

Kritikos

agora reviews

Available online at agora.htav.asn.au/reviews

Books available for review are listed online at agora.htav.asn.au/books



Symbols of Australia: Imagining a Nation

Edited by Melissa Harper and Richard White

November 2021

NewSouth Publishing

448 pp with photographs, paperback

ISBN: 9781742237121

RRP: \$39.99

Reviewed by Kara Taylor, Irymple Secondary College

Symbols of Australia: Imagining a Nation is a great book to read chapter by chapter while reading other books, as us teachers often do. Each chapter is dedicated to a different symbol, opening your eyes to the known and unknown history of both well-known and less-known symbols—the Southern Cross, gum trees, billies, diggers, Australia House and many more.

As each chapter has a different author, the tone changes and writing styles differ so the reader never gets bogged down. In the middle pages are some beautiful coloured photos that also add to the storytelling occurring within the pages. All of these symbols form the narrative of our Australia, showing off our past and present in wonderful detail.

Symbols of Australia: Imagining a Nation is a book not just for educators but for anyone interested in history or our nation's past. It weaves through the many symbols and how they came to be, and historically what their meaning was—which will continue to change as we see ourselves in new ways.

The range of symbols that are looked at by the writers are wide and varied, from before European settlement to the present. The book includes some symbols whose inclusion you might agree or disagree with, such as the pavlova, Holden, baggy green cap and even the 'democracy sausage'—other countries don't seem to understand the importance we place on processed meat wrapped in bread and the debate about whether the onions go on top.

In the classroom this book would be a great example of historical research and using narrative to tell a story about the past and present. Chapters could be used by groups or individuals to look at Australian history in smaller parts or chunks. Students would be able to pick their own symbols as examples, and apply their own ideas to Australian history.

This is a great overall read for the interested reader. While the book seems large, it is a great book to take with you on the way to work, read during a quiet lunch break, or read in the backyard on a restful weekend.

How Have You Engaged Your Students?



Share your successes with other History teachers, and submit an article to *Agora*.

Pitch a Praktikos article of 1200–1500 words outlining activities and strategies HTAV members can adopt to agora@htav.asn.au.