



THE SIMPSON PRIZE



SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 Students

2025 Winner | Western Australia

Grace Sharma

PERTH MODERN SCHOOL

“Australia’s relationship with Great Britain explains why Australia and individual Australians went to war.”

Discuss the accuracy of this statement with reference to either WW1 or WW2.

Australia, as a British colony until 1901 and a part of the British Empire thereafter, maintained strong political, cultural and economic ties to Britain (Australian War Memorial, 2021). When Britain entered World War I in 1914, Australia’s sense of loyalty, combined with its status within the Empire, led to its immediate involvement in the conflict (INFO, 2024). Many Australians felt a deep connection to Britain, viewing wars as their own and seeing service as a duty to protect the “mother country” (Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2020). A strong sense of loyalty to Great Britain was the most significant factor driving Australia’s participation in WWI; however, individual motivations, recruitment pressures, and emerging Australian identity also played crucial roles (Department of Veterans’ Affairs, n.d.), suggesting that Australia's decision to go to war was not solely rooted in allegiance to Britain, but was heavily influenced.



The idea that Australia’s relationship with Britain fostered a profound sense of loyalty and obligation among Australians is evident in the rhetoric of leaders, who articulated the notion that Australia’s fate was inextricably linked to the Empire’s. **Source 1C**, a speech delivered by Prime Minister Joseph at Horsham on August 1, 1914, emphasized the deep-rooted connection between Australia and the British Empire, reinforcing the idea that Australia’s involvement in the war was a matter of both loyalty and obligation. Cook stated, “*whatever happens Australia is a part of the Empire right to the full. Remember that when the Empire is at war so is Australia at war*” (Cook, 1914). This statement articulates the belief that Australia could not remain neutral while the Empire faced threats, framing participation in the war as an essential duty for all Australians. His assertion that “*all our resources in Australia are in the Empire, and for the Empire*” highlights the expectation that Australians would contribute their resources and efforts to support Britain in its time of need (Cook, 1914). Both Prime Minister Joseph Cook and Opposition Leader Andrew Fisher (INFO, 2024), who were in the midst of an election, pledged full support for Britain (Australian War Memorial, 2021). This unwavering support highlights how Australia's relationship with Great Britain not only shaped national policy but also reflected a collective sentiment that spurred Australians to enlist in the war, demonstrating that loyalty to the Empire was a significant motivating factor behind Australia’s decision to engage in World War I.

Source 1G - Lance Corporal F.C. Mulvey’s letter - provides a personal perspective on the sense of duty and loyalty that many Australians felt toward the British Empire at the outset of World War I. Mulvey’s words, “*I have sworn ‘to obey the King’s commands and fight his enemies wherever I am*

required,” reflect a commitment to the British monarchy and its causes, highlighting how the sense of allegiance to Britain motivated Australians to enlist (Mulvey, 1914). This sense of duty was not only a personal commitment but also tied to broader ideals of defending both Australia and the Empire, as Mulvey suggests that “*Australia’s fate is going to be decided on the continent and not out here.*” His belief that the war’s outcome directly affected Australia underscores how many Australians saw Britain’s enemies as their own, reinforcing the Empire’s shared destiny. Mulvey’s letter also reveals a willingness to sacrifice, as he notes that one son from his family can be “*spared for the defence of Australia,*” embodying the broader Australian spirit of honour and duty during wartime. The letter underscores that Australia’s decision to go to war was strongly influenced by both national and imperial loyalties. This shows that his overarching commitment to British interests emphasizes how deeply embedded the relationship with Britain was in Australian society.

The complex motivations behind Indigenous Australians’ enlistment in World War I also highlight how their relationship with Britain and emerging national identities shaped their participation. John Maynard’s exploration of Indigenous soldiers in **Source 1E** reveals that while some may have fought for a sense of duty to the British Empire, others were driven by a desire for adventure, camaraderie, or even aggressive recruitment tactics. Maynard notes that “the records of Aboriginal men who joined up suggest that they were previously employed in other occupations,” challenging the notion that financial necessity was their primary motivation (Maynard, 2018). The sentiments expressed by James Arden and Richard King - who felt they were “real Britishers” willing to fight for the Empire - illustrate how loyalty to Britain remained a powerful force in their motivations (Maynard, 2018). This goes to prove that the allegiance to the British Empire played a significant role in Australia’s involvement in World War 2.

Additionally, the poem *The Call* (**Source 1B**) is used to further evoke a sense of duty that many Australians felt towards the British Empire, reflecting the patriotic fervour of the time (Simpson Prize 2025, 2024). The opening line, “*Coo-ee! It’s the mother country calling; Coo-ee! Her sons shall make reply,*” establishes a familial bond between Australia and Britain, with “mother country” symbolizing loyalty and responsibility (Simpson Prize 2025, 2024). Through phrases like “children of the free,” the poem evokes pride in Australian identity while aligning with British values of freedom and democracy (Fantauzzo, n.d.). The poem’s call for unity - “*Forget our tale of party strife, forget our varied creeds*”—suggests that Australians felt a shared duty to protect the Empire, despite their own divisions. This not only underscores the sense of loyalty to Britain but hints at an emerging national consciousness.



While loyalty to Britain played a major role in prompting Australians to go to war, the experiences of Australian soldiers on the battlefield led to an evolution in national identity that extended beyond

mere loyalty. The Gallipoli campaign in particular became a crucible for Australian identity, birthing the notion of the “Anzac spirit.” This spirit emphasized characteristics like mateship, resilience, and courage, which Australians began to view as uniquely representative of their national character. According to historian C.E.W. Bean, Australians at Gallipoli “proved themselves worthy” as distinct from their British counterparts, laying the groundwork for a sense of national pride that was independent from the Empire (Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*). The Gallipoli campaign showcased the capacity of Australians to withstand hardship and adversity, which in turn fostered a sense of national pride that was tied not just to the British Empire but to the unique qualities of Australian soldiers. Over time, this emerging identity focused on egalitarian values, endurance, and unity, all of which became central to the Australian national consciousness (History Challenge; Stanley, 2024). World War I marked a shift toward national autonomy, as Australians began to view their participation in the war as contributing not only to the British cause but to their own emerging nationhood. Thus, while loyalty to Britain was a central factor in Australia’s entry into World War I, the war’s outcomes significantly contributed to the shaping of a national identity that reflected a newfound sense of pride and autonomy.



For some young Australians, the allure of military service was tied to the excitement and adventure it promised. The image of war in the early stages was often romanticized, with young men viewing it as an opportunity to prove their bravery, masculinity, and honour. Military service was framed as a rite of passage, where participants could test their physical and mental endurance, aligning with the contemporary ideals of masculinity. This is particularly evident in the notion of the "ANZAC spirit," which glorified mateship, courage, and resilience, qualities highly prized in Australian culture. For many, enlisting was seen as a chance to demonstrate these values on an international stage (Soldier’s Attitudes towards War (Australia) / 1.0 / Handbook - 1914-1918-Online, 2024). For others, in many rural areas, enlistment was often influenced by a strong sense of community obligation. Young men felt compelled to follow the example of older generations or their peers, pressured by local pride and the expectation of contributing to the war effort. This peer pressure, combined with a sense of duty to one’s community, often outweighed the broader appeal of loyalty to Britain. In these regions, military service was seen as a way of fulfilling a moral and social responsibility to support one’s fellow Australians. Local communities were key drivers of recruitment, with many men enlisting to align with the prevailing attitudes of their families and friends (First World War Home Front and the Recruitment Drives for Australian Imperial Force, 2023).



Australia’s participation in World War I was driven by a complex mix of loyalty to Britain, national pride, and emerging identity as an independent nation within the Empire. From leaders to everyday

soldiers, many Australians felt a sense of duty to support Britain, the “mother country”. However, while allegiance to Britain was a strong motivator, individual reasons varied, with many Australians also seeking adventure, personal pride, or a sense of unity within their emerging national identity (Department of Veterans’ Affairs, n.d.). Ultimately, Australia’s involvement in WWI showcased both its loyalty to Britain and its growing confidence as a nation, setting the stage for an identity distinct from its colonial roots.

Bibliography:

Cook, J. (1914). Speech at Horsham. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August 1914.

Australian War Memorial. (2021, June 2). *First World War 1914–18* | *The Australian War Memorial*. Awm.gov.au; Australian War Memorial. <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war>

Australian War Memorial. (2024, February 19). *The Simpson Prize 2025* | *Australian War Memorial*. Www.awm.gov.au. <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/simpson2025>

Australian War Memorial. (2021, June 2). *Colonial period, 1788–1901* | *The Australian War Memorial*. Australian War Memorial. <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/colonial>

Department of Veterans' Affairs. (2020, March 11). *Enlisting in the Australian forces during World War I*. Anzacportal.dva.gov.au. <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/military-organisation/enlistment>

Australian War Memorial. (n.d.). *Australians in World War I*. Retrieved from <https://www.awm.gov.au>

Department of Veterans' Affairs (n.d.). *Reflections on Enlistment in World War II: In Their Own Words*. Anzac Portal. <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/reflections-enlistment-ww2-their-own-words>

Old Parliament House, (n.d.). *Getting it Together: from colonies to Federation. A Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House schools learning resource*. Getting-It-Together.moadoph.gov.au. <https://getting-it-together.moadoph.gov.au/national-story/people-and-places/investigation-3.html>

Dawn of the Legend: "Worthy sons of the Empire" | *Australian War Memorial*. (n.d.). Www.awm.gov.au. <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/dawn/empire>

Fantauzzo, J. (n.d.). *A War for Freedom and Democracy? Remembrance Day and the First World War*. NAOC. <https://natoassociation.ca/a-war-for-freedom-and-democracy-remembrance-day-and-the-first-world-war/>

Between Acceptance and Refusal - Soldiers' Attitudes Towards War (Australia) / 1.0 / handbook - 1914-1918-Online (WW1) Encyclopedia. (2024, July 9). 1914-1918-Online (WW1) Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/between-acceptance-and-refusal-soldiers-attitudes-towards-war-australia/>

First World War home front and the recruitment drives for Australian Imperial Force. (2023, March 14). Department of Veterans' Affairs. <https://www.dva.gov.au/media/media-backgrounders/first-world-war-home-front-and-recruitment-drives-australian-imperial-force>

INFO, I. (2024, July 24). *Research Guides: World War I and Australia: War begins for Australia*. Guides.sl.nsw.gov.au. <https://guides.sl.nsw.gov.au/wwi-and-australia>

Department of Veterans' Affairs. (2023, March 14). *Overview of Australia's involvement in the First World War*. Department of Veterans' Affairs. <https://www.dva.gov.au/media/media-backgrounders/overview-australias-involvement-first-world-war>

National Archives of Australia. (2024). *First World War: Recruitment* | *naa.gov.au*. Naa.gov.au. <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/student-research-portal/learning-resource-themes/war/world-war-i/first-world-war-recruitment>

Australian War Memorial. (2021, June 2). *First World War 1914–18* | *The Australian War Memorial*. Awm.gov.au; Australian War Memorial. <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war>

Department of Veterans' Affairs. (2021, August 17). *World War I and Australia 1914 to 1918 | Anzac Portal*. Anzacportal.dva.gov.au. <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1>

Victoria State Government. (2017). *LESSON FOUR THE EFFECT OF WAR: ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF WAR ON AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY*. <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-04/soap2017-lesson-4.pdf>

State Library of Western Australia. (n.d.). *World War I*. Webarchive.slwa.wa.gov.au. https://webarchive.slwa.wa.gov.au/federation/fed/040_wwar.htm