

TEACHERS NOTES

# HIDDEN TREASURES

inside the National Library of Australia



with Betty Churcher

## Series synopsis

The National Library of Australia is the country's largest reference library with over nine million items in its collection, including a surprising number of art works. Yet visitors to the library glimpse only a fraction of the collection with many fragile items unable to be placed on permanent display.

Former director of the National Gallery of Australia Betty Churcher presents an insider's guide to some of the library's art treasures, which are rarely on public display. From her unique vantage point, Churcher makes intriguing historical connections between paintings and engravings, photography, manuscripts and artefacts, illustrated journals and diaries.

This series of short documentaries tells the story of Omai, the first South Sea Islander to visit London; investigates the mystery surrounding the death of Captain James Cook in Hawaii; reveals the exquisite paintings of 18-year-old colonial painter George Raper and Victorian flower hunter Ellis Rowan; and speaks with artist John Olsen about his struggle to paint the biggest commission of his career, the Sydney Opera House mural.

These are fascinating tales about the creative process and the works themselves, offering a tantalising insight into Australia's culture and heritage.

## Curriculum Applicability

| Episode # | Title                                    | Curriculum Links  |
|-----------|--|---|
| 1         | <i>Augustus Earle and His Dog, Jemmy</i> | <b>Society and environment</b><br>Early views of the environment<br><b>History</b><br>Representations of Aboriginal people<br><b>Art</b><br>Portraits         |
| 2         | <i>The Flower Hunter</i>                 | <b>Society and environment</b><br>Representations of the environment<br><b>History</b><br>Development of national identity<br><b>Art</b><br>Heidelberg School |
| 3         | <i>The Photographer and the Painter</i>  | <b>History</b><br>Representing change over time through evidence<br><b>Art</b><br>Photography and painting  |
| 4         | <i>A Passionate Collector</i>            | <b>Society and environment</b><br>Understanding early maps  |
| 5         | <i>Captain Cook in Hawaii</i>            | <b>Society and environment</b><br>Cultural awareness<br><b>History</b><br>Empathy<br><b>Art</b><br>Portraits  |
| 6         | <i>Captain Cook's Tragic Death</i>       | <b>History</b><br>Eyewitnesses and representations  |
| 7         | <i>South Sea Islander in London</i>      | <b>History</b><br>The image of the 'noble savage'<br><b>Art</b><br>Portraits  |
| 8         | <i>First Fleet Sketches</i>              | <b>History</b><br>Sources of history<br><b>Art</b>  |
| 9         | <i>Figure in the Landscape</i>           | <b>Society and environment</b><br>Representing the environment<br><b>History</b><br>Representations of Aboriginal people<br><b>Art</b><br>Viewing landscape   |
| 10        | <i>John Olsen's Opera House Mural</i>    | <b>Art</b><br>Interpreting art  |

## Exploring ideas and themes in the series

Image courtesy of National Library of Australia.



### Episode 1 – Augustus Earle and His Dog, Jemmy

Misadventure turned to good fortune when young English artist Augustus Earle was rescued after being marooned on a remote island and accidentally became the colony's first trained artist. Earle was stranded for nine months with his dog, Jemmy, on an island in the South Atlantic Ocean when his ship sailed without him in March 1824. He filled his time recording life on the island until his art supplies ran out. The artist and his dog appear in many of his island paintings. Earle was eventually picked up by a ship bound for Sydney and during the few years he lived in the colony he became its foremost painter. Included in the National Library's collection is an 1826 oil portrait of Bungaree, the first Aborigine to circumnavigate Australia.

1) The key images in this episode are the portrait and lithograph of the Aboriginal man, Bungaree. Describe the way Bungaree is portrayed in the portrait, including his clothing, ornamentation or decorations, pose or stance, and the background.

- 2) What impression do you gain of Bungaree? Why do you think you gain that impression—how do each of the elements in the portrait help to create that reaction in the viewer?
- 3) What do you think is the main message that the painter, Augustus Earle, is trying to convey in this portrait?
- 4) How is this image or impression of Bungaree changed in the lithographs that were created from the portrait?
- 5) Why do you think people would have presented the portrait in this way?
- 6) From the information given to you in the film segment, what would you say were Bungaree's achievements? Why would these be considered achievements? For example, you might discuss the difficulty that a person might have in trying to live in two different worlds, the Indigenous world and the new one brought in by the settlement of Sydney Cove.
- 7) The presenter does not tell us that Bungaree ended his life as a beggar and a drunk. Does this knowledge make any difference to the messages and meanings of the portrait? Explain your views.
- 8) Summarise in just one or two sentences why this portrait is a 'treasure' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.
- 9) Research. The portrait is of a significant figure in Australian colonial history. Research another significant Indigenous figure (such as Jandamara, Yagan, Bennelong) and tell their story. Include in your presentation the nature of their achievements, their role in the period and place where they existed, and the way they have been represented in images.

For more on the life of Bungaree go to: [www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010162b.htm](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010162b.htm)

For more on Augustus Earle go to: [www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/earle](http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/earle)

### Episode 2 – The Flower Hunter

Image courtesy of National Library of Australia.



Victorian flower painter Ellis Rowan rocked the Australian art establishment when she won the Centennial Art Prize in 1888, defeating established male artists including Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin and prompting a complaint from the Victorian Art Society. A feisty and tenacious adventurer, Rowan travelled Australia searching for rare and exotic species to paint before venturing into the jungles of New Guinea to find inspiration for her exquisite flower paintings. Using watercolours and gouache on coloured paper, she painted many unique varieties, on one occasion claiming to have dangled by a rope over a precipice, hundreds of metres above the rainforest below, to paint a tree orchid. The bitterness of her male rivals lasted until well after her death in 1922. Some 900 of her watercolours are now in the National Library collection.

1) Ellis was a contemporary of Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin—both of whom are considered to be important in the development of Australian nationalism in the late 19th century because of their focus on typical Australian scenes. How might you argue that Ellis

Rowan should also be considered part of this nationalistic development?

2) Ellis Rowan was not typical of women of her day. Suggest or speculate on what obstacles might have existed for women to be independent travellers and artists. Then research more about her life to test these ideas and to see how she overcame these restrictions and limitations.

A starting point could be the following book:

Christine Morton-Evans and Michael Morton-Evans, *The Flower Hunter: The Remarkable Life of Ellis Rowan*, Simon and Schuster, 2008

3) The presenter, Betty Churcher, suggests that the main objection to Rowan by male artists was based on gender. The debate in Federal Parliament over the acquisition of her work was in part based on a belief by some that her painting was botanical rather than artistic. Discuss the idea that her work would not have been considered 'art'.

4) Rowan followed her obsession:

'My love for the flora of Australia, at once so unique and so fascinating, together with my desire to complete my collection of floral paintings, has carried me into other colonies, Queensland and some of the remotest parts of the great continent of Australia. The excitement of seeking and the delight of finding rare or even unknown specimens abundantly compensated me for all difficulties, fatigue and hardships.'

(Source: [www.anbg.gov.au/biography/rowan.biography.html](http://www.anbg.gov.au/biography/rowan.biography.html))

Do you know or know of anyone who has a real obsession? What difficulties might exist in a society for a person who does have an obsession? Why might people follow their obsessions?

5) The main women given acknowledgement in Australian history are those who achieved political rights for women or writers. Research and prepare a list of notable women. Include, but try to expand your list beyond, political activists and writers.

To see more go to: <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/44384/20040920-0000/www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/ellisrowan/index.html>

6) Summarise in just one or two sentences why these paintings are 'treasures' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.

### Episode 3 – The Photographer and the Painter

Image courtesy of National Library of Australia.



Artists working in different media have created a visual time capsule showing Melbourne in the late 1800s. The first, an album of photographs by the city's official photographer Charles Nettleton, features *Bourke Street, Melbourne, Looking East*, an 1878 photograph showing men chatting in the middle of sleepy Bourke Street, while the second, a painting by Tom Roberts circa 1886, shows the same street bustling with pre-Christmas trade. The painting, originally named *Allegro con brio*, was altered in 1890 when the artist added three figures to the foreground. Aerial maps of the city in the National Library collection show the massive transformation that took place in Melbourne over the fifty years from 1838. The photograph,

the painting and the aerial map provide snapshots of early Melbourne, each one supplying information particular to the medium.

1) This segment presents a variety of photographs and paintings as evidence of change over time. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both photographs and paintings as evidence of a place or event in history.

| Type of evidence | Strengths | Limitations |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Paintings        |           |             |
| Photographs      |           |             |

2) How has changing technology influenced the nature of photographs?

3) One of the important elements in evidence is the influence of the creator of the evidence. A painter chooses what to include in his or her painting. Does a photographer also influence or choose what is in a photograph and therefore what meanings or messages it conveys? Discuss this idea.

4) Take a photograph of an area at some different times during the day—for example, a school play area before or after school, during class time, and at recess or lunch. Print these and have one third of the class take a copy of one of the photographs. Ask people in your family to comment on the scene. Compare your answers in school and discuss what this might tell you about how the interpretation of a place and time might be influenced by the nature of the evidence that is available.

5) The presenter, Betty Churcher, says of paintings and photographs that 'each supplies information particular to that medium. Each is a time capsule'. Do you agree? Discuss this comment.

6) Summarise in just one or two sentences why these paintings and photographs are 'treasures' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.

For an analysis of a famous photograph of the Tasmanian Aborigine Truganini, 'the last of her race', see *STUDIES 2/2008*. (This magazine is sent to every secondary school in Australia and should be in your library. Alternatively, you can see a copy of the unit at [www.npg.gov.au](http://www.npg.gov.au))



- 1) Why did Cook sail into Kealakekua Bay?
- 2) With what event did his visit coincide?
- 3) Why was that event important to the Hawaiians?
- 4) What were the symbols associated with that event?
- 5) How did Cook's ship, and then Cook himself, seem to reflect or be consistent with the event?
- 6) How did each side not have a cultural awareness of each other?
- 7) How would that contribute to tension and conflict?
- 8) Which action of Cook's destroyed the illusion that Cook represented Orono?
- 9) Look at the different representations of Cook's death in the segment. What message does each give about his death?
- 10) All were painted after the event and none was painted by an eyewitness. How does that influence the nature and purpose of the paintings?
- 11) Read the account of his death at: [http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/discover\\_collections/history\\_nation/voyages/death\\_cook/](http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/discover_collections/history_nation/voyages/death_cook/)

This account by ship's surgeon, David Samwell, is regarded as the most complete and reliable one. List the elements that contributed to the cause of Cook's death. For example, you might include the date and time—if Cook had landed earlier or later things might have been different. You might list Cook's character—if he had not been so confident he might have behaved with greater caution. You might list the illness of Clerke—if he had led the party as Cook originally intended then Cook would not have been on the beach at the time of the attack. And so on. From the list that you make, create a statement about the nature of causation in history.

- 12) Do you think we know what caused Cook's death? Explain your views.
- 13) Cook's death is a famous and significant event. What does it tell us about the nature of evidence in history?
- 14) Summarise in just one or two sentences why these journals and illustrations are 'treasures' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.

For more information about Captain Cook go to:

<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/44385/20040920-0000/www.nla.gov.au/collect/treasures/treasures.html>

[www.cptcook.com](http://www.cptcook.com)

[www.abc.net.au/tv/captaincook](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/captaincook)

## Episode 7 – South Sea Islander in London

Image courtesy of National Library of Australia.



A young Tahitian warrior named Omai enlisted as a crew member during Captain James Cook's second circumnavigation of the world. On his arrival in London in 1774 he was welcomed into the highest social circles. England's most sought-after 18th century painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds, painted his portrait in 1774, for which a rare sketch is held in the National Library collection. While Omai eventually returned to the islands, his story inspired a spectacular pantomime at Theatre Royal in Covent Garden. With costumes designed by Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg, the pantomime brought ethnographic realism to a somewhat farcical plot.

- 1) The visit of Omai was a sensation in late 18th century Britain. Why would a visit by a person from another place arouse such interest?
- 2) Can you suggest a comparable visit or visitor that might cause a similar sensation in our society today?
- 3) An idea that was current during the time was that of the 'Noble Savage'—people who were deeply in touch with nature, and who lived rich, fulfilling but perfectly natural lives. How might Omai have seemed to be an example of this idea?
- 4) The 'Noble Savage' idea in fact did not take into account the complexity of the society that Omai had come from. What elements of this complexity can we see from this segment?
- 5) Was Omai exploited or did he exploit the situation? Explain the reasons for your answer.
- 6) Omai can be seen as representing some of the benefits and problems that came with culture contact between two different groups. Explain how Omai might have benefited, and how he might have suffered, from his attempts to live in two worlds. (You can ask the same question of Bungaree in Episode 1.)

7) Summarise in just one or two sentences why this item is a 'treasure' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.

For more on Omai and Captain Cook go to: [www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/omai](http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/omai)

## Episode 8 – First Fleet Sketches

First Fleet captain John Hunter copied the work of young First Fleet midshipman George Raper to produce his famous sketchbook showing life in Botany Bay. Raper's own First Fleet paintings, begun in 1788, show his skill and fine eye for detail in capturing the birds and flowers of New South Wales. They were acquired by the National Library of Australia in 2004 after lying undiscovered and undisturbed for more than 200 years in an English manor. While Hunter, who became the second Governor of NSW, didn't share Raper's talents with a paintbrush, both men shared equally an excitement and enthusiasm for recording what they found in Sydney Cove in 1788.



Image courtesy of National Library of Australia.

- 1) Why would people of the First Fleet have wanted to record the flora and fauna that they saw?
- 2) What impact might the publication of these and other similar sketches have had on people in Britain and elsewhere?
- 3) Can you think of any similar example of something new and totally different that might exist in our society today, or in the near future?

4) The episode stresses that copying the work of another artist was acceptable in this period. How do we view this copying today?

5) Copyright and creativity are valued and protected today. In NSW there is a compulsory study of the idea that people have a right to their own creative works, and that any use of them by others must be acknowledged, or even have the creator's permission. Why? Prepare a list of points that you might make in explaining why protection of a person's creative output is necessary and desirable. Are there any strong arguments that you could put against this idea?

For more information on the idea of creativity and copyright see *Nothing Beats the Real Thing!* in *STUDIES 2/2008*.

(This magazine is sent to every secondary school in Australia and should be in your library. Alternatively, you can see a copy of the unit at: [www.afact.com.au](http://www.afact.com.au))

6) The argument is sometimes made that the earliest European-trained artists who saw the Australian landscape were not able to paint it—they applied their European expectations and traditions and failed to reproduce the Australian reality. Does this 'treasure' support or challenge this idea? Explain your reasons.

7) Summarise in just one or two sentences why this collection is a 'treasure' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.

For more on John Hunter go to: [www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010529b.htm](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010529b.htm)

For more on George Raper go to:

[www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/georgeraper](http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/georgeraper)

[http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_1\\_no\\_1/commentary/first\\_fleet\\_treasure\\_trove](http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_1_no_1/commentary/first_fleet_treasure_trove)

[www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020317b.htm](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020317b.htm)

## Episode 9 – Figure in the Landscape

John Glover revolutionised his art and became one of Australia's finest landscape artists after arriving in Tasmania at the age of 64 in 1831. A good English landscape painter, Glover became an outstanding Australian landscape painter

when he turned his eye to an unfamiliar environment to produce the best works of his career. Glover's private sketchbooks show he was appalled by the atrocities he saw committed against the Aboriginal people and was eager to portray them in the idyllic world he imagined they had once enjoyed. What he saw transformed him from a purely landscape painter into a figure in the landscape—a considerable departure for a man in late career.

1) Glover's work is described as being 'picturesque' in style. Explain what that means.

2) Look at the works shown in the segment. Describe the behaviour of the people in the paintings.



Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia.

- 3) Describe the landscape.
- 4) How do the people fit into the landscape?
- 5) What do you think might be the main message of the paintings to a person at the time?
- 6) Do these paintings give us different messages today? Discuss the reasons for your answer.
- 7) Glover arrived in Tasmania in 1831. The scenes of Aboriginal life he depicted no longer existed in reality—Aboriginal traditional culture had been destroyed by this stage. Can his art be used as history? Explain your ideas.
- 8) Summarise in just one or two sentences why these paintings are 'treasures' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.

For more on John Glover go to:

[www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/countryandlandscape/artist-john\\_glover.html](http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/countryandlandscape/artist-john_glover.html)

[www.johnglover.com.au/aboutjohnglover.htm](http://www.johnglover.com.au/aboutjohnglover.htm)

[www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010416b.htm](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010416b.htm)

[www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/2004/EX04%20John%20Glover.htm](http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/2004/EX04%20John%20Glover.htm)

[www.tmag.tas.gov.au/Glover2003/EducationKit/JGtasaborigines.htm](http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/Glover2003/EducationKit/JGtasaborigines.htm)

[www.ngv.vic.gov.au/glover/glover.html](http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/glover/glover.html)

## Episode 10 – John Olsen’s Opera House Mural

John Olsen’s visual diary documents his progress on the biggest commission of his career, the Sydney Opera House mural. Spanning 10 years from 1972, Olsen’s diary follows the evolution of his famous mural, which was inspired by Kenneth Slessor’s epic poem *Five Bells*, a tribute to a friend who drowned in Sydney Harbour. Slessor’s own 1937 notebook sits alongside Olsen’s diary, detailing the gradual process of constructing an epic poem. Olsen guides Churcher through the creation of his mural, and the marine world of Sydney Harbour, to reveal another treasure—a hidden corner of the painting rarely seen by the public.

Photo by Ross Coffey, © Film Australia



- 1) Make a list of descriptive words that reflect how you as a class respond to the Olsen painting.
- 2) Would you say that the painting tells a story, or is its nature more of an emotional description?
- 3) Do you think that understanding the context of the painting is essential to understanding its meaning? Explain your views.
- 4) Read *Five Bells*. You can find a copy of it at: <http://users.tpg.com.au/dandsc/op/op42.htm> You can read a discussion about the meaning and style of the poem at: [www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2008/2240169.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2008/2240169.htm)

Identify any particular phrases or lines that you can see reflected in the painting.

- 5) Imagine that you have been asked to interpret a favourite book, poem or song into a painting. Outline or describe what you might include in your painting.
- 6) Summarise in just one or two sentences why the manuscript and visual diary are 'treasures' in our knowledge and understanding of aspects of Australian history.

For more on John Olsen and *Five Bells* and *Salute to Five Bells* go to:

[http://sunday.ninemsn.com.au/sunday/art\\_profiles/article\\_1090.asp](http://sunday.ninemsn.com.au/sunday/art_profiles/article_1090.asp)

<http://collection.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/results.do?view=detail&images=yes&db=object&id=29837>

[www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/10/12/1097406558854.html?from=storyrhs](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/10/12/1097406558854.html?from=storyrhs)

## Further information

National Library National Treasures website:

<http://nationaltreasures.nla.gov.au/%3E/Treasures>



***Hidden Treasures - Inside the National Library of Australia***

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