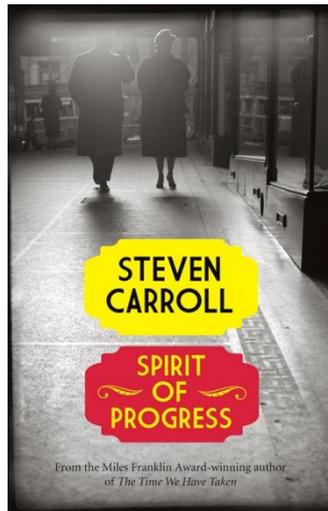


Spirit of Progress



TEACHERS' NOTES

ISBN: 0732291186

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Spirit of Progress is suitable for study in a range of disciplines such as English, Australian History and Cultural studies and politics. It would also be useful for areas of study on themes such as Belonging, Change, Conflict, and Identity.

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Introduction

The novel is inspired by real life events. In 1946, a young Sidney Nolan, one of Australia's finest artists, read an article in the *Melbourne Herald* about an elderly woman who was living in a threadbare tent on the city's fringe. The article inspired Nolan to paint *Woman and Tent*: a picture of a white haired woman who strides out of the painting, either waving one hand in the air or warning off a stranger. Amazingly, the woman in the painting is a relative of the author, Steven Carroll.

Using the creation of this picture as the basis of the story, Carroll spins a captivating tale about identity, reality, truth and the nature of art. He plunges the reader into Melbourne, 1946: the pressure cooker of the city that produced a small creative miracle. He leads the reader into the pivotal moments of the lives of newly married parents, a group of restless artists, a proud old woman with a tent for a home, a journalist, a gallery owner, a farmer and a factory developer and reveals how they irrevocably intersect.

And all the while the *Spirit of Progress*, the locomotive of the new age, roars through their lives like time's arrow, pointing to the future and the post-war world only some of them will enter.

About the author/illustrator

Steven Carroll is one of Australia's most highly regarded and awarded authors. He was born in Melbourne and grew up in Glenroy. He went to La Trobe University and taught English in high schools before playing in bands in the 1970s. After leaving the music scene he began writing as a playwright and became the theatre critic for *The Sunday Age*. He has recently given up his lecturing post at RMIT to write full time and lives in Brunswick, Victoria.

His novels *The Art of the Engine Driver* and *The Gift of Speed* were both shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award. In 2008 *The Time We Have Taken* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, South-East Asia and South Pacific region as well as the 2008 Miles Franklin Award, Australia's most prestigious literary prize.

Spirit of Progress, is a prequel to his award-winning 'Glenroy' trilogy and was longlisted for the 2012 Miles Franklin Award.

Author/illustrator inspiration

This section is locked and a quote from the author and/or illustrator will be provided by HCP if available.

Study notes on themes and curriculum topics

These notes and activities are generally suited to students in years 10-12 but could be used more widely. Please select and adapt according to your students' needs. Some websites have been linked

to these classroom activities, but your school library or public library will have wonderful resources, too. Help students develop their information literacy skills by discussing other possible sources/places to access information.

Spirit of Progress is suitable for study in a range of disciplines such as English, Australian History and Cultural studies and politics. It would also be useful for areas of study on themes such as Belonging, Change, Conflict, and Identity.

Specifically for VCE English students, *Spirit of Progress* allows for detailed examination of VCE English contexts on the following themes.

Exploring issues of identity and belonging

Spirit of Progress examines: the complexity of identity; our public and private selves; the inner self and alienation.

Some of the questions that can be explored are:

How is identity presented in the novel? Is identity fixed and how is it determined?

What is the relationship between how we see ourselves and how the world sees us? Which is the truth? Discuss in relation to the novel.

Is there conflict between character's inner and outer selves; their public and private selves?

Which characters feel as if they belong and which characters feel alienated?

What kinds of statements is Carroll making about identity in the Post-War period? Are his observations relevant today?

Do some people transcend generations and others stay?

Exploring issues of encountering conflict

Spirit of Progress examines: personal/inner conflict, interpersonal, extra-personal, causes and social factors that generate conflict.

Some of the questions that can be explored are:

Are characters in conflict with their environment, content or in flux?

Why is Webster bored? Is Katherine alienated from her environment?

How do external forces shape character's relationships with their environment?

Do characters experience inner conflict? Why and in what ways?

How do historical, international, national, socio-political and family factors influence characters? Discuss in relation to two of the characters.

The imaginative landscape

Spirit of Progress examines: The importance of the imaginative landscape and what it is, the physical features of a landscape, how meaning is created through landscape and how the landscape is used as a metaphor.

Some of the questions that can be explored are:

Spirit of Progress is set in 1946, a time of great change in the cultural and political life of Australia. What sorts of personal changes take place in the lives of main characters and the city of Melbourne?

How does the particular time and place in which the novel is set, impact on the characters and who they are? How would the story be different if it was set in the present in an Australian city other than Melbourne? What is unique about the time in which it is set?

To what extent does living in Melbourne shape the characters in the novel?

Why was the novel set in 1946 and not some other point in time?

What does the novel say about what it was like to live in Melbourne after the war?

What do you think it is like to live in Melbourne today? What are the unique things that living in Melbourne give you?

How is the landscape of Carroll's imagination influenced by the memory or inclusion of actual experiences and events? What is the relationship between fact and fiction?

In what ways is the novel an extended metaphor of a particular point of time and place or universal themes?

How is the actual landscape of Melbourne a site for conflicting views about the future of Melbourne? Discuss with particular reference to Webster and Katherine.

How is the *Spirit of Progress* used as an extended metaphor?

How are feelings and ideas and points of views conveyed in the text?

What and whose feelings are conveyed?

Does the author intrude into the text? In what ways?

Whose reality?

Spirit of Progress examines: multiple realities, emotional realities, constructed realities and cultural realities.

Some of the questions that can be explored are:

Why has Carroll used the story of his Great Aunt as the pivot for the story? How does this allow him to explore a number of realities at once?

How do Carroll's choices in the way he tells the story allow him to ask questions about the nature of realities?

What kinds of ideas does the event allow him to explore? Why is the bulk of the story told in a three-day period?

Whose reality is explored in the novel? Is there more than one?

To what extent is the book an exploration about universal or individual truths about what it means to be human?

Picasso said, 'We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise truth.'
Discuss this quote in relation to the novel.

What is the relationship between truth and fiction in the story?

(Adapted from: *Innovative ideas for using artworks in the NGV Collection as a resource by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English*)

Pre reading activities

1. Close examination of *Woman and Tent* by Sidney Nolan.

In an interview with Radio National which you can find at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/steven-carrolls-spirit-of-progress/2928022> Steven said,

'the figure in the painting was his Great Aunt Katherine Carroll. He said, "she died the year I was born in 1949 so I never met her, but she was one of those mythological figures who lingered on into family folklore. We all knew for some time that somebody somewhere famous had painted her some time or other, but it wasn't I don't think until quite a few years later that the various pieces of the jigsaw started to come together. I can't even recall the process, but it was a story that was known.'

The woman in the painting, therefore inspired *Spirit of Progress*. In the same interview Steve said,

'Obviously there's an autobiographical element ... I think there is in all fiction, you've got to start from something that has got a bit of urgency to it and a bit of reality to it. But as time goes on and as the books flow one into the other, those original models start to fade, and that's a good thing because then you eventually start to see them as characters in their own

right and unanchored from the original sources that might have inspired the writing. They become free.'

Go to this website to see the painting and the text of the article:

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.cs-pa-http%253A%252F%252Fwww.pictureaustralia.org%252Fnolan%252Fnolan018.html>

Go to this website to see Sidney Nolan's painting *Woman and Tent*:

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/11124726?q=Old+woman+who+lives+in+a+tent+%2B+Melbourne+Herald&l-australian=y&c=picture>

Class exercise: As the story pivots around the painting, it is important that students are familiar with it. Consider the subject in the picture.

What is the woman's age, occupation, family background, socio-economic standing, habits/tastes, education, occupation, fears, dreams and so on?

What is she doing? What does this tell us about her inner self?

Look at the choice of colours that the artist has made. Why has he chosen those colours? How has he positioned the elements in the painting? How do they contribute to the mood of the painting?

What might the painting reveal about Nolan's inner self?

Do you think this painting united or divided people?

In what ways was Nolan prepared to take risks that could have led to potential criticism and alienation?

Why do you think Nolan is regarded as one of Australia's greatest artists?

Write a profile piece about the woman from the painting. Imagine and write about a significant factor that impacted on her sense of self and where she lives.

Imagine you are an editor of a newspaper. Write a headline for a front-page story about the woman in the painting. Share with the class. When you have finished reading *Spirit of Progress*, rewrite the headline and share with the class. How has your understanding changed?

(Adapted from: *Innovative ideas for using artworks in the NGV Collection as a resource by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English*)

2. Consider how the social, geographic and political context of a period of time affects an individual's identity

What was Australia like in the post-war period? *Spirit of Progress* has been set in a particular time and place; a pivotal moment in Australia's history when the idea of Progress dominated and

urbanisation and mass production transformed our cities. It is important for students to understand what were the features of life in that time and why it is an important period in Australian history.

In an interview with Radio National which you can find at

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/steven-carrolls-spirit-of-progress/2928022> Steven said,

‘It was I suppose that transitional nature, it was a pivotal point. My history lecturers told me all through my history degree to avoid that phrase, ‘it was a moment of change in history’, because all moments in history are moments of change. And we can see history as a series of transitional moments. But this was a particularly resonant one and a particularly dramatic one. It was the beginning of the post-war world, it was the end of what we might call the imperial world, that had been blown away, and what was about to begin was a different proposition altogether, and uncertain. But nonetheless, the whole idea of progress was its key term.’

Quotes from *Spirit of Progress*:

‘And although six years may not seem a long time, everybody looks tired for it has been a long six years and a long war. And, in many ways, this war will not end for years yet...the damage will not be confined to those six sad and violent years that constituted the war, for the damage too will be passed on and the effects of this war will be felt long into the future.’ (pp.18)

‘For it will remain, this post-war world, a world of taking sides; of us and them, and nothing, no shades of difference in between.’ (pp.174)

Class exercise: Interview a Grandparent or a friend or relative who lived through the late 1940s and early 1950s. Ask them about their memories of the Second World War and the period from the late 1940s to the 1950s. Write up an interview, or film, edit and produce a video to be broadcast in class.

Some questions you could ask:

Were there rations? What were they? What did that mean?

Did they have any family members return home from the War?

What are their memories of that time?

Did they live in the country, the inner city or move out to the new suburbs?

Did they migrate to Australia? What was their first impressions of Australia?

How did life in Australia differ from their country of origin?

What were the politics like?

Were there radical and conservatives? Were people polarised in their views?

Were people excited about the future? Hopeful?

Did they go to the supermarket for food?

How was life different then to how it is now? How do they think growing up in that period of time effected the development of their identity?

What have they observed about your generation? How is your generation different to theirs?

3. Create wikis to understand some of the key people, cultural movements, social and political context and places in Melbourne in 1946.

The novel plunges readers into the cultural heart of Melbourne in 1946. Starting with Wikipedia and using some of the resources listed below, ask students to create a wiki that they will present to the class. Divide the class into groups and ask students to research, write and create a wiki on the following topics. Tell the students that the wiki is intended for lower secondary students. Ask the students to include visual materials. Write about 500 words. Present the wiki to the class.

a) The Angry Penguins

Who were the Angry Penguins?

What were their paintings like?

What was Modernism? How were Modernists different from the Impressionists?

Why were they so controversial?

What has been their legacy to Australia and the wider world?

Background: Angry Penguins was an Australian literary and artistic avant-garde movement of the 1940s. The movement was ignited by a modernist magazine of the same name published by the surrealist poet Max Harris, who founded the magazine in 1940, at the age of 18.

Though the magazine first appeared in the city of Adelaide, South Australia, the subsequent radical modernist movement of that name was based largely in Melbourne, Victoria. The name itself was derived from the cryptic line "the angry penguins of the night" in a poem by Harris (Mithridatum of Despair) (From Wikipedia).

The Angry Penguin painters are considered to be the major figures of a modernist movement in Australian art, based in Melbourne, which has determined and shaped Australian contemporary art. The Angry Penguins included Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, Max Harris, John Perceval, Albert Tucker and Joy Hester. Their aim was to modernise Australian creative arts and poetry, and challenge traditions they saw as restrictive in Australia in the 1940s.

Contemporary movements in Europe, such as surrealism and French symbolism influenced the Angry Penguins. These movements were seen as vital by the Angry Penguin painters to modernise

the contemporary Australian art scene and also to inspire Australian artists in finding different and more relevant modes of expression (From: <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/angry-penguin-painters>)

ANGRY PENGUINS DEFENDED

Sir: In the public interest, we, the undersigned Australian authors and others vitally interested in Australian creative talent and the advancement of Australian art and literature, record our vigorous protest against the recent prosecution in Adelaide of one of the editors of the journal *Angry Penguins* for publishing "indecent, immoral, and obscene" writing.

A prosecution of such a kind is not in the public interest, and operates only to handicap and embarrass literary and artistic expression. Further, it brings the Australian community into ridicule. No sensible person would claim that Australian literary journals and publications have had any injurious effect upon the Australian moral standards, but, in any event, the common sense and experience of the public afford adequate safeguards. It is both the right and the duty of the artist to express honestly what he feels and sees in life, and freedom to do so is at the very root of humanity and genuine democracy.

From a letter to the Editor that appeared in The Argus, 26 October -

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/11367426?searchTerm=Angry%20Penguins&searchLimits>

<http://cas.awm.gov.au/art/ART28283> - the original cover design for 'Angry Penguins', 1945 issue by Albert Tucker.

b) Sidney Nolan

Who was Sidney Nolan?

What kind of pictures did he paint?

What made his paintings unique? Why is he considered to be one of Australia's greatest painters?

For research: <http://www.pictureaustralia.org/nolan/>

<http://www.sidneynolantrust.org/pages/sidney.php>

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/sub/nolan/home.html>

c) Sunday Reed

Who was Sunday Reed? What did she and her husband do for Australian art? What did they create?

Whom did she have an affair with?

For research: <http://www.heide.com.au/about/the-heide-story/#/about/the-heide-story/the-reeds/>

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an23609020>

http://www.iwi.nsw.gov.au/files/u1/heartgarden_html.pdf

d) Heide Museum of Modern Art

What is Heide Museum of Modern Art and why is it unique?

What kinds of things are exhibited there?

Why is it important in Melbourne and Australia's cultural life?

For research: <http://www.heide.com.au/>

<http://www.heide.com.au/about/the-heide-story/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heide_Museum_of_Modern_Art

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/videos/2009/05/21/2577417.htm>

e) George Johnston

Who was George Johnston?

Why was he famous?

What series of novels did he write?

Who was he married to and where did they live?

For research: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/johnston-george-henry-10632>

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/clift-charmian-9764>

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/clift-charmian-9764>

http://www.harpercollins.com.au/authors/50001739/George_Johnston/index.aspx?authorID=50001739

http://www.harpercollins.com.au/authors/50001739/George_Johnston/index.aspx?authorID=50001739

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/1969/15460/>

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/music/result?l-publictag=George%20Henry%20Johnston%201912-1970>

Major themes and ideas in the novel

Spirit of Progress is an ambitious novel, bursting with ideas and arguments about the nature of identity and reality. It questions the role of art in society and wonders if art in fact has the power to exist beyond history. It reveals that there can in fact be multiple realities existing side by side, at the same time. By using little dialogue, few paragraphs, short chapters, multiple points of view, an omniscient narrator that seamlessly travels through the past, present and the future and a swathe of literary techniques such as assonance, repetition, metaphor, Carroll manages to masterfully articulate our interior world and tackle the big philosophical questions. Do I matter if I only matter to myself? Does how I see myself constitute my identity even though other people and institutions and the world at large view me differently? Whose perspective is the truth? Are there multiple truths? Is life something that happens to me or do I have a say? Am I a social creature or an individual? What is the nature of progress and history?

Some of the themes and ideas raised in the book are:

The nature of art

Spirit of Progress asks what is the nature of art? Carroll uses his various characters to examine multiple points of view about the nature of art and the moral dilemmas and philosophical questions art creates. These observations though are tempered because they are told through the gaze of an omniscient narrator which makes us less able to say this is what character x says and believes. Nevertheless throughout the novel, there are constant arguments forwarded about art, what it is, what it isn't and what it can and can't do.

Tessa concludes that:

'Throughout the sad and violent years the verdict on fun has been that it is a light indulgence.' (pp. 130)

'This is the verdict of the Age. Fun is light. Art is heavy.' (pp. 130)

When Sam goes out to see Katherine he seeks to:

'Capture the old woman. Freeze her in time. Turn fact into myth.' (pp.135)

'For if painting is to exist beyond the frame, the painter must know what exists beyond it.' (pp.135)

'...he knows there is only one thing to do. Go back to the source. Even if it means going back without Life's co-operation.' (pp.135)

When Sam returns to Skinner's Farm:

'His intention, all along, was to preserve an image, still shimmering with life before fading altogether, of what we once were. Before this new world, into which the likes of Sam are stepping, renders them History – faded photographs and unreliable memoirs. Myth.' (pp. 158)

And later Sam explains the artistic process:

'It is Eliot who wrote of the catalyst...Something that wasn't there before (be it a poem or a painting) is suddenly there, in the world, but the thing through which the process conducted itself remains the same. Unchanged. Inert. Cows. Artists. It doesn't matter. It's all the same. Something happens that leaves Sam a spectator in the process.' (pp.168)

When Sam takes the painting to the gallery:

'As he walks, Sam is conscious of not just carrying a painting, a portrait of what we were before we entered these post-war years, but a challenge as well.' (pp. 174)

And when they are all at the Gallery:

'All that will remain will be the painting.' (pp. 252)

Ironically, after Katherine has died, all that remains as evidence of her existence is the painting. Art transcends the passing of time and history. A version of Katherine is trapped in a frame, hanging in famous galleries around the world.

'Aunt Katherine who only ever wanted to be left alone, will now have to put up with strangers staring at her. Gawking, even. Grinning at this Curiosity. And, trapped within the painting, she will be powerless to stop them'. (pp. 332)

When Rita sees the painting many years later, it has an unexpected power:

'From the moment she sets eyes on the painting she is immediately back there:' (pp. 333)

'The power of the painting to do that, to conjure up that world to which she is both irresistibly drawn and which she never wants to see again, is quite a jolt.' (pp. 334)

'And with this comes a sense of possession. The painting itself may not be hers...but the world it so effortlessly conjures up will always be hers.' (pp. 334)

A painting therefore, lives beyond the frame because it resonates with the viewer's emotional world.

The nature of identity

Who is History? What is the relationship between social and individual identity? Is the individual a moment in history? How much is our individual identity shaped by our community or institutions or

economic forces or social movements? Does Art capture History in ways that no other things can?
Sam sees the portrait of the woman as a:

‘portrait of what we were before we entered these post-war years’. (pp. 174)

Are we of the present or the past? Who are we? Are we the person we see in the mirror or are we the person that the outside world sees? Skinner has a view of himself that changes once he becomes aware of how others see him:

‘And is it possible that when people look upon the outer Skinner they also see a reflection of Skinner’s mind. A bit odd. Even silly...Simple of heart, simple of mind...yes, he is a ridiculous man. At least, this is the judgement that Skinner now passes on himself’. (pp.192)

‘Once again he sees himself as the young painter must have seen him. Simple, easy to lie to.’ (pp. 193)

‘But above all, that was when he saw the look on Miss Carroll’s face. Pronouncing him simple, inside and out...For she had drawn the conclusion that betrayal requires a calculating mind, and that Mr Skinner did not have one.’ (pp. 194)

Further, Katherine is thrown into an existential conflict when she sees how she has been characterised or captured in the painting in a way that is unlike how she saw herself:

‘The Katherine in the painting and the Katherine standing in front of it are, it seems, two separate people.’ (pp. 240)

‘...she also ponders the old woman in it and wonders if this is the way that the world sees her. Wacky and wild. A curiosity. It is odd seeing yourself the way others do. But why, she’s asking, why should it be true just because others see you like that? Just as she has never really seen herself as old...she’s never seen herself as wild and wacky. Or a curiosity. But simply as who she is: Katherine.’ (pp. 243)

‘History found her useful for a time. But History has moved on as History does, and left her an old woman in a tent.’ (pp. 245)

‘As she turns, ...she bumps in a woman standing behind her. Katherine offers a brief apology and receives a brief response in return. Then this woman turns her attention back to the painting, to the woman and the tent.’ (pp. 245)

Ironically, all that will remain of Katherine, of evidence that she lived will be the painting:

‘All that will remain will be the painting.’ (pp. 252)

‘Vic discovered, going through her few possessions, that there were no photographs of Aunt Katherine. No images; nothing to remember her by. Nothing to show that she once lived. Nothing...except the newspaper photograph and the painting by a young man...who Vic...judged to have caught Katherine in one go.’ (pp. 312)

‘Great-Aunt Katherine, her tent on the very edge of the city, still there, still haunting the family story; still haunting the glittering city itself, still pitched on its fringes and still

indifferent to a world that continues to stare at the spectacle of an old woman who has done nothing more than choose to live in a tent, on a block of land, where there ought to be a house.' (pp. 324)

How much are we a product of History?

What is the relationship between history and the development of the individual?

'But this old woman, who calls from another world while inhabiting the one he lives in, is just out there. A few miles away. And, as much as he resists the phrase 'living history,' he can't help but think of her as History that has managed to live on into a time beyond her time...'.(pp. 50)

'...she will not just be giving birth to the child alone; she will also, she will later discover, be giving birth to a generation.' (pp.93)

'She will not just be giving birth to a child: she will be giving birth to a generation, the Baby Boom. Just as economies have booms (and busts), when the noise of production is everywhere, so too do populations. And sometimes those generations are given a name, as this one will.' (pp. 93)

'It will also be because of the confidence with which this generation will stride into life, for Michael and his kind will inherit a world of plenty that their parents only ever dreamt about... The assumption of a future. The assumption, in short, of eternal Progress.' (pp. 93)

'History finds us useful for a time, then History moves on as History does.' (pp. 234)

Characters and character development

The characters in *Spirit of Progress* are complex. Describe in detail the characters of Vic, Rita, Skinner, Katherine, Sam, Tessa and George at the beginning of the novel compared with what they are like at the end of the novel.

Which people and events shaped and changed them throughout the course of the novel?

What have they experienced over the course of the novel?

Was there any conflict between their public and private personas?

Katherine/Old Woman/Aunt Katherine/Miss Carroll

The plot of *Spirit of Progress* pivots on the creation and exhibition of the painting *Woman and Tent*. The subject of the painting is Katherine. Katherine is generally revealed through the perspectives of other characters. Even when we read her story, we see her through the eyes of the narrator. She rarely has the opportunity to speak for herself as the personal pronoun is not used, nor is there much direct speech.

What kind of impression do we as readers have then of Katherine?

How does this treatment and construction of her as a character shape how we think of her?

Look at the following entries about the Old Woman/Miss Carroll/Katherine.

What kind of picture do you draw from these different accounts?

The way that Katherine sees herself is only one element of her. What does this say about identity and who we are?

The first time the Journalist sees her:

'A small, white-haired woman suddenly lifts the flap of the old tent and peers at them.' (pp. 29)

'The eyes, they both realise instantly, tell you that this is not a woman to be disturbed.' (pp.29)

'She then steps from the tent and starts striding across the sodden ground towards them, waving her arm as she walks.

'Get off my property.' (pp.29)

But the woman, dressed in the black, in loose-hanging clothes, follows them right up to the road, still standing in her land.

'Get right off.' (pp.30)

The first time Sam sees her picture in the paper:

'...he can't but think of her as History that managed to live on into a time beyond her time, but all the same sufficiently removed and distant to be looked upon as you might look upon an old coin or a dress in a museum.' (pp. 50)

'This is why she is a painting. She is both here and there, past and present, and she knows it.' (pp.51)

When Skinner refers to her:

'...he scans the paddocks and sees the light from Miss Carroll's tent glowing in the dark.' (pp. 56)

When the reader sees Katherine's point of view for the first time:

'Katherine (for she *is* Katherine, even if it is only her sisters who call her that, and even if it rings strangely in her ears on those rare occasions she hears her name).' (pp. 59)

When Rita reads the story in the newspaper

‘Aunt Katherine frightens Rita. She has always frightened her, from the night she’d told Rita she was a fool to be marrying Vic because Vic was a drunk who would let her down the way drunks always do, and that her life would be a misery.’ (pp. 85)

When Katherine prepares for the opening night of the exhibition:

‘And Katherine: the complete Victorian madam, from bun to shoes, what the age that bred her might have counted as pleasing while not pretty, even plain, but imposing all the same, carrying in her bearing and manner, and in her upright carriage as she now stands to leave, the full weight and authority of an empire that no longer exists.’ (pp. 239)

When Katherine stands next to her portrait:

‘...the spectacle of an elderly, Victorian-looking woman warrants, if anything, only a passing glance. Somebody’s grandmother. Even when she stands directly in front of the portrait of the wild-eyed, grey haired woman and her tent, nobody gives her a second look.’ (pp. 240)

When Katherine examines the painting:

‘...she also ponders the old woman in it and wonders if this is the way that the world sees her. Wacky and wild. A curiosity. It is odd seeing yourself the way others do. But why, she’s asking, why should it be true just because others see you like that?’ (pp. 243)

Class exercise: Think about yourself and write about how three different people would see you.

For example:

How would your best friend see you?

Your Father or Mother?

A sibling?

The teacher of the subject you dislike the most at school?

How would you capture those different perspectives in a novel format?

Which perspective is the most accurate?

Who knows you the best?

Do you have a public and private self?

Language

One of the ways that Carroll creates his richly textured imaginative landscape is flooding the text with concepts, words and people that are impregnated with symbolism and meaning. Unlocking the meaning of the words, phrases and allusions allows us to seamlessly travel back through time and to more fully understand the text’s imaginative landscape. Language impacts on meaning; it shapes how we understand a text. Working individually, or as a group, ask the students to find challenging words in the text and write out the meaning and effect of each word or phrase, in your own words.

Then ask students to think about the present landscape. What are the prevailing ideas? Who are the key people that define the time? The poets, the writers, the singers? How do we live now?

Post-war landscape	Explanation – what is special about it? How does it symbolise a particular period of time?	2012 landscape	Explanation
The TGV		Facebook	
The Age of Steam		Itunes	
Modernism		Online shopping	
The Left		GFC	
The Right		The Greens	
Marxists-Leninists		Globalisation	
Cultural cringe		Densification	
Mass production		Steve Jobs	
Urbanisation			
TS Eliot			
Ernest Hemingway			
George Orwell			

Visual literacy analysis of *Spirit of Progress*

The Cover

What is the *Spirit of Progress*? How is the *Spirit of Progress* used as an extended metaphor? How does it tie into the themes of the novel?

The *Spirit of Progress* - Australia's wonder train:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_Railways_S_class

Clips from Australian Screen on the launch of the *Spirit of Progress*:

<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/spirit-progress/clip3/>

Some background on the Spirit of Progress:

'The *Spirit of Progress*, the passenger train that ran between Melbourne in Victoria and Albury in New South Wales, was launched in 1937. The Great Depression of 1929–33 had halted railway development; during that period no new locomotives or carriages were constructed. Recovery from the effects of the Great Depression was slow and the Spirit of Progress was the only new passenger train to be constructed in Australia during the 1930s. The train became a symbol of Australia's modernism and technological achievement, and represented Victoria's state pride and industrial development. Around 56,000 people enthusiastically greeted the train when it made its 38-hour journey around country Victorian towns for public inspection.'

From Education Notes at <http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/spirit-progress/clip3/>

Analyse the Cover

Ask the students to look at the cover of the book. Get them to predict what they think it is about. Guide them with the following questions and then get them to answer the remaining ones on their own.

What century do you think the story takes place?

What is the mood? Who is the subject? Is the subject gazing at the responder? Is the subject turned away? What is the effect?

How is the image positioned? Is the responder positioned to have sympathy for the figure in the picture?

Whose point of view is captured in the shot? How is the responder positioned?

Is there a close up or long shot used? How does the social distance impact on the responder?

What kinds of colours are used? What feelings do you think they are intended to inspire in the responder? Is one colour accented over another? Is there a clear division of tones?

What is the most salient feature on the cover?

How does the text work with the images on the cover? How does it influence the responder?

What are the other visual elements in the text? How do they add to the themes of the book?

Does the cover convey a sense of belonging or not belonging? How?

Questions for reading and discussion

Prologue France, December 1977

The Language of Engine Driving

Why has the novel been set in 1977? What broader social movements occurred around this time?

What were the engines and drivers like in Michael's youth? What did they eat and drink?

Did you find it hard to understand who the narrator is in the first few pages? Why? How have the first pages been written to make it hard to understand?

What did Michael's father do?

What are the engines like now? How are they different?

Where is Michael and what is he doing there?

Who are Monet and Sisley?

What is the TGV?

What is 'dying time'?

What are the similarities between the old and new engines?

What is the significance of Michael keeping his father's copy of the *Locomotive Engine Driver's Guide*? What do you think that symbolises?

What could the trains be a metaphor for?

What is 'the Age'?

What will engines do that they have always done?

Why is Michael's father a constant presence?

Who is the Michael that was and the Michael that is?

Think about yourself – were you different when you were younger? Do you have a person that was and a person that is? Do you travel in two landscapes concurrently? The landscape that is, the landscape that surrounds you and your history? What are your interior and exterior worlds?

Why is Michael in France? What could being in France symbolise?

Part One

Melbourne, Tuesday, 16 July 1946

What is the significance of the date? Does it refer to a specific event?

What were Melbourne and Australia like after World War Two?

What were Australian artists keen to do after WW2? What significant movements were popular in the worlds of art and literature and music?

Chapter 1 - The Post-War World

Who are Vic and Rita?

How long did it take for soldiers to return home to Australia at the end of the Second World War?

Why are people silent on the platform?

Why is this a 'new age'?

Why are old words not up to the task of the job demanded of them?

What is a sapper? What happened in Singapore? Who were Vic's old mob?

What is the *Spirit of Progress*? What do you think it represents to Vic?

Why do you think the familiar streets suddenly have 'the shadowy deserted looks of streets in dreams'?

Chapter 2 – The Photographer and the Journalist

Which famous Melbourne paper had their offices on Flinders Street?

Where is the Place de la Concorde?

Who are F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway?

What are the suburbs to the North of Melbourne? What the two sides of the river in Melbourne?

How do journalists like to think of themselves?

What is newsworthy about an old woman living in a tent on the outskirts of Melbourne in 1946?

Describe the remnants of the town on Old Wheat Road.

Are the photographer and journalist trespassing? Why or why not?

What does the Old Woman look like? Why hasn't the author physically described her?

What does 'human interest' mean?

What are the reasons the woman gives for living in a tent?

What kind of story does the Journalist want to write about her?

Is the Journalist right in thinking that 'her small, bony, hand represents some kind of truth about what kind of person the woman is'?

What assumptions does the Journalist make about the woman and the farmer?

What does the Farmer say about Miss Carroll?

How are History and Progress about to impact on Skinner and Miss Carroll?

What world is rapidly disappearing?

Chapter 3. The Journalist on the Street

Why don't we know the Journalist's name?

What is a broadsheet? How would you describe the Journalist?

What is ironic about reading about the Journalist's love of newspapers on page 41 for readers in the 21st century? How does that juxtaposition illustrate the broader themes of the book?

Where are the *Herald Sun* offices now?

How does the Journalist see the newspaper and newspapers in general?

How did you feel when you found out the name of the Journalist on page p.42. Why do you think the author chose to tell the readers his name? What do you think is going to happen?

Who is George Orwell?

What is Heidi in Melbourne? Does it have any connection to the events described in the book?

4. The Painter Reads the Journalist

Who do you think the character of Sam maybe based on?

Find out who Sidney Nolan and Sunday Reed were and what the nature of their relationship was.

What is Sam interested in?

Who is Eliza Fraser? Why is she referred to?

Who is Tess?

What are some of the reasons why Sam would like to leave Melbourne?

Why do artists want to leave the 'cooped-up', 'stifling' city? Do you feel that way about where you live? Do you have a dream that when you leave school you will go somewhere else and your real life will begin?

Who is Kafka? By using this reference what kind of people do you think Sam's friends are?

What is meant by the phrase 'living history'?

Do you know someone who has managed to live on into a time beyond his or her time? Explain.

Why does Sam think the Old Woman could be a subject for a painting?

What does your city/town/suburb look like? Does it have the look of when something is over?

What does Sam realise about the present?

What does Sam want to do before the world 'goes to elsewhere'?

What is the *Spirit of Progress* a metaphor for?

5. Skinner Observes the Light from Miss Carroll's Tent

Who is Miss Carroll?

Describe what being 'country cold' feels like? What does 'country dark' look like?

What does Skinner do?

How did he think the Journalist saw him?

What does the light from Miss Carroll's tent represent?

Describe what Skinner saw before Miss Carroll arrived and after she arrived?

How does Skinner calling the Old Woman, Miss Carroll change the way you see her?

Why doesn't Skinner go and talk to Miss Carroll?

6. Inside Miss Carroll's Tent

Describe Katherine. How has your understanding of the Old Woman changed over the course of reading about her?

What kinds of things does she like? What does this tell you about her?

What is her most treasured possession? What does this tell you about her? What is your most treasured possession?

What is she brooding about?

What are the objects she has in the tent? What do they tell you about her?

Why does she pray?

7. The Absent Father

What does the title of the chapter tell you about Vic?

Where does Vic live? Why is Vic's world about to change?

How does he see fatherhood?

Does he think he'll make a good father? Why?

Where is his father? Who is the 'absent father'?

Will Vic's background or history make him a good father? What does Vic decide?

8. The Dancing Man

Do you have any idea what the title may mean? Who could be the Dancing Man?

What does Tess do?

Who is Graham Greene?

What happened between Sam and Tess? How does Tess feel about it?

Do you know the cinema in Melbourne with the famous ceiling?

How would you describe the entrance to Flinders Street Station?

Why did the end of the affair coincide with the end of the War?

What does the Dancing Man represent to Tess?

What did she think Sam wanted and what did she want? Does she tell Sam the truth?

Have you ever had a perfect parting?

9. Rita at home

What does Rita see marriage as?

What kind of life does Vic know? Describe it in detail.

What does Vic know that Rita doesn't?

Is Vic trustworthy? Why or why not?

Did marriage give Rita what she was looking for?

Do you see first love as 'an act of innocence that leaves as soon as you hand it over'?

Do you think Rita will bloom or wither? What knowledge do you think she could have done without knowing?

What does 'born to be round' mean?

What united Rita and Vic in the beginning? Why is this now a problem?

How does Rita feel about Aunt Katherine?

What does Aunt Katherine say about Vic?

Does Rita think her body has the million – year old memory?

Do you have a family member that everyone is embarrassed by?

10. Webster Imagines His World

Why are all the words capped in the chapter heading?

What maps is he looking at?

Who does Webster liken himself to? What does this tell you about him?

How does Webster see himself and history?

How does he see Skinner and his property?

What does the farm mean to Skinner? What does it mean to Webster?

How does Webster see the post-war world?

What is the noise of production? Why does a suburb need it?

What's happened to manufacturing in Melbourne in the present day?

It is ironic that as readers you are reading about a period of time that was about to go through the largest economic and social boom ever experienced when we are going through the opposite – the GFC.

11 Vic Reads the Evening Newspaper

What is a Gladstone bag?

What does Michael represent? Who are the Baby Boomers?

How much is a life about an individual or history? Are we products of history?

What generation are you apart of? What are the features of your generation?

How did Baby Boomers see the future?

How do you see the future? Are you hopeful about the future?

What will Rita realise in the future? What was Aunt Katherine probably right about? What does happiness feel like to Rita?

What does happiness feel like to you? What does it look like? What are you doing?

Is love a light?

12 The Day Ends

What is Skinner's dilemma?

Why does this chapter include snippets of each of the characters we have met so far?

What do you think is going to happen next?

What does the *Spirit of Progress* represent?

Part Two Wednesday, 17 July 1946

13. Skinner's Gift

What do you think Skinner is planning to do?

What are the gifts he intends to give to Miss Carroll? Why has he chosen them?

What does he think rising early demonstrates for an older person?

What does he think constitutes a 'visit'? Do you ever 'visit' anyone? If you do, do you do anything out of the ordinary?

How were things in the 'Old World'?

How does the way Katherine greet Mr Skinner differ from how she received the Journalist?

What do you think the previous Miss Carroll's were like?

What is possibly won between Miss Carroll and Skinner?

Do you think that there is possibility that a different side to Miss Carroll is about to emerge? Why or why not?

Do you think that unexpected pleasures give you an insight into how people used to be?

14. Webster's Ground

What will bend to the will of Webster? How effective is the use of alliteration?

What will be lost as a result?

Is Nature more important than Progress?

What happens in November, 1959? What is the effect of knowing that?

What is a Caterpillar machine?

15. George is adrift

In what ways is George adrift?

Were there very many galleries in Melbourne in 1946? What did people think of Modern Art? Was it enthusiastically received?

Why does the chapter start with a single word If? What is the effect?

What kind of woman is Tess?

What does petit bourgeois mean? Does the word represent a particular ideology? What does it tell you about George?

What is the 'ideological age of the time'? What were the different sides?

How is George different from other people?

Where are they meeting?

What kind of exhibition will it be?

How does George see Sam?

How does Sam see Melbourne? Is it different to how other people see it? Why?

16. The Indifference of Munching Cows

Why aren't the surrounds an Impressionist painting?

Who were McCubbin and Tom Roberts? What kind of painters were they? What would they have thought about Modernism?

What are paintings like to Sam?

Who is referring to when he mentions water lilies and medieval villages? What does this tell us about Sam and his thoughts about the role of art?

Describe the tent.

How does Sam see Katherine? Is it different to how she sees herself?

What is ironic about Sam giving Katherine a card?

Do people have the right to refuse to be subjects of artworks? Must artists seek permission from subjects to paint or photograph them? Why or why not?

17. The Contessa Reflects

What does Tess think fun feels like?

What does fun feel like to you?

Why is there no fun in the paintings in the exhibition? Why is Art heavy?

What does Sam have that she doesn't?

What does fun bring with it? What do the girls on the swings have that she doesn't?

18. *En Plein Air*

What does En Plein Air mean? Why is it in italics? Is it referring to something?

What are the characteristics of Impressionist painting? How do they differ from the Art of Heavy or Modernism?

What is a Romantic?

Should Artists work from life?

What does painting the old woman do to her?

What is the benefit of painting from Life?

Describe what Skinner looks like.

Why does Skinner agree to let Sam paint on his property? Is that problematic?

What can a painting capture?

19. Affection

What is on Rita's mind? What does she welcome back?

What is the difference between affection and appetite?

Is love a passing thing? What will be sad about this moment?

20. Trust (1)

How important is trust between an artist and a subject?

Why does Katherine like a fire?

What kind of life did Katherine want? How does she feel about company?

Why does she trust Skinner?

21. The Concept of Too Much

What are the worst bits of Vic?

What is the 'Concept of Too Much?'

What has Vic learned?

22. Trust (II)

Why is there another chapter entitled trust?

What is going to happen between Skinner and Katherine? Is Katherine within her rights to be upset?

Can a painter paint whatever s/he wishes?

In what ways has trust been broken?

Is Sam's desire to paint and capture a historical moment more important than the wishes of the woman he wants to paint?

What happens to the relationship between Skinner and Katherine?

23. History Pays a Call

Who is History in this chapter? Why is she referred to as History?

How does Katherine enter the house? What does she want Vic to do?

24. A Painting Appears

How does Sam paint?

Who is Eliot? What did Eliot think of the creative process?

What are the differences between the painting and the photograph?

What is in the frame and what is out of it?

What can Sam see that others can't?

25. An Artist Without an Art

All the chapters up until this point have in the main, only had one point of view. In this chapter there are many perspectives about the one event. Why are there multiple points of view in this chapter?

What does it tell you about the event?

What does playing music allow you to do?

What does Sam want people to ask themselves when they see the painting?

Why does Sam think that Melbourne is a 'pressure cooker of a town'?

How does Tess feel about change?

How does she see Melbourne at that point in time?

Who are the Angry Penguins?

Can an affair only exist for so long?

Does Tessa say what she really thinks about the painting?

Who is Toulouse-Lautrec?

Who is the stranger?

What does Vic see in the paintings? What does Vic realise?

26. A Simple Heart

What is Skinner's first name? What is the effect of finding out his name?

Do you think that Skinner is simple of heart and simple of mind?

Has he become the man that he thinks others have always seen?

What gift could he give Miss Carroll?

What do they both miss out on as a result of making assumptions about the other?

How has the light in Miss Carroll's tent changed?

27. The *Spirit of Progress*

What is the meaning of the title of the chapter?

How have she and Sam changed? Can you tie in the train metaphor to this experience?

'The sadness of having something, and losing something, will pass. But rumour and misunderstanding have a nasty habit of being passed on and becoming fact when they were never true in the first place.' Discuss.

Why does Tess want to write a letter to Sam?

What do trains represent or symbolise?

What does the *Spirit of Progress* mean to Vic?

Why are the words Hope and Progress capped?

Part Three Thursday, 18 July 1946

28 Horizon

What does the phrase 'post-war' encapsulate?

What does the word horizon symbolise?

What is the choice that George has to make?

Will he be like many of his generation and seek to flee Melbourne and Australia?

What is about newspapers and print that he loves?

29. Vic Discovers the Golf Course

Why does Vic like golf courses? How do they make him feel?

Why are people like Vic going to be drawn out to suburbia?

In the post-war period, many people left the inner-city to go and live in newly built suburbs. In the last twenty years, many people now wish to live close to the city. Where would you like to live? Why?

What does Vic tell Katherine? How does he see the world now?

30. Sam on the Docks

Why did so many young Australians want to leave Australia as soon as they finished school?

<http://www.johnkinsella.org/essays/search.html>

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/classmate/cultural-tinge-declared-dead/story-e6frewti-1111114404089>

Why does Sam want to go overseas?

Who or what will Sam miss if he leaves?

31. George's Moment

What is the difference between being a writer or a journalist?

What does George like about being a journalist?

How does George surprise himself?

What is he giving up?

Why do you think he feels older? Have you ever made a decision that had made you feel older?

32. The Kitchen Sink

What does the kitchen sink symbolise?

What did Rita's neighbour say a kitchen sink represents?

What does Vic like about Katherine's land?

Describe the city and Katherine's land. What literary techniques has the author used?

What does Aunt Katherine represent to Vic and Rita?

33. Webster and Skinner Observe Each Other

What do the characters of Webster and Skinner in the writer's landscape?

What are the differences between mass production and what a farm produces? Who has the greater power?

How does Webster see the land?

What does Webster remember about his childhood?

How does Skinner see Webster?

34. Victorian Lady

What does Victorian Lady mean?

Draw a picture of what you think Katherine looks like.

What period of time does Katherine represent?

35. The Subject is Unobserved

What does the title of the chapter foreshadow?

Does anyone recognise Katherine?

Who is more real – the subject in the picture or the real person?

What are the differences between the photograph and the painting?

How has the painter painted Katherine?

What is the difference between how we see ourselves and how the world sees us?

Why is the woman not interested in Katherine initially?

Why didn't Tess send the letter?

Is what she wants to say in the letter how she feels?

What doesn't Tess want to be seen as?

How does she see herself when Sam looks at her?

What is the 'grammar of old feelings'?

What is the effect of flipping from one character's perspective to another's? How does it make you feel as a reader?

Does Sam decide to lie or tell the truth or 'will the right lies prevail'?

What is the truth that exists between two people?

What literary devices does the author use to create meaning? Why does he constantly repeat the same phrases, ideas and words?

Part Four January 1947

36. Elsewhere

What does Elsewhere mean? Why is it capped?

Why has the author used assonance in the first paragraph?

How does Sam feel about Melbourne when he sees it in the distance?

What does he realise about leaving home?

Where is The Rip?

What does Sam leave behind?

37. The Dutiful Servant

How does the body let you down?

What does the train symbolise?

What is the effect of the juxtaposition of the train and the farm?

How has Katherine changed from before?

How does Katherine see her body?

38. A Goodbye of Sorts

How does Tess see Sam's departure?

How does her perspective differ from Sam's?

Does Tess know Sam better than he knows himself?

39. Heaven and Earth

Why does George like the basement?

What is The Great Gatsby?

What does it tell us about George?

What does he love about newspapers?

40. Singapore

What do you think this chapter could be about?

What clues are there as to what it may be about?

There is hardly any direct speech in the book, yet the author chooses to use it on page 280. Why?

How is Vic affected by seeing Alan?

Why is Rita angry?

What is it about Singapore that will impact on her marriage?

Part Five 1949

41. The Lost Domain

How has the city moved on?

How have Tess and George changed?

Who is Tennyson?

What is the difference between Tess's private and public faces?

Why does the author choose to not format dialogue in the standard way?

What is the division between your private and public self?

42. Care and Dread

What do you think is going to happen in this chapter?

What do you think has happened to Miss Carroll?

Why is the line, 'Hello Miss Carroll. Are you there?' in standard dialogue format? What is the effect on the reader? What does it draw the reader's attention to?

Describe how Miss Carroll looks.

Why is it significant that the light is still on?

What could that symbolise?

How does Skinner feel?

Does the significance of the painting change with Katherine's passing?

43. The Centre of Things

How does Sam feel now that he is elsewhere?

Who are Hemingway and Cezanne?

What does he understand about himself now that he is away from home?

How does he come to feel about 'Woman and Tent'?

Does he think there may be a price to paid for distance?

44. Webster at Home

What is Webster doing? What does Webster find frustrating about going for a stroll?

Why is he restless?

What does his wife represent?

What does the black car symbolise? Why is Webster drawn to it?

What the difference between movement and speed?

Why does he need speed? What is it a metaphor for?

45. The Wooden Frame of Fate

How did Katherine die?

How will the memory of Katherine live on?

What is the effect of the juxtaposition of the painting becoming a famous work by a famous painter and Katherine dying alone in a tent?

How do you feel about the painting now?

What is History?

Part Six November 1977

46. Woman and Tent

What gallery is this chapter set? What famous glass panel does it refer to?

Who is Gough Whitlam? What had happened to him?

What is Michael doing there?

Why doesn't he approach Sam? What would he lose or gain by talking to Sam?

Does Katherine live on in a way she would have chosen? Is that important?

What matters more – what she wanted? What the artist produced?

47. The Survival of the Fittest Memories

What is Tess thinking about?

What conversations are playing over in her head?

Again, standard dialogue format is used in this chapter. Why? What is the effect?

What is the difference between the public and private George?

People may pass into History but what remains?

What will happen to Tess? Will she be like Katherine?

What does Tess decide? What will not pass?

48. Rita Calls on History

How does Rita feel reading about the exhibition?

Why does she decide to go?

Viewing the painting takes Rita back to a specific geographic and emotional time and place. Do you have a picture that you drew as a child that when you look at it now, many years later, you feel exactly how you felt at the time you drew it.

What power does the painting possess?

49. Old Streets

What is Sam looking for?

Why is he looking for it?

How does he feel about George?

How does George's death make him feel about his own mortality?

What draws Sam back?

Epilogue France, December 1977

The Travelling World

Who is this chapter about?

Why isn't his name mentioned? Why does the book begin and end with a train journey?

What does it symbolise?

Why is Michael in France?

Is he following in the footsteps of other Australians who felt the need to leave Australia?

What does he take with him?

What has happened to the *Spirit of Progress*? Is that ironic? What does that say about History?

What is the nature of History and Identity?

Bibliography

Innovative ideas for using artworks in the NGV Collection as a resource by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, retrieved from

http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/105231/VCE-ENGLISH-RESOURCE_HR.pdf

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Mandy Newman BA (Sociology), MA (Creative Writing), BTeach is a journalist, writer and a secondary school teacher of English. Originally from Melbourne, she has called Sydney home for twenty years. Mandy has worked as an Education Officer, a web producer at the *Australian Financial Review* and is the author of *How to Say I Do* (Allen and Unwin, 2009). She has appeared on *Sunrise* among other television programs and written features for *Sunday Life* magazine. She is now an education consultant working with major Australian publishers, a teacher and writer.