

ONCE WERE WARRIORS



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.

Communicado in association with the New Zealand Film Commission, Avalon Studios
& New Zealand On Air Present Once Were Warriors Starring Rena Owen, Temuera Morrison &
Mamaengaroa Kerr-Bell Story by Alan Duff Screenplay by Riwia Brown Cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh
Designer Miahcel Kane Editor Michael Horton Music Murray Grindlay & Murray McNabb
Producer Robin Scholes Director Lee Tamahori

Writing Poetic

- 1 **Poem**
Individually or as a class, brainstorm a list of words inspired by the film. Use that list to write a poem.
- 2 **Children's Story**
Translate Beth's "journey" into a flow diagram. Decide on a suitable metaphor for that journey. Use that metaphor to write a children's story.
- 3 **Report**
Write the report you might have written about Boogie and his family situation, as if you were his social worker.
- 4 **Report**
As a private investigator, track and write a report on Jake's activities in the film.
- 5 **Prose**
Re-write a scene (from the film) that had an impact on you, in prose. Find and read that scene from Alan Duff's novel, "Once Were Warriors". Comment on the differences/similarities in the two pieces of writing.
- 6 **Interior Monologue** Choose one scene from the film. Write an interior monologue showing what a character might have been thinking at that time.
- 7 **Letter**
Write the letter to her family you think Grace might have written had she decided to before her suicide.
- 8 **School Report**
Write Grace's school report, clearly showing what sort of person she is.
- 9 **Diary Entry**
Write the entry you think Grace might have written (the entry Beth reads in Grace's book).
- 10 **Point-of-view**
Choose a scene from the film. Write two versions of that scene, from the point of view of two characters somehow involved in it.
- 11 **Script Writing** Read a section of Alan Duff's novel, "Once Were Warriors". Write your own script based on it.
- 12 **Conversation**
Imagine a conversation between Nig and Boogie 10 years later. Write that conversation.
- 13 **Ending**
Write an alternative ending for the film.
- 14 **Obituary**
Write an obituary for Grace

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.

- 1 Grace finds comfort in a certain place. Is there a place you use (or would like to use) when you are feeling depressed or thoughtful? Describe that place, and how it offers you comfort. How could you use this place in a story of your own?
- 2 The film opens with a billboard. What does this image suggest about New Zealand? What is your view of New Zealand?
- 3 Compare the opening and ending of the film with the opening and ending of Alan Duff's novel.
- 4 Is this a hopeful film? Why/why not?
- 5 How is Boogie a modern warrior?
- 6 Write down between five and ten quotes from the film. Explain how your chosen quotes help your understanding of a character or theme or situation.
- 7 Comment on the following quotes from the film.
 - 'It's just a woman's lot, that's all.' (Beth)
 - 'You'll carry your taiaha inside you.' (Bennett)
 - 'It's just the way things are.' (Nig)
 - 'You're not going to hurt my babies anymore.' (Beth)
 - 'Why is everything so black, Toot.' (Grace)
- 8 Explain the title of the film.
- 9 Attempt to explain this film's censor's rating.
- 10 Is Jake a slave?
- 11 Write down and comment on three things about the film that you find:
 - Thought-provoking
 - Upsetting
 - Positive

Writing Transactional

- 1 In groups, brainstorm aspects of a major character from the film. Include:

- words to describe their appearance.
- words to describe their personality.
- examples of their actions.
- examples of how they relate to other characters.
- comments on the development of their character during the film.

Present your findings to other groups, for example, through jigsaw groups, a character chart or diagram, or by drawing an outline of the character and filling in details (eg Inside the body, write down all the words you can think of to describe that character's personality. Inside and around the head area, write down all the words you can think of to describe that character's feelings. Outside the body, write down all the external influences on that character).

Criticism

- 1 "Once Were Warriors" has been criticised for:

- heightened realism (eg in the fight scenes).
- melodramatic style (there is 'moral polarisation into good and bad, the destruction of innocence, strong heroic figures and plain villainy' [McDonnell : 177]).
- nostalgic romanticism (eg the marae scenes – 'creating a seductive but unhelpful myth of an idyllic, pastoral life' [ibid. : 179]).
- overly glamorous design ('The film's gang is glamourised and presented positively . . . unlikely, aerobicised young people' [ibid. : 171]).
- being unsubtle ('The film is emphatically unsubtle and deliberately didactic', 'tends to be almost propagandistic in its determination to convince us of the righteousness of its message' [ibid. : 170, 177]).

- 2 In pairs or groups, write:

- an explanation of what is meant by the criticism.
- a description of some example from the film.
- your own opinion/s of the criticisms.
- Share your findings with the class.

Formal Essay Writing

- 1 Referring closely to events in or suggested by the film, write a 300 – 400 word essay.

- "Once Were Warriors" is a traumatic, brutal and emotional film. Discuss.
- "Once Were Warriors" suggests that Maori are responsible for their own circumstances. Discuss.
- Any number of the themes highlighted in this film – urban decay, cultural dispossession, cultural renaissance, racism, the cycle of violence, domestic violence, parental negligence, alcohol abuse, change, love, regeneration, redemption – are worth discussing. Discuss two themes that you thought were important in this film.
- A negative event can act as a catalyst for change. Discuss.
- "Once Were Warriors" is a 'domestic thriller, the story of a woman gradually discovering the resolve to scrape the shit of circumstances off her shoes' (Pete Calder in Dennis : 185). Discuss.
- "Once Were Warriors" perpetuates negative stereotypes, maintaining and reproducing 'the existing negative notions of Maori and how we live... The issues raised within the movie are not read in the light of the wider contexts and experiences of colonisation, and the impact of that upon Maori people' (Leonie Pihama in Dennis: 191). Discuss.
- Compare the film with the novel on which it was based, analysing the level of effectiveness the film maker reached in transferring themes to the visual medium.

Report

- 1 Individually, in pairs or in groups, write a report on the film. Cover the following aspects.

- Juxtaposition of scenes to relieve tension.
- The use of irony and comic relief.
- The linkages between scenes.
- A comparison of the mood created and the way that mood is created in two (related) sequences (eg before and after the court hearing; the change in mood during the party).
- The effect of framing / composition of a particular shot (eg Grace in her coffin).
- The effect of the use of cross-cutting in a particular sequence (eg tangi; party).
- The use of symbols / motifs (eg music; objects [such as the taiaha, beer bottles, teddy bear, Grace's book]; colour; settings [such as the motorway]).
- The effect of lighting (eg family under the tree scene; marae; haka; Toots's car; gang scenes; court scenes).

- 2 Treatment: Write a treatment for a documentary on a subject related to events in the film.
- 3 Letter To The Editor: Write a letter to the editor about gangs, or any other idea suggested by the film.
- 4 Write a review of the film for a magazine. You might like to consider the following questions:

What views about life and human nature underpin the film? What are the values of the main characters? Do you share those values? Does this film argue for change? Were the conflicts faced by the main characters relevant/contemporary/thought-provoking? Content – was the story interesting/credible/well-arranged/easy to follow/too complicated / trite etc. Were the visual effects effective? Were the actors successful in their depiction of character? What was the atmosphere/mood and how was it created? How is audience interest maintained? Was the ending satisfying?

Research

- 5 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

haka; Maoritanga; Lee Tamahori; Alan Duff; taniwha; Maori myths; anger management; women's refuges; tangi; gang culture; prisons; effects of colonisation on Maori; domestic violence; New Zealand film.

Personal Reading

Read and review one or more of the following texts, comparing them to the ideas in the film - "Once Were Warriors" by Alan Duff; "Maori Girl"

by Noel Hilliard; "Potiki" by Patricia Grace; "Big Brother, Little Sister" by Witi Ihimaera; "Patches Hide No Scars" by Haaere Williams. Read and comment on reviews of this film. References made in this study guide, and other texts which may be useful, are listed as follows:

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 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.

2 Statements

- This film was realistic.
- This film is moving.
- Whatever happens to you in life, it's your own fault.
- This film is dated.
- This film promotes negative stereotypes.
- This film would have been better if Grace had lived.
- This film has no hero.
- This film is unsuitable for children.
- OR - Make a discussion web for the wall, students writing comments/examples on the statements above (or statements contributed by the class for discussion).

3 Sound Chart

Listen to the film, identify and note in chart form scenes which use pre-recorded tracks from New Zealand rap groups; traditional Maori instruments; guitar; other.

- 4 Before watching the film listen as your teacher plays you part of the soundtrack. Write a piece based on the feelings you get from the music.

5 Monologue

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 (over the course of the film); how you changed / did not change over the course of the film.

6 Novel

Listen as your teacher reads a section from Alan Duff's novel (eg rape scene; final pub scene). Note down any changes made in the film. Why do you think they were made?

7 Reading

Prepare a reading from the novel and present it to your class.

8 Press Conference

Have each student write down five questions for main characters, allocate roles then hold a press conference.

9 Beauty and the Beast / How's Life

In pairs or groups, write a problem-page type letter as a character. Select a panel and presenter, then have them reply to the letters.

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

- 11 Circle Talk: Students form two circles with equal numbers. One stands inside the other, facing outward. The outer circle face the middle. Pairs talk to each other on a given topic 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:

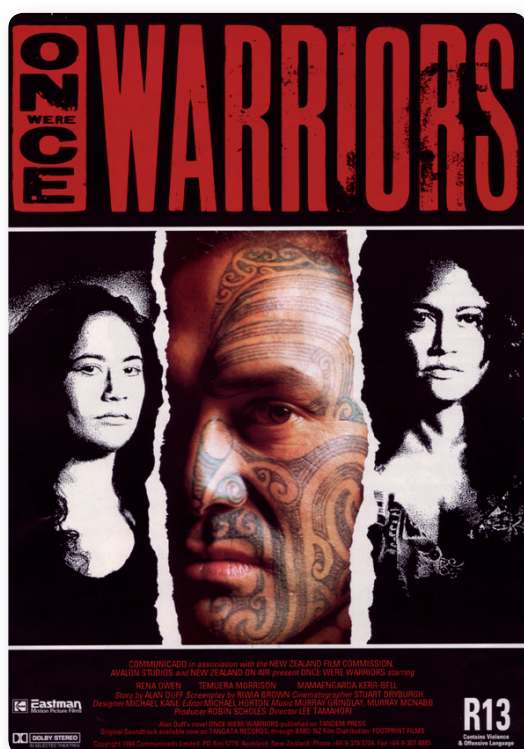
- My favourite part of the film was . . .
- My least favourite part of the film . . .
- I thought the character . . . was . . .
- I thought . . . was the best actor because . . .
- The things I learned were . . .

- 12 Narrative Structure: as a class, write down between 5 and 10 main events that seems to lead to the end of the story. Change or delete one event. Discuss how the story might change as a result.



Presenting

- 1 Design a poster, concentrating on at least one theme, advertising the film.
- 2 Design a collage representing one or more important ideas in the film.
- 3 The film opens with a shot of a billboard depicting New Zealand.
- 4 Design two billboard posters depicting what you see as:
 - a positive view of New Zealand.
 - a negative view of New Zealand.
- 5 Design a poster symbolising Beth's journey.
- 6 Draw and label a plot graph which shows important events and climaxes in the film.
- 7 Roughly copy the moko and tattoo for Toa Aotearoa. Research tribal designs, then design your own version. Include a written explanation of the choices you have made.
- 8 Design a leaflet to raise public awareness about women's refuges.
- 9 Design an advertisement designed to reduce domestic violence.
- 10 Design a satirical tourist brochure promoting the Heke neighbourhood.
- 11 Storyboard a promotional preview for "Once Were Warriors".
- 12 Design symbols for some of the main characters. Be prepared to explain them.



Viewing and Close Reading

1 Sequencing Activity

Cut up a series of plot incidents (or have the students identify a series of important plot incidents) and have the students, in pairs or individually, put them into the correct order. eg:

- Boogie is caught by the police
- Jake tells Beth that he has lost his job
- Grace visits Toot and tells him the Taniwha story
- Jake attacks Beth at a drunken party
- Boogie goes to court • Nig is initiated into the gang
- Boogie smashes windows with the taiaha
- The Heke family travel to visit Boogie • Bully assaults Grace
- Grace commits suicide
- Grace's tangi
- Beth finds Grace's writing book
- Jake attacks Bully
- Beth leaves Jake.

- 2 Turn the plot statements (adding any other necessary details) into a board or card game. Play the games.
- 3 View a scene/s from the film. Using jigsaw groups make notes on/discuss/share insights about: sound; lighting; camera shots/angles; setting; acting/costuming/makeup; dialogue; editing.
 - Suitable scenes might include the taiaha scene; the "under the tree" scene; the rape scene; the hanging scene.
- 4 Make a list of scenes from the film. Make a list of "scenes" from the novel. Compare and contrast.
- 5 Identify examples of the concept of "class" in the film. Discuss what visual and/or verbal clues indicate class.
- 6 Choose and view a scene from the film (eg the "eggs" scene). View it again with the sound off. Write alternative dialogue (which you think will change the way people interpret it) for the scene.
- 7 **Setting Chart**
Fill in a setting chart, like the one below:

Scene	What does the existing reveal about the setting?	How does Tamahori do this?
Opening established shots introducing characters/settings at beginning of film.	Inhospitable, dirty, dangerous, poor, rough, urban jungle.	Contrast, music, colours, pan shots.

8 View the opening montage. List the shot types. Describe the shots. List what you learn. Choose a shot and freeze it. Explain what and how you learn from it.

9 **Reading Film**

View one or more of the listed sequences, then answer these questions:

- The “opening” sequence, from the shot of the billboard to the shot of the “Once Were Warriors” title (approximately 2 minutes 20 seconds).
- The “eggs” sequence, from the shot of Bully asking Beth to cook him some eggs to the shot of the dogs (approximately 1 minute 30 seconds).
- The “under the tree” sequence, from the pan shot of the landscape to the Hekes under the tree to the long shot of the family leaving (approximately 2 minutes 30 seconds).
- The “rape” sequence, from the high angle shot of the party goes to the shot of Grace pulling the covers up around her face (approximately 2 minutes 40 seconds).
- The “hanging” sequence, from the shot of the gospel singers to the shot of Beth screaming and sirens wailing (approximately 5 minutes).
- The “tangi” sequence, from the close up shot of Beth at home to the long shot of the burial (approximately 6 minutes 30 seconds).

10 **Questions:**

- What mood/emotion is evoked by the sequence?
- How has the film maker evoked mood/emotion through
- Sound? Dialogue? Setting?
- Types/angle/duration of shots? Editing?
- Is there any obvious message for the viewer?



11 In groups, complete the following 3 Level Guide.

Level 1 : Reading on the lines

Tick the statements which focus on what the film maker says (presents directly) in this film. When you've made your decisions, discuss your reasons with your group:

- The Hekes like to party
- Nig wants to join the gang
- Jake sorts out his problems with his fists
- Bully abuses Grace
- Grace uses her writing to find peace
- Beth is a weak woman
- Boogie just learns how to be more violent in the detention centre
- Grace kills herself because she hates her family.

Level 2 : Reading between the lines

Tick statements which you think mean what the film maker meant in this piece. Discuss your choices with your group and be prepared to justify them:

- Drinking heavily leads to trouble
- Gangs are intimidating
- It is cowardly to use violence to sort out your problems
- Sexual abuse is often a hidden problem

- Grace is intelligent
- Beth decides to use her strength to protect her family
- Boogie sorts himself out as he learns about his culture
- There should be harsher prison sentences to sort out crime.

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:

- There should be more help available for people with drinking problems Violence breeds violence
- Maori are violent
- Teenagers tend to act impulsively
- Suicide is a cowardly option
- Poverty is part of a vicious cycle
- Finding your cultural roots can help you find yourself and your place in society
- Gangs give a sense of belonging that some people can't find anywhere 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)
Gangs give a sense of belonging	Nig joins the gang because...

Further information

Once Were Warriors was produced in 1994.

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

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

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NEW ZEALAND FILM

TE TUMU WHAKAATA TAONGA