

MELBA MARGINSON

Class grouping:

Whole class

Time:

60-90 Minutes

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to introduce students to the context of Melba Marginson's work prior to visiting the *Her Place* exhibition. Specifically, students will contemplate their existing knowledge about women refugees in Victoria, and the role Melba continues to play in helping them integrate successfully into a new and different society and culture than what they were accustomed to.

The activities in this resource works well if students have access to electronic devices with internet access. This resource is inquiry based and provides students with leading questions for discovery and discussion.

Activities:

- 1. Provided reading**
- 2. Basic comprehension**
- 3. Investigation into human rights**
- 4. Refugee women in Australia**

Preparation and Materials:

Print a class copy of the reading and questions. Ensure students have access to electronic devices and internet.

“A free spirit, independent-minded and adventurous. I love to engage people, mentor less privileged women (and men, occasionally), make my family well fed and happy, and am pleased with what I can achieve for myself and for others.” – Melba Marginson, Facebook, 2017

Biography written by Dr Nikki Hennington, The University of Melbourne:

Melba Marginson is of Filipino background and has worked in the area of multicultural and women’s affairs since migrating to Australia in 1989. She facilitated the formation of several women’s organisations including the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition, which she chaired for nine years. This coalition represents immigrant refugee women’s organisations across Victoria.

Her own journey as an Australian woman is an example of how most immigrant and refugee women settle in this country. She invested her skills and wisdom in voluntary work for many years while bringing up her family. Ms Marginson maintained her passion and commitment towards equality and social justice in this country, which began when she was a student living in the Philippines. Her advocacy for immigrants and refugees was recognised by the Labor government in Victoria under Premier Steve Bracks, appointing her as one of the first new commissioners of the Victorian Multicultural Commission in 2000. She served the commission for five years.

Ms Marginson has a Master’s Degree in Social Science (Policy and Management) from RMIT University. She is currently a director of Northern Health, one of Victoria’s public health boards. She served as a director with the Victorian Women’s Trust for five years. She is currently a member of FECCA Women’s Committee (Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Council of Australia). She has served on a number of state/federal government ministerial advisory

committees and reference groups that consider issues related to immigrants and refugees in Australia.

Ms Marginson was selected for the first Women's Honour Roll by the Victorian government in celebration of Australia's centenary of federation in 2001.

Ms Marginson's public appearances in the media and her various speaking engagements have inspired many Filipino and other migrant women to stand up and be counted, and fight back against widespread domestic violence in their communities. She helped bring about the Domestic Violence Provisions to the Immigration Act of 1982. Tens of thousands of women from overseas benefitted from this legislation. She was asked to write the Filipino chapter for the 2001 Australian Encyclopedia.

Ms Marginson continues to advocate for the Filipino community in Australia through her position as national spokesperson of the Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia, which has offices in Melbourne and Brisbane. She provides organizational leadership, mentoring and advocacy for and on behalf of numerous migrant and refugee women who support her style of leadership. Ms Marginson has pioneered the development of a Women's Leadership Course and a Multicultural Community Leadership & Advocacy Course tailored for migrant and refugee women and men. She has directly delivered these courses to more than 1500 migrants and refugees in Victoria since 2002.

In 2014, her leadership in immigrant and refugee women's issues was further acknowledged when she became a finalist in the HESTA Social Impact award category. In the same year, she became one of Australia's 100 Women of Influence, awarded by Westpac and *Australian Financial Review*.

Activity 2

Basic comprehension:

1. Was Melba a migrant or refugee?
2. What chapter did Melba write in the Australian Encyclopedia?
3. What prominent work has Melba been involved with regarding domestic violence?
4. List five organisations Melba is/has been a part of in Australia.

Activity 3

Investigation into human rights:

1. Provide definitions for both the terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker'?
2. What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and why was it created?
3. Australia is signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What does the declaration state regarding asylum seekers?

Activity 4

Women refugees in Australia:

Refugee women in Australia face many challenges, including:

- a. Gender inequality in the home. In many countries, women and men do not have equal rights. When these women come to Australia, they are often restricted by cultural expectations of their spouse and community.
- b. Poverty. Refugees need permission to work and, initially, live well below the poverty line, unable to afford food, transport etc.
- c. Isolation. When refugees come to Australia, many women cannot speak English. Some have never been to school in their lives. Without basic language and maths skills, these women find it difficult to communicate and participate in their new society.
- d. Childcare. Many refugee women have had children at a young age. Unable to afford childcare, they are limited in their ability to attend school or get a job because they have to look after young children.

Pretend you are a refugee woman who has just arrived in Australia. Using the information listed above, and the reading on Melba, write a letter to Melba explaining the struggles you are facing and what you feel she could do to help. Make sure you use emotive language, painting a vivid picture of the hardship faced by refugee women in Australia.



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