

## The race that stops the nation

### Exercise 1

Read Chapter 16 (extract) of Mark Twain's *Following the Equator*, first published by American Publishing Company, 1897

Melbourne spreads around over an immense area of ground. It is a stately city architecturally as well as in magnitude...It is the largest city of Australasia, and fills the post with honor and credit. It has one specialty; this must not be jumbled in with those other things. It is the mitered Metropolitan of the Horse-Racing Cult. Its race-ground is the Mecca of Australasia. On the great annual day of sacrifice - the 5th of November, Guy Fawkes's Day - business is suspended over a stretch of land and sea as wide as from New York to San Francisco, and deeper than from the northern lakes to the Gulf of Mexico; and every man and woman, of high degree or low, who can afford the expense, put away their other duties and come. They begin to swarm in by ship and rail a fortnight before the day, and they swarm thicker and thicker day after day, until all the vehicles of transportation are taxed to their uttermost to meet the demands of the occasion, and all hotels and lodgings are bulging outward because of the pressure from within. They come a hundred thousand strong, as all the best authorities say, and they pack the spacious grounds and grandstands and make a spectacle such as is never to be seen in Australasia elsewhere.

It is the "Melbourne Cup" that brings this multitude together. Their clothes have been ordered long ago, at unlimited cost, and without bounds as to beauty and magnificence, and have been kept in concealment until now, for unto this day are they consecrate. I am speaking of the ladies' clothes; but one might know that.

And so the grand-stands make a brilliant and wonderful spectacle, a delirium of color, a vision of beauty. The champagne flows, everybody is vivacious, excited, happy; everybody bets, and gloves and fortunes change hands right along, all the time. Day after day the races go on, and the fun and the excitement are kept at white heat; and when each day is done, the people dance all night so as to be fresh for the race in the morning. And at the end of the great week the swarms secure lodgings and transportation for next year, then flock away to their remote homes and count their gains and losses, and order next year's Cup-clothes, and then lie down and sleep two weeks, and get up sorry to reflect that a whole year must be put in somehow or other before they can be wholly happy again.

The Melbourne Cup is the Australasian National Day. It would be difficult to overstate its importance. It overshadows all other holidays and specialized days of whatever sort in that congeries of colonies. Overshadows them? I might almost say it blots them out. Each of them gets attention, but not everybody's; each of them evokes interest, but not everybody's; each of them rouses enthusiasm, but not everybody's; in each case a part of the attention, interest, and enthusiasm is a matter of habit and custom, and another part of it is official and perfunctory. Cup Day, and Cup Day only, commands an attention, an interest, and an enthusiasm which are universal - and spontaneous, not perfunctory. Cup Day is supreme it has no rival. I can call to mind no specialized annual day, in any country, which can be named by that large name - Supreme. I can call to mind no specialized annual day, in any country, whose approach fires the whole land with a conflagration of conversation and preparation and anticipation and jubilation. No day save this one; but this one does it.



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In small groups and then as a class, discuss the following:

- a) How do you observe Melbourne Cup Day? Are there any traditions within your family?
- b) If Mark Twain came into the future 110 years, what similarities and differences would he notice about today's Melbourne Cup?

### Exercise 2

Mark Twain's piece above is an example of the travel writing genre. What images does Mark Twain use to help people who have never been to Australia understand the Melbourne Cup and its cultural significance?

Write a travel article based on your experience/your family or your friends' traditions on Melbourne Cup Day from the perspective of a foreign visitor.

### Exercise 3 – Small group activity

Gambling is a legal activity if you are over 18. It is important to manage decisions and behaviours so that gambling doesn't become a problem. The table below shows information about problem gamblers and then has a column to convert that information into a strategy on how to enjoy yourself responsibly. The first one is done for you.

Fill in the following table and then discuss your strategies with the rest of the class

Information	Strategy
People caught up in a game might spend more than they intended	Leave credit cards and other ATM cards at home. Set aside a certain amount of cash and when that is gone, stop
People are often more reckless gamblers when they have been drinking alcohol	
Some people try to recover losses by placing more bets, not realising that as time goes on they are more likely to keep losing	
Some people keep gambling when they would rather stop because their friends pressure them to	
Some people gamble with more than they can really afford to lose	
Some people borrow money from friends to keep gambling	
Some people need to gamble with larger and larger amounts to get the same feeling of excitement	



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### Exercise 4

Prepare either a brochure, podcast script or a travel writing piece to assist a tourist in understanding the Melbourne Cup as 'the race that stops the nation' and to help them enjoy the day and gamble responsibly. You may wish to refer to the following information.

Victoria is Australia's racing capital. The Victorian Racing Industry comprises three major codes: Thoroughbred racing, Harness racing and Greyhound racing. Over 1800 race meetings are conducted annually at 83 licensed racecourses across Victoria. Thoroughbred racing is the second most popular spectator sport in Australia (second to Australian Rules Football) with the Melbourne Cup being the most widely known event. Research conducted by Roy Morgan revealed that 284,000 Victorians (6.7%) visited a racetrack within a three month period during July 2003 and June 2004. This figure is higher than any other State in terms of total number of visitors and proportion of population. Racing is ranked alongside the largest manufacturing sectors in its contribution to economic activity and employment. (Source: [www.tourismvictoria.com.au](http://www.tourismvictoria.com.au))

The Melbourne Cup Carnival has played a principal role in establishing the Victorian Spring Racing Carnival as Australia's major annual sporting event. Visitors to the Spring Racing Carnival inject more than \$500 million into the Victorian economy. In 2008, on Melbourne Cup day \$154 million was bet at TAB outlets around Australia. They spent record amounts on corporate race-day packages, choosing to wine and dine in marquees, on and around the track. 7,000 corporate leaders and guests will spend \$1 million hiring marquees, and another \$1.5 million celebrating the Cup at Flemington Racecourse. They also spent \$20 million on their outfits, purchasing over 300,000 items, including dresses, gloves, hats, jewellery, shoes, sunglasses, ties and more. They ate 7,000 oysters, drank 32,000 bottles of champagne and used 26,000kg of ice. The \$5.1m Melbourne Cup is more than just a horse race - it is a 145-year old social and cultural tradition that literally brings Australia to a standstill. The race draws competitors from all over the world with the annual invasion of northern hemisphere-trained horses making it a truly international event. The Melbourne Cup attracts a worldwide television audience of around 700 million people in 120 countries and territories while millions more either view or listen to the event via the internet.

Source: <http://www.melbourne.org.au/325.o.html>

In small groups, discuss the above and then set up a debate on the subject: the amount of money bet and spent on the Melbourne Cup is an Australian tradition that should be upheld and maintained.

