

A changing association

The cultural diversity of the Commonwealth is a valuable area of study but does not of itself clarify the concept of the Commonwealth as an entity. After all, studies of non-Commonwealth countries, including projects on food, clothes, customs etc., would have a similar effect of raising students' awareness of cultures other than their own. Equally, the notion of shared principles, though an important binding force in the Commonwealth, is not exclusive to the Commonwealth. It underlies other international and regional organisations too.

So it is important that students learn about the specificities of the Commonwealth too. The activities in this section are designed to raise awareness of Commonwealth history and evolution, and those in the next section explore some of the ways in which the Commonwealth is operating in the world today.

ACTIVITY 1



Level: Primary/secondary

Commonwealth history in maps

Listed on page 33 are all 50 members of the Commonwealth with the date on which they became independent and, in turn, voluntarily became members of the Commonwealth.

On a map of the Commonwealth (see page ix), ask students to fill in the following information, remembering to draw a key at the side of the map.

- 1 Colour in blue all the countries which were full members of the Commonwealth in 1931.
- 2 Now add, in green, all the countries which joined between 1932 and 1949.
- 3 Finally colour in red all the countries which have joined the Commonwealth between 1950 and 1990.

NB For islands too tiny to colour in on a world map of this scale, indicate period of joining by underlining the country name or by drawing a circle round the island(s) in the appropriate colour.

Underneath the map, briefly describe the changes in the membership of the Commonwealth. Who were the founder members? During which decade did membership of the Commonwealth grow most rapidly?

There are in addition to the countries which are fully independent a number of associated states and dependent territories. Information on these states is provided in Appendix A (page 83).

ACTIVITY 1: CONTINUED

Joining the Commonwealth

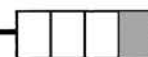
COUNTRY	Year of Membership	COUNTRY	Year of Membership
Antigua & Barbuda	1981	Mauritius	1968
Australia	1931*	Namibia	1990
The Bahamas	1973	Nauru	1968
Bangladesh	1972	New Zealand	1931*
Barbados	1966	Nigeria	1960
Belize	1981	Pakistan	1947 (1989)***
Botswana	1966	Papua New Guinea	1975
Britain		St Kitts & Nevis	1983
Brunei Darussalam	1984	St Lucia	1979
Canada	1931*	St Vincent & the Grenadines	1979
Cyprus	1961	Seychelles	1976
Dominica	1978	Sierra Leone	1961
The Gambia	1965	Singapore	1965
Ghana	1957	Solomon Islands	1978
Grenada	1974	Sri Lanka	1948
Guyana	1966	Swaziland	1968
India	1947**	Tanzania	1961
Jamaica	1962	Tonga	1970
Kenya	1963	Trinidad & Tobago	1962
Kiribati	1979	Tuvalu	1978
Lesotho	1964	Uganda	1962
Malawi	1964	Vanuatu	1980
Malaysia	1957	Western Samoa	1970
Maldives	1982	Zambia	1964
Malta	1964	Zimbabwe	1980

* Independence from Britain obtained under the Statute of Westminster

** India became a republic but asked to become a member of the Commonwealth accepting the British monarch as head of the Commonwealth

*** Pakistan originally became a member of the Commonwealth on gaining independence in 1947, left the association in 1971 and rejoined in 1989.

ACTIVITY 2



Level: Upper secondary

Project on Commonwealth history

Older students can undertake a project on the major developments and changes in the Commonwealth since the beginning of World War 2. This could include finding out about some or all of the following:

- The contribution of Britain's colonies to the Allied cause in World War 2, and the effect of the war on the independence movement
- The reasons for former colonies choosing to join the Commonwealth
- The expansion of the Commonwealth from ten members in 1957 to 50 members today: who joined, and why? who did not join? who resigned? who was expelled? who rejoined? and why?
- The influence of leaders such as Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Eric Williams, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Lester B Pearson, John Diefenbaker and Kenneth Kaunda.
- The development of regional economic organisations and their impact on and linkage with the Commonwealth (e.g. EEC, CARICOM, South Pacific Forum)
- The Commonwealth response to the fight for Zimbabwe's independence; Cyprus; Belize; Namibia; South Africa.

See also essay topics on page 76.



Freedom jump – Zimbabwe

ACTIVITY 2: CONTINUED

Strengthening democracy

The Commonwealth already has considerable experience in helping member countries to strengthen their democratic institutions. Commonwealth observers were at the historic independence elections of Zimbabwe, the Uganda elections (both in 1980) and witnessed preparations for Namibia's pre-independence election in late 1989.

In early 1990 the Prime Minister of Malaysia asked for a Commonwealth Group to observe national elections scheduled for later in the year. Another group was at the February 1991 parliamentary elections in Bangladesh which marked a return to civilian and democratic rule. Zambia asked that its 1991 elections be similarly observed. The Guyana elections in 1992 will be observed by a Commonwealth team.

Before observers are sent, the Secretariat sends a small team to the country to ascertain that all major political parties in the country agree to have the elections observed. The observers then arrive to watch the conduct of the elections themselves. Generally, the task of the observers, who are appointed by the Secretary-General but are independent individuals, is to examine the electoral machinery, voters' rolls, security of the vote and the conduct of the election itself. They report to the Secretary-General as to whether, in their opinion, the election process has been free and fair. This report, in turn, is made available to governments and to the major parties contesting at the polls.

The Commonwealth Today

Teachers might wish to initiate a discussion on new roles and functions for the Commonwealth. An examination of the extract from *The Commonwealth Today* alongside study of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration (page 22) might suggest new directions for the Commonwealth in the 1990s.

On Commonwealth Day

- Display maps showing the Commonwealth's historical development and charts listing key events and changes.
- Display history project work.