

# CONSTRUCTING AUSTRALIA

TEACHERS NOTES

## Pipe Dreams

Politics, tragedy and conquest combine in stories behind the building of Australia. *The Bridge*, *Pipe Dreams* and *A Wire Through the Heart* combine rare archival images with dramatic storytelling in showcasing three landmark events that would allow Australia to mark its place in the world. The Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Kalgoorlie Pipeline and the Overland Telegraph line were engineering triumphs, but the human drama in constructing Australia is even more fascinating...



FilmAustralia  
Making History



## Pipe Dreams



### SYNOPSIS

This is a story of personal tragedy, political rivalries, corruption and trial by media that nearly tore apart Australia at the moment of its birth.

In the late 1800s, two men shared a vision for opening up Western Australia by pumping a river of water through pipes across the desert. Isolated goldfields were ripe with precious metal, but the people were dying of thirst.

Western Australia's first premier and leading explorer, John Forrest, had a vision to develop the state's infrastructure and find ways to make the goldfields economically sustainable. In Charles Yelverton O'Connor, he found the man he needed to turn these dreams into reality.

At the time, the biggest and most ambitious engineering project of its kind in the world would save thousands from disease and drought, unlock untold riches in gold and allow the 'Cinderella' state of Western Australia to take her rightful place in Australia's Commonwealth.

But the five long years of the pipeline's construction would be dogged with controversy, destroy reputations and push an individual to breaking point.

As Australia voted for Federation, becoming the new Australian Commonwealth, the dream of water in the goldfields finally became a reality, but it was at a huge personal cost.

### CURRICULUM LINKS

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

### SETTING THE SCENE

After viewing the program, carry out some of the following introductory activities.

- Construct a timeline of important events referred to in the program, and any other events you consider relevant to an understanding of the relevance to Australians of the construction of the Coolgardie water pipeline scheme, and the work carried out by John Forrest and Charles Yelverton O'Connor. Begin with Western Australia becoming a self-governing colony in 1890 and conclude with the death of Forrest in 1918. Add a paragraph of text describing what you believe to be the importance and legacy of the pipeline both to Australians at the time and today.
- On large poster paper draw a map of Western Australia, illustrating the route of the Coolgardie pipeline, and important features along the route, such as the position of dams and pumping stations, geographical and natural environment features, regions of Indigenous lands, and towns that have grown and developed as a result of the pipeline's construction. Include other details such as the total cost of the enterprise at the time, and how it translates to today's equivalent, the length of the pipeline, how much water it carried per day upon completion, the number of workers involved in the construction and other relevant statistical information.
- From the program and from further research, discuss in class the necessity and purpose for a coastal deep-water harbour to be built somewhere in the Perth vicinity. Include comment on its immediate importance and effect on West Australian residents and citizens generally. Working in pairs, write a 500-word report about the history of the harbour's development, and its relevance to Perth, Western Australia and indeed the nation today. You may include photographs and other illustrations from the past and today where applicable.



## JOHN FORREST AND C. Y. O'CONNOR

As we see in the program, Forrest, already famous for his feats of overland exploration, and now wealthy and politically powerful, as Premier (and treasurer) of the colony of Western Australia, formed an intense working relationship with Irish-born engineer C. Y. O'Connor. They depended upon each other's particular skills and abilities to undertake many great projects of the colony's infrastructure development.

- In pairs, carry out research then prepare and write a magazine article of about 500 words for a young teenage audience about the early explorations of John Forrest, and how these may have been the foundation of his later successes in life. Use desktop publishing or word processing software to format the article and include illustrations with captions where appropriate.
- There is a scene in the program where Forrest and his exploration party are "attacked" by some Aboriginal people and shots are fired. View this sequence again, taking note of Nyungar Elder Richard Walley's comments, then in short story form re-present this event as fiction in 500-700 words, from an Indigenous viewpoint.
- As though you were Forrest, write a passionately-delivered speech to the Western Australian colonial parliament in 1890, the year the colony became self-governing, in which you argue for the development of large infrastructure undertakings of roads, railways and telegraph lines extending out from Perth across the land. In your argument you should associate this need with the growing mood in the eastern colonies for an Australian federation of states, in which Western Australia should be an equal partner. Record your speech for playback on your school's intranet.
- Write an official governmental letter from Premier Forrest in Perth to C. Y. O'Connor in New Zealand with the purpose of influencing O'Connor and his family to give up their lives there and move to Perth for him to take up the position of Chief Engineer of Western Australia.
- In pairs or small groups, plan a scene where O'Connor and his family discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Forrest's offer. Rehearse and present a play reading of the scene to the class. Draw upon other members of the class to take part in the reading as required.
- From the program and any further research required, write a dramatised discussion between John Forrest and his younger brother, Alexander, about their differences in attitude and opinion towards the professional relationship John Forrest has formed with O'Connor, and whether this relationship is beneficial

or not for the citizens of Western Australia, or whether it could lead to financial disaster.

- Discuss in class the possible influences and pressures on O'Connor that may have contributed to his suicide, then plan and write your own response to this tragic event, in personal diary form, as though you had been a family friend.
- Ensure you know what a newspaper obituary is, perhaps by reading some samples in current newspapers and discussing in class the way they have been presented, then prepare and draft an obituary in about 500 words of the life and achievements of C. Y. O'Connor. (Remember that it is highly unlikely that an obituary would discuss in detail events surrounding a suicide.)
- Research and write a biography of 500-600 words about Forrest's life and achievements after resigning from the Western Australian parliament and becoming a member of the first federal government in 1901. You may illustrate the biography as required.
- In pairs, produce a poster or website display commemorating the combined achievements of Forrest and O'Connor in connection with the massive building programs they embarked upon together, and what this has meant not only to Western Australians but to Australians in general today.

## GOLD AND T'OTHERSIDERS

The discovery of gold in Coolgardie in 1892 and Kalgoorlie in 1893 not only brought wealth to Western Australia, it brought "t'othersiders"—gold-seekers from the eastern colonies on the other side of the Nullarbor Desert—and a host of problems for Premier Forrest.

- We are told in the program that the gold rush represented a "now or never opportunity" for Western Australia to catch up with and gain an equal status with the other Australian colonies. Discuss in class then write a short response as to what this statement means, and what the Western Australian government, led by Forrest, decided to do about it.
- In pairs, research and prepare a two-page magazine spread about life on the eastern goldfields of Western Australia in the 1890s, including the reasons for, and the effects of, the outbreak of disease on the goldfield community, and how the disease might be controlled or eradicated. Use desktop publishing software for formatting and page layout. Add photographs, illustrations, maps and extracts from miners' diaries and biographies where applicable.

- Why were the miners on the eastern goldfields discontented with the Western Australian parliament in Perth? Discuss in class, drawing on information from the program, plus further research, then write a letter to the editor of a Perth newspaper (such as *The Sunday Times*, as edited by Charles Vosper in the 1890s) outlining your grievances on behalf of the other miners at the goldfields.
- In pairs, prepare a “what if” alternative history scenario, and present it either as a large poster display, or one or more connected website pages for display on your school’s intranet site. What if the 1900 referendum had produced a “No” result, meaning that Western Australia would not have joined the new Australian Commonwealth in 1901, but would have remained a self-governing colony of Great Britain? Would a breakaway state of “Auralia” have been formed in the south-eastern section of Western Australia? Would Western Australia eventually have joined the Commonwealth or become a separate nation? What kind of Australia may have developed over the next few years, or decades, from this scenario, and would it affect us today?
- Write a short fiction story in 500-700 words about a “t’othersider” on the eastern goldfields of Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie or Boulder. What dreams does he have of wealth and a happy future? Does he think of family back in distant Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne? Is he ill from typhoid fever?
- You are present at Coolgardie on the day ex-Premier Forrest officially turns on the water flow of the great pipeline, 24 January 1903. Write your personal impressions and feelings as a diary entry.
- Discuss in class then write an informative essay on how the discovery of gold in 1892 both directly and indirectly transformed Western Australia from small, struggling colony to progressive Australian state.

### POLITICS, PRESSURE GROUPS, THE PRESS

Today, looking back, the Coolgardie Water Scheme is regarded as a great human feat and an engineering triumph, but at the time it was mooted, and later under construction, it caused much controversy in Western Australia, and was believed to be an impractical, in fact impossible undertaking that may only result in terrible failure. Why was this so?

- From the program and from further research, discuss in class the various forces and factions that questioned and criticised the entire Water Scheme, examining their arguments and their own vested interests in preferring spending programs that might benefit their own political, business and commercial concerns (such as agriculture and pastoral pursuits in other parts of the colony). Take

notes of the class discussion, then prepare a poster display illustrating the factions allied against Premier Forrest and Chief Engineer O’Connor.

- Drawing on the relevant details in the program, in your own words write an editorial by the editor of *The Sunday Times*, Charles Vosper, criticising John Forrest’s hugely expensive infrastructure spending and building program.
- Political cartoons have been a feature of daily and weekly newspapers in Australia for well over 150 years, making fun of political and other important or well-known public figures, and presenting a satirical viewpoint about them expressed in an illustration with a short written caption. In class, discuss the possibilities for topics and characterisation, then in pairs, or singly if you prefer, create two political cartoons. One should be critical of either Forrest or O’Connor (or both), while the other should be critical of their opponents.
- It is suggested during the program that C. Y. O’Connor died by “trial by media”. Discuss in class what you think this means. Comment on the likelihood that trial by media happens in today’s mass media age, and offer examples of who you think have been turned into media “victims”. (You may wish to collect and examine some current newspaper reports and current affairs TV programs in class.) After discussion, plan and write a short fiction story about someone who is placed on public “trial” by the media. Present the story from any viewpoint, such as the victim, a family member, a work colleague or friend or a journalist. Note that there are many references to “trial by media” that you may search for on the internet. (See References and Further Resources section for an example.)
- Discuss in class and write notes on the reasons offered during the program, and from any further research you carry out, for why women in 1899 were given the vote in Western Australian colonial elections and referenda, and whether this may have influenced the outcome of the 1900 referendum on whether Western Australia should federate with the other Australian colonies.



- From the previous activity, in pairs or small groups prepare a scripted radio broadcast of between five and ten minutes' length about Western Australian women being granted suffrage in 1899. It may be presented as a current affairs on-the-spot broadcast (although in reality radio broadcasting was not available in 1899), where you may include interviews with politicians, new women voters and comments by media commentators (such as Charles Vosper and other newspaper opinion editorialists). You may wish to add background music and sound effects. Rehearse, record, edit and re-record if necessary the sound-file broadcast for playback on computer. An alternative to making a recording is to arrange in-class "live" readings of the broadcast.



### COLONIALISM, INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Until fairly recently it was the general attitude and assumption of European immigrants settled in their colonies around the world, including Australia, to develop the land and its resources. Their immediate desire was to construct what was considered a civilised future in a difficult, alien environment, and to turn the landscape into a colonial version of "home", back in Europe, with little concern for unsettling and perhaps destroying delicate natural ecologies and the cultures of local indigenous populations. It may be argued that at the time very few colonists realised (or perhaps cared) that the ongoing alterations to their own environment in the name of progress and of constructing a future may have long-term negative consequences.

- View the sequence containing Richard Walley's and Albert Gaston's comments about the effect of mining on the local Aboriginal population around the eastern goldmining district. Discuss and take notes on the ways in which the Indigenous people were affected by the presence of the miners and their activities, and explain why Gaston, in his autobiography *Coolgardie Gold* says, "We have treated the Blacks very badly...It is to our lasting shame".

- Following from the previous activity, write a short story about the effect of goldmining on the Indigenous population. Tell the story from the viewpoint of an Indigenous person. You may need first to discuss in class the themes, characters, settings, events and general approach to the story.

- Research and prepare an illustrated magazine article about the Indigenous communities of the eastern goldfields region (part of the general Indigenous population of much of Western Australia known as the Nyungar people), looking at how they have coped, survived, adapted and developed since the 1890s gold rushes, and particularly exploring their situation today.

- If a large gold rush looked like breaking out today somewhere in the Australian desert interior or in a forest region, are there any cultural and environmental restrictions that would prevent similar events to those of the 1890s Western Australian gold rush from taking place? If so, what safeguards have been put into place? Are they adequate? Should further measures be enacted into law? Should local Indigenous populations receive compensation or a share in the wealth extracted from the ground? Should they have control over what takes place on their traditional lands in the event of a gold rush that may be of benefit to the entire nation? Should mining be prevented in these localities?

Research these questions, then in pairs prepare and write a report on our preparedness for such a likelihood, including recommendations as required. (These questions may be applied to other activities such as large construction undertakings and contemporary ore-mining activities. You may first wish to examine the range of issues, for example, surrounding the recent completion of the Adelaide-Darwin railway line.)

- Research then debate in class: If the nation, as represented by the Australian government, officially says "sorry" to the Indigenous peoples of the eastern goldfields region for what occurred in the colonial past, may this be an admittance of guilt, and could it open up the likelihood of large and expensive law suits and claims for financial compensation?



## MEDIA STUDIES

After viewing the program, carry out the following activities:

- In discussing the making of *Pipe Dreams*, and the way history may be presented on film, director Franco di Chiera says, “The average person doesn’t want facts and figures. They want to be entertained.” Discuss the relevance of this statement to your viewing of the program. Do you think the program fulfils this purpose? Would you have preferred a different approach? If so, what would be your vision?
- Following from the previous activity, examine the opening sequence in detail (the section before the program’s title credits appear), including Wendy Hughes’ narration. Write a commentary on how this sequence captures the dramatic style, the themes and the general approach of the rest of the program.
- Discuss in class and make notes about the purpose and effect on us of the suicide motif, a set of re-enactment images that introduces the program, and is then repeated many times throughout the program. At what points in the program does the motif reappear and why? Why are most of these reappearances presented in brief flashes of time? Write your own analysis of the function of this motif within the program’s narrative.
- Does dramatised and re-enacted history carry with it issues of subjectivity, interpretation and the possibility of inaccuracy, and of separating characters into “heroes” and “villains”, “visionaries” and “conservatives” etc? Discuss in class, then write your own analysis of the ways in which the historical characters and factions throughout the program have been presented in terms of camera shots, editing, lighting, the words they utter, the voice-over commentary and background music and the opinions expressed by on-camera historians. For example, how is the editor of *The Sunday Times*, Charles Vosper, portrayed on-screen, and what is your reaction to him as a result of this presentation? (For more on the real-life Vosper, see References and Further Resources.)
- Write a 300-word review of *Pipe Dreams* for the student section of your school’s intranet.



Laying Pipes across burning Mangrove.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

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Golden Pipeline Heritage Trail Guide, National Trust, 2002  
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Stephen Biesty & Meredith Hooper, *Gold: A Treasure Hunt Through Time*, Hodder, 2002

Hazel Biggs, *Pioneering in WA*, Singing Tree Books, 1993

Evan Biggs, *Water in WA*, National Library of Australia, 2001

Alfred F. Calvert, *My Fourth Tour in Western Australia*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, WA, 1989

Robert Coupe, *Australia's Gold Rushes*, New Holland, 2000

Frank Crowley, *Big John Forrest 1847-1918: A Founding Father of the Commonwealth of Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, 2000

A. G. Evans, *CY O'Connor: His Life and Legacy*, UWA Press, 2002

Richard Evans and Alex West, *Constructing Australia*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2007

Albert Gaston, *Coolgardie Gold*, Hesperian Press, 1984

Helen Irving (ed), *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1999

Joy Lefroy and Diana Frylinck, *The Pipeline C Y O'Connor Built*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, WA, 2003

Arthur Reid, *Those Were the Days*, Hesperian Press, 1986

Norman Kenneth Sligo, *Mates and Gold: Reminiscences of the Early Westralian Goldfields 1890-1896*, Hesperian Press, 1995

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Merab Tauman, *The Chief, C. Y. O'Connor*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, 1978

R. E. Tyler (ed), *My Dear Emma*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003

Martyn Jack & Audrey Webb, *Golden Destiny: The Centenary History of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and the Eastern Goldfields*, City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, 1993

Kimberley Webber, *Gold Fever*, Macmillan Education, 2001

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John Forrest:  
[www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080565b.htm](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080565b.htm)

Charles Yelverton O'Connor:  
[www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110059b.htm](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110059b.htm)

Trial by media:  
[www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s1041137.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s1041137.htm)

Western Australian gold rush, t'othersiders and Federation:  
[www.ccentre.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=goldrush](http://www.ccentre.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=goldrush)  
[www.liswa.wa.gov.au/federation/fed/O18\\_toth\\_2.htm](http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/federation/fed/O18_toth_2.htm)

Women's suffrage in Australian colonies/states:  
[www.ccentre.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=vote1890](http://www.ccentre.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=vote1890)  
[www.slsa.sa.gov.au/women\\_and\\_politics/suffr4.htm](http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/women_and_politics/suffr4.htm)

Charles Vosper:  
[www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120374b.htm](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120374b.htm)

### Constructing Australia: Pipe Dreams

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Narrator: Wendy Hughes  
Director: Franco di Chiera  
Producers: Ed Punchard, Julia Redwood  
Executive Producer: Alex West  
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