

Stories from Australia's History

Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet



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GRAPHIC
PAGES!

When a word is printed in **bold**, click on it to find its meaning.

ON THE GRAPHIC PAGES, TEXT WITH THIS COLOURED BACKGROUND COMES FROM A HISTORICAL SOURCE.

so years, a
changed Australia forever.

Stories from Australia's history

The story of modern Australia starts on 26 January 1788. On that day, Captain Arthur Phillip arrived at Sydney Cove from England with the **convict** ships of the First Fleet. The new **settlement** brought disaster to Australia's **Indigenous peoples** because the newcomers took their lands. This event marks the beginning of Australia as we know it today.

Since 1788, Australia has grown from a tiny convict settlement into a free and **multicultural** nation. During these 200 or so years, a number of key events have changed Australia forever. The arrival of the First Fleet is one of these events.

Australia Day, celebrated on 26 January, marks the day that Captain Arthur Phillip landed at Sydney Cove, New South Wales.



Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet

On the evening of 26 January 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip raised the **British** flag on the shores of Sydney Cove in New South Wales. He had sailed the First Fleet across the world to an unfamiliar land. Phillip and his men drank rum to celebrate the new **colony**. Nearby, the Indigenous Eora people watched. They had no idea that the settlers were there to stay.



This picture of Sydney Cove was painted by William Bradley, an officer on the First Fleet.

Captain Phillip was ordered to build a settlement for unwanted criminals from Britain's overcrowded jails. However, Phillip saw a better future for New South Wales and he set about building it.

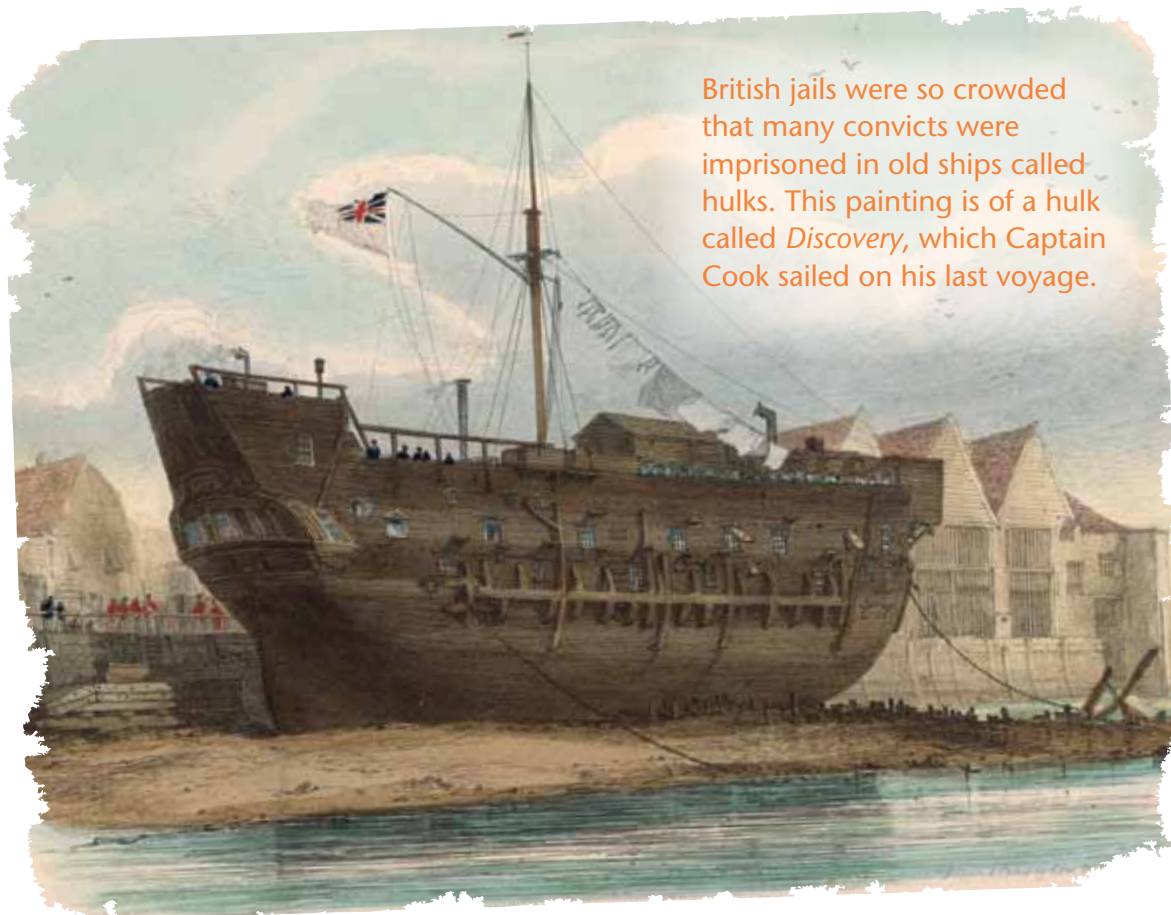
This is the story of the people, the ideas and the events that led to the settlement of Sydney Cove, and how it changed Australia forever.

What does it mean?

colony: A settlement created by a group of people living away from their homeland.

The big picture

In the 1770s, Britain had too many prisoners. Laws were harsh and people were jailed even for small crimes such as stealing clothes or food. During the 1700s, **convicts** were **transported** to America, but after the War of American Independence between 1775 and 1783, the Americans refused to take them. **British** jails became terribly overcrowded.



British jails were so crowded that many convicts were imprisoned in old ships called hulks. This painting is of a hulk called *Discovery*, which Captain Cook sailed on his last voyage.

Meanwhile, the explorer Captain James Cook returned from his voyages in the South Pacific. Cook's scientist, Joseph Banks, reported that Botany Bay on the eastern coast of Australia was a good place for a **settlement**. The British Government decided to send unwanted convicts there.

Captain Arthur Phillip

Arthur Phillip was appointed captain of the First Fleet, and **governor** in December 1786. He was ordered to create a settlement in the unmapped bushland of New South Wales. Convicts would be his workforce. The nearest British settlement would be far, far away.

Preparing the fleet

By March 1787, six transport ships loaded with about 800 convicts were ready to sail to Australia. It took weeks to load the food, tools and building materials into the **cargo** ships that sailed with them, because the fleet had to carry supplies to last two years. After that, the colony would have to grow all of its own food. On 13 May 1787, the First Fleet was ready to leave. Led by the flagship HMS *Sirius* and the smaller HMS *Supply*, the fleet sailed for Botany Bay.

This painting by William Bradley, an officer on the First Fleet, portrays the ships leaving Portsmouth, England.



Eyewitness words

Watkin Tench, an officer in the First Fleet, described the mood on board before sailing:

“...the ships were... healthy, and the prisoners in high spirits. Few complaints... were... heard among them... any attempt... to escape should be punished with instant death.”

Key people

These two people played key roles in the First Fleet and the settlement of New South Wales.

Arthur Phillip

Born: 1738 in London, England

Role: Governor of New South Wales

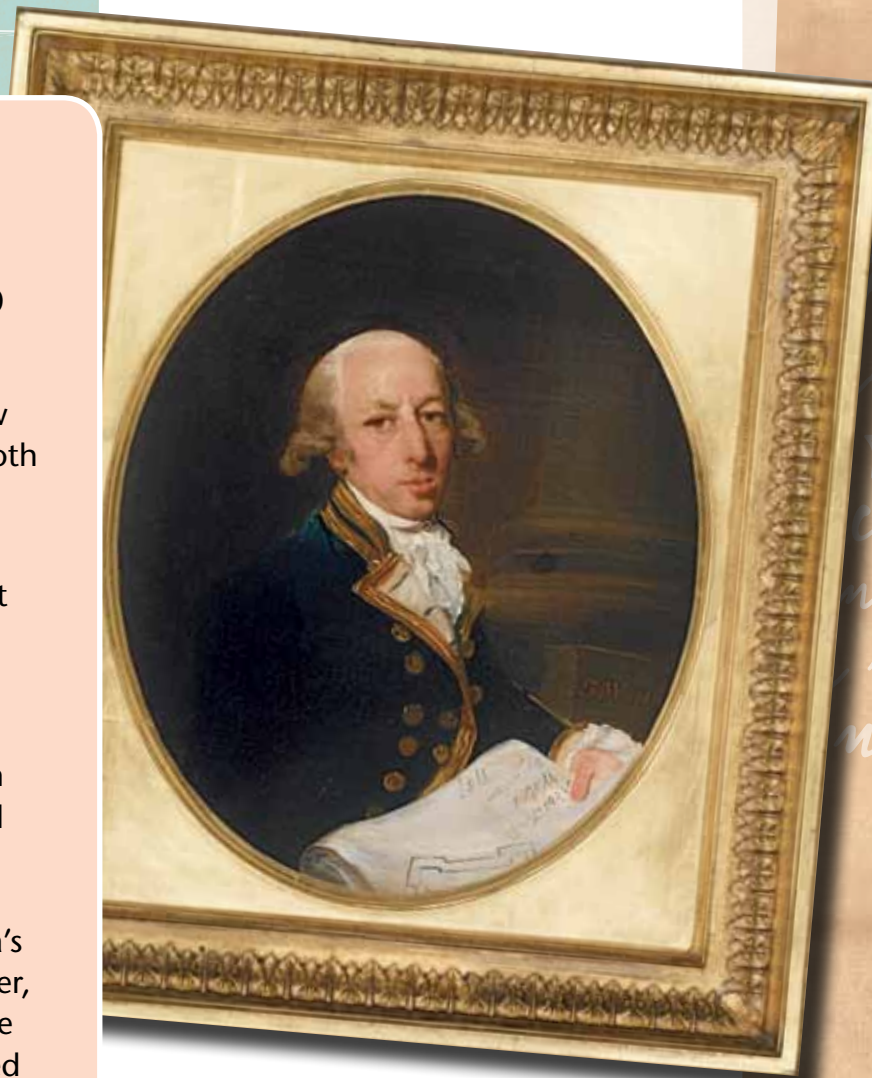
Age at the First Fleet landing: 50

Died: 1814

Appearance: Short and thin, narrow face, long hooked nose, one front tooth missing

Character: Intelligent, honest and reliable. A highly regarded officer, but a quiet and private man, hard to get to know. However, he did have a few strong friendships.

Comments: Arthur Phillip was a firm leader, brave in battle, but he disliked violence. He liked to reward rather than punish **convicts**. He also tried hard to become friends with Australia's **Indigenous peoples**. Phillip was clever, practical and hard-working, and a fine judge of character. He was fair-minded and treated everyone equally. He always believed Sydney could be a successful colony of **free settlers**, not just a jail.



What does it mean?

free settlers: People who chose to move to Australia.

Thomas Townshend Lord Sydney

Born: 1733 in Sidcup, England

Role: Home Secretary in the **British** Government. Governor Phillip reported to him.

Age at the First Fleet landing: 55

Died: 1800

Appearance: Thick-set, round face, regular features

Character: Lord Sydney was an upper-class gentleman who expected others to obey him, but he was not especially talented or clever. Fellow members of the government generally regarded him as unimpressive and not hard working.

Comments: Lord Sydney saw New South Wales as a jail. To him, the new colony was an answer to Britain's convict problem, but had no future as a settlement. He disliked spending money on New South Wales and was very slow to send supplies to the starving colony. However, Lord Sydney was a good judge of men because he appointed Arthur Phillip as governor. Phillip named Sydney Cove after him.



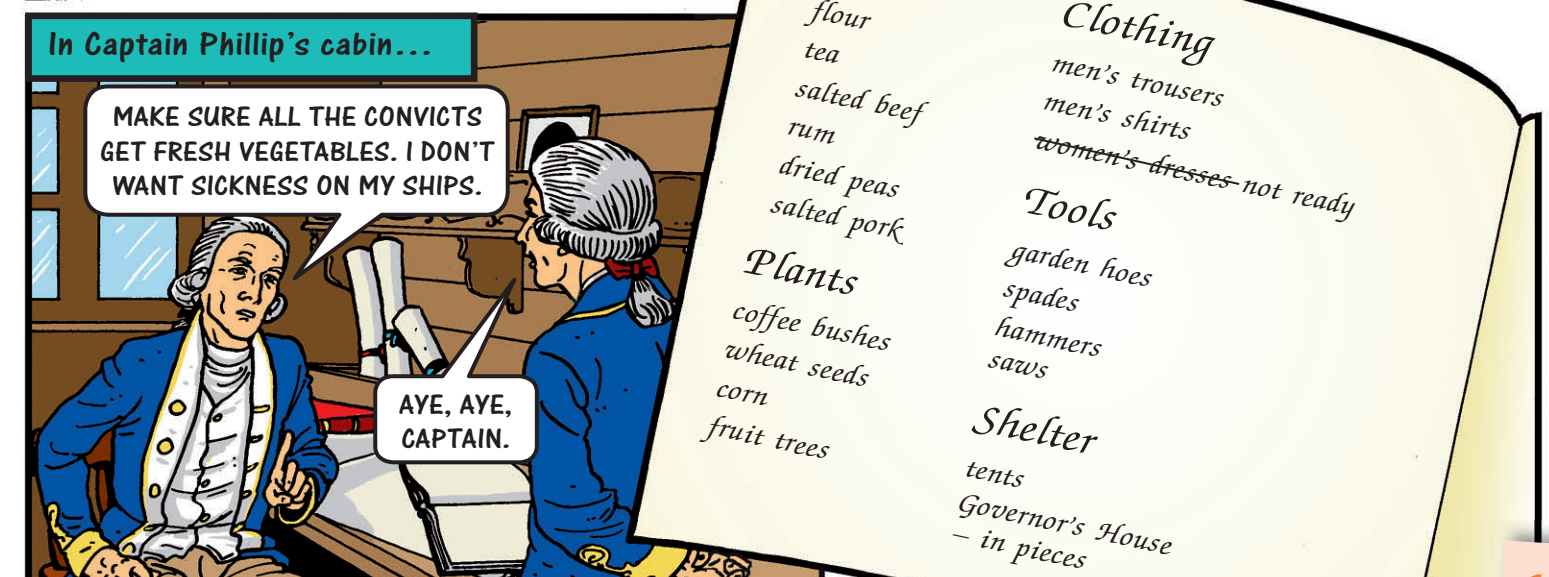
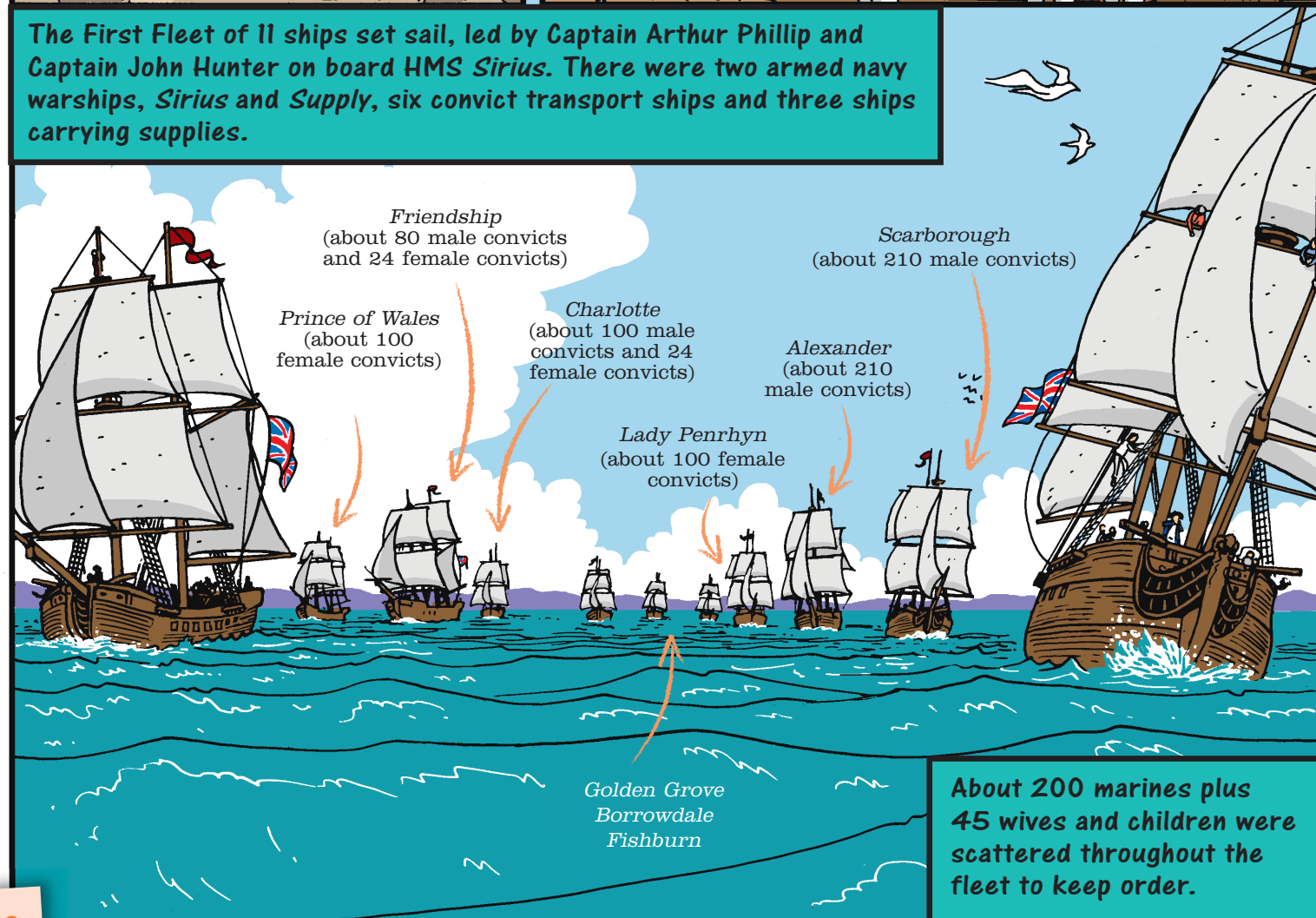
Bound for Botany Bay

When the First Fleet sailed from England, Botany Bay in the colony of New South Wales was just a distant dot on the map. Neither the convicts, nor the marines, nor Captain Arthur Phillip had any idea of what they would find there. They were sailing into the unknown.

13 May 1787
The harbour, Portsmouth, England



The First Fleet of 11 ships set sail, led by Captain Arthur Phillip and Captain John Hunter on board HMS Sirius. There were two armed navy warships, Sirius and Supply, six convict transport ships and three ships carrying supplies.



The Fleet made good progress...

20 May
1787

The convicts planned an uprising, but failed.



3 June

Tenerife, Canary Islands. Stopped for one week for fresh food.



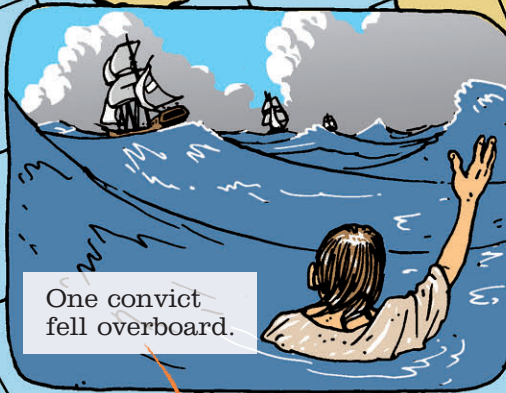
21 convicts died on this leg of the journey.

18 June

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Stopped for four weeks for food, plants and seeds.



One convict fell overboard.



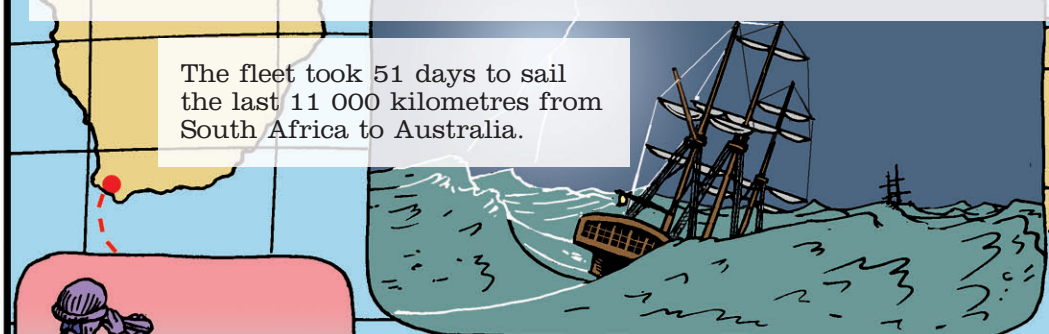
13 October

Cape Town, South Africa. Stayed four weeks and took on plants and live animals.



Off Cape Town, Captain Phillip transferred to HMS Supply to try and get to Australia ahead of the rest of the fleet and start preparing the settlement.

The fleet took 51 days to sail the last 11 000 kilometres from South Africa to Australia.



13 January
1788

HMS Supply saw the coast of New South Wales.



Overall, it took the fleet 251 days to reach Australia.

On board HMS Supply, off the coast of New South Wales...

Ship's log

17 January:
Cloudy with heavy squalls
18 January:
At noon... white cliffs... and Cape Banks... 3 miles from shore.
Fresh gales and clear. At 2 p.m. anchored in Botany Bay.



ROW TO THAT BAY. I WANT TO SPEAK TO THOSE NATIVES.

AND PUT DOWN YOUR GUNS, WE MUSTN'T FRIGHTEN THEM.

WE COME IN FRIENDSHIP!

The Eora people thought the newcomers were only passing through, so they welcomed them ashore. They did not realise they were about to lose their land and way of life...

The next day, the rest of the Fleet arrived at Botany Bay.

THIS HARBOUR IS DANGEROUS. IN A GALE, THE SHIPS WILL NOT BE SAFE.

YES CAPTAIN, AND IT'S TOO SHALLOW.

IT'S JUST A SWAMP!

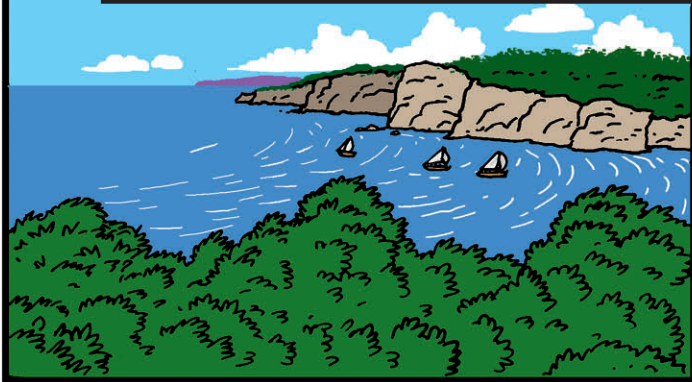
THERE'S NO FRESH WATER AND THE SOIL IS TOO SANDY TO GROW ANYTHING.



A map by the explorer Captain James Cook showed a harbour just to the north. Phillip set off with three small boats to explore it.

22 January
1788

Captain Phillip found Port Jackson, which is now often known as Sydney Harbour.

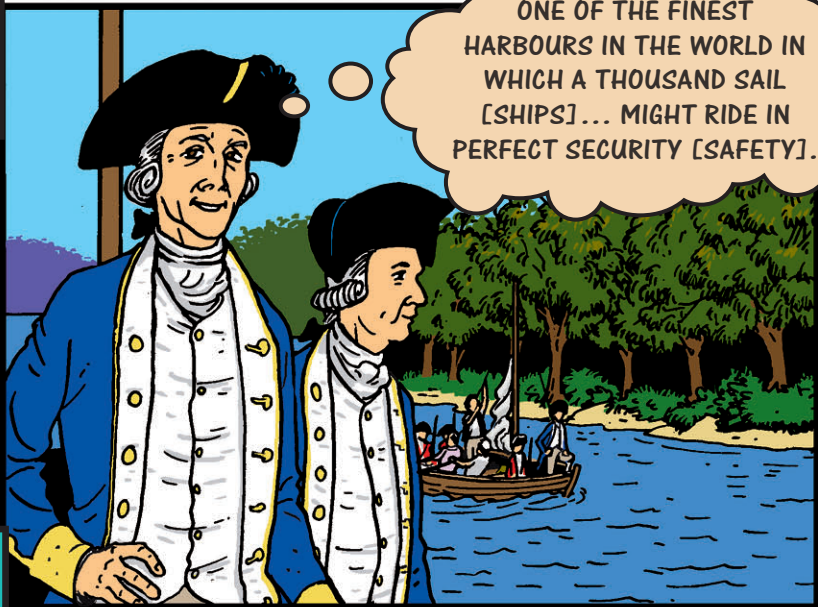


A small cove, ten kilometres from the entrance to Port Jackson, looked perfect for a settlement.



THERE'S GOOD FRESH WATER HERE.

AND THE HARBOUR IS DEEP.



ONE OF THE FINEST HARBOURS IN THE WORLD IN WHICH A THOUSAND SAIL [SHIPS]... MIGHT RIDE IN PERFECT SECURITY [SAFETY].



I NAME THIS PLACE SYDNEY COVE!

26 January

After returning to Botany Bay, Captain Phillip and the entire First Fleet sailed to Sydney Cove. That evening, Captain Phillip went ashore with a small group of men.



LET US DRINK TO HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE III, IN WHOSE NAME WE CLAIM THIS LAND. TO THE SUCCESS OF THE NEW SETTLEMENT!

HURRAY!

NOTHING TO CHEER ABOUT IN THIS DREADFUL PLACE...

The Eora people were angry, but they could not stop the newcomers from destroying their land. They had seen the white men's guns.

Captain Phillip drew up a plan for the new settlement.

WE NEED A HOSPITAL, BARRACKS FOR THE SOLDIERS AND CONVICTS, AND A STORE HOUSE TO HOLD OUR FOOD SUPPLIES.



BUT SIR, THE CONVICTS ARE VERY POOR WORKERS.



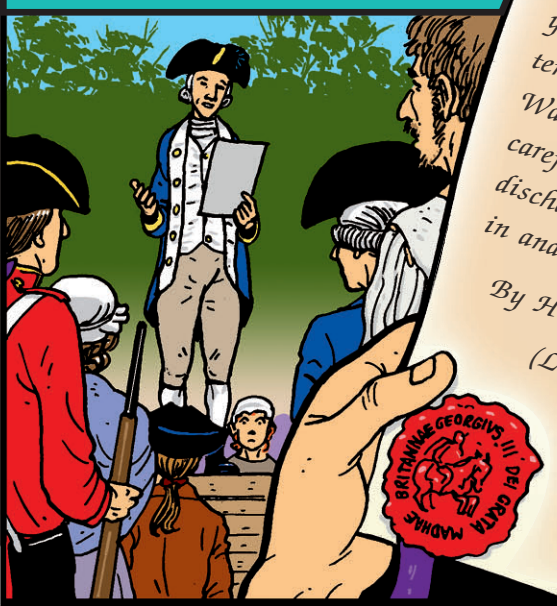
THEN TELL THEM I WILL SHORTEN THE SENTENCES OF CONVICTS WHO WORK HARD AND BEHAVE WELL.

The first weeks at Sydney Cove were very busy...



7 February
1788

Phillip held a ceremony to claim eastern Australia and read out the instructions he had been given back in England.



12 October 1786
We, (having)... trust and confidence in your loyalty, courage and experience in military affairs, do... appoint you to be Governor of our new territory called New South Wales... You are therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the duty of Governor in and over our territory...
By His Majesty's command
(Lord) Sydney

By the laws of England, Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet had a right to take the land...



...but by the laws of the Eora people the English were stealing the land.

Viewpoints

Most of the people who arrived on the First Fleet thought that the colony of New South Wales was hopeless and should be abandoned. Arthur Phillip was more positive. Two letters show these different points of view.

Major Robert Ross, Commanding Officer of the marines, New South Wales

Major Ross sailed to New South Wales with the First Fleet. He hated the new colony and complained constantly. He was a hot-tempered and difficult man, and his bad attitude affected his men, who refused to guard **convicts** or help build the colony. Major Ross wrote:

“in the whole world there is not a worse country than what we have yet seen of this. All that is contiguous to [near] us is so very barren [empty] and forbidding [scary] that it may with truth be said, here Nature is reversed.”

Major Robert Ross, 1788

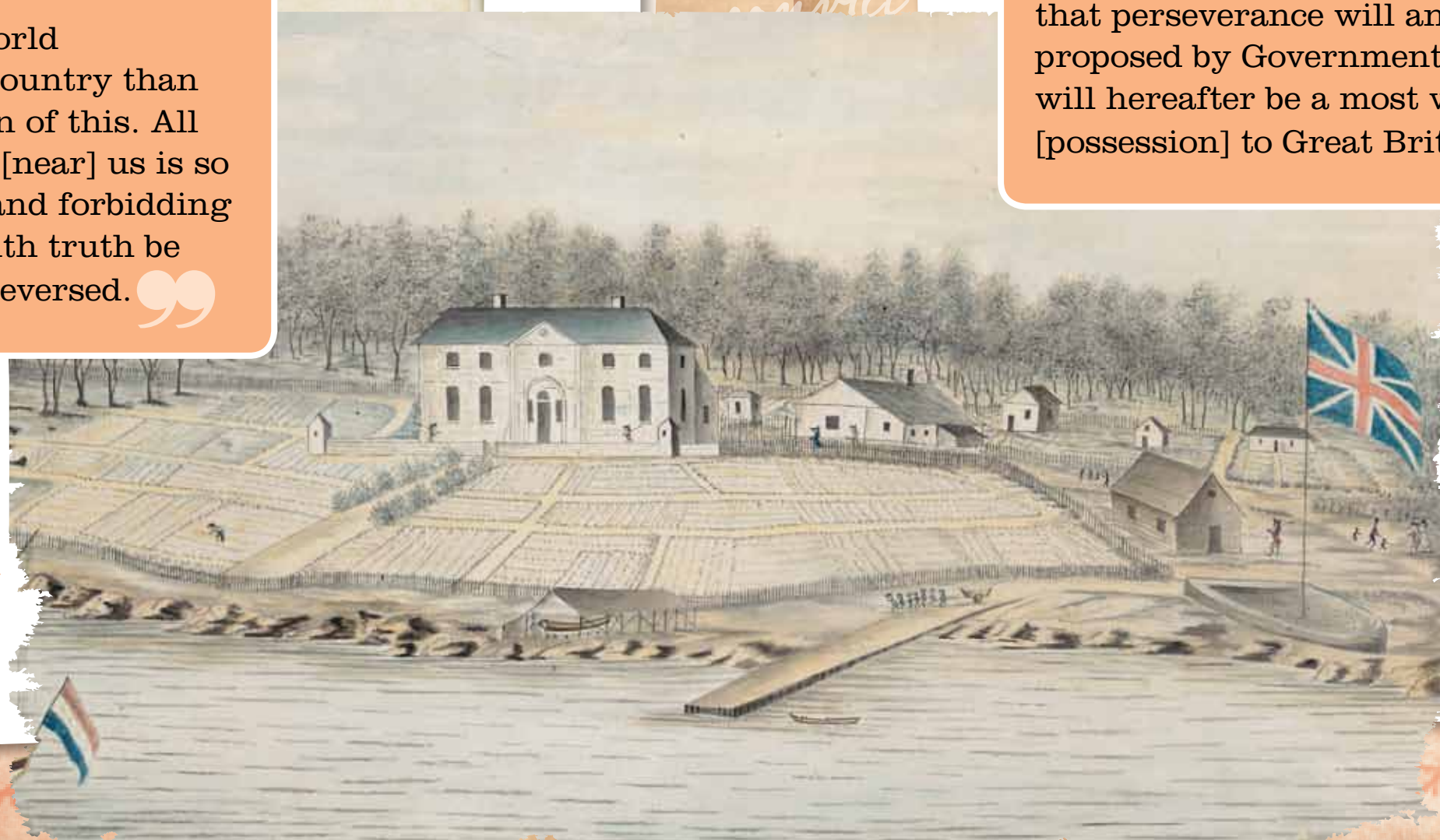
While he was **Governor** of New South Wales, Arthur Phillip lived in Government House in Sydney.

Arthur Phillip Governor of New South Wales

Arthur Phillip could see a great future for New South Wales. He believed that with hard work it could be farmed successfully and become a good place for free settlers. He also thought that the **settlement** could become a fine city and a useful trading port for **British** ships and whaling fleets. He wrote:

“clearing the ground (of Sydney Cove) will be a work of time and it will be four years at least before this colony will be able to support itself, and perhaps no country in the world affords less assistance to first settlers. Still, my Lord, I think that perseverance will answer every purpose proposed by Government, and that this country will hereafter be a most valuable acquisition [possession] to Great Britain”

Letter from Arthur Phillip to the Marquis of Lansdowne, 3 July 1788



The struggle to survive

To the people of the First Fleet, the land of Australia was unlike anything they had seen before. Governor Phillip soon realised that the harsh new land made growing crops and tending livestock difficult.



NO!
STOP!



February
1788

LIEUTENANT KING, THE FOOD WE HAVE BROUGHT FROM ENGLAND WILL SOON RUN OUT. TAKE CAPTAIN COOK'S MAP AND SAIL TO NORFOLK ISLAND.



WHEN YOU GET THERE, PLANT SOME CROPS STRAIGHTAWAY TO FEED OUR COLONY.



Despite food shortages, workers continued clearing the bush and putting up buildings. However, with everyone hungry, many convicts refused to work, and the marines would not oversee them.



NOTICE
APRIL 1788
Death by
HANGING
for anyone
stealing food.
by order
Governor
Phillip.

by order
Governor
Phillip.

2 October
1788

Food was running out, so Governor Phillip had to do something...



CAPTAIN HUNTER, I WANT YOU TO SAIL TO SOUTH AFRICA FOR FOOD.



YES, GOVERNOR PHILLIP, BUT THE VOYAGE WILL TAKE SIX MONTHS.

DO YOUR BEST. WE WILL CUT DOWN OUR FOOD RATIONS UNTIL YOU RETURN.



January
1789

As they waited anxiously for Captain Hunter to return, many people were ill and starving.



STOP
THIEF!



*The diary of
Captain Watkin Tench*
Famine was approaching
with gigantic strides
and gloom and dejection
overspread every (face)...

At last, in May 1789, Captain Hunter returned with four months' supply of food.

Winter
1789

Disease brought by the settlers swept through the Eora people. Smallpox killed 80 per cent of the Eora.



Governor Phillip wanted to learn more about the Eora, so ordered his men to capture two Eora men.



WELCOME, BENNELONG AND COLBEE. YOU WILL LIVE WITH ME IN GOVERNMENT HOUSE.



Colbee escaped, but Bennelong learned English and many of their habits. After a few months, he escaped, too.

Early 1790

The colony was running out of food again...

GIVE EVERYONE EQUAL RATIONS, EVEN MYSELF. AND CUT DOWN THE CONVICTS' WORKING HOURS FROM SUNRISE TO 1 P.M. THEY'RE TOO WEAK TO WORK A FULL DAY.

YES, SIR.

March 1790
Weekly rations:
4 pounds flour
2 pounds salt pork
1 pound rice

THIS CAN'T GO ON MUCH LONGER...

19 March

Governor Phillip decided to send HMS Sirius to China to get food...

I'LL SEND MORE CONVICTS TO NORFOLK ISLAND. THE CROPS ARE GROWING BETTER THERE. BUT WHERE ARE THE SUPPLY SHIPS FROM ENGLAND?

In desperation, Governor Phillip sent Lieutenant Ball to Batavia (modern-day Jakarta, Indonesia) in HMS Supply to buy food...

...and Lieutenant King was ordered to sail to England to ask Lord Sydney to send supplies straightaway.

...but, Sirius crashed on rocks and sank off Norfolk Island.

Week after week, the settlers waited for supply ships from England.

Then...

3 June

HOORAY!

IT'S A BRITISH SHIP!

HOIST THE FLAG!

It was the Lady Juliana, the first ship of the Second Fleet.

Joy turned to horror as the settlers realised the ships were carrying almost 1000 convicts.

SIR, THEY'RE TOO WEAK TO WALK...

Diary, 3 June 1790
If you had seen the shocking sight of the poor creatures that came out in the... ships it would make your heart bleed; they were almost dead; very few could stand...

JUST THROW THEM INTO THE BOATS.

MORE THAN 300 CONVICTS DIED ON THOSE SHIPS. THAT'S MURDER. I WILL REPORT THE CAPTAINS AND MAKE SURE THEY'RE PUNISHED.

YES, SIR. AT LEAST THEY'VE BROUGHT SIX MONTHS' FOOD. NOW WE WON'T STARVE.

The Second Fleet also brought new guards, who oversaw the convicts as they started work on the buildings again.

7 September
1790

Governor Phillip heard that Bennelong was at Manly Cove, so went to see him.

Suddenly...

LOOK OUT!

HELLO,
BENNELONG.

HE'S ALIVE! ROW AS
FAST AS YOU CAN BACK
TO SYDNEY COVE!

DR BALMAIN,
THE GOVERNOR HAS
BEEN SPEARED BY
NATIVES!

Governor Phillip's wound was not serious, so he soon recovered. He would not let his men punish the Eora, and Bennelong and Phillip became good friends.

However, other Eora wanted to drive the settlers away.

10 December

M'ENTIRE'S
DEAD!

Joseph M'Entire had been cruel to the Eora, but Governor Phillip was furious. He ordered ten Eora to be killed in revenge, but the Eora hid, so Phillip gave up the idea.

Drought in 1791 and 1792 killed crops and livestock.

The colony struggled as food shortages continued and the British government kept sending convicts. However, Governor Phillip believed that the new settlement would become a great city one day.

Progress report

- Road to Parramatta and barracks for convicts and soldiers under construction.
- Vegetables, wheat and barley growing well.

It will be many years before the colony is able to grow enough food to feed itself.

Governor Phillip had built a new settlement on the other side of the world and steered the colony wisely through great hardship...

...but by late 1791 he was sick and exhausted.

Letter of Resignation
November 1791

I... request permission to resign the government that I may return to England in hopes of finding... relief (from illness)

Arthur Phillip

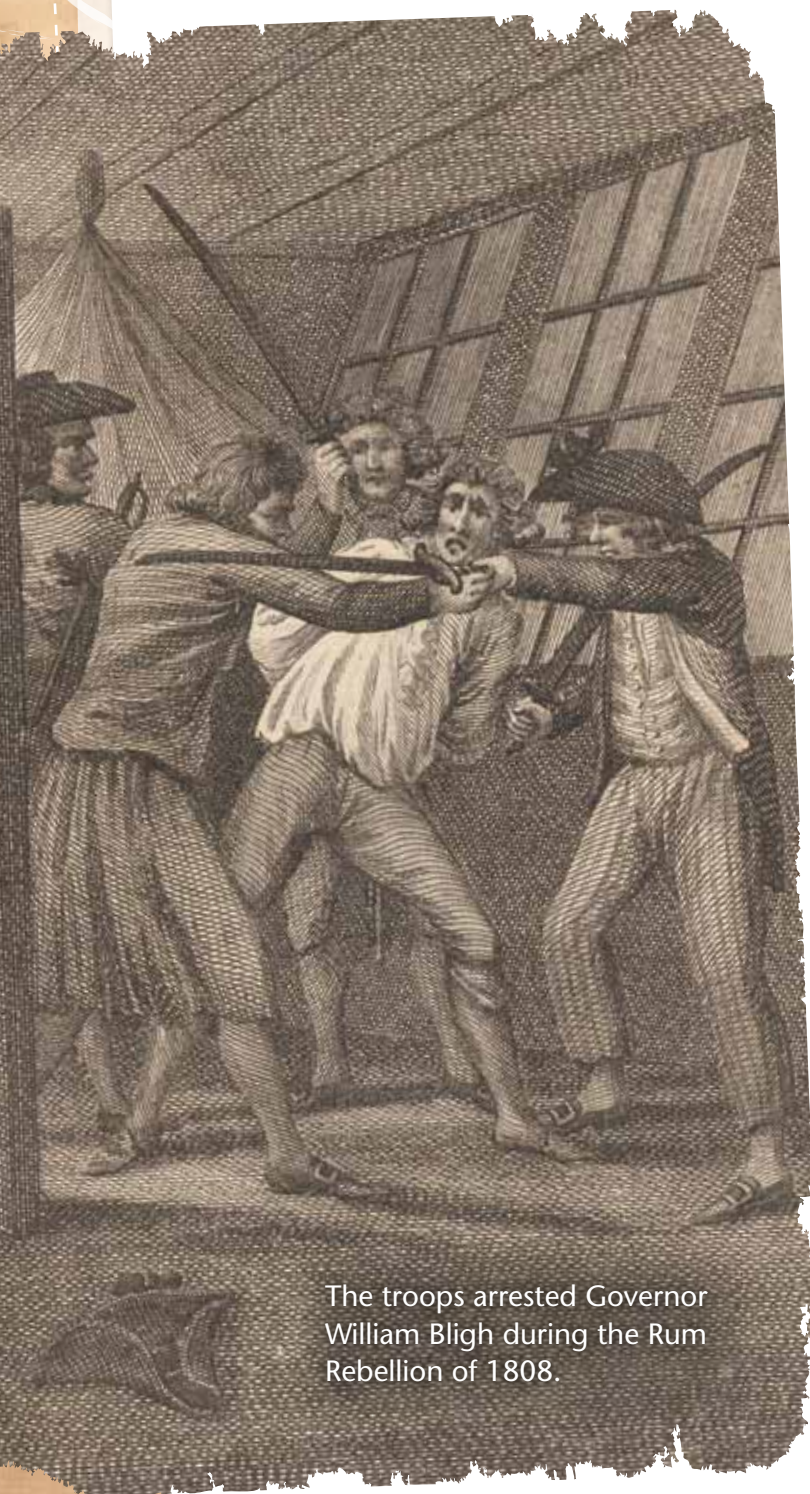
He had to wait another year for a ship to take him back to England.

11 December
1792

Arthur Phillip left behind the beginnings of a great city, Sydney, and a new nation, Australia.

What happened next?

When Arthur Phillip left New South Wales to return to England in December 1792, the worst years of the colony were over. However, more problems soon arose.



The troops arrested Governor William Bligh during the Rum Rebellion of 1808.

Lawlessness and disorder

Major Francis Grose, commander of the New South Wales **Corps**, became temporary **governor** in 1793. He overturned Phillip's strict rules and allowed his soldiers to trade in rum. Soon, drunkenness and disorder were everywhere. By the time John Hunter arrived in Australia and became governor in 1795, the troops were in control and the colony was lawless. The troops' power continued under the leadership of Governor Philip King, who governed the colony from 1800 to 1806. Hunter and King were wise governors, but they struggled against the power of the soldiers.

The Rum Rebellion

The difficulties came to a head in the Rum Rebellion of January 1808, when the New South Wales Corps soldiers **overthrew** Governor William Bligh. This crisis led the **British** Government to end the Corps.

What does it mean?

corps: The name for a group of troops in the army.

Progress in the colony

In 1810, Lachlan Macquarie was appointed governor of New South Wales and brought his own **loyal** troops with him. Like Arthur Phillip, Macquarie was an excellent governor. He built roads and fine buildings, believing that Sydney and New South Wales had a great future.

Bennelong in London

Governor Phillip took Bennelong back to England with him. Bennelong caused a sensation in London, where he mixed with rich and famous people. However, interest in him soon wore off. Bennelong returned to Sydney, where he eventually died, rejected by both the British and Eora people.



Eyewitness words

The British Government praised Arthur Phillip's work as governor. In 1792, Lord Dundas, Minister of Home Affairs, wrote to Governor Phillip:

“...considering the inconveniences [problems] with which you have had to struggle... everything has been done by you which could... be reasonably expected.”

Bennelong, shown here dressed in European clothes, was caught between English and Indigenous Australian cultures.

The effects of the First Fleet

The arrival of the First Fleet in New South Wales had wide-ranging effects.

New Australians

For the newcomers, the First Fleet marked the beginning of a new life in a new home. Most of the **convicts** who came to Australia settled there peacefully. In time, free settlers joined them to form a rich and successful community. Members of the First Fleet were pioneers of the modern nation of Australia.

Indigenous Australians

The arrival of the First Fleet was a disaster for the Eora people. The settlers stole the land and brought diseases that killed up to 90 per cent of their people. For all Indigenous Australians, the invasion of 1788 resulted in a struggle to survive and keep their cultures alive, which continues today.

Whatever happened to...

Captain Arthur Phillip?

Captain Arthur Phillip arrived back in England in May 1793, where his health recovered. He lived with his second wife and continued to serve in the navy, where he was **promoted** to admiral. Phillip suffered a **stroke** around 1808 and died in 1814, aged 76. He was a widely respected man.

Timeline

This timeline shows the main events of the First Fleet and the **settlement** of Sydney.

December 1786

Captain Arthur Phillip is appointed **Governor** of New South Wales.



18 January 1788

HMS *Supply* arrives in Botany Bay.

19–20 January

The rest of the First Fleet arrives.

22 January

Phillip finds Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour).

April–

September 1789

A smallpox epidemic strikes the Eora people.

1789–1792

There is drought, starvation and sickness in the colony.



June 1790

The Second Fleet arrives, bringing 1000 sick and starving convicts.

September–October 1791

The Third Fleet arrives bringing 2000 more convicts.



13 May 1787

The First Fleet sails from England.

26 January

The First Fleet arrives at Sydney Cove. Phillip raises the **British** flag.

14 February

Lieutenant King sails to Norfolk Island.



September

Phillip is wounded by an Eora man.



December 1792

Governor Phillip leaves Australia for England.



What do you think?

The First Fleet and the **settlement** of New South Wales raise many questions about crime and punishment, and the clash of different cultures. Try the following activities to test your own ideas about these important subjects.

Who was right?

Most people agree that the **British** stole the **Indigenous peoples'** lands. However, some argue that without British settlement, Australia would not be the successful, modern nation it is today. Read the following opinions and have a discussion in class about who you think was right.

The British

The British had a right to settle in Australia because they made better use of the land than the Indigenous peoples did. The settlers also brought modern ideas and culture to the Indigenous peoples.



The Indigenous peoples

The Indigenous peoples lived in Australia for thousands of years and used the land without destroying it. Indigenous cultures are just as important as British culture.



What would you do?

The following scenes actually occurred at the time of the First Fleet. Read each scene, then choose what you would do.

Scene 1

You are **Governor Phillip**. During the food shortages of 1789, you have warned the **convicts** that the punishment for stealing food is death. You discover that six **marines** have been robbing the stores. Would you...

- A** hand them over to their commander for mild punishment
- B** flog them
- C** hang them?

Scene 2

You are the Indigenous man Bennelong. After Joseph M'Entire is killed by Eora men in 1790, Governor Phillip asks you to help find the murderers. Would you...

- A** help track them down
- B** pretend to track them, but lead the Governor's men in the opposite direction
- C** refuse to help and run away?

Scene 3

You are Governor Phillip. Some convicts request permission to put on a play for the King's birthday in 1789. Would you...

- A** put them in chains for being so cheeky
- B** agree, but warn them not to neglect their work
- C** invite them to perform their play at Government House?

Once you have chosen what you would do in each scene, find out what actually happened on page 31.

Find out more



Website

<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au>

(select 'Discover Collections', then 'History of Our Nation', then 'From Terra Australis to Australia')

This State Library of New South Wales website covers many aspects of the First Fleet. It includes original documents, paintings and animated maps. Students may need help navigating the site.



DVD

The First Australians, Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), 2008

This documentary tells the story of the First Fleet's arrival in Australia from the **Indigenous peoples'** viewpoint. Episode one covers the story of Bennelong's capture and the spearing of Governor Phillip.



Books

The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay by Arthur Phillip, first published in 1789

This is Governor Arthur Phillip's own account of his experiences on the First Fleet and at Sydney Cove.

Other eyewitness accounts include books by Arthur Bowes Smyth, Watkin Tench and George Barrington.

Glossary

British from England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland

cargo the supplies carried by a ship

convict someone serving a sentence in jail for committing a crime

epidemic a disease that affects many people

governor the person in charge

indigenous peoples the original peoples of a country or region

loyal faithful to person or cause

marines ship-based soldiers

multicultural with many different cultures

overthrew went against their own ruler

promoted given a higher position

rations small shares of food given out when there is not much food to go around

settlement a place where people live

stroke a medical problem where the supply of blood to the brain is disturbed

transported moved over a long distance

What actually happened in the 'What would you do?' scenes described on page 29:

Scene 1: C. Governor Phillip hanged all six **marines** for stealing food, to show the **convicts** that he did not give special favours to free men.

Scene 2: B. Bennelong pretended to help track the murderers, but led the soldiers away from them. He did not betray his people.

Scene 3: C. Governor Phillip invited the convicts to Government House to perform for himself and his guests. The play, a comedy written by the convicts, was a great success.

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