The fifteenth century saw the beginning of an age of exploration by European seagoing nations such as the Netherlands, England, Spain and Portugal. The Dutch, especially, were aggressively searching for riches in the southern hemisphere. So it is not surprising that the first confirmed landing in Australia by Europeans was by Dutch navigator Willem Jansz in 1606. Jansz and other Dutch explorers after him landed on the west coast of Australia. They decided that Australia, then known as New Holland, was of no economic value to their homeland because they thought it was too arid.

In 1688 English explorer William Dampier sailed to the west coast of Australia. Much later, in 1770, Captain James Cook arrived on the more fertile east coast of Australia and claimed it for Britain. In the mid 18th century, British prisons were overcrowded. British rulers decided they needed a new penal colony. In 1788, eighteen years after Captain Cook had claimed the east coast of Australia for Britain, a fleet arrived consisting of eleven ships carrying about 1500 passengers, half of them convicts. They established the first penal colony, in Botany Bay, which is now part of Sydney. The fleet arrived on January 26, 1788. Today, Australia celebrates Australia Day every January 26.

A second penal colony, Port Arthur, was developed by the British to the south, in Tasmania. About 161,700 convicts were transported to Australia between 1788 and the end of penal
transportation eighty years later. There were 25,000 women among these transported convicts. The convicts were transported to the Australian colonies of New South Wales, Van Diemen’s Land and Western Australia.

An estimated two thirds of the convicts were thieves from working class towns in England. Most were repeat offenders. Some were able to leave the prison system in Australia. After 1801 they could be granted leave for good behavior, which allowed them to work for free men for wages. Some were pardoned at the end of their sentence and then lead successful lives.

The British convicts were soon joined in Australia by free immigrants, beginning in the early 1790s. The wool industry and, later, the gold rushes of the 1850s motivated growing numbers of free settlers to move to Australia. During the 19th century, colonies were established by Britain around the continent, while European explorers penetrated far into its interior.

Australia became known as a land of opportunity, because work was plentiful as was land. Money could be made in farming and mining. However, the indigenous Australians suffered during this time. At the time of first European contact, it is estimated the existing Aboriginal population was at least 350,000. Disease and conflict with the British colonists severely weakened Indigenous Australia throughout the period. Traditional lifestyles and cultures were disrupted by death, illness, displacement and dispossession.

After the founding of the colony of New South Wales in 1788, Australia was divided into an eastern half named New South Wales and a western half named New Holland, under the administration of the colonial government in Sydney. Van Diemen’s Land, now known as Tasmania, was settled in 1803. Other British settlements followed.

Edward Hammond Hargraves discovered gold near Bathurst, New South Wales, in February 1851, although smaller amounts of gold had been found in Australia as early as 1823. There was a wave of migration to Australia during the following gold rushes. Many immigrants came to Australia from Great Britain, Ireland, continental Europe, North America and China. The population of the Colony of Victoria’s grew from 76,000 in 1850 to 530,000 by 1859.

On January 1st 1901, the Constitution of Australia came into effect. This is known as the Federation. The six British colonies of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia became states in the Commonwealth of Australia. Australia became its own nation.

The non-Indigenous population at the time of Federation was 3.8 million, while the estimated Indigenous population was around 93,000. Half of the people lived in cities, three-quarters were born in Australia, and most were of English, Scottish or Irish descent. Over the decades following Federation, Australia continued to expand and after World War 2, there was a wave of immigration from Europe. More recently, the immigration has come from Asia.

In the nineteenth century, Australia was transformed from a destination of last resort for convicted criminals to a land of opportunity and promise for people from around the world.
CHOOSE THE BEST ANSWER FOR THE QUESTIONS ON THIS PAGE

1. When was Australia first discovered by European explorers?
   a. 1606
   b. 1688
   c. 1770
   d. 1901

2. Why did Britain first colonize Australia?
   a. Gold
   b. Agriculture
   c. Prison overcrowding
   d. Overpopulation

3. How many convicts were transported to Australia in all?
   a. 1500
   b. 161,700
   c. 350,000
   d. 530,000

4. When did the constitution of Australia go into effect?
   a. 1770
   b. 1788
   c. 1851
   d. 1901

5. How many British colonies combined to form Australia?
   a. 5
   b. 6
   c. 10
   d. 12

6. When was gold discovered in Australia, starting a gold rush?
   a. 1851
   b. 1901
   c. 1914
   d. 1972
Use complete sentences to answer the questions below.

1. Describe an experience or situation in your life that is somehow similar to people traveling to Australia to start a new life.

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2. From the way it is used in the article what do you think is the meaning of *arid*?

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3. What do you predict or believe will be the impact or result of the growing wealth and population of Australia?

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4. Imagine yourself arriving in a new and distant country to start a new life. Describe what you would do.

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5. What do you understand differently after reading about the European settlement of Australia? How will you use this information in the future?

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WRITING ABOUT EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT...

During the nineteenth century, Australia went from being a penal colony, where convicts were sent as punishment, to a land of opportunity that people moved to seeking a better life. How did this happen? How do you think such a development might affect the country’s culture? Why?

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Answers to *EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT OF AUSTRALIA*

**Multiple-choice questions**
1. a
2. c
3. b
4. d
5. b
6. a

**Short-answer questions**
1. Answers will vary. Accept logical, realistic answers.
2. *arid* = dry, waterless, barren
3. Answers will vary. Accept logical, realistic answers.
4. Answers will vary. Accept logical, realistic answers.
5. Answers will vary. Accept logical, realistic answers.