

In the previous activity you were asked to make a list of events as you thought of them — a timeline.

But what happens when you make choices and put some together to create a message or show some pattern?

**1** Look at the following sets of information about certain decades from the period you are considering. **If this was the only information you had about Australian history**, what messages do you think each is giving you about that history? One example has been done as an illustration of the process.

### Set 1

1940s	Start of Australia's post-war immigration program, drawing on people from all parts of Europe.
1950s	Immigrant workers successfully work together to build the Snowy Mountains Scheme.
1960s	The book and film <i>They're a Weird Mob</i> provide a positive image of the willingness of immigrants to fit into and contribute to Australian society.

The theme that clearly comes through this selection of events is **immigration**.

But it is more than that — the way the ideas are expressed shows that the person creating this timeline believes in the **value of multiculturalism**. So the message of this timeline is that **since the 1940s Australia has been developing a successful multicultural society**. It does not say that explicitly, but this is the underlying message that comes through that particular selection. In this case the representation of Australian history being presented is that we are a successful multicultural society.

One viewer of this timeline might agree, and say this is a fair and accurate representation of the period. Another viewer, however, might be critical of it, and say that this timeline does not fairly represent any of the problems and difficulties that immigration has created in Australian society — such as some examples of people discriminating against newcomers, or of ethnic groups within Australia sometimes behaving violently towards each other, or of the struggle that many immigrants have had before they can 'make good'.

Both viewers are looking at the same display, but are interpreting or judging it according to their different values.

Now decide what you think are the messages behind the next two sets of representations.

### Set 2

1960s	Economic development and progress of Australia under the Liberal-Country Party coalition.
1970s	Sacking of the Whitlam Labor Government after a series of scandals and illegal loans.
1980s	Expansion of the mining industry creates huge export earnings for Australia.

**2** What are the economic and political attitudes reflected in the set? What are the messages this timeline gives a viewer? How would you describe this representation of Australian history? Who might object to this representation, and why?

### Set 3

1960s	Increased involvement of Australian troops in the Vietnam War, supporting the corrupt government of the South against the desire of the North to unify the country.
1970s	End of the Vietnam War and of the discriminatory system of compulsory military service for 20-year-old males.
1980s	Bicentenary Celebrations overshadowed by the Indigenous protest march of 26 January 1988.

**3** What are the political and social attitudes in this set? What are the messages this timeline gives a viewer? How would you describe this representation of Australian history? Who might object to this representation, and why?

This exercise raises a number of issues associated with creating a timeline, or any representation of history:

- Why is it necessary to make choices?
- Why is it difficult to make them?
- Are there hidden biases or values that influence your choice or exclusion of elements in your representation — such as a gender bias? Or a racial one? Or an age or class or political one?
- When you have made a selection, why might it be open to criticism?
- Is it OK to be selective and to want to pass on a message in what you do? Or should you always seek to be fair, balanced, impartial and neutral?

**4** Discuss these questions, and keep them in mind as you create your own representation of history later in the unit.