[In 1888, there were just under 50,000 Chinese people living in Australia. Earlier in the 19th century they had immigrated in small numbers as 'cooler labourers' in the pastoral industry, they were attracted to Victoria in the 1850s by the gold rushes and the Queensland goldfields in the 1870s. By the 1880s Chinese people were working in a variety of occupations.

White Australians were always suspicious of Chinese people because their appearance, language, dress, religion and methods of work were different. Misunderstanding changed to mistrust, hatred, and racist attitudes and actions. In the 19th century, Europeans believed that the white race was superior biologically, mentally and socially, and the acceptance of this as fact increased anti-Chinese feelings.

In the 1850s, 1870s and 1880s, white miners on various fields resented the presence of the Chinese, especially since they were sometimes successful at reworking the dumps and claims that Europeans had left behind.]

[In the 1880s, Chinese abilities and willingness to work long hard hours were feared as competition in areas such as shearing, furniture making, dock work and commerce, but they were welcomed as market gardeners, launderers and labourers.]

Attitudes softened if the Chinese were useful but not competitive. European selectors near the goldfields confined themselves to growing maize for forage and dairying, leaving the cultivation of vegetables to the Chinese. When the warden ejected the Chinese from Croydon, he allowed the proprietors of market gardens to remain, but not their employees. Deprived of labour the proprietors decided to
leave, and began destroying their gardens. The Miners’ Association then asked that four men should be left for each garden, but the regulations did not allow that. Further south, a candidate for Toowoomba in the elections for the legislative assembly claimed that he had ‘never eaten a mouthful of vegetables grown by a Chinaman’. In Cooktown businessmen appreciated Chinese customs, found the Chinese reliable, and spoke up for them. The town relied on their market gardens. In European households the vegetables were welcome but not the growers for, as J.M. Macrossan, the minister for mines and works, said in a speech at Herberton in February: ‘There could be no social intercourse and union between a superior and an inferior race. Wherever it had been tried it had always ended in chaos’.

[In the 1880s, Intercolonial conferences of Trade Unions hotly discussed the Chinese as a race of aliens and intruders who would lower the value of White labour in Australia, and they argued strongly for the abolition of Chinese immigration to Australia.

All over Australia, newspapers, cartoonists, politicians, writers and members of the public were becoming more outspoken and sensationalist about the presence of Chinese in Australia.

In the Town and Bush, one man’s bias and racism was shown in the following article by Gould]

An opium-den, with which is generally combined a fantan and lottery shop, is not a pleasant place to enter. The noxious fumes seem to pervade the whole building. There is always a peculiar smell about a Chinese shop. It is an indescribable smell. It is not altogether offensive, and yet it is offensive... Chinamen of the lower orders always look sleek, fat, and greasy. They are great eaters, and delight in fatty food. I have seen them eating poultry literally swimming in fat, and ducks and geese are one mass of oily substances when served up to their taste...

The sight of a low opium-den is too fearful to describe... men and women in various stages of stupefaction with opium. Some are lying on the floor, apparently dead. Others are half dazed, and gaze about with lack-lustre eyes. There is no attempt at decency on the part of either men or women. Sex is forgotten in this den of infamy...

The Chinese are excellent gardeners, and many of them good cooks. Many people have a decided objection to eat vegetables grown by Chinamen. Australian cities would, however, be badly off for vegetables if there were no Chinese gardeners. The bulk of the white men who sell vegetables purchase them from Chinamen, and retail them at a considerably higher figure than the yellow men charge. Chinese gardeners quickly turn a most ‘unpromising’ plot of ground into a first-rate garden. Although not desirable citizens, they are industrious and thrifty.

The great objection to low-class Chinamen is their filthy habits and their gross immorality. Fallen women become an easy prey to them, and even children are lured to destruction by their apparent kindness.

[During 1887 and 1888, some thousands of Chinese arrived at Port Darwin, intending to work on railway construction and mining. After the discovery of smallpox cases on six successive vessels, severe restrictions were imposed, and the immigrants were diverted to other Australian ports.

Public hysteria increased in April when the Afghan berthed in Melbourne with 268 Chinese passengers in their strange dress, shaven heads and pigtails. Unionists arranged immediate protests, and once again the whole of Australia was aghast...
when it was discovered that 48 of the Chinese had false immigration papers. The Victorian government arranged for the ship to continue to Sydney. Its arrival coincided with three other ships, all carrying Chinese passengers. Massive public demonstrations demanded that none be landed. The NSW government increased the entry tax the people would have to pay from £10 to £100 pounds and the Premier of NSW hastily pushed restriction laws through Parliament.

By November 1888, the Victorian parliament had also passed a restrictive act. The *Adelaide Register* said that the matter of Chinese immigration was the ‘burning question of the hour’. Fear of competition, and the entrenched prejudices of white Australians against the people of another culture culminated in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. The first act of Parliament passed by the new Australian government virtually banned the immigration of non-Europeans into Australia, so racism had triumphed.

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**Thinking, talking, writing**

1. Why did Chinese people want to come to live in Australia in the 19th century?

2. What range of occupations were Chinese working at in the 1880s?

3. Do you think White Australians were racist towards Chinese people? Give your reasons.

4. Why was there particular resentment against Chinese miners?

5. Why were Chinese workers encouraged in some areas?

6. Why were Trade Union conferences so active in their desire to stop Chinese immigration?

7. Look at the description of Chinese people in the extract from *Town and Bush*.
   a. List all the words the author used to make the Chinese appear evil.
   b. Why does this author believe that the Chinese have some good points?
   c. What do you think this author's conclusions would be about Chinese people living in Australia?

8. Why did the Afghan incident hasten restrictive laws?

9. Why was it inevitable that restrictive immigration would be introduced for the whole of Australia?

10. In a small group, discuss why racist attitudes and actions are still evident in Australia today. Compare your group's ideas with those of the rest of the class.

11. Use your dictionary to find the meaning of each of the following words used in the extracts:
   - racism
   - aliens
   - prejudice
   - discrimination
   - opium den