# Teacher Notes - Migration

Migrants have experienced many hardships. One such hardship is the experience of racism. Divide these examples amongst the class or you may use others. Groups discuss what their section reveals about migrant experiences of racism. Groups can then note down other experiences that they are aware of through their own experiences, the experiences of family or friends. The class can then discuss these experiences.

‘The brief was to select people from the Baltic States only, but I was very aware of the fact that Australians generally had a negative attitude to non-English-speaking migrants…the few that were here before were either called “dagos” or “refs” and not in a very friendly way.

(George Kiddle, Immigration Officer) *https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/migrant-experience*

**The importance of British cultural tradition**

‘It is natural that a British country like Australia should seek as many British migrants as possible, and give opportunity to as many British people as possible to migrate to this country. The many non-British migrants who are here recognise and accept this British tradition which is the foundation and basis of the Australian way of life.’

(Hon. Athol Townley, former Minister for Immigration)

*https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/migrant-experience*

But underneath it’s all the lack of understanding by different people of different races.’

(Herbert See Poy) *https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/migrant-experience*

‘Someone ask me, “What’s the difference between dagos and wogs?” I say, “Nothing...twenty years!” That’s progress.’

(George Kakanis) *https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/migrant-experience*

‘People don’t understand. A couple of years ago thirty-one per cent of all migrants who come into this country came from Asian countries. That’s one in three!’ ‘…We’re bringing in people who no doubt are communists. There’s no doubt there’s all sorts of people coming in that shouldn’t be. “Come in please. We’re suckers!” Asians know this!’

(Bruce Ruxton, Victorian President of RSL) *https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/migrant-experience*

After September 11, 2001, whilst everyone was affected, Muslims in the West were doubly affected, and they had to exercise patience and tolerance in the face of racism and prejudice. (Qazi Ashfaq Ahmad, Arrived 1971) *https://immigrationplace.com.au/?post\_type=story&s=racism*

**1950s and 1960s - Reception camps often a tough introduction to life in Australia**  
The migrant ships which brought the immigrants often unloaded them directly to special trains that would take them far from the sea to migrant camps. Many of the immigrants from Europe experienced their first days, months or sometimes years in the various immigration settlement camps established by the government. These camps tended to be segregated, with the British going to the more comfortable and accessible camps, while other Europeans were sent to more distant and primitive locations. The camps were supposed to be temporary places until immigrants could find employment and move on to their first job. One of the most infamous of these camps was at Bonegilla, near Albury Wodonga, on the NSW/Victoria border.  
  
The camps were usually former army or prisoner of war accommodation, and were often made from corrugated iron. They became known as "silver cities", an ironic label which used their physical appearance of rows of huts to reflect on the difficult conditions and cultural shock that many immigrants experienced. These silver cities have become part of the linking memories for immigrants from many European societies - from the DPs (displaced persons) of the 1950s, to the Italian labourers of the 1960s.  
  
Bonegilla Immigration Reception and Training Centre was initially focussed on the DPs who were contracted for two years to any job to which they were assigned by the government. Their past lives were "cancelled" - whether they had been brain surgeons or truck drivers, the men were designated as "labourers", and the women "domestics". The dormitories were all single sex - even married couples were split up. Slowly conditions were improved, though blockages in the labour market meant that employment was often not available for many months. Tensions in the camp sometimes exploded; there were threats of riots in 1952, and real riots in 1961, with armoured cars being called out, and a number of immigrants being arrested. Bonegilla was closed in 1971, after some 300,000 people had been through it.

(Prof Andrew Jakubowicz) *https://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Timeline-Commentary/id/10.A-first-home-for-many-migrants-*

From this point onwards, there were many highs and lows in our lives in Australia, but far more highs than lows. In fact, only very few lows.

We spent a couple of years in regional Victoria in Bairnsdale and after adapting to a world relatively free of discrimination and racism, I faced again some of the very challenges we had escaped from at the local school. It was just in a different form but nevertheless just as harsh. I remember coming home from school completely disheartened and picking up my bike and going for a ride along the river alone just to calm myself. And this was after riding my bike in the morning to do paper round and riding my bike to and from school. Not to mention almost being expelled for retaliating during these episodes of discrimination. This was one of those lows of my life in Australia. (Jayanthan Sivapalan, arrived 1988) *https://immigrationplace.com.au/?post\_type=story&s=racism*

Coming from Northern Italy to the Wheatbelt was a shock that Olga repeatedly said nearly killed her. To come to the unimaginable heat of the WA Wheatbelt, living in a tin shed, not comprehending the language, the customs, the food, or the racism, was almost too much for her. It hardened her, this desperate clinging to life, of making sure that, against the odds, her children would flourish. (Olga Paccagnella,arrived 1950) *https://immigrationplace.com.au/?post\_type=story&s=racism*

A lot of people call me wog, a lot of people told me go back to my country …. In the taxi some people …. ask me how many houses? (Youssef Eid, arrived 1965) *https://museumsvictoria.com.au/website/immigrationmuseum/discoverycentre/immigrant-stories/eid-brothers/new-australians/index.html*

No Australians wanted families especially the odd New Australians who did not speak English. Adult Displaced Persons (us) were indentured to work for 2 years to pay off our grim passage to freedom, hence father digging holes; mother in jam factory and Lucy 16 (adult age then 21) could not study, had to work. At 12, I had to feed and look after little sister and father, as mother worked long hours. Father bought block of land with two roomed shed for sleeping and small wooden hut as kitchen/dining room. Toilet was hole in back of block, small tub to wash us and clothes. Life was still a struggle. Father started building house without any previous experience. The digging and hard work took their toll and father ruined his back.

In my first school, I failed last three months. Children took me outside to teach me English. Next year determined, I came second and thereafter was always first or second. Little Vera in junior primary was crying. I came to sit with her, was told off, but ignored it and they left me alone. I have always been very determined in my life, especially at any injustices. Goodwood Primary School was wonderful and I was a favourite with teachers, even though my teacher would sneeze Ah-choo at my Surname. In 1950 was a lot of racism, intolerance, unfair treatment of migrants at work. It was WOG then, now it is the black races which are suffering from small minded, bigoted, intolerant and ignorant people. (Olga Iszczyszyn, arrived in 1950) *https://immigrationplace.com.au/?post\_type=story&s=racism*

Then I went to school in Maribynong and this this was where my nightmare started. I was the victim of racism and bullying, and this racism continued even in my working life. Racism is now not as bad but it does still exist. (Amleto Conticello, arrived 1969) *https://immigrationplace.com.au/?post\_type=story&s=racism*

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |