

Lionel



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY KATE RAYNOR



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There was a time when boxer Lionel Rose was the best-known Aboriginal Australian in the world. In 1968 Lionel beat Japan's Fighting Harada to become the youngest person ever to win a World Boxing title. When he returned victorious from Tokyo, there were so many people crowding the tarmac to welcome home their champion, the modest Rose thought the Beatles must have been on the plane with him! 250,000 people surged through the streets of Melbourne to celebrate his achievement. Lionel's story includes an amazing number of firsts: he was Australia's youngest and first Aboriginal boxer to win a world crown; he was the first Aborigine to be honoured as Australian of the Year; and the first Aborigine to be awarded an MBE.

His early life was less than auspicious. He grew up poor in Jackson's Track, East Victoria, one of the few Aboriginal communities to elude government intervention in that era. It's a place that he says now has 'lots of memories and lots of snakes'. Lionel was one of nine children, and life was hard. His father, a carnival fighter, began teaching Lionel boxing's 'fundamentals' from about the age of six. They improvised training equipment, long punching sessions with old flour bags filled with sand – he says no wonder his knuckles are 'crook' now. But while no-one could have imagined a future world champion was growing up in this bush setting – skipping school and shooting rabbits – Lionel was, from his earliest days, marked by power and determination.

Edward Martin's fascinating feature-length documentary, *Lionel* (2008), takes us back to the 1960s, when Rose was a hero to all Australians; and catches up with the man now, living quietly in country Victoria. Combining a remarkable selection of archival and present day observational footage and interviews, the film explores how Lionel became a mythic sporting figure and his struggle with the dimensions of that myth in his everyday life.

Curriculum Links

Lionel's life is both an inspiring story and a cautionary tale. The film gives students the opportunity to examine the public characters we embrace and the heroes we turn to. Those select individuals enduring the glare of the national spotlight say something significant about our values and our culture. Looking at the world from which Lionel emerged also tells us a great deal about our recent history and the kinds of issues that continue to confront Indigenous Australians.

Lionel would work well in the context of middle to senior secondary studies in Indigenous issues, Australian Society and History. Given its central focus on a champion sportsman, the film should have wide appeal to students. It provides an excellent vehicle for engaging students in matters of importance to Australian culture beyond the boxing ring.

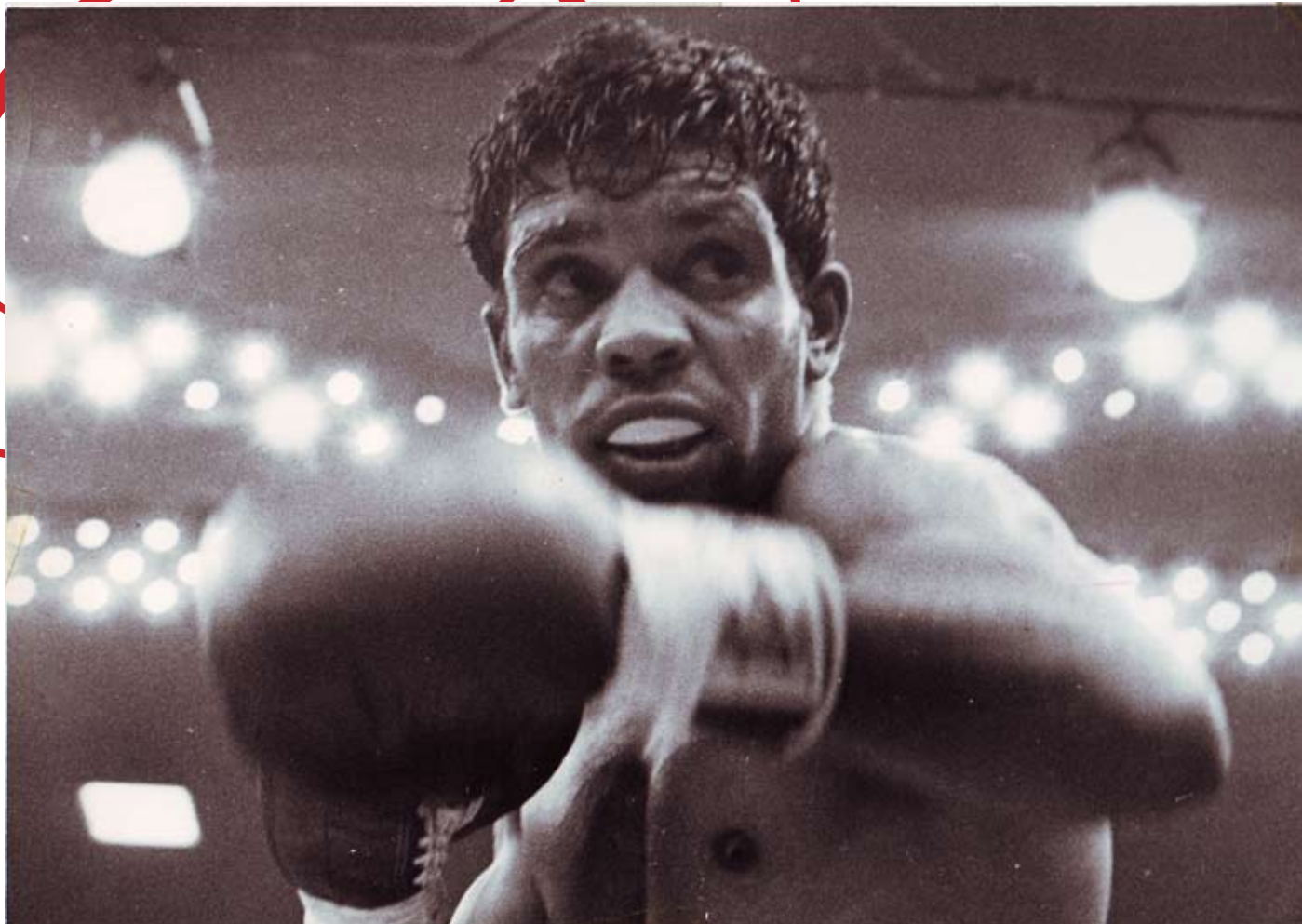
The main aim of this guide is to present a wide variety of teaching and learning opportunities based on the film, ranging in sophistication and complexity. Teachers are encouraged to pick and choose tasks that suit the particular interests and abilities of their students – not to work through the guide systematically. Most of the activities target literacy outcomes: speaking and listening, reading and writing. There are also activities that address film analysis, ICT and creative thinking. Teachers may choose to present a selection of appropriate activities as a matrix, with students given the responsibility to complete a set number of tasks. (Teachers please note: the film contains some coarse language.)



Discussion Points & Activities

Boxing: The Loneliest Sport ...

- What physical and sporting skills do you need to be a successful boxer?
- What personal qualities do you need?
- Can you make generalizations about the types of people interested in competing and watching boxing?
- What does Lionel mean when he says, 'I was strictly a boxer, not a knockout specialist'?
- Lionel says that boxing is 'one of the loneliest sports'. What do you think he means by this?
- Research the various weight divisions in boxing and present your information in a PowerPoint presentation.
- Design a poster outlining the rules of boxing.
- Design a poster to promote a specific match.
- What can you find out about the points system the judges use to assess matches?
- Choose one of the bouts included in this film and write and perform a narrative account of it. Carefully consider your choice of words in terms of drama and suspense.
- Draw diagrams to illustrate the range of punches most boxers use in a match.
- Mark Rennie says his mother Shirley became an amateur nutritionist in order to support Lionel's training. What special dietary needs would a boxer have?
- Prior to becoming world champion, Lionel trained seven days a week. What sort of work would these training sessions have involved? Forty years later, how has training changed? Do boxers still have medicine balls dropped on their stomachs?
- Lionel struggled with his weight. Discuss some of the tactics used to help him reach his target weight. (For instance, he used steam, probably took diuretic pills, and we even see him removing his underwear for one weigh-in.) What are the effects of dehydration? Why might this be particularly dangerous for a boxer?



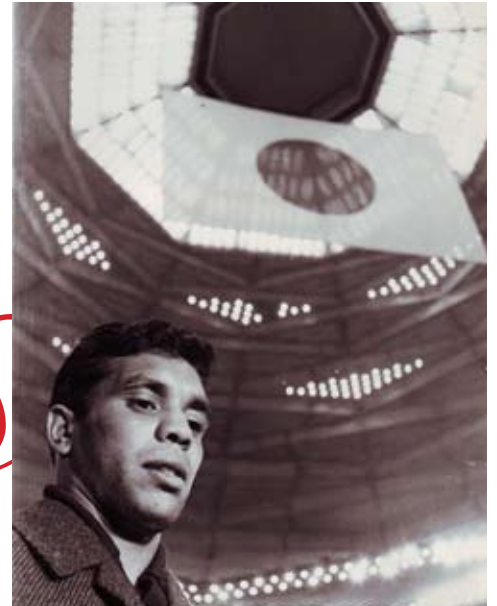
- It is stated in the film that boxing was a 'respected sport' in the 1960s. Do you think its status has changed? If so, why?
- Why do boxers come from primarily working-class backgrounds?
- Imagine an alien arrived at Festival Hall for a title match, completely baffled by the spectacle before it. Give an explanation of the purpose and appeal of this sport.
- Find out more about George Parnassus.
- What does a fight promoter actually do?
- Choose one of Lionel's opponents and research and present a profile on them. (Some of Lionel's opponents include: Rocky Gattelari, Fighting Harada, Takao Sakura, Chucho Castillo, Alan Rudkin, Ruben Olivares, Fernando Sotelo, Jeff White, Yoshiaki Numata, and Noel Kunde.)
- Write an account of one of Lionel's fights to be published in the sports section of a daily newspaper.

Lionel: The Pride of Australia

- Construct a timeline of Lionel's life.
- Create a family tree for Lionel.
- Compile a list of adjectives to describe Lionel, supporting your words with evidence from the film.
- Write a biographical account of Lionel's life to be published in a newspaper.
- Make a list of all of Lionel's awards and honours. (Australian Amateur Flyweight Champion, 1963; Australian Bantamweight Champion, 1966; World Bantamweight Champion, 1968; Australian of the Year, 1968; Deadly Awards, Lifetime Achievement in Sport, 2005; etc.) Of all his many achievements, what do you think Lionel might be most proud of?
- What does it mean to be a champion?
- What makes Lionel a 'great Australian'?
- If it could be argued that all public figures are symbolic in some manner, then what does Lionel symbolize?

Lionel: An Indigenous Australian Legend

- 'Lionel Rose's importance transcends his sporting achievements'. Discuss.
- 'Cathy Freeman was her generation's Lionel Rose'. Discuss.
- As a class, brainstorm a list of famous Indigenous Australians, noting the fields in which they excelled.
- Was Lionel Australia's first black sporting hero?
- Lionel was the first Aborigine to win a world title, the first Aborigine to receive an MBE from the Queen, and the first Aborigine to be Australian of the Year. But during a press conference after his victory over Fighting Harada, Lionel said 'I think of myself as an Australian', more than as an Aborigine. Do you think this sense of his identity might have shifted over his lifetime?
- What sort of work did Lionel do for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs?
- What was Lionel's position on apartheid in South Africa?



- What can you find out about what Lionel did for burns victim Tjandamura O'Shane?

The People in Lionel's Life

- Lionel says his father was 'my main inspiration'. He was a tent or carnival fighter. What can you find out about the tent fighting circuit?
- Why did Lionel's family move to Drouin in 1958? (They were resettled by Community Welfare.)
- Where did Lionel meet trainer Frank Oakes? (At a youth club in Warragul.)
- Jack Rennie played a profound role in Lionel's life. Imagine you are Lionel and you have been asked to write a speech to deliver at a celebration for Jack's retirement from the boxing world. Write the speech you think Lionel might make.
- Why was George Bracken important and inspirational to Lionel? (He was the first boxer Lionel saw in the ring – other than his father – and he had great style and speed.)
- What impact might Lionel's father's death have had on him as a young boxer?
- Describe the relationship between Lionel and his mother.

- During the period in which Lionel lived with the Rennies, Jack's wife Shirley would take Lionel to Jackson's Track every weekend to visit his mother. What sort of relationship did these two women have?
- In pairs, write and perform a conversation between Lionel and Elvis Presley.

Jenny: The Woman Behind The Man?

- Lionel went to Drouin Primary School and Jenny Oakes went to Warragul. Lionel began training with Jenny's father, Frank, and would visit the Oakes' home for dinner. What sort of prejudice did Jenny experience because of her friendship with Lionel?
- Write a character profile of Jenny, detailing her role in Lionel's life. (Consider her personal qualities: loyal, loving, supportive, tolerant, forgiving.) What does Jenny mean about 'culture clashes' in their marriage?
- Write a stream of consciousness monologue for Jenny as she watches one of Lionel's losing matches.

After the Crown: Fall From Grace

- Make a list of some of the negative effects of fame and celebrity.
- Lionel says that in some ways it was

better being an ex-champion and that losing the title was a kind of relief. Explore this idea further.

- Why does Lionel say the 1970s weren't a good decade for him?
- What can you find out about Lionel's various brushes with the law? Why was Lionel sent to jail? Do you think the film underplays these incidents?
- Why did Lionel resume training in 1975, four years after retiring? (He says boxing was his trade, the only thing he could ever do well.) How did his return to the sport turn out? (He was unable to dedicate himself to the necessary training regime, found it 'too hard to be Spartan'.)
- Why did Lionel move back to the country? (He thought it was a better environment for his son.)
- How does Lionel describe himself now? ('I'm a homebody'.)
- Lionel has been very involved in various youth clubs. Imagine you are a young member of one of these clubs and Lionel visits and talks about his experiences. Write an account of the impact he might have on you, and your perception of him.
- 'The media readily cast Lionel as a "fallen hero" and he has every reason to feel bitter. It's a tribute to his character that he doesn't.' Discuss.
- Does the man in this film live up to the legend?
- 'Lionel's imperfections may be larger than life – but so is his heart.' Discuss.



Quick Comprehension Quiz

While comprehension is somewhat out of favour given its status in Bloom's Taxonomy as a lower-order thinking skill, it remains a useful way to quickly review significant facts and details, while also motivating students to pay attention and take relevant notes during screenings. All of the information required to answer the following simple questions is presented in the film.

Questions

1. What happened to Lionel just before his first major amateur fight at Festival Hall?
2. How old was Lionel when he won the Australian Flyweight Title in Tasmania?
3. How many amateur matches did Lionel fight under Frank Oakes?
4. What was the result at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and how did Lionel react?
5. What was Lionel's nickname?
6. How old was Jack Rennie's son Mark when Lionel came to live with the Rennie family and how does Mark describe his relationship with Lionel?
7. What was Lionel's hardest punch?
8. What kinds of work did Jack Rennie find for Lionel during his early days with the Rennie family?
9. What vice did Lionel share with Shirley Rennie?
10. What happened to Rocky Gattelari after his fight with Lionel in December 1967?
11. How does Lionel feel about the Gattelari fight today?
12. Why was the match against Fighting Harada particularly loaded for many Australians?
13. What happened to Lionel after his title defence match against Takao Sakura?
14. How much was Lionel paid to fight the Mexican Chucho Castillo? What was the result and what happened afterwards?
15. Where did Lionel train during the summer holidays?
16. What were some of Lionel's hobbies?
17. What medical attention did British fighter Alan Rudkin require after his bout with Lionel?
18. In August 1969, Lionel was paid \$100,000 to fight Ruben Olivares. Why was this amount significant?
19. What was the name of the song Johnny Young wrote for Lionel to record and how many records did he sell?
20. In what year did Lionel have a heart attack?

Answers

1. His father died.
2. He was sixteen years old.
3. Nineteen
4. Lionel was beaten by half a point. He decided to turn professional.
5. Slim
6. Mark was eight. He says Lionel was like a big brother to him.
7. His right cross.
8. Lionel worked as a panel beater and also in a sandwich bar.
9. They both smoked. It was also rumoured that they had an affair.
10. He was carted off to hospital on a stretcher.
11. He says, 'Sorry Rock', with tears in his eyes.
12. It was a symbolic victory for the many people who had suffered under the Japanese during World War Two.
13. A Japanese man attempted to knife him at the post-bout hotel reception.
14. Lionel was paid \$75,000. The match ended in a split decision, with the victory given to Lionel. The predominantly Mexican crowd rioted, causing \$200,000 worth of damage and Lionel was locked underground for his own protection. Half a dozen people required hospitalization.
15. Kilcunda
16. Rabbit shooting, playing the guitar
17. Rudkin needed seven stitches for a gash above his eye.
18. It was the highest ever payment to a Bantam weight fighter.
19. 'I Thank You', 50,000 records sold
20. 1987





The Film

- Compile a list of all the different types of material included in this documentary (still photographs, current interviews, archival material including television footage from *Wide World of Sport* and *This Is Your Life*, newspaper clippings, Movietone News footage, etc.)
- Discuss the pre-credit sequence, the atmosphere it endeavours to establish, and the intention behind it.
- Design a poster to promote this film. Annotate your design choices, font, colour scheme, layout, etc. How would you select (a) representative image/s?
- Write a review of the film to be published in a daily newspaper.
- Write a fifty-word synopsis of the film to be published in a television guide.
- Who is the audience for this film? Would it connect strongly with an international audience?
- Consider the film's title. Make a list of other possible titles.
- Imagine you had an opportunity to interview the film's director, Edward Martin. Make a list of ten questions you would like to ask him about his career and this particular film.
- Imagine you are the film's director. Write an account of your experiences making this film and your motivation, why you felt this story needed to be told at this time and in this way.
- For the film to succeed, Martin needed to earn Lionel's trust. How might he have developed this important aspect of their relationship?
- 'One of the great strengths of this film is



its cinematic style.' Discuss.

- Music is an important part of this film. What specifications might director Martin have given to composer Cezary Skubiszewski?
- What did you learn from watching this film? Is there any aspect of the topic you would like to explore further?
- Why should we remember Lionel Rose, forty years after his historic victory over Fighting Harada?
- 'This documentary fails to fully account for Rose's significance as an *Indigenous* icon. Where are the interviews with other Aboriginal figures contextualizing his importance?' Discuss.
- The film features contemporary interview material with: Lionel Rose; Jenny Rose; Jack Rennie; Mark Rennie; John Johnson; and Gary Foley. Make a wish list of six other figures who you would like to include in a documentary about Lionel.
- 'At its heart, this is the classic rags-to-riches (and then back to rags) story that we all love.' Discuss.
- Martin says, 'The key themes in the film are about memory, identity and respect'. Explore these three themes in greater detail.
- Consult the list of credits at the end of this guide. Choose one role and write an outline of this person's responsibilities during the production of the film.





- There are several points in the film where we see Lionel today, surrounded by his extended family, watching himself as a young fighter on television. What is the effect of this technique? Choose one of these moments and write an account of Lionel's memories, what he might be thinking and feeling as he watches this old footage. (A particularly poignant moment is the shot of him watching his defeat by Olivares. He says to his family, 'Give us a clap kids'.)
- Compile a list of films about boxing. (Consider some of the following: *Million Dollar Baby* [Clint Eastwood, 2004], *Raging Bull* [Martin Scorsese, 1980], *Rocky* [John Avildsen, 1976], *The Harder They Fall* [Mark Robson, 1956], *Ali* [Michael Mann, 2001], *The Hurricane* [Norman Jewison, 1999], *Fat City* [John

- Huston, 1972], *Cinderella Man* [Ron Howard, 2005], *Golden Boy* [Rouben Mamoulian, 1939], *Killer's Kiss* [Stanley Kubrick, 1955], *The Set-up* [Robert Wise, 1949], *When We Were Kings* [Leon Gast, 1996] and *Body and Soul* [Robert Rossen, 1947].) If students have seen some of these films, have them brainstorm recurrent themes. Why do we find the boxer's tale so compelling? Why do we continue telling versions of this story? What larger stories (universal human experiences?) are contained within it?
- 'The mood of this film is more melancholy than celebratory.' Discuss.
 - Imagine you are Lionel watching this film for the first time. Write a letter to the film's director telling him of your response.

Resources

Books

- Richard Broome with Alick Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1998.
- Peter Corris, *Lords of the Ring: A History of Prize Fighting in Australia*, Cassell Australia, North Ryde, NSW, 1980.
- David Horton, *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1994.
- Grantlee Kieza, *Australian Boxing: An Illustrated History*, Gary Allen Pty. Ltd., Paddington, 1990.
- Wayne McLennan, *Tent Boxing: An Australian Journey*, Granta Books, London, 2007.
- Herbert Mishael (ed.), *'Lay them out before they cut you up!' A Critical Examination of the Boxing Business*, Herbert Mishael, East Malvern, Victoria, 1972.
- Ruth Park & Rafe Champion, *Home Before Dark*, Viking, Ringwood, Victoria, 1995.
- Lionel Rose, as told to Rod Humphries, *Lionel Rose: Australian - The Life Story of a Champion*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1969.
- Andrew Rule, adapted from John Dixon's original screenplay, *Rose Against The Odds: The Lionel Rose Story*, Floradale Productions, Kilmore, Victoria, 1991.
- Brian Stoddart & Wray Vamplew, *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994.
- Arnold Thomas, *Heroes of the Fancy: A History of Australian Boxing*, Arnold Thomas, Boronia, Victoria, 1999.

Web Sites

- World Boxing Foundation**
<http://www.worldboxingfoundation.com>
- Boxing Australia**
<http://www.boxing.org.au>
- Oz Boxing – includes information about rules, safety, weight divisions, etc.**
<http://ozboxing.tonywhelan.net>
- Boxing Victoria**
<http://www.boxingvic.org.au>

Lionel Rose – includes photographs, career bouts and brief bio
<http://cyberboxingzone.com/boxing/lionrose.htm>

The Unfading Jack Rennie
http://www.worldboxingfoundation.com/wbf/?page_id=84

Croucher-Rennie Interview
http://www.worldboxingfoundation.com/wbf/?page_id=29

'Rose Takes World Title', *The Age*, <http://150.theage.com.au/view_bestof_article.asp?straction=update&inttype=1&intid=1105>, 28 February 1968.

Photograph of Rose training in 1968
http://vrroom.naa.gov.au/print_display.aspx?ObjectType=SingleRecordPrint&recordid=809

John Elder, 'Fight To The End', *Sydney Morning Herald*, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/sport/fight-to-the-end/2008/06/14/1213321683301.html>>, 15 June 2008.

Complete details of all Rose's bouts
http://www.boxrec.com/list_bouts.php?human_id=011513&cat=boxer

Max Smith, 'Great Win on Points', *The Age*, <http://150.theage.com.au/view_bestofarticle.asp?straction=update&inttype=1&intid=1105>, 28 February 1968. (includes round-by-round account of the championship fight)

Barry Dickins, 'A Rose Diamond, Cut from the Softest Stone', *The Age*, <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/sport/a-rose-diamond-cut-from-the-softest-stone/2005/07/29/1122144018079.html>>, 30 July 2005

Tony Nobbs, 'Lionel Rose MBE Recovering From Stroke', *East Side Boxing*, <<http://www.eastsideboxing.com/news.php?p=11984&more=1>>, 7 August 2007

More images of Rose
<http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1960s/lionel/rosedx.html>

Credits

Lionel

Year of Production: 2008

Duration: 83 minutes

Director: Eddie Martin

Producer: Lizzette Atkins

Writers: David Tiley & Eddie Martin

Director of Photography: Germain McMicking

Editor: Ken Sallows

Composer: Cezary Skubiszewski

Sound Design: Nick Batterham

Treatment Writer: David Tiley

Production Manager: Rebecca Matthews & Lenny de Vries

Post Production Manager: Donna Molan





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