

The Celluloid Heroes

Introduction

The Celluloid Heroes is a four-part series on the development of Australian cinema. It was made in 1995 to celebrate and commemorate the first century of film-making in Australia.

There are four episodes:

Episode 1: The Pioneers 1895 - 1928

This episode traces the origins of cinema in Australia, with scenes filmed in England in 1895. In the following year, Australian scenes were being shot. The episode concludes with the ending of the silent era of movies.

Episode 2: OK For Sound 1928 - 1948

The coming of sound transformed the experience of watching films. Australian producers responded to the challenge of matching sound to vision, and produced many films in this period. But the struggle to find consistent distribution outlets for Australian films continued.

Episode 3: After The War: The Forgotten Cinema 1948 - 1971

In a pessimistic era, the Australian cinema struggled to survive, reflecting the 'cultural cringe' of the period.

Episode 4: Beyond Our Wildest Dreams 1971 - 1995

Looking at the modern 'renaissance' in Australian film-making, through to the present.

Using *Celluloid Heroes* in the curriculum

Created as a series which records the history of the Australian cinema, this series has wider application in the classroom. It touches on many of the themes of the Studies of Society and Environment Key Learning Area of the National Profiles and the Media strand of the Arts National Profiles. *Celluloid Heroes* can be used to raise a number of important issues in the classroom.

The five main strands to be investigated in SOSE, and the key ideas to be investigated in each, are:

- **Time, Continuity and Change** - looking at historical concepts (TCC)
 - Looking at significant ideas, people or events that have contributed to Australian identity.
 - When did the Australian film industry develop?
 - Why at that time?
 - Who was responsible for it?
 - Who opposed it, and why?
 - Could it have developed differently? Why didn't it?
 - What were the main factors which helped/hindered its development?
 - How did it contribute to an Australian identity?
 - How did it shape and change that identity?
 - What other factors were at work at the same time - and how significant was the influence of films in the development of identity?
 - How did films represent Australian identity?
 - **Place and Space** - geographical approaches and understandings (PS)
 - Understanding the influence of place and distance on the development of approaches or attitudes.
 - Why did the Australian film industry develop where it did?
 - How was it able to spread to other places?
 - What factors limited its spread to places outside Australia?
 - **Culture** - the way a society perceives itself (C)
 - Exploring those characteristics or qualities which develop in the people of a society, and the ways in which people adopt or reject those characteristics.
 - What elements of Australian society were stressed in films?

- How were these different to those of other countries?
 - Which parts of Australian society contributed most to the development of films, and the cultural images they reflected or conveyed?
 - To what extent did the film industry create cohesion, and to what extent division, in Australian society?
 - To what extent did the industry create and influence people's perceptions of themselves?
 - How did the values depicted on the screen influence commonly held attitudes and values?
- **Resources** - the way a society uses the resources available to it to pursue its ends. (R)
- Studying the resources available to a society, and the way they are allocated to help or hinder the development of an industry.
- Who owned and controlled the resources which were a key to the development of the Australian film industry?
 - How did overseas economic interests effect the development of the industry in Australia?
 - What special skills were required to run the industry?
 - What benefits are there to a country in having a film industry?
- **Natural and Social Systems** - the way a society governs and regulates itself (NSS)
- Analysing those natural and created features of a society which help to determine the way the society responds to situations.
- How significant was government intervention, or failure to intervene, in the industry?
 - How well placed were governments to influence the industry?

Each of these ideas can be explored in the *The Celluloid Heroes* series. They are identified in brackets at the end of each question.

The Media strand within the Arts National Curriculum Statements and Profiles

The three main strands to be investigated are:

- Creating, making and presenting
- Arts criticism and aesthetics
- Past and present contexts

Episode 1 - The Pioneers 1895 - 1928

Studies of Society and Environment

The early history of film-making in Australia helps us to understand many ideas which are important to our society.

The showing of film in Australia passed through several stages.

1. Explain the significance of each of these stages in cinema making and film showing:

- the Kinetoscope
- the Kinetophone
- the Cinematograph (R)

2. What difference did projection onto a screen make to the experience of watching films? (R)

3. Divide your class into several groups. Have each group take several of the historic film clips which are included in Episode 1 - there are more than 20 clips for you to allocate and investigate. Have each group report to the class on its findings to these questions about each of the clips it is allocated:

- Identify any key features or aspects of society which can be identified in the clip (for example, style of dress, social attitudes, economic activities, transport, amusement and entertainment, etc.)
- What does film offer to us as historians which no other form of record (such as written records, interviews and photographs) could provide?
- What dangers or limitations are there in using these films as evidence of what Australia was like at the time the films were made? (TCC, C)

4. How were people able to overcome the 'tyranny of distance' in Australia to take films beyond the cities? (PS)

5. What impact do you think this had on rural and isolated communities? (C)

6. The narrator makes these statements during the course of the episode:

- That Australia was a classless society.
- That film helped to overcome Australia's isolation.
- That the value of film was that Australians were able to see themselves for the first time.

Select any film clips which seem to support or contradict these ideas, and discuss whether you would accept these claims for film. (C)

7. The narration stresses the importance of the role of government in the Australian film industry. Identify different times, and different decisions, when the government influenced the Australian film industry. Explain whether the influence helped or hindered the Australian film industry. (R)

8. Special Study: *The Sentimental Bloke*

- Turn the sound off, and look at the set of images of *The Sentimental Bloke* which are included in this episode. Discuss each of the scenes:

- What is shown?
- How is the 'Bloke' portrayed?
- How are other characters, especially Doreen, portrayed?
- What characteristics and qualities does the Bloke have?
- Do you think these are 'heroic' qualities?
- What happens to the 'Bloke'?

- Why do you think the 'Bloke' was such a popular character?

- What aspects of this treatment of the 'Bloke' might not be acceptable to an audience today?

- How might a similar 'larrakin' character be portrayed today to a modern audience to win people's sympathy and support for him? Try to create a set of scenes, or a storyboard, which shows this.

- Try to read 'The Sentimental Bloke' and compare it to the full version of the film. Discuss how the filmmakers have gone about transferring the 'Bloke' onto a different artistic medium. Where have they succeeded, and where have they failed? (C)

9. Looking at the episode as a whole, what sort of emphases in film, and in the image of 'heroes', do you think were most stressed in the silent era? Discuss your answer to this question in class. (C)

10. Taking the period as a whole, what could you say about what 'Australia' was like from the collection of images presented in this episode? (TCC, C)

Media

Past and Present Contexts

The Australian première of movie viewing was held in a converted shop at 148 Pitt Street, Sydney on the 30 November 1894. It was twelve months before the Lumière brothers first projected motion pictures onto a screen for a paying public in Paris on 28 December 1895. Unlike the French occasion, Australians viewed their first movies on Thomas Edison's kinetoscope. The first film projection occurred courtesy of an American magician by the name of Carl Hertz on August 1896.

1. Investigate and describe the early history of image and sound recording equipment and its information and entertainment uses (arcade games, peep shows, message transfer, ethnographic recording, illusion.)

2. Investigate examples of the newer forms of technology creating similar excitement in today's society and describe their information and entertainment uses.

Students could form groups with each group concentrating on one particular technology from the past eg. Edison's kinetoscope, Louis Daguerre's diorama, the popular 'cyclorama', the theatrograph etc., and one from the present and report their findings in the form of a class presentation and/or poster illustrating and comparing the information and entertainment uses of each technology.

Creating , Making and Presenting

3. Cinema, it is said, was not invented; it emerged. There are four parallel actions:

- projection
- persistence of vision
- photography
- the mass audience

The earlier techniques in cinema dealt with the action of *persistence of vision* and this concept can be repli-

cated in the classroom. A simple way of introducing this concept is to have students prepare a sequence of drawings and to view them in a 19th century toy, such as a zoetrope. Details for the construction of a zoetrope and other practical techniques that can be applied in a classroom can be found in Peter Greenaway, *Teaching the Visual Media* The Jacaranda Press 1991.

Episode 2 - OK For Sound 1928 - 1948

Studies of Society and Environment

Sound transformed the experience of watching, and making, films.

1. Listen to the accents of the people in the early films. How has the Australian accent changed? (TCC, C)
2. At one point the narrator comments that part of the justification for having an indigenous film industry is for people to listen to their own voices. Do you think broad Australian accents might have been more acceptable to Australians in the 1920s and 1930s than today? Explain your ideas. (TCC, C)
3. Sound in film coincided with the coming of the Depression. What impact would you expect this economic depression to have on the film industry? (R)
4. In fact the film industry thrived during the Depression, and numbers of people attending cinemas increased greatly. Why might people want entertainment during a time of economic depression? (C)
5. During the 1930s the New South Wales government imposed a quota system - 5% of films shown in New South Wales cinemas had to be Australian made. What beneficial, and what harmful, effects might such a decision have had on the Australian film industry, and on the Australian public? (R, NSS)
6. One of the themes which exists throughout the history of the development of the Australian film industry is the significance of the role of government in protecting the local industry. Do you think that some of Australians' tax money should be used to protect an Australian film industry? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such government support? (R, NSS)
7. Another theme is the importance of controlling distribution outlets. Why would the fact that by the 1930s the American film industry owned virtually all the cinemas have a great impact on the making of Australian films? (R)
8. During the Second World War a special Department of Information was set up, and one of its roles was to make propaganda films, and films which stimulated recruiting and involvement in the war. Do you think it is appropriate for government to use film in this way? (C, NSS)
9. The narrator claims that the production of war newsreels during the Second World War, and especially Damien Parer's *Kokoda Frontline*, changed the way Australians saw war. Why would film have such an impact on people's perceptions of their world? (TCC, C)
10. As well as encouraging recruitment and support for the war, the government censored war newsreels. It suppressed some news (such as the details of the number of dead during the first Japanese bombing raid on Darwin), and it sanitised some (almost never showing an image of a dead Australian in battle). Do you think such censorship is justified in wartime? Is it justified in normal times? (TCC, C)
11. In the post-war period there were a number of joint productions of Australian films, with American or British 'stars' being included to give the Australian product international appeal. What do you think are the benefits and disadvantages of such an approach? (C, R)
12. Taking the period as a whole, what could you say about what 'Australia' was like from the collection of images presented in this episode? How had it changed from the previous period (as represented in the previous episode)? (TCC, C)

Media

Past and Present Contexts

1. One of the largest film producers of the early pioneering times was the Salvation Army unit. Major Joseph Perry utilised film as a fund raising venture for the Army.

Research one of the following people or events from the following list and document the circumstances surrounding their or its involvement with film, noting the contribution and impact they/it have/has made to the development of the film industry in Australia. (The list is not exhaustive and students are encouraged to choose other influences not listed if so desired.)

Students work in groups and report their findings back to the class. Students could use excerpts from 'The Celluloid Heroes' as well as other resources to illustrate their research findings.

- Louis Lumiere

- Thomas Edison

- Marius Sestier and Walter Brennan
- T.J. West and Cozens Spencer
- Raymond Longford and Lottie Lyell
- Ken Hall
- Chips Rafferty
- Lee Robinson
- the government's role in the industry
- Major Joseph Perry and Herbert Booth
- Beaumont Smith
- Franklyn Barrett
- Charles Chauvel
- Frank Thring
- the advent of sound in film

2. What was the place of cinema in pre WW II society? Investigate the place of the picture theatre in the social life of the community through the use of old newspapers, advertisements, local oral history and 'The Celluloid Heroes'.

3. At the beginning of part 1 of 'The Celluloid Heroes', the narrator Bryan Brown sets the scene for a compelling insight into the Australian Film Industry's history by telling us that, "The story of our filmmakers tells of a century of struggle to survive powerful outside competition and government apathy; yet by the end of 1911 Australia had made over 20 full length feature films, the year before Hollywood made its first." What happened to quell the momentum of the Australian film industry around this time?

Research and document the events that led up to and surrounded the development of the big 'combine' in 1913, ie., the merging of virtually all the most powerful film producers in Australia into one group.

Include the consideration of the following factors in a report illustrating the effect that these events had on the future of the Australian film industry:

- The French and USA film industry
- the government's attitude towards the industry and the deal it struck with Pathé Frères
- the First World War
- the demand for film products at this time
- the combine's policy for the film industry in Australia
- the positive effects of the war on local film production

Students could pool resources into a text and pictorial timeline of events leading up to and shortly after the First World War.

Episode 3 - After The War: The Forgotten Cinema 1948 - 1971

Studies of Society and Environment

This episode stresses the barrenness of the Australian film industry in this period. Few films were made - "Australians don't make films", says Tim Burstall in part of his interview about this time.

1. Look at the following situations or factors in Australian society. Discuss how each one might have helped or hindered the development of an Australian film industry at this time. Then try to decide whether any of these factors still exist in Australia today.

2. In 1961 the Federal Government banned the importation of foreign-made commercials for showing on TV. How would this decision have contributed to the creation of a revived Australian film industry in the 1970s? (R)

3. Those who tried to win Government support for the revival of an Australian film industry stressed the idea that a nation projects its culture through its film (and TV) programs. Discuss this idea. (C)

4. Special Study: Film/TV as reflecting a national image

Choose any popular Australian TV series currently shown. Analyse the image that it projects of Australia. (For example - what do the actors look like, do they reflect Australia's ethnic composition? What is the weather like? Where do the people live? What jobs do they do? What are their daily lives like? Do they reflect your reality?) Do you think this show projects a realistic image of Australian culture and life? Now do the same for an Australian film. (C)

5 Taking the period as a whole, what could you say about what 'Australia' was like from the collection of images presented in this episode? How had it changed from the previous period (as represented in the previous episode)? (TCC, C)

Media

Past and Present Contexts

1. Various circumstances contributed to making life difficult for the growth of an Australian film industry during this period. Listen carefully to the people who contribute views as to why such an environment occurred at this time. Students form groups to concentrate on one contributor, eg., Gil Brealey or Lee Robinson, and list the various factors that contributed to such circumstances according to their chosen interviewee. Pool this list into a class list. Students discuss this list and agree on those factors that were of greatest significance.

What strategies did Australian filmmakers use to counter these obstacles?

2. Experimental filmmakers, the advent of television and government policy are viewed as important influences in the rebirth of the film industry during the sixties. Make a list how each of these groups contributed to the rebirth of Australian cinema.

Students can form three groups, one for each area of influence, and utilise 'The Celluloid Heroes', especially section 3, as a starting point for research into this area. Other resources should include newspapers, government publications, film industry resources and other relevant publications. This research should be then shared in class in the form of a report or list and made accessible for all to use.

Creating , Making and Presenting

3. Prepare a letter to the editor outlining reasons why the government should actively promote an Australian film industry. Arguments in favour should be couched in terms of the factors that were relevant and important to the 1960s.

Episode 4 - Beyond Our Wildest Dreams 1971 - 1995

Studies of Society and Environment

This episode stresses the role of Federal Government in helping to re-establish the Australian film industry.

1. Explain how the Government's support through providing a 150% taxation allowance for investment in Australian films helped and harmed the development of Australian films. (R)

2. Look at the themes and settings for the extracts of films made in this period. Can you identify any change in emphasis compared to any of the earlier periods and episodes? (For example, are there more contemporary as opposed to historical themes? Are the 'heroes' depicted differently from those of earlier films? Is the balance between bush and city different?) (C, TCC, PS)

3. From the clips shown, to what extent do you think women have an equal role to men in making and starring in films? Do men seem to have a greater variety of roles to suit their ages?

4. What economic elements do you think are significant today in helping to determine whether an Australian film industry will survive, and grow? (R)

5. Special Study: *Gallipoli*

In 1915 Australian soldiers landed at Gallipoli, in Turkey, in their first battle as a nation. They were part of a British/Indian/French attack on the area. They failed to take the objective and had to retreat but the reaction at the time was that they had fought heroically, and had created an image that all Australians could respect, and which showed the great qualities of Australians. This image was taken up by newspapers, artists, official historians, popular writers and artists, and a myth or legend was created.

One of the strongest ways of transmitting myth today is through film, particularly popular feature films. Most of you will have seen the 1980s film *Gallipoli*. What is it telling us about the Anzac legend in the 1980s and 1990s? Look carefully at the extracts from the film shown in this episode, and drawing on your knowledge of other parts of the film, consider these questions:

- What incidents do the filmmakers choose to present? What picture or image does this collection create?
- What image of the Anzacs do they put across, and how do they do this? Look at such things as casting, humour, bravery, discipline, identity, messages about war, etc.
- What messages are presented in the film? For example, who is to blame for the massacre at the Nek?
- Try to go back to historic documents to compare the historical records with the film version. What is selected, what is left out, what is changed?
- Compare the image of Gallipoli which finally emerges with attitudes to Gallipoli which existed at the time. Many Australian History text books will have information on this. What are the similarities

and differences?

- Has the film *Gallipoli* helped to perpetuate the myth of Anzac among your generation? If so, is this a desirable thing? (TCC, C)

6 Taking the period as a whole, what could you say about what 'Australia' was like from the collection of images presented in this episode? How had it changed from the previous period (as represented in the previous episode)? (TCC, C)

Assignment: Exploring change and continuities in Australian films

One of the best ways of exploring change and continuities in Australian films, and their impact on the society, is to compare specific important Australian films, using a common set of questions.

This can be done as an individual or class exercise; it can be done in class or in your own time.

Choose one or several films from the list below, and answer the set of questions which follow. Some of these questions can be answered from the film itself; others will need some research. A list of useful references is also included.

Key questions to explore:

- What are the main themes of the film?
- What are the main images of Australian society which are presented? (What is the Australia in the film like?)
- What are the characteristics of the 'heroes' in the film?
- What is the involvement of and attitude towards women in the film?
- What particularly 'Australian' elements are stressed in the film? (For example does it use typically Australian landscape? Or identifiably Australian expressions? Etc.)
- To what extent is the film not Australian - that is, could it be recognised and accepted in many other societies? For example, it might be set in an Australian city but would be similar or recognisable in *any* city.
- What elements of this film have made it an important or significant or lasting one in Australian film history?
- If this film were to be made today, how might it be similar/different?

Media

Arts criticism and aesthetics

1. In groups students are to choose a representative sample of Australian-produced films from both past and present circumstances and describe them in terms of themes developed, visual style, genre and other common elements.

Each group could concentrate on an agreed set of elements to categorise the films. Eg: genres.

What are the outstanding features of Australian films evident from this list? Do these features vary from past to present? What were the main features that typified Australian films at the turn of the century? What features typify films that are produced presently?

2. Advances in technology have allowed filmmakers to use an ever-increasing and improving palette of production and story elements in the making of films. Compare and contrast some of the earlier production and story elements used in filmmaking with those of today and illustrate where and how the improvement in technology has refined the art of filmmaking.

Production elements: camera movement, focus, angles, film stock, lighting, acting, sound and editing. Story elements: setting, structuring of time, characters, opening segments, closure, cause and effect, point of view.

3. Highlight those elements, if any, that have basically remained similar. Some of the story elements used in film may come into this category.

Students could choose to analyse genre films like comedy and compare and contrast the differences between the older films with those produced more recently. For example, the *On Our Selection* films compared with the Paul Hogan productions. Or documentaries produced in the 30s, 40s or 50s compared to those produced today.

Past and Present Contexts

1 The period of the Whitlam government's reign saw the efforts of film lobby groups rewarded with govern-

ment initiatives designed to promote the Australian film industry. Focus class research on this period in time and document the initiatives that were produced. How successful were these initiatives?

2 What is the place of cinema in today's society? Investigate the place of the picture theatre in the social life of the community through the use of current newspapers, advertisements and 'The Celluloid Heroes'. What are the differences between the place of cinema in today's society and that of pre Second World War society?

Research one of the following from the list below, and document the circumstances surrounding their involvement with film, noting the contribution and impact they have made to the development of the film industry in Australia. (The list is not exhaustive and students are encouraged to choose other influences not listed if so desired.)

Students work in groups and report their findings back to the class.

Present

- the advent of television
- Mel Gibson
- Tim Burstall
- Bruce Beresford
- Judy Davis
- Fred Schepisi
- Bryan Brown
- the government's role in the industry
- Peter Weir
- the Australian Film Council est. 1968
- Gillian Armstrong
- Paul Hogan
- Jack Thompson
- Wendy Hughes
- Nicole Kidman

Resources:

Australian Feature Films on CD-ROM: One Hundred Years of Australian Feature Production. Produced by the Australian Catalogue Company, \$79.95. PO Box 204 Albert Park Vic 3206. Tel. (03) 9525 5302 Fax (03) 9537 2325

The Celluloid Heroes – a celebration of Australian Cinema 220 minutes 1995,
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Available as a four-tape set or by individual episode - <http://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/film-australia-collection/program-sales/search-programs/program/?sn=3638>

The History of Australian Cinema series 151 minutes © 1964 NFS

Episode 1: Pictures That Moved 1896-1920.

Episode 2: The Passionate Industry 1920-1930

Episode 3 Now You're Talking 1930-1940

Available as a three-tape video set or by individual episode - <http://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/film-australia-collection/program-sales/search-programs/program/?sn=936>

References:

James Sabine, (ed.), *A Century of Australian Cinema*, Heineman, Australia, 1995

Peter Greenaway, *Teaching the Visual Media*, The Jacaranda Press, Qld, 1991

Scott Murray, (ed), *Australian Cinema*, Allen and Unwin, Victoria, 1994

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