

**My Place for Teachers  
Decade Overview 1970s**

Decade Summary	1978
<p>The 1970s was a decade of great economic, political, social and technological change.</p> <p>Politically, the 1972 election ended the 23-year government of the Liberal-Country Party coalition. The Australian Labor Party took power, led by Gough Whitlam, with the slogan 'It's Time'. The new government initiated a large range of socially progressive changes, but was scandal ridden and criticised for being excessively extravagant with public funds. The Whitlam government was dismissed by the governor-general John Kerr in 1975.</p> <p>Socially, the White Australia Policy was finally dismantled during this period. It had functioned since Federation in 1901 as a tool for excluding non-white immigrants. The Whitlam government removed any ethnically specific criteria for evaluating prospective migrants, thus allowing the first influx of Vietnamese refugees in 1978. Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser agreed to accept the 'boat people' as refugees, significantly adding to the idea of a multicultural Australia.</p> <p>Economically, in 1973, the formation of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the international oil embargo precipitated the end of the long economic boom that had underpinned Australia's prosperity in the post-war period.</p>	<p><b>January</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment Act 1978</i> (Cth) was proclaimed in federal parliament.</li> <li>• The SBS Broadcasting Service was established.</li> </ul> <p><b>April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>Migrant Services and Programs Report</i>, also known as 'The Galbally Report', was presented to the prime minister.</li> </ul> <p><b>August</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Malcolm Fraser conservative government announced the end of maternity allowances.</li> </ul> <p><b>November</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The West Gate Bridge over the Yarra River and Port Melbourne was opened. It is the second-largest single span bridge in Australia.</li> </ul> <p><b>November</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ranger Uranium Agreement was signed by the Northern Land Council and ratified by the traditional owners, allowing uranium mining in Arnhem Land.</li> </ul>

## History and Politics

<b>The ALP in government</b>	<p>On 2 December 1972, Gough Whitlam (1916–) led the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to election victory for the first time in 23 years. In the first days of government, Whitlam abolished conscription, ended all military involvement in Indochina, and requested the Arbitration Court reopen its inquiry into equal pay for women.</p> <p>In December 1972, the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission approved the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. In the same month, Justice Elizabeth Evatt became the first woman to be appointed as deputy president of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.</p> <p>In March 1973, all tuition fees at Australian universities were abolished. From June 1973, maternity leave was granted to women employees in the federal public service and the eligible age for voting in a federal election was lowered to 18.</p> <p>The <i>Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act 1975</i> (Cth) became effective. In July 1975, a new scheme of medical and hospital benefits called Medibank came into operation. Australians were now entitled to free health care.</p>
<b>International Relations</b>	<p>In April 1971, an Australian table-tennis team visited China for the first time. In June 1971, Gough Whitlam led an ALP delegation to meet the foreign minister of China. Not long after, the US president Richard Nixon (1913–94) visited China and met with its leader Mao Zedong. When Gough Whitlam became prime minister in 1972, he formally recognised communist China as a legitimate state, the first time an Australian government had done so.</p> <p>In February 1973, the UK-Australia Trade Pact came to an end. Britain entered the European Economic Community (EEC), and the traditional trade links it had maintained with its previous colonial dominions such as Australia were significantly downgraded. All previous preferential tariff agreements between the two countries were ended.</p>
<b>The Dismissal</b>	<p>During 1974, inflation reached 17 per cent, partly due to large increases in world oil prices and to significant wage increases. Subsequently, the economy went into recession.</p> <p>In February 1975, Australian unemployment figures reached 5.2 per cent, the highest rate since the 1930s Great Depression. Rex Connor, the minister for minerals and energy, attempted to borrow large sums of money through Middle Eastern associates to fund the processing of oil, gas and uranium. This was not the usual practice for securing government loans. When the attempt failed, Connor told federal parliament and the press that the relationship with the intermediary, Khemlani, had ended. It soon became clear that this wasn't the case, and Connor was forced to resign.</p> <p>In the midst of this and other scandals, the opposition Liberal leader Malcolm Fraser (1930–) announced that budget bills would not be passed in the Senate, which was controlled by the Liberal-National Country Party, until an election was called. Whitlam refused, and on the 11 November, governor-general Sir John Kerr (1914–91) dismissed Whitlam and appointed Fraser as interim prime minister. The election held a month later saw Fraser win decisively.</p>
<b>The Vietnam War</b>	<p>In May 1970, more than 150,000 people participated in a moratorium march organised by Dr Jim Cairns (1914–2003) to protest against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War (1962–72). These were the largest street demonstrations in Australia's history. Popular opinion had turned against</p>

the war, and nightly television reports showed graphic footage of the realities of the conflict.

In August 1971, Liberal prime minister William McMahon (1908–88) announced that the majority of the Australian troops serving in Vietnam would be returned home by Christmas. In February 1972, the last RAAF plane on service in Vietnam returned to Australia. After the Australian Labor Party's 1972 election victory, military conscription was immediately abolished and all involvement in the Vietnam conflict was terminated.

The legacy of the Vietnam War provided significant issues for many decades after the war had finished. Many of the veterans returned home with mental and physical problems. Although some were not obviously physically affected by the war, they were in fact deeply traumatised.

## Society and Culture

### Significant events

In 1970, the Victorian government announced that ownership of reserves on land at Lake Tyers and Framlingham would be returned to their local Koorie communities.

The Northern Territory Supreme Court rejected the land rights challenge of the Yirrkala Aboriginal people opposing the mining companies' development of the billion-dollar bauxite deposits on the Gove Peninsula.

In May 1971, Neville Bonner became the first Indigenous Australian elected to sit in the federal parliament.

Harold Thomas, a Luritja man, designed the Aboriginal flag. The elements of the flag, the black, red and yellow represent the Sun, the Earth and Aboriginal peoples.

In July 1971, Evonne Goolagong won the women's title at Wimbledon.

On Australia Day 1972, three Aboriginal men set up an umbrella on the lawns of what is now Old Parliament House with a sign that read 'Aboriginal Embassy' to highlight their sense of dispossession. The structure has become known as the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

Pastor Doug Nicholls became the first Aboriginal person to be knighted in 1976 and became governor of South Australia.

In 1978, Patricia O'Shane was the first Indigenous Australian to graduate in law and become a barrister. A year later, the Aboriginal chairman of the Northern Land Council, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, was named Australian of the Year.

### Environmental issues

In February 1971, the Queensland government approved sand mining on Fraser Island, despite strong protests from conservationists.

In March 1971, the Tasmanian parliament approved the damming of Lake Pedder by the Hydro-Electric Commission. In 1972, the world's first Green Party, the United Tasmania Group (UTG), formed to oppose the flooding of Lake Pedder. Those protesting included Bob Brown, future leader of the Australian Greens. In 1973, Lake Pedder was flooded.

In October 1971, the NSW branch of the Builders' Laborers' Federation (BLF) launched the first-ever union 'green ban' when they refused to work on a building project at Hunters Hill, Sydney, due to concerns it could damage nearby Kellys Bush.

In 1973, a green ban was put on the demolition of houses and the redevelopment of The Rocks area of Sydney by the BLF. Its leader Jack Munday was arrested.

In 1974, Cyclone Tracy devastated Darwin with a loss of life of 65 people.

In October 1979, the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Commission reported on power development in Tasmania and advised that a dam be built across the lower Gordon, Franklin and King rivers in the south-west of the state.

### Women's Liberation

During the 1970s, the women's movement, also described as the second phase of feminism, brought about significant social, political, and economic

<p><b>Movement</b></p>	<p>changes for women. Germaine Greer published <i>The Female Eunuch</i> about the socialisation and oppression of women.</p> <p>In 1972, the first International Women's Day March took place. During this year the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), a national women's lobby group, was formed.</p> <p>In 1973, Elizabeth Reid was appointed the first Women's Advisor by the newly elected Labor government, the first such position in the world. The federal public service received paid maternity leave and equal pay for men and women.</p> <p>In 1975, the United Nations Decade for Women was inaugurated with International Women's Year.</p> <p>In 1976, Elizabeth Evatt was appointed the first female Chief Judge of the Family Court.</p>
<p><b>The Arts</b></p>	<p>In 1973, the federal government paid \$1.3 million for the abstract expressionist painting <i>Blue Poles</i> by Jackson Pollock. At the time, it was the highest price paid for a work of art in Australia. The painting is displayed in the National Gallery of Australia and is presently valued at more than ten times its purchase price.</p> <p>In April 1974, a public opinion poll found that <i>Advance Australia Fair</i> was preferred to <i>God Save the Queen</i> as the national anthem. A change of anthem was instituted shortly after. In 1976, <i>God save the Queen</i> was reinstated as Australia's national anthem by the Fraser government. In May 1977, another poll was held, and found that more than 40 per cent of Australian voters still preferred <i>Advance Australia Fair</i> as the national anthem.</p> <p>In November 1974, ABC-TV launched a new popular music program called <i>Countdown</i>. The show was hosted by Molly Meldrum and was renowned for hosting local and international music artists.</p> <p>In October 1975, Margaret Throsby became the first woman to read the main ABC radio news bulletin.</p> <p>Patrick White became the first (and so far only) Australian to be awarded the 1973 Nobel prize for literature for his novel, <i>Tree of Man</i>.</p> <p>In 1975, the novel <i>Poor Fellow My Country</i> by Xavier Herbert was published.</p> <p>In 1976, new Batman and Superman titles were reprinted in colour for the first time under a new Planet Comics imprint.</p>

## Science and Technology

### The muscle cars

In 1971, the Ford Falcon GTHO Phase III and the Holden Torana SLR 5000 and XU-1 were released and termed 'muscle cars'. A muscle car is a small to mid-size vehicle body with a large powerful V8 engine replacing the standard one. The car is often remade with special trim, designed for maximum acceleration on the roads or in drag-racing competitions.

Muscle cars, intended for high speed touring and road racing, were different from sports cars, which were generally smaller two-seaters or GTs. Other well-known muscle cars include the Holden Monaro and the Valiant Charger. Packs of playing cards were made using muscle cars as their theme and were collected by children.

### John Shine

Originally from Brisbane, John Shine completed his graduate and postgraduate degrees in biological science at the Australian National University (ANU) in the 1970s. While completing his postgraduate degree, Shine discovered the ribosomal RNA sequence, a molecule similar in many ways to DNA. Shine's discovery led to the development of what became known as the Shine-Dalgarno sequence. This sequence led to important consequences for molecular biology and genetic engineering.

In 1978, after spending some time at the University of California in San Francisco, Shine returned to the ANU. It was during this period at the ANU that he cloned the human rennin gene, and also the human endorphin gene. This has led to him being considered the father of cloning.

### Electronics

In 1975, colour television was introduced to Australia. Pocket calculators and touch phones also became affordable and accessible in the 1970s.

The Intel 8080 microprocessor chip and a follow-on clone, the Zilog Z80, led to the first wave of small business computers in the late 1970s. The rapid advancement of home computers in the 1970s and 1980s gave rise to simple computer games. The computer game *Pong* was released in 1972 for Atari. In 1974, Atari brought out a home version of *Pong* that could be hooked up to any TV set.

In 1975, the term 'personal computer' was coined and in 1977 the Apple Computer Corporation was founded. The Apple II was one of three personal computers launched in 1977.