**RABBIT-PROOF FENCE**

**Teaching Resource**

A resource that assists students to:

- Reflect on ideas and opinions about the Stolen Generations, identifying past and present points of view
- Reflect on the purposes and appeal of different approaches to characterisation, events and settings
- Examine sources and identify points of view in the past and present
- Analyse how history may be represented in films depending on audience and purpose
- Assess the validity and accuracy of the film presentation of people and events
- Explore permissions and copyright in filmmaking

*See Page 2 for Suggested Curriculum Links*

**Secondary: Years 7-12**

*Note: This resource has clear links to the Australian curriculum. While designed primarily for History, there are also applications for English and Media Studies. The suggested teaching ideas are not exhaustive; the resource is designed to be used as the professional educator sees fit.*

*WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are warned that this resource contains links to content that may contain images and references to deceased persons.*
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Acknowledgements
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- PDF Print Unit may be copied free of charge under Creative Commons.

Media acknowledgements:
- Herald Sun Newspaper
- Andrew Bolt
- SBS-TV Movie Show- Interview with Phillip Noyce, director of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Episode 01 aired February 20, 2002
- National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA)
- The IP Awareness Foundation cannot be responsible for the content of internet links, where website content has changed.
Curriculum connections

This resource covers, but is not limited to, the following Australian Curriculum outcomes

History

Content:
- Rights and Freedoms specifically “The continuing nature of efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (ACDSEH143)”

Chronology, terms and concepts
- Use chronological sequencing to demonstrate the relationship between events and developments in different periods and places (ACHHS182)
- Use historical terms and concepts (ACHHS183)

Historical questions and research
- Identify and select different kinds of questions about the past to inform historical inquiry (ACHHS184)
- Evaluate and enhance these questions (ACHHS185)
- Identify and locate relevant sources, using ICT and other methods (ACHHS186)

Analysis and use of sources
- Identify the origin, purpose and context of primary and secondary sources (ACHHS187)
- Process and synthesise information from a range of sources for use as evidence in an historical argument (ACHHS188)
- Evaluate the reliability and usefulness of primary and secondary sources (ACHHS189)

Perspectives and interpretations
- Identify and analyse the perspectives of people from the past (ACHHS190)
- Identify and analyse different historical interpretations (including their own) (ACHHS191)

Explanation and communication
- Develop texts, particularly descriptions and discussions that use evidence from a range of sources that are referenced (ACHHS192)
- Select and use a range of communication forms (oral, graphic, written) and digital technologies (ACHHS193)
- Learn about the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (ACOKFH022)
Content:
• Texts explore themes of human experience and cultural significance, interpersonal relationships, and ethical and global dilemmas within real-world and fictional settings and represent a variety of perspectives

Literature and context
• Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1633)

Responding to literature
• Present an argument about a literary text based on initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text (ACELT1771)
• Reflect on, discuss and explore notions of literary value and how and why such notions vary according to context (ACELT1634)
• Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635)

Literacy
Texts in context
• Analyse how the construction and interpretation of texts, including media texts, can be influenced by cultural perspectives and other texts (ACELY1739)

Interpreting, analysing, evaluating
• Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts (ACELY1742)
• Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse texts, comparing and evaluating representations of an event, issue, situation or character in different texts (ACELY1744) Explore and explain the combinations of language and visual choices that authors make to present information, opinions and perspectives in different texts (ACELY1745)
• Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1633)

Media Arts
Content:
As they experience media arts, students draw on media arts from a range of cultures, times and locations. They explore the media arts and influences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and from Asia. Students learn that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have converted oral records to other technologies. As they explore media forms, students learn that over time there has been further development of different traditional and contemporary styles. They explore the representation of relationships that have developed between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other cultures in Australia and how these may influence their own artistic intentions in making media artworks.

As they make and respond to media artworks, students explore meaning and interpretation, forms and elements and social, cultural and historical influences of media arts. They consider the local, global, social and cultural contexts that shape purpose and processes in production of media artworks. They evaluate the social and ethical implications of media arts.

Evaluate how technical and symbolic elements are manipulated in media artworks to create and challenge representations framed by media conventions, social beliefs and values for a range of audiences (ACAMAR078)

Analyse a range of media artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their media arts making, starting with Australian media artworks, including media artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and international media artworks (ACAMAR079)
Imagine you are a well-established Australian film director. You are offered the opportunity to make one of two films – either a Hollywood blockbuster movie or an independent film in Australia with limited finance. This was the choice facing the famous Australian film director Phillip Noyce.

Noyce chose to make the independent film - *Rabbit-Proof Fence* – in Australia. Released in cinemas in 2002, it has won many significant Australian and international film awards - http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252444/awards?ref_=tt_awd

**Overview**

Noyce's film is based on the book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by the late Doris Pilkington (Nugi Garimara), which tells the story of her mother, Molly.

The story took place in 1931 at Jigalong, in Western Australia. Three mixed-race girls, Molly (aged 14), her sister Gracie (11) and cousin Daisy (8) were taken from their outback Aboriginal community to the Aboriginal training institution for mixed-race children at Moore River, in Mogumber, near Perth, at the orders of Mr AO Neville, who held the government-appointed role of ‘Protector of Aborigines’.

Here they were to be educated, and taught skills that, it was believed at the time, would enable them to become part of the Australian economy and society — mostly as domestic workers.

Molly and the other two girls escaped after their first day there, and set out to walk back home to Jigalong from Mogumber.

They kept their direction by following the rabbit-proof fence built to stop the migration of rabbits into Western Australian pastoral areas. At the same time they had to evade the government agents sent to return them to Moore River.

The film provides a very powerful and human illustration of Australia’s ‘Stolen Generations’ policy — the policy that led to the forcible removal of an unknown number of young Aboriginal children from their parents.

Optimally you will have watched the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. You can also watch some short clips of key scenes from the film to refresh your recollections – use these links:

1. The Stealing of Children
   [aso.gov.au/titles/features/rabbit-proof-fence/clip1]
2. Mr Neville says No
3. The Wrong Fence
   [aso.gov.au/titles/features/rabbit-proof-fence/clip3]
4. Link to the synopsis for the film:
5. Link to *The Cultural Atlas of Australia*, an interactive digital map which provides details on the key Western Australian narrative locations in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, such as Jigalong; Moore River Native Settlement; A.O. Neville’s office and the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* itself:
   [australian-cultural-atlas.info/CAA/listing.php?id=133]

**Recommended for English Stage 5 and Media Studies Stage 5**

1. National Film & Sound Archive of Australia, The Stealing of Children – Synopsis & curatorial notes by Paul Byrnes for NFSA’s australianscreen online website
2. National Film & Sound Archive of Australia, Mr Neville says No - Synopsis & curatorial notes by Paul Byrnes for NFSA’s australianscreen online website
3. National Film & Sound Archive of Australia, The Wrong Fence - Synopsis & curatorial notes by Paul Byrnes for NFSA’s australianscreen online website
4. National Film & Sound Archive of Australia - Synopsis & curatorial notes by Paul Byrnes for NFSA’s australianscreen online website
Removing children from their parents affected many families from various countries throughout history. It is only in the last few decades that this practice has been recognised as inappropriate although at the time it was most often supposedly done with the child’s best interest in mind according to western Christian belief.

The policy of taking indigenous Australian children has been criticised as a form of genocide — the destruction of a race — and seen as a major cause of personal and social problems in many Australian and Torres Strait Island indigenous communities today.

Some have claimed that, while it was very hard and undoubtedly did much harm to some people, it was done with good intentions — to ‘save’ children from terrible conditions and treatment in their indigenous communities rather than ‘steal’ them from their parents and race.

This issue of the ‘Stolen Generations’ is an important one in Australia today. On 13 February 2008, Australia stopped as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered an historic apology to the Stolen Generation’s victims for the harm that government policies had done to them. Not all Australians accepted the wording of the apology, and there was some hostility towards the speech by Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Brendan Nelson, who argued that there were benefits for some of the Aboriginal children who were protected and educated under the system.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Watch Behind the News providing background to the historic apology: www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s2219615.htm

**a) Class discussion:** After watching the apology speech, discuss whether you think this is an effective and appropriate apology. Be prepared to support your opinion.

**b) After viewing the excerpts from the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* or the entire film plan your answers to the following questions in preparation for further class discussion:**

1. What did you learn about the Stolen Generations issue from this film?
2. How did watching this film make you feel? Why?
3. What is your opinion of this film as a representation of how children/indigenous Australians were treated?
4. If you had never watched this film, how else could you have found out about this issue?
5. Would this alternative way of finding out have been as effective as this film? Why or why not?
6. Is it important that films telling Australian stories continue to be made? Give reasons for your answer.
7. What if this film had never been made — would it affect our society?
8. What are some of the ways filmmakers can approach the telling of history?
Diary of the film\(^6\): Historical Perspectives
- Phillip Noyce’s reflections

Read these diary extracts from the director, Phillip Noyce. Be prepared to share your thoughts on his reasons for making this film.

We know Phillip Noyce chose to make this independent film - *Rabbit-Proof Fence* – over a Hollywood blockbuster film. Read his diary excerpts below and answer questions on Page 8.

3.30 AM October 1999

Fast asleep at my home in the Hollywood hills of Los Angeles. A deep and contented sleep. Deep because post-production on *The Bone Collector* [Phillip Noyce, 1999] is finally over and already early pre-production has started on *The Sum of All Fears* [Phil Alden Robinson, 2002].

Then the phone rings. The phone number that nobody except my agent, studio heads and immediate family have access to. At this hour it must be trouble. Big trouble — it’s a scriptwriter. An Australian woman who has confused the time difference, tells me something one hears almost every day in Hollywood, ‘I’ve written the perfect script and you’re the perfect director for my story.’ Gently, I encourage her to call my office during daylight.

Three months later, after three employees have pleaded with me to read the manuscript that the mysterious caller had sent, I finally relent. I had become such a part of the ‘machine’ that I’m convinced nothing worthwhile could possibly reach my desk except through the Hollywood filtering process of studio executives and agents. Worse, the dawn caller (or the crazy lady as I’ve now christened her) has never written a screenplay before. Her name is Christine Olsen and you’ll now find her name on the poster for *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, credited as screenwriter and producer.

Ten pages into the screenplay I find myself crying. It’s the story of three Australian Aboriginal girls, forcibly removed from their outback families in 1931 to be transported 2,400 kilometres to an infamous government institution where they are to be re-programmed to take their places in white society. Led by the eldest kid, they escape.

As I read, those children quickly become my children and strangely I become a child again, yearning to find the rabbit-proof fence that bisects the Australian continent and just might be the way back home. For me and for them. After ten years in Hollywood, I’m still an outsider, a migrant guest worker telling other people’s stories. As a citizen of the world, without nationality, I’ve become the ultimate Hollywood foot soldier, directing action/adventure, escapist stories designed to mesmerise across all boundaries. I know that black-themed films have never worked at the Australian Cinema box office. But it’s time to go home.

Five months later

I’m travelling along the remnants of that fence in outback Western Australia, crossing the vast flat desert landscape that will lead me finally to the tiny Aboriginal settlement of Jigalong. At Jigalong I meet 86-year-old Molly Craig and her sister, Daisy Kadibill Craig, 79. Seventy years previously they had walked 2,400 kilometres across the desert that I’ve just traversed for three days in an air-conditioned four-wheel drive. Molly’s face is etched by the desert winds. But it’s the legs that one cannot help but notice. The legs of a thoroughbred. Long and strong. Molly made the journey twice. The second time she carried her infant daughter, rescued from capture after the authorities had seized her own children. A year later, the Chief Protector of Aborigines would order the youngster to be seized again. In 2001, Molly still waits for little Anabelle to come home.

Molly and Daisy are but two of the tens of thousands of indigenous children forcibly removed from their families over a seventy-year period in what a 1997 judicial inquiry would label ‘genocide’. In Australia, we call these kids ‘The Stolen Generations’. For me, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* the movie will be as much about stolen history. History that we Australians needed to reclaim.

Back in the nineteenth century, a British settler had thought to cure the boredom of colonial life by importing some English rabbits to hunt. With no natural predator in sight, the rabbits soon outnumbered humans a million to one. In the early twentieth century, the Western Australian Government decided to stop the rabbit plague. Completed in 1907, the rabbit-proof fence would be the longest continuous fence in the world, running from the top to the bottom of Australia and keeping the hungry rabbits out of the new pasture lands. The fathers of our three heroines were workers on the rabbit-proof fence, the first whites the Aboriginal families in the area had ever seen.

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6. Phillip Noyce’s Diary, Phillip Noyce
July 2000

Now I needed to find three girls who could play these outback Aboriginal children. I realised we'd have to search in the remote northwest of the country, where black and white had ‘contacted’ as late as the 1970s and where isolated communities were still living in touch with traditional ways. I travelled with casting director Christine King by light airplane, four-wheel drive and boat to scores of tiny communities. In Djarindjin, on the Dampier Peninsula outside Broome in the Northwest, we found eleven-year-old Everlyn Sampi. She would become the star of our movie and the face that adorns the film’s poster worldwide. Everlyn knew the story of The Stolen Generations because she’d lived it. Her mum was taken at age four and is still today haunted by her experiences, not sure if her own mother had abandoned her as the authorities claimed, or if she’d been stolen, as she now suspected. Like the character she plays, Everlyn was feisty and independent. She ran away from us twice, even before shooting commenced.

Nine year-old Laura Monaghan, who plays Gracie, would appear on a videotape recorded at her primary school in Port Hedland, Western Australia. Seven-year-old Tianna Sansbury would join our cast just four days before shooting commenced, after the original choice to play Daisy had become homesick for her outback desert community. These three children were gifts from the past — in touch with nature and Aboriginal culture in ways that could never be taught or acted. My task would not be to get them to perform, but just ‘to let them be’.

December 2000

Having completed seven weeks of shooting in the barren Flinders Ranges of South Australia, Cinematographer Chris Doyle and I fly to Ho Chi Minh City to begin Pre- Production on The Quiet American. At the Metropolitan Hotel I meet up with Peter Gabriel and offer him the choice of two film projects as composer. The Quiet American comes with a music budget of half a million dollars. On a whim, I also tell him the story of Rabbit-Proof Fence though I can’t help but honestly report that we can only afford recording costs — there is no money for a composer’s fee. For the next ten months we enjoyed one of the closest collaborations I’ve ever had with a film composer.

When he accepted the job, Peter said he wanted to make music that ‘came out of the earth itself.’ Month after month my sound team would send the real sounds of the Australian bush to Peter’s studios in Bath, England. Via MP3 file, Peter emails back the results of the samples that he and his team have orchestrated into a musical score. My assistant downloads the files, presses countless CDs and we experiment mixing the music with the film’s soundtrack in a continuous five-month sound mix. It’s as if our mixing console at Fox Studios in Sydney is linked via the internet to Real World Studios in Bath.

February 2002

World premiere night for an audience of two. Molly’s grandson has dismantled an old 35mm projector from a cinema in Perth and transported it by truck to Jigalong. We inflate the giant movie screen imported from Germany and test the Dolby Stereo Surround Sound that has been set-up in the desert outside Molly’s house.

Two days later, the two hundred residents of Jigalong are joined by 800 black figures that materialise from the desert haze. The dark storm clouds blow over, replaced by a canopy of stars behind the screen. A half hour before sunset, Molly Craig and her sister Daisy Kadibil Craig arrive for the first movie they have ever seen on a cinema screen. The crowd parts as the flashbulbs pop and a thousand people sit down to watch Molly’s story. As the movie proper finishes and the end credits roll, a giant moth flies into the projector and burns up on screen. The film disintegrates and breaks.

From the day the movie opens in ninety-six Australian cinemas, the bitter attacks begin. Unable to simply celebrate the glorious bravery of three Australian heroines, right-wing commentators start a media campaign to discredit the movie. They claim the film distorts the manner in which the kids were removed from their parents and exaggerates the general suffering in the government re-education centres. Politicians join in, with one minister using government funds to print leaflets warning his constituents against seeing the film. The controversy fuels enormous audience interest. The movie’s weekly grosses actually rise in its third month of screening. After twenty-six weeks, Rabbit-Proof Fence ends its cinema run in Australia. As the most successful Australian film of 2002 it has overturned conventional Oz film industry wisdom. Films with black content are no longer box office poison.

August 2002

I return to Hollywood to prepare for November openings in the US and UK of both Rabbit-Proof Fence and The Quiet American.
Over to you

1. The Director decided to make *Rabbit-Proof Fence* rather than the Hollywood blockbuster. Why do you think did he chose to make it?

2. What were the key elements that ensured that it did happen?

3. What difficulties did Noyce face in making the film?

4. How did Noyce’s international experience contribute to the making of the film?

5. In your opinion, was the film worth making? Why or why not?

6. Noyce says “For me, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* the movie will be as much about stolen history ... history that we Australians needed to reclaim.” What do you think he means by this?

   Compare how this historical period is portrayed in your textbooks and in this film.
   - What is similar and what is different in the film and textbook portrayals?
   - Whose perspective is the story from in the film?
   - What other perspectives would there be?
   - Is one more ‘true’ or historically accurate than another? Give reasons for your answer.
**Over to you**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you know anyone who has a personal perspective on this period in Australia's history? Discuss these perspectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Read the summary of the 1997 National Inquiry. How many of its recommendations have been acted upon?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The film claims to be a true story. How might you be able to test whether it is true or not?</td>
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**RESEARCH ACTIVITY**

Choose one of the people from the film on whom the story is based (e.g., Molly, AO Neville). What is your prediction for what happened to them from the moment the film ended? Research their story from the time that the film ends. How did their life turn out? Is your prediction close to the true story?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

After viewing the film and discussing the relevance and value of the film in portraying History, choose one of the characters from the movie OR from those who made the movie and research either them as individuals OR someone like them (e.g., another Stolen child/producer/policeman.) What is their perspective on this area of history? Is there such a thing as the truth in history or is it a collection of individual memories? How do we decide whose history is told?
Permissions and copyright in filmmaking

When making a film based on a book, or involving true stories, real people or historical events, there are numerous permissions, copyright considerations and protocols. Some examples include:

- Adapting books into screenplays requires the acquisition of the rights to do so from the copyright owner (directly or via an agent) of the original work.
- Other than filming in your own home, permissions are almost always required to film on location, whether it is your school or a beach or on the street.
- If a filmmaker commissions a composer to write a music score for a film, contracts need to be drawn up making clear who owns the copyright and for what period.
- If a filmmaker wants to make a film about a real person, still living, they may approach that person for their permission or negotiate an agreement for their story to be told.
- A filmmaker wishing to incorporate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander elements in film should consult Indigenous experts or elders to ensure authenticity.
- If you film a person wearing a t-shirt with a particular logo/brand identified, you may need to obtain permission from the company which owns the logo/brand.

Follow the link to read more about the legalities surrounding permissions and copyright:

A Case Study

Here's a case study of the first steps in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* being made into a film:

- Christine Olsen, a scriptwriter, reads Doris Pilkington Garimara's book about her mother's childhood experiences and contacts the publishers, University of Queensland Press, to apply for the film rights. She is advised that all interested parties must submit 3-4 pages on how they see the film as part of their application.
- Christine wants to meet Doris but because of Doris's busy schedule the only way they can meet is if Christine drives her to the airport. Doris supports Christine's application to write a screenplay based on her book. Christine signs an agreement with the publishers to write the screenplay, taking out an “option” to make a film from the book.
- Having written the screenplay, Christine rings Director Phillip Noyce in the middle of the night in LA (she confused the time difference), which makes him direct his office to have nothing to do with her! His office reads the script and likes it, but it takes them months to convince Phillip to read it.
- Phillip agrees to make the film with Christine. Executive Producers are brought in to raise the finance for the movie based on Christine’s script.
- The strength of the original story and Phillip Noyce’s strong track record enables the executive producers to raise the finance and Phillip and Christine co-produce the movie, with Phillip directing.
- Throughout the process, Doris and Christine keep their copyright - Doris for the book, Christine for the original script - which allows them to receive some payment for their work when the film is made.
Reflecting on the subject of the film

From the film, or from your knowledge of the film so far, answer these questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is the film about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>When and where is it set?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What does the phrase ‘Stolen Generations’ mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Why do you think governments in Australia would have had a policy of removing some children from their families?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Rabbit-Proof Fence</em> is a film. Why should we believe what a film tells us about our history?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Who would you say is the main audience for the film – historians? Indigenous people? Young Australians? Someone else? Discuss your ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The film is set in the past. What does that have to do with your society today?</td>
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Now look at the following pages to test further some of the ideas you have listed here.
What if *Rabbit-Proof Fence* had never been made?

Films like *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, and many other important Australian films and TV programs, are often at risk of not being made at all.

This could be for a number of reasons such as the inability to raise the necessary finance or the non-availability of key creatives and cast. More and more frequently, the issue of copyright infringement — or film piracy — is a factor in determining which films are able to go from script to screen.

Screen piracy is the unauthorised downloading, streaming, copying, distributing and/or selling of copyright-protected content such as movies, TV shows and music. This growing activity has greatly increased the difficulty of raising the millions of dollars needed to make screen content. If film investors are not able to recoup their investment in the movie, there is a chance that the next *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (that is, an important, significant, entertaining, challenging, controversial and powerful movie about our past and our identity) may not be made.

Content theft increases the risks involved in financing content and may result in fewer films being made. Fewer films means fewer jobs for the roughly 46,000 people who work in the film and TV industries in Australia — from directors to cinematographers, actors to vehicle supervisors. This makes it difficult to build or sustain a career in the creative industry.

The success of Noyce’s previous films, together with his reputation, allowed him to find investors to make this independent Australian film.

Would it matter if Noyce had not been able to make this film?

Here are some statements about what it might have meant had the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* not been made. Complete the statements based on your own thoughts.

If the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* had never been made:

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Many Australians would not have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>I would probably know less about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>The many crew members who worked on the film would not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Cinemas would not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>I would not have enjoyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>I would not have thought about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>People living overseas would not have</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Below are some of the usual reasons or arguments people give for their film piracy, along with some facts. To find out more, read the “Digital Citizenship, Copyright & Cyber Safety” Facts Sheet: [http://www.nothingbeatstherealthing.info/digital-citizenship-copyright-and-cyber-safety](http://www.nothingbeatstherealthing.info/digital-citizenship-copyright-and-cyber-safety)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Piracy excuse</th>
<th>Fact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copying and sharing stuff isn’t really stealing</td>
<td>The value of content is not in the physical product but in the experience of watching the film or TV show. The millions invested in making and marketing content can only be realised if people pay for what they watch. Just because content is delivered digitally does not remove the rights of the owners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The crew and cast have been paid</td>
<td>It’s true the cast and crew are paid on most films, using money provided by those who invest in the making of that film. When films’ profits are eroded by piracy, investors for films become harder to find. When fewer films are made, there is less work for film crews and actors, and less choice for us all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big movie stars don’t need my money</td>
<td>Screen content creators include not only high-profile producers, directors and actors, but thousands of artists and technicians – think about the long list of credits at the end of a movie or TV show - who earn modest fixed incomes and their livelihoods depend on people paying for what they watch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I want to watch isn’t available in Australia at the same time as the rest of the world</td>
<td>Content is increasingly available and accessible in Australia with the arrival of more streaming and VOD services. TV content in increasingly available as close as rights deals permit to US broadcast. Availability is often an excuse used by people who want to access content for free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing will happen if I download or stream stuff from an illegal site</td>
<td>Under new Australian laws, pirate sites may be blocked. Or, you may receive a notice from your ISP advising your activity has been detected and, if you continue to access these sites, your details may be provided to the copyright holder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights holders can’t do anything to me if I download or stream from an illegal site</td>
<td>Rights holders could take legal action to recover the cost of the pirated content, plus additional costs to cover legal and administration expenses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only watch it myself and with my family so no harm done</td>
<td>The cumulative effect of many people behaving that way significantly impacts our creative industries, jeopardising future investment and jobs.</td>
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</table>
Teaching the Concept of Perspective

Is *Rabbit-Proof Fence* good history?

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* is an important film because it deals with a significant issue in Australia’s history — the ‘Stolen Generations’.

As a popular film, it is influential in shaping many people’s knowledge and understanding of this part of Australia’s history — and therefore of our identity.

Some people find the film powerful and moving, and accept its depiction of history as valid and accurate. They believe it presents the facts.

Other people have challenged this, and say it is not completely accurate. They say it distorts and misrepresents the facts, and leads us to frame our history in an inaccurate way.

Remember this film is not a documentary but a dramatised version of historical events.

**Discuss:** Name examples of recent films based on real events, people and situations. How much licence should a filmmaker have when making a film based on real events or people, to adapt the story in order to make it more entertaining or accessible or mainstream, as opposed to a documentary?


**Research:** On page 15 is an article by journalist Andrew Bolt, who sets out what he sees as significant inaccuracies or distortions in the film. This is followed by a letter to the newspaper by the film’s scriptwriter and co-producer, Christine Olsen, who challenges Bolt’s arguments, and says he has distorted and misrepresented the situation.

**Group activity:** Read the articles and the differing perspectives of Bolt and Olsen on pages 15 - 18. Break into groups and each look at one or two of these more detailed comments about the film. Report to the class so everyone can fill in the table on page 19.
Two perspectives on history

The critic

Rabbit-proof myths (extract)

Herald Sun, 14 February 2002
By Andrew Bolt

The truth of Australia’s past is hard enough to face, and untruths and exaggerations now will only divide us.

Phillip Noyce claims his new film, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, is a true story.

The Hollywood director’s publicity blurb repeats the boast: ‘A true story.’

Even the first spoken words in the hyped film, which opens next week, are: “This is a true story”.

Wrong. Crucial parts of this ‘true story’ about a ‘stolen generations’ child called Molly Craig are false or misleading. And shamefully so.

No wonder that when Craig saw *Rabbit-Proof Fence* at a special screening in her bush settlement last month, she seemed surprised.

“That’s not my story,” she said as the credits rolled.

No, it isn’t. Instead, it is Craig’s story told in a way that would help “prove” the “stolen generations” are no myth — that thousands of Aboriginal children were indeed torn from the arms of loving parents by racist police.

In saying this, I mean no disrespect to Craig.

She has had a film (supported by $5.3 million of taxpayers’ money) made of an episode of her life in which she showed extraordinary courage, endurance and willpower — but it’s a film which can’t be trusted to tell the whole truth. Who could value its praise?

It was 1931 and Molly Craig was just 14, when she and two of her younger cousins — Daisy, 8, and Gracie, 11 — were taken from an Aboriginal camp at Jigalong, in Western Australia’s north, and sent to the Moore River Native Settlement, 2000km south.

There these girls were to live with other ‘half-castes’ and to go to school, learning skills to help them to adapt to non-Aboriginal society.

But the girls fled after one night and, in an amazing nine-week epic, walked home to Jigalong — all but Gracie, that is, who was found by police at Wiluna.

Craig’s feat made the papers but was not written up in full until 1996, when her daughter, Doris Pilkington, who was herself raised at Moore River, wrote the book on which Noyce has based his film.

BUT Noyce and his scriptwriter didn’t stick to the facts Pilkington uncovered. Instead, the story was rewritten and now supports a monstrous falsehood — that we have a genocidal past that is, as Noyce’s publicity material declares, “more cruel than could ever be imagined”.

Such distortions of the truth, and for what? There are enough cruelties in our past we must confront — the theft of black lands, the half-caste children abandoned by white fathers, and the years of neglect of a people whose culture and communities are now shattered.

There is so much to make good — which is why the lies of the “stolen generations” activists are unforgivable.

The Aboriginal leaders who falsely claim they were “stolen”, the writers who exaggerate the number of children removed, the silly compensation cases that collapse and the slick claims of genocide all risk making every claim of black suffering seem a cynical try-on.

The truth of our past is hard enough to face. Untruths and exaggerations now will only divide us. Your film shames not us, Phillip Noyce, but you.

The filmmaker

Letter to the Herald Sun, 2 March 2002

From *Rabbit-Proof Fence* Writer, Christine Olsen

Andrew Bolt (Herald Sun, 14 Feb 2002) wants to demolish the truth behind the film, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, by either selectively quoting or misquoting from some of the historical records available about Molly Craig’s remarkable story.

Molly’s story has indeed been extremely well documented by Mr Neville, The Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia at the time.

Andrew Bolt’s main argument is that Molly, Daisy and Gracie were not removed from Jigalong because of Mr Neville’s plan to ‘breed out the Aborigine’ but to remove them from squalid aboriginal camps for their own good.

Yours sincerely,
Christine Olsen, writer/co-producer *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

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9. Article: Rabbit-proof myths, Herald Sun, 14 February 2002, Andrew Bolt
10. Letter to the Herald Sun 2 March 2002, Christine Olsen
Differing perspectives: critic vs filmmaker

Critic Andrew Bolt’s full story published in the Herald Sun (14 Feb 2002) argues that the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* portrayed scenes which are factually incorrect. Following are further extracts from that story. Christine Olsen, Writer/Co-Producer of the film responds, saying that Bolt has omitted other facts to make his argument.

**Issue #1**

In his February 14, 2002 story, Andrew Bolt wrote:

THE FILM shows a policeman chasing the girls in his car and ripping them from Molly’s screaming mother.

According to Noyce, this scene “tells the whole story” of his film.

THE FACT, writes Pilkington, is that the officer rode up on horseback to tell Molly’s stepfather he’d take the girls, and “the old man nodded”. The officer put Molly and Gracie on a horse, gave them the reins and asked them to follow him.

The next day he picked up Daisy and two sick women at another camp. There was no chase, no struggle.

**Filmmaker Christine Olsen responds:**

Andrew Bolt suggests that the girls were taken with their parents’ consent and he quotes, selectively, from Doris Pilkington Garimara’s book, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

Bolt’s article says Pilkington writes that the officer rode up on horseback to tell Molly’s stepfather he’d take the girls, and “the old man nodded”.

The full sentence reads “The old man nodded to show that he understood what Riggs was saying.”

What Andrew Bolt also chooses to omit is the following:

“A high pitched wail broke out. The cries of agonised mothers and the women, and the deep sobs of grandfathers, uncles and cousins filled the air. Molly and Gracie looked back just once before they disappeared through the river gums. Behind them, those remaining in the camp found strong sharp objects and gashed themselves and inflicted wounds to their heads and bodies as an expression of their sorrow.”

**Issue #2**

In his February 14, 2002 story, Andrew Bolt wrote:

THE FILM suggests Molly and her cousins were removed from Jigalong only because the state’s Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, was a genocidal racist who wanted to ‘breed out the Aborigine’.

It shows Neville outlining his plan to take half-caste children from their families and stop them breeding with full-bloods.

We then see him ordering that Molly and her cousins be removed because the youngest girl is “promised to a full-blood”.

**THE FACT** is the girls were taken after Neville learned they were in danger.

In 1930, he (Neville) had received a letter from the superintendent of Jigalong complaining that Molly and Gracie “were not getting a fair chance as the blacks consider the H/Cs (half castes) inferior to them”. He asked that they be removed.

Others were also worried, given how vulnerable half-caste girls then were to sexual exploitation, particularly by whites.

In December, 1930, a Mrs Chellow from Murra Munda station wrote to Neville about the girls, warning:

“I think you should see about them, as they are running wild with the whites.”

This fits with what Neville told the 1936 Moseley Royal Commission into the treatment of Aborigines: “The children who have been removed as wards of the Chief Protector have been removed because I desired to be satisfied that the conditions surrounding their upbringing were satisfactory, which they certainly were not …”

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11. *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence, Doris Pilkington | Nugi Garimara, University of Queensland Press (UQP)1996 (Pg 44)*
12. *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence, Doris Pilkington | Nugi Garimara, University of Queensland Press (UQP)1996 (Pg 44-45)*
Differing perspectives: critic vs filmmaker

Filmmaker Christine Olsen responds:

Andrew Bolt says: “In December, 1930, a Mrs Chellow from Murra Munda station wrote to Neville about the girls, warning: ‘I think you should see about them, as they are running wild with the whites.’”

What he omits from his article is Mr Neville’s reply to Mrs Chellow on 30.12.30:

“I have to thank you for your letter of the 19th inst. in regard to the girl ‘Daisy’. I agree with you that in this case it would be advisable to allow ‘Daisy’ to mate with her tribal husband who is a full-blood, and as legal guardian of this child I desire it to be known that I disapprove of any such proposition and do not wish the matter to be further considered. There are quite a number of respectable half-caste lads from whom no doubt this girl will in due course select a mate, but it is rather early to think of that at present …”

Andrew Bolt also omits the letter from the Superintendent of Jigalong Fence Depot to Mr Neville, written 19 days after his original letter, in which he retracts his advice that they should be taken, saying they are very much part of the black community:

“Yours of the 10th June to hand re female half-castes, Molly and Chrissy. As regards details of parentage appearance & etc. They live with their mothers in the black fellow’s camp and therefore have not been in touch with the white people much. They lean very much towards the black and on second thoughts I don’t suppose there would be much gained in removing them. I was asked by some of my neighbours if I could do something for them to better their condition hence any letters to you previously.”

Andrew Bolt says that there was no policy of “breeding out”. Andrew Bolt then quotes Neville from the 1936 Moseley Royal Commission into the treatment of Aborigines: “the children who have been removed as wards of the Chief Protector have been removed because I desired to be satisfied that the conditions surrounding their upbringing were satisfactory, which they certainly were not …”

What he omits to tell us is what Mr Neville said in the following year, 1937, when leading administrators of Aboriginal affairs assembled in Canberra. He spoke to a journalist from the Brisbane Telegraph.

“Mr Neville holds the view that within one hundred years the pure black will be extinct. But the half-caste problem was increasing every year. Therefore their idea was to keep the pure blacks segregated and absorb the half-castes into the white population...The pure black was not a quick breeder. On the other hand the half-caste was. In Western Australia there were half-caste families of twenty and upwards. That showed the magnitude of the problem. In order to secure the complete segregation of the children ‘(they) were left with their mothers (only) until they were two years old. After that they were taken from their mothers and reared in accordance with white ideas.’

A scene in the film depicts Mr Neville lecturing to a group of women about his policy of “breeding the native out”. One of the lantern slides used, in which he demonstrates his theory of “breeding out” over three generations, is a copy of the actual slide used by Mr Neville during his lectures. Andrew Bolt makes no reference to this.

Issue #3

In his February 14, 2002 story, Andrew Bolt wrote:

THE FILM shows the girls arriving at Moore River, where they wear prison-style sacks and are woken in the morning by a guard who screams and belts the walls of their room with a club.

THE FACT is, photos of children at Moore River show them dressed in European clothes. Pilkington writes that when her mother ran away, she was dressed in “two dresses, two pairs of calico bloomers and a coat”.

She also says the girls were woken individually and welcomed by one of the female staff.

Filmmaker Christine Olsen responds:

Andrew Bolt would have us believe that places like Moore River Native Settlement were benign institutions.

He says that the clothes worn in the film are not accurate and that photos of children at Moore River show them dressed in European clothes. Costumes worn in the film are based on research and actual photographs.

Bolt need look no further than the cover of Susan Maushart’s book Sort of a Place Like Home: Remembering the Moore River Native Settlement to see the exact replica of the costumes worn.

Bolt questions the way the children in the dormitory are woken up at Moore River. She (Doris Pilkington in her book, Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence) also says the girls were woken individually and welcomed by one of the female staff.

What in fact would happen is depicted accurately in the film, according to Maushart’s book, where the tracker would go into the boys’ dormitory “beltin’ a board with a stick”. Then he would go over to the girls’ dormitory, “bangin’ on the doors over there.”

13. Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence, Doris Pilkington | Nugi Garimara, University of Queensland Press (UQP) 1996 (Pg 41)
14. Brisbane Telegraph newspaper, 1937
16. Sort of a Place Like Home: Remembering the Moore River Native Settlement, Susan Maushart, Fremantle Press, 2003 (P 44)
Differing perspectives: critic vs filmmaker

Issue #4

In his February 14, 2002 story, Andrew Bolt wrote:
The film shows children at Moore River singing Way Down Upon the Swanee River for visitors. This shows they’re so robbed of their black culture that they sing fake Negro songs instead.

The fact is Molly saw no such concert. And Susan Maushart’s book Sort of a Place Like Home: Remembering the Moore River Native Settlement says this: “Journalists investigating conditions at Moore River were invariably impressed by the colourful experience of a staged corroboree.”

Filmmaker Christine Olsen responds:
Andrew Bolt says that: “the film shows children at Moore River singing Way Down Upon the Swanee River for visitors. This shows they’re so robbed of their black culture that they sing fake Negro songs instead.”

The fact is that song, “The Swanee River (Old Folks at Home)”[17], was sung to Mr Neville by a small children’s choir because it was known to be his favourite.

Andrew Bolt suggests that Aboriginal children “were not robbed of their black culture”. It is here that he misquotes Susan Maushart’s book Sort of a Place Like Home: Remembering the Moore River Native Settlement.

He quotes from the book: “Journalists investigating conditions at Moore River were invariably impressed by the colourful experience of a staged corroboree.”

Here is the passage from Maushart’s book in its entirety:
“In fact, the performance of corroborees was a rare exception to the ban on traditional activities. The reason for this, Jim Brennan explains, was simply that the corroborees were considered good public relations. He remembers Neal trying to get the men to hold corroborees whenever important visitors were due. Various press accounts over the years confirm this. Journalists ‘investigating’ (Maushart’s quotation marks) conditions at Moore River were invariably impressed by the colourful spectacle of a staged corroboree. These command performances often formed part of a lengthy concert programme of skits, songs and dances. In such a setting, the ages-old ritual was stripped of its power and dignity, becoming just another amusing item in a native minstrel show. As Jim Brennan remembers, it wasn’t long before the performers caught on to what was happening. Now and again Neal, he might say, ‘There’s a big mob of white people comin’ up here today. You better put a corroboree on.’...We said, ‘Oh no. No corroboree. We not corroboring tonight. We might corroboree next week.’ They wouldn’t put the concert on so that he can prove to the whites that everybody’s happy, you understand? They’re not happy.”[18]

17. Stephen C. Foster, “The Swanee River (Old Folks at Home)”, 1851 - www.50states.com
18. Sort of a Place Like Home: Remembering the Moore River Native Settlement (P 177-178)
Four aspects in the film that have been challenged

| C. | The film shows a policeman chasing the girls in his car and ripping them from Molly’s screaming mother. According to Noyce, this scene ‘tells the whole story’ of his film. |
| C. | The film suggests Molly and her cousins were removed from Jigalong only because the state’s Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, was a genocidal racist who wanted to ‘breed out the Aborigine’. |
| C. | The film shows the girls arriving at Moore River, where they wear prison-style sacks and are woken in the morning by a guard who screams and belts the walls of their room with a club. |
| C. | The film shows children at Moore River singing Way Down Upon the Swanee River for visitors. This shows they’re so robbed of their black culture that they sing fake Negro songs instead. |

The critic’s view – Bolt

The filmmaker’s view – Olsen

Is Rabbit-Proof Fence good history?

Having read the arguments made by the critic and the filmmaker on pages 16 – 18, summarise the key elements of each argument below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is the film an important one? Explain your reasons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is it important that a film about an aspect of Australian history gets it right? Why or why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some of the criticisms of the film are based in fact. Does it matter if the filmmaker gets some things wrong, or changes the facts for dramatic impact? Explain your reasons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Some of the criticisms are to do with policies and attitudes at the time. Does it matter what the intentions of the policymakers were, or is it only important to know what actually happened with those policies? Explain your ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Some of the criticisms seem to be based on selective quoting. Does it matter if the critics are not accurate in their criticisms? Why or why not?</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Based on Andrew Bolt’s criticisms of Rabbit-Proof Fence and Christine Olsen’s response to those criticisms, what is your opinion about the accuracy and fairness of the film?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What does the film, and the responses of the critic and the filmmaker, tell you about what must exist for a film to be good history?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The film is about the past, but also about the present. How can a film have power to influence people’s ideas about their identity?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The film deals with real people. What, if any, are the rights of these people in the film, and the responsibilities of the filmmaker?</td>
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Sample Assessment Task

NSW Elective History: Deconstructing the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

**Outcomes**

By successfully completing this task a student can:

- **E5.1** apply an understanding of history (heritage, archaeology) and the methods of historical inquiry
- **E5.2** examine the ways in which historical meanings can be constructed through a range of media
- **E5.6** identify, comprehend and evaluate historical sources and use them appropriately in an historical inquiry
- **E5.7** explain different contexts, perspectives and interpretations of the past
- **E5.8** locate, select and organise relevant historical information from a number of sources, including ICT, to undertake historical inquiry.
- **E5.10** select and use appropriate oral, written and other forms, including ICT, to communicate effectively about the past for different audiences.

**How can we determine whether a film is a good historical source?**

Film can be a useful way of conveying historical events and epochs to a broad audience. Through drama, film can captivate general audiences in ways that history textbooks and primary sources cannot. Even when based on truth, the key function of films is to engage an audience. The need to create drama and excitement, as well as to tell a story in a limited time period, can lead to the use of ‘artistic licence’, where filmmakers put extra emphasis on some things and ignore others. Filmmakers sometimes impose a bias that influences the way they present information. As historians, it is our job to determine whether particular films are reliable and accurate depictions of the events described or whether too much ‘artistic licence’ has been used.

**The task**

For this task you are required to evaluate *Rabbit-Proof Fence* as a film about the Stolen Generation as a historical source.

**Assessment criteria**

You will be marked on your ability to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the value of the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* as a source in teaching about the Stolen Generations
2. Use historically correct terms, concepts and make reference to historically accurate and useful sources
3. Clearly communicate your understanding of the Stolen Generations in a sustained and well-structured response.
Sample Assessment Task

Steps to completing task successfully

In sequential order, what steps in the process does the student need to complete?

1. Watch the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, taking notes on the content and the style of the film. You should note down what events are depicted in the film, in detail, but you should also be taking notes on how the film has been made. What sort of emotions is the filmmaker trying to evoke through things like music, lighting and the use of sound and colour?

2. Now it is time for you to conduct some corroborating research. You need to research the events depicted in the film, using a range of sources.

3. Using the information you have gathered, write a response that is no longer than 1000 words to the following questions:
   - *Assess the values of your film as a historical sources for a historian studying the Stolen Generations.*
   - In your judgement you should refer to:
     - The accuracy of the film
     - The level of audience engagement
     - The way the film communicates historical perspectives to allow audiences to empathises with characters

4. Complete a full reference bibliography, which must also include annotations for each source. This means you need to write one or two sentences about how you used each historical source, demonstrating an awareness of the strengths and limitations of each. This must be handed in with your film assessment.

Criteria

| Makes a clear judgement about the value of the film, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in teaching about the Stolen Generations | 21-25 |
| Provides a sophisticated, sustained, logical and well-structured response | |
| Locates and applies information from a comprehensive range of historical sources. | |

| Makes a judgement about the value of the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in teaching about the Stolen Generations. | 16-20 |
| Provides a logical and well-structured response | |
| Locates and applies information from a range of historical sources | |

| Attempts to make a judgement about the value of the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in teaching about the Stolen Generations | 11-15 |
| Provided a relevant and appropriately structured response | |
| Locates and uses information from some historical sources | |

| Generalises about the value of the film | 6-10 |
| Presents a largely relevant but generalised description | |
| Uses a limited range of historical sources | |

| Limited or no reference to the values of the film | 1-5 |
| Presents a limited narrative response | |
| Limited or no use of historical sources | |