Missions, Settlements and Reserves
Exploring Indigenous Australia Series

Video Support Notes

Following many requests, these notes have been printed on A4 size sheets for easy photocopying

Video Education Australia

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Duration 28 mins
Produced by VEA
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WARNING
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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

This program presents an account of government policies of protection which resulted in Indigenous people being removed to missions, reserves and settlements. Using the examples of Coranderrk (Vic.), Cummeragunja (NSW, Murray River), and Yarrabah (Qld, near Cairns), the program presents the experience of Indigenous people living and working on these missions, reserves and settlements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The program includes interviews with those who themselves experienced this life, or whose families did. The historical commentary provided by Kerrie-Lee Barrie and the historian Ros Kidd places these particular experiences in the broader Australian context.

KEY LEARNING AREAS

Studies of Society and Environment, English

KEY CONCEPTS

- protection, assimilation, resistance
- historical concepts of continuity and change
- links between general and particular experience

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss definitions of the word ‘protection’.
2. Using current situations where there are government policies to protect wards of the state, discuss how well these policies work in practice.
3. List reasons why indigenous people might have been removed onto missions, reserves and settlements. (Perhaps this could be done after watching the introductory segment of the video, which presents a letter describing such a reason).

USING THE VIDEO

Summary

This program begins with a letter dated 1874 from Daniel Matthews, the founder of Maloga (whose residents later formed Cummeragunja). Kerri-Lee Barrie discusses the reasons for reserves and introduces the case studies. The program presents the impacts of protection policies on Indigenous peoples over time. The controls over the lives of Indigenous people are emphasised, especially those expressed in the removal of children from their families. Details of the very poor living and working conditions are shared and examples of organised resistance on Coranderrk, Cummeragunja and Yarrabah are discussed. The program concludes with a discussion of the impacts of the past policies on communities today and links understanding of this history with issues of reconciliation. Ros Frogley, Bill Jenkins, Dot Peters, and Joy Murphy represent Coranderrk. Wayne Atkinson represents Cummeragunja and Rosina Colless and Alfred Neal represent Yarrabah.
IMMEDIATELY after viewing the video, students could be asked to write their own personal response to any of the material presented. This would give them a chance to include their feelings about particular aspects and to think about the contents without pressure. The questions provided on the Work Sheet could be provided before the viewing to guide note taking. After viewing the questions could be discussed in small groups and then answered formally, or could be answered individually by students and then shared.

FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Construct a map of Australian missions, settlements and reserves including Coranderrk, Cummeragunja and Yarrabah, as well as those in your own state or region. (See Missions, Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia.)

2. Arrange for a speaker from a local indigenous organisation to talk about the local experience. Use the program headings as guides for questions and/or for writing a report of the talk.

3. Watch the historical drama, Women of the Sun: Part 3, Nerida Anderson, (based on the 1939 Cummeragunja Walk Out) and write a personal response. Alternatively, write an imaginative piece from the point of view of one of the characters.

4. List the main laws that have governed Aboriginal children in your own state. Annotate the list by suggesting their implications and effects. (For lists of laws applying specifically to Aboriginal children see Bringing Them Home, Appendices 1.1 - 7 ).

5. Write a report on one mission, settlement or reserve regarding living and working conditions and wages. This could be one of the places in the video or a place chosen by you. (See Rebellion at Coranderrk for a detailed history of that reserve, and chapter 18 in Invasion to Embassy Land for a discussion of. For other places see entries in The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia, and the chapter devoted to the relevant state in Contested Ground).

6. ‘Past laws, practices and policies ... may have been devised with the best will in the world, (but) were ill-conceived and led to gross violations of human rights.’ Ronald Wilson.

Write an essay discussing this statement in relation to missions, reserves and settlements in Australia.
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SOURCES


Cato, Nancy 1993, *Mister Maloga*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld.

Goodall, Heather 1996, *Invasion to Embassy Land* in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972, Allen and Unwin with Black Books, St Leonards, NSW.

Horton, D. (gen.ed.) 1994, *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra. (Also available on CD Rom)


(Also, a brief Guide to the Findings and Recommendations of The National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families is available from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission).


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
THE LETTERS

The letter in the opening of the video is contained in the book *Pastor Doug* written by Marjory Thorpe, Lansdowne, 1972.

The letter written by Ellen is from the book *The Loddon Aborigine* by Edgar Morrison, 1967. The book is now out of print but available in some libraries.

**Note:**

1. Some minor edits were made so that this letter would be more comprehensible eg. Franklin Ford replaces Jim Crow, which was an early name for the area.

2. After the video was completed, and on the eve of publication of these notes, it was discovered that Ellen actually lived longer than another 2 years and possibly 10-11 years before succumbing to a respiratory disease. One of her siblings died in the same year. *Source: Rebellion at Coranderrk, Diane Berwick, 1998.*
Student Worksheet

1. What was the purpose of the reserves?

2. What were the short-term and long-term impacts of the removal of Aboriginal people onto reserves?

3. Describe the living conditions on the reserves.

4. Describe the working conditions on reserves.

5. What reasons were given for the organised resistance on:
   a) Cummeragunja (1939)
   b) Coranderrk (1881)
6. Explain one of the impacts of the past protection policies.

7. Explain the significance of the following quotations from the program:
   a) 'Aboriginal culture went underground'. (Wayne Atkinson)
   b) 'Her mother used to paint her with charcoal all the time to make her look black' (Rosina Colless about her mother and grandmother)
   c) 'ABC and things like that, that's all we learned.' (Alfred Neal)

8. What are the strengths of such examples of Indigenous oral history for studying the past?
9. Explain the significance of the following quotations from the letters included in the program:
   a) 'The girls can neither be more than 14 years of age and each have a half-caste child.' (Daniel Matthews 1874)

   b) 'I have not been very well this last three weeks...' (Ellen, Coranderrk, 1864)

10. What are the strengths of such primary sources for studying the past?

11. Explain the significance of the following commentaries made in this program:
   a) 'Year after year the files show the government was well aware that people were underfed, they were not clothed, they were dying of preventable diseases'. (Rosalind Kidd).

   b) 'All missions and settlements were totally built, constructed and run using unpaid Aboriginal labour.' (Rosalind Kidd)

   c) (In the 1950s)'there was a major shift in policy from protection to assimilation' (Wayne Atkinson)

12. What are the strengths of such comments provided by historians for studying the past?
OTHER RELEVANT PROGRAMS AVAILABLE FROM VEA

A Matter of Identity
Aboriginal Art Yesterday & Today
Aboriginal Experience Part 1 and 2
After Mabo
After Wik
Before It's Too Late: Aboriginal Traditions & Culture Alive
Brisbane Dreaming
Desert of Dreams
Exploring Indigenous Australia Series:
  The Aboriginal Civil Rights Movement
  Indigenous Organisations Today
  Land, Kinship and Culture
  White Australia - A Black History
From Wave Hill to Wik & Beyond: The Struggle for Native Title
Kath Walker: Poet and Artist
Mabo Myths
Media Portraits of Indigenous Australians
Stolen Generation
Talking Native Title & Reconciliation
The Art of Arnhem Land
Tribal Voice (Yothu Yindi)
Understanding Wik
Urban Aboriginal Lives
Wik: The Battle for Hearts and Minds
Yarrabah

See also: Aboriginal Studies section of VEA Catalogue for our complete range of titles