

COMMONWEALTH DAY IN SCHOOLS

Why learn about the Commonwealth?

Every nation has a responsibility to provide education that will promote international understanding and goodwill. Young people, in particular, should learn how important it is that all people should strive to live together in harmony in an increasingly complex world. Studies related to the Commonwealth can provide an excellent means of getting across to young and impressionable minds the ideas of "independence", "interdependence", "co-operation", "partnership", "pulling together", "unity amidst diversity", "North/South dialogue", which underlie attempts to secure world peace and international understanding and development assistance programs.

What is the Commonwealth?

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of forty-eight independent countries situated in every region of the world. It brings together over a billion people of infinite variety — of faith, of race, of language and of colour — who share certain traditions, techniques and attitudes in government, in the law, in education, and in other fields, and the ability to communicate easily with each other in the English language.

The decision to join the Commonwealth was freely made by member governments when they became independent. All agree that their interests are well served by continued partnership and co-operation. Through their association with each other, members make a genuine effort to encourage greater human understanding and to work towards a peaceful world by reducing prejudice, ignorance, disease and poverty. These political beliefs are set out in a Declaration of Commonwealth Principles which they regard as valid not merely for themselves, but as a contribution to the collective understanding and goodwill of all mankind. As befits an extended family relationship, Commonwealth Heads of Government meet every two years for private consultations on the leading international issues and to review the state of Commonwealth co-operation.

The Commonwealth also conducts a very diverse range of technical assistance, economic, humanitarian and social programs mainly for its developing country members but financed by all members according to their means. A few examples are:

- The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, in which a unique and successful principle has been to provide the means of exchanging relevant experience between developing countries (within regions and between regions) so that they can learn from each other.
- Several major studies undertaken on economic and trade relationships between developed and developing countries (the North/South Dialogue).

— The Commonwealth Youth Program with India, Guyana and Zambia providing regional centres for training of youth leaders.

— As recent additions, units concerned with the means of improving the role and place of women in economic and social development, and the promotion of human rights within the Commonwealth have been established.

— At their 1987 meeting in Vancouver, the Heads of Government agreed to create a new Commonwealth institution for co-operation in distance education. This new agency, known as the Commonwealth of Learning, was inaugurated in Vancouver in November 1988, and is the first Commonwealth body to be based in Canada and outside Britain.

What is Commonwealth Day?

Commonwealth Day is a special day every year when member countries celebrate their membership in the association. Commonwealth Heads of Government have set aside the second Monday in March for this purpose so as to promote understanding and learning about the Commonwealth. Schools can sponsor activities which will enable them to make imaginative use of Commonwealth Day and the period leading up to it, and involve parents and other resource persons in some of these activities. The following are some of the ideas which teachers may wish to consider.

Classroom activities in the period leading up to Commonwealth Day

1. *Arts and crafts*

- a) Put up a large map of the world and colour in Commonwealth nations. Different colours could be used for the different regions — Canada/Caribbean; Britain/Mediterranean; Africa; Asia; Pacific.
- b) Make a display of food labels from Commonwealth countries, relating them to the country of origin on the map.
- c) Make and display dolls dressed in traditional costumes.
- d) Collect or draw pictures of people from different Commonwealth countries and display them.

2. *Readings*

Read stories and poems by Commonwealth writers. Encourage children to get pen-friends in other Commonwealth countries.

3. *Stamp collecting*

Display Commonwealth stamps including those collected from pen-friends in Commonwealth nations.

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