

Introduction

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<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast
- an optional general knowledge activity
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (the Commonwealth).

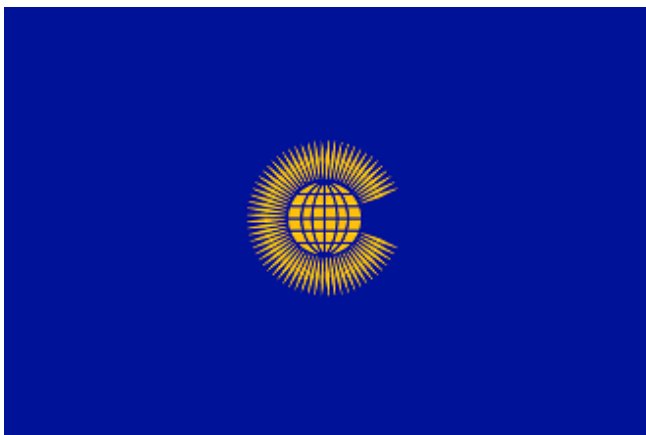
Read the article

The Commonwealth

March 11th is Commonwealth Day, but what exactly is the Commonwealth?

Where is the Commonwealth, and who lives there?

The Commonwealth is a group of 54 countries, spread all over the globe, north to south, east to west. The countries range in size from the tiny island of Nauru in the Pacific ocean (which is so small that it doesn't have a capital), to Canada, the largest territory in the world. Both rich and poor countries are members - the GDP of Singapore is about 200 times that of Sierra Leone. Over one and a half billion people (a quarter of the world's population) live in the Commonwealth, and between them represent nearly every religion, race and political system on the planet.



What is the Commonwealth?

Hot and cold, rich and poor, wet and dry, island and land-locked, the list of opposites used to describe the countries which make up the Commonwealth seems endless. Just what do they all have in common?

The member states all use English as a common working language, and have similar legal and education systems. The countries support each other in their aims to reduce poverty, prejudice, ignorance and disease, and to promote human rights and social development.

Historically, the modern Commonwealth is a product of the British Empire, and began in the late 1940s, after India and Pakistan gained independence. As more and more countries took charge of their own affairs in the 1950s and 1960s, many were attracted to the aims and values of the Commonwealth, resulting in the family of nations seen today.

Activities and events

The Commonwealth is active in a huge number of areas, including ecology, health and economics, providing and sharing information, training and expertise to further the aims of the organisation. The Heads of Government Meeting is held every two years, where the leaders of the member states get together to discuss current issues. Commonwealth Day is held in the second week of March every year, where Commonwealth citizens, particularly children, have a chance to celebrate their friendship. The Commonwealth also hosts sporting and arts events. There is an annual writers prize, which has been won in previous years by famous authors such as Peter Carey and Louis de Bernieres, and a yearly arts and crafts competition. Perhaps the most well-known event sponsored by the organisation is the Commonwealth Games, which is held every four years in one of the member countries. The games have gained the nickname 'the Friendly Games' because of their reputation for good-natured competitiveness.

After reading

Exercise 1

In the second table below are the names of six countries in the Commonwealth. In the first table are these countries' capital cities, populations (in 2006, according to Wikipedia) and the year each country joined the organization. Do you know or can you guess which information goes in each box?

Capital cities	Populations	Joining year
Funafuti	11,000	1962
Kingston	400,000	1964
Maseru	1.8 million	1965
Singapore	2.7 million	1966
Valletta	4.4 million	1978
Yaounde	15.7 million	1995

Cameroon	Jamaica	Lesotho	Singapore	Tuvaulu	Malta

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More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of the Commonwealth at:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-commonwealth.htm>

- **Magazine articles:** Articles about the following countries in the Commonwealth: **Australia; Canada; India; Kenya; New Zealand; Nigeria; Papua New Guinea; South Africa.**
- **Word games:** The following word games are available for this theme: **Australian English; Canadian English; Indian and Pakistani English; Kenyan wildlife; New Zealand English; South African English; Tok Pisin (New Guinea); West African and Jamaican English.**
- **Story: Australia - The Dreamtime** is the central, unifying theme in Australian Aboriginal mythology. It describes the process of the world being called into being. The Australian Aboriginal culture is based on nature in every aspect. Most of their mythological heroes are animals common in Australia.
- **Story: New Zealand.** Dame Ngaio Marsh, one of New Zealand's most remarkable and charismatic women, was world-renowned as a leading crime fiction writer. In this activity, compare the plots of some of her different crime stories.
- **Story: Nigeria - A Visitor to the Star.** Anna Winter pulled on her Gucci sunglasses and sprayed herself with the extra-strength mosquito repellent she had bought in the airport. Anna thought her job was very difficult, and she told everybody about this. How could she be a front-line, award-winning, adventurous journalist if she had to stay in bad hotels and eat bad food?
- **Story: Papua New Guinea.** This folk story involves a masalai (a large ugly cannibal, similar to an ogre).
- **Story: South Africa - Coetzee's novels.** Read synopses of some of the novels of Nobel prize winning writer, South African J.M. Coetzee, and then compare them.
- **Poem: Australia - Mulga Bill's Bicycle** - a funny ballad by one of Australia's favourite poets, 'Banjo' Paterson.

- **Poem: Canada.** Sir Charles George Douglas Roberts was the first Canadian to be knighted for his work as a writer. According to one source: "Those of his poetical compositions that are distinctively Canadian are regarded as being specially excellent".
- **Poem: India.** Tagore, the author of this poem, once said "To study a banyan tree, you not only must know its main stem in its own soil, but also must trace the growth of its greatness in the further soil, for then you can know the true nature of its vitality".
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about the following countries in the Commonwealth: **Australia; Canada; India; Kenya; New Zealand; Nigeria; Papua New Guinea; South Africa.**
- **History: India.** **Bhopal massacre; Black Hole of Calcutta.**
- **History: South Africa.** **Mandela trial; Mandela released; Apartheid repeal.**
- **History: Uganda.** **Amin coup; Operation Entebbe**
- There are also cartoons related to all of these countries and some carefully selected external links for each country.

Answers to general knowledge activity:

Cameroon	Jamaica	Lesotho	Singapore	Tuvvalu	Malta
Yaounde	Kingston	Maseru	Singapore	Funafuti	Valletta
15.7 million	2.7 million	1.8 million	4.4 million	11,000	400,000
1995	1962	1966	1965	1978	1964

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