SYNOPSIS

OVER THE EDGE is edgy, raw, eye-opening television about troubled Indigenous teenagers challenged by their addictions, their triumphs, their ever-changing family situations, their lives. Its prequel, the ON THE EDGE series, screened on ABC3 and NITV in 2010/11.

Creator Fran Dobbie has received repeated requests from viewers asking about or wanting to know how the teenagers in the first series are doing.

ON THE EDGE followed a group of Indigenous teenagers from western Sydney as they took a physical, emotional and spiritual journey to discover who they are. The series was shot in 2009, aired on NITV in April 2010 and on ABC3 in 2011. It has aired thirty times and developed a devoted following. Filmed in the western Sydney suburbs, the series expanded to include their families and their local community with insight into the context of these young people’s lives. Edgy topics such as drugs & alcohol, truancy, and self-harm were tackled head on. The teenager’s spoke in their own voices about why they do the things they do.

In OVER THE EDGE we revisit the 2009 teenagers now aged 18-20 and invite them to share how their lives have changed since their involvement in the series. Some will feel pride, some will feel shame at having their lives exposed – life isn’t what they thought it would be. We go into their homes, talk with their families, and meet their newborn children. We see their successes, joys and their fears.

Two three of our teenagers, Alan, Muriel and Lillian, are already parents. How has it changed their dreams for the future? We replay what they said in 2009, and hear about their aspirations now. How are they coping? What would they say to others confronting teenage pregnancy?

One of our young people has discovered what it’s like to be behind bars at a young age. What does he say now about walking on the wrong side of the law?

Others are now employed. Did Tai follow his dream of becoming a lawyer? Did Yulara’s dream to represent World Vision as an Indigenous Youth Ambassador come true?

What does it mean to them now being Aboriginal? Are they proud or has discrimination kept their culture a hidden secret? Are they owning their identity?

Fran Dobbie (the presenter), a Yuin woman, walks with these young people again, to hear their stories and offer a shoulder or advice.1
CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL SUITABILITY LINKS

OVER THE EDGE is most suitable for Middle and Senior Secondary Students (Years 9 – 12). The issues and themes explored could also make the documentary suitable for screening to younger students taking part in targeted student wellbeing programs.

Teachers should note that the documentary contains coarse language and drug references. Harsher language is censored. Teachers should also be sensitive to the fact that students in their classes may have experienced issues similar to the young people in the documentary.

**General understandings addressed in the documentary:**
- The impact of choices
- The importance of talking through issues and seeking help
- The impact of positive and negative methods of coping with difficult emotions

**Summary of links to the national curriculum**

The following table provides a summary of links to the National Curriculum.

| Learning areas: |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| English 9-12    | Media 9-12      | Health and Physical Education 9-12 |
| General capabilities – Personal and social capabilities | Cross Curriculum Priorities | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures |

Reference: [http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)

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<th>LEARNING AREA</th>
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- Achieving goals
- Indigenous relationship with the land
- Strategies to overcome difficulties and hardship

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| **Health and Physical Education** | **Years 9 and 10**  
Evaluate factors that shape identities, and analyse how individuals impact the identities of others (ACPPS089)  
Propose, practise and evaluate responses in situations where external influences may impact on their ability to make healthy and safe choices (ACPPS092)  
Plan, implement and critique strategies to enhance the health, safety and wellbeing of their communities (ACPPS096)  
Evaluate situations and propose appropriate emotional responses and then reflect on possible outcomes of different responses (ACPPS094)  
Evaluate and apply health information from a range of sources to health decisions and situations (ACPPS095)  
Critique behaviours and contextual factors that influence the health and wellbeing of their communities (ACPPS098)  | Various links as to studies across different national senior Health and Physical Education curricula |
| **Media**                     | **Years 9 and 10**  
Evaluate how technical and symbolic elements are manipulated in media artworks to create and challenge representations framed by media conventions, social beliefs and values for a range of audiences (ACAMAR078)  
Analyse a range of media artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their media arts making, starting with Australian media artworks, including media artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and international media artworks (ACAMAR079)  | Various links as to studies across different national senior Media curricula |
| **General Capabilities: Personal and Social Capabilities** | **Self-awareness**  
Reflective practice in relation to personal qualities and responses to challenges  
**Self-management**  
Developing confidence, resilience and adaptability  
Decision making, conflict resolution and negotiation  
Building and maintaining relationships  
**Social awareness**  
Contributing to society, developing empathy and understanding relationships.  | |
| **Cross Curriculum Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures** | **Country/Place**  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place throughout all of Australia.  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have unique belief systems and are spiritually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways.  
**People**  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have sophisticated family and kinship structures.  
Australia acknowledges the significant contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people locally and globally.  | |
PRE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Understanding where the main characters come from

(English, Media, Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures)

The documentary focuses on the lives of young Indigenous people from the Western suburbs of Sydney. To understand the issues faced by these young people it is important to have some knowledge of the area they are from.

Access the website below and then answer the questions that follow.


1. What are some of the challenges faced by the people in Greater Western Sydney (GWS)?
2. List 7 of the local government areas in GWS?
3. Briefly describe the importance of this area on a national level.
4. Complete the following sentence:
   The six University of Western Sydney campuses are located in an area that spans the ____________, ____________, and ____________ peoples, with the region having one of the largest urban populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.
5. Complete an analysis of the Educational Outcomes of GWS in comparison to the rest of Sydney. What do these statistics indicate?
6. How many Indigenous nations are represented amongst the population of Western Sydney?

For more information about this region see the website below:


Community issues - whole class brainstorm

(English, Media, Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities)

Read through the documentary synopsis with the class/group to create a link between the events in the film and those in the student’s own lives and communities.

Conduct a class brainstorm on the following questions:

- What are the challenges and issues faced by people in your local community?
- What resources and assistance are in place in the community to assist people with these issues and challenges?
Students could work in groups of 4 or 5 to brainstorm this question and then report back to the class or they could use apps such as Popplet, Bubbl.us or MindMap to create a visual representation of their work to present back.

**The impact of risk taking and choices - group reflection activity**

*(English, Media, Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities)*

1. The consequences of risk taking and the importance of making positive choices are two of the key issues explored in the documentary. This activity has direct links to the Health and Physical education curriculum and will encourage students to think about the choices they make and the risks they take in their own lives.

Divide the class into groups of 4 and ask the groups to allocate the roles: timekeeper, scribe, encourager and presenter (they can remove one of the roles if smaller groups are required.) The timekeeper is responsible for making sure that the group completes the questions in the set time, the encourager makes sure the group stays on task, the scribe takes notes and the presenter will report back to the class. Write the following questions and statements on the board and give students 20 minutes to complete the task.

- What does it mean to take a risk?
- As a group brainstorm examples of when you have taken a risk or made a choice and the outcome has been positive.
- Brainstorm examples of your own, or stories that you have heard of, where risk taking has not resulted in a positive outcome.
- What kind of risks do you face in your life now? (at school, at home, at work)
- What kinds of risks do you think you will face in 5 years’ time?
- List 5 of the biggest choices you see yourself having to make over the next 5 years.

After 20 minutes ask the presenters to report back to the class. Record the class responses to the first 3 points in a table with columns labelled ‘negative’ and ‘positive’. As groups present, look for points that cross over and discuss areas that come up frequently. Record the responses for the last 2 points in a table with columns labelled ‘now’ and ‘the future’. Again, take the time to discuss and explore the reasons behind reoccurring findings.

Ask students to consider how we can manage risk taking without negative consequences. Come up with a list of strategies as a class.
Indigenous role models in our community

(English, Media, Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures)

Who do you look up to? Who are your role models? Could you list 5 Aboriginal Role Models?

Research one of Indigenous role models listed below, and present your findings to the rest of the class. You can do a PowerPoint, a Prezi or make a video. Your oral presentation only has to go for a couple of minutes but you must be able to answer questions from the audience on the person you have chosen.

Questions to cover could include:
- A short introduction about the person (including the time period they are from)
- What have they done that is positive?
- What positive personality traits do they exhibit?
- Why do people admire them?
- What are they doing now?

A good oral presentation needs you to think about pause, pace and pitch. Palm cards help you remember the key points you want to make. If you use presentation software, your slides should have simple, clear fonts, no more than six lines of text per slide and no more than six words per text line. Make sure you include a list of where you get your information from and that you use a variety of methods to engage your audience.

This by no means a comprehensive list of Indigenous role models. If you would like to choose someone who is not on this list let your teacher know.

- David Gulpilil
- Cathy Freeman
- Patrick Johnson
- Christine Anu
- Casey Donovan
- Jimmy Little
- Troy Cassar-Daley
- Yothu Yindi
- Albert Namatjira
- Noel Pearson
- Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Nooncald
- Neville Bonner
- Yunupingu Mandawuy
- Debra Mailman
- Wesley Enoch
- Rachael Perkins
- Buddy Franklin
- David Unaipon
- Jessica Mauboy
- Yvonne Margarula
VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Questions for comprehension and analysis

(English, Media, Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures)

1. The central characters in the documentary are Alan, Norma, Yulara, Kayla, Tai and Corey. Choose one of the young people to focus on when completing these questions:
   - List 5 personal qualities that your chosen character displays in the documentary extracts from 5 years ago and 5 traits they display now.
   - In what ways has their life changed over the past 5 years?
   - What are the challenges they face in the documentary?

2. What issues arise on the morning the group are scheduled to go to camp? Why do you think these issues occur?

3. Fran talks to the group about the reason for the reunion. What does she ask them to think about on the journey?

4. What is Aunty Lila’s role in the group?

5. The name of the band the group are helping to devise a film clip for is ___________________.

6. Why do the group complete a ropes course?

7. Aunty Lila explains the relationship between humans and the eagle, what is the connection?

8. The next section of the documentary focuses on Alan’s story and shows footage from the series ON THE EDGE where he meets his father for the first time. What impact did this chance meeting have on Alan?

9. Fran describes the meeting between Alan and his father as having a ‘ripple effect’. What does she mean by this?

10. In the evening the group take the time to sit down talk. What advice do the members of the band share about dealing with anger?

11. The next section of the documentary focuses on Norma. Fill in the table on page 10 to reflect the changes she has made to her life outlook and relationships over the past 5 years.

12. Choose one of the other characters (Corey, Yulara, Kayla, Tai, Alan) and complete the second table on page 10 to reflect how they have changed over the 5 year time period.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORMA 5 YEARS AGO</th>
<th>NORMA NOW</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>COREY, YULARA, KAYLA, TAI OR ALAN (CIRCLE) 5 YEARS AGO</th>
<th>... AND NOW</th>
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POST VIEWING
ACTIVITIES

Exploring the Indigenous
Australian relationship with
the land

(English, Personal and Social Capabilities and Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures)

Aunty Lila talks about the special relationship that
Indigenous Australians have with the land. Use the web-
sites below to research this in further detail and then
choose one of the activities below to complete:

http://www.qm.qld.gov.au/Find-out-about/Aboriginal-and
+Torres+Strait+Islander+Cultures/Land#.VLYqWyuUeSo
australian-story/austn-indigenous-cultural-heritage

- Creative writing task: Pretend you are a researcher living
  with a group of Aboriginal people in outback Australia.
  Write a series of diary entries about your stay that relate
  to the relationship the people in this community have
  with the land (300-500 words). Alternatively, if you are
  an Indigenous student, write a script for a short film that
  explains/shows the Indigenous relationship to the land.
- Essay: Write an essay that compares and contrasts the
  Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian relationship
  with the land. (700-800 words)
- Script and perform a role play with a partner that com-
  pares and contrasts the Indigenous and non-Indigenous
  Australian relationship with the land. (2-3 minutes)

14 Why is Aunty Lila called the ‘whale lady’? How does she
describe her relationship with the land?
15 Glenn Liddard (Indigenous Welfare Officer) discusses
the merits of playing sport, what are they?
16 The group go to visit a juvenile detention centre where
they hear some heart breaking stories. Which of the
stories resonated most with you? Why was this?
17 What do we learn about Tai in this section of the
documentary?
18 The documentary ends with each of the characters talk-
ing about their future aspirations, identify these for each
of the characters in the space provided on this page.
Activities relating to themes and issues.

The film addresses issues such as: teenage pregnancy, incarceration, depression, addictive behaviours, coping with grief and loss, unemployment, choosing a career or studying, methods of keeping a healthy body and healthy mind.

The remaining activities link to these topics and aim to broaden student knowledge and understanding of how to deal with these issues.

**GOAL SETTING**

*English, Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities)*

Why set goals?

In the film Alan talks about how he wants to set new goals and work towards achieving them. People will often tell you about the goals they want to achieve in life, school and sport. Sports psychologists encourage people to write down these goals as they feel it increases their chances of success.

How do you think writing down your goals could enhance your ability to achieve them?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

The main reason people set goals is for motivation; having something to work towards provides incentive to do whatever it takes to achieve a goal. Motivation increases a person’s focus on achievement and decreases the chances of them being distracted by things that could prevent them from getting closer to their goal.
Think of a goal that you have (in life or in school) and list some things that could prevent you from achieving it:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Types of goals

There are two types of goals that are most commonly referred to when sport psychologists are working with athletes, these are short-term and long-term goals.

Short-term goals are the goals that a person wants to achieve in a relatively short period of time. They are usually set up with a bigger picture in mind, with a series of short-term goals leading to the achievement of a bigger one.

What are some examples of short term goals?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Long-term goals are the goals that a person wants to achieve over a long period of time. They usually require a greater amount of planning and sustained effort. They do not provide much information on how they can be achieved and rely solely on an individual’s ability to break them down into smaller, more manageable steps.

What are some examples of long-term goals?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Tips for setting goals

For a goal to be affective and worthwhile it needs to be appropriate for the individual; the more appropriate a goal is, the more likely it is to be achieved.

The **SMART** goal setting principles are used to make goals more effective. The letters stand for:

- **S** specific - it must be clear what you want to achieve
- **M** measurable - your goal must have a measurable outcome
- **A** action plan - short term goals leading to your long term goal
- **R** realistic - your goal must be within your capabilities
- **T** time frame - time to achieve your goal

Think of a short-term or long-term goal you have and apply each of the SMART principles to how you might go about achieving that goal. Record your responses and refer to back to your plan to help you stay on track.

DRUG RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

(Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities)

The effect of drugs on Brain Chemistry

- Choose one of the drugs listed: Cannabis, Cocaine, Heroin, Meth-amphetamine, Ice, Ecstasy, GBH, Inhalants, Amphetamines,
- Do further research into the drug and write a 400 word report that provides the following information:
  1. A general description of the drug
  2. Statistics related to the use of the drug in Australia
  3. A detailed, scientific description of the effect that the drug has on the brain
  4. Any other interesting, relevant information

- Each section should be at least 100 words.
- You can include images to support the information you provide.
- You should include a correctly structured bibliography with at least 3 sources

Starting point resource:

MENTAL ILLNESS RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

(Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities)

- Anxiety disorders
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Panic/phobia
- Eating Disorders
- Borderline Personality disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Narcissistic Personality disorder
- Multiple Personality
- Sexual & Gender disorders
- Antisocial Personality Disorder
- Depression
- Genetic Disorders
- Organic Mental Disorders
- Antisocial Personality disorder
**Task:** In pairs prepare and present a 3minute talk and an information brochure on one of the above mental illnesses. Explain the disorder and how it affects someone who suffers from the illness. You must also address the following questions:

- What behaviours are exhibited by a person suffering from the disorder?
- Can the disorder appear in different forms?
- Are sufferers of the disorder dangerous to themselves or others?
- Are there any suggested treatments? What support is available for those with this condition in your local area?
- How is the disorder diagnosed?

The Brochure you produce should be something that you could display in a Doctor’s office, school welfare office or community centre. It should be informative, eye catching and include concise information about the condition as well as information such as:

- Myths and facts
- Stigma
- Places to go for support/treatment
- Causes

**TOPICS FOR REFLECTIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES**

*(English, Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capabilities)*

A selection of these topics could be set as reflective writing activities after viewing the documentary.

1. How much did the group learn from the experience of getting back together? Justify your answer using examples from the documentary.
2. The documentary explores themes such as the consequences of risk taking, overcoming challenges, the importance of dealing with grief and coming to terms with the past in order to move on. Which theme resonated the most with you and why?
3. Is there a difficult challenge you would like to achieve? What did you learn from the documentary that could help you attain this goal?
4. Norma and Alan talk about being is pressured into doing things that they now regret. Have you experienced peer group pressure? Reflect on the ways that you have dealt with peer pressure, is there anything you would do differently now?

**MEDIA PRESENTATION**

*(Media, English)*

Use ICT to create a 2 minute visual account of the themes and issues explored in OVER THE EDGE. Use voice over, images and appropriate music to represent the documentary and to show your understanding of the piece.

**EXPLORING MEDIA CODES AND CONVENTIONS**

*(Media, English)*

Students view the documentary and then respond to the following questions:

- Identify the codes and conventions used in the documentary.
- How does the use of codes and conventions evoke a personal response?
How does the use of codes and conventions convey a message about the consequences of risk taking?

What are the other key messages conveyed in the documentary?

USING THE DOCUMENTARY FOR CONTEXT STUDY

A context study, in terms of senior English, is described as a broad focus area where students study and respond to a range of texts that explore similar ideas. The analysis of texts could include exploring why language choices have been made (verbal and non-verbal) and how intended audiences and purposes influenced choices. After studying a variety of texts students respond to a prompt question/statement by completing a written piece in a persuasive, expository or imaginative style.

OVER THE EDGE could be viewed and studied as part of a context study on Identity and Belonging. Suggestions of texts that the documentary could be studied in conjunction with include:

Identity and Belonging: Growing Up Asian in Australia (Alice Pung, Black inc, Australia, 2008) Bran Nue Dae (Rachel Perkins, 2010), Witness (Peter Weir, 1985), Bombshells (Joanna Murray-Smith, Nick Hern, 2004).4

Suggested writing prompts for Identity and Belonging:

- It is difficult to possess a sense of belonging when we are unsure of our own identity
- Discovering our identity is a challenging journey
- Identity is shaped by negative and positive experiences
- Mistakes help shape our identity

The written responses for these prompts should be between 800-1000 words.

ADDITIONAL CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Aboriginal Culture
http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/famous-aboriginal-people-role-models#toc2
http://australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia
strengths-australian-aboriginal-cultural-practices-fam

Indigenous Australian Relationship with the land
http://www.qm.qld.gov.au/Find-out-about/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander+ Cultures/Land%28VLYqWyuUeSo
australian-story/austn-aboriginal-cultural-heritage

Lesson Plans Relating to the teaching of Indigenous history, culture and religions
http://www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/apac/detcms/navigation/lesson-plans/

Goal setting/Making Positive Choices
http://www.teachhub.com/
http://positivechoices.org.au/students/making-choices/

(Endnotes)
1 Over the Edge, Earthstar productions Production Kit, 2014.