ONLY IN CINEMAS 26 NOVEMBER 2008

A STUDY GUIDE BY MARGUERITE O’HARA

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Introduction

Baz Luhrmann’s Australia (2008) is an epic adventure set in the Northern outback of Australia in the late 1930s and 1940s. The story brings together people from many backgrounds and walks of life, from the English aristocracy to the rough-hewn outback drovers and the Indigenous people of Australia. There is a transforming journey, romance, war, greed mistreatment, heroism, tragedy and triumph. The story traverses some of the most beautiful and inhospitable country in the remote north of Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Curriculum relevance

The film will be of interest to many people – fans of Baz Luhrmann (director of Strictly Ballroom [1992], Romeo + Juliet [1996] and Moulin Rouge! [2001]), fans of the Epic style of moviemaking in the tradition of Gone With the Wind (Victor Fleming, 1939), and fans of Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman who play the romantic leads. However, the film is much more than a sweeping epic romance. It deals honestly and sensitively with a period in Australia’s history when Indigenous Australians were dispossessed of their land, their children and their human rights. This theme of dispossession runs strongly through the film, not just
in relation to the Indigenous people.

Students from upper primary to senior secondary would find Australia entertaining and informative — a romance set in Australia's recent past telling a story about both the country and the different races and people who make up that history. There are several subject areas where this film will have relevance, including:

**English** — exploring the construction of a narrative that incorporates many different elements to drive the story.

**Australian History** — exploring some of the many consequences of white settlement on Australia's original inhabitants; the influence of English pastoralists on land use and the development of the cattle industry; the Japanese bombing of Darwin during World War Two; the multicultural mix of the population of northern Australia, particularly in the north-west of the continent.

**Geography** — understanding how the remoteness of these cattle stations and the nature of the country affected non-indigenous people working and living in such sparsely settled areas; understanding what country means to the original inhabitants of these areas; comparing and contrasting different approaches to living in outback Australia at this time; developing an awareness of the tyranny of distance in Australia.

**Film Studies** — exploring how Luhrmann renews the film genre of the action adventure historical romantic epic; exploring how country plays a key part in determining the action of this story.

**Australia** has not yet been classified by the Office of Film and Literature Classification but assuming it is given a G or PG rating (mild themes, Parental Guidance recommended) it could be studied and enjoyed at different levels by students from a broad age group.

There are three sets of questions in this guide, see Table 1 on this page.

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**Synopsis**

It is 1939. Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) leaves England for Australia to confront her husband, Maitland. He has spent the last year preparing to sell their last remaining asset, Faraway Downs, a cattle station the size of Belgium in remote north-western Australia. Suspicious of his stalling, she travels by flying boat to the remote tropical outpost of Darwin to take matters into her own hands. She is met in Darwin not by her husband, but by a crude, rough-hewn cattleman known only as ‘the Drover’ (Hugh Jackman). On the overland journey from Darwin to Faraway Downs, 100 kilometres west of Kununurra in Western Australia, Sarah and the Drover develop a deep, mutual dislike for each other.

After an unexpected turn of events, a part-Aboriginal child, Nullah (Brandon Walters) becomes part of Sarah's life. He reveals to Sarah that all is not as it seems.

To save the property, Sarah must join forces with the Drover to drive 1,500 head of cattle across northern Australia's breathtaking yet brutal landscape. Along with Nullah, they are joined by a misfit band from the station. All the while they are shadowed by a mys-
BAZ LUHRMANN AND NICOLE KIDMAN ON SET

Sarah is transformed by her experiences of the country and the people on this journey, finding romance in the landscape, passion with the Drover, and a maternal love for Nullah. But when the Pacific War comes to Darwin in the form of Japanese bombing raids, the group is torn apart. Sarah, the Drover and Nullah must fight to find each other in the tragedy and chaos of the bombing.

Key cast and crew

All the key creative and cast positions in the film are filled by Australians. The cast includes many well-known Australian actors, some of them, like Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman, with an international profile. There are also some newcomers, including eleven-year-old Brandon Walters as Nullah, the Aboriginal boy who is an integral part of the story and important as the central human link in the love story and the story of the ‘Stolen Generations’ of part-Aboriginal children. See cast and crew details on the right.

The epic film

The epic is a genre of film which emphasizes human drama on a grand scale. Epic films are often more ambitious in scope than films of other genres and this helps to differentiate them from similar genres such as the period piece or adventure film. Epic films often have high production values, a sweeping musical score by an acclaimed film composer, and an ensemble cast of bankable stars. These things place them among the most expensive films to produce. The genre probably derives its name from the similarities it shares with epic poetry where grand stories of heroic travels and extraordinary heroism are a staple.

Many epic movies have a large scope, often set during a time of war or other conflict. A historical setting is typical, though fantasy or science fiction settings are also used. There are subgenres within the epic. These include the historical epic – Lawrence of Arabia (David Lean, 1962) – religious epics – The Ten Commandments (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956) and Ben-Hur (William Wyler, 1959) – and war epics such as Schindler’s List (Steven Spielberg, 1993) and Black Hawk Down (Ridley Scott, 2001). The main character’s actions are often central to the resolution of a conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lady Sarah Ashley</td>
<td>Nicole Kidman</td>
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<td>Drover</td>
<td>Hugh Jackman</td>
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<td>Nullah</td>
<td>Brandon Walters</td>
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<td>Neil Fletcher</td>
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<td>Goolaj</td>
<td>Angus Pilauki</td>
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<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Ursula Yovich</td>
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<td>Bandy Legs</td>
<td>Lillian Crombie</td>
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<td>Kipling Flynn</td>
<td>Jack Thompson</td>
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<td>Captain Dutton</td>
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<td>Sergeant Callahan</td>
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<td>King Carney</td>
<td>Bryan Brown</td>
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<td>Cath Carney</td>
<td>Essie Davis</td>
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<td>Yuen Po, the Chinese cook</td>
<td>Yuen Wah</td>
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<td>Administrator Allsop</td>
<td>Barry Otto</td>
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Crew

Director: Australia is directed by Baz Luhrmann whose previous films include Strictly Ballroom, Romeo + Juliet and Moulin Rouge!.

Associate Producer and Production and Costume Designer: Catherine Martin. Catherine has won two Academy Awards for Costume Design and Art Direction for her work on Moulin Rouge!.

Scriptwriters: Baz Luhrmann, Stuart Beattie, Ronald Harwood and novelist Richard Flanagan all worked on the script.

Cinematographer: Mandy Walker.

Editors: Dody Dorn and Michael McCusker.

Music and soundtrack: the team is headed by David Hirschfelder and there are a number of musical contributors.
Some films that are drawn on a large scale or cover a broad sweep of history, time and events, such as Francis Ford Coppola’s three Godfather films, are sometimes referred to as epics. The term can be used to refer to the filmmakers’ vision and ideas. Whatever we include in this genre, it’s true to say that epic movies are always ‘big’ in themes and scope and cost.

In a romantic epic, the romance and the main characters’ relationships are the centrepiece of the story, rather than a sub-plot. Archetypal romantic epics include Gone with the Wind, Cleopatra (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963), Ryan’s Daughter (David Lean, 1970), Out of Africa (Sydney Pollack, 1985), The English Patient (Anthony Minghella, 1996), Titanic (James Cameron, 1997), and Atonement (Joe Wright, 2007).

While epic films were very popular in the 1960s, there has been something of a revival of this style of filmmaking over the past ten years, including the immensely successful Lord of the Rings trilogy (2001-2003) of Peter Jackson.

Australia, while sharing many of the qualities of earlier epic films, has within its story elements which transform the nature of an epic film. While the story is set in the 1930s and 40s, many of its themes feel very contemporary.

**Time and place – historical background**

Australia is a work of fiction and does not offer a documentary-style account of the area and the period. While the filmmakers do take some dramatic licence in telescoping time frames, the research of the period was meticulous and what we see in the story does reflect many practices common at the time. The fictional story is firmly grounded in fact.

**1. Cattle stations and cattle barons**

In 1930s outback Australia, enormous cattle stations, usually in remote areas, were owned by pastoralist families and sometimes business consortiums. Often the proprietors were Englishmen who had come to Australia to make their fortunes and take advantage of the cheap land and labour. Faraway Downs, the fictional cattle station of Maitland Ashley, is described as being as large in area as Belgium.

**2. The original inhabitants**

Indigenous Australians had been living in this part of northern Australia for thousands of years before white settlers came to breed and graze their vast herds of cattle. This was never *terra nullius* (empty land) and, as in most parts of the country, white settlement was both disruptive and
destructive of the original inhabitants’ way of life. Their traditional lands were cleared and fenced and their way of life changed forever.

Aboriginal Australians were a large part of the cheap labour used to manage the cattle stations, both as drovers and fencers and in the homesteads where they worked as housemaids, cleaners and cooks. Most worked for basic food rations, tobacco and little or no money. It was not until the Wave Hill protest in 1966 that Aboriginal workers were given fair pay. At the same time, many part-Aboriginal children, often with white fathers, were removed from their families and placed in church or government homes. These were the children now known as ‘the Stolen Generations’. From 1910 until the late 1960s, it was government policy to remove numbers of Aboriginal children from their families, particularly those of mixed race, and place them in church or government run institutions, far from their families and communities.

In the Kimberley and Darwin regions there were also people who had come from various parts of Asia to work as pearl divers, miners and labourers in the industries in northern Australia. Darwin is closer to Jakarta than it is to Sydney and closer to Singapore than it is to Melbourne. It is still a very multicultural city.

3. Darwin

Darwin, the main city and administrative centre of the Northern Territory, was largely administered by the British, and the city was known for both its ethnic diversity and its social divisions. The Second World War is said to have put Darwin on the map when the town became an important base for allied action against the Japanese in the Pacific War.

Darwin was attacked sixty-four times during the war and 243 people were said to have lost their lives; it was the only place in Australia to suffer prolonged attack and bombing raids during World War Two. Here is one report of what happened (See inset left).
In 1942 the Darwin population was approximately 2000. There was believed to be only sixty-three women, about 300 military personnel, with the balance made up of civilian workers. On Thursday 19 February, with the temperature hovering at thirty-three degrees in the shade and the humidity around ninety per cent, Darwin was waking to another hot day. The wet season was tailing off but you could still ‘cut the air with a knife’. There were forty-four ships in the harbour and their sailors were already sweating in the heat.

Unexpected Attack from the Air

The incoming Japanese planes were first spotted by Father John McGrath at the Bathurst Island mission north of Darwin. He radioed Darwin at 9.30am and this message was passed to RAAF command at 9.37am. Strangely no general warning was given and there was no sounding of alarms. At the first sound of planes many were confused, believing they may be Australian or American because they flew in from the south. The first siren wailed at 9.58am as the Japanese began dropping their bombs. The air raid lasted more than an hour, with 188 planes dropping more than 300 bombs and 243 people killed and over 300 wounded.

Darwin was gripped by panic. Training went out the window as the stampede to exit Darwin as quickly as possible began. In what later became known as the ‘Adelaide River Stakes’, people of all colours and creeds walked, ran, rode bikes, horses and drove cars, not stopping until they reached Adelaide River, 115kms south. Deplorable behaviour perhaps, but with no water and electricity, rumours abounding, no communication, and leaders lacking the skill to take charge, wholly understandable.

The following day headlines in eastern states announced fifteen killed and twenty-four hurt. General confusion or military propaganda? We will never know for sure, but with Australia reeling under the fall of Singapore and other ‘bad’ news, the woes of Darwin were quickly off the front pages.

Here is what Baz Luhrmann, director of Australia, says about the experience of filming in Bowen:

“It’s virtually impossible to film a project as ambitious as Australia which, by necessity, must be shot on location for long periods of time, without the generosity and support of the community, and with the community of Bowen Shire ‘our cup hath runneth over’. Apart from the physical environment being a paradise for filmmaking – the light, the ocean, the climate – it’s been the people of Bowen and their participation on all levels from acting in minor roles to construction and ancillary services and most of all their spirit and belief in the film, that has made making this film in Bowen possible.1

Residents and business owners say the movie has put Bowen on the international map and it is expected that the significant boost to the economy will continue for some time to come. As with all locations basking in the reflected glory of being a filmed location, time will tell.

Other locations used in the shoot

The early scenes of Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) at her home in England before she leaves for Darwin were shot at Camelot, a historic property on the outskirts of Camden near Sydney. Strickland House, a heritage-listed property located in the Sydney suburb of Vaucluse, dou-
bled as Darwin’s Government House in the film.

In Darwin, several major scenes were shot at Stokes Hill Wharf, including the arrival of Kidman’s character, Lady Sarah Ashley, on an old Qantas flying boat.

The eastern Kimberley landscape forms the backdrop of many of the droving scenes, while much of the filming of Faraway Downs took place on a Packer-owned cattle property, Carlton Hill Station, about an hour’s drive from Kununurra, a dusty outback town about midway between Broome and Darwin near the Western Australia border with the Northern Territory.

See Map 1 of the area where the story takes place.

The drove from Kununurra near the Western Australian border to Darwin covers 825 kilometres. It traverses some of the most beautiful and often difficult terrain in Australia, as we see in the film.

Themes

The film weaves many themes and episodes into the story. These include:

- A transforming journey
- Droving
- The bombing of Darwin during World War Two
- The grab for land
- The connections between the Aboriginal people and the white settlers
- The experiences of the Stolen Generation
- The British governing and administrative presence in Darwin
- The connections between land and the Indigenous people
- A love story
- The power of magic and beliefs.

You may like to add to this list of themes.

- After watching the film and discussing its different elements, number this list from one to ten, with one being the most important theme explored and ten the least important.

Recurring symbols and important natural features

The Boab Tree – this tree with a distinctively bulging trunk, spidery branches and large nuts is the iconic tree of the Kimberley Region. It is important to the Indigenous people and provided shelter for drovers as well. These trees appear in the film in different locations.

The Boomerang harmonica – a popular mouth organ in Australia between the 1920s and 1960s, now being made again in Germany. It is played by Kipling Flynn and Nullah in Australia.

The Wet Season – during the annual wet season in the region, the country is transformed with a renewal of natural life.

About the production

The film was researched over a two-year period and the crew travelled all over the country to find authentic artefacts from the period. Outback cattlemen were interviewed, authentic saddles constructed and actors taught how to ride.

Thousands of visual images from the online resource, Picture Australia, were studied to ensure all details were accurate.

The 1930s breed of shorthorn cattle was researched and the animals sourced and cattlemen were recruited for advice. Luhrmann and two other crew members went on an actual cattle drove to understand the demands placed on drovers pushing hundreds of cows across hot and dusty terrain.
1. Telling a story

- Choose one of these descriptions that best fit the style of story we are told in *Australia*.
  - a love story
  - a history story
  - a journey story
  - a story about Aboriginal people and white people
  - a story about living in the outback.

If you think the film *Australia* has a bit of all these types of stories, give each one a number from one to five to show what you think the film is mainly about.

2. Goodies and Baddies/Heroes and Villains

Most stories and films have characters that are either more good than bad or more bad than good. Good people, as in real life, are not always perfect all the time and bad people sometimes do the right thing or show us a nicer side of themselves. People do change! It would be a bit boring and unrealistic if people in movies were only either good or bad. Still, this film does tell a story about heroes and villains.

- In Table 2, sort the main characters into two lists, mainly good and admirable ‘heroes’ and mainly bad and not someone to be liked or admired ‘villains’:
  - The Drover, King Carney, Fletcher, Lady Sarah Ashley, Maitland, Flynn, Nullah, Daisy, Yuen Po, King George, Cath Carney, Sergeant Callahan.

  See Table 2.

3. Points of view

a) Write the story (or part of it) told in the film from one character’s point
of view. Think about how different characters would have a different ‘take’ on the events and their part in what happens.

OR

b) Write a letter to a friend about your experiences at Faraway Downs or in Darwin. For this activity choose a character who would have been likely to write a letter at this time.

OR

c) Prepare a newspaper report about one of the important human stories told in the film.

You could choose from:
- Lady Sarah Ashley
- The Drover
- Nullah
- Flynn
- King Carney
- Fletcher
- Daisy
- King George
- Captain Dutton
- Magarri
- Cath Carney

History

1. When the war came to Darwin

- Why do you think the Japanese air force bombed Darwin in the 1940s?
- What were the targets in the bombing raids shown in the film?
- Lady Sarah and the Drover decide to return to Faraway Downs with Nullah during the bombing of Darwin. Why would this be a sensible decision?

To find out more about Darwin’s history and what it is like today, go to <http://www.koalaexpress.com.au/darwin.htm>, a tourist site with easy-to-follow information about Darwin.

2. The children of the outback

- How is it that Nullah, a part-Aboriginal boy, is living on Faraway Downs?
- What do we see him witnessing in the opening scenes of the film?

- How does this put his safety at risk?
- What else makes Nullah’s life difficult at this time in history?
- How does he ‘sing people to him’?
- What experience is Nullah keen to have with King George?

3. ‘Kings’

- Who are the two characters in this film who are called ‘King’?
- Why is each one given this name? What are they each ‘Kings’ of?
- Give some examples of how each ‘King’ exercises his power.
- Does each use their power to do good?

4. Transport

- How did Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) travel to Darwin from England in 1939? How long do you think this journey would have taken then and how long would the trip from England to Australia take now? You can read about long-distance transport at this website: <http://www.clubmarine.com.au/internet/clubmarine.nsf/docs/MG19-6+Feature>
- What other kinds of transport within Australia are shown in the film? How did the characters travel from Faraway Downs, west of Kununurra, to Darwin?
- How would the Indigenous people have moved through the country at this time?
- What forms of transport are now available to residents and tourists of these remote areas? How would large mobs of cattle now be moved from one place to another?

Geography

1. The country

- Describe the country shown around Faraway Downs.
- How do the early scenes of the film show Lady Sarah’s ignorance about both the dangers of the country and the weather conditions? Give some examples to show how different this country is to the English countryside she comes from.
- What are some of the most beautiful aspects of this remote area?
- Describe some of the animals we see in this film? How many are native to Australia?
- How is Aboriginal connection with country shown in the film?

2. The weather

Weather conditions, particularly in northern Australia, determine what people can do, particularly in relation to work and travel.

- What are the two seasons in the northern part of Australia, particularly in Darwin? Check a tourist or weather site or a climate page in an Australian Atlas to find out how hot it gets and for how many months each year the temperature is more than thirty degrees.
- Research the phenomenon of the wet season. When does it rain, for how long and what happens to the countryside?
- How would you find water and pasture for cattle in the dry outback areas near Kununurra?

3. Darwin in 1940

Darwin is the administrative centre and principal city of the Northern Territory.

- Who lived in Darwin in the 1930s and 1940s?
- Describe some of the different groups and races of people we see in the film.
- How do you think the place and people would have changed over the past sixty years? Find information about Darwin’s history at <http://www.enjoy-darwin.com/darwin-city-history.html>.
- What do you think are some of the most important things to have happened in Darwin’s history over the past 100 years?
FEATURE FILMS, especially those telling a complex story, are usually divided into sections. Within these sections there are a number of different scenes which focus on different characters and different elements of the story, a bit like chapters in a novel. As the story develops, the interconnections between these stories become clearer. Early scenes are especially important in grabbing the attention of an audience and introducing the film’s themes and characters.

1. Opening scenes

a) Pre-title scenes

Opening scenes in films usually introduce some important aspects of the story we are about to see, as well as some of the characters, and create expectations and interest in the audience.

- Describe what we see and hear in the opening scenes of Australia before the shots of the arid landscape transform into a map of Australia.
- How many of the film’s themes are introduced in these opening scenes?
- What expectations are set up about the identity of the characters, some of whom are only glimpsed in these early scenes?

b) The old country – establishing contrasts and character

- What do we see and hear from Lady Sarah Ashley at her home, Ashlight House, in England?
- What personal qualities of Lady Sarah are introduced in this first scene before she leaves for Australia? What are her strongest character traits?
- Describe her house in England and its grounds.
- What do we learn about the situation at Faraway Downs which is behind her decision to make this long trip to Australia?
- What do we find out about Maitland, Lady Sarah’s husband in Australia?
- What is the significance of the telegram Sarah receives from Maitland on her arrival in Darwin?

2. Arrival in Australia

a) Pre-arrival scenes

- How does Lady Sarah travel to Australia? How long a journey would this have been in a flying boat and what would it have cost? You can find out more about these extraordinary early passenger flying boats at a number of websites.
- What are her reasons for making this long journey?
- What do we learn about her character from the letter she receives from her husband before she leaves for Australia?
- Describe her arrival in Darwin society?
- How is the theme of racial separation and contempt for Aborigines shown in the scene at Ivan’s Pub?
- What does the Drover’s intervention reveal about his character and behaviour?
- Who are the people we see at Government House? What are their interests and positions in Darwin society?
- Administrator Allsop responding to Captain Emmett Dutton’s advice that he is under instructions from the Defence Ministry that ‘cattle barons ought not be looking to profit from the war in Europe’, says:

- Telegrams were a common method of conveying information quickly and briefly before the widespread use of telephones, let alone text messaging and email. They used Morse code to transmit messages through telegraph systems and charged per word and for punctuation. Although Western Union stopped using them in 2006, telegrams are still sometimes used today. You can read more about the history of telegrams at these sites:
  - http://members.iinet.net.au/~oseagram/wahist.html
- What is the significance of the old land on her arrival in Darwin?
- Describe the Darwin we see as Sarah arrives there.
- How is the theme of racial separation and contempt for Aborigines shown in the scene at Ivan’s Pub?
- What does the Drover’s intervention reveal about his character and behaviour?
- Who are the people we see at Government House? What are their interests and positions in Darwin society?
- Administrator Allsop responding to Captain Emmett Dutton’s advice that he is under instructions from the Defence Ministry that ‘cattle barons ought not be looking to profit from the war in Europe’, says:
War ... cattle barons ... profiteering. You’re young, Captain. The Carney Cattle Company control the shipping, stockyards, and all but one of the major cattle stations – Ashley’s Faraway Downs ... In the Northern Territory there is only one true king and his name is Leslie Carney.

At Carney’s offices, in the next scene, Neil Fletcher, the manager of Faraway Downs, says (referring to Maitland Ashley): ‘He can muster all he likes. The beasts I’ve left on that property can barely stand’. What do these scenes tell us (the audience) about the land and its people? Lady Sarah is up against?

- Lady Sarah sees a group of half-caste Aboriginal children being loaded on to a waiting sloop at the wharf by Police Sergeant Callahan, a Priest, a Brother and Nuns. The skipper of the boat tells Sarah – ‘they’re taking them out to the mission on the island’. To Sarah’s query – ‘half-castes’? – the skipper says – ‘what can you expect, cattle stations, lonely men and all those native women’.

What do we understand from these conversations about:
(a) The behaviour of white males with Aboriginal women at this time? (Read the information [inset right] about ‘The Drover’s Boy’ for more information about relations between white men and Aboriginal women.)
(b) Community attitudes to the children of such unions?
(c) Lady Sarah’s introduction to life in the Top End of Australia?

- At Ivan’s pub what does the sign above the bar say? Who does this sign offend and insult?

These opening scenes establish a lot about the key elements of the story and indicate the different values and attitudes of many of the people who play significant parts in the story as it develops.

Students could follow the development of one of the main characters in the central sections of the film by focussing closely on the key experiences each one has as they struggle with their own beliefs, values and encounters with the landscape and the people, e.g. Lady Sarah and the Drover.

Several other characters undergo changes to their attitudes and values and their roles in the drama are also worth attention. Students could select one of these characters as a secondary focus and share their ideas and observations after they have watched the film. They could choose from Kipling Flynn, Cath Carney, King Carney and Captain Dutton.

2. The central scenes

The central sections of the film follow the transformative processes undergone by Lady Sarah and some of the other characters as they come to understand the land and its people. The final scenes resolve some of the uncertainties, but is it a happy ending?

Below is an outline to the different sections of the film with some suggestions about what to watch for and think about as the story develops. There are quotes from each section of the film. Your task is to identify the speaker and the context for each quote.

Section 2 – Travelling to Faraway Downs

The first 825 kilometre journey Sarah embarks on with the Drover is to travel to Faraway Downs from Darwin.

- What do we learn about the Drover, Sarah, Magarri and Goolaj as the truck moves across the country?
- Who do they see at the crossroads in an improvised vehicle?
- What tensions and misunderstandings are apparent between Sarah and the Drover?

Who says this and in what context?
- I’ve got nothing to do with the stations ... I just move the cattle from A to B. It’s challenging ... push-
ing a couple of thousand beasts across the world’s harshest terrain. You lose a few; sometimes you lose a lot. To me the challenge is a small price to pay for freedom. No man hires me, no man fires me.

– Guests, we’re not used to guests … but now that you mention it, I happen to like the women of the outback.

Section 3 – at Faraway Downs

- What is Sarah confronted with when she arrives at Faraway Downs?
- What does she begin to suspect about what has been happening at Faraway Downs?
- How are Daisy and Nullah’s lives controlled by others?
- Who confirms for Sarah her suspicions about what has been happening to the cattle?
- How is Sarah able to persuade the Drover to help with the muster and the drove to Darwin to sell the cattle?

Who says this and in what context?

- Maitland Ashley died today at the hands of a savage, godless Aborigine.
- I sing you to me … like I sing a fish to me … I sing too when Mama and Fletcher make wrong-side business.
- The billabong? That’s Carney property; our cattle don’t cross the river.
- Funny little creamies … soft in the head. That’s why the Government sends them to the missions. They all tell monstrous lies.
- … if King Carney’s good Christian wife were ever to draw the same conclusion as you, Fletcher’s hopes of wedding his daughter would be dashed.
- Some white stockmen like to have an Aboriginal woman on the drove. Keep them company at night. Shave their heads, make them look like boys and work them just like any other stockmen during the day. That would be what you’d call ‘exploiting them’.

Section 4 – the cattle trek to Darwin

- Who takes part as drovers on the trek to Darwin to sell the 1,500 head of cattle?
- As they travel through the Bungle Bungles, what does Sarah decide about the land they are moving through?
- Who is behind the attempt to cause the cattle to plunge over the escarpment?
- What do we learn about the Drover’s past and how does Sarah respond to these revelations?
- What is the significance of King George’s help on the trek across the Kuraman desert?

Who says this and in what context?

- The thing the Aborigines fear most, physical intimacy, love, it’s dangerous, it can’t be controlled. Love changes everything. Family, destiny.
- I sing you across the Kuraman … to water … but the boy returns to me.
The ancestors created songs for everything, every road and tree. And all the songs were linked so that when you sing the songs in order, you could pretty much find your way anywhere.

Section 5 – In Darwin

- What kind of reception does Sarah get this time in Darwin?
- Why does Sarah decide to put herself up for auction at the ball?
- How does Fletcher make the Drover so angry?

Who says this and in what context?

- We’re making delivery of 1,500 head of prime FD branded short-horns at twenty per cent less than what the Carney Cattle Company is offering.
- I want to make a good impression with Dr. Barker, the Protector of Aborigines.
- Her husband barely in the grave, she crosses the Kuraman with blacks, now she’s cavorting with the Captain … and that dress!
- Everyone works for Carney. When are you going to learn, you filthy boong lover.
- A life on the station would be far better than a life in an institution.
- It’s a fact of science that the Aboriginal mother soon forgets her offspring.
- Everything green, flowering, millions of birds, the fish and animals fat with life … everything will change.

Section 6 – back at Faraway Downs

- What is the outcome of the argument between Carney and Fletcher at the waterhole?
- What is it that Captain Dutton tells Sarah over the radio that causes her to return to Darwin?

Who says this and in what context?

- I a man, I got to go walkabout.
- That business with the schooling, how’s that different from what the Administration’s doing out on the missions?
- I would prefer it if you didn’t return.

Section 7 – Separated – Darwin, Faraway Downs and Mission Island

- Why are women and children being evacuated from Darwin?
- How does Cath Carney help Sarah?
- What does Fletcher want Sarah to do at this stage and why?
- What does Sarah do to remain in Darwin?
- What does Magarri hear under the Boab tree with the Drover?
- What part does the Drover play in the dangerous situation in Darwin?
- Why do the Drover and Magarri go to Mission Island?

Who says this and in what context?

- … hugging that grubby piccaninny!
- This child is under the legal care of the church … as the Government has decreed for all half-caste children.
- Their fathers are the men of this town … they are your sons … they are your brothers … they are your husbands.
- There’s nothing you can do, she’s gone.
- How it is ain’t how it should be. One more glass.
- Those half-castes bring bad luck … that creamie has cursed me.
- I will always hear you, my darling, wherever you are.
1. Imaging Australia

THIS FILM HAS HAD a good deal of pre-publicity and even been used as part of an advertising campaign for Tourism Australia to encourage tourists to come to Australia and have a real Australian experience. While the ads do not feature either Kidman or Jackman – though Brandon Walters (Nullah) does feature in some of them – these advertisements do reflect the film’s key themes of adventure, romance and the emotional transformation people may undergo when travelling in isolated areas of the outback. The tagline for one of these television advertisements features Brandon Walters urging visitors to explore Australia’s rich Indigenous heritage – to ‘come walkabout’. The advertisements for Tourism Australia carry the message: ‘To find yourself, sometimes you need to lose yourself. In Australia they call this going walkabout’.

- What kind of picture of Australia does Australia present?
- How like or unlike is this image of Australia to that of other Australian films that have been successful both here and overseas? E.g. Gallipoli (Peter Weir, 1981), Wolf Creek (Greg Mclean, 2005), Crocodile Dundee (Peter Faiman, 1986), Rabbit-Proof Fence (Phillip Noyce, 2002), Walkabout (Nicolas Roeg, 1971), Muriel’s Wedding (P.J. Hogan, 1994), The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Stephan Elliot, 1994), Babe (Chris Noonan, 1995), Lantana (Ray Lawrence, 2001), Ten Canoes (Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr, 2006), The Tracker (Rolf de Heer, 2002), Kenny (Clayton Jacobson, 2006), The Castle (Rob Sitch, 1997), The Black Balloon (Elissa Down, 2008), Somersault (Cate Shortland, 2004)?
  - How many of these films are set in the fairly distant past?
  - How many of them deal with Indigenous and white Australian relations in the past?
  - How many of them use the natural landscape of Australia as a key element in telling their story?
  - How many of these films present a love story?
  - How many of them would you describe as ‘absolutely Australian’?
- In what ways could Australia be described as presenting Australia and its history and way of life in a different way to earlier films?

2. Destinations – film location tourism

Throughout filmmaking history, directors have chosen cities and places in which to set their stories. Close to home there are regular bus trips by tourists to the street and suburb where Neighbours, the long-running soap series is filmed. Hanging Rock became an even more popular picnic spot after Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir) was released in 1975; many tourists only knowledge of Casablanca would be from their watching of the 1942 film Casablanca (Michael Curtiz), Both The Da Vinci Code (Ron Howard, 2006) and The Lord of the Rings trilogy are claimed to have increased tourism to their respective settings in Paris and New Zealand. The recent thriller In Bruges (Martin McDonagh, 2008), while apparently deriding the Belgian city Bruges as a place to visit, makes it look very appealing.

- Name any films you have seen that are filmed in a place that is integral to the story and comment on how this might have affected the numbers of people visiting that place.
- In general terms, do you think that if an area is used as a location in a widely-watched feature film that it could affect an area’s tourism potential?
3. The director’s intentions

As an Australian filmmaker, I am using my country as a canvas on which to create a metaphor for ‘the faraway’. It is an exotic place at the end of the world where you can be transformed by experience and ultimately by love.

– Baz Luhrmann, director of Australia

SCHOOL GROUP BOOKINGS:

If you are interested in taking your school or class to see Australia, please contact your local cinema for more details. Highly discounted rates are available & teachers go along free of charge (at participating cinemas). Contact your local cinema and book a screening today!

GREATER UNION / BCC CINEMAS:
WEB http://www.greaterunion.com.au
EMAIL Corporate_Events@greaterunion.com.au
PH (02) 9373 6581

HOYTS CINEMAS:
WEB http://www.hoyts.ninemsn.com.au
EMAIL Australia@hoyts.com.au

VILLAGE CINEMAS:
WEB http://www.villagecinemas.com.au
EMAIL corporate_sales@village-cinemas.com

READING CINEMAS:
WEB http://www.readingcinemas.com.au

Hollywood and ‘love'.

4. Looking globally

Australians watch American, Asian and European films but who watches Australian films?

• Do you think this film will be enjoyed by non-Australian audiences?
• What qualities does it embody that would have appeal to audiences outside Australia?
• How central to the film is the story of what happens to Nullah and the other Indigenous characters?
• How important is the appeal of a sweeping but troubled and unlikely love story between characters played by actors with a strong international profile?

5. Soundtrack

• Were you aware of the musical score as you watched the film?
• How important is the musical score for creating and/or establishing moods?
• What other sounds do we hear on the soundtrack that are integral to the story, e.g. the Boomerang harmonica that Nullah plays, the pounding hooves of the cattle, the bombing?

6. Reviews, reviewing and awards

• Write a review of Australia, outlining the film’s strengths and any weaknesses, commenting on acting performances and providing

Film Review Competition

20th Century Fox and ATOM would like you and your students to get involved with Baz Luhrmann’s newest cinematic spectacular, Australia. We are running a Film Review Competition where your students can enter a ‘film review’ (no more than 1000 words). There are some terrific prizes to be won, not only for the students, but also for your school!

The prizes for the 5 best film reviews are:

• 5 x Apple iPod Touch valued at $329.00 each
• ALSO the best student film review overall from the 5 student winners, will win a $5,000 computer package for their school!

Entries can be received from 26 November 2008 until 2 April 2009. Entries will only be accepted by email to <australia@fox.com.au>. The heading ‘AUSTRALIA FILM REVIEW’ is to be placed in the subject header. Winners will be notified by email or telephone & also published on the Metro magazine website.

Brief Synopsis of the Film:

Baz Luhrmann’s Australia is an epic adventure set in the North of Australia in the late 1930s and 1940s. The story brings together people from many backgrounds and walks of life, from the English aristocracy to the rough-hewn outback drovers and the Indigenous people of Australia. There is a transforming journey, romance, war, greed, mistreatment, heroism, tragedy and triumph. The story traverses some of the most beautiful and inhospitable country in the remote north of Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

With his new film, Luhrmann is painting on a vast canvas, creating a cinematic experience that brings together romance, drama, adventure and spectacle.
an outline of the story that does not reveal too many of the details people don’t need to know beforehand. Decide on the publication or website for which you are writing the review. Select a visual moment from the film or choose one of the poster images from an online film site such as <http://thecia.com.au/reviews/a/australia.shtml> or this film’s official website <http://www.australiathemovie.com.au>.

- After writing your own review, read some reviews of Australia. They will appear in newspapers and magazines, on television and radio film review programs, and on internet sites such as Rotten Tomatoes, a site where you can read summaries and complete versions of worldwide reviews of a film gathered from a number of sources. At the same time, an internet search will bring up blog sites where individuals express their views.
- What aspects of this film would you select to be nominated for an award, either in Australia or for the Academy Awards? Choose two categories such as Best Actress in a Leading Role and Best Director and prepare an Oscar nomination form outlining the strengths of the artists in the categories you have chosen. Keep in mind that many categories of work on a film are eligible for awards. Maybe you think the Production Designer or Lighting Director did an award-winning job.

If you are unsure of the range of performances for which awards are given, go to <http://www.oscar.com/nominees/> where you will find a list of categories.

References and Resources

http://www.australiathemovie.com.au

The film’s official website with the trailer and a number of still images from the film


A travel site offering information about Darwin’s history and that of the region

http://westernaustralia.tv/video/177

At this Western Australia Tourism site you can watch a preview clip of Australia and other video clips of the Kimberly area where much of the film is set.

Marguerite O’Hara is a freelance writer.

Endnotes
2 From a special liftout supplement about Australia published by the Bowen Independent newspaper, p.2. This brochure can be read at <http://www.tourismbowen.com.au/australia_movie/australia.html>.

This study guide was produced by ATOM. (©ATOM)
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