

utu



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.

Glitteron Films in association with the New Zealand Film Commission Present UTU
Starring Bruno Lawrence, Anzac Wallace, Wi Kuki Kaa, Kelly Johnson, Tim Elliot, Tania Bristowe,
Ilona Rogers & Martyn Sanderson Screenplay Geoff Murphy, Keith Aberdein
Photography Graeme Cowley Editor Michael Horton Production Designer Ron Highfield
Music John Charles Sound Graeme Morris Production Manager Pat Murphy
Assistant Director Lee Tamahori Producers Don Blakeney & Kerry Robbins Director Geoff Murphy

Writing poetic

- 1 Write about an incident in which you think you (or someone else) was hard done by. Recount/share your writing orally. Choose your own or another's incident. List a series of plot points for a story.
 - Write that story.
 - Write a business letter to a publisher asking them to read and consider publishing your story.
 - Script or storyboard a scene from your story.
- 2 After brainstorming a list of words to describe Te Wheke, write a poem about him.
- 3 Write Te Wheke and Williamson's diary entries in which they vow revenge.
- 4 Translate the story into a contemporary setting and situation.
- 5 Write two descriptions of Te Wheke - one as one of his followers, the other as one of Colonel Elliot's men.
- 6 Rewrite your favourite scene as a piece of prose.
- 7 Before viewing the film, listen as you are played part of the soundtrack, then write a piece based on those feelings.

Writing Expressive

- 1 Do you think the characters in this film are stereotypes? Why/why not? (For example, is Colonel Elliot the typical coloniser thinking himself racially superior? Is Wiremu the typical pragmatic intellectual, Williamson the wise fool?)
- 2 In what ways is this film a love story?
- 3 As a class, list as many aspects of the western genre as you can. Is this film a western? Change the names and setting and retell the plot of this film as an American western.
- 4 Why might this film be deliberately vague about locations/tribes?
- 5 Do you think people have responsibilities towards their loved ones? What sort of responsibilities? What responsibilities do the characters in this film see themselves as having?
- 6 Explain the censor's rating.
- 7 What did you think when Te Wheke shot the soldier towards the beginning of the film? Is Te Wheke an honourable man? Explain. Why does Te Wheke throw the vicar the gun? Explain why Te Wheke might have been named "the octopus".
- 8 What does the fact that Williamson speaks Maori say about him?
- 9 Do you have sympathy for one particular character more than others? Why/why not?

Writing Transactional

Essays

- It has been said, about Te Wheke and Williamson, that 'the film's inconsistency of tone wastes their potential to become tragic heroes' (Martin & Edwards : 88). Discuss.
 - What do you see as the strengths and/or weaknesses of this film? (You might like to discuss the vitality of the action scenes; film techniques; characterisation; plot; themes).
 - Discuss how effective a character was in attracting and maintaining your interest.
- 1 In pairs, compose a list of incidents from the film. Then try to write a short (less than 200 word) plot summary.
 - 2 In his sermon, the vicar quotes Matthew 26:51-2 - 'all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword'. Write a modern version of a sermon with this message.
 - 3 This film is set in 1870. After researching 1870s New Zealand, write an encyclopaedia entry.
 - 4 Write the newspaper article that might have been written about Te Wheke's trial.
 - 5 Write two promotional summaries of the film - one promoting it as a spectacular adventure/action film, and the other as an educational/historical/cultural film experience.
 - 6 Imagining that the incidents in this film are historically accurate, write an entry for a history text or encyclopaedia about the events depicted in the film.
 - 7 Write obituaries for some of the characters in the film.
 - 8 Script aspects of "Utu" as a documentary.
 - 8 **Research**
Research one of the following topics (all related to the film). Try using the KWL format.

Topics

Geoff Murphy; Anzac Wallace; Bruno Lawrence; Wi Kuki Kaa; Kelly Johnstone; Tim Elliot; Mereata Mite; waiata; marae protocol; Maori tattooing; utu; 1800s Maori village life; MacBeth; guerilla warfare; trojan horse; New Zealand land wars; Te Kooti; Te Rauparaha; Wiremu Tamihana; tattoos; tangi; Napoleon; Boers; haka; manuka; patupaiarehef; New Zealand film.

Personal Reading

Read some histories of the New Zealand wars, and comment on them. You may like to read, for example, "The Penguin History of New Zealand", by Michael King' "Penguin History of New Zealand", by Keith Sinclair; "The New Zealand Wars", by James Belich. (You may like to read fiction on the same topic, for example, "The Season of the Jew", by Maurice Shadbolt).

Research, read and comment on reviews of the film. Read or research "Macbeth" and discuss its relevance to the film. Locate and read the short story by James Cowan, "A Bush Court Martial", about the death of

Wi Heretaunga, upon which the film's court martial is based.

References made in this study guide, and other texts which may be useful, are listed below.

References

- Cairns, B & Martin, H: Shadows on the Wall – A Study of Seven New Zealand Feature Films, Longman Paul, Auckland 1994.
- Dennis, J. & Bieringa, J. (Eds): Film in Aotearoa New Zealand, Victoria University Press, Wellington 1996.
- Horrocks, R: On Film, Heinemann, Auckland 1980.
- IPL Books: Celluloid Dreams – A Century of Film in New Zealand, IPL Books, Wellington 1997.
- McDonnell, B: Fresh Approaches to Film, Addison Wesley Longman New Zealand Ltd, Auckland 1998.
- Martin, H. & Edwards, S: New Zealand Film 1912 – 1996, Oxford University Press, Auckland 1997. Partridge, D. & Hughes, P: Flicks – Studying Film as Text, Oxford University Press, Australia 1992.



Speaking/Listening/ Interpersonal/Using Text

- 1 In groups, discuss and make notes on one of the following themes. Then jigsaw group to share your findings with the rest of the class.
 - Violence leads to violence.
 - Seeking revenge is futile.
 - Colonial expansion necessarily leads to differences between cultures.
- 2 Write down and recite your favourite piece of dialogue. In less than 30 seconds, say why you chose it.
- 3 Listen to parts of the film again. The score helps to build atmosphere. How?
- 4 In groups choose a sequence which you think tells you a great deal about a main character. View it, discuss, note and share with the class what information you learned and how you learned it.
- 5 Character: The audience will usually identify with the character presented in the most positive light. Groups take one major character each, discuss and fill in a character chart like the one below. Discuss as a class which character you identify with most closely.
- 6 **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.
 - The action scenes are the best part of this film.
 - I learned things from this film.
 - This film is a western.
 - This film has no messages for us.
 - I could improve this film.
- 7 **Circle Talk**
Students form two circles with equal numbers. One stands inside the other, facing outward. The outer circle face the middle. Students talk to each other on various topics for a preset time, before one circle moves clockwise, so that all students experience a series of partners with whom to share their thoughts. Topics might include:
 - My favourite part of the film was...
 - My least favourite part of the film...
 - I thought the character... was...
 - I thought... was the best actor because...
 - The things I learned were...
 - I would change the ending of this film by...
 - The most colourful character was... because...

8 Have students write down questions they would like to ask a main character. Allocate roles and hold a press conference.

9 **Character**

In groups, on a large sheet of paper draw around a group member to create an outline of a major character. Inside the body, brainstorm and write down all the words you can think of to describe that character's personality. Inside and around the head area, brainstorm and write down all the words you can think of to describe that character's feelings. Outside the body, brainstorm and write down all the external influences on that character. Pin your sheet to the wall for others to read and comment on.

10 In pairs, script an interview with a main character exploring their motivation, and present it.

11 **Character Decision Grid**

In pairs, discuss and complete a character grid, like the one below, for a main character.

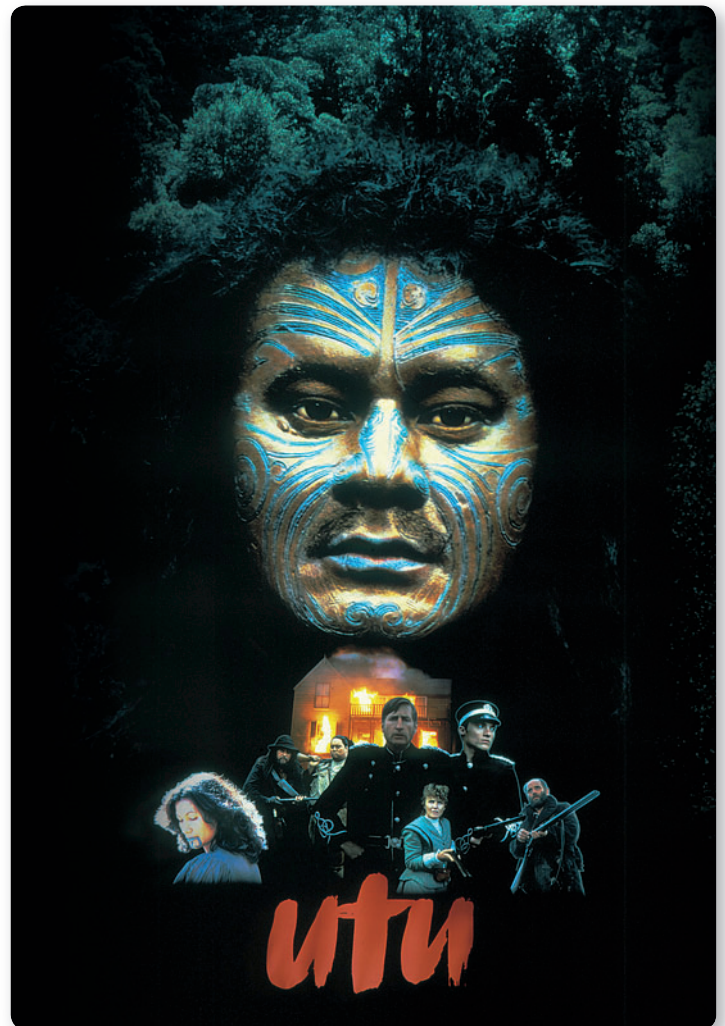
12 **Narrative Structure**

As a class, write down between 5 and 10 main events that seem to automatically lead to the conclusion of the story. Delete or significantly alter one of these events. Discuss how the story changes as a result. Do the same with a well known fairytale.

Decision	What it shows about the character	Evidence (quote, shot, image etc)

Presenting

- 1 Design a poster advertising the film.
- 2 Present a plot summary in the form of a flow diagram.
- 3 Design a character diagram showing the main characters and the relationships between them.
- 4 Design a board or card game based on the film.
- 5 Design a wanted poster for Te Wheke.
- 6 Design a tourist brochure to encourage people to travel back in time to this era in New Zealand.
- 7 Storyboard a promotional preview of the film.
- 8 Design a symbol for some of the main characters. Be prepared to explain them.
- 9 Design a collage based on ideas in this film.
- 10 Design a diagram that shows how Murphy has dealt with time in this film.



Viewing and Close Reading

- 1 Stop the film at various points and predict what might happen (and explain why you think that); stop the film just before the end and predict what might happen; stop the film soon after the start and predict the entire storyline.
- 2 “Utu” is ‘a fiction rich in cultural detail’ (Martin & Edwards : 87-88). Make as detailed a list as you can of the ‘cultural detail’ included in this film.
- 3 Individually or in pairs, collect a series of quotes made by main characters, write them on a series of cards. On the back, identify who said it, at what stage it was said and what it reveals about character or theme. Swap cards and test yourself
- 4 Design a plot diagram showing the major events/ relationships in the film.
- 5 With a partner, look for images of fire and hats in the film. Explain their relevance to each other. What does the piano symbolise?
- 6 **Setting Chart**
Fill in a setting chart, like the one below:

Scene	What it shows about character	Evidence (quote, shot, image etc)

- 7 **Jigsaw Groups**
In groups, take one of the following topics then re-view the film, taking notes and discussing your findings. Re-group so that each new group member has different expertise. Teach your new group about your topic.

Topics

- Humour
- Sound (eg ‘richly scored’ [Martin & Edwards : 88] – in what ways?)
- Film Techniques (eg types of shot and their purpose – ‘lushly shot’ [ibid.] – in what ways?).
- Themes
- Setting
- Genre

- 8 Reading Film: View some of the following sequences and answer the questions that follow. The opening sequence, from the opening shot to the fade out to the credit (approximately 2 minutes).
 - The “Williamson” sequence, from the shot of Te Wheke looking at himself in the mirror to the shot of Emily falling to the ground (approximately 1 minute).
 - The “tangi” sequence, from the shot of Henare’s hat floating down the river to the shot of the village as Scott starts to climb towards Manu (approximately 1 minute).
 - The “Williamson and the gun” sequence, from the shot of Williamson raising the gun to the shot of the shed collapsing (approximately 1 minutes).
- 9 Questions/Tasks:
 - Roughly storyboard the sequence.
 - How does the film maker use sound to create a tone or mood?
 - How does the film maker use camera shots to create a tone or mood or effect?
 - List the design features of this sequence. What do you learn about the characters/setting/ background?
 - Does this sequence attempt to “manipulate” the audience? In what way?



10 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.

- Te Wheke is clever.
- Wiremu is clever.
- Kura is clever.
- Williamson is a lively character.
- The vicar has a message for his congregation.

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.

- Lieutenant Scott is conflicted.
- Colonel Elliot is a snob.
- Williamson is driven mad by the death of his wife.
- Sometimes violence is justified.
- Some people deserve to die.

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.

- Differences between cultures are inevitable.
- Violence breeds violence.
- Wiremu is the most honourable character.
- Utu is a viable option.
- Family is more important than anything else.

From the level 3 section, have students put the chosen statements in a chart, like the one below. Fill in the right hand side with evidence from the film.

Statement	Evidence (Quote or Explanation)
Violence breeds violence	After the soldiers attack the village...

Further information

Utu was produced in 1983 and was selected to compete at the Cannes Film Festival in the same year. It is available in New Zealand on DVD.

Utu is distributed by Magna Pacific. The DVD is available for purchase from good DVD stores or online at: www.realgroovy.co.nz or www.gumboot.co.nz.

This guide was written for New Zealand Film by Cynthia Thomas, who has 23 years teaching experience.
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NEW ZEALAND FILM

TE TUMU WHAKAATA TAONGA