

Bradman’s success continued throughout the 1930–31 season with a double century (223) against the West Indies and a score of 258 when playing for New South Wales against South Australia. He also scored a double century (219) for New South Wales against South Africa and scores of 226, 112, 167 and 299 in Test matches against South Africa. Bradman’s high batting scores seemed set to dominate international cricket for at least the next decade.

1932–33: Bodyline

When the English team toured Australia for the 1932–33 Test series, the English captain, Douglas Jardine, was determined to prevent Bradman dominating the game. For some months before the tour, he had been working with some of England’s fast bowlers to develop a strategy to prevent Bradman from gaining high scores.

Jardine’s goal was to defeat Bradman and, in so doing, defeat Australia. His ‘fast leg theory’ tactic, which the Australians labelled bodyline, effectively meant that the English team’s bowlers seemed to be deliberately aiming for the batsman’s body. The tactic required bowlers to bowl fast, short-pitched balls to the leg-side of the batsman. This would force the batsman to play a defensive shot towards the elders on the leg side and limit his ability to make runs. Jardine chose pace bowler Harold Larwood to lead the implementation of the bodyline tactic.

The tactic succeeded. Larwood’s skill restricted Bradman to a batting average of 56.57 during this series — still a very respectable average and far higher than those of his team mates. England won the series 4–1.

Cricket had been an important part of Australian sporting life and a source of friendly competition with England. The 1932–33 tour changed that. English newspapers gave the impression that ‘fast leg theory’ was harmless and that the Australians were complaining about it only because they were losing. Australian spectators thought otherwise, especially when they saw the popular Australian captain, Bill Woodfull, hit above the heart and the Australian wicketkeeper, Bert Oldfield, end up in hospital with a fractured skull as a result of bodyline bowling.

Harold Larwood never played for England again. Douglas Jardine resigned from the captaincy before the next Test series with Australia.

1933 to 1938

Bradman continued to achieve high scores in the 1933–34 New South Wales season. In the 1934 Test series in England, he gained a triple century (304) in a Third Test partnership of 388 with Ponsford and a double century (244) in the Fifth Test as part of a 451 partnership with Ponsford.

Bradman was hugely popular in England. After an operation for acute appendicitis at the end of the 1934 tour, he was dangerously ill with peritonitis. People all over England were volunteering to give blood in case Bradman needed a transfusion. King George V
asked for continual updates on Bradman’s health. Charles Kingsford Smith, the famous Australian aviator (see pages 96–7), tried to find space in his Centenary Air Race plane so that Bradman’s wife Jessie could get to her husband in England as quickly as possible.

**SOURCE 4.19**

An extract from a newspaper report describing the Fifth Test at The Oval, London, in August 1934, by ‘Cricketer’, the pen name of English cricket writer Neville Cardus

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**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. From the information in source 4.19, what was the score when Australia lost its first wicket?
2. What was the score when Australia lost its second wicket?
3. What had happened in the meantime?
4. Use the source and your own knowledge to explain what Cardus meant by ‘the double concerto’.
5. From what perspective is Cardus writing about these events?

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**SOURCE 4.20**

Photograph showing spectators applauding Bradman as he comes out to bat in the Fourth Test at Headingley, Leeds, in August 1938

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**SOURCE QUESTION**

What aspect of Bradman’s career has the photographer emphasised in source 4.20?

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After moving to South Australia, Bradman began playing in its state team, then in 1936 became captain of the Australian team. In the 1936–37 Ashes series in Australia, Bradman and Fingleton scored 346 in their successful partnership in the Third Test and the following day Bradman scored 270, including 110 singles. He achieved scores of 212 in the Fourth Test and 169 in the Fifth Test and achieved three centuries in the Ashes series in England in 1938.

The outbreak of World War II in September 1939 meant that Bradman did not compete in Test cricket again until 1946.

**When Australia lost two for 472 runs in Oval Test**

‘WHENEVER BRADMAN DID NOT HIT BALL FOR RUNS WE CONGRATULATED OUR BOWLERS’

On a beautiful Oval wicket in hot sunshine Bradman and Ponsford exceeded their own stand of 388 made at Leeds a few weeks ago; this time these two great batsmen came together when Australia had lost one wicket for 21, and not until five minutes before half-past six did the broken English attack take another wicket. The Australian score was then 472.

For five and a quarter hours Bradman and Ponsford repeated the double concerto of Leeds, but this time Bradman was even more remarkable in his technique than ever, while Ponsford for a long time looked vulnerable but elusive to English fast bowlers — when at certain intervals these fast bowlers really did bowl fast.

*Manchester Guardian, August 1934.*
1948: The Invincibles

During the war, Bradman played in a number of fundraisers and resumed his Test cricket career only when England toured Australia in 1946-47. In 1948, at 40 years of age, he led the Australian team, nicknamed The Invincibles (considered the greatest Australian side ever), to a 4–0 victory in the Ashes series in England. He scored two centuries during this series. When Bradman came out to bat for the last time, the crowd watched in expectation of him achieving an overall batting average of 100 or more. He was out for a duck (no score) on the second ball. He had scored zero in the match where he needed only four runs to bring his batting average up to a century. Players and spectators formed a guard of honour as he left the ground for the last time.

Celebrating ‘the Don’s’ contribution and significance

Sir Donald Bradman died of pneumonia on 25 February 2001. His memorial service, held at St Peter’s Cathedral near the Adelaide Oval, was broadcast live on television and radio throughout Australia and to an audience of millions around the world. Australia’s then Governor-General, Sir William Deane, delivered one of a number of eulogies praising ‘The Don’s’ qualities as a human being as much as his talents as a cricketer. Singer-songwriter John Williamson performed his composition Sir Don, calling on him to ‘come out for just one more parade’. The South Australian Cricket Association handed out candles to the crowd who had assembled to watch the service on the giant screens at the Adelaide Oval.

SOURCE QUESTION

What does source 4.21 indicate about attitudes to Sir Donald Bradman at the time of his death?

Sir Donald Bradman:
• was one of the greatest cricketers of all time; he led the side judged the greatest Australian side ever; his first-class batting average of 99.94 is the highest ever
• was one of the greatest sportspeople of the twentieth century
• contributed hugely to Australian victories over England and became a source of national pride in the gloomy years of the 1930s Depression
• was widely respected for his personal integrity
• was a personal success story that showed people what someone could achieve from humble beginnings and by working hard to make the most of his or her talent
• is still a role model and an inspiration for aspiring and successful cricketers.

RETROFILE

• In 1998, Australian cricket captain Mark Taylor became the first Australian to equal Bradman’s highest Test score. Rather than continue to bat, he declared [ended his innings], thus forgoing the opportunity to surpass Bradman’s score.
• The highest test cricket score (correct as of August 2009) was that scored by West Indian captain Brian Lara — 400 not out against England in 2004. Australian Matthew Hayden has the second highest score — 380 — scored against Zimbabwe in 2003.
• Bradman memorabilia is popular and commands high prices at auction. In 1995, cricket enthusiast Mick Jagger paid nearly A$100 000 for one of Bradman’s cricket blazers.
Strike me lucky! — Roy Rene

The misery of the Depression left people searching for ways of escaping the hardship. They found different ways of ‘making do’ and forgot their worries for a short time through the new forms of entertainment such as radio and movies. Australia’s greatest comedian and clown of the era was Roy Rene, also known as ‘Mo McCackie’. Mo was always on the side of the underdog and his audiences loved him.

Roy Rene was born Harry van der Sluice (or Sluys), the fourth of seven children in a Jewish Dutch family. His stage career began in Adelaide in 1901 when he was ten years old and won a singing competition. In 1910 he moved to Melbourne and took the name Roy Rene, after a famous French clown.

Six years later, Roy Rene formed a duo with a comedian named Nat Phillips; they became known as ‘Stiffy and Mo’. Audiences adored their bawdy humour because it was a great relief from the seriousness of wartime experiences. Through slapstick humour Stiffy and Mo challenged authority and shocked conservative members of Australian society. The expressions they used became the language of the streets and live on as Australian slang: ‘you beaut’, ‘strewth’, ‘fair suck of the sav’, ‘coming the raw prawn’ and ‘strike me lucky!’.

Stiffy and Mo’s partnership ended in 1928 and Mo pursued a solo career. In 1934 he made a film with Cinesound called Strike me Lucky. He eventually moved to radio and became popular to an even wider audience in a 12-minute show called ‘McCackie Mansion’. As Mo McCackie he came to represent the struggle of the ordinary man who continued to battle against all odds. Australians forced to endure the hardship of the Great Depression related to his defiant jokes, his boldness and his celebration of working-class Australia.

SOURCE 4.22
A poster for the 1934 Roy Rene movie Strike me Lucky. In the tradition of the great clowns, Roy Rene could make audiences laugh and cry. Live entertainment and the talkies were an escape from the harshness of life during the Depression.

SOURCE QUESTION
Using source 4.22 as your evidence explain why Roy Rene became so popular with audiences during the Great Depression.
Throughout his career Roy Rene’s trademark was the clown: face painted black and white with a leering grin, baggy trousers and battered top hat. Despite his huge success in Australia, Roy Rene refused to take his show overseas. He believed he belonged to an Australian audience: ‘The people here understand me. I work in their language.’

Roy Rene died in 1954 leaving behind an artistic influence that would shape Australian humour and comedy. Roy Rene’s contribution to Australian entertainment was formally recognised in 1976 when the Australian awards for live entertainment were named in his honour. The winners of the ‘Mo Awards’ receive a statuette of Roy Rene in character as Mo McCackie, the outrageously ordinary man who survived the Great Depression.

**Sir Isaac Isaacs — the first Australian-born Governor-General**

Isaac Isaacs was born in Melbourne in 1855. His parents were Jewish and had migrated to Victoria from Poland in the year before his birth. His father was a hard-working tailor and so young Isaac Isaacs did not grow up in a privileged family.

Isaacs was educated in local government schools in northern Victoria where he achieved outstanding academic results. In 1876 he began studying law part time at Melbourne University. In order to keep his full-time job he would begin studying at 4 am. When he graduated from law in 1880 he began a career that would take him into Australia’s highest legal and political positions:

- 1897 — elected to the convention responsible for writing Australia’s constitution
- 1901 — elected to Australia’s federal Parliament
- 1906 — judge on Australia’s High Court
- 1931 — appointed as the first Australian-born Governor-General of Australia.

The decision to appoint Isaac Isaacs to the position of Governor-General of Australia caused great controversy and showed the deep class and religious divisions within the nation during the 1930s. The Prime Minister of the time, James Scullin, was forced to travel to London to personally advise King George V of Isaac Isaacs’ appointment. Sections of the Australian press and conservative politicians declared that the Governor-General should be a British aristocrat, because this was the tradition.

Isaac Isaacs’ appointment was commented on in newspapers overseas. Readers of the American *Time* magazine were told that King George V was very reluctant to promote an Australian to the position.

Only the most strenuous Australian insistence moved His Majesty in the first place to appoint as representative of the Crown in Australia ‘a man whom the King has never seen’.

**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. With reference to source 4.24, clarify why King George V was reluctant to select Isaac Isaacs as Governor-General.
2. Compose a short letter to the editor of the American *Time* magazine justifying the appointment.
Critics of Isaac Isaacs were careful to avoid discussion of his Jewish background, but anti-semitism was nevertheless evident in 1930s Australia. Few Australians of this decade were prepared to welcome migrants who were not of British background. The White Australia Policy and fear of foreigners shaped images of Australia.

Sir Isaac Isaacs served as Governor-General until his retirement in 1936. Despite the public debate about the choice of an Australian Governor-General, Isaacs gained wide respect for the manner in which he carried out his duties. He was a man of principle and compassion for those who were suffering during the Depression years. In recognition of the financial hardships experienced by so many Australians during the Depression, he sacrificed a quarter of his salary, refused to take his retired judges pension, greatly reduced official entertainment and gave up the official residences beyond Canberra. He became the first Governor-General to live permanently in Canberra.

After retirement from the Governor-General’s position, Sir Isaac Isaacs remained actively involved in public life. His long and distinguished career was based on his commitment to improving Australian society through the courts and through the Australian Parliament. He believed this was the means by which Australia could achieve social justice and become an example to the world of a ‘progressive community’.

Nancy Bird Walton — born to fly

A joy flight in a Gipsy Moth aeroplane at a local fair took Nancy Bird into the skies for the first time. The year was 1928, she was 13 years old and the story of Australian aviation had only just begun. In 1933, when Australia was in the grip of the Depression, Nancy Bird began flying lessons at a newly opened pilots’ school. She was one of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith’s first pupils and became Australia’s youngest female commercial pilot. Thus began a lifetime of service to Australian aviation.

- 1934: began the ‘Ladies Flying Tour’ with co-pilot Peggy McKillop. By flying to rural fairs and racecourses, they could take paying customers on joy-rides in a Gipsy Moth.
- 1935: began work with the Far West Children’s Health Scheme establishing a flying ambulance and baby health clinic for Australians living in remote locations. The work was hazardous and lonely but provided an essential healthcare service.
- 1936: won the Ladies Trophy in the air race from Adelaide to Brisbane
- 1938: toured Europe for the Dutch East Indies airline in the study of aviation
- 1939: met and married Charles Walton and became known as Nancy Bird Walton
- 1939–45: commandant of the Women’s Air Training Corps of Australia, responsible for the recruitment and training of women to serve in the women’s auxiliary air force
- 1950: formed the Australian Women’s Pilot Association and led it until 1990

Nancy Bird Walton’s name is a part of Australian aviation history. At a time when the Great Depression was destroying so many hopes, her achievement demonstrated the benefits aviation could bring to a vast land and its people.
She was, said her granddaughter Anna Holman, a remarkable person with the grace of a glider and the determination of a jet-fighter. ‘What a life. What a woman. Way to go, Nan.’

So it was with rousing words and soaring hearts that Sydney yesterday celebrated the extraordinary life and times of aviation pioneer Nancy Bird Walton at a state funeral service in St Andrew’s Cathedral.

The service for Mrs Bird Walton, who died last week at 93, was preceded by a low-level fly-past by the latest Qantas 380 superjumbo bearing her name. Its appearance over George Street brought cheers of delight from a large crowd.

Later in the afternoon, three Tiger Moths, of the type flown by her during a career spanning almost the whole history of Australian aviation, flew over the Harbour Bridge.

The congregation . . . heard tales of unprecedented, female derring-do.

How, as a four-year-old child, Mrs Bird Walton had been inspired by the Great England–Australia Air Race. How, 13 years later, she was taught to fly at Charles Kingsford Smith’s aviation school in Mascot. How she and her co-pilot Peggy McKillop, who became known as Little Bird and Big Bird, would turn up to country race meetings, park in a paddock and offer joy flights.

How, in a long career that inspired women, in which she flew health care to the bush and won the admiration of a nation, she was never involved in an accident . . .

Grace Slater, president of the Australian Women’s Pilots Association, said that with a name like Bird, Nancy was born to fly. Once again yesterday her flying spirit soared.

Margaret Preston was a pioneer of the arts in Australia. During the 1920s and 1930s she developed a uniquely Australian art style which understood the significance of Australia’s geography, location and Indigenous heritage. During an era when the richness of the Aboriginal cultural heritage was ignored by white Australia, she had an artistic vision that came from the native flora and the ochre and white tones found in traditional Aboriginal bark painting.

She was born Margaret Rose McPherson in April 1875, becoming Margaret Preston after her marriage to William Preston in 1919. When Margaret was ten years old her family moved to Sydney where her mother took her to the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Forty years later she recalled the experience as being the moment she decided she was going to be an artist.

Margaret Preston began her life’s work at a time when other Australian artists were still clinging to the conventions of European art. Her work was dedicated to the belief that ‘we are a nation of people who are growing up and should not acquire a counterfeit culture by borrowing the intellect of other countries’.
Australian art and literature from the Depression years shows the expression of a strong social conscience and a concern about the lives of ordinary Australians. Writers such as Vance and Nettie Palmer, Xavier Herbert and Frank Dalby Davidson sharpened our awareness of social justice and challenged Australians to fight for a fairer and just society. Margaret Preston challenged the Australian identity and the viewer’s imagination.

The truly Australian character of her art came through the richly coloured still lifes of native flowers, the images that captured the tranquillity of Sydney Harbour’s rippling blue waters, and the striking Aboriginal-inspired earth-coloured flat shapes. The art of Margaret Preston celebrated a unique and distinctive Australian culture at a time of national doubt and despair.

**SOURCE 4.28**
Margaret Preston (1875–1963), *Sydney Bridge*, 1944, relief.
Image 13.2 × 13.0 cm, sheet 16.8 × 16.3 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

### ACTIVITIES

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. The 1930s was a time of real challenge for most Australians. With reference to the work of some notable Australians of the period, explain:
   a. the problems that most people faced
   b. the different ways in which Australians responded.

2. Identify three personalities from different walks of life who have had a role to play in the history of the 1930s. Write a brief outline of their lives, clarifying their roles and contribution to Australia.

#### RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATE

3. Access the ‘Our Don Bradman’ weblink in your eBookPLUS. Download the mp3 file and listen to the song from the 1930s. Analyse the lyrics and identify phrases that indicate Australians’ pride in Bradman’s skill.

4. Write the news script suitable for a radio or TV report announcing Sir Donald Bradman’s death. Select information that conveys a sense of Bradman’s importance in Australian history.

5. Use the Bradman Museum weblink in your eBookPLUS to learn more about Bradman’s records, significance and achievements.

6. Write a poem or song celebrating the humour and the movies of Roy Rene, and his ‘strike me lucky’ message for Australia in the Depression.

7. Use sources 4.25 and 4.26 and the information from the text to create an interview with Nancy Bird Walton. Set your interview in the year the flying ambulance was established. Construct questions that will give Nancy Bird Walton the opportunity to express her sense of the significance of aviation to the future of Australia.

8. Research other examples of Margaret Preston’s artwork. Explain why she is regarded as having made such an important contribution to a modern Australian cultural identity.
Phar Lap — his life, death and significance

Phar Lap was one of the most famous and most loved horses in Australian racing history. He became famous during the Great Depression. For the ‘Aussie battler’, his story came to symbolise hope amid the hardships of unemployment queues, shantytowns and the humiliation of life on the ‘susso’.

Nicknamed the ‘Red Terror’, ‘Big Red’ and ‘Bobby’, the chestnut gelding:
- won 37 of 51 starts, including at one stage 14 straight wins
- won 32 of his last 35 starts
- gained 3 second places and 2 third places
- was among the highest stake winners in the world.

In March 1932, Phar Lap won the richest race in North America: the Agua Caliente Handicap. Just over a fortnight later, Phar Lap died slowly and painfully while on rest and recuperation at a training camp near San Francisco. For Australians, Phar Lap’s death, the death of a national hero at the height of his career, was a national tragedy.

Phar Lap’s early career

Phar Lap was foaled in New Zealand on 28 October 1926 and came up as Lot 41 in the Trentham yearling sales in 1927. Sydney trainer Harry Telford thought that, at the right price, the horse could be a good buy. He convinced businessman David J. Davis to put up the money to buy Phar Lap sight unseen. The horse sold cheaply at only 160 guineas (£168). This was the lowest price paid for any horse at auction that day.

Davis was disappointed when he actually saw the horse and angry that Harry Telford had recommended the purchase. Phar Lap was a big horse and he moved rather awkwardly. Telford was impressed by his pedigree. The two men came to an agreement: Telford would finance the training of the horse in return for two-thirds of any prize money it might win.

To begin with, even the stablehands thought Phar Lap was a bit of a joke — a horse more suited to a milk cart than a racetrack. He performed poorly in his early races as a two-year-old and was known for clownish behaviour, such as using his teeth to pull strapper/trainer Tommy Woodcock’s hair and tearing stable boys’ shirts.

Phar Lap’s track work was weak and he frequently tripped. It took five attempts before he won a race as a two-year-old in April 1929. Later that year, he won the Rosehill Guineas, considered an important sign of his chances in the AJC Derby, the major race for three-year-olds.

Superstar status

Phar Lap’s season as a three-year-old also began disappointingly when he came only third in the 1929 Melbourne Cup. Still he followed this with more than twelve wins in other races, including winning the AJC Derby by three and a half lengths, and did even better the following season.

Phar Lap became the horse racing ‘superstar’ of radio, newspapers and cinema newsreels. The people most associated with his success — trainer Harry Telford, strapper Tommy Woodcock and jockey James Pike — became celebrities, frequently photographed and quoted because of their connections to the famous horse.

In 1930, Phar Lap became favourite for the Melbourne Cup, Australia’s most prestigious horse race, even though he was carrying 138 pounds (62.5 kg) — 15 pounds over the weight for his age. Before the race, two men attempted to kill Phar Lap and he was saved only by the quick action of Tommy Woodcock. From then on security guards travelled everywhere with him.

Over 70,000 racegoers attended Flemington racecourse that day and another 40,000 watched from ‘Scotchman’s Hill’ just across the river in Footscray Park. When he won
the 1930 Melbourne Cup, Phar Lap became the first ‘odds on’ favourite to win in the whole history of the event. He won a total of £12,429 in prize money over the five days of the racing carnival. With their three-year agreement ended, Davis sold Harry Telford a share of Phar Lap for £4000. (The average weekly male wage in 1930 was about £6.)

It was in the race [1929 AJC Derby], from here to the front it led that much all the way round. It was on odds on. I’d never seen a race like it, for a horse to be that far ahead. I was at the races that day and that far ahead. I don’t think there’s been another race like it. From here to over there . . . it’s run all the way.


What aspect of Phar Lap’s win in the 1929 AJC Derby impressed Rosie Haynes?

By this time Phar Lap was 17.1 hands and measured 2.08 metres from ground level to the top of his head. The Victorian Racing Club decided to increase Phar Lap’s handicap from the 1930 weight to a requirement that he carry nearly 150 pounds (68 kg) to race in the 1931 Melbourne Cup. Davis insisted that he race even though Telford was against it. Phar Lap came eighth. He had won nearly every major race in Australia at least once and racing authorities were now penalising him to give other horses a chance to win. It seemed time for him to leave Australia and compete on the American racing circuit.

Phar Lap embarks for the United States

Phar Lap left Australia on 20 November 1931. After a six-week stay in Auckland, he and Tommy Woodcock sailed on to San Francisco and then made the 640-kilometre trip across the border to Mexico and Phar Lap’s first overseas race: the Agua Caliente Handicap on 20 March 1932.

All over Australia, people were following the story of Phar Lap in newspapers and on radio. Phar Lap’s jockey, Billy Elliot, brought Phar Lap from the back of the field to win the race by over two lengths and break the record for the distance with a time of 2 minutes, 2.8 seconds. Phar Lap earned his owners US$50,000 in prize money competing against the best horses in North America.

Well Phar Lap was something that came into their life when they needed it. They were suffering from the Depression, they were despondent. They were losing hope, and along came this . . . John the Baptist. Brightened their lives up, gave them a new interest.

To: SOURCES

ChAPTeR 4 | The 1930s — moments and experiences from the Great Depression

PHOTOf. 4.32
Photograph showing
Phar Lap and his
Australian jockey, Billy
Elliot, winning the Agua
Caliente Handicap on
20 March 1932

SOURCes

According to Jock Rorrison [source 4.31], how did people react to Phar Lap’s racing success?

Devise a headline to match the photograph shown in source 4.32. It should be appropriate to
either an American or an Australian newspaper report of the 1932 Agua Caliente Handicap.

Phar Lap looks quite at home as he goes down to the starting gate. He’s wearing the bandages
on the fore-legs, just as he did in all his Australian races . . .

They’re off and a good line but Phar Lap is cut off by the outside horses. And he com-
mences to drop back . . .

Phar Lap has dropped back to the rear of the field. He is out wide and keeping clear of the
other horses . . .

They’re going towards the turn now, out of the straight . . . Phar Lap is commencing to move
up. He’s running seventh now . . . Phar Lap goes up to Cabezo, he’s shooting by the horses
now, and takes the lead . . .

Phar Lap has just unwound a terrific run, but he shows no signs of weakening as he comes
towards the home turn . . .

Reveille Boy moves up to Phar Lap . . . they’re racing neck-and-neck now . . . Elliot is riding
very hard, but Phar Lap’s got it . . .

Come on Phar Lap! Phar Lap, you beauty!

Death of a legend

Phar Lap then went to the Edward Perry Ranch, a training camp near San Francisco.
A few weeks before the big race, he had injured his hoof by treading on a stone. His
owners thought a few weeks at the camp would give him time to recuperate. Only
16 days later on 5 April 1932, Phar Lap died of a mystery illness. He had been in obvious
pain throughout the morning and the vet had been unable to provide any help. Phar Lap
died around midday in the arms of his strapper, Tommy Woodcock.

Australians were shocked to hear the news of Phar Lap’s death when it started to filter through at 10.30
the following morning. It was the headline news that
day and a key news story for many days after.

Newspaper and radio reports mourned the
tragic loss of a champion horse and recalled his
great moments in racing. In 1930 and 1931, when
Australians were experiencing some of the worst
hardships of the Depression, Phar Lap had become
a national symbol for ‘the Aussie battler’. In 1932,
the year of highest unemployment, Phar Lap won
one of the most famous horse races in the world. To
many, it seemed that Phar Lap had exemplified key
characteristics of the Australian identity: bravery,
perseverance in hard times and playfulness — the
all-round ‘good bloke’.
People of all ages and social backgrounds wrote sympathy letters to Harry Telford. Their letters compared the loss of Phar Lap to the loss of a friend, a child and even an angel. One explained the week of rain following Phar Lap’s death as the skies ‘weeping for him’.

**Autopsy findings**

Phar Lap’s death has had such a dramatic impact that for over 75 years people have tried to find out who or what killed him. Two autopsies failed to conclude exactly why Phar Lap died. The first autopsy identified signs of arsenic and this led many to believe the Mafia had poisoned Phar Lap to protect their racing investments. Another theory was that the arsenic came from an insecticide that had been sprayed on the trees at the San Francisco ranch.

The second autopsy concluded that Phar Lap had suffered a ‘colicky condition’ (bad stomach pains), perhaps as a result of eating damp pasture grasses.

In 2000, authors Geoff Armstrong and Peter Thompson reported the results of a new veterinary investigation of the autopsy reports. The veterinary experts concluded that Phar Lap had probably died from duodenitis-proximal jejunitis, or anterior enteritis, a bacterial disease identified in the 1980s. Phar Lap might have been more susceptible to this disease because of the stresses associated with his travels, training program and change of climate. Seventy per cent of horses who contract this disease die.

In 2005, Dr Ivan Kempson from the University of South Australia and Dermot Henry, Manager of Natural Science Collections at Museum Victoria, joined together to see what they could learn about Phar Lap’s death. They tested Phar Lap’s hair to see if it showed signs that Phar Lap’s death could be linked to arsenic poisoning.

Henry took a small quantity of hide and hair samples from under Phar Lap’s mane. Kempson then took these to Chicago for examination in a special machine called a synchrotron. As a result of testing from 2005 to 2007, Kempson found that:

- Phar Lap had ingested a single large dose of arsenic in the 30–40 hours before his death
- there was a recognisable difference between this arsenic and the arsenics that taxidermists had used to help preserve Phar Lap’s body.

These results showed that Phar Lap died from arsenic poisoning. They did not explain how this occurred.

**Reminders of Phar Lap**

Phar Lap is still honoured in Australia and beyond as one of the greatest racehorses of all time.

- His skeleton is mounted in the Dominion Museum in New Zealand.
- His stuffed hide is displayed in the Melbourne Museum.
- His heart (at 6.2 kg, nearly twice the normal size) is now in the National Museum of Australia in Canberra.
- In April 2004, the Victorian State Government, the Australian Racing Museum and the Commonwealth Government joined together to make a successful bid at auction for Phar Lap’s saddle.

In April 2008, Museum Victoria purchased Harry Telford’s handwritten notebook of homeopathic recipes, some containing arsenic, strychnine, belladonna, cocaine and caffeine, which he used in tonics, ointments and pre-race stimulants for the horses he trained. The information that these recipes provide has led to a new hypothesis: that Tommy Woodcock, who stood in as Phar Lap’s trainer in the United States, had accidentally given Phar Lap a lethal dose of arsenic as part of a ‘tonic’ to help restore him to peak condition after the long voyage to the United States.

**SOURCE QUESTION**

What do sources 4.34 and 4.35 indicate about the Australian public’s attitudes to Phar Lap?
A bridge for the future

The first European settlement had been established in Sydney less than 30 years when a plan to build a bridge spanning the northern and southern sides of the harbour was proposed. Sir Francis Greenway, Sydney’s convict architect, believed the construction of a bridge could represent a ‘strength and magnificence that would reflect credit and glory on the colony’.

Greenway’s dream inspired many others. By 1890 the level of ferry traffic on the harbour had become so heavy that the construction of a bridge was essential for the development of the city. Numerous proposals continued to be discussed during the nineteenth century, but it was not until 1922 that the government finally approved the construction of Sydney’s bridge. A brilliant government engineer named John Job Crew Bradfield was appointed to head the project.

Sydney sacrificed much of its heritage for the bridge. Many elegant colonial buildings and 438 of the small cottages of the suburb known as ‘The Rocks’ were demolished as construction began on the southern approaches. A huge workforce of skilled tradesmen set up their workshops at Milson’s Point to manufacture the steel girders and the thousands of parts required for the bridge. To avoid shipping hazards under the bridge, it was decided to build the arch in two halves, anchored by huge steel cables in rock at either end.

More than 1000 men were employed to build the bridge; sixteen died. Standards of industrial safety were poor and conditions were dangerous for men working on the slippery steel 90 metres above the water.

The greatest arch bridge of the age

At 10.15 pm on 19 August 1930, the steel workers gathered high on the centre of the arch with electric lights shining on them. Hundreds of steel cables supporting the two main cables of the bridge were slackened and the north and south spans of the bridge met and were bolted into place. On the following morning flags were proudly flying from the top of the cranes and ships sounded their horns in celebration. The bridge workers were given a half-day holiday and a two-shilling bonus to toast the bridge.

In the following year, the deck of the bridge was built and the road, tram and train lines were finished. The roadway linking the north and south sides of Sydney Harbour was named the Bradfield Highway.

When it was completed, the great arch soared to 135 metres above sea level. The massive weight rested on four steel bearings set in concrete foundations that were dug 12 metres into the sandstone rock of the harbour foreshore. The Sydney Morning Herald summed up the sense of achievement when it proclaimed: ‘Across Sydney has been thrown the greatest arch bridge of the age, a commanding structure with stately towers that stand like the pillars of Hercules bestriding the tide.’
Politics and pageants

When building on the bridge began, the economy was booming. However, by 1931 the Depression had hit hard. The Commonwealth Government had borrowed heavily from overseas lenders to finance huge public works projects such as the Hume Weir and the Harbour Bridge. The government had difficulty in meeting the interest payments, so many other projects had to be cancelled, adding to the growing numbers of unemployed men. Almost in defiance of the unemployment and hardship of the era, work on the Sydney Harbour Bridge continued through the depths of the Great Depression.

Jack Lang, the New South Wales Premier, officially opened the bridge on 19 March 1932. He declared that the day belonged to the people. Crowds of up to one million people gathered on the harbour foreshore to view the lavish opening ceremonies including a two-kilometre procession of decorated floats and marching bands.

A procession of passenger ships and an aerial display of the Royal Australian Air Force continued to entertain the crowds. A spectacular fireworks display and a Venetian Carnival were combined with balls and dinners across the city to mark the occasion.

The event also featured high drama when Captain Francis de Groot interrupted the official proceedings by charging through the crowd and brandishing a sword (see page 155).

Source questions

1. Using sources 4.37 and 4.38, describe how you think the bridge would have changed Sydney.
2. Explain how the sources support the claim that it was a marvel of modern technology.

Songs were composed and stamps were issued in commemoration of Sydney’s achievement. C. J. Dennis wrote a poem that expressed the pride of the people of Sydney in having finally built the ‘mighty span’ that had been talked of for over 100 years. Dennis wrote of a dream in which Governor Phillip and the Sentimental Bloke (a character invented by Dennis) ‘Stands up, serlouts the Bridge, an dips our lids’.

Essentially we have just shown the world what we can do by united effort in organising a great festival to celebrate the opening of the bridge, and in carrying it out with such massed crowds as only British common sense could control or make possible. The day and the night passed practically without a hitch through a perfect maze of display and performance. This is something that will have been put to our credit in a thousand centres outside of New South Wales where recently we have been marked down as given over to political strife and class hatred.
In small groups discuss the message and meaning of source 4.39. Analyse the language and imagery of the editorial to determine the points the writer is making.

A symbol of triumph

In 1982 the bridge was closed for the day to allow pedestrian access for a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Harbour Bridge opening. In May 2000 the Walk for Reconciliation opened the bridge to thousands of pedestrians again. As a response to the findings of the inquiry into the Stolen Generations, and as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation, Australians walked across the bridge that is Sydney’s symbol of triumph over the suffering of the Depression years.

The Aboriginal Day of Mourning

Celebration of the nation

Six years after the opening of the Harbour Bridge, celebrations were again being held. On Australia Day in 1938 the nation celebrated 150 years of European settlement. From Menindee and Brewarrina the government brought Aboriginal people to Sydney so that they could play a part in the re-enactment of Captain Arthur Phillip’s landing.

Hero Black, Archie Boney, Anzac Williams and Jimmy Wongram were four of the 26 men brought from western New South Wales to perform with boomerangs at Farm Cove. Newspapers around Australia reported on the re-enactment and accompanying celebrations. The newspapers did not report that the actors were made to stay at the Redfern police barracks before their performance, or that on this day many other Aboriginal people had marked the anniversary of colonisation with a day of mourning. For Aboriginal people the significance of Australia Day was quite different. 26 January was ‘Invasion Day’, ‘Survival Day’ or the ‘Day of Mourning’.

Source 4.40 illustrates the deep divide that existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the 1930s. Consider the re-enactment from the Aboriginal point of view, then write a short account of what was re-enacted on Australia Day 1938.
The Day of Mourning Conference

In 1932 the Aboriginal activist William Cooper founded the Australian Aborigines League (AAL). William Cooper campaigned for reform all through the Depression years. In 1933 he had organised a petition to King George V, and by 1937 he had 2000 Aboriginal signatures demanding the Australian Government take control of Aboriginal affairs and create an Aboriginal advisory council. Cooper was an imaginative and passionate political activist who used strikes, demonstrations, letters and petitions to pressure for change.

In 1937 William Cooper drew public attention to the Aboriginal experience of European settlement by calling for the commemoration of 26 January in 1938 as a day of mourning. Cooper was joined by William Ferguson, Jack Patten, Margaret Tucker and Pearl Gibbs in organising a protest march and conference challenging the colonial view of the European settlement of Australia. The protest began with a march from Sydney Town Hall attended by Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal supporters. One thousand Aboriginal people then attended the conference at the Australian Hall in Elizabeth Street, Sydney. The conference went largely unreported in the newspapers of the day.

After years of protest about the government’s restrictive policies towards Aboriginal peoples the aim of the Day of Mourning was to:

- appeal for official recognition of past suffering and present injustice
- gain representation for Aboriginal people in parliament and bring about the termination of the Aboriginal Protection Board
- urge the Commonwealth Government to introduce new laws and policies for the education, housing and health care of Aboriginal people
- push for the introduction of policies that would bring Aboriginal people full citizenship and civil equality with the white community, including abolition of the Aborigines Protection Act 1901–1936.

On this day the white people are rejoicing, but we, as Aborigines, have no reason to rejoice on Australia’s 150th birthday. Our purpose in meeting today is to bring home to the white people of Australia the frightful conditions in which the native Aborigines of this continent live. This land belonged to our forefathers 150 years ago, but today we are pushed further and further into the background. The Aborigines Progressive Association has been formed to put before the white people the fact that Aborigines throughout Australia are literally being starved to death. We refuse to be pushed into the background. We have decided to make ourselves heard. White men pretend that the Australian Aboriginal is a low type, who cannot be bettered. Our reply to that is, ‘Give us the chance!’ We do not wish to be left behind in Australia’s march to progress. We ask for full citizen rights . . .

**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the purpose of the Day of Mourning as expressed by Jack Patten.
2. Compare the image of Aboriginal people as presented in source 4.40 (page 147) with that presented in sources 4.41 and 4.42. Explain:
   [a] the differences between the images
   [b] the evidence the sources provide of attitudes of the time
   [c] the overall significance of the Aboriginal Day of Mourning.
From mourning to reconciliation

At the 1938 Day of Mourning Conference, no claims were made to the Commonwealth Government for land or financial compensation. Resolutions supporting Aboriginal freedom and equality were passed, a manifesto was issued (see source 4.43) and plans were laid to make further representation to government.

Five days later an Aboriginal delegation met with Prime Minister Joseph Lyons and presented him with a 10-point program for justice and equality. It would be another 30 years before a Liberal government, under Prime Minister Harold Holt, finally took responsibility for Aboriginal affairs and held a referendum to change the Australian Constitution and so count Aboriginal people as part of the Australian population (see page 268).

With every national celebration since 1938, a Day of Mourning has been observed in Aboriginal communities across Australia.

Working historically

Source 4.43 is a primary written source, meaning it was written at the time of the Aboriginal Day of Mourning by the participants. When we analyse written sources we begin with a simple set of questions: Who is the author? What is the source? When and where was it written? Who is the audience? Why was it written? Using the labels and questions as your guide, analyse the source to establish the main idea and purpose (the events surrounding source 4.43 provide strong clues to the purpose).

Source 4.43

An excerpt from the manifesto entitled ‘Aborigines Claim Citizenship Rights’, issued at the Day of Mourning protest meeting in 1938

The audience is the wider Australian community.

Note the direct and forceful tone.

Plain speaking

These are hard words, but we ask you to face the truth of our accusation. If you would openly admit that the purpose of your Aboriginal Legislation has been, and now is, to exterminate the Aborigines completely so that not a trace of them or of their descendants remains, we could describe you as brutal, but honest. But you dare not admit openly that your hope and wish is for our death! You hypocritically claim that you are trying to ‘protect’ us; but your modern policy of ‘protection’ (so-called) is killing us off just as surely as the pioneer policy of giving us poisoned damper and shooting us down like dingoes!

We ask you now, reader, to put your mind . . . to the facts presented in these pages. We ask you to study the problem, in the way that we present the case, from the Aborigines’ point of view. We do not ask for your charity; we do not ask you to study us as scientific freaks. Above all, we do not ask for your ‘protection’. No thanks! We have had 150 years of that!

We ask for equal education, equal opportunity, equal wages, equal rights to possess property, or to be our own masters — in two words: equal citizenship! How can you honestly refuse this? In New South Wales you give us the vote, and treat us as equals at the ballot box. Then why do you impose the other unfair restrictions of rights upon us? Do you really think that the 9,884 half-castes of New South Wales are in need of your special ‘protection’? Do you really believe that these half-castes are ‘naturally backward’ and lacking in natural intelligence? If so, you are completely mistaken . . . Give us the same chances as yourselves, and we will prove ourselves to be just as good, if not better, Australians, than you!

A new deal for Aborigines!

After 150 years, we ask you to review the situation and give us a fair deal — a New Deal for Aborigines. The cards have been stacked against us, and we now ask you to play the game like decent Australians. Remember, we do not ask for charity, we ask for justice.

J. T. PATTEN, President, La Perouse.

W. FERGUSON, Organising Secretary, Dubbo.

Source questions

1 Summarise in point form the detail of the demands made and the grievances expressed in this source.

2 Assess how useful this source would be to historians studying civics and citizenship in New South Wales.
Activists for change

The Aboriginal protest campaigns of the 1930s forged powerful partnerships. The Day of Mourning became a symbol of the impact of European settlement on Aboriginal communities. It signified Aboriginal political organisation and the long struggle for Aboriginal rights. The formation of the Australian Aborigines League in 1934 brought together inspirational activists like William Cooper and Pearl Gibbs.

Pearl Gibbs, 1901–1983

Like other Aboriginal people of her generation, Pearl Gibbs learned about discrimination when she was a small child. When her mother tried to take her to school in Cowra, New South Wales, she was denied entry because she was not white.

In 1917, when she was 16 years old, Pearl was sent to Sydney to work as a cook. There she met many other Aboriginal girls who were denied their basic rights and freedoms because of racial discrimination. In the 1930s she organised strikes, boycotts and protests in her campaign to achieve equality for Aboriginal people.

Conditions on all the Aboriginal Stations are a disgrace. They are all very much alike. At Brewarrina the children are taught by a man who is not a qualified teacher. Two old men on that station, one blind, the other a cripple, are left by themselves in a half starved state. The manager of the Station and others get milk from five cows, but the old men get only condensed milk. I spoke to these old men and when they told me how badly they were treated it made me cry, and pray that this movement will be a success. These old men are absolutely neglected. Though on the Reserve, I know that no manager visited them for ten days. They had no milk even for their porridge. I explained the meaning of full citizen rights to these old men, and they knew they would be better off with full citizen rights than under the Protection Board, because they would get Old Age Pension and proper medical attentions.

SOURCE QUESTION

Using source 4.45 as evidence, explain why the issue of citizenship rights, as expressed in the source 4.43 manifesto (page 149), was of such importance to Aboriginal people.

William Cooper, 1861–1941

William Cooper was a well-respected spokesman for the Yorta Yorta people on the Cummeragunja Reserve. At 72 years of age, he was forced to leave his land because he had been drawing attention to the poor reserve conditions. In his new home at Footscray, Melbourne, he continued to be an advocate for the Cummeragunja community and, in 1932, established the Australian Aborigines League. This organisation paved the way for the activists of the future.

William Cooper campaigned for social justice and racial equality and continually fought to raise the awareness of the broader Australian society of the injustice Aboriginal people faced on a daily basis.

Margaret Tucker, 1904–1996

Margaret Tucker spent her early childhood on the Cummeragunja Reserve. When she was 13 years old she was taken from her mother and sent to the Cootamundra Girls Training School to be taught the skills necessary for employment as a domestic servant. In her nine years of employment under the supervision of the Aboriginal Protection Board she was paid a total of £80, which was a little over the average yearly income for a white woman similarly employed.
Margaret Tucker became politically active in the 1930s through her involvement in the Australian Aborigines League, started by her cousin William Cooper. In the decades that followed she was a founding member of numerous organisations fighting for social justice for indigenous Australians.

SOURCE 4.46 A photograph of William Cooper (left), his second cousin, Margaret Tucker (second from left), and other family members, in 1936

ACTIVITIES

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Explain why Phar Lap’s death had such an impact on Australians.
3. Describe what happened on the Aboriginal Day of Mourning and then identify its place and importance in the history of reconciliation.
4. Who were the Aboriginal activists and what were they working for?

RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATE

5. Write a 15-line biography of Phar Lap suitable for inclusion in an encyclopedia of Australian racing history. It should indicate Phar Lap’s significance to Australia’s past.
6. Write a report suitable for an Australian radio broadcast announcing Phar Lap’s death.
7. To find out more about Phar Lap, use the Phar Lap’s Story weblink in your eBookPLUS. Follow the prompts to launch the story in sound and pictures.
8. Watch the film Phar Lap (1984) and write a movie review of it. Your review should include comments on the film’s accuracy in relation to conveying the facts about Phar Lap’s life and the significance of Phar Lap and his death for the Australian public.
9. Imagine you are a journalist working for the Sydney Morning Herald. It is 20 August 1930, and you have been assigned the job of reporting on the joining of the Sydney Harbour Bridge arches. Describe the event and then explain the significance the building of the bridge has for the people of Sydney.
10. Imagine you are a delegate at the 1938 Day of Mourning Conference. You have been asked to write a report for a general Australian audience on the meaning of the ‘Aborigines Claim Citizenship Rights’ manifesto. Your report needs to be a clear and short at around 200 words.

WORKSHEET

Worksheet 4.1 Design a board game
Searching for solutions

By 1930 the Great Depression was having a devastating effect on Australia. More than one in five adult males had lost their jobs, and in the poor Sydney suburbs like Newtown and Darlinghurst the unemployment rates were as high as 50 per cent of men. Voters were looking for strong political leadership.

Only 17 days before the Wall Street stock market crashed, James Henry Scullin had been elected Prime Minister of Australia. The misery unleashed by the crash sent governments scurrying for solutions. Bitter debate and political splits followed as the government battled against the worst economic crisis in Australia’s history. Two main ideas on how to end the Depression gained support:

- **Deflation.** This required continued cuts in government spending and wages, raising taxes and keeping up the payment of overseas loans.
- **Inflation.** This required an increase in government spending, provision of relief work for the unemployed and a reduction of the repayments being made on overseas loans.

**The Niemeyer plan**

Sir Otto Niemeyer from the Bank of England was invited to Australia in 1930 to give advice on Australia’s financial crisis. Niemeyer declared that Australia had been living well beyond its means during the 1920s and that it was now time to balance the budget, pay off the debts and cut costs. This was a policy of deflation, bound to bring even greater hardship to the unemployed because it meant even further reductions in welfare payments.

**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. Describe how Sir Otto Niemeyer has been portrayed in source 4.47.
2. Explain the point the cartoonist is making.

**SOURCE QUESTION**

Imagine you are a journalist in 1930. Put the comments in source 4.48 into a summary form that the readers of your newspaper will quickly understand.
The Theodore plan

The Federal Treasurer in the Scullin government was Edward Granville Theodore. He proposed a bolder solution to the economic difficulties, based on his belief that the government needed to spend its way out of the Depression. His theory was that increasing government spending and creating more credit would generate more employment.

Although his plan was supported by Prime Minister Scullin, it was not accepted by the banks. They rejected the plan because it was inflationary, and so would increase prices. The banks and conservative politicians argued this would damage the fragile Australian economy even further.

The Premiers’ Plan

Despite the social cost, Prime Minister Scullin and the state premiers agreed on a compromise plan which acknowledged Niemeyer’s advice. In June 1931 all state premiers, except Jack Lang, signed a commitment to the Premiers’ Plan. It agreed to:

- repay overseas loans on time
- cut government spending by reducing wages, pensions and social services by 20 per cent
- increase taxation.

With increased unemployment, Australia’s standard of living dropped even further. Compulsory pay reductions destroyed what little confidence people had in the nation’s economy and more businesses collapsed as spending decreased even further. By 1932 unemployment in Australia had officially risen to 29 per cent. The real figure was probably higher.

The Lang plan

John Thomas Lang was the Premier of New South Wales from 1925 to 1927 and again from 1930 to 1932. He was the most loved, hated and controversial political leader of his day. Born in 1876 into an impoverished Irish–Scottish family with its roots in Labor politics, he was known as Jack Lang, or the ‘Big Fella’.

In 1923 Lang was elected Labor leader in New South Wales. He led the party to victory in the 1925 general election and became Premier. The Jack Lang government established social programs and reforms that were regarded as the most progressive New South Wales had seen. This was a time when the conservative Commonwealth Government played no part in providing welfare services. Lang pushed through pioneering legislation for a 44-hour week, pensions for widows, workers compensation and child endowment. His government abolished student fees in state-run high schools and made widespread improvements to major roads.

After Labor’s 1927 election loss, Jack Lang remained as leader of the party. He was elected premier again in October 1930 with a landslide victory, giving Labor a 20-seat majority.

Jack Lang believed that the Depression was due to selfish capitalists and the greed of overseas bankers and that following the Premiers’ Plan would only increase Australia’s suffering. In 1931 Lang released his own daring plan to fight the Depression. Lang refused to cut New South Wales Government salaries or cut pensions and public works spending, and he stopped paying overseas banks the interest due on their loans. Lang proposed the money saved should be used for social services and unemployment relief. He argued that an injection of money into the Australian economy would stimulate industry and commerce. This was a challenge to the power of the federal Labor government, British financiers and the Bank of England.
Failure of government

By the end of 1931, the Scullin government had lost support from within and was accused of having sold out to the rich. There was an atmosphere of despair and public disillusionment with any political or economic plan. The Labor Party splintered into groups that either supported or protested against the government's strategies for recovery.

With the lack of confidence in his government, Scullin was forced to call an election on 19 December 1931. He led a political party that appeared defeated even before the votes had been cast. Labor suffered a crushing electoral defeat, with only 14 out of 75 Labor members being returned to Canberra. The newly formed United Australia Party (UAP) formed government, headed by Joseph Lyons. Prime Minister Lyons remained committed to balancing the budget by cutting government spending and paying back overseas loans.

Working historically

The aim of political cartoons is to express an attitude or opinion about a particular political event. The motive of the cartoonist will indicate bias, or the point of view being expressed. The cartoonist's opinion can be determined by looking for details that indicate the subject is being mocked, criticised or sympathised with.

The following cartoon provides an insight into the range of attitudes towards Jack Lang during the Depression. Use the labels as a guide to help analyse the meaning and usefulness of the cartoon.

SOURCE 4.50 Some saw Lang as a reformer; others saw him as dangerous. This 1931 cartoon by Virgil Reilly depicts Lang as a mad dog.

SOURCE QUESTIONS

1. Describe the objects and the action taking place in the cartoon.
2. Identify any symbolism and what you think the symbols might represent.
3. Explain how the words or the language of the cartoon support the symbols or images.
4. Identify the message of the cartoon and the motive of the cartoonist.
5. Suggest who would be the audience for the cartoon.
6. Evaluate how useful this cartoon is in explaining the public's attitude to this controversial personality.
Extremist politics

The growth of private armies was an unexpected and disturbing reaction to the Depression in Australia. The best known of these were the New Guard and the White Army. These groups, whose officers were usually World War I veterans, were organised along military lines.

The New Guard, based in Sydney, was led by an ex-AIF officer called Eric Campbell. Campbell was violently opposed to the Labor government of Jack Lang. There were rumours in Sydney that the New Guard had a plan to kidnap or assassinate Jack Lang. Campbell said that if the Commonwealth Government would not move against extremists like Jack Lang, then it was up to the New Guard.

The New Guard used the community fear of political revolution as an excuse to attack any political group they disagreed with. They were involved in street fights with striking relief workers, unionists and communists.

Even the thrill of bridge opening day could not hide the divisions within Depression society. The New Guard had declared Jack Lang a communist, and they were determined to ‘give the Commos a hiding’. The New Guard decided to use the opening ceremony to express their contempt for the political leaders of the day.

Despite mounted police escorts and tens of thousands of onlookers, the New Guard made their attack on the government. Captain Francis de Groot, dressed in military uniform, galloped on horseback through the crowds, his sword outstretched. He halted in front of the Premier and lunged at the opening ribbon, cutting it with his sword. The police pulled him from his horse and rushed him away. The ribbon was tied together again and minutes later Premier Lang cut it with a pair of golden scissors.

Less than two months after the bridge opening, Jack Lang was sacked as New South Wales Premier by the Governor, Sir Philip Game. The New Guard disappeared from the political scene when Jack Lang was no longer there to fight.

**SOURCE 4.51** Photograph of Captain de Groot interrupting the ceremony and cutting the ribbon at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, 19 March 1932

**SOURCE 4.52** The growth of fascism in Europe in the 1930s (see page 163) provided a sinister background to the appearance of private armies in Australia. This cartoon by Alex Gurney in *World*, November 1931, depicts Eric Campbell as a small reflection of the Italian dictator Mussolini.

**SOURCE QUESTION** Eric Campbell saw himself as the leader of a highly organised body of loyal citizens. How does the cartoonist depict him?
The dismissal of Jack Lang

In February 1932, Prime Minister Joseph Lyons announced that he would force the Lang government to pay £958,763 in overseas loan repayments. Lang declared he would fight. He withdrew all the New South Wales Government money from bank accounts so that the Commonwealth Government could not confiscate it.

Events moved swiftly, as the timeline shows. In May 1932, the Governor of New South Wales dismissed Lang from the office of Premier for defying the Commonwealth Government.

So ended one of the most controversial political events in Australian history. Jack Lang had split his own party and helped to bring about the defeat of the federal Labor government. Was Jack Lang a dangerous and radical politician who was a threat to Australian stability or a champion of the ordinary people in the struggle against powerful financial interests?

Lang was strongly attacked by political groups like the New Guard and the conservative members of his own party. He was expelled from the Labor Party but continued his career as an independent politician in both New South Wales and the federal Parliament. In speeches and interviews he continued to be a passionate politician until his death in 1975 at the age of 98. The question of what motivated Jack Lang, and whether his radical approach to politics and the economy had any merit, continues to be a subject of debate for historians.
In 1932, NSW Governor Sir Philip Game dismissed Lang’s government over the issue of non-payment of Federal obligations. In opposition, Lang’s popular appeal withered . . . It took anti-Lang campaigners, including future Prime Minister Ben Chifley . . . more than a decade to recreate the Labor Party in NSW. The 1940s saw Lang refocus all his bitterness against his Labor opponents now in Government . . .

**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

Use sources 4.54 and 4.55 to describe the contrasting public images of Jack Lang.

**The legacy of the Great Depression**

By the mid 1930s, the world economy began to improve and export prices for Australia’s wool and wheat rose. The improvement in business confidence gradually led to increased employment and Australians were able to leave the worst of the Depression behind them. Thousands of families had battled their way through the Great Depression. At the end of it Australians had been forced to examine their beliefs and to look more critically at their government and society.

The decade that began with such hardship ended with tragedy when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. With the coming of World War II, the generation that had survived the Great Depression had many battles left to fight.

**ACTIVITIES**

1. Identify who the ‘Big Fella’ of Australian politics was and then describe what he is remembered for.
2. Place the following events in the correct chronological order:
   - James Henry Scullin elected Prime Minister of Australia
   - Black Thursday on Wall Street
   - Sir Otto Niemeyer travels to Australia and presents his economic plan
   - Signing of the Premiers’ Plan
   - Labor under James Scullin defeated at the general election
   - Joseph Lyons heads a United Australia Party government
   - The Sydney Harbour Bridge is opened
   - The Aboriginal Day of Mourning is held for the first time
   - The Governor of New South Wales sacks Jack Lang as Premier of New South Wales
3. Explain the two ideas presented as central to solutions to the Great Depression.
4. Analyse Sir Otto Niemeyer’s advice and explain how this was in contrast with the beliefs of Jack Lang.
5. Briefly explain the reasons for Labor’s loss at the federal election of 1932.
6. What was the New Guard and why was it formed?
7. Evaluate the significance of the sacking of Jack Lang and why it was such a controversial event in Australian political history.

**RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATE**

8. Choose one of the suggestions for solving the economic problems of the Depression (page 152) and find out more about it. Imagine it is 1931 and you are one of the political or financial leaders. You are to stand up in the House of Representatives and present a clear explanation of your ideas and how they can be implemented. Present your speech to the class.

**WORKSHEETS**

- Worksheet 4.2 Political parties uncovered
- Worksheet 4.3 Crossword of the 1930s
- Worksheet 4.4 Social and political cartoons
CHAPTER 4  Review — timeline and summary

TIMELINE

1929
October: The Wall Street Crash; beginning of the Great Depression
James Scullin becomes first Australian-born Labor Prime Minister

1930
June: Sir Otto Niemeyer visits Australia to provide economic advice
November: Phar Lap wins the Melbourne Cup
December: Sidney Myer provides Christmas lunch for 12 000 people experiencing Depression hardship

1931
January: Isaac Isaacs appointed as first Australian-born Governor-General
February: Dame Nellie Melba dies
Jack Lang proposes a radical ‘Lang Plan’ to fight the Depression
June: Premiers’ Plan announced to improve the Australian economy
December: Prime Minister Scullin defeated and replaced by Joseph Lyons

1932
March: Opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge
April: Phar Lap dies at a farm in California
May: Jack Lang sacked as Premier by Governor, Sir Philip Game
June: NSW Labor government defeated by United Australia Party

1933
April: Aviator Bert Hinkler dies attempting flight from England to Australia

1934
December: Roy Rene’s film Strike Me Lucky released

1935
October: John Curtin appointed leader of the federal Labor Party
November: Sir Charles Kingsford Smith disappears over the Bay of Bengal

1936
October: Don Bradman captains the Australian cricket team

1938
January: Celebration of 150th anniversary of European settlement of Australia
The Aboriginal Day of Mourning

1939
April: Joseph Lyons dies — the first Australian Prime Minister to die in office
Robert Menzies becomes Prime Minister of Australia
September: World War II begins

SUMMARY

The Great Depression — experiences
• The stock market crash on Wall Street, New York, on 28 October 1929 is regarded as the event that marked the beginning of the Great Depression.
• Stock market speculation, overproduction and high levels of debt were the main economic causes of the Great Depression.
• The Depression brought very high levels of unemployment and falling prices to most countries.
• In 1933, the impact of the Depression was shown in the Australian census statistics which recorded 400 000 Australians living in shantytowns and 30 000 totally homeless.

Politics and the Great Depression
• Many plans were proposed to solve the economic problems of the Depression years, including the Niemeyer Plan, the Theodore Plan, the Premiers’ Plan and the Lang Plan.
• In 1932 Jack Lang’s controversial plan to fight the Depression split the state Labor Party, and led to Lang’s sacking from the office of Premier of New South Wales and to the defeat of Labor at the state election.

Legends, events and leaders
• Sport and entertainment had an important role to play during the Depression because they provided a distraction from the harshness and problems of everyday life.
• Donald Bradman’s sporting achievements during the 20 years he played international cricket became legendary and provided an Australian role model of personal success through hard work and talent.
• Roy Rene was a comedian who came to champion the struggle of the ordinary Australian during the Depression through defiant jokes and a bold style that made people laugh despite their troubles.
• Nancy Bird Walton was Australia’s youngest female commercial pilot and a pioneer of Australian aviation.
• Margaret Preston defined a unique Australian image through her art work that inspired a confidence in being Australian.
• Phar Lap was a racehorse that symbolised hope amid Depression hardship because he won nearly every major horse race in Australia and became a champion who beat the odds.
• The Sydney Harbour Bridge was celebrated as the ‘mighty span’ that was a triumph of engineering and achievement during the era of unemployment and hardship.
• Through events like the 1938 Aboriginal Day of Mourning, activists like William Cooper gained public attention and demanded government action to overcome the injustice and discrimination faced by Aboriginal people in Australia.
Multiple choice

Choose the letter that best answers the question.

1 On 24 October 1929, why did panic set in on the Wall Street Stock Exchange in New York?
(A) Shares were sold at dramatically reduced prices.
(B) Shares were not being sold at all.
(C) Shares were sold at dramatically increased prices.
(D) Shares were valued at an all-time high.

2 What was the experience shared by Europeans, Americans and Australians at the beginning of the 1930s?
(A) Low unemployment and high export prices
(B) Low unemployment and thriving business
(C) High unemployment, low export prices and depressed business
(D) A booming economy and general prosperity

3 Consider these statements describing the two main ideas on how to end the Depression:
   Statement I: Deflation required continued cuts in government spending and wages, raising taxes and keeping up the payment of overseas loans.
   Statement II: Inflation required an increase in government spending, provision of relief work for the unemployed and a reduction of the repayments being made on the overseas loans.
(A) Both statements are false.
(B) Statement I is true and statement II is false.
(C) Statement I is false and statement II is true.
(D) Both statements are true.

4 As a response to the Depression, governments imposed high tariffs. What is a tariff?
(A) A set of laws
(B) A customs or duty placed on imported goods
(C) Goods that are exported
(D) Interest rates on loans

5 What did Sir Otto Niemeyer advise the Australian Government to do?
(A) Australia should continue borrowing money from overseas.
(B) The Commonwealth Government should try to increase funding to public works programs.
(C) Australia should balance its budget by paying off debts and cutting government expenditure.
(D) Australia should increase basic wages and spend her way out of the Depression.

6 What did the term ‘on the susso’ mean to Australians of the Depression years?
(A) Having a problem with alcohol
(B) Receiving a sustenance payment from the government
(C) Being wanted by the police
(D) Being in highly paid employment.

7 Refer to source A. Why would this source be regarded as a primary source in a study of the Depression?
(A) It appeared in a weekly magazine so it would have been very popular.
(B) It shows how people dealt with the hardship of the Depression.
(C) It made people laugh.
(D) It was produced as a comment on the Depression at the time.

8 According to source A, what was the attitude of Australians to the Depression?
(A) It was to be laughed at.
(B) It was not the worst thing to happen in a person’s life.
(C) It required an attitude of determination, humour and mateship to survive.
(D) It was a fear to be conquered, in the way a person could overcome a fear of heights.

Source A
A cartoon by Stan Cross in Smith’s Weekly in 1933. It captured the spirit of survival and vibrant humour on which we pride ourselves as Australians.
9 Who was John Thomas Lang?
   (A) The Premier of New South Wales from 1925 to 1927 and again from 1930 to 1932
   (B) The Prime Minister of Australia from 1929 to 1932
   (C) The Governor-General of Australia in the 1930s
   (D) The Premier of New South Wales from 1927 to 1932.

10 Why has Jack Lang remained a controversial figure in Australian history?
   (A) Because he was regarded as a radical who threatened Australian security and a visionary who looked for daring alternatives to solve economic problems
   (B) Because he was a communist and a ‘do-gooder’
   (C) Because he was a fascist and nationalist
   (D) Because he was a capitalist and successful businessman

11 Consider the following two statements about the Aboriginal Day of Mourning.
   Statement I: William Cooper called for a commemoration of 26 January 1938 as a day of mourning because he wanted to draw public attention to the Aboriginal experience of European settlement.
   Statement II: The aim of the Aboriginal Day of Mourning was to push for the introduction of policies that would bring Aboriginal people full citizenship and civil equality with the white community.
   (A) Both statements are true.
   (B) Both statements are false.
   (C) Statement I is true and statement II is false.
   (D) Statement I is false and statement II is true.

12 Who was William Cooper?
   (A) The architect responsible for the design of the Sydney Harbour Bridge
   (B) An economist called on by the Australian Government to provide advice on how to deal with the effects of the Great Depression
   (C) A campaigner for social justice and racial equality in Australia
   (D) The governor of New South Wales who dismissed Jack Lang from office

Short answer questions
1 Outline the immediate effect of the Wall Street stock market crash on 24 October 1929.
2 Using your own knowledge, describe the achievements of a personality who made a significant contribution to Australian life during the difficult years of the Depression.
3 Identify one important event that occurred in the 1930s and then explain the significance of the event to Australian history.
4 Using source B and your own knowledge, analyse the meaning of the cartoon and what it suggests about the significance of Don Bradman during the Great Depression.

Source B
Cartoon by Samuel G. Wells, c. 1932

5 Using your own knowledge, describe what ‘being on the susso’ meant.

Extended response questions
1 Read the following statement:
   At the end of the Depression, Australians were forced to look more critically at their government and their society.
   Discuss this statement. Support your answer by using your knowledge of the causes and effects of the Depression.
2 Read the following statement by William Cooper of the Aboriginal Advancement League:
   For us it is a day of mourning. This is the day we lost our land, lost our spirit culture, lost our language.
   Discuss this statement. Support your answer by using your knowledge of the events surrounding the Aboriginal Day of Mourning and the objectives of the conference organisers.
3 Describe the difficulties faced by the Australian Government during the worst economic crisis in our history, and the various plans put forward to solve the economic and social problems.
WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION?

The decade that had begun with dreams for prosperity and progress ended in a colossal stock market crash in 1929. The crisis that followed is known as the Great Depression, and it left its mark on the decade of the 1930s. This video lesson features historical sources from the National Museum and will give you an insight into how people survived, and even prospered, in the darkest years of the Depression.

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THE 1930s

Download this interactive learning object and test your knowledge about Australia in the 1930s. Answer all 15 questions and receive instant feedback. You can even print your results to hand in to your teacher.

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