

**“INTIMATE,
ELEGANT
AND FUNNY”**

- Bill Gosden,
New Zealand Film Festivals

**“FASCINATING
AND REVEALING”**

- Brad Newsome,
Sydney Morning Herald



*An intimate portrait of Jane Campion
and her collaborators at work*

FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE

A film by Clare Young

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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY FIONA HALL



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I: JANE CAMPION
AND DIRECTOR
OF PHOTOGRAPHY
ADAM ARKAPAW
ON SET

Overview

"If you want to cover up, to be safe, then you don't allow the audience in."

- Jane Campion

'From the Bottom of the Lake' is an intimate portrait of Jane Campion and her collaborators at work: a personal and insightful exploration of how the creative spirit can sing. The film shows how artists can create an original vision and bring it into the world.

The film begins in 2010, watching Jane at work during the development and writing of the crime-mystery mini-series "Top of the Lake". Sharing this process is her long-time collaborator, sparring partner, and co-writer Gerard Lee. "You create a space where ideas just arrive". Together Jane and Gerard nap, argue, get depressed and celebrate. We see the struggle between plot and inspiration, authenticity and cliché, deadlines and perfection. "You're always working to that bottom line, what can be fixed, what can be improved, what can be moved."

We jump to rehearsals at the fictional "Women's Camp" in New Zealand, where Jane and her actors improvise to discover the characters and their relationships. "Inspiration is always a visitor to a relaxed space inside you, it comes when you're not trying." We see Jane at work with her leading ladies, Holly Hunter and Elisabeth Moss. Across the diverse landscapes of New Zealand we see the intensities and challenges of the shooting of the show: an army of crew members, actors throwing each other on tables, stunt men jumping off ropes from trees. "I'm protecting the story, I'm protecting the actors' work..."

Finally, in 2013 we ride in the car with Jane and Gerard to the premier of "Top of the Lake" at Sundance Film Festival. "People become directors because they find strength and courage in the idea, to bring it into the world..."

This documentary, filmed by Jane's assistant and mentee Clare Young, has privileged access to one of the world's most admired and critically acclaimed filmmakers. What unfolds is a surprising, inspiring, and often humorous insight into the creative process.

Curriculum Links

'From the Bottom of the Lake' could be studied in relation to the following subject areas:

- Drama
- Media Arts

Drama:

The documentary is recommended for use at Years 9 – 10 and Senior Levels of Drama.

In Years 9 and 10, students develop knowledge, understanding and skills about drama as an art form through improvisation, scripted drama, rehearsal and performance. They make and respond to drama works independently, with their peers, teachers and community. They manipulate the elements of drama and narrative structures to shape tension, dramatic action and convey text and subtext.

They perform drama works, developing relationships, status, physical and psychological aspects of roles/characters and refining expressive skills in voice and movement for different forms, styles and audiences. They critically evaluate experiences of drama making, performing and responding and analyse how meaning is created through dramatic action in different forms and styles. They critically respond to drama through the viewpoints of meanings and interpretations, forms and elements, societies and cultures and evaluations.

'From the Bottom of the Lake' would provide students with an excellent insight into the creative process of writing, directing and acting with reference to the above core concepts they cover in Drama.

Media Arts:

The documentary is recommended for use at Years 9 – 10 and Senior Levels of Media Arts.

In Years 9 and 10, students make and respond to media arts works independently, with their peers, teachers and community. They analyse their own and other's media artworks and consider how representations are created and challenged by media conventions, audiences and contexts.

'From the Bottom of the Lake' provides students with an excellent insight into the creative process of writing, directing and acting with reference to the above core concepts they cover in Media Arts.



Director's Statement:

"The creative process has been described as elusive and mystifying. Inspiration reveals itself in surprising ways, as glimpses on the surface of our imagination. As a young filmmaker, my ambition was to understand how creativity worked, to take notes, to study, to really KNOW the process – how someone could create exceptional original drama, which had the capacity to deeply move its audience, told by characters we would fall in love with.

Writer/director Jane Campion asked me to be her assistant on "Top of the Lake", a six-hour crime mystery story for television. In a world of show-biz so full of fake and formula, watching Jane and her collaborators at work, stumbling and sailing along, in their poetic unusual way, was inspiring and exciting.

Jane generously and at times reluctantly agreed that I could document the process: from the development and writing, through pre-production and the shoot, and finally, back to Sydney where the process began. 'From the Bottom of the Lake' is a story for filmmakers and film-watchers to illuminate the process of creation. It is a story for future generations of storytellers and artists who battle down that road to create meaningful and honest work that touches your heart.

Creativity is unpredictable, bold, fragile, tough, and at times heart-achingly beautiful. 'From the Bottom of the Lake' is an honest portrayal of an artistic process, its pains and of course its delights. It is a triumphant tale of our capacity as humans to look to the bottom of the lake, deep into our imaginations, to tell stories which enchant us and haunt us – stories which celebrate the ceremony of innocence, our endless search for truth and meaning in our lives."

- Clare Young.

*In a world of
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full of fake
and formula,
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Clare Young

HOLLY HUNTER (GT)
AND JACQUELINE JOE
(TUI MITCHAM) ON SET





Pre-viewing Activities

1. Brainstorm what students know about writer and director Jane Campion. In pairs, have students complete a timeline of her major works. Valuable sites for research include:

- <http://www.nytimes.com/movies/person/83988/Jane-Campion/biography>
- http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001005/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm

2. Divide students into pairs/small groups. Allocate them one of Campion's feature films and have them complete a poster summary of the film, including the following information:

- Plot synopsis
- Actors
- Writer(s)



1: HOLLY ON SET
DAY
2: JANE'S
WRITING IN
NOTEBOOK
3: JANE AND
HOLLY ON SET
4: JANE ON THE
SHORELINE

- Major themes explored
- Critical reception/awards

Films to allocate to students:

- Short films - *Peel* (1982) and *Passionless Moments* (1984)
- *Sweetie* (1989)
- *An Angel at My Table* (1990)
- *The Piano* (1993)
- *Portrait of a Lady* (1996)
- *Holy Smoke* (1999)
- *In the Cut* (2003)

Have students present their posters to the class and following the presentations, discuss any recurring themes, actors, writers and other continuities present in Campion's work.

3. As a class, read the following article about 'Top of the Lake': <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10105994/Jane-Campion-interview-for-Top-of-the-Lake-The-world-is-focused-on-sexiness.html>

Have students answer the following questions:

- What was it that drew Campion to writing and directing for television?
- What are the main plot premises underlying 'Top of the Lake'?
- Explain the Latin phrase: 'Et in Arcadia Ego'. Why does this concept so interest Campion?





1



2

Viewing Activities

Students to take notes on the following questions while viewing the documentary:

SECTION 1 – THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The documentary begins in May 2010, with Jane Campion and her co-writer/collaborator Gerard Lee in Devon, England, where they are writing the pilot for a six hour crime mystery.

1. It is stated that Jane Campion ‘reluctantly’ agreed to let Clare Young document the creative process. Why do you think Campion is so reluctant?
2. Lee and Campion have worked together on several productions spanning more than 20 years. What is your impression of their writing relationship?
3. How does Campion describe her style of writing in terms of time taken to allow the ‘ideas’ to emerge? Are you surprised by this?
4. Explain Lee’s method of employing a ‘separate pad to write down critical thoughts’ that he had?

SECTION 2 – REHEARSALS AND FILMING

We now cut to Sydney in June 2011, where we learn that ‘Top of the Lake’ is fully financed and Jane Campion has asked Clare Young to be her assistant on the series.



3

1: JANE
WATCHING
MONITOR
2: JANE AND
GERARD LATE
NIGHT WRITING
3: CLARE
INTERVIEWING
JANE & GERARD
4: GERARD AND
JANE IN NOSS
MAYO

1. Clare asks Jane how she manages the ‘pull and tug between perfection and deadlines?’ Explain Jane’s response.

2. Jane will be directing three of the six episodes; describe the process Jane uses when storyboard-ing. Why does she feel ‘insecure’ as a director?

We move to January 2012, to the South Island of New Zealand where rehearsals are about to commence. Campion and her actors improvise to discover the characters and relationships.

3. Explain how Campion views the rehearsal process and space. Refer to her definition of creativity as ‘time, space and trust’.
4. We see the actors immersing themselves in their characters in several intense scenes. How do these scenes make you feel? Are you surprised by the intensity?
5. Gerard Lee returns towards the end of the shoot. How does he explain his feelings of pride in relation to Campion’s career and personality?

SECTION 3 – SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

The final part of the documentary takes us to January 2013 at the Sundance Film Festival.

1. What is significant about ‘Top of the Lake’ being screened at the Festival?



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Post-viewing Activities

1: SHOOT DAY 8,
SOUTH ISLAND,
NEW ZEALAND

Given the intimacy of *'From the Bottom of the Lake'*, it is suggested that students take a look at the nature of documentaries and the different modes they can take.

ACTIVITY: WHAT IS A 'DOCUMENTARY'?

The term "documentary" was originally used in a 1926 review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana*, a film about residents of Samoa. Prior to that, terms like "actualities" had been used for non-fiction films. Because editing capabilities were limited, the films tended to be short and without any elements of narrative storytelling or creative cinematography (e.g., straightforward footage of a train leaving a station).¹

Flaherty is credited with changing the documentary landscape in 1922 with his film *Nanook of the North*, which looked at Arctic-dwelling Inuit Eskimos. The film instigated some of the most important debates about the practice of documentary filmmaking. Flaherty was accused of staging some of his scenes, and in response, said, "One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit."

Flaherty believed it was acceptable to add fiction to documentaries, as long as the effect on the audience was real.²

Another debate was raised in the 1930s with Leni Riefestahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1934), a record of a Nazi Party Congress, and *Olympia* (1938), which documented the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Both were considered cinematographic masterpieces, but many also believed that they were more propaganda than documentary.³

As the use of film spread, the types of documentaries diversified. Since the 1930s, documentaries have included:

- o Educational films (made primarily for class-room use)
- o Newsreel depictions of events
- o Nature films
- o Biographies
- o Autobiographies
- o Films designed to raise awareness about social issues and inspire people to action



One of the distinguishing characteristics of many documentary films is that they are not only informational but also artistic. Film Historian Tim Dirks describes them as “factual works of art.”

For the purposes of awarding the Oscars, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences defines a documentary film as a:

‘nonfiction motion picture dealing creatively with cultural, artistic, historical, social, scientific, economic, or other subjects. It may be photographed in actual occurrence, or may employ partial reenactment, stock footage, stills, animation, stop-motion, or other techniques, as long as the emphasis is on fact and not on fiction.’

ACTIVITY

Students are to complete the following questions individually and discuss their answers:

1. List at least 5 documentaries you have seen (not including *‘From the Bottom of the Lake’*).
2. What is the best documentary you have seen? Explain why.
3. What types of documentaries are least interesting to you? Explain.

1: MAKEUP
TESTS 2: JANE
NAPPING
3: JANE ON SET
4: JANE WITH
PAD AND PEN

4. How do ‘documentaries’ differ from non-fiction ‘reality’ TV shows?

5. With reference to the above, write a paragraph explaining the documentary style and elements of documentary present in *‘From the Bottom of the Lake’*. Explain which parts of the documentary you found most compelling and why.

6. Consider Flaherty’s statement regarding adding fictional scenes to documentary: *“One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit.”* Do you agree with this? Explain your response.

7. Discuss a plan for making your own documentary – what subject you might choose, how you would get your subject across, and how you might go about making it.

Modes of Documentary:

This task introduces students to the different modes of documentary. Break students into five groups and assign one of the following documentary modes to each group:

- Cinéma vérité,
- Expository mode
- Observational
- Mockumentary
- Diary



Instruct groups to research the elements and style of their assigned mode. Students may use *Table 1 on the following page* to compile their research (each group adds to their specific mode only).

*! SHOOT
DAY ONE
PARADISE*

Once they have investigated this documentary mode, groups should present their information while their peers take notes. As part of the sharing time for this activity, the class can contribute additional examples for each type of film. Students are encouraged to show a short clip of a documentary illustrative of their style.

Sites to assist students with starting their research into their assigned mode:

<http://medb.byu.edu/files/lesson/docmodes1.pdf>
<http://www.tickingmind.com.au/uploads/40084/ufiles/Lesson%20Ideas%20PDFs/Mockumentary.pdf>

FOUR CORNERS ACTIVITY

- Post signs in four corners of the room: AGREE, DISAGREE, STRONGLY AGREE, and STRONGLY DISAGREE.
- Read aloud statements about the nature of documentary film and inform students that they must go to the corner that best matches how they feel. Once students have chosen corners, they orally defend their choice. Some statements that can be used are:
 - Documentaries should be realistic.
 - Documentaries should persuade the audience or make some political point.
 - Documentary is the best film genre to push for social change.

- Documentary filmmakers should not try to edit their films to make them more dramatic and entertaining.
- Documentaries should show both sides of a story
- Documentaries should aim for objectivity

Reality & Documentary

Can a documentary capture reality? Is there a single objective reality out there? These are the questions that have intrigued film-makers from the earliest days of documentary filmmaking. Some contemporary philosophers argue that there is no one single objective reality, because we all see things differently. In addition, camera operators choose what they will film, and what they will leave out; and films are then edited on top of this. Therefore, even if a film appears to be showing a 'reality', it has actually been edited and manipulated by the people making it.

Other questions we may ask include: whose reality is being captured and does the act of filming an event actually change that event? Some argue that the very act of filming changes everything; that when people see a camera they behave differently than they would if there were no camera present.

Have students discuss and complete the following questions:

- In your opinion, could the presence of the camera alter the behaviour of any of the participants in *'From the Bottom of the Lake'*. Think about this with particular reference to Jane and Gerard's writing process and the rehearsal period in New Zealand.
- Do you think the camera's presence changes things? Would your behaviour change if you knew your class was being filmed?
- Think about the role of the audience; would the behaviour of your class alter if you knew the film would be shown to the principal or parents? Would it alter if the film was going to be shown to other students?
- Do you think a camera can ever truly capture reality?
- Do you think the film maker should ever involve themselves in the subject of their documentary? Does Clare Young involve herself in the documentary in any way? Would her role as Jane Campion's assistant on *'Top of the Lake'* have had any influence on her filming the documentary during rehearsals and shooting of the series?

TABLE 1

Documentary Mode	Purpose of this mode	Potential problems and opportunities with this mode	History of this mode	Examples of this mode
CINEMA VERITE				
EXPOSITORY				
OBSERVATIONAL				
MOCKUMENTARY				
DIARY				



'From the Bottom of the Lake' is available from
Ronin Films

MAIL

P.O. Box 680,
Mitchell, ACT 2911

WEBSITE

www.roninfilms.com.au

PH

02 6248 0851 or

EMAIL

admin@roninfilms.com.au

Ronin Films also
distributes Jane
Campion's short films
including *Peel* and
Passionless Moments.

References:

- 1 Acara Revised Draft Australian Curriculum: The Arts Foundation to Year 10
http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/Draft_Arts_Curriculum_22_February_2013.pdf
- 2 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10105994/Jane-Campion-interview-for-Top-of-the-Lake-The-world-is-focused-on-sexiness.html>
- 3 <http://www.nytimes.com/movies/person/83988/Jane-Campion/biography>
- 4 http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001005/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm
- 5 <http://www.pbs.org/pov/behindthelens/lessonplan1.php>
- 6 <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma01/Huffman/Frontier/define.html>
- 7 <http://www.pbs.org/pov/behindthelens/lessonplan1.php>
- 8 <http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/rules/86/rule01.html>
- 9 <http://medb.byu.edu/files/lesson/docmodes1.pdf>
- 10 <http://www.tickingmind.com.au/uploads/40084/ufiles/Lesson%20Ideas%20PDFs/Mockumentary.pdf>

Footnotes:

- 1 <http://www.pbs.org/pov/behindthelens/lessonplan1.php>
- 2 <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma01/Huffman/Frontier/define.html>
- 3 <http://www.pbs.org/pov/behindthelens/lessonplan1.php>
- 4 Ibid
- 5 <http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/rules/86/rule01.html>



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