

Country of the Week: Australia

Australia is the only country that is also a continent.

BASIC

This week, we are looking at a very interesting country. **Who can name it?** (*Australia.*) Australia is the only country that is also a continent. It is also the sixth largest country in the world. Australia is in the southern half of the world. Its seasons are the opposite of the seasons in the United States. **What season is it there now?** (*Spring.*) Most of Australia is taken up with a dry desert called the outback. That is why most of its people live in cities and towns in the east, where there is more rain.

There are many kinds of animals that

GENERAL

This week, we look at Australia. **Where in the world is Australia?** (*In the Southern Hemisphere, meaning the southern half of the world, near Southeast Asia.*) In Australia, the seasons are the opposite of the seasons in North America. **What season is it in Australia now?** (*Spring.*) Australia is the only country that is also a continent. Continents are the largest landmasses on Earth. **How many continents can you name?** (*North America, South America, Africa, Asia, Antarctica, Europe, and Australia.*) Australia is the smallest continent, but it is the sixth largest country in the world. Most of Australia is a region of very dry desert land called the outback. It is hard to live in this area, which is why most of the people live in the cities along the country's eastern coast.

ADVANCED

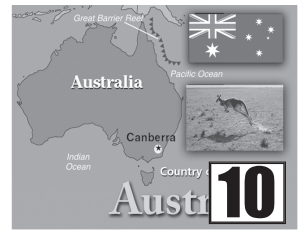
This week, NewsCurrents is looking at Australia, the only nation in the world that is also a continent. Australia is the smallest of the seven continents with an area of less than 3 million square miles, but it is the sixth-largest country on Earth.

Most of Australia is very dry and thinly populated. About 85 percent of the land is a region made up of desert and dry grassland. **What is this area called?** (*The outback.*) Much of this land is used for grazing cattle and sheep. But most of Australia's population lives in cities and towns along the east coast, where the climate is sub-tropical. But Australia is perhaps best-known for a region that is not even on land — a 1,250-mile-long natural feature located underwater off its northeast

live only in Australia. One is shown here.

Who can name this animal? (*A kangaroo.*)

Other Australian animals are the koala, the dingo, and the duck-billed platypus. **What do you know about any of these animals? Have you seen any in zoos?** One of the most famous parts of Australia is the Great Barrier Reef, where coral and other sea creatures live. **Have you ever been to Australia? Would you like to visit there? Why or why not?** NEXT



There are many kinds of animals that live only in Australia. **What kind of animal is shown here?** (*A kangaroo.*) Other animals found only in Australia are the koala, the dingo, and the duck-billed platypus. **Have you ever seen any of these animals in a zoo? What else do you know about them?**

The most famous place in Australia may be the 1,250-foot-long Great Barrier Reef, located off the northeast coast of the continent. This is an underwater structure made up of the skeletons of tiny, soft-bodied animals called coral. The Great Barrier Reef is home to more than 400 kinds of coral, 1,500 kinds of fish, and hundreds of other life forms. **Would you like to scuba dive and see the Great Barrier Reef for yourself?** NEXT

coast. **Who can name this feature?** (*The Great Barrier Reef.*) It is actually made up of nearly 3,000 smaller reefs strung together. It is home not only to 400 different kinds of coral, but 1,500 varieties of fish and hundreds of other life forms. It is Australia's top tourist attraction and a natural destination for scuba divers from all over the world. **Would you like to visit Australia? Why or why not?**

Most scientists believe all the continents were once one giant landmass, and that Australia separated from it about 200 million years ago. Because of this, much of Australia's wildlife is unique to the continent. **What are some examples of this unique wildlife?** (*The kangaroo, the koala, the dingo, and the platypus, to name a few.*) NEXT

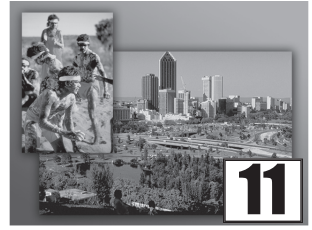
Country of the Week: Australia (cont'd)

Australia has a history of conflict between Aboriginals and European settlers.

BASIC

The first people in Australia were the Aboriginals — *ab-or-IHJ-ih-nuls*. Here you see some of them in traditional clothes and body paint. More than 200 years ago, white settlers began coming to Australia from Europe. These settlers came from England and Ireland. They killed many Aboriginals, and forced many others from their homes. **Did anything like this happen in the U.S.?** (*This is similar to the treatment of Native Americans here.*) Today, most Aboriginals live in cities and wear modern clothing. But they are greatly outnumbered by Australians

whose families came from Europe. Many Aboriginals are also very poor. For many years, the Australian government has been looking at ways to help them and to make up for their poor treatment. The government has returned some of the country's land to Aboriginal groups. **Do you think this was a good or bad idea? Why? What else do you think could be done to help Aboriginals?** END OF STORY



GENERAL

The first people to settle in Australia probably came there from Asia about 30,000 years ago. **Do you know what these people are called?** (*Aboriginals — ab-or-IHJ-ih-nuls.*) In 1788, settlers began coming from England and Ireland to Australia. These settlers killed many Aboriginals, and forced many others from their homes. Most Aboriginals had to work as low-paid laborers and had limited rights. For most of the last century, many Aboriginal children were taken from their families and brought up by white families. These children are now called “the stolen generation.” **What do you think about this?**

In the 1960s, some Aboriginals began to demand that the Australian government return their land to them. They also demanded better living and working

conditions. In the 1990s, the government returned some land to the Aboriginals. It also made a “statement of regret” for past mistreatment. But many were upset that this was not a formal apology. Newly elected Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says he will offer a formal apology for Australia’s treatment of the Aboriginal people. **Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not? How is this situation similar to the treatment of Native Americans? How is it different?**

Today, there are about 430,000 Aboriginals in Australia — about two percent of the country’s population. Most of them wear modern clothes and live in cities. But many are trying to keep their traditions alive. The ones in this picture are wearing traditional clothing and body paint. **Why is it important for native people to do this?** END OF STORY

ADVANCED

The first settlers in Australia probably came from Asia about 30,000 years ago. **What are these people called?** (*Aboriginals — ab-or-IHJ-ih-nuls.*) In 1788, a European nation established a colony here, and began sending convicts to Australia to relieve overcrowding in its jails. **What nation was this?** (*Great Britain.*) In the following century, these colonists killed many Aboriginals, and forced most of the rest from their land. Malnutrition, due to the loss of their food sources, and a lack of immunity to European diseases severely decreased the Aboriginal population. Today, there are about 430,000 Aboriginals in Australia, making up only two percent of the population.

In the early 20th century, the Australian government began a policy of assimilating Aboriginals into the rest of society. By the

1940s, most Aboriginals were put in missions and trained as low-paid laborers. Up until the 1960s, Aboriginal children — especially those with lighter skin or those of mixed race — were taken from their homes and placed in orphanages to learn “white” culture. These children are now called “the stolen generation.”

Aboriginal rights movements began in the 1960s, and eventually succeeded in getting the Australian government to return some of the land it had taken. The government also issued a “statement of regret.” But many Aboriginals still want an official apology, along with reparations. Kevin Rudd says his new government will issue a formal apology for abuses of the Aboriginal people. **Do you think this is the right thing to do? Why or why not?** END OF STORY