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THE AUSSIE FILM THAT SAYS IT ALL!

THINK ABOUT IT!

THINKABOUTITMOVIE.COM

A FILM BY
RICHARD & WENDY FRIAR

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA



<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>



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THINK ABOUT IT!

This is a film by two self-confessed ordinary Australians and novice filmmakers. Richard and Wendy Friar are committed to bringing people together for the future of world peace, democracy and the planet.

Why did they make this film?

Initially, we made the film because of the gut feeling we had about the invasion of Iraq and the reasons given for it, which just didn't make sense to us.

Something didn't feel right, the media wasn't helping to explain it, and leaders appeared already committed. No-one at the time felt comfortable to talk about it. Like a lot of people, we just wanted to know what was going on ... and why. From those beginnings, the film grew into a much wider conversation about the future of humanity and the planet. It generated a life of its own that took us on a roller-coaster ride to places we never

thought we'd have to go.

Making the film has been a demanding journey of the heart that has stretched and challenged us on every level. We met so many wonderful and caring people, learned so much about the world and what was possible to achieve beyond the cynicism and hopelessness that so many feel.

We'd never made a film before but we were inspired in 2003 by that giant wave of 30 million people who marched around the world for peace in the largest global gathering in human history and the foreboding sense of what is now the reality for Iraq.¹

What's the film about?

The film helps 'join the dots' by bringing together in one place key elements about what's happening in our systems of operation that allows things like Iraq to happen; why Iraq went so wrong; what's going on that makes it so hard to break the cycle of conflict and violence. The film also makes the connection between the Iraqi invasion tragedy and the invasion of this country 200 years ago, to understand the generational effects of conflict all over the world that, directly and indirectly, touch us all.

It looks at the ways in which we live our lives and relate to others – from the state-rooms of nations to the board-rooms



of corporations to the lounge-room we share with our family. It looks at how we can move forward, as individuals, to make powerful contributions in united ways with others, locally and globally, towards a more peaceful and sustainable world.

With humanity at a crossroads, choices have to be made. Climate change and peace building are the two equally important sides of the 'sustainability coin'. Are we going to invest in peace building or war mongering? We need tools to help us bring more and more people into the fold of that big, vital conversation for the future.

The fifty hours of interview footage and four years work are jam packed into a 53-minute download, bringing together the most important things we could be thinking and talking about with friends, family, colleagues and the organizations to which we belong.

There has never been a better, more hopeful, time to *Think About It!*²

Curriculum Relevance

Think About It! is a film that is unashamedly committed to encouraging people to come together to understand and put a stop to the Iraq war and repair the social and global damage that has taken place since 11 September 2001. President George Bush's response to the bombing of the twin towers in New York



was to engage in a 'war on terror', a war supported by the Australian Government. Australians such as Greens Senator Bob Brown and former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, as well as anti-war activists from around the world, offer their perspectives on the links between the Iraq war, the media's reporting of wars, and the connections between several other global issues. These include the misuse of the world's resources and the failure to address the rights of indigenous Australians who have suffered dispossession.

In presenting one approach to 'joining the dots' between a number of contemporary

social, political and economic issues, it would be an informative documentary for middle and senior secondary students of:

Discovering Democracy and Civics and Citizenship – looking at the responsibilities of citizens and governments in democracies

History, Global and Peace Studies – understanding the economic and human consequences of war

English – Exploring how language can be used to conceal truths and realities

Media Studies – Analysing the documentary form.



The film is structured in three parts, though there are connections made between each section

Part 1 – understanding the justifications given for the invasion of Iraq and the power of the United States war machine; how the exercise of such power is related to a failure to act on climate change and address aboriginal issues.

Part 2 – how media reporting rarely tells the truth.

Part 3 – the ongoing consequences of the Iraq war and our failure to protect the planet and its people.

Think About It! was released in 2007 before the Australian Federal Election when there was some evidence that people had thought about some of

these issues and voted to change the government which had been in power for eleven years. What major changes there are to Australia's role in international conflicts such as the Iraq War remains to be seen. Equally, with a Presidential election in America, there may be further changes to United States incursions into other countries.



Student Activity

Words at work

Here are some words and acronyms used in this film. Discuss what each one means in your group before watching the film. After watching the film you may need to modify or reconsider some of your definitions.

Words, phrases and acronyms	Meaning
WMD	
Strategic Studies	
fundamentalists	
neo-cons	
Al Qaeda	
jihad	
Halliburton	
human shield	
The AWB	
Abu Ghraib	
surgical attacks	
collateral damage	
axis of evil	
coalition of the willing	
infidels	

Background about Iraq

Iraq is much more than the country invaded by the American forces in 2003. The war-torn images and car-bombings that we see on the nightly news do not tell us much about Iraq and its history and achievements. The world's first known civilization developed along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is now Iraq. The ancient Greeks called part of Iraq and the surrounding area, Mesopotamia (between the rivers). A lot of Iraq's rich ancient heritage has been destroyed in the bombings and looting resulting from the recent wars. In the film *Think About It!* several speakers note that understanding the historical context and background to the Iraq War is crucial.

Iraq is an oil-rich nation in the Middle East bordered by Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Turkey and Kuwait.

There are three main religious groups: Shi'a Muslims (60-65% of total population), Sunni Muslims (32-37%) and Christians (3%). These are distributed amongst the two main ethnic groups: Arabs (80%) and Kurds (20%).

Saddam Hussein was the leader of the main Sunni political group, the Baath Party, and became Head of State in 1979.

In the 1980s, he was given considerable support by the United States and some European countries that wanted a stable Iraqi government that was not dominated by religious fundamentalists. Such fundamentalism is often anti-western and is likely to disrupt trade patterns, particularly in oil.

Saddam was a brutal tyrant who ordered an extermination of northern Kurds, and favoured the minority Sunnis against the majority Shi'a in positions of power.

He invaded Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990. The Kuwait invasion was opposed by a United Nations force led by mainly United States troops, but with support from other western and Arab nations.

After the defeat of the Kuwait invasion, Saddam was ordered by the United Nations to destroy all chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction and to dismantle any programs to develop nuclear weapons. The UN



imposed a ban on oil exports until Iraq complied and opened its doors to UN scrutiny and weapons inspectors.

Saddam refused to co-operate with the UN teams and to reveal the weapons he was suspected of hiding. The teams finally discovered weapons dating back to 1990, but no continuing weapons development.

On 11 September 2001, four planes were reported to have been hijacked by supporters of Osama Bin Laden and flown into the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon building in Washington DC, with another plane crash-landing into a field in Pennsylvania.

In June 2002, President Bush, citing frustration with his inability to find and destroy Bin Laden, announced a new doctrine sanctioning 'pre-emptive attacks' – attacking a country suspected of being a threat to the US, even though no threat had been made or was imminent. Many people believed this to be contrary to accepted international law and both illegal and immoral.

In 2003, the USA claimed that Saddam had violated UN resolutions and invaded Iraq, giving the following justifications:

- Iraq had weapons of mass destruction capable of harming the US

- They were providing support to Osama Bin Laden and other terrorist groups and
- They were actively seeking uranium and metal tubes from Niger to develop nuclear weapons.

After the invasion no weapons were found, and no evidence provided of Iraq co-operating with Bin Laden. The Niger documents were shown to be forgeries.

Now the justification for the invasion changed to:

Saddam was a brutal dictator who needed to be removed, and

Iraq could now be established as a free democracy and a model for other Middle East nations.

Critics of the invasion claimed other motives included:

Securing USA access to Iraqi oil and lessen dependence on Saudi Arabia

Promote American ideas of democracy, and

Develop a safe base for US forces in the Middle East.

After the defeat and surrender of the Iraqi forces, the occupying forces have met continuing and violent opposition



from some groups of Iraqis – Sunnis who supported Saddam’s administration and are now attempting to regain positions of power, and extreme Shi’ites who want to see a form of theocracy established, not a secular democracy. These extreme fundamentalists are supported by Iranian Shi’ites keen to assist in undermining the democratic system that they also reject.

Saddam Hussein was captured late in 2003 and after a trial in which he was found guilty of massacres against the Kurds, he was executed in December, 2006.

Several countries, including Spain and the United Kingdom, have, or are in the process of withdrawing their troops from Iraq, while the United States increases its troop commitment.

There is now a legitimate fear that the situation has become so dangerously unstable and violent, that a withdrawal of troops may leave a political vacuum and lead to a civil war. Often it is easier to start a war than end it. Victory is unlikely for any of the competing groups.

Watching *Think About It!*

As you watch the film, note any revelations about the decision to invade Iraq and the conduct of this war that offer a different perspective to that usually presented in the media.

Look for explanations of how and why media reporting of wars tends to be incomplete, inaccurate and/or dishonest.

Student Activity

After Watching the Film

Construct a diagrammatic representation of the consequences of the 9/11 attacks on America using the diagram on page 8, or create your own diagram using appropriate software. The 11 September 2001 attacks are in the centre of the diagram. In the surrounding balloons, show how subsequent events, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are connected to this event. Use arrows to show links i.e. connecting the dots. Here are some quotes from the film that you might use in constructing your diagram:







What sources do we depend on to tell us about what is happening in both our own country and around the world?

Why is the truth so hotly contested by different groups, particularly in war situations?

Who controls information and how are photographers and reporters caught up in the 'spinning' of information, particularly in war reporting?

Is it ever possible to know the real story about the conduct and casualties of a war? Who would you trust to provide this information honestly and accurately?

Who are the winners and losers in this war? There are both human and economic costs of any war.

According to the speakers in this film, who are the winners in economic terms?

Which groups of people are shown to make up the largest number of casualties in any war?

What are the ongoing human generational costs of living and dying in a country where war is being conducted?

How do we all lose as the violence in the Iraq war continues?

What do you understand by the term 'compassion fatigue'?

Citizens often feel powerless and/or indifferent to suffering resulting from their own country's participating in a faraway war. Why do you think this might be the case?

Responding to real and perceived threats.

Why do you think Australia did not invade and bomb Indonesia after the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005?

Do terrorist acts, like the Madrid bombings, the London bombings and the Bali bombings, make people more or less inclined to support the wars on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq?

Where are some of Al Qaeda's leaders like Osama bin Laden, thought to be in hiding? Should we hold these countries accountable for 'harbouring terrorists'?

What are some of the day-to-day consequences for everyone as a result of the global fears provoked by the 'war on terror' and 'terrorist bombings'?

What can individuals do about stopping wars and persuading governments to pursue alternative policies?

What factors would influence you to take an active stand against war or another aspect of Government policy? Would Australia have to be under direct threat of attack, or are you in favour of responding to requests for help from our political allies like America and Britain? Would you attend an anti-war rally or lobby politicians to stop a war you believed was wrong?

Why do you think support for policies to address global warming is much greater than opposition to the Iraq War?

What has oil got to do with the Iraq war and climate change?

Funding films

Documentaries are expensive to make. Here is a statement from the Friars on how they funded their film.

The only way that *Think About It!* could be made was to fund the film ourselves and accept the support of service providers who have put their accounts on hold or waived them altogether. It's been a giant effort by everybody involved to get the film completed, put on screenings and launch the millionvotes4peace.com initiative.

Funds raised from the screening and discussion events help reimburse the film project, support the millionvotes4peace.com initiative and, as the infrastructure is established, the film project also aims to support children injured in Iraq through the Doctors for Iraq Society.

Donations are also most gratefully received and will help speed up the supply of much-needed medical aid to Iraq.

If you would like to give us a hand in other ways, please be in touch. There's plenty of stuff we could use help with!

People appearing in this film

David Gulpillil – Indigenous actor and activist.

Professor Bob O'Neill – former chair of the International Institute of Strategic Studies.

Malcolm Fraser – former Liberal Party Australian Prime Minister from 1975–1983.

Peter Garrett – then Shadow Minister for Climate Change, now Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts in the Rudd Government.

Doctor Anas Al Takriti – former President of the British Muslim Association.

Professor John Keane – founder of the Centre for Democratic Studies, London.

Dilnaz Boga – investigative journalist and filmmaker, India.

Cindy Sheehan – international peace spokesperson, USA.

Giovanni Fusetti – social ecologist, Italy.

Dave Burgess – NO WAR activist, Sydney.

Senator Lynn Allison – former leader of the Australian Democrats.

Rod Barton – former Australian government intelligence analyst.

Andrew Wilkie – former Australian government intelligence analyst.

Terry Hicks – father of David Hicks, who was imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay and recently completed his sentence for being a supporter of terrorism.

Reverend Doctor Ann Wansborough – senior policy analyst, Uniting Church, Australia.

Genan Dadoun – Muslim Women's Association, Australia. Speaker, World peace March, Sydney, 2003.

Doctor Annabel Lukin – Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, Australia.

John Pilger – international journalist, author and filmmaker.

Doctor Adel Iskander – Co-author Al Jazeera, University of Washington DC, USA.

Dave Jones – conflict negotiator, United Nations.

Donna Mulhearn – 'human shield' during Iraq invasion.

Brigitte Kumpfer – trauma psychologist, Australia.

Doctor Salam Ismael – Doctors for Iraq.

Two Feather – peace spokesman, USA.

Bob Brown – Australian Greens Senator, Australia.

Kerry Nettle – Australian Greens Senator, Australia.

Student Activity

People, Peace and War

Look through this list and count how many countries are represented by these people.

List the different areas of expertise and

positions the speakers represent.

What do they all have in common?

Two of the people appearing in this film, Andrew Wilkie and Rod Barton, are former Australian Government intelligence officers. Why do you think they resigned from their positions?

Most people say they want a peaceful world but have different approaches to achieving this. How do you think proponents and supporters of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan might answer some of the criticisms aired in this film? Create a list of their challenges to the views shown in the film.

Is it possible to conduct a 'war on terror'? What does such a term imply about who the enemy might be and how they can be identified and defeated?

Student Activity

Analysis of the documentary form

Filmmakers are increasingly taking advantage of the popularity of the film medium as a way of presenting information and often a particular perspective on a contemporary issue. Documentaries generally are of three types:

Observational, where the camera is an apparently neutral recorder of events. However, keep in mind that camera people and directors make choices about where the camera should point and what it should capture.

Impartial, where a filmmaker tries to present all sides of an issue fairly, without imposing his or her views on the audience.

Actively committed, where the filmmakers deliberately select and shape their material to convince the audience to accept their point of view. This can be done with varying degrees of subtlety. Sometimes, positions are presented in such a one-sided way that we react against being told what to think and switch off, unless the film supports our own attitudes and beliefs.

Which of these documentary styles is

employed by Richard and Wendy Friar, the makers of *Think About It!*?

How are the beliefs of the Friars expressed in this film?

What does the linking narration tell us?

Earlier in this guide, it was suggested that *Think About It!* falls into three sections. Were you conscious of these parts as you watched the film and how effectively did they work to re-direct the film's central concerns?

In what ways did this documentary add to your understanding of how a number of issues – war, dispossession, misuse of resources, religious conflict and misunderstanding – are connected?

Does the film provide a new perspective on the information we often see on television news programs about war and human dislocation?

What sort of images are used to break up the 'talking heads' and illustrate the issues in this film?

Were you persuaded by the Friars' belief in people power to change how we connect to one another?

You can add your name to the Friars' petition for peace at <<http://millionvotes4peace.com>>.

References and Websites

Waleed Aly, *People Like Us: How arrogance is dividing Islam and the West*, Picador, 2007.

<<http://www.thinkaboutitmovie.com>>

Richard and Wendy Friars' website with lots of information about their project

<<http://millionvotes4peace.com>>

Wendy and Richard Friar's million votes for peace web site which explains the purpose of this campaign and its links to their film.

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Endnotes

¹ Richard and Wendy Friar, from their web site, <<http://www.thinkaboutitmovie.com>>.

² *ibid*.



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