



Gone to a Good Home

TEACHERS NOTES

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Synopsis

In 1967, Lily was nearly 17, two months pregnant and living happily with her boyfriend Steve when police arrested her, declaring she was in moral danger. Despite having parental permission to marry, the couple were kept apart and Lily was confined in a Catholic girls home until the baby was born. Alone and confused, she was manipulated into signing adoption papers.

Almost 30 years later, her life is still defined by that event. 'I don't think I'll ever get over it. It was the theft of my child.'

Lily's story is not unique.

For three decades, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Australian authorities pressured many unmarried mothers to give up their babies for adoption into what they

considered 'better' homes—those of married couples.

At a time when society had no place for single mothers and their illegitimate children, these women were unaware of their legal rights. Sometimes they were coerced, even drugged, and their babies literally stolen.

Despite arguments that the practice was well-intentioned, for the individuals involved the ongoing impact has been devastating.

This documentary explores the experiences of these women and their efforts to contact their children and gain recognition for past wrongs, while revealing the dramatic change in social values that has since occurred.



Curriculum links

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at secondary and tertiary levels.

Curriculum links include:

- Women's Studies
- Social Justice
- Social Policy
- Social Work
- Psychology
- Child Protection
- Health & Welfare Studies
- Human Services
- SOSE/HSIE
- Community & Family Studies
- Legal Studies
- Personal Development
- Values Education
- English
- Media.



Lily Arthur's story

In 1967, police raided Lily's home and arrested her.

- What was your reaction to the actions of the police?
- What is the effect of the use of black and white for the recreated drama scenes?
- Comment on the shot of policemen standing over Lily's bed.
- Find examples of lighting, sound and montage which add to the scene's tension.

The police took her to a cell in Brisbane's Boggo Road Jail.

- Why might the sergeant have said, 'You could get hung for bringing her here'?
- Why do you believe she got 'the deluxe cell'?
- What is the visual effect of showing Lily being checked on through a small door flap during the night?

Nearly 30 years later, Lily recalls that she was arrested because she was 'exposed to moral danger.'

- What does this phrase mean?
- Do you consider she was in 'moral danger'? Explain.
- What do you think is gained having an older Lily comment on events that happened to her 30 years ago?
- How would you have felt being arrested for a 'crime' you had no understanding of?
- How might Lily's then circumstance of a teenage mother-to-be be treated today?

The order of Sisters of Mercy ran the Holy Cross girls' home. Their mission was to protect and care for unmarried girls through their pregnancies. The court where Lily was taken after her night in jail ordered her to be confined in this home. Lily was given shifts to wear.

- What type of garment is a shift and why do you believe the girls were required to wear them?
- Why did they cut Lily's hair?

The Sisters called Lily by the name of Leanne.

- Do you think their reasons for doing so were sufficient justification?
- Why did renaming Lily take away her identity? Suggest reasons that this worked in her favour. In the long run, was it truly in her favour?

Lily was treated like a prisoner and made to work in the laundry.

- What was her crime?
- Why is there irony in calling the Holy Cross a 'home'?
- What message is conveyed by the image of the washing flapping in the wind against a blue cloud-studded sky?

After Lily returned from hospital to the Holy Cross we see her being chased and slapped around the legs by a nun.

- What does this visual image remind you of? Why?



Lily was denied marriage to Steve even though he obtained all the necessary papers.

- Why do you believe this happened?
- What signals do you see that Lily definitely wanted the marriage?
- What meaning was conveyed through the thrown confetti and the church irradiating light? Was this symbol ironic?

Role plays

Break into pairs. Your teacher will tell you to complete either Task A or Task B:

A: It is 1967. A Sister of Mercy who works at the Holy Cross home is being interviewed by a radio reporter. Devise a series of questions and answers whereby the nun explains the order's point of view and the reporter gathers enough information to enlighten a conservative listening public about these institutions.

B: It is 2005. A Sister of Mercy who previously worked at the Holy Cross home in the late 1960s is being interviewed on a TV forum show. Devise a series of questions and answers whereby the reporter is determined to uncover what occurred in the past and the nun explains the order's point of view at that time. The women who were the young pregnant residents make up the audience for the TV show and are allowed to ask a question each from the floor. Script their questions too.



The hospital

It seems that major hospitals in Australia were complicit in the process of separating unmarried mothers and their children. It was The Royal Women's Hospital in Brisbane where Lily gave birth and was confronted by a woman from the Children's Department. She badgered Lily about surrendering her baby for adoption.

- In the program, how is Lily's state of mind conveyed visually both in this moment and as a memory during her therapy?
- How would you describe Lily's feelings on being told she should give up her baby?

The word 'Adoption' is written in cursive writing and creates a shadow of itself on-screen.

- What is suggested by this?

View the scene where Lily sees her baby in the nursery.

- Why do you believe the hospital rules were that a mother must firstly sign the adoption papers before being allowed to see her baby?
- Why might the card Lily holds up say 'McDonald'?
- Comment on the atmosphere of the hospital nursery. What gives you these feelings?

Lily went from the Holy Cross to Sydney. She says she feels guilty because she'd 'had sex and had a baby.'

- What does Lily mean when she says 'everybody around me made it wrong'?
- What effect is gained by showing several couples kissing?
- Comment on the irony of backing this scene with the Burt Bacharach/Hal David song, 'What the World Needs Now Is Love'.

The court case

Lily sued the Queensland government for damages over the forced adoption of her baby. Her lawyer, Grant Dearlove, warned her that the case might not go well because the adoption was so long ago.

- Why might this time period make a difference to the outcome?
- Can courts be considered to be objective when a lawyer says, 'whether you can get that evidence admitted before the judge or not depends upon the judge'? Explain your answer.
- Why would this case attract media attention?
- What do you think Lily means when she says that regardless of the verdict it will 'go down in the law books'?
- Do you see any bias in the way the film presents Lily outside the court? Support your comments with evidence.
- To what extent do you think the law can be considered a reflection of community standards and expectations?

Tim Pollock and Lily

Tim registered an objection against being contacted by his birth mother and even wrote Lily a message asking her to stay away.

- What do you believe could motivate Tim's request?
- Why do you believe Lily overrode Tim's objection? Do you think she was right to have done so?

Tim finally meets his birth mother in the park.

- How can we tell Tim is genuinely pleased to see her?
- Describe and account for Lily's feelings. Why does she describe them in such detail?



The horizontal bars on the back of the garden seat where Tim and Lily sit continue one symbolic theme that we have seen throughout the film. They have previously been used as a prison-like symbol, but this time Lily sits in front of them.

- Comment on new meaning created.
- Collect other images containing horizontal bars and in each case, comment on their meaning.

Parliamentary inquiry

By 1997 enough women had spoken out against adoption by force that in NSW an inquiry into adoption practices of the 1950s-1990s was set up. The committee tabled a paper called *Releasing the Past*. (See references) One major illegal procedure highlighted in the report was not allowing the unmarried mother to see or hold her child after it was born. The film tells this story through personal memories of Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, a member of the inquiry who recalls his first day as a doctor in a Sydney hospital labour ward and Patricia Large, an unmarried mother giving birth. Their observations are interleaved

- How effective is this structure in conveying the committee's findings? Bring evidence to support your answer.
- Was Patricia Large a patient of Dr Chesterfield-Evans? How do you know?

- Why did the doctor tell Patricia to remember the time of birth and the baby's weight?
- Do you believe the existence of Origins Inc helped bring about the inquiry?
- In your opinion, are such inquiries valuable?

Lily today

At the end of the film Lily is still hoping society will acknowledge that a major crime has been committed against mothers who were forced to give up their babies.

- Do you think society should do so? What are some ways we could make that acknowledgement?
- What is the way forward for women like Lily whose lives have been shaped by such devastating events?

We see Lily sharing with Steve a photo album which integrates all phases of her life.

- What photos do you see?
- Do you see the photo album as a representation that she personally is coming to terms with what happened to her all those years ago? Explain your answer.
- Are there any other incidents that back up your opinion about whether Lily is gradually accepting her past?
- Why does Lily hope that 'society can make a remedy (for the stolen children) if they look hard enough'?



Consequences of forced relinquishment of children

According to ethicists and psychologists, the list of factors below represents some feelings harboured by women today who were forced in previous decades to give up their babies for adoption. Find an example from the film that you believe illustrates each emotional state listed.

| FEELING | EXAMPLE FROM FILM |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Stress | |
| Guilt | |
| Anger | |
| Need to know their child is loved | |
| Grief | |
| Fear | |
| Depression | |
| Anguish because of repressed memories | |



Origins Inc

Origins Inc was founded in 1995 by a small group of mothers who had lost their children to forced adoption practices in the 1950s-1990s. These women were no longer prepared to endure their severe emotional trauma and decided to speak publicly about their pain. Dian Wellfare, the founder of the organisation tells viewers that the post World War Two era was the only period in history when unmarried mothers 'were expected to give away their newborn babies to strangers.' Psychiatrist Dr Geoffrey Rickarby further suggests that this 'mass illegal persecution of a group will go down in Australian history'.

- Why might a meeting between the birth mother and her adopted child give the mother freedom to face the past and thus begin healing the future?
- List some of the main functions of support groups such as Origins.

Motivation of institutions

The whole practice of adoption seemed driven by institutions that saw mutual benefit in the actions they facilitated. In the table below, list reasons you believe each institution was involved in the process.

| CHURCH | WELFARE AGENCIES | HOSPITALS | SOCIETY |
|--------|------------------|-----------|---------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Professor Trevor Jordan says that at the root of adoption there is always sorrow: 'sorrow of an unplanned pregnancy, sorrow of the relinquishing of a child and sorrow of infertility'.

- Can you see adoption in any other way than this? Explain your answer.

Professor Jordan suggests that people 'acted with the best knowledge of the time...flawed knowledge' and that on other occasions they acted in 'mean and cruel ways'.

Form two teams and debate this issue.



The following table shows methods used to convince women that 'being a good mother meant to give up' their children. Match each method with an example from the film. Then comment on the visual technique used.

| HOW UNMARRIED MOTHER COERCED | EXAMPLE FROM FILM | TECHNIQUE USED TO IMPART INFORMATION |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Threats of deportation from Australia | | |
| Being told they could not support the child | | |
| Being humiliated | | |
| Not being allowed to see the child before signing adoption papers | | |
| Being drugged | | |
| Being told the baby was not in the hospital | | |
| Hiding the true purpose of papers signed by the mother | | |

- What factors in the system do you believe allowed these types of practices to flourish?

Look at the scene where adoptive parents receive their baby.

- What do you see that makes the couple suitable adoptive parents?
- What setting helps convey their suitability?
- What possible reasons could make the father of a newborn child say it would be better off adopted?

Adoptees

Dr Wilf Jarvis, psychiatrist suggests that adopted children sometimes 'needed contact with their original parents'. A good example of this is Kathleen Gollacher's story.

- What might be some of the reasons why Kathleen's birth mother refuses to see her?
- What might be some of the reasons why Kathleen wants to see her birth mother?
- Why do you believe Kathleen 'just wanted to be normal...like friends at school'?

When Kathleen had her own daughter, the obstetrician said he'd 'never seen such a happy mother'. Kathleen explains this as her daughter being 'the only flesh and blood that I had in the world...'

- Explore the reasons why many people believe blood relations and family are more important than friends. Do you believe so?

Roseanne Pineiro's reunion with her son was successful. He produced her gift of a baby pin with an angel on it.

- How do you think he felt about his birth mother?
- Do you believe that being adopted can affect the way a child feels about himself/herself? Explore some of these possible emotions. Can this then influence the way they interact with their society?

Wendy Jacobs found her son, began to form a relationship with him then had the sad news that he had been killed by a train.

- What questions do you think might haunt Wendy about her son? Give reasons for your answer.

Albert Geisse and his wife Pauline adopted a baby boy in 1971. Everything went well for their family; Matthew skated for Australia in the junior ranks and won ten titles. However, after he left school, things changed and he 'got himself into quite a bit of trouble'.

- Do you believe that contact with Don, Matthew's birth father, might help him to settle down? Why?
- Listen to Albert's phone call to Don and decide how you believe Don took it. How would you feel if you received such a phone call 30 years after you'd had a child?

Language

There are many words such as 'illegitimate children' or 'unmarried/unwed mothers' which belong to a bygone era.

- What were the connotations of each of these words?
- Today, what distinction is made between single and married women who have children?
- Can changing the language we use be a first step towards altering attitudes?

Below is a list of possible reasons that much of society during the 1950s to the 1980s thought so harshly about girls 'having children without the benefit of wedlock'. Fill in the table's blank column with today's ideas. Add any ideas of your own. Do you believe society's attitudes have changed?

| 1950s-1980s 'UNMARRIED/UNWED MOTHERS, ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN' | 21ST CENTURY |
|---|--------------|
| Living together without being married was sinful | |
| Having a baby outside marriage brought shame to the girl and the family | |
| Women were denied access to resources and could not support a child alone | |
| A 'normal family' included a father who the child needed as model to develop in a balanced manner | |
| Women needed the strength of a man to cope emotionally in life | |
| Girls who fell pregnant had no self respect. They had ruined their lives and should be ashamed | |
| | |
| | |

On the adoption certificate that Lily signs we see the words 'putative father' followed by Steve's name.

- What does the word 'putative' mean?
- Do you find the word discriminatory? Explain your answer.

Symbolism

Throughout the film we see paper boats which bear various names and messages.

- Choose several examples and explore their symbolism. Look at the material they're made of, the water, the names and the angles at which they float.
- List several of their filmic functions.
- Why does the film open with one of these boats out of focus?

The table below lists some symbolic moments in the documentary. Complete it and add examples of your own.

| CONTEXT OF FILM | SYMBOLIC MOMENT | MEANING |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Talking about 30 day revocation period | Dian Wellfare drops lace hanky | |
| Looking into hospital nursery | Shadowy figures appear one by one | |
| | Statue of Blind Justice | |
| | Bassinet covered in cobwebs | |
| Dian Wellfare telling of her nightmares | People knocking on windows | |
| | Faceless baby | |

Conclusion

- In your opinion, will every human being ever share the same values? Does it matter? Explain your answer.
- Do we all have a responsibility to right the wrongs of yesteryear?
- Define a 'human right'. Explore the difference between
 - * individuals in society disagreeing with the lifestyle of others.
 - * institutions trampling over the rights of individuals.
- How can we as a society ensure that in the future no group forces their priorities on others, no matter how beneficial and correct this group believes their ideas to be?



References and further resources

Adoption Australia - Origins Inc
<http://www.originsnsw.com/>

Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
www.hreoc.gov.au

Australian Institute of Family Studies
www.aifs.gov.au

Australian Law Reform Commission
www.alrc.gov.au

The Benevolent Society – Post Adoption Resource Centre
<https://www.benevolent.org.au/connect/post--adoption--support--home>

Children by Choice Association
www.childrenbychoice.org.au

Velma Demerson, *Incorrigible*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 2004
A woman's account of her life story following her arrest as an eighteen-year-old. Her 'crime' was loving a Chinese man, a 'crime' that was compounded by her pregnancy and subsequent mixed-race child. Sentenced to a home for wayward girls, Demerson was then transferred to Toronto's Mercer Reformatory for Females, where she was subjected to solitary confinement, abusive medical treatments and the state's apprehension of her child.

Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales Standing Committee on Social Issues, *Releasing the Past: Adoption Practices 1950–1998*, Final Report, Parliamentary Paper Number 600, December 2000. Accessible from <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/5540/Report.PDF>

Aviva Ziegler (director), *Plumpton High Babies* [videorecording], Film Australia, Sydney, 2003



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Original script and concept: Heather Phillips

Producer: Mark Chapman

Director: Karen Berkman

Executive Producer: Mark Hamlyn

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