



CAROLINE WRIGHT-NEVILLE



# SURVIVING SHEPHERD'S PIE

STUDYGUIDE

ISSUE 29 AUSTRALIAN SCREEN EDUCATION

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**THEME:**

*Surviving Shepherd's Pie*, written and directed by Diana Leach, is a series of photographs and profiles of women in the Australian outback. Diana Leach became intrigued by the lives of outback women and the character traits that linked them together. With this fascination in mind, she travelled across Australia and spent six weeks researching and interviewing rural women.

Australian history books and read about rural life and history. Go to new publications on similar themes and compare and contrast versions of history.

- Find some poems by writer Henry Lawson. What images of Australia do they depict?
- Are Henry Lawson's depictions of Australia relevant to today?
- Read the poem *My Country* by Dorothea MacKellar (1885-1968). Why would this poem be so popular in Australia?
- Look at paintings about rural Australia and describe the colours, subject choice and effect the artwork has on your understanding of rural life.
- What are some positive/negative images of rural life you can find from the media today?

The film explores how the women's identities are forged by the Australian outback and how Australian rural women's characters have been shaped by geography.

The four women in the film are all competitive horsewomen who have been involved in the rodeo circuit at some stage of their lives. The film also explores the relationship between the rodeo and rural Australian culture.

(SOSE), English, English as a Second Language (ESL) and Media Studies. It is also useful for students in urban areas as a text for understanding rural Australia. This study guide could also be used as a way of getting rural students to explore the same issues in an urban context.

**UNDERSTANDING RURAL AUSTRALIA**

- Describe what you think about when you hear people talking about 'The Bush' and the outback.
- Choose some old



Photos by Diana Leach: Top and Bottom: Cissy Bright

- Compare rural life in Australia to other countries you know. What are the similarities/ differences?
- What do country people think of city people and vice versa?

#### WEB LINKS TO RURAL ISSUES:

<http://abc.net.au/rural>  
<http://abc.net.au/landline>

#### SURVIVING SHEPHERDS PIE

#### BEFORE YOU WATCH:

- What is shepherd's pie? How do you make shepherd's pie?
- What would be the connection between the lives of rural people, the outback and the title of the film?
- What changes would women have to make to their lives in order to live in the outback?
- Would men have to make the same changes as women?
- What is the stereotype of country women?

#### LANGUAGE

Look at these quotes from the film and discuss what they mean:

*Listen to the silence, peace, quietness.*

*What you see is openness with everyone so far away. In town, everyone goes into the same house in the same street every night.*



*There's another side to country life, the man with a gun who has shot sheep with lambs and dogs. That's the reality and sadness. City people don't understand country people.*

*If you're born in the country you have a different attitude. East is East, West is West and never the twain shall meet.*

#### AFTER WATCHING

#### THE DIRECTOR EXPLAINS THE THEME OF THE FILM IN THIS WAY:

*'Surviving Shepherd's Pie is an exploration and celebration of how Australian rural women's characters have been shaped by geography.'*

- In what ways do you think the women

have been shaped by geography?

- What are the common threads between the four women?
- According to the women, what are the most important factors about living in country?
- What are the two sides to country life as described by Enid Healy?
- Why would these women have



stayed in such a harsh environment?

- Do the women in the film fit into the stereotype of country women?
- What are the hardships faced by people living in the outback?
- What similar hardships would be faced both by city and country people?

#### THE RODEO

The sports of camp-drafting and rough-riding began in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s. They originated during cattle musters when stockmen would go on long cattle drives and compete against each other to see who had the best horses and who was the best horse rider. This pastime became

Photos by Diana Leach: From the top: Cissy Bright; Traci Tapp and Traci Tapp



popular in the bush, as a way of socialising and developing partnerships between far stretched communities. Bushmen's carnivals began to be organized in northern New South Wales in the 1920s and became well-established by the 1930s.

Travelling tent rodeos were also popular in the 1920s and 1930s, with circuit competitors and spectators rough-riding in rodeo arenas on wild brumbies and range stock. The rodeo still remains popular in rural Australia. Some families travel long distances to go to competitions around the country. In some families, small children are trained to ride calves and practise roping mock cows in order to become fearless in the arena.



Go to this site and find out about rodeos:  
<http://www.abcra.com.au>

Director Diana Leach comments, 'We also explore the idea of the rodeo as an expression of the Australian rural culture and identity.'

- What aspects of rural culture are reflected in the rodeo?
- In what form can the same aspects be related to urban culture?

CISSY BRIGHT

**C**ISSY BRIGHT grew up in a rural area near the Gold Coast. At 18, she married and moved to a cattle station in the Northern Territory. She stayed there for eight years before

she left her husband and moved to Borroloola. In Borroloola, she met her second husband Bill Bright. After the family lost their property in the cattle slump they moved into a concrete hut. Bill worked as a bull catcher and they bred cattle. They

managed to save enough money to start again and bought 250,000 acres of cattle breeding land in the Northern Territory. Cissy is also a champion camp drafter. She began her camp-drafting career after a man challenged her by suggesting that women should not be allowed to compete in rodeos, and that she couldn't ride properly. Since then, she has proven herself to be a skilled horsewoman and her daughter has continued the tradition, recently winning the title world champion female rider as well as achieving runner-up in a mixed event.

- What was Cissy's dream as a young woman?
- Describe Cissy's life in her younger days when she was first married and moved to the cattle station.
- What hardships did her family face after they lost their property?
- Why do you think she wanted to prove herself to the man who challenged her about the rodeo?
- When Cissy met her second husband at a rodeo, she said 'Hold the mirror while I put me make up on'. When Bill came to propose to Cissy he said 'C'mon, get yer gear, we're going.' From these exchanges how would you describe their characters? Do you think this is typical of the way Australians relate to one another?

Photos by Diana Leach: Top and Bottom: Eunice Bougoure

## TRACI TAPP

**T**RACI TAPP now 36, attended a private school in the town of Katherine. At 16, she met her husband Ben and moved into his family station where she was laughed at for her posh outfits and the way in which she rode a horse. As a member of Ben's family, she had to learn to be involved in the daily running of the cattle station. The initial stages of her life on the station were fraught with difficulties as she tried to adapt to cooking, washing in an old-fashioned boiler as well as helping to fix fences and muster cattle. The Tapp family lost their fortune and Traci and her family moved to Toowoomba, Queensland, where they train quarter horses and muster by helicopter and horseback in the Northern Territory.

- Why did Traci's family object to her marriage?
- At what points does she wonder about her choice of outback life?
- What does she miss most about town life?
- Why doesn't she go back to live in town?
- What did she do to gain acceptance from the stockmen?
- Why is a good relationship vital for survival?
- Why does she ask herself, 'What am I doing here?'

## EUNICE BOUGOURE

EUNICE BOUGOURE is 78 and lives in Toogloawah in Central



Queensland drought country. Eunice is a champion rough-rider and was in a performance group of three women who called themselves 'The Bush Fillies'. The Bush Fillies competed in rodeos during the 1940s. After enduring 25 years of hard work in a violent and unhappy marriage, Eunice took her children and left her husband. She made a new life for her family, settling on a farm, where she earned a living trapping rabbits so she could send her children to school. Within a year, the farm flooded and she was forced to move again to a piece of land which she later sold at a profit. Finally, she settled on her present property where she bred cattle and grew a commercial rose garden. For 15 years Eunice endured drought by carting water 20 kilometres per day to water her roses. She has since retired from growing roses and lives in her tiny cottage with her dogs, continuing to breed cattle. She has a great love for opera and has recently been overseas.

- Describe the way in which Eunice demonstrates her strength of character.
- If Eunice were a leader in an organization, what qualities would she bring to the role?
- How does Eunice describe catching the snake in her kitchen, the light-



ning strike on her dog and the way in which she helped the stranded family in the flood?

- Eunice says: 'I never looked for luxuries. You just battle on.'
- How does Eunice see life and death?

## ENID HEALEY

**E**NID HEALEY lives with her husband Ken on a small farm in Lyndhurst, New South Wales. She is a painter of Australiana. Enid, Ken and their blue heeler spent years travelling around Australia on the rodeo circuit, often living in caravans, washing in



streams and digging holes for the toilet. When she was a child she and her brother used to get out of milking the cows so they could go to rodeos or rough-riding shows. Her first win was second prize in a ladies' bucking competition in 1949 after her second time on a horse. Enid mounted an unbroken horse and managed to hang on to win the round. She was popular with the crowd because even though she was tiny, she was still able to stay on a huge wild horse. She met Ken, a champion rider, while she was nursing in Kyabram.

- Describe the relationship between Enid and Ken.
- What does she say are the two realities of country life?
- Enid tells this story:  
*I saw God when I took a baby Rosella parrot and let it go and I saw two adult parrots fly to each side of the baby parrot to guide it back to the tree. It was one of the most beautiful things I've seen.*  
What does she mean?
- When someone asks Enid about being rich, she replies:  
'We're rich because we have a wonderful marriage and a family we love. I feel very rich.'
- What family values does Enid believe are important?

## MEDIA STUDIES

### CINEMATOGRAPHY: OPENING SCENE

#### Music as Image

Listen to the music in the opening scene with your eyes closed.

- What instruments can you hear?
- What are some other sounds in the piece?
- What atmosphere is generated by the combination of musical instruments and other sounds?
- Without looking at the screen, guess what images are set alongside the music?
- Open your eyes and watch the images with the music.

#### Images

- What images in the opening scene can you also find in Australian landscape paintings?
- Describe the colours in the film.
- What is the significance of the dead cows, sheep skulls and dead trees?
- Describe the architecture in the film.
- What is the overall effect of these images and the music on your understanding of the Australian bush?

### Language Task

- Watch the film and write down all the words and phrases connected to country living. e.g. muster
- Look through an Australian dictionary of slang and find words and phrases that might be from life in the country. Can you guess what they mean?

### FOLLOW UP ASSIGNMENT: GROUP PROJECT MEDIA STUDIES, SOSE, ENGLISH

Make a documentary about Australian women.

STEP 1: Watch the film again and listen to the women's statements.

Discuss what questions you think the director/interviewer would have asked to get those responses.

STEP 2: Form a group. Choose a group of women in Australian society:

For example:

- Indigenous women
- Women in a religious order (e.g. nuns)
- Migrant women
- Professional women
- Blue collar workers
- Women in politics

STEP 3: Think of an aspect of their lives that you want to explore and devise a series of open-ended questions around it.

STEP 4: Research an organization that you can contact in order to find some women to interview.

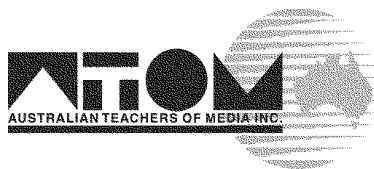
STEP 5: Arrange interviews and collect as much background information on the group as you can.

STEP 6: After you have gathered your research and interviews, devise a screenplay for a documentary that portrays the essence of what you have discovered from talking to these women.

#### Your screenplay should include:

- Imagery • Music • Background • Art

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Franziska Wagenfeld, the producer of *Surviving Shepard's Pie* is available to talk about the documentary. For more information and bookings please visit The Speakers' Bureau at [www.metromagazine.com.au](http://www.metromagazine.com.au)

*Surviving Shepherd's Pie*

Produced by Viva Productions with the assistance of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Developed in association with the Australian Film Commission and with the assistance of Film Victoria. Producer's attachment supported by Film Victoria. Financed with the assistance of the Australian Film Finance Corporation.

Executive Producer: Dasha Ross  
Producer: Franziska Wagenfeld  
Writer/Director: Diana Leach  
Year: 2001  
Duration: 52 min

*Surviving Shepherd's Pie* is available from:

Film Australia Sales  
PO Box 46  
Lindfield NSW 2070  
tel 02 9413 8634 fax 02 9416 9401  
email: [sales@filmaust.com.au](mailto:sales@filmaust.com.au)  
[www.filmaust.com.au](http://www.filmaust.com.au)

