

TEACHERS NOTES

WHO

DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®



Jack Thompson

Catherine Freeman

Kate Ceberano

Dennis Cometti

Geoffrey Robertson

Ita Buttrose

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? TEACHERS NOTES

Series synopsis

Australian celebrities play detective as they go in search of their family history, revealing secrets from the past.

Taking us to all corners of Australia and the globe are six stories of individuals seeking to find definitive answers about where they came from.

Along the way secrets are uncovered and histories are revealed—from adultery and madness to children born out of wedlock and even the whiff of a right royal scandal—with each individual discovering that their ancestors form an integral part of not only their own identity, but that of the nation.

Combining emotional and personal journeys with big-picture history, these inspiring and sometimes challenging stories remind us how Australians have come to be the people that we are today.

Considering Australia's multicultural background, this is a global story, with each celebrity tracing their ancestors around the world. They travel to the places where their forebears would have lived, loved and died, and learn about the hardships and hurdles their ancestors overcame.

This is a fascinating chronicle of the social, ethnic and cultural evolution of Australia's national identity.

Curriculum links

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include English, Media Studies, SOSE/HSIE, History, Geography and Indigenous Studies.

The Office of Film and Literature Classification has classified the series PG (parental guidance recommended), with the consumer advice: mild themes, infrequent mild coarse language.

Before watching

The series features the following episodes:

1. Jack Thompson (Actor)
2. Kate Ceberano (Singer and Entertainer)
3. Geoffrey Robertson (QC and Human Rights Advocate)
4. Catherine Freeman (Gold Medal Olympic Athlete)
5. Dennis Cometti (Sporting Commentator)
6. Ita Buttrose (Publishing Pioneer)

About these teachers notes

These notes a variety of suggested questions and activities for each of the six episodes in the *Who Do You Think You Are?* series. Episodes 4 and 5 have been given more in-depth coverage; teachers may find it useful to include some recall questions after the class has viewed either of these programs, before progressing to the activities.

Episode 1: Jack Thompson



Photographer Ross Coffey © NFSA

Write answers to the following:

1. When Jack was a child, what were the circumstances that led to him changing his name?
2. What is Jack's initial view about great-great-grandfather, Captain Thomas Pain, and why does his opinion later change?
3. What is a wharfinger? Why did Captain Pain become a wharfinger?
4. Explain the rift between forebear German Lee and his brother Alfred, resulting from German's marriage to Katie.
5. What does Jack discover about Alfred Lee's achievements?
6. Why does Jack feel connected to the very origins of 18th century British exploration and settlement of Australia?
7. What does Jack mean by 'Australian royalty'? What is his family connection to this 'royalty'?
8. When forebear Patrick Byrnes was sentenced to death in Ireland, 1836, what was his crime, and why was his sentence commuted?
9. Explain how Byrnes' occupation as cedar cutter may have impacted on the lives of local Aboriginal people.
10. Throughout the episode, what are the historical coincidences about his ancestors that connect to Jack's own life and activities?

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Carry out the following activities:

- Imagine Jack were able to write a letter across the generations to one of his ancestors. What would he write? What questions would he ask? Select from Patrick Byrne, Katie Lee or Captain Pain. Write an answering 'ghost' letter from his forebear. (Each letter should be 250-300 words.)
- Select an incident from the life of one of Jack's ancestors. Carry out more background research if necessary, then adapt the incident in any way suitable into a short fiction story or a script for a short drama play.

Episode 2: Kate Ceberano



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Write answers to the following:

1. At the age of 40, what does Kate feel about her life, career and family history?
2. Explain the circumstances of how Kate's ancestor, August Anderson, settled in Australia from Sweden.
3. In what important way was August Anderson associated with the Lameroo district in South Australia?
4. Early in the episode Kate says she thinks she is the product of 'pirates and bums'. Later she changes her mind. Why?
5. Why is forebear Henry Mundy considered significant to Tasmanian history?
6. Explain the connections between Henry Mundy, the two Lavinias, James Stuart, Joseph Lopez and Edith. Which one of these is Kate not related to by blood, and why?
7. What does Kate discover about Henry Mundy's profession in the 1830s that makes her feel a direct emotional link to him?
8. What is a quadrille?

9. What were the circumstances of Mundy's death, and the reasons behind it? Explain Kate's reaction to this.
10. Why is Kate doubtful about looking into the life of ancestor Major Thomas Lord, and why does she later have a better opinion of him?

Carry out the following activities:

- Research the convict history of Maria Island, in Tasmania, and find out if it is still settled today. Using desktop publishing software design a travel brochure about the location, its history, attractions, and what kind of accommodation, transport, other facilities and services it offers visitors. You may illustrate the brochure as required.
- In pairs, adapt from the episode an aspect of Kate's family history for a short, fictional play script. Rehearse the script with other students as required, making revisions, then produce a reading for the class. Alternatively, write, rehearse and redraft for sound only (dialogue, music, sound effects), then record for playback.

Episode 3: Geoffrey Robertson



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Write answers to the following:

1. Before filming this episode, why has Geoffrey not researched his family history?
2. When did forebears Alexander and Christina Robertson arrive in Australia, and where did they settle?
3. What were the terms of the NSW Squatting Act of 1836?
4. What reasons does Geoffrey offer for why Alexander took up difficult farming land?
5. Explain the connection between the Robertsons' emigration to Australia and Sydney preacher John Dunmore Lang.

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6. Why does Geoffrey become angry when discovering the situation surrounding his Robertson forebears' sea journey from Scotland to Australia?
7. What Sydney building did ancestors Louis Dettman and his wife Agnes Kroll work and live in, and what is historically important about this location?
8. Who wrote a job reference for Agnes after Louis died, and what is important about this person in terms of Australian national history?
9. When and from where did Louis and Agnes emigrate?
10. What is the mystery surrounding Joseph Kroll and his daughter Agnes? Does Geoffrey solve this mystery by the end of the program?

Carry out the following activities:

- Geoffrey's family history is connected to the activities of NSW clergyman John Dunmore Lang. Research, then prepare a formatted, history-based double page spread about Lang's work, his beliefs, successes, failings and historical importance, for a magazine aimed at young teenagers. Ensure you include details about his immigration scheme, and add illustrations where applicable.
- Plan and write a fiction short story based on the mystery surrounding Agnes Kroll's mother. Will you narrate the story from the viewpoint of one of the characters?

Episode 4: Catherine Freeman



Photographer Ross Coffey © NFSA.

Carry out the following activities:

- Extract relevant information from the program to construct Catherine's family tree, using either poster paper or website software, extending back into the past as far as you can from both her mother's and father's side of the family. Include dates, nationalities or racial/ethnic

heritage and place names where possible. Add an explanation as to why Catherine's own family name is Freeman rather than Fisher.

- Research and write a 500-word account of the terms of Queensland's Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897, the ways in which the Act was carried out, and its effects on the lives of Aboriginal people in Queensland. (See website references. Note that the Act was amended with extensions in 1934.)
- Discuss in class why Catherine's maternal great-grandparents were sentenced to penal servitude on Palm Island in 1925. Was this legally carried out under the terms of the 1897 Act?
- Research the history of Queensland's 'tropical paradise', Palm Island, as an Aboriginal penal settlement. When did it cease to be used as a place of incarceration? What is life like for the local populace on Palm Island today? Are general living conditions, including health and education, acceptable in comparison to general Australian standards? Do the populace still feel the effects of their penal history? Either prepare a formatted and illustrated magazine-style article examining these questions, aimed at a young teenage audience or, in pairs or small groups, prepare, script and record a radio-style documentary report about these questions that would run for between five and ten minutes of air time. (See 'Palm Island' website references.)
- Write a fiction short story drawing in any way you feel suitable on what you know of the biographies, from the program, of George Patrick Sibley and his wife Annie Ah Sam. The story does not necessarily have to be about these two people; you may take aspects of their lives, and of what happened to them, to fashion your own tale. Decide the themes you wish to develop, the characters and settings, and how best to narrate and style the story.
- George's father, George Charles Sibley, left England for Australia in 1883 when he was 18 years old. Bearing in mind that the program tells us his life was 'at the bottom of the English social ladder', in pairs write a conversation he has with a friend after he reads or hears about the local Dorset newspaper advertisement calling for labourers to emigrate to Queensland. You may wish to refine and record the conversation.

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- Write a commentary about why Annie's father, Tommy Ah Sam, would have come to Australia from China, and the racism he experienced. How did this racism, for example, affect the way he eventually had to earn a living to survive?
- Catherine's paternal great-grandfather was Frank Fisher Snr, a lighthorseman during World War One. Discuss in class why, if Aboriginal people were subject to harsh Australian racial laws, they would consider volunteering for active service. Find out, and write a short commentary on whether returned servicemen who were Indigenous were later regarded as equals to everyone else in civilian life. For example, were they granted membership of the Returned and Services League (RSL)? Were the wives of Indigenous servicemen killed in action granted war pensions? (Note references to short film, *Harry's War*.)
- Write a short fiction story drawn from what you have learnt during the program about Frank 'Bigshot' Fisher. (See website references to 'Racism in Australian Sport'.)
- Discuss in class then write your own commentary on the ways in which Catherine's discoveries about her own family history and heritage could represent, or be regarded as an example of, the larger, 'big picture' history of not only Australia but other nations and peoples around the world.

Episode 5: Dennis Cometti



Photographer David Dare Parker © NFSA.

Carry out the following activities:

- Extract relevant information from the program to construct Dennis's family tree, using either poster paper or website software, extending back into the past as far as you can from both his mother's and father's side of the family. Include dates, nationalities and place names where possible.
- On his father's side of the family, the Western Australian township of Meekatharra assumes great importance and significance for Dennis. Discuss in class and write notes on the importance of Meekatharra to the Cometti family story.
- Following from the above, draw and label your own map of Western Australia, ensuring you display where Meekatharra is positioned relative to Perth and to important places such as Geraldton and the Pilbara. Include and label essential road and rail communication links, plus Meekatharra's general climatic conditions (seasonal temperatures, rainfall). Your map may be used as part of the next activity, immediately below. (See 'Meekatharra' in website references.)
- Carry out further research about Meekatharra's gold mining heritage. Is it still a gold mining town today? Has it developed other interests and business attractions, such as tourism? Plan and write an informative, illustrated travel-oriented magazine article titled 'Meekatharra: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow'.
- In any way you consider suitable, write a short fiction story based on one or more of the events and situations Dennis uncovers about his grandparents Giovanni (also known as Jack) and Maria's marriage break-up in Meekatharra. For example, you may wish to examine the theme of how difficult life may have been, not only for women generally in such an environment, but particularly for migrant women with language backgrounds other than English.
- Dennis travels to Italy to find out more about his father's side of the family. Discuss in class the extent to which Dennis may be out of place, or at least feel he is out of place, in the Tirano area of northern Italy, and the extent to which he is removed from his Italian heritage and culture. (You may wish to examine, for example, the significance of the Australian Rules football he carries with him, and the relevance of employing an interpreter.)
- Write a short account of the reasons Jack Cometti may have left his home in Tirano to emigrate to Western Australia in 1909.
- Moving to the distaff side of Dennis's family history (as seen in the Cometti family tree you have constructed in a previous activity), discuss in class then write your own account of why he suggests that the female forebears on his mother's side are 'feisty'.

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- Dennis's great-grandmother, Emma Hines, married three times, and was involved in a murder case. From the program, working in small groups, take any aspect of this biography and fashion it into a script for a short radio play (or sound-only internet podcast). You may invent dialogue and adapt the events referred to during the program to suit the dramatic purposes and themes of your story. Also consider the mode in which you present the story; possibilities may be tragedy or historical drama, melodrama, murder-mystery or even comedy. Rehearse a script reading, revise where appropriate and, with help from other students, produce and record the play.
 - Write a short description of the crimes that Hannah Stanley and Sarah Edwards committed in England in the early 19th century, and explain why they were transported to New South Wales. Why is it that, once in the colony, Hannah is said by Dennis to have had 'bargaining power' when finding a suitable husband, despite having been a convict?
 - Discuss in class then write your own explanation as to why historian Linda Emery suggests it is 'a badge of honour' for Dennis to have three convict ancestors in the family. Might it be more accurate to suggest that this may be, rather, a blot of shame? (You may wish to compare Linda's comment to Jack Thompson's claim, in Episode One, that discovering a transported convict in the family is a sign of 'Australian royalty'.)
 - From the previous activity, write a short fiction story called *Badge of Honour*.
3. How far into the past, and to whom, can Ita trace her family history?
 4. What is the significance of the ring that Belinda and Ita discover?
 5. Explain why Ita cannot find William Buttrose's birth certificate, why he changed his name, and why he and wife, Frances Adelaide Buttrose, left Scotland for Australia in the 1850s.
 6. Why did Jewish Europeans such as Julius Rosenthal come to Victoria in the 1850s, and why were they forced to make a living as merchants rather than craftsmen?
 7. Why does Ita visit the Japanese Consul-General's offices in Melbourne, and what does she discover there about one of her forebears?
 8. Describe the Northern Territory settlement scheme in which Alexander Marks was involved, and why it did not develop.
 9. Why did Casper Marks and his family leave New York for Australia in the 1840s?
 10. What do you think Ita has learnt or realised by the end of this episode?

Carry out the following activities:

- From the program, create Ita's family tree on large poster paper. Include her own children, and provide dates and location names where possible.
- Plan and write a short fiction story where the image of Frances Adelaide Buttrose's wedding ring plays an important role.

Series overview

Carry out the following activities.

- Discuss in class and then write your own appraisal, in 300-400 words, of what you think the series achieves. Is the series more concerned with the 'star quality' of the six major participants, in terms of a voyeuristic 'reality-TV' insight into their own private lives, rather than the histories they are attempting to uncover? Would the series maintain the same level of viewer-interest if the subjects were not as publicly well known to us? Is the series an adequate and worthwhile way to learn and to appreciate history, or is it merely superficial 'pop' TV?
- Discuss the argument that any of us, as viewers of the series, would find it much more difficult, if not impossible, to research our own family history to the extent that the six participants in the series were able to do.

Episode 6: Ita Buttrose



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Write answers to the following:

1. What was Ita's family name before it was changed to Buttrose?
2. Why did the male population of South Australia decline in the 1850s, and what was the consequence?

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Consider, for example, the access the participants have to assistance.

(You may wish to compare or contrast the series, in this respect, to reality lifestyle TV programs about house and garden renovations.)

- How far back can you trace your own family history? Carry out some research by interviewing older members of your family. Draw up a family tree, then write explanatory comments about forebears where applicable (such as dates and place names). Your family tree may be imperfect; many details may be missing, and you may encounter dead ends. Include a commentary about this, the research that might be required to uncover the details, how you might go about carrying out this research, and where you might need to carry it out. For example, because Australia is a nation of immigrant cultures, we may find, as did most of the participants in the series, that much of our family history exists elsewhere. (It is worthwhile reading *Searching For The Secret River*, Kate Grenville's account of her personal research into her own family history, and how she came to write her novel loosely based on the lives of her convict forebears, *The Secret River*, which is set in early 19th century New South Wales. See book references.)
- Imagine the series as a game of advances and retreats, dead ends, deciphering vital clues, encountering red herrings, and uncovering exciting or horrifying information, as experienced by all of the participants during the series. In small groups, drawing on the various facets of the series, devise and create a *Who Do You Think You Are?* role-play, board, card or computer game. Ensure the rules of the game are clearly expressed. Trial the game, survey the players for their opinions, and make adjustments as necessary.

Media studies

Carry out the following activities.

- Discuss in class, then write your own notes on the proposition that the series in general, and each episode in particular, is constructed, sequenced, filmed and edited to appear seamless, spontaneous and 'natural', whereas the opposite may more likely be the truth. You may wish to examine, for example, particular camera set-ups where it is likely that the director and camera crew already, due to

behind-the-scenes research, have had access to family information not yet known to the participating subject. Provide examples from the series to support your opinions.

- In 300-400 words discuss the role of the voice-over narrator during one or more of the episodes. For example, could the unseen narrator be interpreted as an all-knowing, all-seeing, authoritative voice?
- Write a short account of the series as a constructed detective-genre mystery, with traditional narrative elements of beginning, middle and end, quest, denouement and revelation, closure and central character empathy. Discuss whether it is also possible to include the narrative characteristic of *conflict*, essential in most fictional storytelling, into this construction.
- Imagine that you are the series producer, juggling the production of six episodes. Discuss in class the range of production issues involved in putting the program together. Do you think it would have been easy? From the discussion, as though you were the producer, plan and write a sequence of personal diary entries about your worries, problems, concerns, failures and successes in attempting to put six 52-minute episodes of screen-time together. For example, what do you do, and how do you feel, when a participant's particular line of family research suddenly stops at a dead end, and cannot proceed?
- In pairs, devise and write a radio promotional advertisement for the series that would take up 30-60 seconds of air time. Decide how best to use voice, music and possible sound effects. Test, revise and then record your promotion for playback.
- Write your own review of the series in 400-500 words, designed for a popular weekly magazine for young teenagers. (An alternative may be to prepare, rehearse, present and record a three-minute, on-camera review designed for the audience of a popular youth-oriented news and current affairs TV program.)

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References and Further Resources

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- Noel Currer-Briggs, *Worldwide Family History*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982
- Hazel Edwards, *Writing a Non-Boring Family History*, Hale & Iremonger, Marrickville, NSW, 1997
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Harry's War:

www.frontrowvideo.com.au/details/f0011.html

John Dunmore Lang:

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The Proceedings of the Old Bailey:

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Palm Island:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palm_Island,_Queensland

<http://andrewbartlett.com/faq.php?id=14&category=4>

www.faira.org.au/lrq/archives/199901/stories/shameful-white-history.html

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