

Commonwealth Day provides a good opportunity for presentations and exhibitions which demonstrate the diversity of environments, cultures and traditions of Commonwealth peoples who together make up a quarter of the world's population. Classroom preparation can take place in Geography, History, English, Social Studies, Religion and Arts and Crafts lessons or, ideally, within an integrated curriculum.

The level of conceptualisation required in this area of study, together with the need for a reasonably flexible structure, make it particularly suitable for primary and infant schools, or for the younger end of the secondary school.

There are two main approaches:

Projects on individual Commonwealth countries

Theme or topic work related to the Commonwealth generally or to a particular region, e.g. Caribbean, Asia, Pacific

Putting topic work in context

The limitation of the country- or topic-based approach is that it does not necessarily of itself lead to an understanding of the Commonwealth as a whole. It demonstrates the diversity but not the 'unity in diversity' of the Commonwealth. If teachers are able to combine this kind of work with some of the activities and information in other sections of this handbook,

pupils should be able to gain a clearer idea of what the Commonwealth means and what it is in practice. In the study of a particular theme or country the Commonwealth connection should anyway be underlined wherever possible.

Two different approaches to celebrating Commonwealth Day



ACTIVITY 1



Level: Primary/lower secondary

Country Projects

It is best to choose countries about which it is relatively easy to find information. Students may work separately on their chosen countries or in small groups on joint projects, or the whole class may work together in studying a particular country. If the whole class studies one country, it is helpful for other classes to take different countries, perhaps from different regions, so that a fair range is covered by the school as a whole and a varied display can be mounted for Commonwealth Day.

The project could include all or some of the following:

Looking at students' own images and stereotypes - establishing their existing perceptions.

Checking their images against some basic geographical and social information.

Looking up equivalent information about their own country and trying to identify similarities and differences. (This comparative approach could be adopted throughout the course of project work.)

Using photographs. Here it is important that wherever possible pictures of countries should balance poverty and affluence, urban and rural, modern and traditional. Encourage a critical approach: Why did the photographer choose to take a particular image? What does the picture not show?

Study of the country's physical and human geography. How people live in the towns and in the rural areas. Homes and homelessness. Food crops and crops grown for export. How people meet basic needs for food and clothing. Learning recipes. Making clothes.

Using short stories, extracts from novels, autobiographical accounts, poems, folk tales.

Study of environmental problems, e.g. soil erosion, drought, air and water pollution, depletion of finite resources.

Learning about the country's wildlife, and the threats to wildlife (plenty of opportunity here for drawings and paintings).

Brief introduction to important historical events (including becoming a member of the Commonwealth).

Learning about the main religions and their effect on the society.

Art and craft work.

Dance, drama and song.

Using nationals

The project will be given a new dimension if a national from the country, or someone who knows the country well, is able to participate in the work and share his or her first-hand knowledge and experience. This too may require a bit of 'detective work'. The Ministry of Education may be able to help with contact addresses for overseas teachers. Churches, hospitals, diplomatic missions, and foreign companies operating locally, are other possible sources.



ACTIVITY 1: CONTINUED

Links across the Commonwealth

The best way of learning about another Commonwealth country is by making direct links. Students can be encouraged to write to pen friends and exchange information, pictures, photos, news etc. Alternatively, or in addition, a special link can be made with a school in another Commonwealth country. The Commonwealth Linking Trust (see page 81) helps put schools in touch with each other and many schools have found this an enriching experience. The following is one teacher's advice:

Starting a link

The essence of a successful school exchange of correspondence lies in the relationship, aims and objectives of the teachers concerned. If a school exchange is to fit into a course containing a wide variety of activities a number of points should be tackled at the outset:

- 1 Each school should try to appreciate the exact relevance of the exchange in the other school's curriculum.
- 2 The actual nature of the exchange should be agreed. (Is it to be a one-to-one pen-friendship, or a general exchange of individual work, or an exchange of group-based project work?)
- 3 The frequency of the exchange should be discussed. Ideally, an actual timetable of delivery dates, preferably for the whole school year, should be agreed upon by both parties.
- 4 The expected duration of the exchange between any two groups or classes should be agreed. One year may well be a suitable initial period.

Exchanging items

Many kinds of items can be exchanged, such as:

- Diaries of life in the two schools/communities
- Copies of school magazines and newsletters
- Tapes of songs and stories, and messages from pupils
- Photographs of students, their families and school activities
- Drawings and paintings of the local environment: people, homes, trees, flowers, animals, insects, everyday scenes
- Small items collected locally: pieces of material for clothing, unusual pebbles, shells, dried leaves and flowers
- Collections of stories, legends and folk tales
- Scrapbooks
- Project material and descriptions of Commonwealth Day celebrations

Points to remember

More generally, it is helpful to:

Make sure that the teachers concerned are fully committed to the undertaking in practice, not merely in theory.

Put the exchange as a first priority. Alter lesson schedules to adapt to the exchange as the need arises.

Be prepared to devote time to preparing the best material from your pupils for the exchange. Hurriedly executed work does not help to establish a good correspondence – or mutual appreciation.

Remember to allow adequate lesson time for the packages received, especially if the exchange is an integral part of a syllabus. Analysis and appreciation of a package can be a lengthy procedure if it is to be worthwhile.

ACTIVITY 1: CONTINUED

Try to link up children of approximately the same age.

Determine at the outset whether the other school is seeking an exchange of visits following the correspondence.

If an eventual exchange of visits is agreed, determine at the outset the exact number of your own pupils interested in accommodating visiting correspondents in their own home. Volunteers sometimes fade into the background when the time arrives.

Keep the exchange school informed about any alterations to the original schedule (e.g. a package being unavoidably late).

It is **not** helpful to:

Promise your pupils anything about the exchange which is not absolutely certain. It can undermine credibility.

Assume that the teacher with whom you have established an exchange is agreeing with your suggestion unless it is actually specified (e.g. that your correspondents are prepared to complete and return the questionnaires devised by your own pupils).

Be too ambitious about how many packages you want to exchange each term. If they are to be the best quality your pupils can achieve, they will take a surprising length of time to put together.

(This list is based on the experience of a teacher who has developed school links.)

On Commonwealth Day

- Country projects will provide the basis for a varied and colourful exhibition of maps, charts, written work, drawings, craft work etc. If a link with a school in another Commonwealth country has been formed, the display can include letters, photographs and other materials received from the link school.
- Dances, songs, and drama can be performed.

Theme or topic work



Almost any theme or topic can be explored cross-culturally and used to demonstrate the diversity that exists within the Commonwealth. Topic work is more valuable if the aim is not merely to 'collect examples' of different customs or facets of life in Commonwealth countries but also to look at the factors that give rise to this diversity. In this way, children are helped to see other cultures as not just different - or worse still, exotic or alien - but as the specific ways in which human beings, who are fundamentally the same in their needs, hopes, abilities and feelings, have responded to the various circumstances and conditions of life they find themselves in.

Topic work is probably best undertaken by the whole class, although individual students can pursue different aspects of the theme.

The topics outlined on the following pages are just a handful from the many ideas that could be explored.

ACTIVITY 1

Level: Primary/lower secondary

Food

Staple foods

Students can find out what kinds of food are grown for local consumption in various Commonwealth countries. The differences and similarities in food preparation in different countries can be examined. What is meant by staple foods? This study can be related to nutrition and eating habits.

Cash crops

Which kinds of food are exported and where to? What is meant by cash crops? Students can collect labels from food products from different Commonwealth countries and stick them on a large world map, relating them to their countries of origin. This work can be supplemented with drawings of the fruit, vegetables, cereal crops, animals etc.

Other ideas

Is there a Commonwealth agricultural expert working locally who could be invited to the school to talk about his or her work to improve agricultural production?

Students can make up a shopping list for family meals in different countries. Where would they get the food? Would they produce it themselves? How would they store it? How would they cook it?

Parents or other people in the community may be able to provide recipes of national dishes from different Commonwealth countries and help the children prepare them.



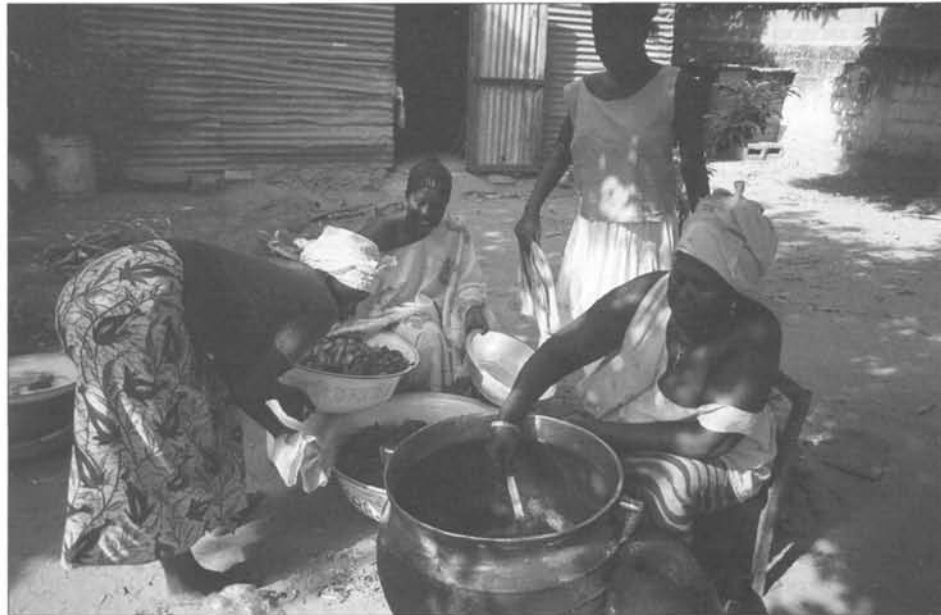
Mixing peppers for 'Jerk Pork' in Jamaica

See also 'Producing healthy food' (page 51).



South Indian snacks

ACTIVITY 1: CONTINUED



Making food in The Gambia



Malaysian food

On Commonwealth Day

- Display project work on food.
- Prepare and eat meals, snacks and drinks from different Commonwealth countries.
- Make a special cake, using ingredients from different Commonwealth countries if possible, and decorate with a Commonwealth symbol or message. Every student in the class should have a slice.

ACTIVITY 2

Level: Primary/lower secondary

Clothes

Find out

Students can find out about clothes worn by different Commonwealth peoples. They can cut out pictures from magazines, look for illustrations and descriptions of clothes in library books (encyclopedias, stories etc.) and make colourful drawings and paintings of them in art classes.

Discuss

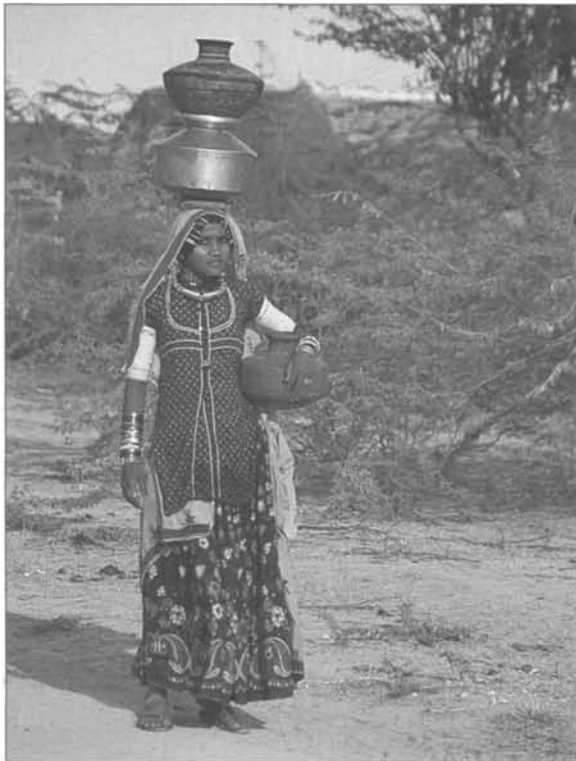
Discuss the design of clothes with children. Look at everyday working clothes as well as clothes for special occasions. In what way are the clothes practical, suitable for particular types of work or for particular weather conditions? Is there any connection between religious belief and the style and design of clothes? How is individuality expressed through the clothes people wear? Compare women's and men's clothing. Discuss the influence of fashion.

Other ideas

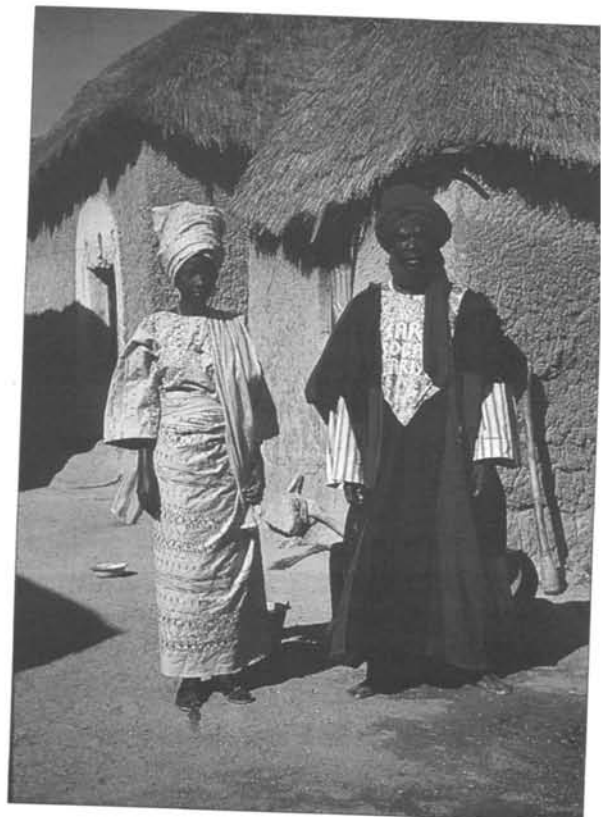
Parents or other people from different Commonwealth countries can be invited to demonstrate how clothes are worn.

Clothes can be made from scraps of cloth, paper, old sheets etc. Use silver foil, bottle tops, seeds and other small objects as jewellery. Experiment with printing, dyeing and embroidery.

Small children may like to dress up dolls and puppets in national dress made from scraps of materials.



Indian woman from Gujarat



A Hausa couple in Nigeria

ACTIVITY 2: CONTINUED



Masai women and child in Kenya

On Commonwealth Day

- Pupils can dress up in the clothes they have made. They can put on a parade for visitors and as each pupil walks across the stage another pupil can briefly explain why the clothes are designed as they are.
- Display project work on Commonwealth clothes.

Maoris host commonwealth arts festival

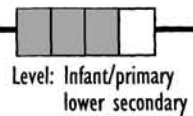
The Commonwealth Arts Festival held in Auckland in January 1990, as an integral part of the Commonwealth Games, was organised in co-operation with the Nga Puna Waihangā, the national organisation of Maori artists, writers and craftspeople.

The Maoris hosted the 19-day festival which reflected both traditional forms and techniques and their contemporary reinterpretation.

Music and dance galas, theatre, film, and exhibitions of ceramics, woodcarving and quilt work were all on offer. One of the highlights was an event given the name of 'Commonwealth Drums', which assembled rhythm, drum and dance performers from all over the Commonwealth.

Adapted from *Commonwealth Currents*, October 1989

ACTIVITY 3



Creative arts

There is plenty of scope for enjoyable learning about the literature, drama, art and music of Commonwealth countries and for attractive presentations on Commonwealth Day.

Folk tales

Younger children will enjoy traditional folk tales from different parts of the Commonwealth. Try to find examples of creation myths, fables, proverbs, animal stories and legends.

Children could make wall friezes, cartoons and paintings to illustrate the stories. Some stories may lend themselves to dramatisation.

Art and craft

Depending on the availability of books and other resources, a study of Commonwealth arts, crafts and architecture could be made. Artefacts brought into the classroom will make the experience more real and immediate. Musical instruments, printing blocks, decorated calabashes, ceremonial objects etc. can be used or experimented with and can also serve as models for many forms of craft work.

Song and dance

Children can learn songs and dances from different Commonwealth countries. As with other themes, it may be possible to invite nationals to teach these to the students.



Pottery class in Tanzania

On Commonwealth Day

- Put on exhibitions and performances.
- Dramatic presentations could combine various art forms. Plays based on Commonwealth stories may include dance and song, and art and craft work may provide some of the props and scenery.

ACTIVITY 4



Level: Secondary

Literature

Through Commonwealth literature students can gain an imaginative insight into other cultures as well as identifying common issues and experiences.

The three literary extracts below illustrate (amongst many other things) some important points about language, about new forms of English and about the place of indigenous languages.

Modern Secrets

Last night I dreamt in Chinese.
Eating Yankee shredded wheat
I said it in English
To a friend who answered
In monosyllables:
All of which I understood.

The dream shrank to its fiction.
I had understood its end
Many years ago. The sallow child
Ate rice from its ricebowl
And hides still in the cupboard
With the china and tea-leaves.

Shirley Lim (Malaysia)

The Lonely Londoners

Cap had a friend in Brighton who had a garage business, who was friending with a French girl. The French girl went back to France and tell she sister how things rosy in Brit'n, and the sister come, and Cap get in with she. This number was a sharp thing and Cap like it more than the regular Austrian. He tell Frenchy how the garage business not doing so well - this time so he give her the impression that he have part ownership in his friend business - and that he would be leaving it and taking up a post with the Nigerian Government. He tell the girl is a better job, and she believe every word he say, partly because his face so innocent, and partly because she can't understand English so well.

Sam Selvon (Trinidad)

On Learning to Be an Indian

My grandmother cannot speak English. I have never discovered whether this is from principle or simply because she has never tried, but she understands it perfectly. In England Mother had kept Premila and me familiar with Hindustani by speaking it to us sometimes when we were home for vacations, and by teaching us Indian songs. So during our first few weeks in Bombay we could both understand the language though we were still too out of practice to try speaking it. Consequently my grandmother and I spoke in different languages to each other. But we got along very easily in spite of it.

Santha Ram Rau (India)

ACTIVITY 5

Level: Infant/primary/secondary

Religions

All the major world religions are practised in the Commonwealth: Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There is also a variety of traditional religions practised in Africa, some of the Pacific islands and among the Australian Aborigines. In Malaysia and Singapore the Chinese communities follow traditional Chinese religion which combines Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and ancestor worship.

Learning

Students can find out which religions are practised in different Commonwealth countries and learn about them. For each religion they should try to find out about: the founder, beliefs, scriptures, worship and main festivals.

Sharing

Within the school or the class there may well be students of different religions, so knowledge can be shared among the students. Local residents may also be able to come and talk about the religions they practise and bring in holy books and artefacts associated with these faiths.

Short extracts from four holy books are provided below:

From the Bhagavad Gita

He sees his soul as one with all beings, and all beings as one with his soul; his soul joined in union, beholding Oneness everywhere. Who sees Me everywhere, and sees all in Me, him I lose not, nor will he lose Me.

The knowledge whereby one eternal nature is perceived in all beings, undivided, though beings are divided, know that knowledge to be of Substance.

Hindu scriptures

From the Metta Sutta (Loving-Kindness)

Whatever living beings there be - feeble or strong, long, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born and those who are to be born - may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded.

Let none deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place. In anger or ill-will let him not wish any harm to another.

Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.

Buddhist scriptures

From the Qur'an

All that is in heaven and earth gives glory to Allah. He is the Mighty, the Wise One.

He is the first and the last, the visible and the unseen. He has knowledge of all things.

He created the heavens and the earth in six days and then mounted his Throne. He knows all that goes into the earth and all that emerges from it, all that comes down from heaven and all that ascends to it. He is with you wherever you are. Allah is cognisant of all your actions.

Islamic scriptures

ACTIVITY 5: CONTINUED

From the Bible

What, then, does the Lord your God ask of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to conform to all his ways, to love him and to serve him with all your heart and soul... The Lord secures justice for widows and orphans, and loves the alien who lives among you... You too must love the alien, for once you lived as aliens.

Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength... Whatever gift each of you may have received, use it in service to one another.

Christian scriptures

On Commonwealth Day

A multi-faith observance can be organised on Commonwealth Day. Traditionally this consists of a procession of flags of Commonwealth countries (in the order determined by the date of membership of the Commonwealth); the national anthem and hymns; readings from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh holy books; affirmations of common faith; prayers from the different religions; and another procession as the flags are borne out.

ACTIVITY 6

Level: Infant/primary/
lower secondary



Australian surfer

Games and sport

Students may be able to find out about various games and sports played in different Commonwealth countries. Which of these have become common in many or all Commonwealth countries or have similarities with games played elsewhere?

Children who come from, or have lived in, other Commonwealth countries could teach some popular children's games to the others.

Project work could be done on the Commonwealth Games: information on notable events, record holders, numbers of competitors etc; drawings of sportsmen and women; surveys of Commonwealth action to prevent sporting links with South Africa.



ACTIVITY 6: CONTINUED



Pakistani test cricketer, Imran Khan

The Commonwealth Games

The Commonwealth Games began in 1930 as the 'British Empire Games' and have been held every four years since then. Numbers of competitors have risen from 400 in 1930 to 1583 in 1982. The Games feature up to ten events which always include athletics and swimming - the other eight being selected from archery, badminton, bowls, boxing, canoeing, cycling, fencing, gymnastics, judo, rowing, shooting, table-tennis, weight-lifting and yachting. Contestants must be amateurs and are accommodated in a special Commonwealth Games village for the duration of the Games. A Commonwealth arts festival coinciding with the Games is normally organised by the host country.

The 13th Commonwealth Games was in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1986 and the 14th in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1990. The 15th Games will be held in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in 1994.

On Commonwealth Day

- Young visitors to Commonwealth Day activities (e.g. students' younger brothers and sisters) can be taught children's games from different Commonwealth countries.
- Charts, drawings and written work on the Commonwealth Games can be exhibited.
- The school could hold its own Commonwealth Games with pupils playing the part of athletes from different countries.

ACTIVITY 7



Level: Top junior/secondary

The media

Teachers or students can try to build up a collection of newspapers and magazines from various parts of the Commonwealth. Possible sources are:

- Link schools
- Commonwealth High Commissions in the capital city
- Local residents from other Commonwealth countries
- People travelling to other Commonwealth countries

News and views

Students can go through the newspapers and identify events and concerns of particular importance to the country in question. They can cut out articles and photographs that interest them, paste them on posters and write short comments beside them. They can describe the impression they gain of the country by reading one of its national newspapers.

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A WEEKLY PAPER OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS
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The New Zealand Herald
Classified Advertising - 786-777
Other Departments - 785-808
AUCKLAND, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1989
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ACTIVITY 7: CONTINUED

Students could produce their own newspaper or magazine on Commonwealth affairs and events in member countries. They could write to the Commonwealth Secretariat in London for sample copies of *Commonwealth Currents* (see page 82: Resources) and use these for further information and ideas.

Common concerns What references to other Commonwealth countries can be found in the foreign news sections? (National newspapers in the students' own country can be used in this way too.) What interaction between Commonwealth countries can be identified? Which are the problems that appear most often and what is the Commonwealth's attitude to these problems?

Broadcasting Radio and/or television can also be used as a source of information about the Commonwealth. Students can keep a record of relevant news items and discuss their significance in class. If the external services from countries like Britain, Australia and New Zealand operate in the locality it can be used as a source of information on the region and will also provide some insights into other parts of the world, particularly the Commonwealth.

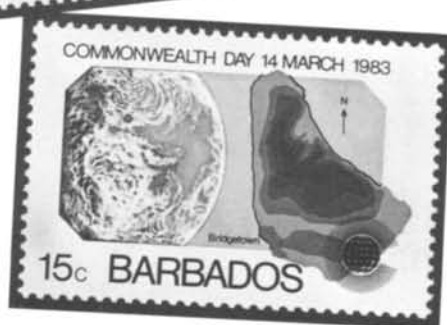
If they have access to a tape recorder, students could make their own 'radio programme' to include a summary of major Commonwealth news items, interviews with local residents from other Commonwealth countries, and interviews with prominent Commonwealth figures (these roles being played by students).

On Commonwealth Day

- Display newspapers and magazines, including those made by the students.
- Produce a live 'radio' or 'TV' show, using a 'phone-in' format or studio audience so that visitors to the school can participate too.

ACTIVITY 8

Level: Infant/primary/secondary



Stamps

Students can collect stamps from Commonwealth countries, including those sent by pen-friends, and make a display, grouping the stamps by region or by theme.

What can be learnt about the different countries by observing the subjects portrayed on the stamps?

Students may be able to find stamps that were specially issued for Commonwealth Day 1983.

They could design Commonwealth Day stamps for their own country, incorporating the Commonwealth symbol and illustrating something of importance either to the particular country or to the Commonwealth.

ACTIVITY 9

Level: Infant/primary/secondary

Coins

Students may be able to exhibit a collection of Commonwealth countries' coins. Pen friends, visitors from other Commonwealth countries, link schools and banks are possible sources.

ACTIVITY 10

Level: Infant/primary/secondary

Flags

In art classes students could make Commonwealth flags. They could investigate the reasons for the choice of designs and emblems. A flag-raising ceremony could be held on Commonwealth Day.