Decade Summary	1948

On 3 September 1939, prime minister Robert Menzies declared that Australia was at war:
 	
    Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war. No harder task can fall to the lot of a democratic leader than to make such an announcement …
    Extract from prime minister Robert Menzies's announcement of war speech, 1939
 	
The Second World War brought about significant social, political and economic change for Australia. The federal government was united on a declaration of war against the Axis powers and mobilised troops to fight in Europe and North Africa. The only potential problem was the issue of conscription and training troops for the rigors of the war effort.
 	
In the early 1940s, Australia found itself in danger of a Japanese invasion. Significant towns along the northern coast of Australia, particularly Darwin, were bombed, resulting in more than 200 deaths. On 7 December 1941, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was bombed by the Japanese, signalling the entry of the USA into the Second World War. Due to the presence of the US navy in the Pacific, prime minister John Curtain declared that it was to the USA that Australia must now turn for its security.
 	
The fall of British-held Singapore in 1942 led to a reappraisal of Australia's reliance on Great Britain for its security. At the time, Great Britain was preoccupied with its own struggle for survival against Nazi Germany in Europe. In May and June 1942, the war was brought home to Australians on the east coast when three Japanese midget submarines were discovered in Sydney Harbour.
 	
On the home front, the federal government imposed censorship and rationing, and directed all major resources to the war effort. As with the First World War, women entered the workforce to replace the men who enlisted in the military forces.
 	
Post-war Australia was epitomised by housing shortages, strikes and government attempts to nationalise private banks while continuing rationing. These restrictions led to unrest and instability within the community. Post-war Australia also experienced the resettling of European war refugees through the assisted immigration program. The migrants were recruited to work on large public works programs such as the Snowy Mountain Hydro-electric Scheme, which was launched in 1949.
	January
	• Employees working under the Federal Award System begin working a 40-hour week.
	
	May
	• The Housing Commission in Melbourne holds its first ballot to allocate new homes for families of returned servicemen.
	
	June
	• The federal government ends the rationing of meat and clothing.
	
	August
	• The federal government's legislation to nationalise private banks is declared invalid by the High Court.
	
	October
	• The first Australian Holden motor car comes off the assembly line and becomes a symbol of Australian prosperity.
	
	December
	• Dr Herbert Vere Evatt (1894–1965), former minister for external affairs and attorney-general, is elected president of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

History and Politics	
Australia declares war	Between 1937 and 1940, Japan had moved southwards conquering the Asian countries in its path. For Australia, the conflict became far more localised when on 19 November 1941 HMAS *Sydney* and all its 645 hands were lost, sunk by the German raider HSK *Kormoran*. This tragedy represented the greatest loss of life in an Australian warship, and the largest Allied vessel to sink with all hands during the war. On 7 December 1941, the Japanese launched its Pacific offensive with Thailand, Malaya, the Philippines and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, all suffering attacks. On 9 December 1941, Australia's governor-general, Alexander Hore-Ruthven, declared that Australia was at war with Japan. This was the first time Australia had declared war on another country as an independent nation, expressing its relatively new principle of self-governing responsibility in international affairs. Prior to this, Australia had relied on Great Britain for its foreign policy. On 11 December 1941, the War Cabinet agreed to call up men for full-time home defence army service. By June 1942, nearly 100,000 men had enlisted.
Conscription	On 5 January 1943, the *Defence (Citizen Military Forces) Act 1943* (Cth) was passed. The federal ALP conference approved prime minister John Curtin's proposal to extend the use of conscripted forces to fight in some non-Australian territories in the south-west Pacific area. Curtin had great difficulty in persuading state branches to agree to this radical change to traditional Labor policy, which had long held that men should not be conscripted for overseas fighting, but ultimately he was successful. On 19 February 1943, the 'Militia Bill' became law and all of the Australian forces now became available to the US General Douglas MacArthur in planning the Pacific campaign.
The Japanese attack	On 19 February 1942, the Japanese bombed Darwin. More than 243 lives were lost and the population experienced a total of 62 raids over the next two years. The death toll and reports of casualties were intentionally diminished by the government to maintain national morale. Townsville, Katherine, Wyndham, Derby and Port Hedland, Millingimbi, Exmouth Gulf and Horn Island were also targeted, with loss of military and civilian lives. In April 1942, General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia as Supreme Commander of allied forces in the south-west Pacific. More than 900,000 Australians served in the forces during the war, which was three times more than the number of service people in the First World War. Between May and June 1942, the Imperial Japanese Navy made a series of attacks on Sydney and Newcastle. Three midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour, in an attempt to sink United States and Australian warships. Having been detected, the crews of two of the midget submarines sunk their boats and committed suicide. The suffering of Australian soldiers as Japanese prisoners of war first became public in November 1944, after Australian men were rescued from a torpedoed Japanese troop ship. More than 22,000 Australian servicemen and approximately 40 nurses were taken prisoner in 1942 when Japanese forces captured Malaya, Singapore, New Britain, and the Netherlands East Indies. Hundreds of Australian civilians were also interned. By the end of the war, more than one-third of these prisoners, approximately 8,000, had died.
Indigenous war service	Many Indigenous people enlisted in the Australian Defence Force at the beginning of the Second World War; however, in 1940 the Defence Committee stated that Indigenous enlistment was 'neither necessary nor desirable'. It was not until Japan entered the war that Indigenous people

	were again encouraged to enlist. It is difficult to estimate how many Indigenous men and women enlisted as Australian Defence Force enlistment forms did not allow for Indigenous people to declare their heritage until 1980. Indigenous servicepeople were also employed as labourers performing vital tasks for the military. They salvaged crashed aircraft, located unexploded bombs, built roads and airfields and assisted in the delivery of civilian and military supplies. Many Indigenous people served in the regular armed forces during the Second World War and a smaller number in irregular units. In northern Australia, there were Special Reconnaissance Units made up almost exclusively of Indigenous people. The Indigenous people who served in those units were not formally enlisted and nor were they paid. It was not until 1992 that they were finally awarded medals and remuneration. Lt Reginald (Reg) Saunders was the first known Aboriginal commissioned officer. He was commissioned in the Australian Army after his graduation from the Officers Cadet Training Unit at Seymour, Victoria, on 25 November 1944. He served as a lieutenant and later a captain.
War's end	On 15 February 1942, Singapore surrendered to the Japanese. Thousands of British troops, including 15,000 Australians, became prisoners of war. On 8 March 1942 Allied forces on Java surrendered to the Japanese, along with 2,700 Australians. While these losses were devastating to the war effort, in the same year, Australian civilian militia and soldiers stopped the Japanese advance on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea. Between 1943 and 1945, Australian soldiers fought in the western Pacific and southern Asia in support of the main United States advances into Japanese-held territory. On 4 May 1945, Germany unconditionally surrendered, thus ending the war in Europe. On 15 August 1945 Japan surrendered, signalling the end of the war in the Pacific. Overall, approximately 550,000 Australian men and women (one in 12 of a population of approximately 7 million Australians) served overseas during the war, and 39,000 died including 8,000 who were prisoners of the Japanese.
Post war reconstruction	The *National Security Act 1939* gave the Australian Government new powers during the war, and the government used those powers to make laws and regulations such as issuing personal identity cards, rationing clothing and food and forming the Women's Land Army. In December 1942, the Department of Post-war Reconstruction was set up by the federal government to coordinate public works programs, resettlement of refugees and rehabilitation of servicemen after the war. The reconstruction program prioritised full employment bolstered by large-scale public works initiatives. Additionally, it initiated a housing program for low-income workers, a new emphasis on Australia's manufacturing industries, particularly the design and production of an all-Australian motor car and a large-scale immigration program to stimulate and implement development. In 1946, the first post-war immigration agreement was made with British Government for 70,000 people a year to migrate to Australia. This immigration scheme would provide labour for the new industries and increase Australia's population as part of the 'populate or perish' call. The agreement meant that a migrant paid £10 towards the fare while the two governments would share the rest of the cost. These immigrants were known colloquially as 'Ten Pound Poms'.

Society and Culture	
The home front	In 1941, prime minister John Curtin gave the directive that Australia was to be converted to a war economy with economic, domestic and industrial resources assigned to the war effort. In March 1942, rationing began in Australia. Accessing everyday commodities was limited, for example, to 58 grams of tea and 450 grams of sugar each week. Clothing purchases were reduced, and over the next two years butter (227 grams a week) and meat (1 kilogram) rationing were introduced. In June 1940, prime minister Robert Menzies appointed newspaper owner Keith Murdoch as director-general of information. Murdoch owned a chain of newspapers across the county and the government wanted to ensure that, through him, they controlled the release of sensitive wartime information and propaganda. Murdoch, with (Sir) Richard Boyer, set up a US division of his department, aiming to entice the USA into the war. He was the founder of the Australian–American Association, of which he remained president until 1946.
The Americans	On 17 March 1942, General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Darwin after his retreat from the Philippines. He became the supreme commander of all Allied forces in the south-west Pacific, and based his operations headquarters first in Melbourne, then in Brisbane. By June 1943, there were about 178,000 US servicemen stationed throughout Australia, representing the greatest influx of a foreign group into Australia. The influence they had on Australian culture, fashion, lifestyle and attitude was considerable. But this influence also brought tensions and rivalry; it was reported that up to 20 brawls a night were occurring between the US and Australian servicemen. Many factors contributed to these tensions, including the fact that US forces received better rations than Australian soldiers and shops and hotels regularly gave preferential treatment to US troops. In November 1942, the notorious 'Battle of Brisbane' between Australian and US troops took place, when more than 3,000 Australian soldiers attacked a US army canteen. One Australian soldier was shot dead and 20 were seriously injured on each side. It was the biggest of a series of clashes between the two groups in wartime Australia.
Women's wartime achievements	Between 1941 and 1945, about 27,000 women entered the defence and civilian workforces to replace the men who were involved in fighting at the frontline. During the Second World War a host of organisations was formed for women to aid the war effort. These included the Women's Employment Board, which was set up to facilitate the entry of women into employment, the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), in which women were placed to work on farms where there was a labor shortage, and the Australian Comforts Fund. Women were paid at a lower rate than their male counterparts, doing exactly the same job. At the end of the war many of these jobs disappeared. The service experience, however, did liberate many women who sought jobs and remained in the post-war workforce. In November 1940, Margaret Doyle became the first woman announcer on ABC radio, following a new policy to free up male announcers for active service in the war. In April 1941, minister for the navy and then prime minister Billy Hughes approved the employment of women as telegraphists in the Royal Australian Navy. Soon after, the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) was formed, reaching a size of 2,000. In August 1941, the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) was created and reached 25,000 in three years. In 1941, the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) was formed with Clare Stevenson as its director. In 1942, the Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS) was established. In September 1943, Dame Enid Lyons (widow of 1930s Liberal prime minister Joseph Lyons), and Labor Senator Dorothy Tangney were the first two women to win election to federal parliament.

Science and Technology	
Flight	On 12 May 1946, the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) and Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service (Qantas) Empire Airways joined their businesses to establish the first post-war flying service from England to Australia. In 1947, the Australian government nationalised Qantas by acquiring all shares in the organisation. In September 1946, the government-owned domestic airline Trans-Australia Airlines (TAA) began operation with daily flights between Melbourne and Sydney. By the end of 1946, TAA connected all capital cities with both passengers and freight flights. Meanwhile, the private entrepreneur Reginald Ansett had entered the aviation arena in 1935 with a service from Melbourne to Hamilton in western Victoria. In the 1940s, he expanded his operation to establish Ansett Transport Industries.
Radio	Between 1943 and 1953, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) began to broadcast nationally and daily the children's program, *Kindergarten of the Air,* designed to educate young children as many kindergartens had closed during the war. In July 1946, ABC radio began broadcasting House of Representatives and Senate sessions. In July 1947, the ABC went to air with its first independent news service, which had no reliance on commercial interests. Between 1944 and 1949, the popular serial *The Lawsons,* written by Gwen Meredith, was broadcast by the ABC. The Lawson family lived on a property called 'Wongalee' and represented ordinary Australians who battled to survive everyday life. This struck a familiar chord with thousands of Australians as their lives revolved around concerns for their family members who were away at war. Another popular radio serial was *Blue Hills*, also by Gwen Meredith, which began in 1949 and was the longest running daily radio serial, surviving for 27 years. Simultaneously, the commercial radio sector was also flourishing in what would become known as radio's 'golden age'. Radio stations flourished throughout the country. Commercial businesses paid for advertising time on high-rating radio dramas, the original 'soap operas', such as the very popular serials *Big Sister* and *When a Girl Marries.*
The Holden	On 29 November 1948, prime minister Ben Chifley launched Australia's first mass-produced car, the FX Holden, which was manufactured by General Motors-Holden's at Fisherman's Bend in Melbourne. General Motors-Holden's Ltd was a company formed in 1931 from a merger between General Motors (USA) and Holden's Motor Body Builders, which was founded in 1883 and specialised in saddles, coach-building and then building automobile bodies. The first fully Australian-made car was named in honour of Henry James Holden, the founder of the Holden company.
Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme	In July 1949, the federal government announced plans for the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme, which was a very large engineering project in the Great Dividing Range of New South Wales. The scheme diverted the headwaters of the Snowy River through a series of tunnels and dams to generate electricity for NSW, Vic and the Australian Capital Territory, and released water for irrigation purposes. Australia's most sophisticated engineering feat began construction in October 1949 and employed thousands of European immigrants who were resettled in Australia after the Second World War.