

The Princes of Ponderosa

Lead-in

What do you know about the Australian constitution? Look at the sentences below. Which are true and which are false?

- 1 It used to be a British colony.
- 2 It is now an independent country.
- 3 It is a republic.
- 4 It is made up of six states, (Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia), and two territories, (Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory).
- 5 It is part of the British Commonwealth.
- 6 It seceded from British control after World War II, and declared independence.
- 7 The head of state is Queen Elizabeth II, who is also queen of the United Kingdom.
- 8 A governor-general is appointed to represent the Queen's interests in Australia.

In what ways is Australia constitutionally different from your country? Tell your partner.

Vocabulary

Look at the words below. They describe the constitutional state of different countries. Match them to the correct definition.

state	nation	principality	republic	empire
territory	kingdom	colony	commonwealth	

- 1 A country ruled by a king or queen. The people in the country are subjects.
- 2 A country ruled by a prince.
- 3 A country ruled by an elected leader – a president. The people are citizens.
- 4 A country with its own land and government, or a people with its own culture and language.
- 5 A number of countries ruled by one person or government.
- 6 An area of land that is officially part of a country but does not have the status of a state.
- 7 A group of countries or states with the same political or economic interests.
- 8 A region of a federal country that has its own government for some matters.
- 9 A country that is being controlled by another country.

What is the constitutional status of the countries below?

Spain South Africa Wales the United States

Reading 1

You are going to read a light-hearted newspaper article about how some Australians have declared their homes, streets or suburbs independent of the Australian government.

Can you think of any advantages of declaring your home, street or village an independent country?

Read the passage. Why, according to the article, do Australians declare their homes and suburbs independent?

The Princes of Ponderosa

David Fickling in Melbourne

Virgilio and Joe Rigoli are unhappy at being brought before a Melbourne court on charges of tax evasion. As self-proclaimed princes of the principality of Ponderosa - a 24-hectare property surrounded by a moat in northern Victoria - they are determined that they will not be governed by Australian law. They secede from Australia with a declaration of independence in 1994. They believe this declaration has freed them from paying tax on A\$4.2m (US\$2.3m) of income over the past 10 years.

The Rigolis are far from alone. According to David Siminton, who styles himself governor of the state of Sherwood in the principality of Camside, Australia has 22 such microstates. They are as varied as the real countries on which they model themselves, and all but a handful have given themselves royal titles. Almost all agree that something is wrong with Australia's constitution, and that the Magna Carta and the Queen's role as head of state have something to do with it.

In 1970 Leonard Casley, a West Australian wheat farmer, declared himself Prince Leonard of the Hutt River Province and since then the micro-nation fad has been growing. One "nation" can be found in the seedy Sydney suburb of King's Cross. George Cruikshank says his two-room flat comprises the territory of the Empire of Atlantium. The nation has its own postage stamps, coinage and flag, and boasts a citizenship of several hundred people in more than 60 countries.

Coin collecting is a major earner for the micro-nation, says Mr. Cruikshank, who is officially known as Emperor George II. Micro-nations have been claimed all over the world, but Australia seems particularly afflicted. There is a tradition to such claims: in the 1930s Western Australia considered seceding from the rest of the country. "It's part of the Australian character," says Mr Cruikshank. "You have this disrespect for authority, a desire not to take things too seriously."

The Guardian Weekly 28-11-2002, page 22

Glossary

Magna Carta = an important English historical document (1215). The point made here is that Australia is still subject to British constitutional history.

Reading 2

Read the passage again and answer the questions. Discuss them with a partner.

- 1 What is Ponderosa
 - a. A big house in its own grounds.
 - b. A suburb of a large city.
 - c. The state of Victoria.

- 2 Why did the Virgilios declare Ponderosa independent?
 - a. They wanted to be princes.
 - b. They wanted to avoid paying tax.
 - c. They are lonely and unhappy.

- 3 What is typical of self-proclaimed micro-states?
 - a. They are all ruled by princes.
 - b. They are all unhappy with the Australian constitution.
 - c. They all live in two-bedroom flats.

- 4 What was Leonard Casley's real job?
 - a. A prince.
 - b. A politician
 - c. A wheat farmer

- 5 How does Emperor George II make most of his money?
 - a. postage stamps
 - b. flags
 - c. coinage

- 5 Why are Australians more likely than other people to declare their homes independent?
 - a. They enjoy being royal.
 - b. They don't respect authority.
 - c. They refuse to pay tax.

Vocabulary in context

Find the words in A in the passage. Match them to the definitions in B.

A	B
a moat	is made up of
self-proclaimed	a short-term fashion
a fad	affected
seedy	water around a castle or palace
comprises	dirty and unpleasant
afflicted	announced by yourself

Follow-up

Imagine that you are going to declare the school an independent country. Answer these questions.

- 1 What are you going to call your new country, and what will its constitutional status be?
- 2 What will your title be?
- 3 What political reasons can you think of for declaring yourself independent? What are you protesting about?
- 4 How will you raise money to pay for services in your new country?

Talk to your partner.

Links

The Guardian Weekly

<http://www.guardianweekly.com>

<http://www.atlantium.org/history.html>

Teacher's notes - The princes of Ponderosa

Lead-in

Start by brainstorming what students know about Australia: kangaroos, Nicole Kidman, cricket, etc. Then put students in groups of three or four to look at the sentences and decide which are true and which are false. Make sure they check and explain the new vocabulary in the sentences.

Answers

- 1 True. Until 1901.
- 2 True.
- 3 False.
- 4 True.
- 5 True.
- 6 False. It seceded from British control gradually during the nineteenth century. In 1901, the states and territories became independent and formed the Commonwealth of Australia, (the official name today), but Australia has never declared independence from Britain, and still shares the same Queen.
- 7 True. Though only nominally – real power lies with the elected Prime Minister and his/her government.
- 8 True.

Ask students in pairs or groups to say in what ways Australia is constitutionally different from their country.

Vocabulary

Ask students to match the words to the correct definition.

Answers

- 1 kingdom
- 2 principality
- 3 republic
- 4 nation
- 5 empire
- 6 territory
- 7 commonwealth
- 8 state
- 9 colony

Ask students in pairs to discuss the constitutional status of the countries.

Answers

Spain = kingdom

South Africa = republic

Wales = principality

the United States = republic/federation of states

Reading 1

Read the introduction as a class, then ask students in pairs to think of advantages of declaring their home, street or village an independent country.

Ask the students to read the passage, and answer the question.

Answer

In general, because it is part of the Australian character; they have this disrespect for authority, a desire not to take things too seriously.

Specifically, to avoid paying tax, complain about the constitution, particularly Queen Elizabeth II's role as head of state, and to make money.

Reading 2

Ask the students to read the passage again and answer the questions. Then discuss them with a partner.

Answers

1a, 2b, 3b, 4c, 5c, 6b.

Vocabulary in context

Ask students in pairs to find the words in A in the passage, then match them to the definitions in B.

Answers

A

a moat

self-proclaimed

a fad

seedy

comprises

afflicted

B

water around a castle or palace

announced by yourself

a short-term fashion

dirty and unpleasant

is made up of

affected

Follow-up

Ask students to think about the questions, then tell a partner about their new country.