

How inventions changed the course of history

Provide your students with a list of great Australian inventions. You might like to visit the Powerhouse Museum - http://www.phm.gov.au/australia_innovates/ where you will find a selection of the most significant innovations developed by Australians in the century since Federation. They are organised into 9 categories (agriculture & food, communications & IT, energy & environment, health, household & clothing, leisure, manufacturing, research and transport).

Questacon - http://www.questacon.edu.au/html/our_clever_country.html also lists stories about innovative Australians and their inventions.

Ask each student to choose one invention (or you could allocate inventions yourself or try a lottery approach). Challenge your students to prepare a presentation with a reasoned and researched argument on why this particular invention was one of the country's most significant.

Their presentation could be in the form of a poster or a five-minute oral presentation (it all depends on the ages of your students). It should cover:

- the important features of the invention;
- how and why it was developed; and
- how the invention impacted on society and the changes that it created.

The oral presentation activity is ideal for older students and could be:

- conducted on a roster basis with students presenting for the first five minutes of selected lessons throughout the term or year; or
- you may wish to set aside a whole lesson or two, after which you can conduct a "peer review" session where there is a class discussion about each of the inventions and a ranking exercise to produce the class's consensus report on which have been the most significant inventions. You could even aim to come up with the 20 most significant inventions for Australia.