

# Parliament of Victoria



Teach and learn

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## Workday revolution



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# About this resource

The *Workday revolution* resource focuses on worker's rights in the 1800's and how the stonemasons worked together to advocate for an eight-hour workday, eventually leading to changes in legislation.

*The Workday revolution* is a collection of videos, questions and activities that uses the eight-hour workday – a significant moment in Victoria's parliamentary history – as a starting point for investigating how workers of the day rallied together to fight for fairer working conditions, something many of us are still benefitting from today.

The stories have been brought to life by students through rich-media storytelling. The resource also includes ideas and additional resources for further investigation.

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## Learning outcomes

The story of the stonemasons can be used as a case study to explore the following learning outcomes:

- the history of Melbourne and life in the 1800s
- rights and responsibility of workers, women, children and migrants
- democracy and change

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## The structure

The resource is separated into three sections:

### 1. The videos

There are four videos in the series, designed as stimulus material for discussion and to provide students with some insight into the working conditions of the stonemasons, women and children in the 1800s. Each of the videos have accompanying discussion questions.

### 2. The workday revolution

This section provides more details about the action that was taken, not just by the stonemasons, but also by people across a range of industries, to advocate for changes to working conditions. There is also a copy of some of some important freedoms that are acknowledged as part of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The declaration can provide a framework for analysing and evaluating the working conditions in the 1800s, as well as the changing working conditions in contemporary Australia.

### 3. Discuss questions and activities

This section includes a range of relevant thinking routines, as well as discussion questions and activities that have been arranged thematically. At the end of each theme there is a list of topics and additional resources that can be used to explore the theme in more detail.

## Extension: *Changing the ways we work*, Parliament of Victoria

The [\*Changing the ways we work\*](#) teacher guide focuses on contemporary workplaces and more current legislation, asking students to consider how the workplace has changed and whether we need new laws or whether our existing laws need amending.

Questions and activities from this resource can be done in conjunction with or instead of *Workday revolution*.

The resources can be used to:

- explore historical and contemporary workplaces
- explore how laws are made and amended
- evaluate the need for new laws or amendments to existing laws
- explore active citizenship
- consider worker's rights, including the rights of women and children

There are also connections to other teaching guides, such as:

- [\*Representation and democracy\*](#). This resource explores the different forms of representation, the principles of democracy and how democracy and representation work in Victoria
- [\*Action and influence\*](#). This resource explores the different actions people can take to create change, and the type of influence these actions have; from small-scale, local outcomes to coordinated actions that can have a global impact.

Further information and learning activities about democracy and representation can be found on the [Teach and Learn page](#) of parliament's website.





Acknowledgements:

*The Workday revolution* teacher guide and resources draws on original research produced by the Victorian Parliamentary Library "The origins of the eight-hour day in Victoria." The resources were developed with input from students from Buckley Park College.



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# The videos

The *Workday revolution* videos focus on some important events that took place in Melbourne in 1856.

There are four videos in the series. Firstly:

- *Tommy and the workday revolution* (runtime 6:08 minutes) focusing on Tommy and his family's life during the 1800s

And the three videos in the 'students discuss series', where students reflect on Tommy's life and the actions of the stonemasons:

- *Tommy's dread* (runtime 2:11 minutes)
- *Stonemasons unite* (runtime 2:30 minutes)
- *Tommy's joy* (runtime 2:53 minutes)

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There are more details about each video and some questions that students can complete to support their understanding.

The questions are based on the literacy strategy, reciprocal teaching (predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising). These questions can be completed either individually or in pairs, small groups or as a class.

The following thinking routines from *Harvard Project Zero* may also be useful:

[Values, identities, actions](#) is used predominantly with art, but this thinking routine can also be used with the videos. Students are encouraged to consider the underlying values and identities that led to the action taken.

[See, think, make, discuss](#) considers the relationship between civic life and how we live together as a community, from local communities to a global context.



Watch and download the  
*Workday revolution* videos

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[vicparl.news/workday-revolution](http://vicparl.news/workday-revolution)



## Tommy and the workday revolution

Runtime 6:08 minutes

*Tommy and the workday revolution* explores Tommy's experiences as part of a typical working class family in the 1800s. Men, women and children worked 10-14 hour days, six days per week. Workers had few rights and could be sacked without reason or warning.

### Before watching the video:

- What do you think Tommy might be dreading?
- How do you think Tommy's mum and dad feel about the workday ahead?
- Why do you think 13-year-olds were sent off to work in the 1800's?

### While watching the video:

- Make a list of any questions that you have.
  - Questions might include words or events you don't understand, as well as anything you find interesting and would like more information on.

### After watching the video:

- What does a stonemason do and what risks might have been associated with being a stonemason in the 1800's?
- What might the mum's week have looked like?
- What would it have been like to have been a worker in the 1800s?
- What are four questions you could ask to find out more about Tommy's life?
- What are four questions you could ask to find out more about the labour laws in the 1800s?
- Summarise what you think are the key points of the video.



## ‘Students’ discuss’ videos

There are three videos in this series: *Tommy’s dread*, *Stonemasons’ unite* and *Tommy’s joy*. Throughout each video the students reflect on what life was like in the 1800’s, the work they did, and how the Stonemasons worked together to bring about change. Similar to the *Tommy and the workday revolution* video, each video has a series of questions to support student understanding and reflection.

These questions can be used:

- in conjunction with the *Students’ discuss* videos (e.g.: compare and contrast responses)
- as reflection questions after watching *Tommy and the workday revolution*, or
- as the basis of further research into life and work in the 1800s.



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### Tommy’s dread

Runtime 2:11 minutes

Before watching the video:

- What would it be like to work a sixteen-hour day?
- What rights should children have?
- What does a ‘fair go’ mean to you?

After watching the video:

- What aspects of life or work from the 1800’s do you think would have been good to keep? Why?
- What responsibilities should children have?
- Does everyone in Victoria get a ‘fair go’? How might Victoria address areas where workers aren’t treated equally?
  - o Areas to consider might include, the gender pay gap, gig economy, skilled-migrant workers’ rights, regional versus metropolitan employment opportunities, minimum wages ...



## Stonemasons unite

Runtime 2:30 min

### Before watching the video:

- What do you think of the stonemasons' actions?
- What does 'freedom of speech' mean to you?
- Why are freedoms important?

### After watching the video:

- What supports and restrictions would you provide for the stonemasons?
- "Free speech comes from facts, not rumours, and the intention must be constructive, not to do harm." Using an example, discuss how this definition of free speech might apply. Consider:
  - o the protests of the stonemasons, recent protests and/or social media
  - o what is and isn't an example of free speech,
  - o what consequences might there have been / are there to free speech
- The students discuss the importance of freedoms. How are both rights and responsibilities important? Consider:
  - o do we really have the freedom to live our life in any way we please?
  - o what circumstances might it be okay to limit rights and freedoms?
  - o how might we balance freedoms, rights and responsibilities?



Ben (Tommy), Year 7



## Tommy's joy

Runtime 2:53 min

### Before watching the video:

- How did life improve after the eight-hour day was introduced?
- What does 'democracy' mean to you?
- If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

### After watching the video:

- Would you still think we have the eight-hour day
- How does everyone have a say? How do you have a say, especially given that people under the age of 18 cannot vote?
- If you have something that you would like to change, what actions might you be able to take?





SUTTON'S

[Redacted sign]

NEW HOME

CHANDLERS' ANGLES, AWPS, LOGS

GOLD SMITH

TRAY GIFT DEPOT  
SULLIVAN TYPE &  
FEDERAL NOVELTY COMPANY

274

LIGHT BULBS  
76 N. BERRMAN'S SQ. 276

VICTORY TO THE UNITED STATES  
1918



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# The workday revolution

Around the time of the gold rush in the 1850s, Melbourne experienced a building boom. Stonemasons were elite tradesmen who specialised in working with the materials used in construction at the time, such as blue stone. Stonemasons were in demand as their job couldn't be done by unskilled workers. This meant they had more power than many other tradesmen.

There were many key steps that led to the eight-hour day being 'legislated' (becoming law) in Victoria.

The eight-hour victory in Victoria was not the first in Australia but it was among the earliest to 'establish and officially sanctioned standard... for a whole industry across a specific region.'

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# Timeline of the eight-hour workday



## 1850s

**1854**

Legislative Council votes on a site for Parliament House.

**December 1855**

A construction company run by William Cornish starts building the Legislative Assembly and Council Chambers.

**March 1856**

There's a public meeting of building trade employers and employees at the Queen's Theatre. The majority of attendees support the eight-hour day and agree that the new system would start on 21 April.

**February 1856**

Melbourne experiences a building boom. Many skilled labourers from England arrive, including stonemasons James Stephens and James Galloway who are familiar with the United Kingdom's eight-hour workday.

**11 April 1856**

Dr Thomas Embling (Member of the Legislative Council for North Bourke) calls for reduced work hours.

**21 April 1856**

Mr Holmes at the Western Market and Mr Cornish at Parliament House still have not agreed to the new conditions. Both agree for less work hours, but with a reduction in wage from 15 shillings to 13 shillings per day. The stonemasons at parliament are already on strike.

Building workers at the University of Melbourne decide to 'down tools' and march in protest. More than 700 men from other building sites join the march and agree to strike until the contractors agree to reduce hours at current pay.

Mr Holmes gives in before nightfall. Mr Cornish, under pressure from members of parliament, the press and the workers, eventually agrees to reduced hours at 14 shillings per day.

## 1856 continued

The 8-hour day is soon used across other occupations, mostly limited to the building trades, such as quarrymen and harness makers. Each trade individually argues its case with employers. For example:

- coachbuilders go on strike for four months and eventually settling for the 8-hour system at reduced pay
- bakers successfully reduce their daily hours to 12 hours per day, as well as reducing night and Sunday work and wages for uniforms

## 1859

Charles Jardine Don wins the seat of Collingwood, citing that the working classes had been 'too long unrepresented in the Assembly'. In November Don moves a motion that all future government contracts should include the 8-hour day. The proposal is debated but receives limited support. Don withdraws the motion when he realises it won't pass.

## December 1859

The 8-hour day is still limited to skilled building trades such as metal workers, shipwrights and saddlers. Poor economic conditions result in a number of industries losing or reducing their 8-hour day agreements. Stonemasons continue to fight to keep the 8-hour system through a series of strikes.

Over the coming decades, skilled and unskilled workers across many different industries continue to negotiate their working conditions.

Several bills are introduced into parliament during this time, with the aim to improve working conditions, including making the eight-hour system compulsory for government contracts. The bills do not pass.



### Learning activity:

Simplify the timeline, or research another industry that introduced the 8-hour day



# 1860s - present

**1881**

A select committee begins investigating the proposal to regulate and shorten working hours for shop employees.

**1882**

The committee inquiry is upgraded to a Royal Commission.

**1885**

The Factories and Shops Act 1885 passes with measures to eliminate child labour, limit the work week to 48 hours for all female factory employees and males under 16 years of age. There are also measures to increase safety and limit shop opening hours.

**December 1884**

The Victorian Parliament passes the Trades Unions Act 1884, legalising trade unions. The trade societies continue to work towards shortening the work week, including the eight-hour day and a half day holiday on Saturdays.

**1939**

The Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration (established in 1904) approves a 44-hour week across Australia.

While New South Wales Parliament passes the Eight Hours Act in 1916, limiting the working week to 48 hours, each industry in Victoria continues to independently negotiate their working conditions. It's not until the mid-1900s that this changes.

**1980s**

A 38-hour work week becomes the standard in Australia.

**1947**

The Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration reduces the work week to 40-hours, to come in effect nationally on 1 January 1948.



# The rights of the worker

The workday revolution was about fighting for worker's rights, initially for the stonemasons and then for other skilled labourers and then for the people considered unskilled labourers. As can be seen in the timeline, it took some time for many workers and industries to be afforded the same rights as the stonemasons.

In 1948, United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The declaration aimed to guarantee the rights of individuals everywhere, many of these rights allowing for people to advocate for themselves, as the stonemasons had done many years early. Even though the declaration was nearly 100 years after the start of the workday revolution in Victoria, the workers at the time were already afforded some of the freedoms that are now associated with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These freedoms include:

## Freedom of association

We are free to join any organisation or group if it is legal. We can choose to belong to a trade union or to a political party. Having and debating points of view allows for a healthy and strong democracy.

## Freedom of movement

Australian citizens can move freely to and from all states and territories. We can leave and return to Australia at any time.

## Freedom of speech

Australians are free, within the bounds of the law, to say or write what we think privately or publicly, about the government, or about any topic. We do not censor the media and may criticise the government without fear of arrest. Free speech comes from facts, not rumours, and the intention must be constructive and not to do harm.

There are laws to protect a person's good name and integrity against false information. There are laws against saying or writing things to incite hatred against others because of their culture, ethnicity or background. Freedom of speech is not an excuse to harm others.

## Freedom of assembly

We are free to meet with other people in public or private places. We can meet in small or large groups for legal, social or political purposes. Being able to protest and to demonstrate is an accepted form of free expression. Protestors must not be violent or break laws such as assaulting others or trespassing on private or public property.

## Freedom of religion

Australia does not have an official or state religion. We are free to follow any religion we choose and we are also free not to have a religion. The law does not enforce any religious doctrine, however, religious practices must conform to the law. We are free to follow any religion we choose. We are also free not to have a religion.



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# Discussion questions and activities

The questions and activities below provide a starting point for delving deeper into some of the key concepts and themes from *Workday revolution* videos and the additional information. The questions can be used as the basis for classroom discussion, student reflection or more detailed research projects.

The questions have been organised thematically, and at the end of each theme there are two sections: '*Exploring further*' that lists other concepts that can be used to extend the learning; and '*Additional resources*' that includes some resources that might be a useful starting point for exploring themes in more detail.

# Thinking routines

The thinking routines are from Harvard Project Zero. They can be used flexibly with classroom discussions, by themselves or as reflection tools. More tools are available on the [Project Zero](#) website.

## Extending connections and providing evidence

- [What makes you say that](#) – useful in discussion to encourage students to reflect on their responses, share their interpretations and provide evidence, e.g.: supporting observations and examples
- [Connect, extend, challenge](#) – useful for connecting new ideas to students' prior knowledge, make explicit connections, and encourage students to ask further questions

## Considering perspectives

- [True for who](#) – considers how the situation looks from different points of view
- [Projecting across time](#) – useful for considering what has happened historically and what this might tell us about the future

## Reflecting on learning

- [I used to think ... now I think](#) – useful as a reflection tool that can be used before, during and after studying a topic
- [3-2-1 bridge](#) can be used before learning to establish student's prior knowledge and after to consolidate what they have learnt. Students can then compare the two responses and reflect on not just what they learnt but how their thinking might have changed

# Generating questions

Students can use the 'Question matrix' below to generate questions that can be used for discussion or for further research.

?	Event	Situation	Choice	Person	Reason	Means
Present	What is?	Where/ when is?	Which is?	Who is?	Why is?	How is?
Past	What did?	Where/ when did?	Which did?	Who did?	Why did?	How did?
Possibility	What can?	Where/ when can?	Which can?	Who can?	Why can?	How can?
Probability	What would?	Where/ when would?	Which would?	Who would?	Why would?	How would?
Prediction	What will?	Where/ when will?	Which will?	Who will?	Why will?	How will?
Imagination	What might?	Where/ when might?	Which might?	Who might?	Why might?	How might?

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## The history of Melbourne and life in the 1800s

- How does Tommy's experience compare with that of thirteen-year-olds in Australia today?
  - Create two daily planners, one for you and one for Tommy.
  - Add Tommy's workday to one, using the information you heard in the video, and add your school day to the second planner
  - Reflect on how you spend your time compared to how Tommy spent his. What are the similarities and differences?
  - What would an ideal day look like for you? Are there any changes to laws (or new laws) that would need to be made for your ideal day to be a reality?
- What were working conditions like for children in the 1800s?
  - Consider what sort of work they might have done (e.g.: was there work specifically done by children), was the work dangerous and what they might have been paid
- What were the working conditions like for women and migrants in the 1800s?
  - Consider what sort of work they might have done (e.g.: was there work specifically done by women and/or migrants), was the work dangerous and what they might have been paid

### Changing work

- How might the work of stonemasons have changed over time?
  - Consider whether there is still work for stonemasons, and not just what has changed but also how and why
- Why do you think child labour laws were introduced?
  - Consider how changing social and community attitudes might have changed and therefore contributed to changing labour laws for children and/or vulnerable people
- How might the work of women and migrants have changed over time?
  - Consider whether there are more or less jobs available for each group, and not just what has changed, but also how and why it changed
- What are the influences that cause jobs to change?
  - Consider what jobs exist now that didn't in the 1800s, What jobs have disappeared, and are there any jobs that have stayed the same
- How have working conditions changed (for the better or worse) or stayed the same over time?
  - You might like to interview some adults you know and ask how they think things have either stayed the same, improved or not, and whether there are any other changes they would like to see take place.

### Exploring further

- Victoria in the 1800s
  - The influence of the gold fields and the formation of the state
- Changing jobs and lost jobs
  - Different jobs and industries that might have changed or been lost over time
  - Jobs that exist now but did not previously exist
  - How workplace legislation has changed to include these jobs

- Workplace legislation
  - Legislation changes around safety, work hours, penalty rates, opening hours and the introduction of technology
- Child labour, in Australia and overseas
  - Protection laws around child labour here and overseas
  - Infringements of child labour laws, including causes and consequences

## Additional resources

### [Eight-hour day](#)

National Museum Australia

The website has some additional information about the eight-hour day movement, including pictures and a video discussing the significance of the movement.

### [Invasion of Victoria](#)

Deadly Story

The article provides information about the land, now known as Victoria, prior to colonisation up until Victoria separated from NSW.

### [Marvellous Melbourne](#)

Melbourne Museum

This resource provides an overview of some of the key historical events in Melbourne's formation from pre-1830s until the 1990s.

### [Melbourne's history and heritage](#)

City of Melbourne

The website includes information relating to First Nation's histories, the formation and building of Melbourne, and Melbourne's multicultural history. There is also a free booklet, *The history of the City of Melbourne*, which provides an overview of the creation and growth of Melbourne.

### [lost jobs: the changing world of work](#)

Old Treasury Building

The online resource explores some of the jobs that have changed and being lost, but also some of the economic and technological changes that have led to differences in employment. It includes details of what work was like for children in the 1800s.

### [Snobs, squatters & trimmers: 19th century Aussie jobs that are obsolete](#)

Huffington Post, 10 September 2016

The article takes a closer look at the classification of some obsolete jobs that appear on the Public Record Victoria's registers. It also includes links to the Public Record Victoria's website where students can search the records for family history, history of Melbourne and other records kept by the office.

### [The art of stonemasonry](#)

ABC news, 10 October 2017 (runtime 1:19 minutes)

The video explores the work of stonemasons, focusing on restoring heritage buildings in NSW.

### [Building and construction of Parliament House](#)

Parliament of Victoria

The article provides a more detailed timeline for the construction of Parliament House, including contemporary additions to the building.

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# Rights, responsibility and freedom of workers, women, children and migrants

- What rights and freedoms do Tommy, his family and the stonemasons have?
  - Consider how they used these rights and freedoms to create change
- Tommy's mum says "Let's just say, I wish I worked on a worksite."  
Why does she say this?
  - Consider whether everyone had the same rights and freedoms in the 1800s
- Exploring the timeline:
  - what rights and freedoms did the workers from different industries have?
  - What responsibilities might they have had?
  - What freedoms were included in some of the laws/legislation changes?
- How have working conditions changed for people over the last 150 years?
  - Consider the type of work, pay, number of hours at work, leave entitlements (sick / carers leave / holidays), influences of technology
- How are the rights of workers protected and supported today?
  - Consider the role of unions and commissions as well as legislation
- Sometimes legislation (laws) might limit the rights or freedoms of people (for example, putting someone in jail limits the freedom of movement).  
What examples might there be, where someone's freedoms and rights might be limited?
  - Consider what the limitation is, the reason for the limitation and if or not the limitation might be justified.

## Exploring further

- Magna Carta
  - The relevance and influence of the Magna Carta
- The Victorian and Australian Constitutions
  - Rights, freedoms and responsibilities are embedded into founding documents
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  - Protections and infringements
  - Protections of particular demographics, e.g.: the Rights of the Child
  - Bills in parliament and compatibility statements



## [Additional resources](#)

### [Freedoms and rights](#)

National Library of Australia

The website has a range of activities and inquiry-based approaches to developing students' understanding of rights, freedoms and opportunities to participate in Australia's democracy.

### [How are human rights protected in Australian law?](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission

The website has brief information as to how human rights have been embedded into the Australian Constitution.

### [Human rights protections](#)

Attorney-General's Department (Australian Government)

The website includes details of the role of the Attorney General in implementing the government's human rights policy agenda, including links to the Australian Human Rights Commission and other anti-discrimination actions and organisations.

### [Victoria's human rights laws](#)

Victoria's Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission

The website has a full copy of the Act as well as an explanation of the charter, including what rights can be limited, the obligations on parliament, the courts/tribunals and other public authorities, and the role of the Human Rights Commission.

### [Using the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities](#)

Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (runtime 5:44 min)

The video provides a good overview of what the charter means and a case study of how the charter might be applied.

### [The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The children's version](#)

UNICEF

The website provides a list of the Rights of the Child (available also to download), a video explaining the Rights of the Child and links to other resources, such as why rights for children matter. There are also links to further learning resources.

### [What are Children's rights?](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission

This website has an overview of how the Rights of the Child apply in Australia, the work of the Human Rights Commission in protecting the Rights of the Child, and some links to other organisations such as Youth Law Australia, which discusses laws that might be most relevant to young people (e.g.: employment law and getting official documentation).

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## Democracy and change

- What factors led to the stonemasons' dissent (action)?
- How did the stonemasons work together to bring about change?
- Why do you think it was so difficult for members of parliament to pass a law making the the eight-hour day the default work arrangement?
- What were the benefits and limitations to each industry having to independently negotiate their work arrangements?
- Why did it take so long for the eight-hour workday to become standard across Victoria (or Australia)?
  - What do you think members of parliament objected to?
  - Why do you think some industries managed to get the eight-hour workday while others struggled?
- What laws would you have made in the 1800s to make the working conditions better/safer?
- What is meant by the term 'democratic action'? How might the stonemasons' action be considered democratic?
- If you wanted to see some changes in today's work conditions or any laws, what actions might you take?
  - Once you have a list of actions, rate the difficulty for you to take these actions compared to the stonemasons.

### Exploring further

- Democracy
  - How has it changed over time
  - What values underpin democracy in Australia and why
- Active citizenship
  - Participating in democracy and creating change
  - Ways to have your voice heard: voting (once 18 years old), contacting local representatives, writing committee submissions, participating in a peaceful protest, signing a petition
  - Raising awareness on issues
  - Understanding the impact of different actions
- How laws are made
  - Advocating for change
  - Understanding bills (draft laws)
  - Passing a bill through parliament

## [Additional resources](#)

### [What is Democracy?](#)

BTN (ABC) 2016 (runtime 4:08 minutes)

The video provides a brief historical account of the origin of democracy

### [Developing democracy](#)

UNESCO Memory of the World Program: The Australian Register

The article explores the history of democracy in Australia from colonisation until 1965, including the voting rights of women and Aboriginal Peoples.

This is part of UNESCO's Memory of the World project.

### [Decoding Democracy](#)

Museum of Australian Democracy (runtime 5:15 minutes)

The video focuses on how democracy works at federal parliament, including the Constitution., the bicameral system and how people can contact their local, state and federal representatives.

### [Democracy—BTN special](#)

BTN (ABC) (runtime 24:27 minutes)

The video includes a history of democracy, including the Magna Carta, representation, the history of universal suffrage, referendums, media access to parliament, protests, and changing voting ages, including considerations of further changes to voting ages.

Parliament  
of Victoria