


# SLEEPING DOGS



This New Zealand Film Study Guide was written by Cynthia Thomas, who has 20 years' teaching experience. It has been designed as a starting point for teachers who wish to put together a unit based on Sleeping Dogs.

There are currently five New Zealand Film Study Guides available - An Angel At My Table, Forgotten Silver, Goodbye Pork Pie, Ngati, Sleeping Dogs. More titles are planned for 2003.

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study guide five



**NEW ZEALAND FILM**

**COMMISSION**

**TE TUMU WHAKAATA TAONGA**



**NEW ZEALAND FILM STUDY GUIDE**

The following are activities based on the achievement objectives presented in the Ministry of Education document, "English in the New Zealand Curriculum".

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WRITTEN LANGUAGE

**WRITING poetic**

- > Write three school reports – for Smith, Jespersen and Bullen, clearly reflecting what you see as their major personality traits.
- > Write a series of diary entries as Smith (or another major character).
- > After brainstorming all the possibilities as a class, write an alternative ending to the film. Then read C. K. Stead's two endings to Smith's Dream.
- > Which ending do you prefer? Why?
- > As Smith, write a letter that you would have liked given to your children in the future.
- > Write a fuller description of an event in the film which is referred to only briefly eg the death of Elsie.

**WRITING expressive**

- RESPONSE**  
Write down your feelings in response to the following statements or questions. You may refer to both the film and your own experiences.
- > Exercising your vote is important, so people should be sure to take the opportunity to vote.
  - > What has the title to do with the content of the film?
  - > New Zealand could never be like the New Zealand in this film.
  - > Imagine that it could happen. A dictator is in power in New Zealand. How would you respond? How do you think others might respond?
  - > Smith only got involved with the rebels at the motel because of sexual jealousy.
  - > Is the storyline far-fetched, convincing or somewhere inbetween? Why?
  - > The sex scene in this film was unnecessary. Why? / Why not?
  - > The scene in which Smith meets up with his wife in the countryside is unnecessary. Why? / Why not?
  - > Willoughby is a strangely appealing character..

**WRITING transactional**

- Write a review of the film for a magazine.
- > Write two letters to the editor, one supporting and one opposing the Volkner regime.
  - > Write a newspaper article based on the information you get from the television news item Smith sees at the beginning of the film, or about the attack at the motel, or about Smith's final stand.
  - > Design and write the front page of a newspaper (after Smith has been labeled a revolutionary).
  - > Design a leaflet promoting the Volkner regime, for a letterbox drop, or a leaflet promoting the revolutionary cause, for a (secret) letterbox drop.
  - > Write an entry for a history book or encyclopaedia about this era in New Zealand.
  - > Design a tourist brochure for Buck's Motel, or the Coromandel.

Research one of the following topics (all related to the film). Try using the KWL format.

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WHAT I KNOW	WHAT I WANT TO KNOW	WHAT I LEARNED

**TOPICS**  
C. K. Stead • The Vietnam War (American involvement) • 1951 Waterfront Dispute • Communism • 1981 Springbok Tour • The Rise of Hitler • Film Reviews – Sleeping Dogs • History of New Zealand Film

CORAL LANGUAGE

These texts may be useful :  
Cairns, B. & Martin, H. Shadows on the Wall – A Study of Seven NZ Feature Films, Longman Paul, Auckland 1994. Horrocks, R. On Film II, Heinemann, Auckland 1980. Partridge, D. & Huges, P. Flicks – Studying Film as Text, OUP, Australia 1992.

**PERSONAL reading**

Read and review one or more of the following texts, or texts with a theme similar to Sleeping Dogs.  
Novel by C. K. Stead – Smith's Dream; Novel by John Mulgan – Man Alone; Play by Craig Harrison – Tomorrow Will Be A Lovely Day.  
  
Close Reading - See Viewing tasks.

**SPEAKING / LISTENING interpersonal**

- CONTINUUM**  
As your teacher calls out the following statements, physically place yourself on a continuum, from strongly disagree, through neutral, to strongly agree. For each statement, pair up with someone who disagrees with your stand. Discuss your viewpoint with that person.
- STATEMENTS**
- The sort of things shown in Sleeping Dogs could never happen in New Zealand.
  - if it's worth believing in, it's worth fighting for
  - the best actor in this film was the New Zealand landscape
  - Sleeping Dogs is an effective film
  - we can trust our governments in New Zealand
  - from what we know about Smith, Gloria was sensible to leave him
  - Smith is a sympathetic character
  - Smith is a wishy-washy character who thinks that the way to solves a problem is to run away from it
  - I liked the way the film ended
  - this film would be worth a re-make

Brainstorm what makes this film especially New Zealand. In groups, make a list of the colloquialisms you remember from the film. Use this to write a colloquial summary of the film, then present it to the class.

In groups, on a large sheet of paper draw around a group member to create an outline of Smith (or another major character). Inside the body, brainstorm and write down all the words you can think of to describe his character / personality (eg uninvolved, individual, ineffectual, brave etc). Inside and around the head area, brainstorm and write down all the words you can think of to describe his feelings (eg afraid, resentful, disillusioned etc). Outside the body, brainstorm and write down all the external influences on Smith (eg political – dictatorship, Cousins's plot, Gloria's betrayal etc). Pin your sheet to the wall for others to read and comment on.

**SPEAKING / LISTENING using Text**

In pairs or small groups, go to the novel on which the film was based (C.K. Stead's Smith's Dream). Based on your viewing of the film, find a section you particularly like and prepare a reading and explanation for the class.

VISUAL LANGUAGE

Read your alternative ending to the class. In pairs, script an interview with a main character exploring their motivation, then present it.

**PRESENTING**

- > Design a poster advertising the film.
- > At one point in the film we see a poster of a political slogan – Together! It's getting better. Design your own series of political posters, including slogans, for both the Volkner regime and the revolutionary group.

**SEQUENCING ACTIVITY**  
The following description of a promotional preview of the film is out of order. Put it in the order you think most effective. Storyboard your own preview for Sleeping Dogs.

- The man with the dog is back on screen, full-face and taut: I'm nothing to do with any bloody revolution. I won't kill people. (a)
- The camera cuts to special police wading into a riot crowd with batons. And how much does it take, says that same voice-over, before a man says, No? (b)
- From New Zealand's Aardvark Films, a major motion picture – Sleeping Dogs, intones that same gut-bucket voice. What happens when sleeping dogs are woken up? (c)
- A man and his dog are playing in evening sunshine on a beach. What happens, asks a voice sunk slow and deep with portent, when an ordinary man is pushed to his limit? (d)
- Nobody's asking you to, says the guerrilla. Just press the button. Explosions. Diving Sky Hawks. The silhouette of ponga fronds against the red fireballs of detonating rockets. (e)  
Answers : d,b,a,e,c

- > Design a collage representing one or more important ideas in the film.
- > Design a board game or card game based on significant events in Sleeping Dogs.
- > Design a memorial monument for the freedom fighters.
- > Design a wanted poster for an appropriate character.

**VIEWING (and Close Reading)**

Following teacher instructions, storyboard your favourite scene.

**READING FILM**  
View the motel massacre sequence (from the CU shot of Smith with his head in his hands after Willoughby and Mary leave the room, to the shot of Smith with his hands over his ears, after the massacre (approximately 3 m 20s), and answer the following questions.

- > How does the film maker show Smith's jealousy?
- > What types of shot does the film maker use to show that Smith is weighing up whether to help the rebels?
- > How does the film maker use the following to create suspense in the lead up to Smith setting off the alarm?
- > Type of Shot. Shot Duration. Sound. Editing.
- > What is the effect of having Smith sound the alarm, then stop? Why do you think Smith does that?
- > How does the film maker use the following to intensify the action as the attack begins?
- > Type of Shot. Shot Duration. Sound. Editing.
- > Is this an effective sequence? Why / why not?

Brainstorm important incidents in the film, then plot them on a plot graph showing the level of intensity / excitement / importance.

**SEQUENCING – Jigsaw Groups**  
Groups choose one setting each (eg Smith's home, on the island, capture - prison, escape – on the streets / at the in-laws, Rotorua, Coromandel) and make a list of important events that take place in their setting. New groups are then formed, with at least one member of each previous group as members. Individuals then tutor the rest of the group about their original topic.

**SEQUENCING – Plot**  
Students put plot items in order (or write their own series of incidents, which others then order) then put them in a flow diagram.

- eg
- Smith leaves home because of Gloria's betrayal.
  - Smith seeks refuge of Gut Island, while a dictatorship is declared.
  - Smith is arrested as part of the resistance.
  - Smith escapes and becomes caretaker at a Rotorua motel, a safe house.
  - Smith is forced to make a choice and helps in the massacre of American troops at the motel.
  - Smith spends time with Gloria, now part of the resistance.
  - Smith is forced to go on the run with Bullen.
  - Smith and Bullen think they've outrun their pursuers.
  - Bullen dies.
  - Jespersen shoots Smith.

IN GROUPS, COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING 3 LEVEL GUIDE.  
Level 1 : Reading On The Lines  
Tick the statements which focus on what the film maker shows in this film. When you've made your decisions, discuss your reasons with your group. Smith leaves home because Gloria has been having an affair.

- Smith is in a hurry because he's got an appointment to keep.
- Smith is contented on the island.
- Smith helps the rebels.
- Jespersen shoots Smith because he refuses to obey authority.

Level 2 : Reading Between The Lines  
Tick statements which you think mean what the film maker meant in this film.

- Discuss your choices with your group and be prepared to justify them.
- Smith is unhappy to be leaving his children.
- Smith doesn't care about what happens to his family.
- At the motel, Smith only helps the rebels because he's jealous.
- Smith is both cowardly and brave.
- Smith is really the winner in the end.

Level 3 : Reading Beyond The Lines  
Tick the statements which you think the film maker would support. Be ready to give your reasons when you discuss your choices.

- Running away from your problems is not a solution.
- It is important to stand up for what you believe – if you're not against it, then you're in favour of it.
- Power can corrupt.
- It is important to guard democratic freedoms – a passive people can be easily controlled by a manipulative government.
- No man is an island – it is impossible to fully escape the society of which one is a part.
- People are changed by their experiences.
- Fear is an effective form of control.
- The power of propaganda is immense – freedom of the press is very important.
- Violence breeds violence.