

## Student Performance in the Australian History Competition

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The Australian History Competition has now been running for three years, with nationwide student participation increasing to around 15,000 in 2013. The primary aim of the competition is to present students with an interesting history challenge. At the same time, the competition supports the implementation of the new national history curriculum by promoting a broad view of history and modelling approaches to the teaching and testing of skills and concepts.

One of the incidental outcomes of the competition is that the History Teachers' Association of Australia is now accumulating data on student performance in the only nationwide history testing that has been attempted. The results are interesting and generally encouraging. Each year students have most difficulty with knowledge based questions. This is not surprising given that there is still no national 'core content' to work with. However, it is not the intention to 'examine' content areas that students have been prepared for and there is no expectation that their historical knowledge goes beyond major events. Where some students appear to struggle is in applying the broad knowledge they do have or in being able to use the content that is provided in the source material. Students also tend to under-perform in questions relating to chronology. On the other hand, the results for the majority of questions that target specific skills and concepts have been very pleasing. These questions present a mix of accessible and more challenging questions and, as expected, only the more able students perform well in all questions. Even so, the general response to the skills and concepts questions is good and suggests that these areas are being well-addressed in schools across the country.

The following sample questions are taken from the 2013 Year 10 and Year 8 competition papers. Question numbers and source labels have been changed from the original and the sources and formatting have been reduced in size.

For more details about the Australian History Competition, including 2014 dates and registration, go to: [www.australianhistorycompetition.com.au](http://www.australianhistorycompetition.com.au)

### YEAR 10 QUESTIONS

#### SOURCE A

Model outside a store in Bathurst, NSW



#### Questions 1-4 refer to Source A

- Which 20th century popular musician is shown in Source A?  
A Bob Dylan  
B Slim Dusty  
C John Lennon  
D Elvis Presley
  - What form of music was he associated with?  
A Jazz  
B Protest songs  
C Rock 'n' Roll  
D Country and Western
  - The music associated with the person shown in Source A became popular in Australia from the 1950s. This is evidence of what influence on popular culture?  
A Americanisation  
B British heritage  
C Indigenous art forms  
D European immigration
  - What type of historian studies this aspect of the past?  
A Military  
B Social  
C Economic  
D Political
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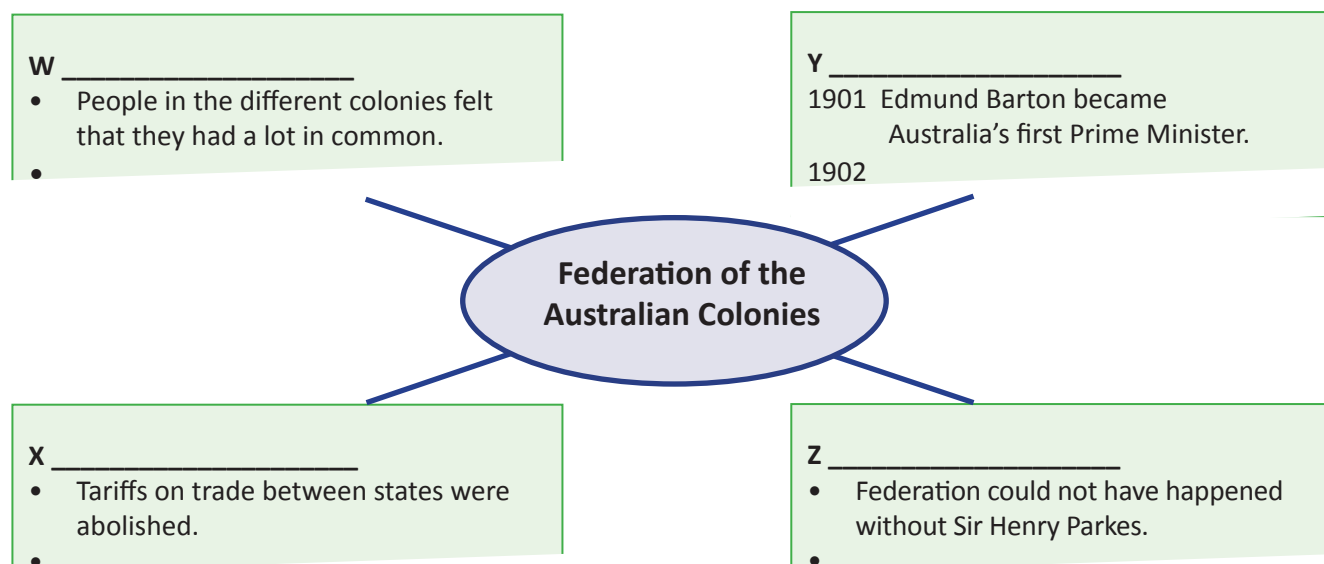
**Questions 1-4**

These questions focused on the popular culture topic and were intended to provide an interesting and accessible start to the Year 10 competition. While lower order, the questions built from a specific example to broader aspects of social history and incorporated some consideration of cause and effect and use of accurate terms. Even though these questions were meant to be easy the student response was even better than anticipated.

**Student response**

	A%	B%	C%	D%	Correct
Q1.	0	0	0	97	D
Q2.	4	1	90	3	C
Q3.	90	4	1	4	A
Q4.	1	91	3	2	B

**SOURCE B** Federation Mind Map



**Questions 5-8 refer to Source B**

- When did the Australian colonies federate?
 

A 1788	B 1851
C 1901	D 1915
- What heading would you write at 'Z' in the mind map?
 

A Effects	B Causes
C Chronology	D Interpretations
- Where are 'causes' listed in the mind map?
 

A W	B X
C Y	D Z
- From your own knowledge, what is another point you would add to 'causes'?
 

A Republicanism
B Arguments for a stronger defence
C A desire to end convict transportation
D The absence of rivalry between the colonies

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### Questions 5-8

These questions were based around a major event in Australian history that could be considered ‘core knowledge’. It was also felt that the dates given in question 5 and the some of the events and terms mentioned in question 8 would assist students who had a broad understanding of Australian history. A focus was on demonstrating an understanding of cause, effect and interpretation. While a large majority of students were able to identify the correct date for Federation, the remaining questions proved to be much more challenging. The results were as anticipated for questions of this level of difficulty but it is also possible that some students did not employ good multiple choice skills in eliminating poor alternatives. To do this successfully is a good test of a student’s broad understanding of historical context. How relevant, for example, were Republicanism or convict transportation to events in 1901?

### Student response

	A%	B%	C%	D%	Correct
Q5	4	8	79	6	C
Q6	14	29	10	45	D
Q7	46	24	4	24	A
Q8	14	44	16	24	B

### SOURCE C Plaques at the Adelaide River War Cemetery, Northern Territory



### Questions 9-11 refer to Source C

9. Where did these three people serve during World War II?
- A Royal Australian Air Force and the Marines
  - B Royal Australian Navy and Merchant Marine
  - C Royal Australian Air Force and Merchant Marine
  - D Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force
10. The date on these headstones links them to which historical event?
- A Battle of Kokoda
  - B Battle of the Coral Sea
  - C Japanese bombing of Darwin
  - D British surrender of Singapore
11. What aspect of World War II do these headstones provide historians with evidence about?
- A Causes of the war
  - B Reasons for the Allied victory
  - C The strategy used by Japanese forces
  - D The people involved in Australia’s war effort
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**Questions 9-11**

The three questions tested location and selection of information, source context and evidence and source use. The sources were chosen partly to highlight the role of the merchant navy and the diversity of Australians who served in World War II. Obviously many students did not read carefully enough for the relatively easy question 9 and missed the distinction between the RAN and the merchant navy. The response to question 10 may have been somewhat dependent upon student knowledge but the source label, indicating the location of the graves, should have been helpful. While not very difficult, the response to question 11 shows a good understanding of evidence and source use.

**Student response**

	A%	B%	C%	D%	Correct
Q9	6	8	47	37	C
Q10	22	27	41	7	C
Q11	4	5	8	80	D

**SOURCE D** Extracts from two articles in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 10 June 1933

**Extract 1: Equal Social Rights for Sexes**

When Mrs Linda P. Littlejohn returned from Adelaide last week, after attending the conference of the Women Voters' Federation, she revealed a greater determination than ever to fight for the establishment of women's social rights... The conference affirmed:

- (1) That all positions and all posts in the Commonwealth and States' Civil Services should be open to women as to men.
- (2) That equal pay for the sexes should be established ...

**Extract 2: Careers for Women**

... in England women fill positions as chemists, postmistresses, and other occupations which are almost exclusively held by men in Australia.

In Australia the percentage of women in industry has increased since the war. This is mainly accounted for by the increase in the manufacturing industries. Thus there are more girls employed in textile factories, knitting, canned foods, clothing, and similar industries than previously.

In most cases, however, girls enter these factories not for a career, but to provide them with occupations until such time as they marry. Marriage, in fact, continues in Australia to be the greatest career of all for women.

Questions 12-14 refer to Source D

12. Which conclusion about Australia in the 1930s does Source D support?

- A Women were employed only in factories.
- B Married women were not allowed to work.
- C Australian women had achieved workplace equality.
- D Some women were campaigning for workplace equality.

13. What is the most accurate statement about this source?

- A Extract 1 is unreliable because it is feminist propaganda.
  - B Extract 2 is unreliable because it shows a sexist attitude.
  - C Extract 1 reports detail that may be checked in other sources.
  - D Extract 2 makes statistical generalisations that cannot be checked.
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14. Read the two statements:

- I *Women's Weekly* is interesting but not useful as a historical source.
- II Both extracts would help a social historian to develop empathy for the 1930s.

Select the best answer:

- A Both statements are correct.
- B Only Statement I is correct.
- C Both statements are incorrect.
- D Only Statement II is correct.

### Questions 12-14

These three questions came at the end of the 50 question Year 10 paper. They focused on evidence, source use and empathy. They were intended to challenge more able students and both the source and question format tested literacy and required an ability to think carefully about the alternatives presented. Student responses were quite pleasing and consistent with the hierarchy of difficulty within the three questions. The responses to questions 12 and 13 suggest that many students are able to demonstrate good insight into evidence and source use. The response to Question 14 was interesting, with many students apparently challenged not so much by the difficult concept of empathy but by acceptance of *Women's Weekly* as a potentially useful historical source. Elsewhere in the paper there was a similar reluctance to accept *Wikipedia* as a reliable source. This suggests that many students may work from preconceived notions of what a 'useful and/or reliable' source is, rather than assessing a source thoughtfully in relation to the question that has been asked.

### Student response

	A%	B%	C%	D%	Correct
Q12	10	12	19	56	D
Q13	13	16	43	25	C
Q14	32	17	15	32	D

### YEAR 8 QUESTIONS

**SOURCE A** Scene near the front door of Amiens Cathedral, France



Questions 1-4 refer to Source A

1. What is the artwork shown in the photo?
    - A A mosaic
    - B Icons
    - C Sculptures
    - D A fresco
  2. A cathedral is a place of worship for which religion?
    - A Islam
    - B Judaism
    - C Hinduism
    - D Christianity
  3. When and where were such cathedrals typically built?
    - A the Roman Empire before 380 AD
    - B western Europe in the period from around 1000 AD
    - C the Holy Land in the period before the 6th century AD
    - D the Byzantine Empire in the period from around 1500 AD
-

4. Read the two statements about the headless figures shown in Source A.
- I These figures prove that the dark ages was an uncivilized time.
  - II Such figures may help historians to understand the beliefs of people who lived at the time they were produced.

Select the best answer:

- A Both statements are correct
- B Only Statement I is correct
- C Both statements are incorrect
- D Only Statement II is correct

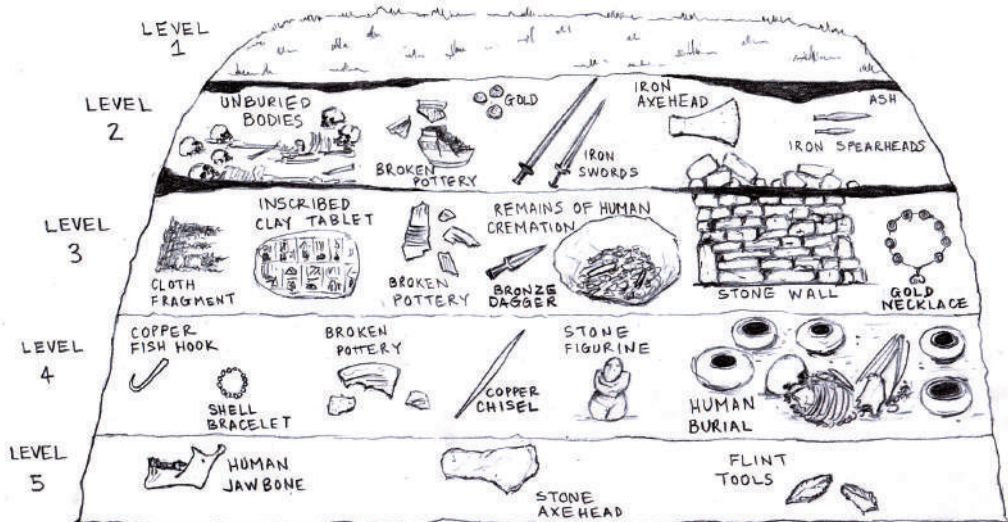
**Questions 1-4**

These questions presented students with an image that would engage interest on close examination. The questions assumed the sort of broad knowledge that would come from an overview of the medieval period and the final question required historical judgement that was informed by some degree of historical empathy. While questions 1 and 2 proved to be very accessible, the response to question 3 is consistent with other responses that suggest that students are more challenged by historical context and chronology. Given the demands of the question, the response to question 4 was very encouraging.

**Student response**

	A%	B%	C%	D%	Correct
Q1	6	6	79	7	C
Q2	4	9	3	82	D
Q3	33	41	18	5	B
Q4	25	13	10	48	D

**SOURCE B** An archaeologist's drawing of the layers in a tell



**Questions 5-9 refer to Source B**

5. In archaeology, what is a tell?
- A A natural landform shaped like a hill
  - B A reconstructed ancient occupation site
  - C A mound of earth covering ancient settlements
  - D An epic story about ancient times, usually told orally
6. In which layer in Source B is the first evidence of artistic expression?
- A Level 2
  - B Level 4
  - C Level 3
  - D Level 5

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7. What is the correct sequence of the technology shown in Source E, from earliest to latest?
- |   |                                |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| A | stone → copper → bronze → iron | B | bronze → iron → stone → copper |
| C | iron → bronze → copper → stone | D | copper → bronze → iron → stone |
8. What important development appears for the first time in Level 3?
- |   |           |   |             |
|---|-----------|---|-------------|
| A | Pottery   | B | Writing     |
| C | Jewellery | D | Metal tools |
9. What is the most likely explanation for what happened in Level 2, based on the evidence?
- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| A | A flood destroyed the city, drowning most of the population.              |  |  |
| B | An earthquake destroyed the city at night while people were sleeping.     |  |  |
| C | People were killed in a battle and the city was destroyed then deserted.  |  |  |
| D | The water supply dried up during a drought and people abandoned the city. |  |  |

### Questions 5-9

This was intended to be an interesting source and activity for students, with some reliance on overview knowledge but largely based on students being able to effectively use information drawn from the source. The results are obviously encouraging. In question 6 there may have been confusion about layer order or the meaning of ‘artistic’.

#### Student response

	A%	B%	C%	D%	Correct
Q5	8	10	72	8	C
Q6	26	43	25	4	B
Q7	72	3	20	3	A
Q8	4	78	11	5	B
Q9	6	7	82	3	C

**SOURCE C** A bridge at Ross, Tasmania

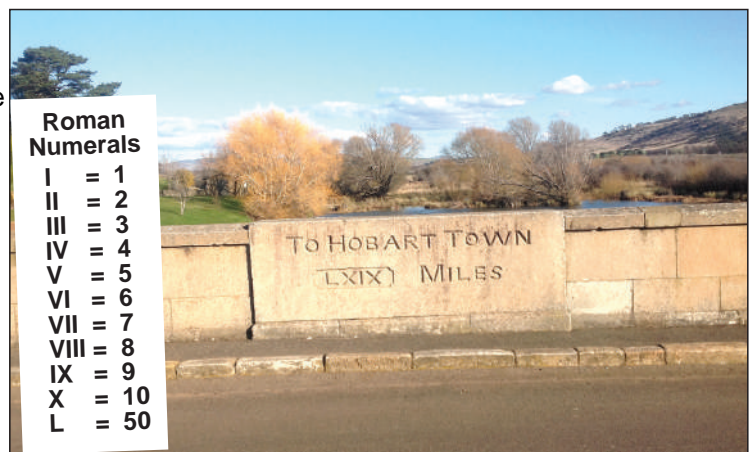
### Questions 10-11 refer to Source C

10. According to the information shown in Source C, how many miles is it from Ross to Hobart?

A	69	B	49
C	71	D	41

11. Read the two statements.

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| I  | Source C is an example of the legacy of ancient societies in the modern world.           |
| II | The ideas of ancient Rome have had a significant influence on modern European societies. |



Select the best answer:

- |   |                               |   |                              |
|---|-------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| A | Both statements are correct   | B | Only Statement I is correct  |
| C | Both statements are incorrect | D | Only Statement II is correct |

### Questions 10-11

These questions have been adapted for publication here. They came near the end of the Year 8 paper. The intention was to focus on the legacy of ancient societies in the world around us and, incidentally, incorporate a numeracy exercise. Student response was as anticipated, with question 11 also presenting some literacy challenges.

#### Student response

	A%	B%	C%	D%	Correct
Q10	66	8	19	3	A
Q11	52	17	10	17	A