

# Australia

This studyguide has been written to accompany the film *Australia*, directed by Baz Luhrmann.

An epic romance starring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman, *Australia* was released in cinemas in Ireland on December 26th, 2008. Filmed on location throughout Australia, the film combines history with adventure and love. It is the story of English aristocrat Lady Sarah Ashley who finds herself driving herds of cattle through the Outback in the company of the mysterious Drover and guided by Indigenous Australian, King George.

The studyguide focuses on several key themes from the film: Love, War, Australia Today, Indigenous Australians. Themes and tasks have been devised to support English, Geography, History, SPHE, CSPE and Art at Junior Cert. level or Transition Year. They combine group, pair and individual work and facilitate development of oral, written and visual literacy skills.

*Australia* is an exciting and moving film that offers many possibilities for classroom work.

IFI Education

Studyguide



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Running time:  
Australia directed by Baz Luhrmann, Australia/USA 2008, 165 mins

Website:  
[www.Australiamovie.com](http://www.Australiamovie.com)



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# Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*

## 1. Pre-viewing

- (a) Director Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia* is set in the 1940's. Look at the pictures on the right. What do you think are the main themes of the film? Refer to the timeline above.
- (b) What do you know about Australia? Brainstorm your ideas and share with the class.
- (c) Study the sequence of events on the timeline. Select what you think are the most important events in Australian history and discuss your choice.
- (d) Can you think of any other Australian films?

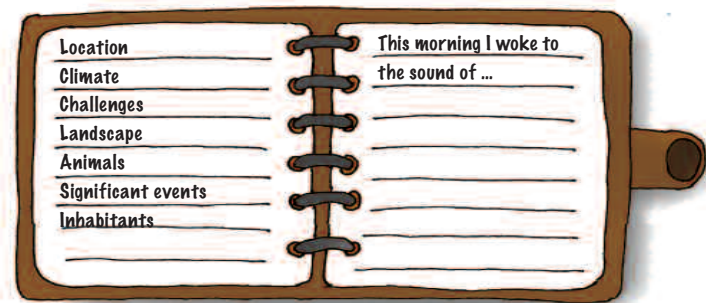


## 2. Post-viewing

### Synopsis

Set in Northern Australia before World War II, Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) is an English aristocrat who inherits a vast cattle station, Faraway Downs. Under threat from other cattle barons, she is helped by an Australian, known as Drover (Hugh Jackman), with whom she falls in love. Together they drive herds of cattle across the harsh landscape of the Northern Territory but get caught up in the bombing of Darwin.

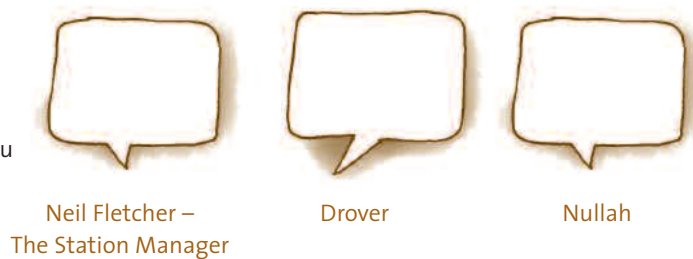
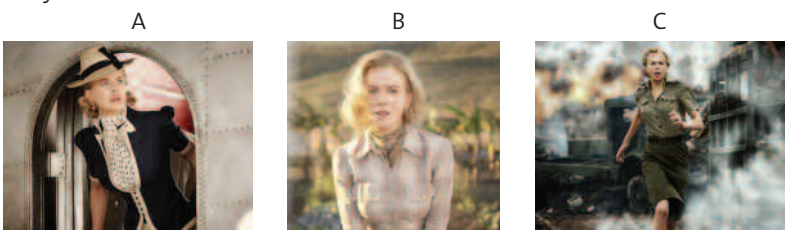
- (a) Recalling what you can from the film, look at the map and pick out any place that Lady Sarah Ashley and Drover went to on their journey.
- (b) What kind of journey was this for them? Write a diary entry from the point of view of Lady Sarah Ashley or Drover describing a day on the journey. Think about the words on the left before you start:



- (c) Do you think this journey might be different today? Explain why.

## 3. Character

- (a) Both Lady Sarah Ashley and Drover change a lot during the course of their journey. In pairs, look at the pictures A,B,C and think of adjectives to describe Lady Sarah Ashley at different stages on her journey. Compare with your partner.
- (b) What do you think is the biggest change in her character. How and why does this happen?
- (c) In pairs, choose one of the other characters from the film. Imagine you are that person and describe how you feel about Lady Sarah Ashley.
- (d) How does Lady Sarah Ashley feel about these other characters?



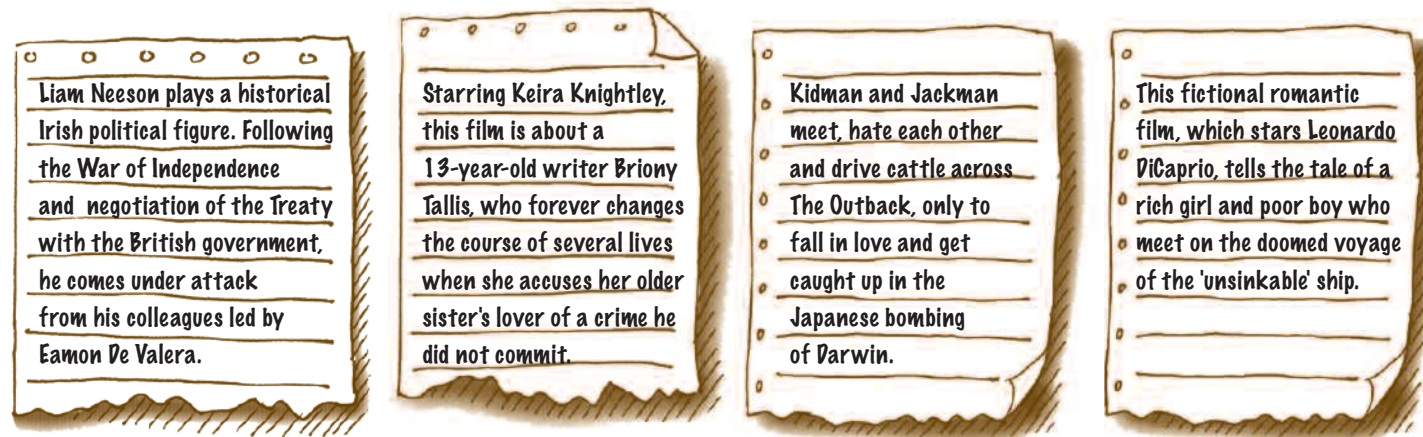
# A Love Story

## 1. Love is one of the main themes in *Australia*.

Baz Luhrmann has described *Australia* as a love epic. Love epics are romantic films done on a large scale, usually in a historical setting.

- (a) Australia also has elements of other film genres (types). Can you name others? Give reasons for your answer.
- (b) Other love epics: *Michael Collins* (1996), *Titanic* (1997), *Atonement* (2007), *Australia* (2008)

Match the following plot descriptions to the above film titles.



- (c) What elements do these love films have in common?
- (d) In groups, discuss how these elements appear in *Australia*.
- (e) Can you think of any more?
- (f) Do you think *Australia* is a good example of a love epic? Why?

## 2. Group project

You are a film production team. You have been asked by 20th Century Fox Film Co. Ltd to present an idea for your own love epic.

- (a) Choose a storyboard, film poster or short script to present your idea.



Develop your idea using the following guidelines:

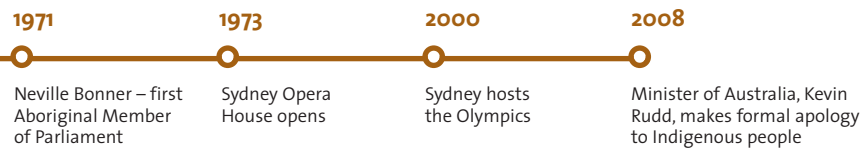
Story	Characters	Location
Fact or fiction? Is it based on a historical event? Past, present or future? Whose story is it?	Who are the main characters? Actors? Are they famous or are they your classmates? What kind of costumes will they wear?	What period is it set in? Where?

- (b) In groups, create and present your final idea to the class.

## Extension task

As a class, vote on your favourite story. Act it out or make a short film!





# A War Story

## 1. The bombing of Darwin and its consequences is a main sequence in *Australia*.

- (a) When was Darwin bombed by Japanese forces? Refer to timeline and find out why this happened.
- (b) Can you identify the wars that these films are based on?

**Other war films**  
*Pearl Harbour, The Wind that Shakes the Barley, Pan’s Labyrinth, Rescue Dawn*

## 2. Role Play:

In pairs choose one of the following roles each:  
**Person A:** News reporter **Person B:** Soldier, Civilian, Child, Japanese Bomber

Create a television news report on the bombing of Darwin. A – Interviews B – about your experience. Present your news report to the class. Swap roles if there’s time!

## 3. Australian history focus

- (a) The bombing of Darwin has been removed from school history curricula in Australia. What do you think is the reason for this?
- (b) Is there any period in Irish history that might be removed from our history curricula? Explain your answer.

### Anzac Day

Anzac Day is commemorated by Australia and New Zealand on April 25th every year to honour members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who fought at Gallipoli in Turkey during World War I.



### 4. Anglo-Celtic Australian’s

In the film *Lady Sarah* Ashley leaves England for Australia because she is determined to force her husband to sell their property, *Faraway Downs*.

Following Captain Cookes arrival on the East coast of Australia in 1770 (see timeline) people began emigrating to Australia in search of new opportunities.

Anglo-Celtic Australians make up the largest ethnic group in Australia. Irish Australians are the third largest group. Around 40,000 Irish convicts were transported to Australia between 1791 and 1867. The most famous Irish convict is Ned Kelly.

- (a) Read the passage on the right about Ned Kelly and fill in the police record!
- (b) Why do you think Ned Kelly has become a folk hero?

<b>POLICE RECORD</b>	
Surname:	
Name:	
Nationality:	
Birth Place:	
Family:	
Occupation(s):	
Wanted for:	
Died:	

**Research Task:**  
To understand more about this historical event work in groups to research and present the following questions.

- Who governed the Northern Territory at this time?
- What were the reasons behind the military build up in the Northern Territory?
- Why did the Japanese bomb Darwin?
- What was similar about the bombing of Pearl Harbour and the bombing of Darwin?

Useful web link - [www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au](http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au)

## WANTED!

**Ned Kelly (June 3rd 1854 - Nov 11th 1880)** was an Australian bushranger, and, to some, a folk hero for his rebelliousness against colonial authorities. He was born in Victoria to an Irish convict father, and as a young man he didn’t get on with the police. At the age of 14 he was arrested for assaulting a Chinese pig farmer. Ned Kelly became a wanted man after killing three policemen. He was hanged for murder at Old Melbourne Gaol in 1880. His daring reputation made him a famous figure in Australian history, folklore, literature, art and film.

“Our indigenous culture is truly unique and ancient, and for me learning so much about it for me was incredible.” Baz Luhrmann

# Indigenous Australians 1

## 1. ‘Aboriginal’

Aboriginal people are central to the story of the film. The term ‘Aboriginal’ refers to ‘first or earliest known, indigenous’ and was used to describe Australia’s native mainland population. The term Indigenous Australians is also used.

- (a) Can you name two Indigenous Australian characters in the film?
- (b) What is their relationship to each other?
- (c) What do you know about Indigenous Australians?

The Australian mainland has been inhabited for more than 42,000 years by Indigenous Australians.  
2.6% of Australia’s population is indigenous



## 2. King George

In Australia... King George is the Indigenous tribal leader.

- (a) Describe King George under the following headings:  
• Appearance • Character • Role
- (b) In pairs, discuss any Indigenous Australian traditions that you can remember from the film. What do these traditions tell you about their way of life?

### Other films about Indigenous Australians



Did you know that King George (David Gulpilil) has starred in all of these films!

## 3. Symbols

- (a) Here are some symbols that reflect the culture and traditions of Indigenous Australians. Can you match the words with the symbols?



Woman, man, person, boomerang, people sitting, star, kangaroo track, moving kangaroo track, snake, campsite, honey ant, animal tracks, rain, bush berry

Refer to contents page for answers.

- (b) Invent your own symbols for these words:  
*Spear, Land, Crocodile, Fire, Horse tracks.*

## 4. Dreamtime Storiest

Storytelling is an important element of the film. ‘Dreamtime stories’ are a feature of Indigenous Australian mythology. They refer to stories about the creation of sacred places, land, people, animals and plants.

- (a) What stories can you remember from the film?
- (b) Can you tell the story of the film in your own words?



## 5. Codes of Conduct

Indigenous Australians have their own code of conduct. Here are some examples from the code:

- There are no words for “please” or “thank you”.
- Aboriginal people tolerate silence in communication.
- They use hand signals and gestures mostly to communicate. This originates from having to communicate with each other across long distances.
- Direct contact is considered inappropriate between men and women who know each other.
- There are no greetings like “hello”. They address each other using a relationship name such as “mother’s brother”.

- (a) What do you think of these?
- (b) Which do you think is the most interesting? Why/not?
- (c) Do you think you could live by this code of conduct? Why/not?
- (d) In groups, invent and draw up your own code of conduct. Give your group a name. Think about what is important to you and use these words to help: *religion, greetings, land, social conduct, traditions*. Present your decisions to the class and explain your choices. Vote on the best code of conduct.
- (e) Discuss an important tradition in your culture.
- (f) Can you name any other Indigenous Cultures?



“By choosing to set the film between the two World Wars, I was able to bind the historical romance to what really is the greatest scar in the history of the country: the Stolen Generation” Baz Luhrmann

# Indigenous Australians 2

## 1. The Stolen Generation

From the earliest years of European settlement in Australia (see timeline), there is evidence of Aboriginal children being taken from their families as the authorities believed it was ‘for their own good’. During the first half of the 20th century, it was official policy in most states to remove so-called ‘half or quarter caste’ Aboriginal children. The practice continued until the early 1970’s, and was only fully brought to public attention with the release of the ‘Bringing Them Home’ report in 1997. See [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au) for more information. In February 2008 the new Prime Minister, Labour’s Kevin Rudd, made a formal apology to the Indigenous Australians.

In *Australia* one of the central characters in the film is Nullah, a young boy who has an Indigenous Australian mother and a white father.

- (a) What happens to Nullah when he decides to go on walkabout for the first time?
- (b) How does Lady Sarah Ashley help him?
- (c) How does Nullah help Lady Sarah Ashley?
- (d) Describe their relationship.



## 2. Indigenous Australian Poetry

- (a) Read the poem below which is written by Grandfather Koori

**Never Blood So Red**

Never blood  
so red so red  
never blood so red  
as blood of the poet  
the Kokatha poet  
who lay in the pool  
so dead.

Never blood  
so red so red  
in Fremantle gaol so red  
it glistens on batons  
walls and feet  
red drops on the warden’s head  
never blood  
so red so red  
never blood so red  
as blood of the poet  
the Kokatha poet  
whose cries for justice  
bled  
whose cries for justice  
bled.

Grandfather Koori  
Australian – Aboriginal – Wiradjuri  
Activist, writer, poet (1933–1993)

- (b) What do you think the poem is about?
- (c) Describe how you think the poet feels.
- (d) What do you notice about the poet’s style? Comment on the language and imagery.
- (e) In groups, discuss what it tells you about the history of these people.

### Extension task

- (a) Look for a photograph in a magazine, or draw a picture, that you think could be used to illustrate the poem.
- (b) Think about a time when you felt strongly about a situation. Write a poem about this.

## 3. Aboriginal words

- (a) Can you match the Aboriginal words to the correct meanings?
- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| •Billabong         | •A song and dance ceremony                           |
| •Bongalin Bongalin | •Senior lawman or elder                              |
| •Corroboree        | •A coffin made from bark                             |
| •Dilly Bag         | •A dead creek  |
| •Jungayi           | •Traditional hunting tool or weapon                  |
| •Lorrkon           | •The name of a dance which represents animals        |
| •Womera            | •Small hand-woven string bag decorated with feathers |

Refer to contents page for answers.

“As an Australian filmmaker, I am using my country as a canvas. It is an exotic place at the end of the world where you can be transformed by experience and ultimately by love.” Baz Luhrmann

# Australia Today 1

## 1. Australia

Australia is the world’s smallest continent.

- (a) Where is it?
- (b) What oceans does it lie between?
- (c) Put these in order of size: South America, Europe, Australia

## 2. The Outback

The ‘Outback’, ‘bush’, ‘never never’ and ‘big backyard’ are all names which refer to remote dry areas of Australia.

- (a) Why do you think one of the names for the outback is ‘never never’?
- (b) What kind of landscape is this?
- (c) In the Outback you can find animals such as: kangaroos, dingoes, koalas, possums, flying foxes and stingless bees.

It is also home to some of the most poisonous and dangerous creatures in the world: snakes, spiders, vicious insects and crocodiles.

Pick two of the Outback animals/creatures and find out about them. What animals/creatures are native to your country?

## 3. Travel Australia

In the film, Lady Sarah Ashley and Drover travel through Outback territory. Now it’s your turn: You have been asked by Tourism Australia to draw up a brochure promoting a tourist journey through the Outback:

- Find out where the Outback is and decide on a location for your brochure.
- Use maps and illustrations
- Include the following information:

- History of area/heritage
- Transport – How do you get there? What’s the best way to travel when there?
- Climate – what is the weather like?
- Accommodation – where can you stay?

- Attractions – what can you see/do?
- Nature – what can you find there?
- Landscape – what type of landscape is there?

Useful information can be found on: [www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com)

### Extension Task

- (a) Write a postcard home telling your family about your journey.
- (b) Draw a picture of something you saw on your journey.



“It is one of the last places in the world that still conjures mystery, excitement and romance in people’s minds.” Baz Luhrmann

# Australia Today 2



Read the quote above. In your mind does Australia conjure up mystery, excitement and romance? Explain your answer.



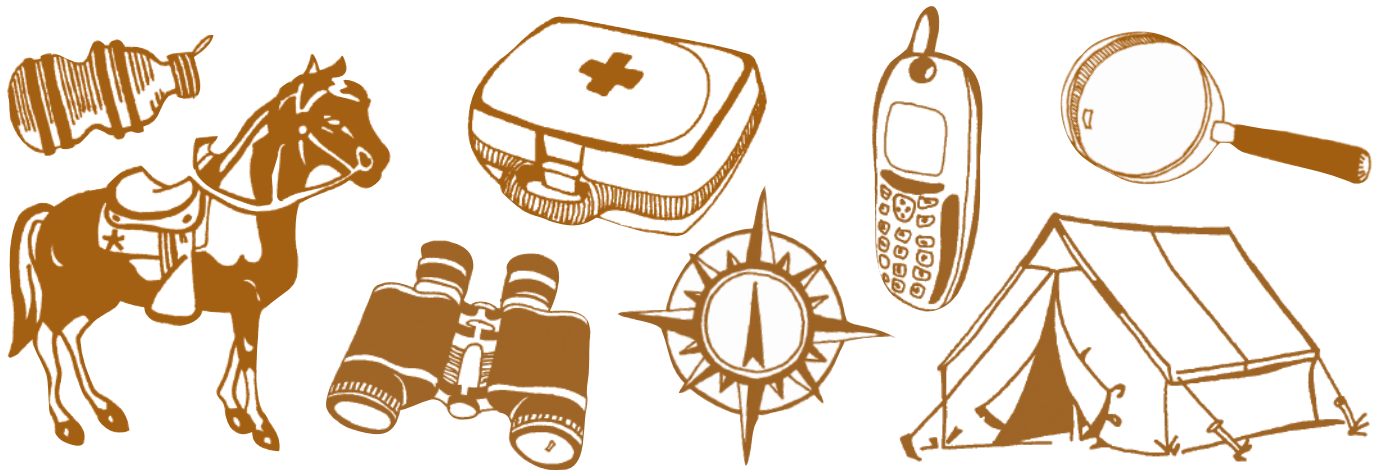
## 1. Survival Challenge

Like the popular television series ‘I’m A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here’, you and your group have been faced with a survival challenge!

You have been sent to the middle of the Outback. You must survive for three nights. You are only allowed to bring three of the following items to help you and your team survive. Choose from the following:

Mobile phone, spear, tent, first-aid kit, water can, matches, horse, binoculars, sun lotion, knife, diary, compass, magnifying glass, insect repellent.

- (a) Discuss in your group and explain your choices to the class
- (b) What type of person do you think would survive in the Outback?
- (c) What characteristics do you think are necessary?
- (d) Would you like to visit the Outback? Discuss why.



## 6. Save the Dingo!

The Dingo is Australia’s native dog. It is a wild dog found in the Outback ‘Watu’ is the Indigenous Australian word for Dingo.

There is fear that the dingo is becoming extinct, design a poster as part of an environmental campaign to ‘Save the Dingo’.

### FAST FACTS

Type: Mammal  
Diet: Carnivore – rabbits, birds, lizards  
Size: Head and body, 3.5 - 4 ft. tail, 12 - 13 inches  
Weight: 22 – 33lbs



“Australia is a metaphor for the far away: to surrender, to experience and to be reborn through a relationship.” Baz Luhrmann

## 1. Baz Luhrmann

Baz Luhrmann was born in Sydney, Australia. His father owned a movie theatre and this is where he first became interested in film and storytelling. He first became known for the romantic comedy Strictly Ballroom (1992). He followed this with an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet (1996) and then Moulin Rouge! (2001). These three films make up the ‘Red Curtain Trilogy’. In 2004 he directed the world’s most expensive advertisement for Chanel No. 5, starring Nicole Kidman. He is married to production designer, Catherine Martin who worked on all his films, including Australia (2008). Baz Luhrmann was determined to set an historical epic in the country of his birth.



- (a) Read the quote above from the director, Baz Luhrmann.
- (b) What do you think he means by this?

## 2. The Stars of Australia

In most films we can easily pick out the star. Look at the pictures.

- (a) In groups discuss who you think is the real star of the film and describe under the following headings: Appearance, Character, Role.

## 3. Film Storytelling

As with a novel, the story of a film is told by a narrator. A narrator exists within the world of the story and may tell the story from his/her own point of view or from the point of view of one of the characters.

- (a) Who is Australia’s narrator?
- (b) Why do you think the story is narrated by this character?
- (c) How would the story be different if it was told from the point of view of: Neil Fletcher? Drover?



Drover



Lady Sarah Ashley



Nullah



King George



The Landscape

## 4. The Wizard of Oz

### The Wizard of Oz (1939)

- American musical-fantasy film, directed by Victor Fleming.
- Based on the 1900 children’s novel The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L.Frank Baum.
- Film stars Judy Garland as Dorothy Gale.

In the film Lady Sarah Ashley tells Nullah the story of *The Wizard of Oz* to comfort him when his mother dies. He later sees the film at an open air cinema.

- (a) In groups, discuss the story of *The Wizard of Oz*. Do you think it is a Dreamtime story? Why/not? (see pg. 4, Indigenous Australians I)
- (b) What song does she sing to him?
- (c) When does the song appear again in the film?
- (d) What do you think is the significance of this?



**Extension Task** In pairs, think of other songs that Nullah could sing or write your own.



“Every single costume is totally anchored in historical research and realism.” Catherine Martin

# Film Studies 2

## 1. Costume Design

Throughout the film Nicole Kidman has many different costume changes. Each look is essential to the development of her character, Lady Sarah Ashley.

- (a) Referring back to Q3, pg. 1 ‘Characters’, choose a scene and design a brand new look for her character, Lady Sarah. Use the sketches from *Australia*’s costume designer, Catherine Martin, to help you with some ideas.

Here are a few things to think about:  
*What scene is she appearing in?*  
*Where is she?*  
*Is it day or night?*  
*Is she wearing accessories?*  
*What fabric will you use?*

- (b) In your opinion, what does this new look say about her character?

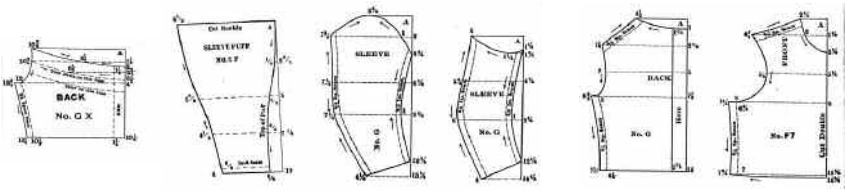
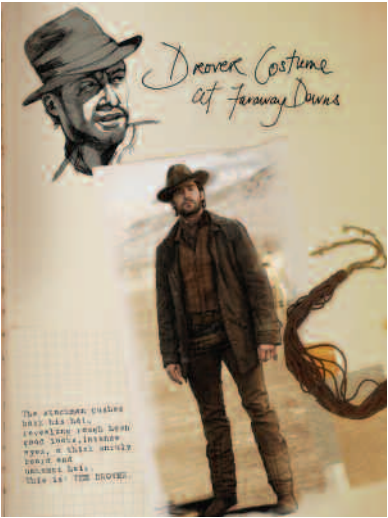
- (c) Drover needs a new hat for when he is in the Outback.

Invent a hat that will help him survive when he is on his journey? Refer to the section *Australia Today II* for ideas. Use illustrations to present your invention.

## Extension Task

In *Australia* Lady Sarah Ashley and Drover attend a ball.

- (a) Design an outfit for Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman to attend the Oscars in style!



“The film truly is about the landscape and how the outdoor experience can have an effect on your soul.” Baz Luhrmann

# Film Studies 3

## 1. Poster Design

In groups, look at the film poster that was designed to promote the film *Australia*.

- (a) What does it tell you about the film?  
(b) Do you think it’s an effective design? Why/not?  
(c) Which element in particular might influence audiences?  
(d) Design your own film poster to promote the film *Australia*, considering the following:
- The type of message you are trying to communicate.
  - The images, symbols and lettering you will use.
  - The places where you will display the poster.



## 2. Set Design

*Australia* was filmed in various locations across the huge country. Catherine Martin and her team constructed a huge exterior set to look like 1930’s Darwin. They also built ‘Faraway Downs’, the cattle ranch and house which belonged to Lady Sarah Ashley and her husband.

- (a) Choose an exterior or interior set from the film eg. house, pub, cattle ranch, outback.  
(b) Design and construct a miniature version of your set using materials such as, cardboard, glue, paint, wire, fabric, straw etc.

## 3. Landscape as Location

For exteriors, Luhrmann relied on the beauty of the Australian landscape as a backdrop for his epic tale.

- (a) Do you think the use of these stunning landscapes would attract people to *Australia*? Why/not?  
(b) What locations in Ireland do you think would attract filmmakers? Give reasons for your answers.  
(c) If you were to produce your own love epic would you choose *Australia* or Ireland for your location? Give reasons for your answer.



## Answers

Page 4:	3. Symbols woman; man; person; boomerang; people sitting; star, kangaroo; track; moving kangaroo; track; snake; campsite; honey ant; animal tracks, rain, bush berry
Page 5:	3. Aboriginal words Billabong A dead creek Bongalin Bongalin The name of a dance which represents animals Corroboree A song and dance ceremony Dilly Bag Small hand-woven string bag decorated with feathers Jungayi Senior lawman or elder Lorrkon A coffin made from bark Womera Traditional hunting tool or weapon