

ACTIVITY 3

What does a study of the Miss Australia competition tell us about social change in the 1940s?

When the Miss Australia competition re-emerged in 1945, it took on a new role as a charitable fundraising event for various war charities, including war veterans' appeals and Legacy. For the first time entrants had to raise a certain amount of money for charity as an entry fee. Yearly contests were staged from 1946–1949.

- 1 What image of Australian womanhood do these publications promote?

From the 1940s, greater emphasis was placed on the role of Miss Australia winners as — unofficial — ambassadors for the nation, and on their duties as promoters of Australian products abroad.

Source 1 Promotional pamphlet for the 1949 Miss Australia Quest



Source 2 Detail from promotional pamphlet for the 1949 Miss Australia Quest

Proceeds were to go to Legacy and the Lord Mayor's Fund for Metropolitan Hospitals and charities. Note the range of suggested activities in the illustrations.

Source 3 Miss Australia Quest Information brochure, 1946

In carefully selecting from the ranks of Australia's young women one who will carry abroad the mantle of her Country's title and glorify the Australian girl, we are sending abroad a spokeswoman who, it is hoped, will visit the Motherland as a true representative of the sunny part of the British Empire which bred her, and who will link our hand of friendship across the Pacific with that of our great ally, America. On both sides of the Pacific Ocean, we speak the British tongue.

Source 4 Letter to Prime Minister Ben Chifley, 1945

... An appeal is being made for an Australian girl typifying the radiant beauty and fresh out-of-doors life of our sunny land, in an endeavour to choose a Miss Australia who may go forth as a true ambassador for her country, with her trim figure dressed in Australian wool, our greatest product.

Author unknown. National Archives of Australia, Prime Minister's Department. A1608/1, Miss Australia Competition, 1945–1945, 204562, 16/13/400.

On loan from Sophie Jensen. Photograph by George Serras



- 2 What does it tell you about the writer's view of Australian national identity?
- 3 Why might a Miss Australia be in a position to promote Australian products overseas?
- 4 Look at your summary table on pages 8–9. Make brief notes on any aspects you can for the 1940s.