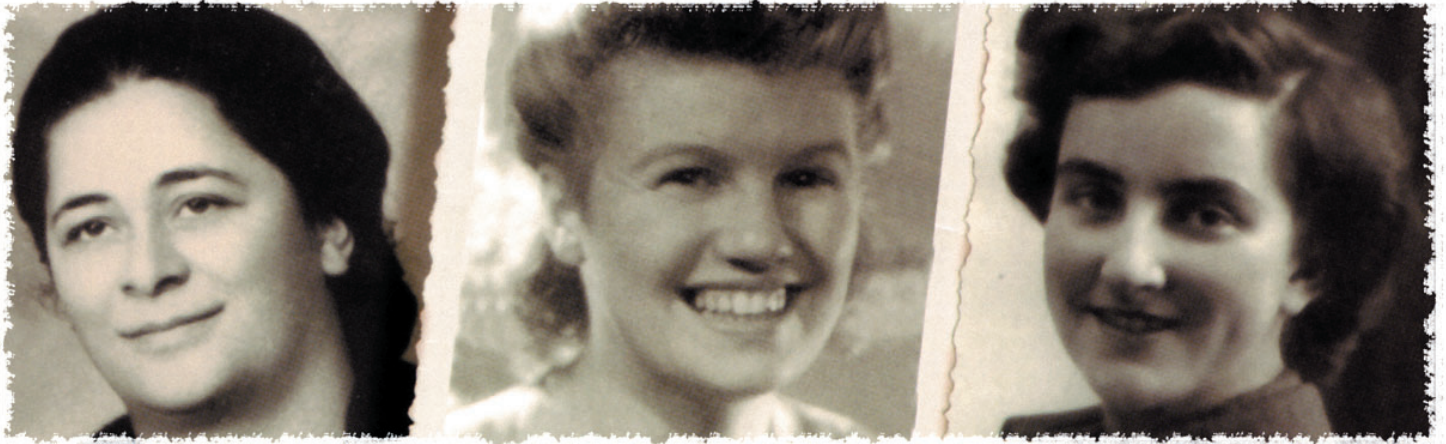


WAR STORIES

OUR MOTHERS NEVER TOLD US



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.



Featuring Pamela Quill, Flo Small, Tui Preston, Jean Andrews, Rita Graham, Neva Clark-McKenna, Mabel Waititi
Cinematographer Alun Bollinger Editor Paul Sutorius Music Composed and Arranged by Jonathan Besser
Interviewed by Judith Fyfe Executive Producer Robin Laing Produced and Directed by Gaylene Preston
Produced in association with The New Zealand Film Commission & New Zealand on Air

Writing poetic

- 1 Choose one of the interviewees from the film. Write a series of diary entries as that woman.
- 2 Brainstorm a vocabulary list suggested by the film. Write a poem using the words suggested.
- 3 Write a letter home from each of the women's partners.

Writing expressive

- 1 The film is 90 minutes long. If you were going to lengthen the film, what would you add, and why? If you were going to shorten the film, what would you delete, and why?
- 2 How did the film make you feel? Why? Were there parts you found particularly touching? Why?
- 3 What is the relevance of the title of the film?
- 4 Does the film present you with fact or opinion (an objective or subjective view) or a mixture? Explain.
- 5 Explain some of the examples of humour in this film.
- 6 Gaylene Preston lets the women in this film talk. What other angles might she have taken?
- 7 Why do you think Gaylene Preston made this film?
- 8 Make a list of things you learned from watching this film.
- 9 Research John Milton's Sonnet XIX, "On His Blindness". Explain how the last line, 'They also serve who only stand and wait', relates to this film.
- 10 Are there any other questions you would have put to the interviewees?
- 11 Research and explain the lyrics to the song, "Now Is The Hour".
- 12 How have moral standards changed since the war years?
- 13 Did the stories of Jean and Mabel differ because of race?
- 14 What do you think about the way conscientious objectors were treated?

Front page from left:
Mabel Waititi, Flo Small, Neva Clark-McKenna,



Tui Preston &
Jean Andrews

Writing transactional

1 ESSAYS

- 'This film is poignant, funny and riveting' (Martin & Edwards : 181). Discuss.
- Discuss the way two or more sequences proved effective in this film.
- Discuss two or more ways in which this film effectively presented its information and ideas.
- Discuss how the organisation of material added to the effectiveness of this film.
- Discuss how your thoughts or emotions were affected by this film.
- 'The patriotic oratory and the booming braggadocio of the commentary sound hollow as events are seen from the perspective, not of the boys going into battle, but of the women left behind' (Russell Campbell, "Nine Documentaries", in Dennis & Bieringa : 115). Use this quote as a starter for a discussion of the contrasts presented in this film.

- 2 Write a letter to Gaylene Preston in response to her film.
- 3 In pairs, summarise each woman's story for a leaflet about the film. Pick out a slogan you could apply to each woman, for example, Pamela's could be, 'live for the day'.
- 4 Write a review of the film. You may like to focus on some of the following questions.
 - What sort of film is it? Does it tell an important or entertaining story? How (camera work/editing/sound)? How is audience interest maintained?
 - How is the film structured? Is the choice of beginning and ending important?
- 5 Transcribe part of one of the interviews. Rewrite it in the third person. Write a precis of it.

- 6 Write a leaflet for trainee film makers about how to make a successful documentary using this film as an example (for example, people have commented on the non-obtrusive interviewing technique, skilful soundtrack including background effects and tunes, emotive themes, informative stills from the women's past, and skilful editing in Preston's film, all of which contribute both information and atmosphere).
- 7 Script a section of the film as a drama.
- 8 Write a letter to the editor for or against either making Anzac Day our national day, or allowing trading on Anzac Day.
- 9 Write a newspaper article based on one of the events mentioned in the film.
- 10 Write an entry for a history book or encyclopaedia about the role of New Zealand women at home during World War II.
- 11 Article: Write an article, including some visual material, about the historical, geographical or social (or a mixture of all three) background to this film.
- 12 Research: Research one of the following topics (all related to the film). Try using the KWL format.

What I Know	What I Want To Know	What I Learned

TOPICS

World War II military campaigns eg the North African campaign, War in the Pacific, The Battle of Britain; The Role of New Zealand Women in World War II - at home and abroad; The Changing Role of Women; The Women's Army Auxiliary Corp; Maori Battalion; POWs; American Servicemen in New Zealand; Music of the 1940s; New Zealand Law - WWII; Peter Fraser; Rationing; London during WWII; Little Snoring; Suffolk; Wigram; war graves; Trentham; Alexandria; conscientious objectors; Gaylene Preston; Abortion; New Zealand film.

Personal reading

Read the text based on the film, "War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us", by Judith Fyfe (Ed). Comment on what the film adds to the book. Research, read and comment on reviews of the film. Read a selection of war poetry. Choose your favourites. Comment on why you chose them.

Texts that may be useful, or have been referred to in this study guide, 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.
- Edmond, Lauris: "Women in Wartime", Government Printing Office, Wellington 1986.
- Fyfe, Judith (Ed): "War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us" (from a film by Gaylene Preston), Penguin 1995.
- 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.



Pamela Quill & Rita Graham

Speaking/listening Interpersonal/Using text

- 1 Oral History: Record/transcribe/present the story of an older person/someone of interest/a friend, for the class.
- 2 Listen to a selection read from the book edited by Judith Fyfe. What does the film add?
- 3 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 limited use of narration improves this film.
 - I learned things from this film.
 - This film has no messages for us.
 - Even ordinary people can be heroic.
 - Wars mainly effect men.
- 4 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 interviewee . . . was . . .
 - The things I learned were . . .
 - I would change this film by . . .
- 5 Constructed Reality: In groups, on a sheet divided in two, brainstorm how a documentary maker could present your school (or a topic of your choice) in a positive or negative light. Together, write two different, persuasive commentaries for the same series of shots.
- 6 In Flo's story, Flo talks about a photo game. Discuss and design a similar game that your class could play.
- 7 Discussion: What is a documentary? In groups, brainstorm the purposes of documentary (eg to discuss, explain, inform, persuade etc), write a definition then present it to the class. Construct a final definition as a class.
- 8 In groups, script and video an interview with each group member on the same theme (for example, talking about your experiences at primary school, or your first year at secondary school).

Presenting

- 1 Design a poster advertising the film.
- 2 Design a poster or leaflet encouraging those at home to support the war effort.
- 3 Design an anti-war poster.
- 4 In the title, Preston uses a heart symbol to stand for the "o" in "stories". Why do you think she used this symbol? Re-design the title, using type and symbol to relay a message (for example, you could focus on the word, "war").
- 5 Design a collage based on ideas in this film.
- 6 Design two memorials, one for the men who fought in WWII, and another for the women left at home.
- 7 Storyboard a promotional preview for the film.



Viewing (and close reading)

- 1 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

- Emotion created by the film.
 - Accompanying stills/archival footage.
 - Soundtrack.
 - Film Techniques (eg types of shot and their purpose).
 - Themes (eg the futurity of war; the extraordinariness of the ordinary / heroism in ordinary lives; the changing role of women; unofficial history; stoicism).
 - Genre.
- 2 Much of the film combines the use of filmed images with archive footage. Re-design and storyboard a sequence from the film using a different approach.
 - 3 Storyboard Discussion: in groups, storyboard a section of the film, then discuss what you think your work shows about documentary making and the effect the documentary maker wanted to achieve in your chosen sequence.

- 4 Reading Film: Answer these questions individually, or use a jigsaw group format. Find evidence from the film to back up what you say.
- 5 Structure: How is this film structured (eg chronologically? revolving around an issue / person/event?)? Is a narrator used? What is the nature and effect of that commentary? Is there a climax? Is use made of dramatic reconstruction / stills / historical footage? When and why? Are the opening and closing sequences important? How is the documentary paced?
- 6 Audience: Who do you think is the target audience? What effect do you think the documentary maker would like to have on the audience?
- 7 Film Technique: What types of shot are commonly used, and why? Does lighting play a role in emphasising the content/theme of the film? How important is sound (eg background noise, music) in adding to the emotional impact of the film?
- 8 Style: What is the tone of the film? What do you think is the purpose of the film (ie what values do you think the film shows or reinforces or criticises / challenges, and why)? Is this a balanced documentary? Discuss.
- 9 In groups, complete the following 3 Level Guide.



*Clockwise from bottom left:
Gaylene Preston, Tui Preston,
Pamela Quill, Neva Clark-McKenna,
Judith Fyfe, Flo Small, Rita Graham,
Mabel Waititi*

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.

- These women faced challenges.
- It was only men who went overseas to fight.
- The women were annoyed because they couldn't fight, too.
- New Zealand has changed a lot since the 1940s.
- Several of these women faced prejudice.

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.

- These women overcame obstacles.
- Women are more important than men.
- Everyone was affected by the war.
- Some people's stories aren't told in official histories.
- Bravery comes in many forms.

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.

- Even ordinary lives can be extraordinary.
- 'They also serve who only stand and wait' (Milton).
- War is a devastating thing.
- War is a necessary evil.
- We can learn from history.

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)
They also serve who only stand and wait	All of the woman in the film ...

Further information

For further information on the film visit Gaylene Preston Productions website: www.gaylenepreston.com

War Stories was produced in 1995 and is available in New Zealand on DVD.

War Stories is distributed by Arkles Entertainment – for further details on where to purchase the dvd visit www.arklesentertainment.com

This guide was written for New Zealand Film by Cynthia Thomas, who has 23 years teaching experience. © New Zealand Film 2005.

From more information about New Zealand Film Study Guides and other resources visit our website: www.nzfilm.co.nz

Copyright notice: Educational institutions may make and use copies of all or part of this Study Guide, only as reasonably required for its own purposes (for no copyright fees) and must not sell or lend such copies.



NEW ZEALAND FILM

TE TUMU WHAKAATA TAONGA