The year 2007 marks the centenary of surf lifesaving in Australia and has been designated the Year of the Surf Lifesaver. To celebrate this milestone in Australian social history, the National Museum of Australia developed an exhibition entitled *Between the Flags: 100 Years of Surf Lifesaving*. The exhibition opened at the Museum in 2006 and will travel to venues around Australia throughout 2007 and 2008.

**How to use the package**

This education package contains teachers’ notes, audiovisual resources and activities that can be adapted for Years 4–10. It can be used as a stand-alone resource, to explore the place of surf lifesaving in Australian social and cultural history, or in conjunction with a visit to *Between the Flags: 100 Years of Surf Lifesaving*.

The package is designed to be flexible and provides a set of teachers’ notes and activities for each exhibition theme, which address SOSE/HSIE, History, Health and Physical Education and Arts curricula. The package also contains a DVD which includes interviews with surf lifesavers and archival footage that can be used in classroom activities.

**Contents**

- Introduction
- Rips, rescues, relaxation and riots: Australian beach culture
- Samurais of the surf: Being a surf lifesaver
- Winning against the wind and waves: The sport of surf lifesaving
- A wave of ideas: The development of lifesaving technology
- Going global: Exporting Australian surf lifesaving
- Bronzed Aussie gods: Surf lifesavers
- Glossary
- References and resources

**On the DVD**

1. Surf lifesavers’ stories
   - Interviews with surf lifesavers featured in the *Between the Flags* exhibition
2. Surf patrol
   - A documentary produced in 1948 by the Australian National Film Board
3. At the beach
   - Australians talk about surf lifesaving
100 years of surf lifesaving: An overview

As the popularity of ‘surf bathing’ increased in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so did the drowning deaths at Australian beaches. In response, bathing enthusiasts began to organise themselves to provide lifesaving equipment and training. Groups and clubs sprang up around the country, some driven by local councils; some affiliated with the Royal Life Saving or Humane societies. As safety increased, so did the numbers of bathers and, correspondingly, the need for more people to safeguard the beaches and provide better facilities for the growing number of clubs. The New South Wales (NSW) Surf Bathing Association was formed in 1907 and by 1923 had become the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA). Groups from all over Australia became affiliates, and rescue methods for Australian conditions developed rapidly. Now known as Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA), in 2007 it celebrates 100 years of surf lifesaving in Australia.

From the earliest days, surf clubs held surf lifesaving competitions, promoted the sporting benefits of membership and the skills of lifesavers, and demonstrated techniques and equipment. Surf carnivals attracted the public and grew into large, spectacular public events often with thousands of spectators. Carnival events included surf and belt races, beach sprints, rescue and resuscitation, surfboat races, novelty events and colourful military style march-pasts. The competitions attracted both membership and sponsors, and began to carve a place in the national psyche. Carnivals became huge showcase events, staged to mark major celebrations like the sesquicentenary, the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and royal visits. In 1956, during the time of the Melbourne Olympic Games, over 70,000 spectators watched the international surf carnival at Torquay in Victoria. The lifesaver began to supersede other mythic figures such as the digger and the bush pioneer. Meanwhile, women were largely excluded from surf lifesaving throughout most of the twentieth century. Given the opportunity, women demonstrated their ability, often meeting the training requirements and bronze medallion standards, but were still ineligible for the award. Considered weak and unsuited for patrol work, they were entitled only to associate membership and were usually responsible for fundraising and social events.

Broad social change during the 1960s and 1970s made an impact on surf lifesaving on a variety of fronts. Traditional values were being questioned, and clashes between surfers and lifesavers, growing professionalism in sport, diminishing volunteer numbers and increasing financial burdens all brought considerable pressure to bear on the organisation at local and national levels. Some forecast the demise of the movement but a raft of changes in the 1970s and 1980s boosted membership, revived both the sport and community support for surf lifesaving and increased media interest. Women were admitted to full membership in 1980 and today make up 43 per cent of members. The Nippers program recruited pre-teens and shifted the lifesaving culture towards more family participation. Technological advances brought changes to rescue methods that highlighted individual skills and diminished the need for large-scale team work. The ironman events, introduced in the 1960s, began attracting considerable prize money and became professional in the 1980s. The changes were, for a time at least, a mixed blessing for surf lifesaving.

By the 1990s, SLSA had begun to grow again and had developed a strong family culture. Today, surf lifesaving continues to evolve while also maintaining strong links with tradition. With almost half its membership under the age of 25, the future looks promising. SLSA is working to broaden its links with cultural groups that traditionally have not been involved in surf lifesaving. Events such as the surfboat and belt races and the march-past are still contested alongside modern events such as tube rescues and inflatable rescue boat (IRB) rescues. Surf lifesaving’s national championships are the largest annual sporting event in the southern hemisphere. Arguably more significant is the fact that, in the past 100 years, Australia’s surf lifesavers have saved more than 500,000 lives. An independent study in 2005 calculated that in that year alone, Australia’s surf lifesavers prevented 485 beach drowning deaths and saved 313 people from permanent incapacitation. In 2006, SLSA had more than 113,000 members, of all ages, in 304 clubs across Australia.
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Surf Lifesavers, Mollymook, New South Wales, 2006. Photo: Dean McNicoll, National Museum of Australia
Acknowledgements

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Teachers may copy material in this package for classroom use.
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RIPS, RESCUES, RELAXATION AND RIOTS: AUSTRALIAN BEACH CULTURE

Australians and the beach

We are a beach-going nation. Over 85 per cent of us live within an hour’s drive of the coast, which is more than 35,000 kilometres in length and includes around 11,000 beaches. On average, our beaches receive about 80 million visits each year. Australian and international visitors descend upon the coast to surf, fish, swim, explore, relax and compete. Tragically some of these visitors struggle with, and succumb to, the power of the surf. It is this notion that has seen many of our beaches change from unguarded and potentially life-threatening environments to places patrolled by members of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA).

Discussion point: Apart from having access to the beach, why do so many of us live close to the coast?

From bans to beach crowds

Early European settlers saw the coast as a raw, untamed place and a bitter reminder of their isolation and ‘transportation’. Swimming usually took place in the sheltered waters of inland waterways. Farm Cove in Sydney was one such location. However even this was perilous. In 1791, Bennelong, a Wangal Aboriginal man who became famous as an intermediary between British and Indigenous people, swam with several others to the rescue of settlers whose boat had overturned.

Gradually, non-Indigenous people began to follow the example of the Indigenous population and took to the water in increasing numbers. This was noticed by the emerging media; the 18 February 1834 edition of the Sydney Gazette announced that ‘bathing is now the favoured recreation in Sydney’. Beaches quickly became a recreational alternative.

The development of seaside spas and resorts in England soon translated to Australia. Beaches around the developing cities were soon the preserve of the upper echelons of society. A shift in social mores in the early twentieth century saw the introduction, in 1838, of a ban on swimming between 6 am and 7 pm. This ban was destined to fail as the lure of the surf compelled a few individuals (often middle-class professionals — doctors, lawyers, clergy and even a school inspector!) to challenge the ban. Eventually it was overtaken, resulting in a rapid increase in the number of beach-goers.

Discussion point: Why were middle-class professionals compelled to challenge the daylight hours swimming ban?

An association is born

With more beach-goers came an increase in drowning. It was soon apparent that unregulated/unpatrolled beaches would claim many lives. In response, surf lifesaving clubs were established at Bondi and Bronte beaches in Sydney in 1906–1907. Initially these clubs were part of the New South Wales Surf Bathing Association which became the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia and, in 1991, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA).

The establishment of surf lifesaving clubs soon spread to other states and territories. As public transport expanded, more people had access to beaches, and all around Australia the need for patrolling lifesavers to protect beach-goers increased dramatically. ‘Black Sunday’ at Bondi Beach on 6 February 1938 was a solemn reminder of the need for surf lifesaving clubs. A rogue wave set swept hundreds out to sea, which led to the rescue of some 250 swimmers. This mass rescue reinforced the importance of establishing surf lifesaving clubs at Australia’s popular beaches.

Balancing recreation and regulation

Coping with larger numbers of beach-goers has meant that SLSA’s role of rescue and regulation has become complex. We often see the beach as a ‘free’ place, where we can relax and express ourselves in many ways. The post-Second World War period in Australia has seen the beach take on a multi-faceted role in our society — playground, sports arena, creative muse and ‘escape hatch’. Underpinning all of this is the reality that the beach may also be a dangerous place. Consequently, SLSA’s task is to allow people to enjoy the beach safely and yet not feel constrained by rules and regulations.

Discussion point: How does SLSA balance regulation and recreation on our beaches?

SLSA reflecting society

Surf lifesavers increasingly reflect contemporary Australian society; they are male and female and are from increasingly diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, recent times have seen them targeted for verbal and physical assault, as occurred in 2005 in Sydney. SLSA has responded to this with a focus on determining the beach-going habits of multicultural Australia and encouraging people of non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds to become part of surf lifesaving activities. Our culture of beach-going is strong; this initiative from SLSA may go a long way toward diminishing all manner of stereotypes on our beaches. It may also contribute to the revitalising of our beaches as ‘neutral’ places that cater to the needs of all who feel the sand beneath their feet.

Did you know? In 1791, Bennelong, a Wangal Aboriginal man who became famous as an intermediary between British and Indigenous people, swam with several others to the rescue of settlers whose boat had overturned.
ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Rockin’ the swells
In the 1960s Australia produced some extraordinary ‘surf music’ bands. The Atlantics were one popular example. Go to www.theatlantics.com and listen to some of their surf rock instrumentals, such as ‘Bombora’. Analyse and discuss the music with the following ideas in mind:
1. Musical elements: Rhythm, timbre, texture, tone, harmony, dynamics, instrumentation, tempo, arrangement and improvisation.
2. Cultural elements: How does the music express the notion of surfing? Why was it popular with teenagers in the 1960s? Why is it instrumental music, with no vocal element? How does it compare with surf music of the era from other countries, such as the Beach Boys in the USA?

Activity 2

Australian beach idol
Ask students to compose and perform a surf rock song of their own. They may like to choose a theme from the beach, such as sunbaking, surfing, beach sports, etc., and try to express it in the music. They may like to add vocals or perhaps compose an instrumental instead. Get them to experiment with the instrumentation; introduce instruments that are not normally associated with ‘surf rock’ and see what effect they have upon the composition and performance.

Activity 3

Read it in the Gazette
The 18 February 1834 edition of the Sydney Gazette reported that ‘bathing is now the favoured recreation in Sydney’. Ask students to imagine that they are a reporter for the 1834 Sydney Gazette; get them to interview a classmate who is to play the role of a non-Indigenous person living in Sydney at that time. The topic is the popularity of swimming in Sydney. What questions will they ask them? What do they think the readers of the 1834 Sydney Gazette would have found interesting in an interview like this? They should keep this in mind as they develop their questions and conduct the interview.

Activity 4

Keeping visitors safe
Australia’s beaches are frequently visited by people of non-English speaking backgrounds. Surf lifesavers may have to communicate with them as part of beach patrol activities. Get them to discuss and record the problems and possible solutions to this situation. They should keep in mind that the goal is to ensure the safety of all beach-goers, regardless of their English language skills.

Activity 5

The art of beach-going
Look at the painting, Australian Beach Pattern, painted during 1938 and 1940 by Charles Meere. Get students to describe the people they see. What types of people are represented in the image? Who is not represented? Why? What does the image say about going to the beach in the 1940s? Compare this image to a contemporary beach scene. What are the similarities and differences?
Did you know? Australia’s surf lifesavers have saved more than 500,000 lives since 1907.
ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

A day in the life of a surf lifesaver
Ask students to research the tasks a surf lifesaver on patrol might have to carry out. As a class, get students to brainstorm the things that could occur while surf lifesavers are on patrol. What are the hazards? What are the highlights?

Conduct a class discussion on the responsibilities a surf lifesaver undertakes when patrolling Australian beaches. Ask students to write a journal entry of their imaginary day as a surf lifesaver. Encourage students to illustrate their entries.

Activity 2

Surf lifesavers: A total makeover
Students have been commissioned to design a new uniform for Australian surf lifesavers. Working in small groups, instruct students to create an appropriate design using either digital imaging software or drawings on paper. Indicate to students that part of their brief is to ensure the uniform is practical as well as attractive. Students should then conduct presentations using PowerPoint or simple graphics to ‘sell’ their ideas. Vote for winners!

Activity 3

Initiation to Australian beaches
Ask students to imagine they have just migrated to Australia and have no experience of surf beaches. What are the dangers? How can surf lifesavers help? Ask students to write a letter home describing their first day at the beach and their first swim in the surf.

Facts to consider: By 2001, 43 per cent of the Australian population was born overseas or had one parent born abroad. Some 16 per cent of Australians don’t speak English at home.

Activity 4

Recruiting surf lifesavers: We want you!
Patrolling the beaches as a surf lifesaver is only one of the many volunteer roles available within Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA). Working in small groups, encourage students to create mind maps of the potential volunteer roles within a surf club. Generate a class list. Still working in groups, ask students to produce a poster recruiting new volunteers for surf lifesavers. Consider what you would include in your recruitment campaign to encourage all types of people — lounge lizards included! Illustrate your posters with images of the different types of roles and people who can become volunteers within surf clubs.

Activity 5

Flotsam and jetsam: An installation of the beach
Note: This activity is for schools within reach of beaches.
Over a period of weeks, ask students to collect things that wash up on Australian beaches. Working in groups, create a small installation on tabletops — have them consider colour, text and spatial issues around the surface they are working on. Using digital cameras, ask students to photograph the installation and digitally enhance these photos to create photomontages representing aspects of the beach.

Activity 6

Profiling surf lifesavers
Ask students to consider the different types of people who volunteer as surf lifesavers. Using magazine cuttings, paint and pastels, ask students to create an A4-size portrait of a surf lifesaver. While each face should be different, they should all be wearing the surf lifesaver’s cap. Combine the pictures to create a large work of art.

Activity 7

Harmony project for Australia’s beaches
On 10 March 2006, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Andrew Robb, launched a $600,000 partnership with SLSA to encourage young people from diverse backgrounds to join the surf lifesaving community and promote community cohesion.

Mr Robb said the living harmony partnership was a response to December 2005’s Cronulla riots in New South Wales.

‘The project will invite young Australians of diverse backgrounds to complete surf lifesaving qualifications and get involved with Australia’s surf lifesaving movement,’ he said.

‘It will use Sydney’s surf lifesaving clubs as a catalyst to draw together different communities. The pilot programs will be based in Sydney but could be rolled out nationally beyond 2006.’

The President of SLSA, Ron Rankin, also enlisted help from other community groups to show young people the volunteer and career opportunities available through sporting and other networks.

Working in small groups, ask students to research the Cronulla beach riots and carefully consider all aspects of the event. Look especially at media reaction; did this help or hinder the situation? Create a list of the ways people use Australian beaches and encourage students to consider how this might sometimes cause conflict. Ask them to suggest solutions that would avoid a repeat of such conflict.

Sport has always been an intrinsic part of surf lifesaving. Patrol members need very high levels of fitness to fulfil their duties safely and effectively. Sporting competitions are an excellent way of promoting the development of those skills. From 1910, lifesavers were required to gain their surf bronze medallion to be admitted to full membership. Carnivals were held to showcase the skills of lifesavers and promote the correct use of equipment. They were modelled on a system of drills, discipline and teamwork, culminating in the colourful spectacle of a military style march-past. These carnivals have drawn crowds since they first began. Public interest reached a high point during the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. As part of the celebrations, an international lifesaving carnival held at Torquay Beach in Victoria attracted over 70,000 people.

Surf sports today

Although new technology has brought changes to surf lifesaving, traditional events such as surfboat and belt races are still popular. Carnivals are held throughout the summer at club, interclub, state, national and international levels. Although the lifesaver’s first role is to protect beachgoers, surf sports are an important part of club participation. Australian surf lifesavers have dominated international competition, winning six out of seven team world championships.

Events are divided into two categories: surf sports, and rescue and resuscitation. Sports events test physical speed, agility, endurance and watercraft skills. Many events comprise a series of tasks or legs. Some events you might not know much about are:

**Beach flags**
A short sprint race starting from a lying position conducted in elimination rounds.

**Cameron relay**
An event for teams of four: one swimmer, two runners and one surfboard paddler. Each competitor races one leg.

**Coolangatta Gold**

**Ironman/woman**
An individual race: swim – surfboard paddle – surf ski – beach sprint.

**Lifesaver relay**
A rescue relay in mixed, multi-age teams of nine: including surfboat crew, a swimmer, surfboard paddler, ski paddler and beach sprinter.

**Surf belt race**
An individual swim race, although it may look like a team event. Each belt swimmer is assisted by four reel-handlers who reel out the line.

**Taplin relay**
An event for teams of six: two swimmers, two surfboard paddlers, two ski paddlers. Each race one leg over the ironman/woman course.

Spectators still flock to surf carnivals and today the SLSA National Championships are the largest annual sporting event in the southern hemisphere, attracting more competitors than the Commonwealth Games. More than 8000 lifesavers, 500 officials and 100,000 spectators are expected to turn out for the 2007 National Championships in Western Australia.

**Discussion point:** Australians are well known sports enthusiasts, but does watching sport make you more or less interested in playing sport?

Competing as a surf lifesaver

Surf lifesaving offers many levels of competition, from weekend participation to professional events for elite athletes. Nippers can compete from 7 years of age. From 15 years, members are eligible to gain the bronze medallion and become patrol members. Members who have fulfilled their patrol obligations can compete in events at age, open or masters level. Surf lifesaving competitors at the elite level train for many hours every week and compete all around the world.

**What is the bronze medallion?**
Candidates for the bronze medallion must have completed a 400-metre swim within 9 minutes. To gain the award they must pass theory and practical tests in fitness, survival, rescue and first aid, and complete a 200-metre run, 200-metre swim and 200-metre run within 8 minutes.

**Discussion point:** What skills and personal qualities do you think characterise an elite sportsperson?

Women and surf sports

Women were involved in lifesaving from as early as 1908 and many formed clubs and participated in competitions. In the 1920s however, they were excluded from competition and barred from receiving the bronze medallion. Despite the ban, women continued to participate in interclub competitions, particularly outside cities, where it was easy to escape the notice of officials. This ended in 1934–1935, when the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA) banned women’s participation in any event conducted by SLSAA or its affiliates. After much lobbying, women were finally admitted as full members in 1980. Today they make up more than 40 per cent of members.

**Discussion point:** There are more than 40,000 Nippers in Australia. That’s almost a third of the members of Surf Life Saving Australia!...
ACTIVITIES

Activity 1
Sport and fitness
Ask students to list as many different types of surf lifesaving activities as they can. As a class, brainstorm the physical fitness requirements for each one. (For example, rowing requires muscle strength in legs, arms, shoulders, back and abdomen, and cardiovascular fitness and endurance.) Ask students to think of simple activities they could undertake to help improve fitness in each category. Make a list of activities that could be carried out easily at school. Choose one or two focus areas for the term and draw up a simple class fitness program.

Extension: Working in groups, ask students to research the indicators for one type of fitness per group and to devise a simple test to measure their fitness.

Activity 2
Beach hazards
Take a trip to a nearby beach or search the internet to find a webcam or good photo of a beach. Ask students to make a sketch map of the beach, showing natural and constructed features and highlighting potential hazards. Think about ocean conditions, hazards on land and dangerous marine animals. Ask students to design safety signs for each hazard. Compare these to the safety signs used by Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) — you will find these on the SLSA website at www.slsa.com.au. Go to the ‘beach safety’ page and look for ‘fact sheets’.

Extension: Ask students to research one type of hazard to find out specific information on the dangers and how to manage them.

Activity 3
Images of the beach
Ask students to think about their experiences at the beach. What is their strongest memory or feeling? Ask them to use this memory or feeling to paint, draw or make a collage using at least one recognisable surf lifesaving image, such as red and yellow flags.

Extension: Ask students to write a poem or short story that relates to their artwork.

Activity 4
Sport and nutrition
Give students some basic information on sport and nutrition. When you are exercising, what you eat is very important. (When you exercise, your body uses up carbohydrate, loses water and salts, and may also use some protein if you are doing endurance training.) Ask students to search the web for information about sports nutrition. The Sports Dietitians Australia website has useful facts sheets at www.sportsdietitians.com.au. You could also look at the Australian Institute of Sport website at www.ais.org.au. Then ask students to write a simple nutrition plan for themselves, based on what they have learned and on their own sport and exercise routine.

Activity 5
Sport in society
Discuss the athlete’s role in Australian society. Ask students which athletes they admire and why. What happens when we apply terms like ‘role model’, ‘celebrity’, ‘legend’ and ‘star’ to sportspeople? Does it change what we expect of them? Ask students to research a sportsperson who competed during the last century and a sportsperson competing in the same field today. Ask students to write a report examining the achievements of each and the changes that have taken place between the historical and modern eras.

Activity 6
Women in sport
In 2006, the Australian Parliament held a Senate Inquiry into Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia which heard many comments on the inequalities between men and women in funding, sponsorship, media coverage and leadership. Ask students to cut out newspaper articles and watch the television news each day for a week, tallying the stories on men and women in sport. Have them tally their findings. Hold a class debate on the topic ‘It should be compulsory for media to give equal coverage to men’s and women’s sport’.

Photo: Dean McNicoll, National Museum of Australia
A WAVE OF IDEAS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SURF LIFESAVING TECHNOLOGY

A battle with the elements

The early days of surf lifesaving saw a limited range of techniques and equipment being used. The ‘human chain’ was an ungainly and dangerous method of rescue; it was soon replaced by the first version of the line and surf-reel. This device was developed in 1907 by John Bond, Lyster Ormsby and Percy Flynn of Sydney’s Bondi Beach Surf Bathers’ Life Saving Club.

Walter Biddell of Sydney’s Bronte Beach Surf Life Saving Brigade organised the purchase of a surfboat (of heavy wooden construction), lookout tower and shark bell in 1907. He also developed a torpedo-like lifebuoy which, in some surf conditions, was better than the line and reel but was not suited to rough conditions. Biddell also invented a cork surf belt and a three-person surfboat based on two torpedo-like tubes — possibly the ‘ancestor’ of the modern inflatable rescue boat (IRB).

Discussion point: What were the drawbacks of the ‘human chain’ rescue method?

From rockers to EAR

Surf lifesaving resuscitation techniques have followed medical developments in this area of emergency medicine. The Schafer ‘prone pressure’ method was adopted in the early twentieth century. This method relied upon the patient being laid face-down while the rescuer pressed on the patient’s lower back. The technique was designed to force exhalation and drain water from the lungs. Dr Frank Eve devised the Eve Rocker method in the early 1940s; this method incorporated a board that was used in conjunction with the Schafer method. While successful to some extent, the Eve Rocker/Schafer method combination was eventually found to sometimes cause water in the patient’s stomach to drain into their lungs.

Discussion point: What advantages does fibreglass have over wood as a surfboat construction material?

Bytes on the beach

Computer technology has found a vital place in surf lifesaving. An example is the development of emergency response points. These beacon units are designed for use in remote beach locations and can be activated by members of the public. Built-in Global Positioning System (GPS) and radio technology provide vital information to surf lifesavers.

Technology has greatly reduced the ‘people power’ required in rescue operations. The line and surf-reel teams have been replaced by one and two-person teams capable of quicker and more efficient rescue and resuscitation. Beach-goers now enjoy greater levels of safety due to the evolution and application of technology.

Discussion point: In what other ways can technology assist surf lifesavers?

Did you know? During expired air resuscitation (EAR) testing in the 1960s, four lifesavers volunteered to have their breathing stopped under supervised medical conditions so that EAR could be proven to restart a person’s breathing.
ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Technology timeline
Surf lifesaving technology has gone through several stages of development. Construct and illustrate a timeline that shows these stages and identifies the various pieces of equipment developed. Extend this timeline into the next 100 years and predict when and what new forms of technology may be developed.

Activity 2

The breath of life
Examine the physiology of the human lung and determine exactly what happens in the process of drowning. Once you have established this, examine how expired air resuscitation (EAR) can restore breathing. Investigate how modern oxygen supply equipment is used by surf lifesavers in the resuscitation process.

Activity 3

Plucked from the breakers
Get students to create an artwork based upon the theme of ‘the surf rescue’. The work may represent the point of view of the person being rescued or the rescuers. Students should keep in mind that their work may be more powerful if it expresses the force of the surf, the urgency of the rescue and the strong emotions that people may experience in this situation. A related activity is to interpret the theme in class using class members as ‘live’ models. In this way they can be positioned to create a living artwork. Other class members can make a drawing of the result from a variety of viewpoints (remember to make sure the poses aren’t too difficult to hold for a few minutes!).

Activity 4

Walter’s inventions under scrutiny
Ask students to imagine that they are Walter Biddell, inventor of the cork surf belt and torpedo-like lifebuoy in the early 1900s. Students are to present these ideas to a panel of members of the Bronte Beach Surf Life Saving Brigade, who are judging them as possible equipment for the brigade. Using a combination of drawings and verbal presentation, students need to convince the panel that their inventions are essential items for surf lifesaving. If possible, record the presentation with a video camera. You may like to add to the activity by having all participants dress in ‘period’ costume. Discuss who from the 1900s Bronte Beach Surf Life Saving Brigade would be likely to be on the panel and why they would have been chosen for such an activity.

Activity 5

Inflatable muscles
Inflatable rescue boats (IRBs) have a crew of two people who engage in a variety of physical activities, such as launching the craft, controlling it in the surf and lifting people on board during rescues. Examine these and any other physical activities associated with operating the IRBs and compile a list of strength/flexibility exercises that may assist the crews in developing specific physical fitness for their roles. Aim for a list that is suitable for both the gym and the beach.
GOING GLOBAL: EXPORTING AUSTRALIAN SURF LIFESAVING

In Australia today, surf lifesavers are an everyday part of the summer landscape, but Australian surf lifesaving also has a long history of making its mark around the world. The movement leads the way in rescue, resuscitation and first aid techniques, and has gained international recognition in some remarkable places.

Early days

The First World War decimated many newly formed surf lifesaving clubs but, after the war, administrators travelled overseas looking for the newest methods and equipment to help develop the Australian service. By then, Australia was already taking the lead and was sought after to help establish associations and train lifesavers around the world. Australia’s first representative surf lifesaving team went to New Zealand in 1937. Hawaiian surfers were a major influence on lifesaving practice and the first international competition, the Pacific Games, was held in Honolulu in 1939.

International twist of fate

When war broke out in 1939, about 50 per cent of lifesaving members signed up in the first year and they found opportunities to use their skills in unexpected places. After several British drownings in Palestine, beach patrols were formed in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Training continued even while bullets whizzed overhead and, in 1941, a surf carnival was held on Gaza beach complete with flags, caps and a march-past. Surf lifesaving also became important for recreation and morale. Diggers set up a surf club in the Changi prisoner-of-war camp, under the leadership of SLSA’s longest serving president, Adrian Curlewis. POWs trained in secret for the bronze medallion and conducted exams in the mud with a makeshift reel made from a stolen clothes line. Eight clubs were also established at Aitape, New Guinea, and sailors on the HMAS Sydney established nine squads, all of whom passed their bronze medallion exam. The HMAS Sydney squads hoped to adapt Australian rescue and resuscitation methods for sea rescues and showcase them among their international naval colleagues. Several United States military police stationed in Queensland also completed their bronze medallion training.

Discussion points: Why do you think there is such a strong association between surf lifesaving and the armed forces?

Going global

After the Second World War, Australian support helped establish the Surf Life Saving Association of Great Britain, and Australia also took a leading role in establishing international standards and competition. In 1956, an international surf carnival was held at Torquay, Victoria, to coincide with the Olympic Games. Teams attended from Great Britain, the United States (USA), New Zealand, South Africa and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and, following the event, formed the International Council of Surf Lifesaving (ICSL). The USA did not have a national association but sent teams from California and Hawai’i. After seeing the Australian model, the group from the USA decided to establish their own national organisation, based on the Australian structure, which was eventually formed in 1965. In 1971, Australia was a founding member of World Life Saving (WLS) with Great Britain, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA. Australians have also assisted in developing surf lifesaving associations in the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and South America to name just a few places. WLS joined a European organisation to become the International Life Saving Federation, which today includes more than 60 member organisations. SLSA continues to have a leading role.

Into the twenty-first century

In the 1980s, Australia began to focus on international training and development in Asia. Today, SLSA plays a significant role with the Japan Lifesaving Association. Many individual Australian clubs also arrange international exchanges. Examples of exchange partners include Nova Scotia, Canada (which launched Canada’s first lifesaving competition series, based on Australia’s Kellogg’s Nutri-Grain Surf League); South Africa (where Australian members are working to establish clubs, train lifesavers and educate people in villages along the remote Wild Coast); and Japan (which hosted the Sanyo Bussan International Surf Challenge in 2006 and participates in annual exchange programs).

Discussion point: What sort of things do you think Australian surf lifesavers learn from sharing their expertise overseas?

Australian lifesavers continue to establish clubs far from home, and in 2003 the Baghdad Surf Life Saving Club was formed by members of the Australian Defence Force in Iraq. Australian surf lifesaving leads the world in coastal research on aquatic animals, marine hazards, resuscitation and first aid techniques. Australians are also still at the forefront in training and international competition. In 2006, Australians took first place in the seventh World Lifesaving Championships in Lorne, Victoria.

Did you know? In 2004, red and yellow beach flags were adopted as the international standard, marking the safest place to swim at the beach.
ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

**International rescue**
Ask students to work in groups to research Australian contributions to international surf lifesaving. Ask each group to look at one decade, from the beginnings of the movement in the early twentieth century. Ask students to create a poster, highlighting one significant place or partnership. The posters can then form a visual timeline of surf lifesaving’s international outreach.

Activity 2

**Heroes at home and abroad**
Ask students to research the experiences of surf lifesavers during wartime. Then ask them to imagine themselves stationed in a war zone, far from home. Ask them to write a series of journal entries, including some entries that relate to a rescue. They may take the role of a surf lifesaver or someone without lifesaving experience, to write the journal.

Activity 3

**Community consciousness**
Ask students to work in groups to research a community organisation and give a presentation to the class. Ask groups to find out about the organisation’s history, aims, core activities, membership and important achievements.

Extension: Find a community organisation in your area and arrange to do some volunteer work (fundraising, tree planting, a clean-up, etc.) as a class.

Activity 4

**Laughing in the face of danger**
Ask students to read the poem ‘The Surfers’ March’ by Leslie Greener. Discuss the elements of the poem, the language, tone, structure and its purpose. Ask students: Why did the poet write this poem? What was he trying to achieve? Do you think he was successful? Ask students to work in groups to tell a story using verse, drama and humour.

Activity 5

**Coastal research**
Ask students to search the internet to find out what kind of research is being done on Australia’s coastal environment. The CSIRO website www.csiro.au and CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research website www.cmar.csiro.au are good places to start. Ask students to choose one area of current research to explore in greater depth and give a 10-minute report to the class.

Activity 6

**Surf lifesaving goes global**
Ask students to develop a symbol or logo that represents Australian surf lifesaving expertise overseas. Ask them to search the internet for places where there are links with Australia, and to create a world map, identifying each place using the logo.
An icon emerges
The history of surf lifesaving in Australia extends back 100 years to
just after the Federation of Australia. The tough, quiet stockman
and the heroic digger had been symbols that emphasised mateship
and bravery, but with Australia’s increasing urbanisation along the coastal
fringe of the country, there was a need for a new type of ‘hero’. Enter
the surf lifesaver, a figure who was to become one of the most easily
identifiable symbols of nationhood. Like the digger and the bushman,
the surf lifesaver represented the young nation’s determination to tame
nature in the spirit of voluntary self-sacrifice.

Discussion point: What is a national icon?

‘Shooting the breakers’
After the ban on swimming during daylight hours was lifted around
Australia from the early 1900s, surfing became a popular national
pastime. In the nation’s search for a unique identity, ‘body surfing
or ‘shooting the breakers’ became an important part of the national
image. Australians were increasingly seen as a healthy, athletic
people, free from the constraints of the colder, northern hemisphere
and ‘woower’ attitudes. The beach became a way of life, and surfing
a part of what it was to be an Australian.

Asserting an Australian identity
Every nation has its mythical figures, and surf lifesaving was seen as
a means through which an Australian identity could be asserted. As
early as 1924, Australian lifesavers were featured at the British Empire
Exhibition at Wembley. This unique representation of identity continued
at the 1937 Paris Exposition and at the 1939 New York World’s Fair.
In the ‘lifesaver’, Australians were able to identify nationhood with an
ideal type of heroic manhood.

Discussion point: What aspects of surf lifesavers lend themselves to
iconic stature?

Promoting Australia
The surf lifesaver also proved a popular and effective icon for
advertisers, who were fully aware of the sex appeal of the bronzed
young men who patrolled the beach. In the 1920s, lifesavers
provided a way of presenting the body without offence, and by the
1930s, the Australian Tourist Association used images of lifesavers
to promote international travel. Lifesavers were also used to promote
everything from hair products to cigarettes, from soaps to gin, and
even headache powders.

Discussion point: What image comes to mind today when you think
of surf lifesavers patrolling our beaches?

Women in SLSA
Until the 1980s, women were unable to become surf lifesavers as it
was believed they were not strong enough to carry or use the rescue
equipment. The prohibition of women further enhanced the notion
that surf lifesaving was dangerous and that Surf Life Saving Australia
(SLSA), with its strict membership guidelines, was the organisation best
suited to protect the public interest at the beach.

Discussion point: How do you think women’s roles have changed over
the past 100 years in the surf lifesaving movement?

Community perceptions
SLSA states that part of its community role is ‘the articulation of
an Australian image’. After research disclosed that the majority of
lifesavers come from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, SLSA began to
encourage Australians from diverse ethnic backgrounds to join its many
surf clubs, allowing it to better represent and serve the needs of all
Australians visiting the beach.

Surf lifesaver Doug McGhie, from Western Australia, initiated a
successful program through Nippers that encouraged young migrant
children to become actively involved in SLSA. ‘We have kids from
China, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Korea, Iraq, Iran, and
Afghanistan. We’ve had children from France, Belgium, Yugoslavia,
Turkey, Czechoslovakia — really, absolutely everywhere. And they all
have a go,’ said McGhie.

So while the media continue to represent lifesavers as glamorous
specimens of health and fitness, the organisation now welcomes
members of all shapes, sizes, religions and cultural backgrounds to
help with safety on the beach.

Discussion point: Why do you think Australians from different migrant
backgrounds might not join up as surf lifesavers?

Did you know? During the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, the first international surf carnival was held at Torquay Beach. The event drew
crowds as large as any of the Olympic events in Melbourne, with 70,000 people packed onto the beach to watch more than 2000 surf
lifesavers in action. The Melbourne newspapers proclaimed the arrival of ‘Olympic sun gods’, who thrilled the crowd with daring surfboat riding!
ACTIVITIES

Activity 1
**Calling all curators!**
Ask students to bring in anything they have at home related to surf lifesaving: old photos, articles, costumes, T-shirts, caps, etc. Create an exhibition in the corner of the classroom on surf lifesaving. Ask students to consider what is primary and secondary evidence. Ask them what the display could say about surf lifesaving and how they can present this with the objects they have.

Activity 2
**Creating an icon: Surf lifesavers as portrayed in film**
Have your class watch the Michael Edgely film *The Coolangatta Gold* (1984). Critique the film. Discuss the aspects of surf lifesaving it covers and those it does not. What image does it create of Australians?

Activity 3
**The surf lifesaving initiative**
Surf Life Saving Australia offers training courses in the inner suburbs for kids who don’t feel comfortable or welcome in the clubs. The goal is to raise minority representation in surf lifesaving above 5 per cent. Ask students to brainstorm ways they could encourage inner suburban kids to become more involved or connected to surf lifesaving clubs? What activities could be initiated in the suburbs to create greater understanding of beach safety issues?

Activity 4
**Body mapping**
On a large sheet of paper, trace around two students lying in a pose appropriate to a surf lifesaver on patrol. Get students to design smart costumes for them. Using brightly coloured pencils, students fill the rest of the figure with as many words as they can think of that have some association with surf lifesaving.

Activity 5
**Journals of a surf lifesaver**
Ask students to imagine being a surf lifesaver during summer — taking away the flags at the end of a long day on patrol. What does the beach look like, what does it smell like, what can you hear, what does the sand feel like under your feet, what is the coastal breeze like on your face? What is the surf like as you enter it for one last swim, what is the temperature like, can you taste the salt in your mouth? Create a painting or collage that captures the sensory qualities of the relationship between the beach and the surf lifesaver at the end of a long day on patrol.

Activity 6
**Beach textures**
Get students to make rubbings of patterns found within the school environment, on bricks, fence palings, playground equipment, etc. These are then cut out and pasted into a beach scene — complete with safety flags.

Activity 7
**An Australian icon — a light-hearted look**
Using photos found on the web or in magazines as references, students create a caricature of surf lifesavers on patrol, depicting an amusing scenario.

Activity 8
**Read all about it!**
Get students to design the front page of a newspaper, complete with headline, to depict an exciting rescue by a surf lifesaver on patrol. Ask them to write a short report and illustrate the page.

Activity 9
**Sharing the sand**
Students consider what they enjoy about visits to the beach. What activities do they like to participate in — building sandcastles, playing volleyball, bodysurfing, boogie boarding or lying on the sand reading a book? Starting with the iconic red and yellow surf lifesaving flag, students create an artwork inspired by their experience of the beach. The artwork can be created in a variety of media — photography, collage, acrylic, watercolour, oil pastels, etc. This activity provides students with an opportunity to reflect on how we share our beaches with communities who might use the beach in different ways.
Bronze medallion
Minimum training standard for qualified surf lifesavers.

Clubbie
Term (sometimes derogatory) used by surfboard riders and others to identify surf lifesavers belonging to an official SLSA club.

Defibrillator
A medical device designed to provide an electric shock to a person whose heart has stopped beating. The shock clears all electric activity in the heart and allows the normal contractions to re-establish, which in turn promotes the return of regular blood circulation.

Digger
Term coined in the First World War by Australians and New Zealanders to describe soldiers.

Duck
Slang term for an inflatable rescue boat (IRB), derived from ‘rubber duckie’.

Human chain
Pre line-and-surf-reel method of surf rescue in which people link arms and form a chain in an attempt to reach those in distress in the surf.

Icon
A religious devotional painting or a person regarded with great admiration or as a representative symbol.

IRB
Inflatable rescue boat used by SLSA for surf rescues and other activities.

Lifebuoy
A support for keeping a person afloat in water.

Nipper
Boy or girl aged between 7 and 13 years involved in SLSA training programs and activities.

Quad
Four-wheeled motorbike used by SLSA surf patrol members to transport emergency equipment, surf lifesavers and rescued swimmers on beaches.

Resuscitation
The act of reviving from unconsciousness.

Wave set
Two or more waves that arrive in rapid succession. Large sets can often cause difficult conditions for swimmers.
REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

References


Maxwell, C Bede, Surf: Australians Against the Sea, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1949.

Surf Life Saving Australia website www.slsa.asn.au

Resources


**Literature and film**


*Bronzed Aussie Gods: A Celebration of Australian Beach Culture*, 1999, video recording VHS, 54 minutes, Light Source Films, Byron Bay, NSW.

**Poetry**


**Literature for children and young adults**


Kerr, Melinda & Skarratt, Jane, *The Tipper Series: Tipper Becomes a Nipper; Tipper the Nipper Counts to Ten; Tipper the Nipper Gets Nipped; Tipper the Nipper Gets Rescued*, Lothian, Port Melbourne, 2001.


**Websites**

Australian Government Culture and Recreation portal
www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/surflifesaving/

Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage

CSIRO
www.csiro.au/

CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research
www.cmar.csiro.au/

International Life Saving Federation
www.ilsf.org/

South Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage — Education
www.denr.sa.gov.au/reporting/education/

Surf Life Saving Australia
www.slsa.asn.au/

Surf Life Saving New South Wales

Surf Life Saving Northern Territory

Surf Life Saving Queensland

Surf Life Saving South Australia

Surf Life Saving Tasmania
www.slst.asn.au/

Surf Life Saving Victoria

Surf Life Saving Western Australia