

Reading Placement Test (30 minutes)

Australians are very fortunate to have a say in their own government. During elections, they vote for people to represent them in councils and parliaments. If they are not satisfied with these representatives, they can vote them out of office in the next election. Due to this right to elect their leaders, Australians are called 'democratic'.

'Democracy' is a Greek word meaning power in the hands of the people. About 2,500 years ago in Athens, this form of government was first used. The people of Athens agreed with the ideas of Cleisthenes, who argued that all male citizens should take part in the Assembly. This was the organization which conducted the day-to-day matters of the state. All these citizens were given an equal vote in making the decisions of the Assembly. Wealth or poverty, social status or education did not matter. This Greek practice of government was very different from governments found in neighbouring lands. In places such as Egypt and Persia, the people were ruled by all-powerful kings, who they must obey. They were not allowed to challenge his authority, even though the king may have behaved cruelly or despotically towards them.

For centuries the Greek concept of democracy was not accepted outside of Greece. Even as late as the twentieth century, many people believed in a doctrine called 'the Divine Right of Kings'. This was the belief that kings were appointed by God to rule the nations. It was considered illegal, even evil and sinful, to oppose their rule.

In England between 1642 and 1649, a civil war was fought over this issue. King Charles 1 wanted to rule without interference, but was challenged by Parliament. The Parliament, however, claimed that as it was chosen by the people, it should have more power in governing England. In the civil war King Charles 1 and supporters were defeated, and the parliament was made supreme. Charles 1 was executed in 1649. Since that time, British monarchs have given parliament a greater voice in controlling the nation's affairs.

In 1902 in Australia the nation's new Commonwealth parliament paved the way for a new form of democracy. It was one that, until that point, had existed in no other place. Australia became the first country to both gain the right to vote and the right to stand for election for Parliament for its women. It was a significant victory and the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902, granting these rights, was passed as law against strong opposition.

Australia was breaking new ground and leading the world in developing a more participatory democratic system. However, it took nearly 20 years before the first Australian woman was elected to a state parliament. It took more than double that time for a woman to enter Australian national parliament. Over the past 30 years women have increased their representation in Australia's parliaments.

Voting in Australia is compulsory, so all Australian citizens must vote in all elections, council, state and federal. It is considered to be one of the duties of citizenship.

Adapted from Reading Developing Skills in English, Pritchard and Pritchard 1994 and Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au accessed 13/11/07 updated 30/10/07

Reading Placement Test - Questions (30 minutes)

Read the following questions and then read the text and circle the correct answer.

1. Australians are called democratic because
 - a. They are happy with their representatives
 - b. They can vote for people to represent them in government
 - c. They have councils

2. If Australians are not happy with the government
 - a. They can ignore them
 - b. They can vote for someone else next election
 - c. They can refuse to vote

3. In a democracy, the government is
 - a. Chosen by the king
 - b. Elected by the people
 - c. Chosen by community leaders

4. The idea of democracy came from
 - a. The people of Athens
 - b. A leader called Cleisthenes
 - c. All the male citizens

5. In Greece the male citizens
 - a. Were given a vote each
 - b. Were mostly wealthy
 - c. Were mostly educated

6. The idea of democracy
 - a. Was accepted in other countries outside of Greece
 - b. Spread quickly to other countries
 - c. Took hundreds of years to spread to other countries

7. The 'Divine Right of Kings' means
 - a. Kings must be elected
 - b. Kings were like gods
 - c. God chooses the kings to rule the nations

8. Under the doctrine 'Divine Right of Kings'
 - a. To fight against the king was considered to be dangerous
 - b. To fight against the king was considered to be ridiculous
 - c. To fight against the king was considered to be against the law

9. In England a Civil War was fought
 - a. Between the people and the parliament
 - b. Between the people
 - c. Between the Parliament and supporters and the king and supporters

10. The result of the Civil War in England was
 - a. King Charles lost
 - b. The Parliament lost
 - c. The King had more power after 1649

11. Australia's democracy in 1902
 - a. Copied other democracies
 - b. Introduced new rights for all voters
 - c. Introduced new rights for women

12. The law granting women the right to vote
 - a. Passed easily
 - b. Also gave them the right to stand for election
 - c. Was supported by everyone

13. The first woman was elected to the Australian national parliament
 - a. 20 years later
 - b. 30 years later
 - c. Over 40 years later

14. This text is mostly about
 - a. The history of democracy
 - b. How women got the vote in Australia
 - c. The beginning of democracy

