**Australian Identity; examining its manifestation and construction through literature**

As it is impossible to divorce the notion of identity and culture from language, it is essential for us to study the literature that is generated by a speech community. In the following activities we will be analyzing and critiquing the different understandings of Australian identity as they are conveyed in various poems. This is similar to the mini AC task where we analysed five iconic Australian songs to determine key social values and characteristics valued by Australians.

**Activity 1**

Read the poems below and annotate for the following:

* historical context
* social values highlighted
* characteristics valued
* perception of Australian identity
* perspective of the individual
* lexical choice

Each poem should have roughly 300 word analysis attached to it. You must use formal language features in your analysis.

**The Man From Snowy River by A.B ‘Banjo’ Patterson**

There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around

That the colt from old Regret had got away,

And had joined the wild bush horses - he was worth a thousand pound,

So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.

All the tried and noted riders from the stations near and far

Had mustered at the homestead overnight,

For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are,

And the stockhorse snuffs the battle with delight.

There was Harrison, who made his pile when Pardon won the cup,

The old man with his hair as white as snow;

But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up -

He would go wherever horse and man could go.

And Clancy of the Overflow came down to lend a hand,

No better horseman ever held the reins;

For never horse could throw him while the saddle girths would stand,

He learnt to ride while droving on the plains.

And one was there, a stripling on a small and weedy beast,

He was something like a racehorse undersized,

With a touch of Timor pony - three parts thoroughbred at least -

And such as are by mountain horsemen prized.

He was hard and tough and wiry - just the sort that won't say die -

There was courage in his quick impatient tread;

And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,

And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.

But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his power to stay,

And the old man said, "That horse will never do

For a long a tiring gallop - lad, you'd better stop away,

Those hills are far too rough for such as you."

So he waited sad and wistful - only Clancy stood his friend -

"I think we ought to let him come," he said;

"I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the end,

For both his horse and he are mountain bred.

"He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,

Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough,

Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride,

The man that holds his own is good enough.

And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home,

Where the river runs those giant hills between;

I have seen full many horsemen since I first commenced to roam,

But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen."

So he went - they found the horses by the big mimosa clump -

They raced away towards the mountain's brow,

And the old man gave his orders, "Boys, go at them from the jump,

No use to try for fancy riding now.

And, Clancy, you must wheel them, try and wheel them to the right.

Ride boldly, lad, and never fear the spills,

For never yet was rider that could keep the mob in sight,

If once they gain the shelter of those hills."

So Clancy rode to wheel them - he was racing on the wing

Where the best and boldest riders take their place,

And he raced his stockhorse past them, and he made the ranges ring

With the stockwhip, as he met them face to face.

Then they halted for a moment, while he swung the dreaded lash,

But they saw their well-loved mountain full in view,

And they charged beneath the stockwhip with a sharp and sudden dash,

And off into the mountain scrub they flew.

Then fast the horsemen followed, where the gorges deep and black

Resounded to the thunder of their tread,

And the stockwhips woke the echoes, and they fiercely answered back

From cliffs and crags that beetled overhead.

And upward, ever upward, the wild horses held their way,

Where mountain ash and kurrajong grew wide;

And the old man muttered fiercely, "We may bid the mob good day,

No man can hold them down the other side."

When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull,

It well might make the boldest hold their breath,

The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full

Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.

But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,

And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,

And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,

While the others stood and watched in very fear.

He sent the flint stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,

He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,

And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat -

It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride.

Through the stringybarks and saplings, on the rough and broken ground,

Down the hillside at a racing pace he went;

And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound,

At the bottom of that terrible descent.

He was right among the horses as they climbed the further hill,

And the watchers on the mountain standing mute,

Saw him ply the stockwhip fiercely, he was right among them still,

As he raced across the clearing in pursuit.

Then they lost him for a moment, where two mountain gullies met

In the ranges, but a final glimpse reveals

On a dim and distant hillside the wild horses racing yet,

With the man from Snowy River at their heels.

And he ran them single-handed till their sides were white with foam.

He followed like a bloodhound on their track,

Till they halted cowed and beaten, then he turned their heads for home,

And alone and unassisted brought them back.

But his hardy mountain pony he could scarcely raise a trot,

He was blood from hip to shoulder from the spur;

But his pluck was still undaunted, and his courage fiery hot,

For never yet was mountain horse a cur.

And down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise

Their torn and rugged battlements on high,

Where the air is clear as crystal, and the white stars fairly blaze

At midnight in the cold and frosty sky,

And where around The Overflow the reed beds sweep and sway

To the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,

The man from Snowy River is a household word today,

And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.

*The Bulletin*, 26 April 1890.

**The City Bushman by Henry Lawson**

It was pleasant up the country, City Bushman, where you went,

For you sought the greener patches and you travelled like a gent;

And you curse the trams and buses and the turmoil and the push,

Though you know the squalid city needn't keep you from the bush;

But we lately heard you singing of the "plains where shade is not",

And you mentioned it was dusty - "all was dry and all was hot".

True, the bush "hath moods and changes" - and the bushman hath 'em, too,

For he's not a poet's dummy - he's a man, the same as you;

But his back is growing rounder - slaving for the absentee -

And his toiling wife is thinner than a country wife should be.

For we noticed that the faces of the folks we chanced to meet

Should have made a greater contrast to the faces in the street;

And, in short, we think the bushman's being driven to the wall,

And it's doubtful if his spirit will be "loyal through it all".

Though the bush has been romantic and it's nice to sing about,

There's a lot of patriotism that the land could do without -

Sort of *British Workman* nonsense that shall perish in the scorn

Of the drover who is driven and the shearer who is shorn,

Of the struggling western farmers who have little time for rest,

And are ruined on selections in the sheep-infested West;

Droving songs are very pretty, but they merit little thanks

From the people of a country in possession of the Banks.

No, the "rise and fall of seasons" suits the rise and fall of rhyme,

But we know that western seasons do not run on schedule time;

For the drought will go on drying while there's anything to dry,

Then it rains until you'd fancy it would bleach the sunny sky -

Then it pelters out of reason, till the downpour day and night

Nearly sweeps the population to the Great Australian Bight.

It is up in Northern Queensland that the seasons do their best,

But it's doubtful if you ever saw a season in the West;

There are years without an autumn or a winter or a spring,

There are broiling Junes, and summers when it rains like anything.

In the bush my ears were opened to the singing of the bird,

But the "carol of the magpie" was a thing I never heard.

Once the beggar roused my slumbers in a shanty, it is true,

But I only heard him asking, "Who the blanky blank are you?"

And the bell-bird in the ranges - well, his "silver chime" is harsh

When it's heard beside the solo of the curlew in the marsh.

No, the bushman isn't always "trapping brumbies in the night",

Nor is he for ever riding when "the morn is fresh and bright",

And he isn't always singing in the humpies on the run -

And the camp-fire's "cheery blazes" are a trifle overdone;

We have grumbled with the bushmen round the fire on rainy days,

When the smoke would blind a bullock and there wasn't any blaze,

Save the blazes of our language, for we cursed the fire in turn

Till the atmosphere was heated and the wood began to burn.

Then we had to wring our blueys which were rotting in the swags,

And we saw the sugar leaking through the bottoms of the bags,

And we couldn't raise a chorus, for the toothache and the cramp,

While we spent the hours of darkness draining puddles round the camp.

Would you like to change with Clancy - go a-droving? tell us true,

For we rather think that Clancy would be glad to change with you,

And be something in the city; but 'twould give your muse a shock

To be losing time and money through the foot-rot in the flock,

And you wouldn't mind the beauties underneath the starry dome

If you had a wife and children and a lot of bills at home.

Did you ever guard the cattle when the night was inky-black,

And it rained, and icy water trickled gently down your back

Till your saddle-weary backbone started aching at the roots

And you almost felt the croaking of the bull-frog in your boots -

Did you shiver in the saddle, curse the restless stock and cough

Till a squatter's blanky dummy cantered up to warn you off?

Did you fight the drought and pleuro when the "seasons" were asleep,

Felling sheoaks all the morning for a flock of starving sheep,

Drinking mud instead of water - climbing trees and lopping boughs

For the broken-hearted bullocks and the dry and dusty cows?

Do you think the bush was better in the "good old droving days",

When the squatter ruled supremely as the king of western ways,

When you got a slip of paper for the little you could earn,

But were forced to take provisions from the station in return -

When you couldn't keep a chicken at your humpy on the run,

For the squatter wouldn't let you - and your work was never done;

When you had to leave the missus in a lonely hut forlorn

While you "rose up Willy Riley" - in the days ere you were born?

Ah! we read about the drovers and the shearers and the like

Till we wonder why such happy and romantic fellows strike.

Don't you fancy that the poets ought to give the bush a rest

Ere they raise a just rebellion in the over-written West?

Where the simple-minded bushman gets a meal and bed and rum

Just by riding round reporting phantom flocks that never come;

There the scalper - never troubled by the "war-whoop of the push" -

Has a quiet little billet - breeding rabbits in the bush;

There the idle shanty-keeper never fails to make a draw,

And the dummy gets his tucker through provisions in the law;

There the labour-agitator - when the shearers rise in might -

Makes his money sacrificing all his substance for The Right;

Where the squatter makes his fortune, and "the seasons rise and fall",

And the poor and honest bushman has to suffer for it all;

Where the drovers and the shearers and the bushmen and the rest

Never reach that Eldorado of the poets of the West.

So you think the bush is purer and that life is better there,

But it doesn't seem to pay you like the "squalid street and square".

Pray inform us, City Bushman, where you read, in prose or verse,

Of the awful "city urchin who would greet you with a curse".

There are golden hearts in gutters, though their owners lack the fat,

And I'll back a teamster's offspring to outswear a city brat.

Do you think we're never jolly where the trams and buses rage?

Did you hear the gods in chorus when "Ri-tooral" held the stage?

Did you catch a ring of sorrow in the city urchin's voice

When he yelled for Billy Elton, when he thumped the floor for Royce?

Do the bushmen, down on pleasure, miss the everlasting stars

When they drink and flirt and so on in the glow of private bars?

You've a down on "trams and buses", or the "roar" of 'em, you said,

And the "filthy, dirty attic", where you never toiled for bread.

(And about that self-same attic - Lord! wherever have you been?

For the struggling needlewoman mostly keeps her attic clean.)

But you'll find it very jolly with the cuff-and-collar push,

And the city seems to suit you, while you rave about the bush.

You'll admit that Up-the Country, more especially in drought,

Isn't quite the Eldorado that the poets rave about,

Yet at times we long to gallop where the reckless bushman rides

In the wake of startled brumbies that are flying for their hides,

Long to feel the saddle tremble once again between our knees

And to hear the stockwhips rattle just like rifles in the trees!

Long to feel the bridle-leather tugging strongly in the hand -

And to feel once more a little like a native of the land!

And the ring of bitter feeling in the jingling of our rhymes

Isn't suited to the country nor the spirit of the times.

Let us go together droving, and returning, if we live,

Try to understand each other while we reckon up the div.

**Niggers Leap, New England by Judith Wright**

The eastward spurs tip backward from the sun.

Nights runs an obscure tide round cape and bay

and beats with boats of cloud up from the sea

 against this sheer and limelit granite head.

 Swallow the spine of range; be dark. O lonely air.

 Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull

that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff

 and then were silent, waiting for the flies.

Here is the symbol, and climbing dark

a time for synthesis. Night buoys no warning

 over the rocks that wait our keels; no bells

 sound for the mariners. Now must we measure

 our days by nights, our tropics by their poles,

 love by its end and all our speech by silence.

 See in the gulfs, how small the light of home.

Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers,

and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?

 O all men are one man at last. We should have known

the night that tidied up the cliffs and hid them

had the same question on its tongue for us.

And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange.

 Never from earth again the coolamon

or thin black children dancing like the shadows

of saplings in the wind. Night lips the harsh

scarp of the tableland and cools its granite.

Night floods us suddenly as history

that has sunk many islands in its good time.

**Activity 2**

For the poems below, read through each one and complete the questions. You must use complete sentences.

**My Country by Dorothea Mackellar**

The love of field and coppice,

Of green and shaded lanes.

Of ordered woods and gardens

Is running in your veins,

Strong love of grey-blue distance

Brown streams and soft dim skies

I know but cannot share it,

My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,

A land of sweeping plains,

Of ragged mountain ranges,

Of droughts and flooding rains.

I love her far horizons,

I love her jewel-sea,

Her beauty and her terror -

The wide brown land for me!

A stark white ring-barked forest

All tragic to the moon,

The sapphire-misted mountains,

The hot gold hush of noon.

Green tangle of the brushes,

Where lithe lianas coil,

And orchids deck the tree-tops

And ferns the warm dark soil.

Core of my heart, my country!

Her pitiless blue sky,

When sick at heart, around us,

We see the cattle die -

But then the grey clouds gather,

And we can bless again

The drumming of an army,

The steady, soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!

Land of the Rainbow Gold,

For flood and fire and famine,

She pays us back threefold -

Over the thirsty paddocks,

Watch, after many days,

The filmy veil of greenness

That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,

A wilful, lavish land -

All you who have not loved her,

You will not understand -

Though earth holds many splendours,

Wherever I may die,

I know to what brown country

My homing thoughts will fly.

**The New True Anthem** by Kevin Gilbert

Despite what Dorothea has said

about the sun scorched land

you've never really loved her

nor sought to make her grand

you pollute all the rivers

and litter every road

your barbaric graffiti

cut scars where tall trees grow

the beaches and the mountains

are covered with your shame

injustice rules supremely

despite your claims to fame

the mud polluted rivers

are fenced off from the gaze

of travellers and the thirsty

for foreign hooves to graze

a tyranny now rules your soul

to your own image blind

a callousness and uncouth ways

now hallmarks of your kind

Australia oh Australia

you could stand proud and free

we weep in bitter anguish

at your hate and tyranny

the scarred black bodies writhing

humanity locked in chains

land theft and racial murder

you boast on of your gains

in woodchip and uranium

the anguished death you spread

will leave the children of the land

a heritage that's dead

Australia oh Australia

you could stand tall and free

we weep in bitter anguish

at your hate and tyranny.

**Questions**

1. Who is the second person referring to?
2. List the specific accusations made against 'you'.
3. Identity five semantic features utilised throughout each poem.
4. What kinds of environmental damage are depicted in the poem?
5. What impact does this poem have on you? Whose view of Australia do you prefer Mackellar's or Gilbert's? Why?
6. Does a politcal message of shame, guilt and blame appeal to you or put you off? Why?

**Activity 3**

Read the poem below and answer the questions attached.

**Australia by Ania Walwicz**

You big ugly. You too empty. You desert with your nothing nothing nothing.You scorched suntanned. Old too quickly. Acres of suburbs watching the telly. You bore me. Freckle silly children. You nothing much.

With your big sea. Beach beach beach. I´ve seen enough already. You Dumb dirty city with bar stools. You´re ugly. You silly shoppingtown. You copy. You too far everywhere. You laugh at me. When I came this woman gave me a box of biscuits. You try to be friendly but you´re not very friendly.

You never ask me to your house. You insult me. You don´t know how to be with me. Road road tree tree. I came from crowded and many. I came from rich. You have nothing to offer. You´re poor and spread thin. You big. So what. I´m small. It´s what´s in. You silent on Sunday. Nobody on your streets. You dead at night. You go to sleep too early. You don´t excite me. You scare me with your hopeless. Asleep when you walk. Too hot to think. You big awful. You don´t match me. You burnt out. You too big sky. You make me a dot in the nowhere. You laugh with your big healthy. You want everyone to be the same. You´re dumb. You do like anybody else. You engaged Doreen.

You big cow. You average average. Cold day at school playing around at lunchtime. Running around fot nothing. You never accept me. For your own. You always ask me where I´m from. You always ask me. You tell me I look strange. Different. You don´t adopt me. You laugh at the way I speak.

You think you´re better than me. You don´t like me. You don´t have any Interest in another country. Idiot centre of your own self. You think the rest of the world walks around without shoes or electric light. You don´t go anywhere. You stay at home. You like one another. You go crazy on Saturday night. You get drunk. You don´t like me and you don´t like women. You put your arm around men in bars. You´re rough. I can´t speak to you. You burly burly. You´re just silly to me. You big man. Poor with all your money. You ugly furniture. You ugly house. Relaxed in your summer stupor: All year. Never fully awake. Dull at school. Wait for other people to tell you what to do. Follow the leader. Can´t imagine. Work horse. Thick legs. You go to work in the morning. You shiver on a tram.

**Questions**

1. Paraphrase this poem in a short paragraph. You will have to think carefully about the meanings of some of the phrases. For example: 'Too old quickly.' What or who is too old? Too old for what? What does 'quickly' mean here?
2. How would you describe the tone of the poem? Identity quotes to support your interpretation. Why do you think the poet feels this way?
3. Write a paragraph where you compare and contrast this poem with Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country.'
4. How does this poem deviate from the Standard? What is the function of this departure?
5. What image do you have of the poet? Be specific in your description e.g. age, ethnicity, gender etc.
6. Complete this sentence: 'This poem says that Australia is a place where....'