

A CAPITAL CHOICE

*The selection of Canberra as the
site of our national capital*

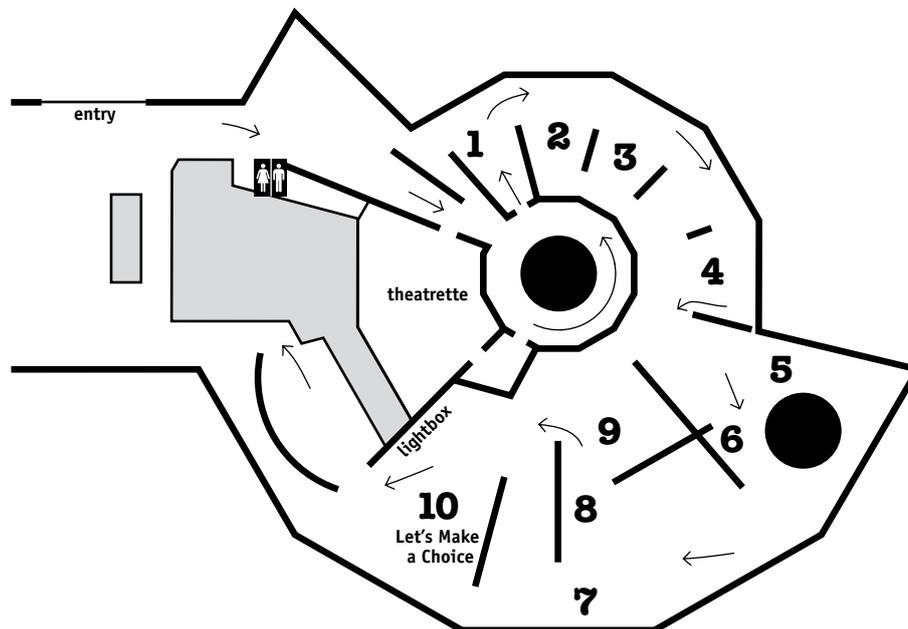
Teacher Resource

Why was Canberra chosen as the site for our national capital?

A Capital Choice asks Australians which town they would have chosen for their national capital. Through images and an interactive game, the exhibition explores the process and reasons why Yass-Canberra was selected as the site of our national capital in 1908.

The exhibition links directly to the national profile SOSE outcomes (Time, Continuity and Change), as well as state curricula. Further information can be found at www.education.nationalcapital.gov.au

A Capital Choice is located at the end of the National Capital Exhibition, by the theatrette exit (section 10 of the plan).



Outcomes

At the end of *A Capital Choice* students will:

- understand that the choice of the site for our national capital was a decision of the new Australian Parliament
- identify criteria for the selection of a site for a city
- locate the potential sites for the Australian national capital on a map
- make informed decisions using an agreed criteria

Using A Capital Choice with Students

Ask your students to sit around the map of NSW, facing the 'Let's Make a Choice' game along the wall. You may wish to point out the information on the light box before your students are settled. **Use the sample questions to prompt your students' discussion of the theme, or use your own.**

What the Constitution Said

(The following information is taken from 'What the Constitution Said' located on the lightbox in section 10 of the National Capital Exhibition.)

Setting the Scene

Before it could be decided where the national capital would be, it had to be decided where it wouldn't be!

Sydney and Melbourne have always been rivals. Sydney argued that as the oldest and most populous city in Australia, it should be the capital of the newly Federated Australia. Melbourne, on the other hand, argued that as the richest city, it should be the capital.

A compromise was found – the new national capital would be located in neither city. The Australian Constitution (section 125) states that the national capital would be located in NSW, at least 100 miles (160km) from Sydney, at a location to be determined by the Federal Parliament.

Q *Do you think it was a good idea not to locate the national capital in Sydney or Melbourne? Or do you think this was a bad idea? Why?*

INTERESTING FACT

The Australian national capital was to be located at least 100 miles from Sydney, two days travel by horse. This was to ensure that Sydney would not have undue influence over the Federal Parliament.

Now that we have an idea of where the national capital can be located, we can choose a site.

Let's Make a Choice: Which Location should be the new National Capital of Australia?

(The following information is taken from 'Let's Make a Choice' located on the wall in section 10 of the National Capital Exhibition.)

Setting the Scene

The Constitution provided a guide to the selection of the site for the national capital – the city was to be located within NSW at least 100 miles (160km) from Sydney. Many towns vied for the honour of becoming the chosen site. How were the Federal Parliamentarians, who were to choose the site, to make their choice?

Q *Should a capital city have mostly flat land or hilly land? Why? (Flat land was considered better because it is much easier and cheaper to build on)*

Q *Why is it a good idea to have a lake in your city? (A lake is picturesque (provides pleasant scenery) and also provides recreation opportunities)*

Q *If you were to build a new capital city, how would you choose the best location? What criteria would you use to guide your selection? (See opposite for the list of criteria used by the Federal Parliamentarians, listed on the 'Let's Make a Choice' game)*

INTERESTING FACT

Coastal sites were not considered for the national capital due to concerns about attack from the sea. The selection of the site for the Australia national capital was finalised in 1908, only five years after the first powered flight.

What to Do

Play the 'Let's Make a Choice' game with your students.

- Using the information below or on the exhibition panels, briefly introduce each of the 11 most popular potential sites for the national capital.
- Using the criteria for selecting a site for a national capital your students have developed or those listed on the 'Let's Make a Choice' panels (see below), ask your students to choose a site they think best meets the criteria.
- Ask a few students to take the tile of their site preference and place it into the correct position on the map.
- How many lights are lit for each site? Which site is the most suitable according to the criteria on the exhibition panels?
- Return the tiles to their original positions ready for the next group.

Criteria for Selecting a Site for the National Capital

- A good water supply
- A picturesque location
- Community and political support
- Easily accessible from Melbourne and Sydney
- Closeness to an existing city or town to reduce building costs
- Proximity to an existing rail line
- Fertile soil
- A good climate

Most Popular Potential National Capital Sites (from 'Let's Make a Choice')

Albury

- Located on the border of NSW and Victoria on the Murray River
- An established town with strategic importance as a major transport hub
- Located on the Sydney-Melbourne rail line

Armidale

- Located on the New England Tablelands, halfway between Sydney and Brisbane
- 'Invigorating' climate, good water supply and picturesque views
- An established town on the Great Northern Rail Line

Bombala

- Located on the eastern slopes of the Snowy Mountains, close to the sea
- 'Invigorating' climate and good water supply

Canberra

- Located in south eastern NSW, in an amphitheatre of hills
- Good water supply and close to the Sydney-Melbourne railway line
- Sparsely populated and therefore few building limitations

Dalgety

- Located on the eastern slopes of the Snowy Mountains
- 'Invigorating' climate, good water supply and close to the Cooma rail line
- Choice for the site of the national capital in 1904

Lake George

- Located close to Canberra, south of the major regional centre of Goulburn
- Close to the Sydney-Melbourne rail line
- Despite the romantic notion of building a city on the shores of a lake, Lake George often dries up

Lyndhurst

- Located on the Central Tablelands in Central Western NSW, just over 160km from Sydney
- 'Invigorating' climate, good water supply, sparsely populated and on the NSW rail line
- The site most favoured by Sydney but considered by others as too remote from Melbourne

Orange

- Located on the Central Tablelands in Central Western NSW
- 'Invigorating' climate, fertile soil, close to an established centre, picturesque views and on the NSW Western rail line
- Considered remote from Melbourne

Tooma

- Located in southern NSW, close to the Murray River
- Picturesque views, close to both Sydney and Melbourne and good water supply
- Although supported by Minister for Home Affairs William Lyne (Tooma was located in his electorate), not located on major transport links

Tumut

- Located in southern NSW, close to Gundagai
- Picturesque views and good water supply
- Although supported by Minister for Home Affairs William Lyne (Tumut was located in his electorate), not located on major transport links

Yass-Canberra: the selected site

- Located in south eastern NSW, close to Yass and Queanbeyan
- Picturesque views, close to Sydney-Melbourne rail line, adequate water supply (although prone to drought) and good climate
- Encompassed several potential sites for the building of the national capital

The People's Representatives Decide

(The following information is taken from 'The People's Representatives Decide' located on the light box in section 10 of the National Capital Exhibition.)

Setting the Scene

After several inquiries and tours of potential sites, the Members and Senators of Federal Parliament had to cast their vote. Where would Australia's national capital be located? With so many worthy sites, the choice would not be an easy one.

In the Federal Parliament debate raged right up to the vote. In the House of Representatives Yass-Canberra beat Dalgety 39 votes to 33. In the Senate, Yass-Canberra tied with Tumut, until a Senator from Victoria changed his vote to Yass-Canberra.

Q *Did the parliamentarians of 1908 get it right when they choose Yass-Canberra as the site for the national capital? (Use the criteria from the 'Let's Make a Choice' section to support your answer.)*

INTERESTING FACT

The national capital was very nearly located in the small south-eastern NSW town of Dalgety. Federal Parliamentarians chose the site in 1904 but the NSW Parliament did not support the choice, as it was considered too close to Melbourne.

More information and teacher resources

www.nationalcapital.gov.au

**National Capital Authority Education Portal –
www.education.nationalcapital.gov.au**

**National Capital Exhibition Virtual Tour –
www.nationalcapital.gov.au/visiting/attractions/nce_tour**

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