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# BUCKSKIN

A FILM ABOUT JACK

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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY FIONA HALL



AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA

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## SYNOPSIS

Jack Buckskin grew up on a diet of family and football, before life-changing events led Jack on a new path. His life is now dedicated to renewing a once-strong Aboriginal language and culture, and to inspiring the people of Adelaide to connect with Kurna – the language and culture of his ancestors – and of the country on which the city of Adelaide now sits.

Jack Buckskin is the sole teacher of a once-extinct language. From the northern Adelaide suburb of Salisbury, Jack’s mission is to teach the Kurna language, the language of his ancestors, to as many people as he can in his lifetime. But this is not easy; the language was driven to near-extinction over a century ago. Now, Jack and fellow language speakers are sculpting a new Kurna language and culture and, through that, are bringing a new way of being to the youth of suburban Adelaide in the form of a new Aboriginal identity – and with that, hope.

## CURRICULUM LINKS

The Australian National Curriculum (History) at Year 9 provides a study of the history of ‘The Making of the Modern World’ from 1750 to 1918. There are three depth studies for this historical period; ‘Buckskin’ directly links to:

- Depth Study Two – ‘Australia and Asia’:
  - Students investigate the history of Australia

1750–1918 in depth

- Making a nation: The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

*Please note: The following curriculum links relate to the Victorian Certificate of Education.*

### VCE English Unit 3 and 4

#### Area of Study 2: Creating and Presenting

- Students draw on ideas and/or arguments suggested by a chosen Context to create written texts for a specified audience and purpose; and to discuss and analyse in writing their decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context.

*Buckskin* could be used as a supplementary text when exploring context writing in VCE English. Specifically, the context of ‘Identity and Belonging’ (Jack’s search for connection with his heritage), as well as ‘The Imaginative Landscape’ (Jack’s relationship with the landscape and the way the land holds spiritual meaning for him and his people).

*Buckskin* could also be used as a supplementary text for exploring the above ideas in middle school English.



## PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

- Brainstorm what students know about Indigenous languages in Australia.
- After gathering ideas, talk to the students about Jack's mission to teach Kurna to as many people as he can, and present the following background information:

### ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

According to UNESCO, Australia has the highest rate of language extinction in the world; of the 250 Aboriginal languages that existed before colonisation, only 145 were still spoken in 2005, and of these, 110 are critically endangered.

- Have students visit the following website on Aboriginal languages and note down/discuss what statistics and facts they discover about the status of Aboriginal languages in Australia today: <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/language/#ixzz2f71vlt7o>

### ABOUT KURNA

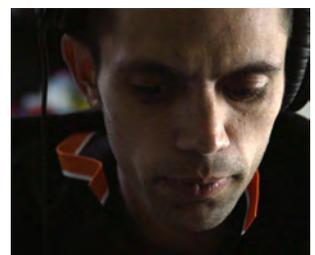
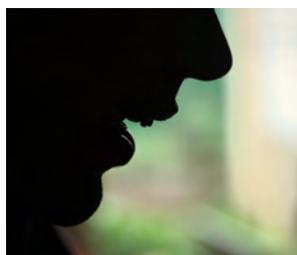
Kurna country (in South Australia) is vast, covering about 7200 square kilometres, ranging from Crystal Brook in the north, to St Vincent's Gulf in the east, Cape Jervis in the south and Mt Lofty Ranges to the west.

The Kurna people witnessed the destruction of most of their sites of significance and their population through disease and displacement soon after colonisation of the Adelaide Plains.

The Kurna language had long been suppressed following the colonisation of South Australia. Historians believe that the Kurna language of the Adelaide Plains was most probably taken over by English in the mid-nineteenth century. The last known fluent speaker was Ivaritji, also known as Amelia Taylor, and she died in 1931.

Kurna language has been going through a revival from 1990 to the present time. The revival of the language has been possible through partnership of linguists – most notably Dr Rob Amery – and the Kurna community in Adelaide. The revival of Kurna has been assisted by historical documents, in which German Lutheran missionaries wrote a number of words in phrases between 1836 and 1858. These missionaries were Schürmann and Teichelmann.

The Kurna language can now be studied as a senior high school subject and Jack Buckskin is now one of the main language teachers. Jack has taught at a number of high schools, as well as to adult students through the School of Languages.





## VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Direct students to take down notes about Jack and his:

- connection with Kurna;
- connection with friends and family;
- hardships he has faced and the ways he has coped with these.

## POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

### RESEARCH

Jack's ancestor, Ivaritji – also known as Amelia Taylor – was the last known fluent speaker of Kurna. It is thought she was born sometime between 1845–1849 on the Adelaide Plains and, at the time of her death, was the last remaining person of full Kurna ancestry.

- Visit <<http://www.anthropologysociety.com/home/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Gara-1990a.pdf>>
- Construct a timeline and one-page profile of Ivaritji's life.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

Jack now teaches Kurna to more than 100 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, aged five to sixty-two, through high schools and language schools. Jack is also sharing his culture and stories through dance, having organised a traditional family dance group, Kuma Karro (which translates to One Blood). Jack is committed to educating the community and sharing Kurna culture.

Consider these quotes:

'My daughter Mahleaha, she will be the first fluent speaker of the language in almost 100 years.' – Jack.

'A person without knowledge of his culture and his history is like a tree without roots' – Uncle Stephen.

- Why do you think Jack's work is so important? Consider the impact his work is having on him, his family and the people with whom he works (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians).
- In 2011, Jack was awarded the Young South Australian of the Year award and was a finalist in the Young Australian of the Year award. Visit the following website: <http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/the-awards/>
- Look at the past winners of the Young Australian of the Year and select three other recipients who have contributed to the promotion of culture and inclusion as Jack as done. Complete a biography on each person, highlighting the ways they have done this.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Read the following article about Aboriginal words that have made their way into everyday Australian English: <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/language/aboriginal-words-in-australian-english>

- Do you know any of these words? Have you heard them used in daily life, and if so, by whom?



PROMPT	KEY IDEAS TO EXPLORE	EXAMPLES FROM 'BUCKSKIN'
<b>1</b> The landscape is a determining force in people's lives.	Who we are is often a product of where we live.	- Jack's relationship with Adelaide - How he forges a sense of connection with his land in an urban environment
<b>2</b> The landscape mirrors human problems.	How we feel sometimes affects how we see the world around us.	- Jack's growing sense of belonging to his people and land - His personal struggles and the ways he has dealt with them
<b>3</b> One landscape may be experienced in many different ways.	Although landscape appears to be the same for everyone, it means something different depending on our experiences in life.	- Jack's interpretation of urban Adelaide and his people's connection to this landscape - Draw on his response to Charles Hill's painting 'The Proclamation of South Australia 1836'.
<b>4</b> It is difficult to possess a sense of belonging when we are unsure of our own identity.	Finding one's identity is vital in developing a sense of belonging.	- Jack's reaction to holding the original translations of Kaurna by Schürmann and Teichelmann - His reflections on his growing sense of identity since having a daughter, Mahleaha, and finding purpose in passing on Kaurna to her
<b>5</b> Family and friends help us define our identity.	Those close to us play vital and varied roles in helping us find out who we are.	- Jack's mother, his wife Khe Sanh and daughter Mahleaha, Uncle Stephen Goldsmith and linguist Dr. Rob Amery's role in helping Jack discover his identity and sense of belonging - The impact that his sister Mary's death had on his connection with his culture and sense of identity



'Holding our tongues' is a project about the long and painful task of reviving Aboriginal languages. You can find out about the project here: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/legacy/features/holdingourtongues/default.htm>

- Visit the above site. Using the languages identified on the map of Australia on the homepage, select three languages other than Kaurna and research the ways in which these languages are being preserved.
- Complete a timeline of the Kaurna language from the time of settlement to today. Ensure you include reference to the work of the German missionaries Schürmann and Teichelmann in documenting the language. You can begin your research here: <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/kwp/projects/language/>

## WRITING TASKS

- You may use *Buckskin* as a way of exploring the VCE English Contexts 'The Imaginative Landscape' and 'Identity and Belonging'.
- Teachers may also use the documentary as a springboard for exploring the above concepts in middle-school English classes.

Write an expository response exploring the following prompts in relation to *Buckskin* (*See Table this page*).

### *The Proclamation of South Australia 1836*

This Proclamation of South Australia, issued by Governor Hindmarsh and read out by him to the assembled immigrants who had disembarked from the Buffalo at Glenelg in December 1836, notified the settlers that government was in place in the new 'Province of South Australia'.

The Proclamation has been read publicly at a ceremony on 28 December each year since.

- In the documentary, we see Jack examining Charles Hill's painting 'The Proclamation of South Australia 1836'. He comments, 'For our people this was the day we lost everything really ... a day where we lost our land, our language, our culture'.
- To view the painting, visit: [http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agasa/home/Learning/docs/Online\\_Resources/SouthAustraliaIllustrated\\_EducationResource\\_online.pdf](http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agasa/home/Learning/docs/Online_Resources/SouthAustraliaIllustrated_EducationResource_online.pdf)

- 1 Imagine you were there at the Proclamation. Write two accounts of what you would be witnessing – one from the perspective of a settler and one from the perspective of a Kurna person.
- 2 The full transcript of Hindmarsh's Proclamation can be viewed here: <<http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=61&c=1628>>

Consider this extract:

*It is also at this time especially, my duty to apprise the Colonists of my resolution, to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the native population as to the rest of His Majesty's Subjects, and of my firm determination to punish with exemplary severity, all acts of violence or injustice which may in any manner be practised or attempted against the natives who are to be considered as much under the Safeguard of the law as the Colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British Subjects. I must therefore with confidence to the exercise of moderation and forbearance by all Classes, in their intercourse with the native inhabitants, and that they will count (no) opportunity of assisting me to fulfil His Majesty's most gracious and benevolent intentions towards them, by promoting their advancement in civilisation, and ultimately, under the blessing of Divine Providence, their conversion to the Christian Faith.*

- What reference is made to the Kurna people by Hindmarsh?
- Conduct research into the treatment of the Kurna people following the Proclamation. Do you think Hindmarsh's proclamation was adhered to?
- A starting point for your research can be found at <<http://australia.gov.au/topics/culture-history-and-sport/indigenous-culture-and-history>>



## LINKS

### Buckskin:

Website: <<http://www.buckskinfilm.com>>  
 Facebook page: <<https://www.facebook.com/BuckskinMovie/>>  
 Trailer: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84Vkf-R5U4k>>

### Kurna:

Kurna group 'Kurna Warra Pintyandi': <<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/kwp>>  
 Kurna Language Learning Series YouTube channel: <<http://bit.ly/13iLQi7>>  
 Kurna Placenames website: <<http://www.kurnaplacenames.com>>



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