My Ethnic Identity

As discussed, ethnicity is a very complicated and nuanced notion. It is not simply a single, visible trait (you look Asian!) or a simple matter of religion (Muslim is NOT an ethnicity). It is a complex form of identity constructed by people over a prolonged period of time. It is impacted upon by historical and cultural factors as well as race and geography.

In much the same way that Indigenous identity is CHOSEN, so is ethnicity. No one can force an ethnicity upon another person. In order to belong to an ethnic group, one must choose to belong. Additionally, it is very important to remember that a person can most certainly identify as more than one ethnicity.

Remember; Race is NOT ethnicity, religion is NOT ethnicity, nationality is NOT ethnicity (but they all play a part in its construction)

Whilst a person may choose to belong to no ethnic group, most of us could certainly locate and identify our ethnicity or ethnic heritage if we so chose and that is exactly what we are doing today. We will be creating an ethnic overview of our own identity and heritage.

The first and perhaps most significant question we must ask ourselves is ‘Who am I and who do I identify as being?’ This is a HUGE question and may incorporate such aspects of your person as sexuality, religion, politics and ETHNICITY.

Some of us will readily identify an ethnicity as ‘ours’; others will not. Regardless, explore and write about the following:

History: What is the story of my forbears? What has happened to my predecessors throughout history? This question looks at war, immigration, cultural change, defeat by empires, changes in government and any other historical factor that has impacted upon a group

Religion: What (if any) is my religion? Many ethnicities incorporate religion, although in the modern world, many people claim ethnicity whilst not actually practicing its religion. Think of someone who identifies as an Australian Greek Orthodox, but does not actually attend church. They are still Australian Greek Orthodox by ethnicity.

Ancestry: What is my heritage (where do ‘my people’ come from)? In Australia, many of us will have a number of totally separate answers to this question. If your heritage stems from one Korean parent and one Sri Lankan parent, then you are likely headed down the path of ‘ethnic hybridity’ although the choice is certainly yours alone to make.
Dress: What do I wear? What do other members of my ethnic group/groups wear? How is my ethnicity (or its influence) reflected in my outer appearance? This includes jewellery, makeup, hair and other adornments.

Food: How is food a part of my ethnic identity and/or heritage? How does what I eat express who I am. Everything we eat says something about who we are. Think Muslim, Jew, vegan, bodybuilder, Italian.
Food is one of the key ways that human beings transmit culture. How do you do it?

Customs: What do you do? What material and non-material aspects of culture are particular to the ethnic group/groups that you identify with? Do you dance, sing, cook, sculpt, dye eggs, hold festivals, scar your bodies, commemorate certain events or people, acknowledge certain dates?

Now, please remember...

Even if you do not choose to identify as a member of an ethnic group, you can still acknowledge an ethnic heritage. It does NOT mean that you must belong to that group. There are people in the USA who are 1/32 Irish heritage who identify as ‘Irish’ and this is their choice (whether you agree or not). Identity (including ethnicity) is a choice.

If you identify as belonging to two (or even three) ethnicities, please write about all seven factors for each. If you identify as someone who is both French Romani and Rwandan Hutu, then you might introduce yourself to people by saying “Hi. I’m Paul and I’m French Romani/Rwandan Hutu”.

Format of your analysis

-Please write a short introduction, explaining the purpose and intent of your personal analysis.

-Simply write an examination of each of the seven influencing factors under sub-headings.

-Write a short conclusion, summarising what you have learned and decided about your ethnic identity.

-If (at the end of your analysis), you still choose not to identify as a member of any ethnic group, please provide a thoughtful explanation as to why you choose not to do so.

*Look at this as a great opportunity to learn about your heritage and cultural identity*