

# Youth Challenge Program

What are the Mysteries of Maralinga?

2007

## An overview of the day for Teacher Facilitators

A Youth Challenge is a program devised by Ryebuck Media to help students explore issues in an interactive way during a day's activities.

Small numbers of students are brought together from a variety of schools to tackle a particular theme — such as Defence, Immigration, Sexual Harassment, Bullying in Schools, or Sustainable Development.

**The aim of the day is to provide an environment in which students address an issue in an informed and practical way, and learn skills and strategies that can be implemented in other contexts in their own community.**

In this case it is investigating an aspect of their local community's history. We want students to take with them after the Youth Challenge day greater knowledge, understanding, confidence, and awareness of the skills and processes involved in such a task, and an enthusiasm to engage with a personal research activity.

**The specific focus of the day is Australia's involvement in atomic weapons testing in the 1950s:**

What are Australia's Cold War secrets? Could Australia have been a nuclear power? Why did we build a nuclear reactor? Why were we testing atomic weapons in the 1950s? Why were the bones of dead Australians secretly tested for nearly thirty years after the explosions? What responsibilities does a government have to its citizens for the actions of previous governments? Is it acceptable to allow some citizens to be harmed for the benefit of the majority?

That's the students' task at this Youth Challenge: to look at some of the evidence available and decide for themselves how people and governments reacted, and whether those reactions were acceptable or unacceptable at the time.

### The process on the day is:

#### Segment 1

#### Welcome and program outline

Students are told that they are going to focus on one main *history mystery* during the day – Australia's involvement in atomic weapons testing in the 1950s. In trying to solve this mystery they will develop the knowledge and skills that they can use to better explore history in their own communities.

#### Segment 2

#### Introductory Activities – The *History Mysteries* Quiz

Students are shown some 'mystery objects'. They are each given a worksheet and during the course of the day they have to try to work out what the mystery objects are. Those who identify the objects correctly will be placed in a draw to receive prizes.

#### Segment 3

#### *Australian History Mysteries* in the Twentieth Century

A special video segment introduces some history mysteries from the twentieth century. These are briefly discussed and together students begin to work out how to go about solving a history mystery. What evidence exists? How do you locate it? How do you decide if it is reliable or unreliable evidence?

#### Segment 4

#### Meet the Guest Historian

Students hear how an historian puts into practice the sorts of skills and approaches detailed in the previous session. The historian also shares a mystery object with the audience and answers questions.

## Segment 5

### Are you a good *History Mystery Detective*?

A light-hearted computer decision-maker challenges students to help solve a fascinating little history mystery and try to win some prizes! In this way they learn some of the methods, processes and skills that are involved in working with evidence and being good detectives.

## Segment 6

### Why was Australia involved in testing atomic weapons in the 1950s? Was it justified?

A video segment introduces students to this specific mystery and students have to engage with specific interest groups and understand their involvement and attitudes. They then break into workshop groups to explore various perspectives on this issue, and to develop a role-play segment for a TV documentary on the events of the time.

## Segment 7

### Workshop (and Teachers' professional in-service session)

This is where we ask you to work for about 25–35 minutes, helping the students reach a point where they are ready to work independently for the rest of the day.

The process is:

- 1** Students are broken into mixed groups.
- 2 Activity 1** The workshop leader (teacher) takes them through an ice-breaker exercise, such as this: *Divide students into groups of 2 or 3. The members of the group should not know each other. Each student's task is to talk to a partner, and then briefly introduce that person to the whole group, giving some details about that person.*  
This will take about 5 minutes.
- 3 Activity 2** Hand out the **Workshop Materials** to students in the group. Distribute role-cards to the students, and have them work through the hypothetical situation exercise.  
This will take about 10 minutes.
- 4 Activity 3** The students now have to work through the evidence in the **Workshop Materials** relevant to their group and the atomic testing at Maralinga. Students work through the evidence and answer the questions associated with each piece of evidence. We suggest you have students read a part of the evidence out loud, and then the group answers the particular questions for that source. Do this for each piece of evidence. The final question brings all the evidence together for students to decide what the main information and messages are that they will need to convey to others about the perspective they are exploring. They then have to decide: what is the information and messages that they need to include in their segment of the documentary. This reading and discussion of the evidence will take about 20 minutes.  
*At this point, and before students make those decisions, workshop leaders will retire from the group. They will participate in a professional in-service session run by the National Museum of Australia education team about the practical classroom resources and activities available from the NMA.*  
Students continue in their group without the facilitator, and decide how they will present their segment of the documentary.
- 5 Activity 4** Finally, students have to decide how they will present their findings about the behaviour of the group they are studying. This will involve all members of the group, and will be presented to the whole audience after lunch.

## Segment 8

### Role-play presentations

Students present their segment of the TV documentary in their role-plays. The maximum time they have is 3–4 minutes, and every student in the group must participate in the presentation.

## Segment 9

### Casting a vote

Students now decide whether they think the Australian involvement in the testing of atomic weapons was justified and necessary in the circumstances.

## Segment 10

### Where to from here?

Students are encouraged to take the principles and skills of historical inquiry they have been developing throughout the day into their local communities to investigate their own 'history mystery'.