



# The Federation Project: A Year 4/5 Inquiry

**How can digital technologies be used to bring the stories of history alive?**

*Emily Fintelman, Flemington Primary School*

Throughout the ages, stories of people and events were shared through word of mouth and written communication. While digital technologies are only part of our most recent history, they can be one of the most powerful tools we have for a new way of storytelling and documenting. Digital technologies can bring history alive for students and allow them to tell the stories of times, people and experiences gone by.

A class of Year 4/5 students at Flemington Primary School worked in small collaborative teams to investigate the perspectives of individuals and groups of people involved in Australia's Federation. They worked through a whole-class inquiry process, followed by an independent inquiry, to explore the various events and experiences of Federation based on their own interests and questions. Groups created digital products to creatively and purposefully present their findings and bring the stories of history alive.

## **Context**

This Federation project was undertaken as part of a history unit developed by the upper years teaching team at Flemington Primary School to meet the following Level 5/6 Historical Knowledge outcomes in the Victorian Curriculum: 'The Australian Colonies' and 'Australia as a Nation.'

The unit was planned in such a way that students would briefly investigate Australia's Federation and

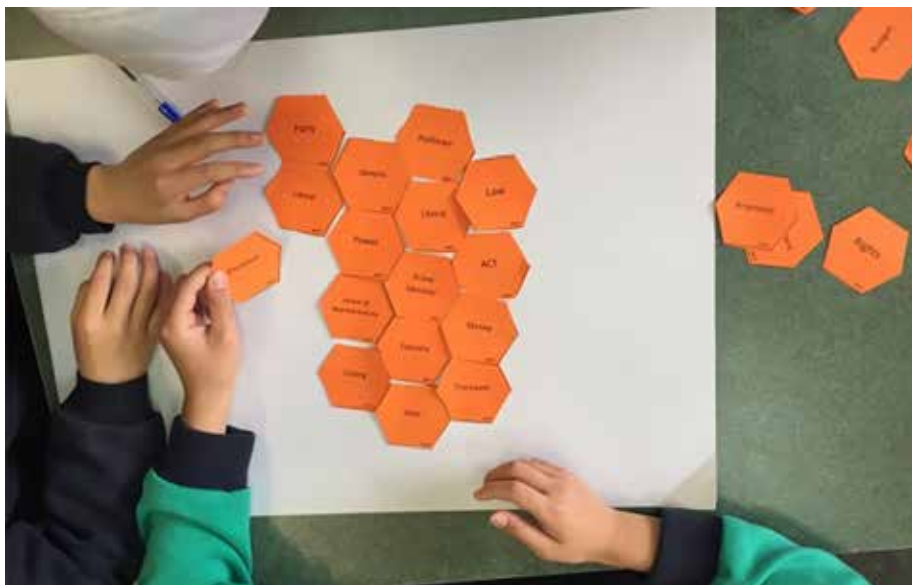
move on to another aspect of the History curriculum. However, student interest and the opportunity to 'go deeper' was too important to pass up, and the children in my Year 4/5 class began to take the reins and lead their own inquiries.

While it was essential to design a path for the inquiry learning to take place, it was also important to be flexible enough to change course when the students were overflowing with interest, questions and a desire to investigate further along another path that had not been previously planned for them.

## **The Inquiry Process**

### **TUNING IN**

The class kicked off the inquiry with a 'Hexagonal Thinking' Tuning In task that required students to begin talking about Federation and Australia's history. Small groups were provided with hexagonal cards that included vocabulary related to the topic, such as Federation, colonisation, First People, settlers and migrants. Students worked in their groups to read out the words, discuss them, share their knowledge (if any) about the meaning of the words, and write the meanings down. They then began to connect the hexagons in a way that showed a relationship between the words, explaining their reasoning. They placed together words and concepts that they believed were linked; for example, 'I think that First People, settlers



PREVIOUS PAGE: Municipal Arch, Princes Bridge, Melbourne, 1901. (Museums Victoria)

LEFT: Hexagonal Thinking is a useful Tuning In task to elicit vocabulary, connections and prior knowledge from students.

and migrants are all groups of people that were around at Federation, so I think we should link those words.'

This was a powerful and effective Tuning In task because:

- students were able to share prior and perceived knowledge about the topic
- students learnt about new vocabulary and concepts from peers through discussion
- it was easy for me to gather information on students' existing knowledge and understandings
- questions and wonderings were rife during these hexagonal thinking conversations, which was the beginning of a great inquiry.

#### FINDING OUT AND SORTING OUT

With student questioning in full swing, as a class we started to explore ways of investigating their questions and organising their findings.

Some of the initial questions investigated were:

- why and how did Australia become a nation?
- who were the key people that influenced Australia's Federation?
- what were the different perspectives on Federation?

Digital technologies supported the history learning at this stage of the inquiry. Some of the Finding Out tasks were teacher guided and others were led by student interest and ideas as to how to find out answers to their questions.

Students tended to want to research to find out more about their areas of interest. Through this process we refined the ways in which the research could be conducted – from 'Google it and click on the first link' to identifying the types of websites that could be useful in finding particular information, refining search terms and parameters, creating a list of trusted sources for information, and drawing from a wider range of sources than just URLs, including video collections, image searches and archived documents.

Some of the activities in the Finding Out and Sorting Out stage were:

- creating a timeline of Australia's history using the app Popplet.
- examining artefacts from the time of Federation, such as propaganda posters and newspaper excerpts using The National Library of Australia's website Trove.
- using iMovie to create brief biographies of key figures in Australia's Federation, such as Edmund Barton and Henry Parkes.
- watching 'Behind the News' videos on Australia's Federation history and reading other viewers' comments about the videos.

At this point, Jo Clyne (historian and author) visited the class to read a book she had written called *Dear Oma*.<sup>1</sup> This beautiful book of historical fiction follows the story of a young German boy named Karl living in Melbourne at the time of Federation. While reading this book, students discussed the different

1 Jo Clyne, *Dear Oma: A Story of Federation* (Melbourne: HTAV Publishing, 2013).

RIGHT: One group of students told the story of Henry Parkes using the app Puppet Pals 2.



perspectives and experiences of various individuals and groups of people living in Australia at this time. Through this rich text, students became aware of a wider range of people who were impacted by Federation and began making stronger connections with various experiences of Federation. For example, one German student was able to sympathise with the family in the book who were concerned about the new migration laws Federation would bring, while a student interested in architecture was impressed by the way groups of people built arches especially for the Federation Parade.

After reading the text, Jo issued the class a challenge – to tell an important story or point of view of Federation by creating a digital product.

#### GOING FURTHER

During the course of class discussions it became clear that students had a wide and varied range of interests surrounding the events leading up to Federation and the people involved in it.

Jo's challenge presented the opportunity for students to go further – to pursue their own questions and interests arising from the inquiry so far. Students split into smaller inquiry groups and began to investigate their own interests as a team using the research skills refined during the Finding Out and Sorting Out phases.

Some of these stories, points of view and questions related to the following topics.

- Edmund Barton and other politicians – *How did Edmund Barton influence Australia's Federation?*
- Indigenous people – *How were Indigenous people treated during this time?*
- Railroad companies – *What was the impact of Federation on Australia's railroads?*
- Migrants from Europe and Asia (particularly personal heritages) – *What was it like for migrants moving from their countries of origin to Australia before and after Federation?*

When groups had collected relevant information to be able to tell their selected important story or point of view, they had to decide on a digital medium for sharing that story. Given that students had their own iPads, at once the talk turned to apps – 'I want to use iMovie,' 'Tellagami looks cool when you're done,' 'I haven't tried Hopscotch. Let's use that.'

It was essential to ensure that student discussion regarding the use of technology was purposeful and focused. Therefore, I reframed the discussion so that groups concentrated on two questions:

- 1 What I am trying to create?
- 2 Which app(s) will help me do that?

*What I Am Trying to Create?*

With this question in mind, students were able to first tackle the issue of what



Projects and Technologies		
Project Title	Project Description	Apps Used
The Federation Arches Film	A stop motion animation where a narrator takes the audience through a tour of the different arches built for the Federation Parade.	Stop Motion Studio and iMovie
Edmund Barton Quiz	An interactive quiz game about Edmund Barton where players have to answer true or false questions about Edmund Barton's life and career.	Hopscotch (programming app)
Henry Parkes	A film that shows a conversation between a girl from 2016 and the ghost of Henry Parkes, who explains who he is and what he did during the time of Federation.	Puppet Pals 2 and iMovie
The Federation Song	A song written from the imagined perspective of people who supported Federation to convince others to join the cause - recorded in GarageBand.	GarageBand and iMovie

would be the best format or style to express the story they wanted to share. Some of the ideas they came up with included songs, documentary-style narratives, quizzes and interviews.

#### *Which App(s) Will Help Me Do That?*

Once teams had a clear understanding of what they were trying to achieve, it was much simpler for them to look at the digital tools available that could help them to do this and then trial and select the right tools for the job, digital and otherwise.

The wide variety of approaches that groups had as a response to the challenge was astounding. Each group came up with unique, creative and effective ways of articulating the experience of a person or group of people at the time of Federation. It was an essential part of this project that teams were given both the freedom to choose how best to express the story they were sharing and the guidance and opportunity to select digital tools to do this effectively.

Examples of Federation projects completed and the technology used to create them are listed in the table above. You can also view them online at our 'Federation Project' Google docs page at <http://bit.ly/2zXeyeB>.

#### REFLECTING AND ACTING

Upon completion, groups presented their projects to their peers, primarily to teach them about the stories they had deemed important to share. Through exhibiting their projects, they were also able to receive peer feedback and celebrate their learning. Some students were selected to present their projects at the HTAV 2016 Kids' Conference where they received further feedback from a wider group of peers and adults.

By the end of this process they were able to articulate clearly what they had learnt using the 'I used to think ... but now I think ...' routine and demonstrate interest in further areas for inquiry in history.

#### **Digital Technologies in the History Classroom**

It is the aim of the History curriculum to assist students to investigate the past in a way that develops curiosity and imagination, and encourages thinking about the present day and possible future challenges. Also, it is the aim of the Digital Technologies curriculum to provide opportunities for students to design and create digital solutions.

With the introduction of the Digital Technologies curriculum, it is a natural progression that we find ways to:

- engage students with the stories of history through the use of technology
- support students to investigate and draw conclusions using the myriad of digital resources at their disposal, and
- assist students to learn how to leverage digital technologies to be a powerful and effective medium for documenting, sharing and creating history.

Through the Federation project, students were given the freedom to inquire – that is, to investigate, build understandings and represent these understandings of important stories in the most powerful way they could. Animations, games and songs were all vehicles through which students could share the stories of history. It is through digital technologies that students can learn to bring the stories of history alive.