



AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY

STUDY GUIDE
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INGA CLENDINNEN

SERIES **8**

(1934-2016) Historian

INTRODUCTION

This program is an episode of *Australian Biography* (Series 8) produced by the National Interest Program of Film Australia. This well-established series profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time. Many have had a major impact on the nation's cultural, political and social life. All are remarkable and inspiring people who have reached a stage in their lives where they can look back and reflect. Through revealing in-depth interviews, they share their stories - of beginnings and challenges, landmarks and turning points. In so doing, they provide us with an invaluable archival record and a unique perspective on the roads we, as a country, have travelled.

SYNOPSIS

As a writer and historian, Inga Clendinnen's interests lie in understanding how people think and introducing other people to the problems and lessons of history. She has received international acclaim for her studies of Aztec and Mayan cultures, and her book on the Holocaust was voted Best Book of the Year by *The New York Times* in 1999. Recently, she has also turned her attention to the historical relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

At the core of her work is the idea of difference: different individuals and cultures see the world differently, and this needs to be respected and nurtured. A recurring theme is the attitudes to violence, war and death that form an often unexamined part of every society.

With the same remarkable candour, perceptiveness and intellectual rigour that she brings to her work, Inga has been able to examine these universal concepts in relation to her own life. In her memoir, *Tiger's Eye*, she explored her reactions to

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ABOVE: INGA CLENDINNEN IN 2001

a life-threatening illness. In this interview, she recounts many of her most formative experiences.

Growing up in Geelong in the 1930s and 40s, she felt suffocated by the quietness and order of suburbia and was repelled by her mother's laborious domestic routine. She recalls the financial pressure on the household in the post-Depression years and her brutal introduction to the realities of war, when the American servicemen her family billeted were killed or maimed. Scholarships to high school and then Melbourne University offered her a chance to escape.

Inga speaks frankly too about her marriage at the age of 20, the unexpected pleasures she discovered in motherhood, and the need to find a new role as a researcher and writer as her sons reached their teens.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Australian Biography: Inga Clendinnen will have interest and relevance for students from middle to senior secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include History, SOSE/HSIE, Indigenous Studies, Studies of Religion, English, Media Studies, Women's Studies, Personal Development and Health Education.

BEFORE WATCHING

Opening Remarks by Clendinnen

I think getting to know other peoples' minds is one of the most fascinating and absorbing and educational processes you can be involved in, and having to find ways to introduce people to the real and absorbing problems of history is a deep pleasure to me.

DISCUSSION

- 1 What motivates people to choose certain careers—to be architects, teachers, chefs, doctors etc?
- 2 Do you think it is important to study History? How is it relevant? What do you think we can learn?
- 3 Have you ever thought of being an historian? List the skills and qualities you think would be needed and give reasons for your choices. Compare your list with another class member.

- 4 Interview a history/SOSE teacher. Ask them what motivated them to become a teacher in that field.
- 5 What does Clendinnen mean by 'the real and absorbing problems of history'?

AFTER WATCHING

1 GROWING UP

Clendinnen was born in 1934, around the time the Depression was easing, and lived in the Victorian regional city of Geelong. They were frugal times and the family's domestic life was very routine.

QUESTIONS

- What birth control method did her parents use after she was born?
- Clendinnen describes this method as 'draconian.' What does this word mean?
- What were the arrangements at her father's work during The Depression?
- What does she mean by 'stratagems of poverty'?
- Catching dripping was an example of a 'stratagem of poverty'. What did this involve?
- What does Clendinnen mean by saying 'nothing' happened in her mother's life?
- What were some examples of her mother's 'laborious' weekly routine?
- What was 'lighting the copper'?
- Why did her mother accept this routine, which required so much work and effort?
- What did Clendinnen feel about 'the houses, the little neat gardens... and the uniformity' of her neighbourhood? Why do you think she felt like that?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Research. What was the Depression? How long did it last? What caused it? What made it cease? What was everyday life like in Australia during it? In your own words, write a one page report.
- Writing Exercise. Imagine you are living the life of the young Inga Clendinnen. Write a page about how the neatness and routine of suburbia is scary and stifling, and what you want instead.
- Research. Outline four birth control measures available today. What are the advantages and disadvantages

of each method?

- Interview and Table. How do women with families live differently now in their domestic lives? Talk to a mother you know and, dividing a page into days of the week, table her weekly activities.

IMPACT OF WAR

Clendinnen was five years old when World War 2 broke out. American soldiers, when on leave in Australia from active duty in the Pacific, would stay with her family.

QUESTIONS

- What were Inga's first lessons about war?
- Clendinnen says of the boys who went off to war, 'Society seemed to think there should be no mark left on them.' What does she mean?
- What lasting effect did this experience of war have on Clendinnen?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Research. What is the R.S.L. and what work is done by this organization?
- Research. When and why did United States enter World War 2? Throughout the war years how did the United States help Australia?
- Describe where Guadalcanal is, what happened there and outline its importance in the war in the Pacific.

EDUCATION AND PATHWAYS

Clendinnen knew she didn't want to live all her life in Geelong but didn't know how to go on a different pathway. She was helped to an academic life because teachers suggested she apply for a scholarship to Morongo, a private girls school. After obtaining this scholarship and attending the school, she gained another scholarship to university.

QUESTIONS

- Why was Clendinnen disappointed that her sister stayed in Geelong to work as a secretary before marrying?
- When referring to her sister's life, Inga says, 'My mother thought life could be safely lived.' Can you explain what is meant by this statement?
- What does Clendinnen say about the differences between the other girls at Morongo and herself?
- How did Clendinnen's mother discuss

menstruation with her? Why do you think her mother discussed the topic in this way?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Write a profile of Geelong for a display in your classroom. Include a map and at least one other graphic. Possible headings: geographical features, Aboriginal presence, white settlement and main industries in the past and at present.
- Debate Topic. That the existence of private and state schools creates divisions in society that we don't need.

2 MARRIAGE, FAMILY

Clendinnen married at 20 when she was at university. She then had two sons, staying home to look after them, before combining motherhood with work as a history tutor.

QUESTIONS

- Why did she get married so young?
- What was her attitude to childbirth and to the changes in her body to do with breast-feeding?
- Why didn't she start any major research until her sons were adolescents?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Interview a middle-aged woman whose children have grown up. How does she occupy her time now that her children are living independent lives?

3 CLENDINNEN'S AREAS OF STUDY

When her children had grown up, Inga was able to start major research. She concentrated on the Aztec civilization, but has also worked on The Holocaust and Salem. These topics all involved exploring the themes of violence and brutality.

QUESTIONS

- Why does Inga say she is attracted to work on subjects that involve brutality and violence?
- Why is Clendinnen impressed by warriors (in particular, Aztecs)?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Complete a poster outlining one or more of the following aspects of Aztec life: Religion, Irrigation, Contact with

the Spaniards.

- Complete a poster outlining important points about Salem. Where is it, what were the characteristics of its inhabitants and what occurred there in the late 17th century?

4 ILLNESS

In later life Inga finds out she has a rare disease, active autoimmune hepatitis (acute liver disease), with a very bad prognosis and the need to take heavy drugs.

QUESTIONS

- What Aztec qualities did she see as important in her own challenge of dealing with the hepatitis?
- How did she think and behave when she was ill before she received a liver transplant?
- What does Inga think about the way the organ transplant system works in Australia, in comparison to the United States? What do you think?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Find out some statistics on the organ donor programme in Australia at present. How many patients are on the waiting list, how many patients received organs in 2001, what organs are involved, what percentage of the population are donors? What conclusions can you draw from these statistics?
- Find a newspaper article or Internet site about corruption in the world or

gan trade. Then, in your own words, outline what occurs in two different countries.

- Watch the video *Breathing Space*. This is the story of Melissa and Nicki, two brave young women who are faced with early death unless they undergo donor organ transplant surgery. Or, if accessible, interview a person who you think wouldn't mind talking to you about their chronic illness. How has the subject dealt with being a 'patient'? What things have helped them deal with their illness?
- Referring to the system of organ donation in Australia, what does Clendinnen mean by saying that this is, 'how a civil society should work'?
- Write a descriptive essay entitled 'Essential Australian Qualities'.

5 BOOKS AND LECTURE SERIES

Clendinnen has won several national and international awards for her books, which are:

- *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987
- *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991
- *Reading the Holocaust*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1999
- *Tiger's Eye: A Memoir*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2001



In 1999 Inga Clendinnen delivered the Boyer Lecture Series, prestigious public addresses on ABC's Radio National, only allocated to prominent Australians. Clendinnen chose 'True Stories of our Nation' as her topic - the recorded history of relations between Europeans and Indigenous people in Australia.

Here is an outline of each of the lectures:

INCIDENT ON A BEACH (LECTURE ONE)

Lecture one examines a scene from 1801 where a French scientific expedition discovers an Aboriginal woman on the beach. Inga Clendinnen describes how this scene gives important clues to our history. With this image in mind, she retrieves what happened, ponders its possible consequences, and encourages us to imagine the thoughts and feeling of the silent players in the scene.

PILGRIMS, SAINTS AND SACRED PLACES (LECTURE TWO)

Dr Clendinnen argues that Australia is an essentially democratic, inclusive and egalitarian society. She also discusses the rise of One Nation and sheds new light on the people who voted for Pauline Hanson arguing that, to label them racists, is too simplistic an analysis.

BACK TO THE PAST: VICTORIA 1841; ARNHAM LAND 1931-7 (LECTURE THREE)

Dr Clendinnen tells us two more revealing stories from our past to inform us of the present. She argues that our image of the tribal nomad continues to captivate us, but is no longer useful or accurate. This image, she says, enables us to ignore the years of contact and injustice.

INSIDE THE CONTACT ZONE: PART ONE (LECTURE FOUR)

Dr Clendinnen looks at the scar left by the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents. Are we innocent just because we weren't there, or didn't know what was taking place? Is this all in the past? Can we walk away from what has been done, should we just be looking to the future?

INSIDE THE CONTACT ZONE: PART TWO (LECTURE FIVE)

Dr Clendinnen says "it took all types to

make a colonial world". She shows that "in every place and at every time, there have been white Australians of justice, compassion and authentic tolerance; people attracted by difference, not frightened by it."

WHAT NOW? (LECTURE SIX)

Dr Clendinnen discusses the way forward for Australia arguing that unless we have a cornucopia of true stories, we will never know what really happened. "While the past is past," she says, "it is not dead."

Transcripts are available from the Radio National Boyer Lectures <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/boyerlectures/>

ACTIVITIES

- Read excerpts from *Reading the Holocaust* or *Tiger's Eye: A Memoir*. Seek responses to the text. Discuss the particular genre that each might fit into. What makes it similar to other texts? What makes it different from other known texts in the genre? Research topic areas or issues further.
- Read a transcript of one of Clendinnen's Boyer lectures. Consider the style of the approach Clendinnen uses and the issues raised about cultures, race relations and about history. Prepare some form of critical evaluation, either written or as an oral presentation.
- Discuss the ways in which Clendinnen's investigations about her chosen interest areas have affected her.
- Research. Who was Boyer? Why was this lecture series set up? List 10 people who have delivered them and why they were chosen.

6 WORLD VIEWS AND THE VALUE OF HISTORY

Clendinnen says it is important to realize that people think differently from you and we should respect these differences and be enriched by them.

She further asserts that unless we have an acceptance of differences between peoples, 'we will have mass culture, the commodification of the individual, a sorry state with beaming bureaucrats and politicians presiding over it'.

QUESTIONS

- Discuss Clendinnen's thoughts about difference. Explain what she means

by the quote above.

- What effect does she say the decline in interest in studying History as a subject will have on us?
- What guiding principles does Inga Clendinnen use to live her life?
- What does she say is the most important thing you have to do in the course of your life?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Interview a history teacher. Find out whether there has been a lessening of interest in History as a school subject, and if so, why?
- Inga nominates one important thing 'that has to be done' in the course of your life. Do you think there is one important thing that has to be done? Write an essay, taking a serious or light-hearted approach to the topic.

FURTHER RESOURCES

THE DEPRESSION

Albert B Facey, *A Fortunate Life*, Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle, 1981. Popular autobiography of a classic Australian 'battler' covering Gallipoli, the Great Depression and early rural settlement.

WORLD WAR 2

Juliet Gardiner, Norman Longmate and Simon Roberts, *The 1940s House*, BBC, London, 2001. English television series and books, outlining what it was like for a modern day family to live an ordinary life during World War 2.

HOLOCAUST

BOOKS

L.E. Bitton-Jackson, *Elli*, Harper Collins, London, 1984.

Autobiography. When Elli emerged from the concentration camps, Auschwitz and Dachau, after one year, she was fourteen. She looked like a sixty-year-old.

Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1997.

Anne Frank was a thirteen year old girl who hid from the Nazis, with her family and another family, in the attic of an office building in Amsterdam for two years.

VIDEO

Rod Freedman (director), *Uncle Chatzkel*, Film Australia, Sydney, 1999.

Chatzkel Lemchen has lived through the Russian revolution, two world wars, the Holocaust, a communist regime and the transition of Lithuania from Soviet republic to an independent state. Much of his family and most of his fellow Jewish citizens were killed by the Nazis and their Lithuanian supporters. Chatzkel, however, survived.

WEB SITES

A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust, Florida Centre for Instructional Technology <http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/timeline.htm>

Excellent site. Includes student activities, documents, images, bibliographies

Voices of the Holocaust project, Illinois Institute of Technology: <http://voices.iit.edu/> Interviews conducted in 1946 in displaced persons' camps around Europe.

Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre, Melbourne: <http://www.jhc.org.au/> Overview pages are very accessible.

AZTECS

WEB SITES

'Welcome to Mexico', Snaith Primary School, Yorkshire: <http://home.freeuk.com/elloughton13/mexico.htm>

A fun, interactive and educational resource for younger students.

The History Ring: <http://home.echo-on.net/~smithda/aztecs.html>

BOOK

Anna Lanyon, *Malinche's Conquest*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999.

Malinche was an Amerindian woman who acted as an interpreter/negotiator for Cortez when the Spanish landed in Central America. She has traditionally been seen as a traitor to her peoples.

SALEM

PLAYSCRIPT

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 2000. The Salem witch-hunt of 1692.

The story of how a small community is stirred into madness by superstition, paranoia and malice.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

FILM/VIDEO

John Moore (director), *Thomson of Arnhem Land*, Film Australia, 1999.

The story of Donald Thomson, visionary Australian anthropologist and passionate campaigner for Aboriginal justice.

Phillip Noyce (director), *Rabbit Proof Fence*, Miramax, 2001.

Based on the true story of three Aboriginal girls who were forcibly taken from their families under the 'protectionist' policy in Western Australia in 1931.

James Ricketson, David Stevens, Stephen Wallace, Geoffrey Nottage (directors), *Women of the Sun*, Ronin Films, 1981.

Comprising four episodes, the programme examines the lives of four different Aboriginal women. The first story is set in the 1820s, the second in the 1890s, the third in the 1930s and the last in the 1980s.

Frank Rijavec (director), *Exile and the Kingdom*, Ngurin Aboriginal Corporation, 1993. (Distributed through Film Australia). The first complete account in Australian film history of the experiences of a single group of Aboriginal people from pre-colonial times to the present.

ILLNESS

WEB SITES

Queensland Government Health Department: <http://www.donatelife.gov.au/donatelife-queensland>

Australian Organ Donor Register: <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/>

VIDEO

Riju Ramrakha (dir), *Breathing Space*, Australian Film Finance Corporation and Far Sighted Documentaries, 1998. (Distributed by Film Australia)

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Michelle Pountney, 'Body part clone coup', Herald Sun, Herald & Weekly Times Limited, Melbourne, 3 June 2002.

HISTORY

Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000.

For teachers and senior students.

Australian Biography: Inga Clendinnen
A Film Australia National Interest Program
Director/Producer: Robin Hughes
Executive Producer: Mark Hamlyn
Duration: 26 minutes
Year: 2001

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