

New Zealand Film Study Guide

The following activities are based on the achievement objectives in the New Zealand English curriculum. They may provide a starting point for teachers wishing to design a unit based on the film.

Poetic Writing

- 1 Write two poems. Before viewing the film, brainstorm a list of words on the theme of family then use them to write a poem. Do the same after watching the film and compare.
- 2 Write an alternative ending for the film.
- 3 Write a description of the family two years on, or write a diary entry by Soul, two years on.
- 4 Write a story explaining why Nanna Maria and her children are estranged.
- 5 Write the letter (to be read after her death) you think Nanna Maria might have left her family.
- 6 Write what you think might have been the last school reports received by Soul and Charls, clearly showing their personalities.
- 7 Write a children's story about a feast, concentrating on ideas about the importance of family and community.

Expressive Writing

- 1 Have students keep a journal recording their personal response to the film at various points in its progression.
- 2 Have students write responses to statements/questions/starters.

Sample statements/questions/starters:

- I learned something from watching this film.
- I was amazed when/that...
- What is your response to the "door" custom – in Fiji after a death you shut the door for three days or the evil spirits will know how to get into the house? Why do Nanna Maria's children think the house is cursed? Why does Soul think the house is cursed? What does Soul mean when he says, 'Doors open. You guys better find something else to talk about'? Can you be imprisoned by customs?
- Nanna Maria says that her children wanted her to 'Curl up somewhere like an old woman. Then you could sell the house'. Do you think this is true? How do we treat our elders? What do you think of that?
- Formal education is not the only way of learning – 'How they gonna learn anything if they go to school all the time?' (Nanna Maria).
- What are some of the customs of your own culture?
- In the film Cat criticises Percy's parenting. What do you think makes a good parent? Why?
- Is there one pivotal scene in this film? Explain.

- What do you think are the most touching scenes in the film? Why?
- Which scenes do you think are the most exciting? Why?
- Explain this film's censor's rating.
- Explain Soul's number plate, "Raskil".
- If the letterbox could talk, what would it say? Whose voice would you use to say it?
- What do you think makes a home a home?
- This film is visually impressive. Discuss.
- Choose one word you think describes this film (eg charming, electrifying, nostalgic, satisfying, thought-provoking) and explain why you have chosen this word.
- The ending of this film is satisfying. Discuss.
- What do you think music adds to this film?
- Are the names of any of the characters related to their personalities?
- When Nanna Maria chooses Soul she says, 'Soul you're my number two With you in the house it will always be alive'. What do you think she means? Do you agree? If not, who would you have chosen as Number 2, and why?
- Do you think we should all try to be the same? Why/why not?
- Does your own family have particular traditions and set relationships?
- What are your hopes and dreams for your own family?

Transactional Writing

- 1 In groups of four, take the roles of a police officer and the three drivers involved in the accident. Have the police officer take the statements of those involved.
 - 2 Research and write an encyclopaedia entry about Auckland's volcanoes.
 - 3 Research and write a leaflet for visitors about Fijian customs or food.
 - 4 Research and write a tourist brochure for Fiji or Mt Roskill or Mt Doom.
 - 5 Imagine that the grandchildren had to write a letter of application to be Number 2. Write those letters.
 - 6 As a class, brainstorm what you think are important ideas presented in this film, then write an essay about the film's themes.
- 7 In pairs, write the will you think Nanna Maria instructed Sukhi Naidu to write.
 - 8 Precis/Paraphrase/Summarise – write a 1 minute plot summary to be read aloud at a school assembly to promote the lunchtime showing of this film. Try reducing your plot summary to 30 seconds, then 20, then 10.
 - 9 After studying the language of reviews, write a review of this film for a teenage magazine.
 - 10 Write a series of character cards describing aspects of a character's personality. Swap them with someone else and practise identifying the character based on the description.
 - 11 Write down some questions that you would like to ask the director of this film. Explain why each of your questions is important.
 - 12 Decide on a certain number of important plot/story points then write them in a flow diagram. Change one event in the diagram, then rewrite it after that point.

Scaffold the process, possibly by:

- * brainstorming ideas.
- * giving topic sentences.
- * having students decide on supporting examples and quotes in pairs or groups.

Example – ideas, topic sentences, examples and quotes.

Ideas	Topic Sentences	Examples	Quotes
Family is important.	This film highlights the idea of the importance of family.	Nanna Maria wants to have a big feast at which she will name her successor, in order to reunite her family.	'Today I want a feast'. 'At the end of the day I will name my successor'.
Difference should be celebrated.	Additionally, we are presented with the idea that we should accept and celebrate difference.	Nanna Maria remembers the diverse extended Fijian family of her childhood, and the life within it, with love, and despairs at the state of her present family's relationships. She thinks that every house, every family, needs different people to do different things, and that everybody is important.	'This place is as boring as hell. Before there used to be laughing and singing and swearing and fighting, there used to be big fights all the time. There is none of that anymore'. 'Look at all that life'.
We need to show compassion for one another.	Also presented in the film is the idea that if family relationships are to develop positively we need to be compassionate towards each other.	Mus and Soul despair at how they can possibly please their grandmother.	Father Francis offers the advice, 'all you can do is show compassion to one another. That's all you can do'.

- 13 Clines – Give students two “extreme” words related to the film. Students then (possibly with the help of each other, a dictionary or a thesaurus) fill in the middle with words that fit on a continuum between these poles, being prepared to justify their choices.

Sample Words:

colourful *dull*
alienated *integrated*
submissive *aggressive*
passionate *passionless*

- 14 Use the KWL format to quickly research a topic related to the film.

What I Know	What I Want To Know	What I Learned

Possible Topics – Toa Fraser, Philippa Campbell, Lydia Livingstone, Tim White, Ruby Dee, Tuva Novotny, Taungaroa Emilie (or any of the actors), Mt Roskill, Fijian customs, kava, asthma.

Speaking and Listening/ Interpersonal and Using Text

- 1 In groups, after discussion, come to a consensus and assign each of the following adjectives to one or more characters. Justify your choices to another group.

Adjective List:

hardworking, long-suffering, stubborn, strong, weak, hurt, humorous, lively, introverted, quiet, noisy, likeable, strict, unyielding, judgemental, excitable, loving, dutiful, rebellious, surly, happy, thoughtful, intelligent, unforgiving, forgiving, optimistic, pessimistic, traditional, fun-loving, extroverted, sad, angry, helpful, argumentative, tactful.

- 2 In pairs, write out quiz cards using the 5 w’s + h (who, when, why, what, where and how) then quiz another couple. Eg:

Who is the most openly disapproving of Nanna Maria’s children?

When did Nanna Maria move to New Zealand?

What does Hibiscus borrow Tyson’s car to go and buy?

Where is the film set?

How does Soul show that he is deserving of becoming Number 2?

- 3 In pairs, write and present a tourist driver’s spiel about your local area.
- 4 In pairs, write down what you remember of Soul’s speech. Rewrite it as if he’d been given time to think and plan it.
- 5 Write the short speech you might give to thank a friend for being a friend, or to thank a family member or someone special for being there.
- 6 In pairs or groups, script and present an interview with a character, exploring their motivation.
- 7 Write down quotes on separate cards. Swap them with someone else and practise identifying the character who said it, what was happening at the time, and what happened before and after the words were uttered.
- 8 Before watching the film listen as your teacher plays you part of the soundtrack. Write a piece based on the feeling you get from the music.
- 9 As one of the film’s characters, write and present a monologue in which you give your views on life, your views/emotions about things that happened to you and the people in your life and how you changed or learned something during the course of the film.

10 Continuum

Teacher reads out a series of statements one by one. Students physically place themselves on a continuum from strongly agree through neutral to strongly disagree, then discuss viewpoints.

- Family is important to our sense of identity.
- I felt emotional at times during this film
- Every family has a spirit.
- Families are the most important influence on teenagers.
- The scene when was the best part of this film.
- The appeal of this film is universal.
- I would strongly recommend this film.

11 Inside-Outside Circles

Students stand in two circles facing each other. Teacher poses a question or makes a statement. Students discuss with their partner for a set time (eg 1 minute), then rotate to a new partner for the next question.

Sample Questions:

- What was your favourite part of the film?
- How did the film start, and what did you think of the start of the film?
- How did the film end, and what did you think of the end of the film?
- Who was your favourite character? Why?
- What did you think were the most exciting parts of the film?
- What did you think were the most moving parts of the film?
- What were you feeling when the film ended?

12 Jeopardy

Teacher gives an answer, then students (individually or in pairs or groups) write the question.

Sample Answers:

kava, Mari, Crispy, Italy, England, Raskil, family spirit.

13 Picture Dictation

Have students draw in a series of frames as the teacher reads about some aspect of the film for example, a story summary. Students then attempt to “read” their picture summary to a partner.

14 Panel

Have students write “viewer” questions for major characters or someone involved in making the film. Decide on a show host and a panel. Hold a panel discussion based on the questions.

15 Collocation Exercise

Have students group words (each written on a slip of paper), then justify their groupings.

Sample Words:

director, producer, cinematographer, writer, duty, spirit, family, passion, Mt Roskill, Fiji, Asia New Zealand, passionate, loveable, determined demanding.

16 Consensus – Give a list of statements, then have individual students arrange them in order of importance. Students form groups and try to come to a consensus. Class tries to come to a consensus.

Sample Statements:

- The most important thing in a good film is the script.
- The most important thing in a good film is the director.
- The most important thing in a good film is the acting.
- The most important thing in a good film is the cinematographer.
- The most important things in a good film are the special effects.

17 Response Grid – Group students. Give each group member a colour. Call out a grid reference and a colour, eg “blue B2”. Student responds to their group according to the grid. Example

	A	B	C	D
1	Sound effect why were you used?	Film shot, why were you used?	Theme, explain yourself	Setting, explain your relevance.
2	Ruby Dee, why did you accept this role?	Toa Fraser, why did you make this film?	Minor character, why are you relevant?	Number Two, why are you the title?
3	Exciting scene, what are you about?	Opening, what do you teach the viewer?	Closing scene, why are you effective?	Why are you a scene that could have been left out?
4	Word, passionate, are you relevant?	Word, moving, are you relevant?	Word, determined, are you relevant?	Word, uplifting, are you relevant?

18 Anonymous Letterbox – What ideas did this film highlight for you? Students scribble answers to a question such as this on slips of paper which are boxed and pulled out to be discussed (in pairs, groups, or as a class).

19 Three Level Guide – Use three level guides to promote discussion and comprehension. In groups, students tick statements they believe to be true, discussing to prepare a justification for their choices.

Example:

Reading on the Lines

Tick the statements which show what the film maker shows in this film. Be ready to give your reasons.

- Family is important to Nanna Maria.
- Crispy becomes a part of the family.
- The door is nailed shut because it is broken.
- Tyson doesn't like his family.
- Each member of this family is an individual.

Reading Between the Lines

Tick statements which you think mean what the film maker meant in this film. Be ready to give your reasons.

- English Maria enjoys becoming part of the family.
- People should follow customs religiously.
- It is natural that families love and hate and fight.
- People are entitled to be individuals.
- Leaders have special qualities.

Reading Beyond the Lines

Tick the statements which you think the film maker would support. Be prepared to give your reasons.

- By being judgemental people can improve their family relationships.
- Although customs are an important part of culture, they shouldn't be followed without question.
- It is important to live life to the full.
- New Zealand is a multi-cultural society.
- Difference/Individuality should be celebrated

Presenting

- 1 Design a family tree and place the following characters in it: Grandfather Joseph, Nanna Maria, John, Cat, Percy, Michael, Erasmus (Mus), Tyson, Hibiscus, Charlene, Soul, Nia, Moses.
- 2 Design your own family tree.
- 3 Storyboard a promotional preview for “Number Two”.
- 4 After studying static images
 - Design a static image explaining the Fijian “door” custom, with the door as its focal point.
 - Design a static image showing an important idea in the film, with the letterbox as its focal point.
 - Design a poster advertising the film.
 - Design a new, thematically suitable letterbox for Number 2.
 - Design the ideal letterbox for your own home.
 - Design a suitable invitation to the feast.
 - Design a suitable menu for the feast.
 - Design a suitable invitation and menu to your own ideal party.
 - Design a symbol for one of the characters. Be prepared to explain it.
 - Design two different “doodles” as two different characters, then see if others can identify which characters drew them.
 - Design a static image using only two or three colours, any number of shapes or symbols, and one of the following quotes to highlight an important idea in the film. On the back, write why you have chosen the quote, colours and shapes that you have, and explain what and why you would have included in your image had you been given greater choice.
Possible Quotes
 - ‘Today I want a feast.’
 - ‘You open that door some Fiji spirits’ll come in the night and bite your balls off.’
 - ‘How they gonna learn anything if they go to school all the time.’
 - ‘all you can do is show compassion to one another.’
 - ‘Look at all that life.’

Viewing

- 1 Re-watch a scene that you think is the most touching eg the lipstick scene. Storyboard the scene according to teacher instruction. Explain why you think the scene is touching.
- 2 Before viewing the film, watch the opening sequence without the sound. Discuss what is happening and what would be appropriate sound. Watch the sequence with the sound. Discuss what sound adds to the film.
- 3 Re-watch the opening sequences of the film. Brainstorm what things give the film its cultural flavour.
- 4 View a sequence then discuss the design and its importance to your understanding of the film.
- 5 Choose a shot and freeze it. Explain what and how information is conveyed.
- 6 Prediction – stop the film at pre-chosen points. Predict what you think will happen next. Justify.
- 7 Closing sequence – re-watch the end of the film. Discuss what makes the ending satisfying.
- 8 Jigsaw Film Reading – Divide students into “expert” groups. All students record information relevant to their topic as they watch a scene of the film then discuss it as a group. Groups re-form with the new groups including a member of each of the original groups. Experts “teach” their group about their topic. Example – View the “fight” sequence or the “car accident” sequence or the “flashback” sequence.
 - What does sound contribute to this sequence?
 - What is the effect of the use of certain shots in this sequence?
 - What is the tone/atmosphere of this sequence? How is it created?
 - Describe the setting and its importance.
 - How does this sequence contribute to character development?
 - What important ideas are highlighted in this sequence?

