



Indicative A response

Personal response to film — analysis and review

Year 9

English

Section 1. Analysis and research

Background

This screenplay was adapted from a book called *“Follow the Rabbit-proof Fence”* and was written by *Doris Pilkington Garimara*.

The film director is *Philip Noyce* and the film was produced in the year 2002.

Who is the target audience? *Contemporary audiences, both children and adults*

Structure and form

What is the significance of the film's title? *Fence to keep out bad animals; represents white people's presence in the bush; guided the girls back to their home.*

What special effect did the director use to introduce the film? *Subtle Indigenous voice and music; narration with subtitles (Aboriginal dialect); black and white film.*

Give a reason for the film starting the way it did. *It sets the scene and makes the audience listen carefully as it is not a standard opening to a present-day film. I think Noyce wanted to cast people back to another time in the past ... in the eyes of ...*

Name five main characters in the film.

Molly, Daisy, Gracie, Mr Neville and Moodoo.

What prior knowledge does the viewer need to bring to this film to understand it? *Very little prior knowledge is required. By the end of the film, the plot and messages are clear.*

What scene represents a climax, or high point, in the film? *Children meeting up with their mother after women's business meeting in the dark.*

Why do you consider it a climax? *Because this is the part that the audience was hoping for, particularly after Gracie did not make it back to her mother.*

The director finished the film in a particular manner. What does the ending suggest to you?

The flash forward to the storytellers in present day was very profound and moving. It implies hope, they survived, there is a future and time can heal. The use of imagery like the eagle flying, Indigenous music playing and translation of conversations between two elders all move the audience. This connected with modern audiences in a time they live.

What questions do you still have about the film that it did not answer? *What is happening to all the other children and their families now? How can present-day Australia heal and support these families now?*

Camera effects

Describe or identify a special sound or music piece that complemented the film's plot (i.e. enhanced or heightened tension, challenged the viewer, suggested mystery or magic).

Colour of the landscapes, darkness and use of fire connect with the soul, haunting music and didgeridoo, clap stick and singing all enhanced the mood. The eagle flying overhead twice symbolised a watchful eye and totem for the girls. It was cleverly reintroduced to the story in the conclusion.

Mood

Identify two examples where the film uses colour or a play on light or dark to suggest a mood or tone of a scene.

The second-last scene where the girls were nearly home and there was women's business going on under dark light and shadows representing mystery, magic or power. The fifth scene depicting the three girls hiding from the tracker and policeman at one of the households in the bush. They hid in a shrub, with only the whites of their eyes peering out and reflecting the moonbeams, highlighting tension.

Theme

What is the key theme or message of the film? *Despite their daily struggles, the girls meet one challenge after another to escape from the police, survive and finally find their mothers.*

What visual methods (e.g. camera shots, locations) did the director use to communicate this theme?

The view of the eagle as it flew overhead and looked down across the landscape as the girls walked across the harsh surface.

How does this film resolve its central issue? *It does not necessarily resolve the issues. Rather, it communicates the issues, as two girls were reunited with their mothers, one was not. So through this clever situation, it highlighted that all was not resolved.*

Does the film leave any loose ends at the conclusion of the film? ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

If yes, what does it suggest to the viewer? If no, why not? *The distress caused by the laws of the time obviously had an enormous impact upon the families and victims. There is hope and new direction represented through the final scene where the families of the girls are talking and walking in the bush.*

Characterisation

Did the film represent the historic context effectively? ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

Identify one way this was communicated. *I can't speak from personal experience but it must have been devastating for all the children who were removed from their families. Short term, it would cause trauma and stress; long term, I cannot easily say what the effects could be. Upon listening to the oral histories from victims of the removal, it is clear these feelings are deep and profound, and may never heal.*

Which character do you feel most sympathy for? *Gracie*

Why? *She was never reunited with her mother or family.*

Circle three words that strongly represent a major theme during the film.

☒ courage ☐ survival ☐ perseverance ☒ hope ☐ love ☒ injustice ☐ hate ☐ fear

Characterisation (continued)

Does the film arouse in the audience a sense of sympathy towards Mr Neville? If yes, how is it achieved? If no, why not?

In some ways, yes I think it shows sympathy towards Mr Neville. He was not all bad, but rather a person responsible for the care and delivery of his duties to save Indigenous children. This was subtly disclosed as the film progressed.

Do you think the tracker knew the girls were trying to outsmart him? ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

Justify your response: *There were a few times where his smile or expression gave him away. I think he wanted the girls to succeed in their trip and all the signs along the trail hinted to him that the girl was clever and a survivor. Something, perhaps, his daughter was not.*

Media representations

If what happened to Molly and her friends happened to you and your family now, and the local media found out, how would the public respond?

I think "Today Tonight" and all the other TV stations would feature the situation nationally. Politicians would be brought in and the family would be back to normal the next day. The people responsible for this would be taken to court and most probably jailed.

Explore and identify some key Indigenous filming protocols that the film director would have used by examining the Australian Film Commission's protocol statements: <www.afc.gov.au>.

List two special protocols that you were not aware of prior to this assessment.

- 1. Dealing with women's business in the film was handled following the protocols to "maintain the secrecy of Indigenous knowledge and other cultural practices".*
- 2. Representations of deceased people — some of the 2002 film's Indigenous actors may have since passed away, so this consideration is very important. When filming in the national parks, Indigenous traditional owners were consulted on uses of imagery so that the cultural values of the park were maintained and promoted. This was acknowledged in the credits at the end.*

What evidence or examples of protocols can you see being used in the film?

End scene where a women's business gathering was taking place. It was darkened and hidden by moving images, darkness and smoke.

Rate how successful you think the director was in communicating the theme to a modern audience.

☒ Highly successful ☐ Successful ☐ Partially successful

Many old primary sources referred to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples with words like "half-caste". Why do you think using these terms today is inappropriate?

These terms disrespects their cultures and does not reflect social justice and equity standards in our communities.

☒ Checked by partner

Section 2. Personal response review

Rabbit-Proof Fence is set in the 1930s in Western Australia and is an adventure and history lesson in one. The 2002 film is an adaptation of the novel "Follow the Rabbit-proof Fence" written by Doris Pilkington Garimara. The film focuses on the three main characters — Molly, Daisy and Gracie (three Aboriginal girls, called "half-castes" at the time) played by Everlyn Sampi, Tianna Sansbury and Laura Monaghan. It was directed by Phillip Noyce.

The film tells of the girl's struggle being separated from their family through a government decision that they would be retrained as servants for white people. They follow a 1500 kilometre wire fence, put up to stop rabbits, as the only means to guide them in the right direction to meet up with their mother at Jigalong. This fence symbolises to me the "white mans'" barrier placed in the landscape to control nature. Ironically the girls use this fence to help them escape.

Another key character is Mr Neville who is the sinister, but at times, well intended white man responsible for recapturing and returning the three girls. While the story is about Indigenous kids, it is also a story about any kid regardless of colour — who can relate to being lost, separated or fighting for what is fair. This theme is reflected today across our own and other international settings. This makes the film an important social record of a part of our Australian history. The film's theme of courage, fairness, love, survival and humanity is cleverly woven into the story and makes it easy for Twenty-first Century audiences to relate to.

The director, Phillip Noyce, manipulates images, creatively frames scenes and uses sound to grab audiences' attention and develop the characters' moods. The camera work and musical scores build the emotional moods for the viewer by showing the vast barren Australian landscape, the isolation, the relentless heat, azure blue skies and shadows of night. The film cleverly avoids making a political statement about the government of the time and their decision to control or "save" "half-caste" Aboriginal children.

The climax of the film for me was when one girl was captured and the others could only watch from behind the bush as she screamed with despair.

The ending is as so real and heart-rending as the audience meets the real Molly and Daisy as they are today. This makes a huge wave of emotion flow through your heart and transforms the film from fiction into something that is real, true and key to relating things of the past to present-day audiences.

My personal view on the Stolen Generation is one of sadness and regret. The film delivers a very powerful message about the situation in a way that is not judgmental. I do feel that for non-Indigenous generations who were directly a "silent" witness to this enforced law it would have been difficult to accept. Now that we know the facts and background to these well-intended yet draconian laws, and have social justice awareness, we can see how wrong this decision was. I am relieved that the Australian Government can now actually make an apology for a wrong decision of the past and acknowledge decisions were not fair and right and start rebuilding respect, trust and a healthier nation.

Section 3. Evaluation and reflection

Comparing different viewpoints and perspectives

*Rabbit-proof fence
full of holes*

*Apology to Australia's Indigenous
peoples*

Similarities

Acknowledgement that there was a law separating children from families

Key differences

<i>Not true — This policy saved many children from infanticide. Grossly misleading assertions regarding Aboriginal policy Refutes forcible removal.</i>	Stolen Generation a truth or untruth?	<i>True — Acknowledges that any forced removal from a family unit is wrong. Acknowledges no matter what the circumstances the separation laws had long-term impacts on families.</i>
<i>Mr Neville and all the people who protected the half-caste children.</i>	Who is the victim?	<i>Indigenous families and children, both then and now. Not only through separation laws but also through abuse and ethnic injustices.</i>
<i>Government of the day and all who enforced the laws and cared for the children.</i>	Who should be recognised?	<i>Indigenous families and Australian people.</i>
<i>There was a problem, laws fixed the problem and saved many half-caste children.</i>	View towards Indigenous children and their families	<i>Mend poor decisions of the past and build a better future for the Stolen Generation families.</i>

Major similarities

Major differences

There was a law, a solution delivered by government.

Whether it was right, fair or wrong.

Your conclusion

Reason 1

*Primary sources and evidence clearly indicate there was widespread removal of "half-caste" Aboriginal children from their families.
I feel the terms used in old government documents are very racist and know now what appropriate terminologies to use.*

Reason 2

Through the "Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples" and acknowledgement of the negative impact this law had on victims is helping a healing process. For too long past governments have not formally recognised the problem nor taken some responsibility for it.

Your overall conclusion

"Rabbit-proof Fence" is a very powerful film. It communicates one of many social injustice issues in a tasteful, nonjudgmental way without having to point a finger. I believe this from reading the "Bringing them Home" report, researching Stolen Generation documents and listening to oral histories. Some people of the time, like the missionaries, did help and provide for many displaced children, but the government's actions and policies were very clear — separate and cleanse. I believe it was the wrong law, wrong approach and wrong justifications. In Peter Howson and Des Moore's article they are very defensive of past government actions and laws and fail to see the issue's bigger picture. I feel the only way forward now is for all of Australians to support the victims of the Stolen Generation and make their future better.

Reflection sheet

Name *Student A*

My *Rabbit-proof Fence* ideas and responses.

<p>What would you have done in Molly, Gracie or Daisy's situation?</p> <p><i>I would not have left the safety of the compound. I could only survive two days in the bush in the way these girls had to. It is amazing they actually travelled that far almost unaided. Perhaps I would have waited till I was placed in a household and when the time and place was right I would try to meet one of my relatives close by.</i></p>	<p>Identify and list three to five words you used in the review or analysis to express your point of view.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>relieved</i> <i>humanity</i> <i>draconian</i>
<p>Has your point of view changed since writing your analysis and review? Briefly explain your response.</p> <p><i>Yes it did. As I read the social justice records and the personal accounts through oral histories of the victims all other words and opinions did not matter. I first thought people were doing their job to save poor kids but now I see the big picture.</i></p>	<p>List two research sources you previewed that provided a new perspective or idea towards the social justice issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Millicent's story. Primary source — Confidential submission 640, South Australia: WA woman removed in 1949.</i> <i>Stories from the families of the Stolen Generation — oral history — Primary source: ABC — mission voices.</i>
<p>Explain in a few sentences your opinion about how well this film brought the issue of the Stolen Generation to life for the present-day audience? (Comment on the cultural representation of artefacts, music, language choices, selective use of images and interactions, etc.)</p> <p><i>The introduction and closing of the film was very moving as it celebrated Aboriginal peoples' uniqueness and cultures through didgeridoo, and clap stick sounds, melodic voices, speaking in a language group's own language, all set on a backdrop of the red sands and blue-green sky and vegetation.</i></p> <p>What questions do you still have about the Film or consequences of the issues represented in the film?</p> <p><i>What has happened to their families — how are they now?</i></p> <p><i>How do the children feel about their grandparents' experiences?</i></p> <p><i>How do they deal with this situation of lost links today, as a family and in communities?</i></p>	