



Etched in Bone



RED LILY
PRODUCTIONS

Photograph by Glenn Campbell
Poster design by Clémentine Oubosse

ETCHED IN BONE STUDY GUIDE

By Béatrice Bijon

<https://etchedinbone.com>

Etched in Bone Study Guide was produced for Red Lily Productions

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Etched in Bone (2018)

A documentary film by Martin Thomas and Béatrice Bijon
A Red Lily Productions Film
Distributed by Ronin Films

INTRODUCTION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

SYNOPSIS

Jacob Nayinggul, an Aboriginal elder from Arnhem Land in northern Australia, knows that bones of his ancestors were stolen by scientists in 1948. For sixty years they were held by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC as part of a large collection of human anatomy. When, after years of argument, the Smithsonian finally agrees to repatriate the bones, Jacob Nayinggul creates a new form of ceremony. Wrapped in paperbark, the stolen bones — and with them the ancestors' spirits — are welcomed home and put to sleep in the land where they were born.

WARNING

Etched in Bone contains images of Aboriginal people who have passed away. Footage of human bones is shown in the film. This includes images of bones being handled. No images of the repatriated bones are used in this study guide.

The time codes given in this study guide refer to the DVD version distributed by Ronin Films.



Rock formation near Red Lily Lagoon, Arnhem Land.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Etched in Bone is suitable for secondary students in Years 10 to 12 in the learning areas of English, History and Media.

Etched in Bone can be used as a resource to address the Australian Curriculum: Cross-Curriculum Priority – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

The film's depiction of the repatriation of Indigenous Australian bones that were stolen from their ancestral country provides opportunities for students to:

- (1) Deepen their knowledge of Australia and the world's oldest continuous living cultures.
- (2) Engage in discussions about Indigenous Australian identity and belonging, country and place, and culture and people.
- (3) Engage in discussions about the impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australians.
- (4) Examine the influence of traditional Indigenous views and values as well as their significance and impact on contemporary Australian society.

The film also provides an opportunity for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuing culture.

Details about integrating these cross-cultural activities can be accessed at:

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/cross-curriculum-priorities/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-histories-and-cultures/>

Teachers of Year 10 are advised to consult the curriculum documents for those subjects endorsed by their state or territory.

Teachers of Years 11 and 12 are advised to consult the curriculum subjects endorsed by their state or territory.

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS: YEAR 10

English

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/curriculum/f-10?layout=1#level10>

Humanities and Social Sciences: History

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/history/>

The Arts: Media Arts

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/media-arts/>

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: SENIOR SECONDARY CURRICULUM

English

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/senior-secondary-curriculum/english/>

Humanities and Social Sciences — History: Modern History

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/senior-secondary-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/modern-history/>



Arnhem Land bones at the Smithsonian Institution prior to their repatriation in 2010. Photo Adis Hondo.

I. BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Trailer

Watch the official trailer for *Etched in Bone*: <https://vimeo.com/326248430>

- What do you think the film might be about?
- Name the elements of the trailer that allow you to identify the location, the period(s) when the film is set, and the characters and themes. What is the genre of the film?
- Identify some elements that you find enigmatic. Why?
- What are the qualities of this trailer? Was the trailer efficiently edited? In what ways does it make you want to see the film?
- What other information appears in the trailer?

Promotional material

Go to the *Etched in Bone* website: <https://etchedinbone.com>

Locate the poster and the DVD sleeve. Both are examples of promotional material for the film, and like the trailer and the film they have an aesthetic value. The poster and the DVD sleeve are made up of visual elements as well as written text.

Analyse and compare them, using the following questions/prompts:

- Evaluate the layout. What is in the foreground? What is in the background? How is the text positioned?
- Evaluate the colour, sense of movement and framing.
- Identify the different written features. What are their purposes? Analyse the typography.
- What are the differences in style between the poster and the DVD sleeve? What are the effects created?
- How effective are the poster and the DVD sleeve in promoting the film?

Writing task

Drawing on your findings in the two previous activities, assess how successfully the trailer, poster and DVD sleeve promote the film.

II. AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES



Collecting paperbark for wrapping the repatriated bones in 2011.

After the screening of the film, time will be devoted to class discussion, group work, and individual study. In view of the sensitivity of some images, teachers are advised to allow time in class for spontaneous questions and feedback immediately after viewing the film. Students might want to voice their interest in the film and express their emotions.

Brainstorming

- Discuss the students' reactions.
- Ask students to correct and add to the responses they gave to the pre-viewing tasks.
- Analyse the title of the film.

III. THE FILM AS TEXT

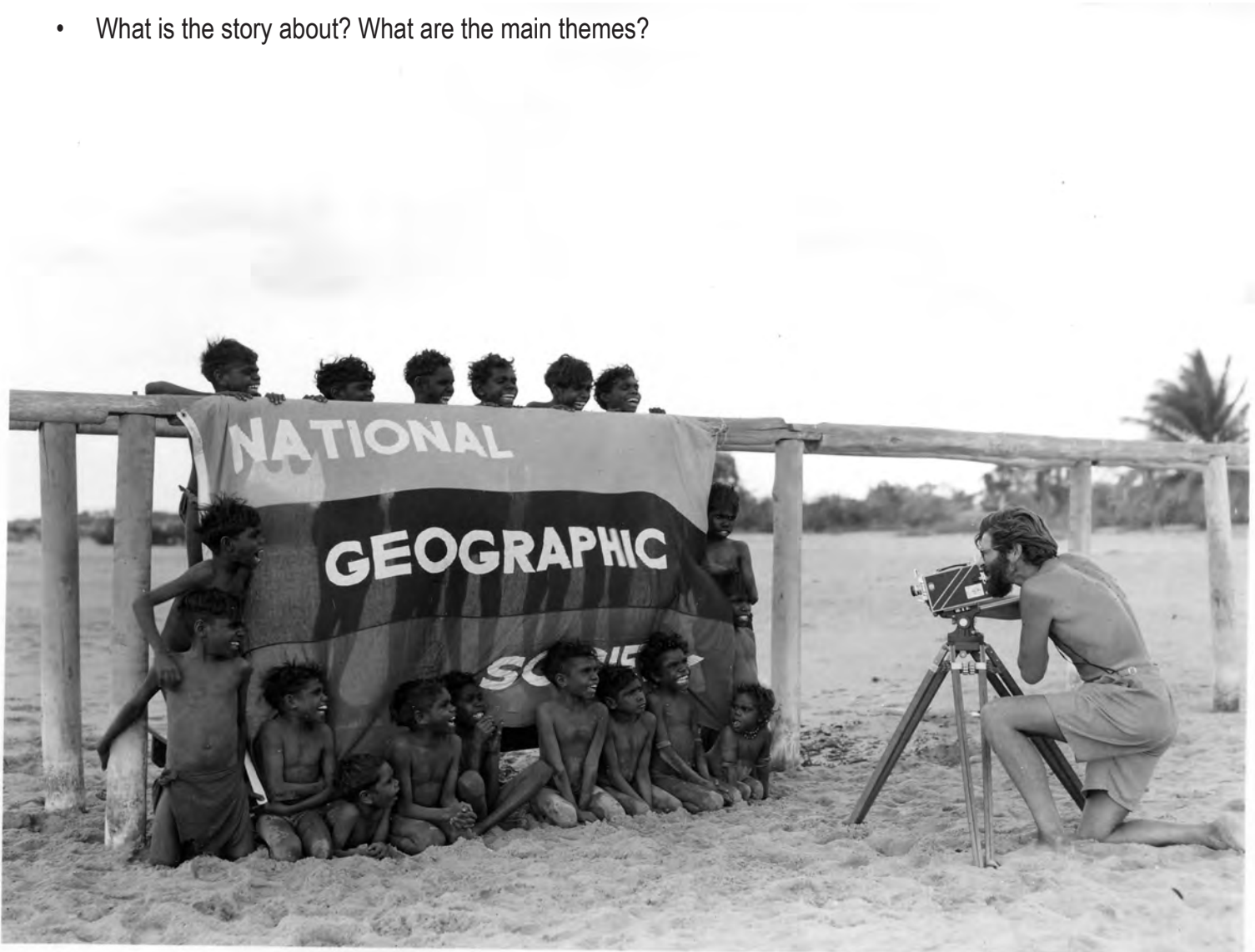
This activity can be done with the whole class. Alternatively, the class can be divided into small groups, each of which will be given one or more of the following tasks.

(1) Elements of the story

- In the order in which they appear in the film, identify the different sections or elements of the story that make up the narrative (e.g. the smoking ceremony at the beginning would be one 'section').
- Give each section a title.
- Write a short paragraph on each section that answers the following questions: who? where? when? what?
- Identify one or two scenes that stand out for you? Explain why.

(2) Content

- What is the story about? What are the main themes?



National Geographic cameraman Howell Walker on the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948. State Library of South Australia.

(3) Form

- How is the story conveyed to the audience?
- What are the different voices and points of view?
- Analyse the role of the voiceover and explain what point of view it represents.
- What is your impression of the voiceover?



Sound recordist James Lane (left) and cinematographer Scott Wombey shooting *Etched in Bone* in 2016.

(4) Chronology

- Are the events in the story presented in the sequence in which they happened (i.e. in chronological order)?
- Are there any flashbacks?
- There are several ellipses (or gaps) in the story where events are not shown. Can you identify any of them? What effect do they create?

(5) Characters

- Who are the main characters?
- How do the main characters relate to one another?
- Describe Jacob Nayinggul's personality.



Sound recordist Suze Houghton (right) and cinematographer Adis Hondo shooting *Etched in Bone* in 2011.

(6) Camera techniques

- Look up the following film terms:
 - camera angles: long shot; wide-angle shot; high-angle shot; low-angle shot; eye-level shot; close-up shot; aerial shot.
 - camera movements: panning shot; tilting shot; zooming shot; static shot; aerial shot.
- How are these techniques used to generate a point of view? How are they used to create effect and convey meaning?
- Still photographs are used several times in the film. Identify the different occasions when they appear. Why did the film makers use stills at these times?

(7) Soundtrack

- Describe the different elements that make up the soundtrack.
- Read the composer's comments on his musical compositions on <https://etchedinbone.com/music/>. Make a note of how he approached the composition and discuss this with your peers.
- Explain how the different elements of the soundtrack create meaning.

(8) Rhythm and Mood

- Describe the general pace of the film. Do some sections accelerate or slow down action? If so, what is the effect created?
- How would you define the general mood of the film? Use a variety of adjectives to convey your impressions.

IV. ARNHEM LAND AND ITS VISITORS

Etched in Bone is mostly set in Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory of Australia.



GEOGRAPHY OF ARNHEM LAND

Arnhem Land is one of five regions that make up the Northern Territory of Australia. It is situated in the north-eastern part of the Territory. To its west lies Kakadu National Park. The region has a tropical climate that brings extreme dry and wet seasons. Gunbalanya, Maningrida, Yirrkala and Ramingining are the largest settlements in Arnhem Land. Some inhabitants live permanently or seasonally in small camps or settlements known as outstations.

Mapwork

- Locate the four main settlements on the map of Arnhem Land. Then locate the following: Gove Peninsula; Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island); Warruwi (South Goulburn Island); Croker Island; Groote Eylandt; and the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Arnhem Land is made up of hundreds of clan-based estates that are managed and controlled by their traditional owners. Although the clan boundaries have been recognised since ancient times, the customary ownership of the Arnhem Land estates was not formally acknowledged by the Federal legal system until the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) in 1976. This legislation recognises that the Aboriginal owners hold inalienable freehold title to their land. They have all the rights and responsibilities of landowners, although the land cannot be bought or sold.

Arnhem Land today

Like any other form of private land, permission is required to visit Arnhem Land. All visitors must have a written permit, issued by the Northern Land Council. In the film, some of the people attending the burial ceremony are visitors or tourists. They were required to have permits.



Red Lily Lagoon, Arnhem Land.

HISTORY OF ARNHEM LAND

The civilisation of the First Australians is the most ancient continuing culture on Earth. Artefacts found in Kakadu National Park, just a short distance from Gunbalanya, indicate that Aboriginal people have inhabited the area for more than 60,000 years. The Aboriginal belief system and culture are highly complex, having developed over millennia. At the heart of their world is the concept of the Dreaming, which influences all aspects of life. For Aboriginal people, the Dreaming provides a holistic account of humanity, the environment and the wider cosmos. The existence of plants, animals, oceans and landforms is explained by the Dreaming. So too are the responsibilities of the people who occupy the land. Myth, ceremony, law, and social responsibility are defined by this all-encompassing understanding of the world.

For the people of Arnhem Land, family relationships and responsibilities are complex and very different to those of other Australians. In Aboriginal culture, there is a deep spiritual connection between people and their ancestral country.



Rock art on Injalak.

The Dreaming is the foundation of Aboriginal Australians' outlook on the universe and humankind. It is a complex and subtle concept that encompasses:

- A vision of time.
- A narrative of things past and present.
- An ordering principle that embraces everything significant to Aboriginal people.

The anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner said 'one cannot 'fix' Dreaming in time: it was, and is, everywhere'.

The Dreaming is the source of Aboriginal Australians' visual art, stories and songs.

Arnhem Land reflects the linguistic diversity of Australia as a whole. More than 250 languages were spoken across the continent at the time of European settlement. Currently, only one hundred of these languages are still spoken and some are now highly endangered. There are many collaborative projects between Indigenous speakers and researchers, aimed at the preservation and revitalisation of endangered languages. The United Nations declared 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

Many visitors have had impact on the people of Arnhem Land and their history. They include:

- Seafarers from the port of Makassar in South Sulawesi (now part of Indonesia)
- Dutch navigators
- Matthew Flinders
- Ludwig Leichhardt
- Missionaries

Arnhem Land visitors

Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group 'a visitor' from the list above. Get them to research the visitor and answer the following questions.

- Who were they?
- When did they visit Arnhem Land?
- What did they do there?
- How long did they stay in Arnhem Land?
- For what are they best known?

People have been going to Arnhem Land to conduct anthropological research since the early twentieth century.



Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929) went to Gunbalanya in 1911. He published *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia* (1914) in which he describes his observations and theories. He visited rock art galleries on Injalak near Gunbalanya, some of which are seen in the film. He collected bark paintings and artefacts while in the area. Many are held in Museum Victoria.

Donald Thomson (1901-1970) was an anthropologist and zoologist who studied in different parts of Australia. In Arnhem Land, he made comprehensive photographic records of Aboriginal society. He also collected bark paintings, weapons, and other artefacts. Thomson was a vocal advocate of Aboriginal rights.

By the mid-twentieth century, anthropology was being taught at a small number of Australian universities. **Ronald Berndt** (1916-1990) and **Catherine Berndt** (1918-1994) carried out fieldwork in many parts of Australia, including a number of areas where contact between Aboriginal people and Europeans was relatively recent. Being a husband-and-wife team they had the opportunity to document men's knowledge and women's knowledge. They first worked in Gunbalanya in 1947.

Anthropology

The first recorded usage of the word 'anthropology' dates from 1593. Drawn from the Greek, the word was created by pairing *anthropos*, meaning 'man', 'humanity', or 'mankind' with the suffix '-logy' drawn from *logos*, meaning word, speech, discourse or reason. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines anthropology, in its original usage, as the 'science of man, or of mankind, in the widest sense'. Some forms of anthropology concentrate on the society or culture of the people being studied. Another branch of the discipline, which focuses on the human body, is sometimes referred to as 'physical anthropology'.



Recording session during the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948. State Library of South Australia.

V. FOCUS ON GUNBALANYA



Cahills Crossing on the border between Kakadu National Park and Arnhem Land.

Gunbalanya is the traditional Aboriginal place name of an area also known as Oenpelli. These days it is the site of a remote town in western Arnhem Land, 240 km east of Darwin and sixty km northeast of the town of Jabiru (in Kakadu National Park). The boundary between Arnhem Land and the park is the East Alligator River. The only road access between the park and Arnhem Land is via Cahills Crossing, a causeway seen in the film (07:20). The area near Gunbalanya is referred to as the Stone Country. The sandstone escarpment seen in the film is part of the Arnhem Land Plateau. It is famed for its remarkable formations, its thousands of rock shelters, and its rich rock art heritage. Injalak hill is the plateau close to Gunbalanya from which bones were stolen.

Gunbalanya has a population of approximately 1120 people. Fifty-four per cent work full time while twenty-five per cent are unemployed. The main language is Kunwinjku, although most people also speak English. Several other Indigenous languages are common in the locality. The Aboriginal people of the region refer to themselves as Bininj.

Gunbalanya landscape

Etched in Bone shows different images of Gunbalanya.

- Describe the aerial images of the town and environs.
- Describe other views of the landscape and the natural sounds.

Kunwinjku is spoken by around 2000 people in west Arnhem Land. It is the most commonly used dialect of the language referred to as 'Bininj Kunwok' (literally 'people speak'). There are other languages indigenous to the area, but they are now spoken by very few people. In the film, Jacob Nayinggul speaks several Indigenous languages and he explains that he learnt them when he was a boy. Some of these languages are now endangered.

Indigenous languages

Watch the sequence from 36:55 to 39:00.

- Name a few local languages spoken or mentioned by Jacob in the film.
- Were you aware that some Indigenous people speak several languages as well as English?
- Explain and analyse Jacob's reflection on the significance of speaking his languages.
- Language is not only a means of communication. It is closely connected with culture and with a sense of identity. Reflect on this.

GUNBALANYA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

One of the first white men to settle permanently in west Arnhem Land was Paddy Cahill, a buffalo shooter. In 1906 he set up a cattle station at Gunbalanya. He had a dairy herd and built a homestead. The name 'Oenpelli' dates from this period. When Cahill experienced financial difficulty the Commonwealth Government took over the property, transferring its administration to the Christian Missionary Society in 1925. The society was a religious organisation connected with the Anglican Church. Most missionaries in Arnhem Land were white Australians, although a few came from Fiji.

From 1925, Oenpelli operated as a Christian mission. Missions were usually small settlements, staffed by individuals of strong religious conviction. They provided basic housing and schooling for children and provided rations for the local people who were encouraged to abandon their traditional nomadic lifestyle. The missionaries encouraged churchgoing and hoped that the Aboriginal population would convert to Christianity. The mission at Gunbalanya operated until 1977, at which time the settlement moved towards more independent structures of governance.



Gunbalanya as seen from Injalak.

THE 1948 AMERICAN-AUSTRALIAN SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO ARNHEM LAND

The film introduces the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land which visited Gunbalanya in 1948, staying for two months. The main purpose of the expedition was to study the natural environment and the Aboriginal inhabitants. The activities of expedition members were widely reported in the press and communicated internationally through film, radio, and print media.

Etched in Bone shows archival images of the expedition working at Gunbalanya and other locations.

Watch the sequence from 13:30 to 18:06. This part of the film draws extensively from archival footage.



American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land camped at Oenpelli, 1948. National Library of Australia.

Reviewing the expedition

- Who were the leaders? What does the film tell us about their background?
- Who funded the expedition?
- What was their itinerary?
- How long did it last?
- Why was it called a scientific expedition?
- Can you describe some of the activities conducted by the expedition while in Gunbalanya?
- Drawing from the film and from your own knowledge, can you think of any positive outcomes that might have resulted from the expedition?
- Many things were collected while the expedition was in Arnhem Land. Identify examples of what was collected? Why were these items collected?

At the lagoon

The film shows footage of the lagoon at Gunbalanya. Some sequences were taken in 1948 while others were taken recently by the filmmakers.

- What kind of activities did local people carry out in the lagoon in 1948?
- Compare and contrast the archival images and the contemporary footage. What has changed?

Looking and listening

- What is your impression after hearing the first notes of music?
- Who made the archival images?
- Explain the significance of the archival footage to the film. Why did the filmmakers choose to use it?
- How does the archival footage influence the audience's response to the film?
- The voiceover talks about 'the dark side of the expedition'. Explain what this means.

Archaeology (literally the study of ancient things) is the study of culture by excavation and description of its material remains, such as tools, pottery, jewellery, stone walls, monuments, as well as bones and human remains.

The primary aims of the discipline are: to recover, record, analyse, and classify the material evidence of historic societies; to describe and interpret the patterns of human behaviour that led to its creation; and to understand the reasons for that behaviour.



Archaeological dig during the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, 1948. National Library of Australia.

VI. THE BONE THEFT

The bones were stolen from cracks in the rock on Injalak. Until the twentieth century, Indigenous people lived on that hill. As can be seen in the film, people used to put their ancestors' bones to rest there. Injalak is also an outstanding rock art site.

Nowadays, when local Bininj guides take tourists to see the rock art on the hill, protocols need to be respected. The guides tell the visitors that there are still some human remains in the cracks of the rock. Tourists are requested to show respect for the place and not to touch, photograph, or film human remains. The filmmakers got permission to show images of bones.

The stealing of the bones by the American scientist Frank Setzler is a pivotal moment in the film. Setzler (1902-1975) was an American archaeologist and Head of the Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution's United States National Museum in Washington DC. This museum, which is now known as the National Museum of Natural History, has one of the world's largest collections of human bones.



Frank Setzler at Oenpelli, 1948. National Library of Australia.



James Smithson's shrine. Smithsonian Archives.

Taking the bones

Watch the sequence from 18:07 to 20:30.

- Describe how the filmmakers used Setzler's diary as visual evidence, paying close attention to the way the written document and photographs have been brought together. Do you think the techniques used are effective? Explain your view.
- What information is provided by Setzler's diary? What does it tell us about its author's relationship with Indigenous people and his ethics as a scientist?
- Closely describe the sequence when Frank Setzler is seen removing the bones from cracks in the rock. Do Setzler's gestures or facial expressions give you a sense of what he is feeling while he is doing this? What is your opinion of this scene?
- Although members of the Gunbalanya community were distressed when they saw the footage of the bones being disturbed, they saw it as important that it be included in *Etched in Bone*. Why do you think they might have felt this?
- Once the bones were removed, where were they taken? How long did they stay there?
- Describe and analyse the soundtrack of the sequence. Try to identify the different instruments. How does the musical score convey meaning or emotion?

The film points out that the collection of bones and other body parts by American and European museums became common practice in the nineteenth century and that it continued into the twentieth century.

Interview with Samuel Redman

Watch the sequence from 26:47 to 30:14.

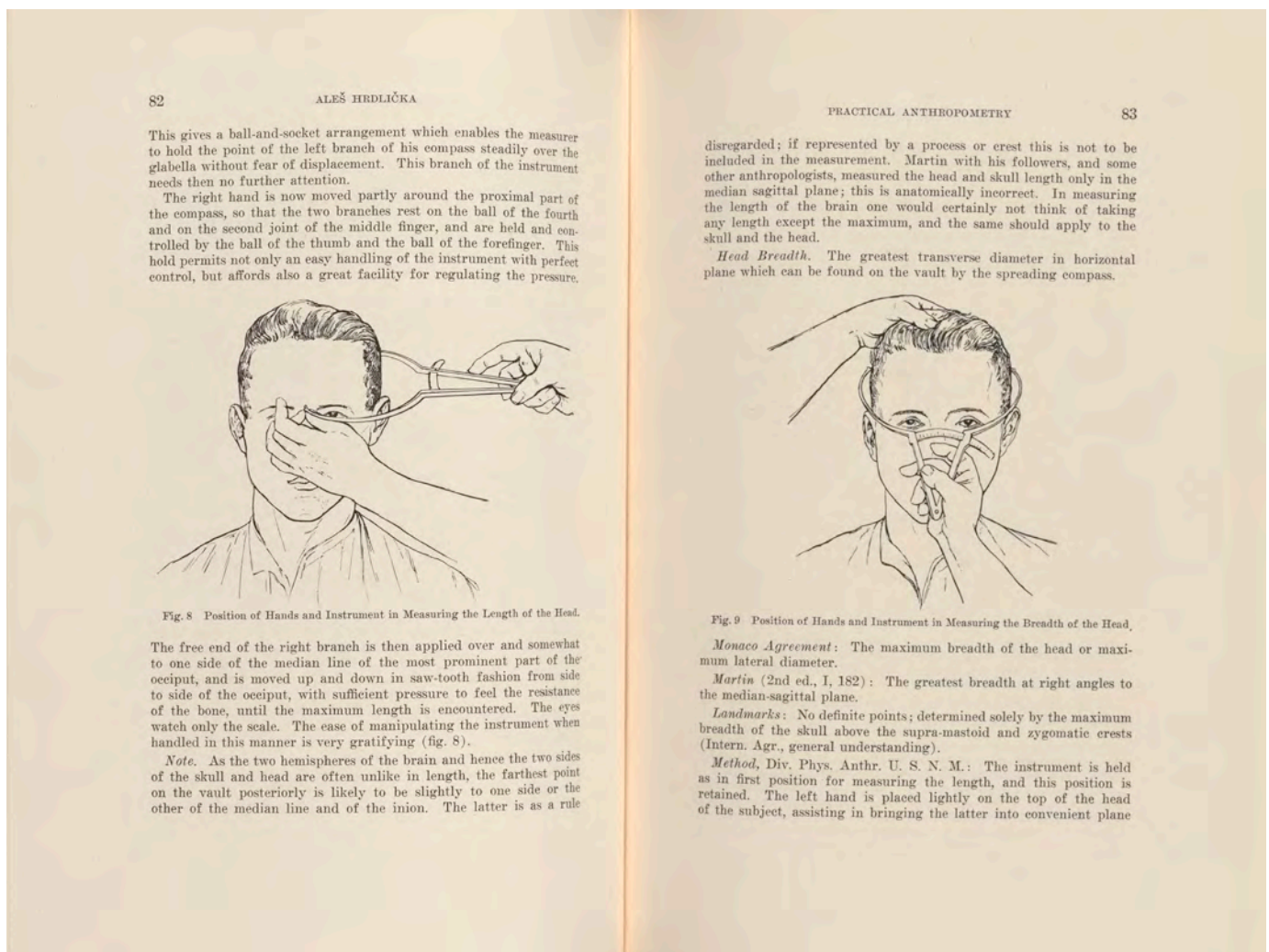
- Explain why scientists collected human remains.
- Describe the methods whereby scientists obtained human bones and other body parts.
- Who was Aleš Hrdlička?
- Samuel Redman explains that Hrdlička's theories were racist. What does this mean?
- What did anthropometry involve? How was anthropometry used to justify racial theories?

Further analysis and interpretation:

There are many images and stories of bones in the film. For instance, the film tells the story of James Smithson, the founding benefactor of the Smithsonian Institution, whose bones were transported from Italy to Washington where they were given a national welcome and buried in a marble shrine. There is also footage of Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, the main military cemetery in the United States.

- What does the juxtaposition of these stories with the Gunbalanya story suggest?
- What is the effect that the filmmakers might have wanted to achieve?

Anthropometry is the measurement of the size and proportions of the human body. In the nineteenth century, it involved the systematic collection of measurements of the human body as a way of linking human biology with cultural evolution.



Illustrations from the handbook *Practical Anthropometry* by Aleš Hrdlička. National Library of Australia.

VII. REPATRIATION

Repatriation is a term that refers to the organised return of a person to his or her place of origin – usually the land of birth. The term can apply to the return of dead people (for example, the repatriation to their homeland of soldiers killed in battle). It can also refer to the return of objects to their place of origin.

The term ‘repatriation’ is sometimes heard in debates about museums. That is because there are numerous works of art, artefacts and human body parts in public collections that were acquired as a result of military victory, imperial conquest, colonisation, or plain theft by individuals. As a consequence, they ended up in a foreign country. Many people are trying to resolve these past injustices by calling for the return of disputed collections. The response of museums has been mixed. Even if there is willingness on the part of a museum to return collections — and this is not always the case — the need for agreement between the governments of different nations can make repatriation a complicated and time-consuming business.



Repatriation ceremony for American Indian human remains at Isabella Reservation, Mount Pleasant, Michigan, USA. Photo Marcella Hadden, Niibing Giizis.

There are many disputed artworks or objects across the world. A famous example is the Parthenon Marbles, held in the British Museum and claimed by Greece.

The Smithsonian Institution is one of hundreds of museums around the world that holds collections of human remains removed from Indigenous burial sites. Many descendants of people whose bodies are held in collections are demanding that they be returned. Many feel pain and sorrow that their ancestors' remains are being held in a museum in a distant country.

The call for repatriation

Discuss in class whether there is any difference between repatriating artefacts and repatriating human remains.

Repatriation is a transnational issue. Different countries have responded to repatriation requests in different ways. Some museums, curators and institutions have ignored the issue and blocked the claims to human remains made by Indigenous communities. In so doing, they have also ignored the spiritual connections that Indigenous people often feel for their ancestors. Some people argue that this perpetuates the wrongdoings of colonisation. In contrast, there are institutions that have been deeply engaged with repatriation. Even when there is good will on both sides, this can be a long and complex process.



Storage of human remains at the Smithsonian Institution. Smithsonian Archives.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been highly vocal in calling for the repatriation of the remains of their ancestors for many years. They have been supported by the Australian Government which has an Indigenous Repatriation Program, administered by the Department of Communications and the Arts.

In the period 1989-2019, the remains of more than 1,618 Indigenous Australian ancestors were repatriated from overseas collections. Others held by Australian institutions have also been returned to communities.

<https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation/international-repatriation>

Repatriation is made more difficult if the site of origin of human remains is unknown or uncertain. Communities want to be sure that the bones and the spirits are going home to their own ancestral land. As we see in the film, repatriation creates challenges for Indigenous communities who need to create new protocols and ceremonies to welcome home the ancestors.

Reflecting on repatriation

- Write a text explaining and reflecting on what sort of healing and justice the repatriation of human remains can achieve.
- Initiate a class discussion about the ways in which *Etched in Bone* could be used to raise awareness about the theft of ancestral human remains and the need to return them to their original communities.

Many organisations have been involved in the repatriation process including land councils, museums, universities and Indigenous cultural organisations.

'The Australian Government supports the repatriation of ancestral remains and secret sacred objects to their communities of origin to promote healing and reconciliation.'

Department of Communications and Arts: <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation> (accessed 16 January 2020)



Graves of the repatriated ancestors one day after the burial in 2011.

VIII. CEREMONIES

Ceremonies and rituals are integral to the social and spiritual lives of Indigenous communities. They are evidence of the continuing survival of Indigenous traditions. Ceremonies are all about culture.

Ceremonies are performances that can involve dance, song, body decoration, and a wide range of rituals. In *Etched in Bone*, the songs performed during the burial ceremony were handed down to the musicians by their elders. Some were brought to them by deceased relatives who appeared in dreams.

There are ceremonies that mark the major stages in life: the birth of a child or the death of a member of a community. Initiation ceremonies celebrate the transition from childhood to adulthood. In Arnhem Land, many ceremonies are sacred and secret. Attendance at these ceremonies is restricted to certain categories of people.

Etched in Bone shows several ceremonies which mark different stages in the return of the bones to their country. During each ceremony, smoke is used to cleanse and protect people who were in contact with the bones.



Jacob Nayinggul leads a procession to the mission graveyard where the repatriated bones were buried in 2011. Photo Glenn Campbell.

Studying the ceremonies

Review the following sections of the film relating to ceremony and respond to the questions.

Elders smoke a hard drive at the beginning of the film (00:40 to 02:12)

- Where is this event taking place?
- Why is the location significant?
- What is the purpose of this ceremony?

Planning a ceremony to receive the bones in Washington (21:32 to 24:25)

- Who are the three Aboriginal men and where do they come from?
- What are the main issues they are discussing? What are the difficulties they face?
- We are told that 'these people will be listening to us'. Who makes this remark? Who are 'these people'?



Joe Gumbula (right) sings to the Arnhem Land bones prior to their departure from the Smithsonian in 2010. Photo Adis Hondo.



Members of the Gunbalanya community are smoked after wrapping the bones.

Ceremony to receive the boxes of bones (30:15 to 33:27)

- Where is this ceremony taking place?
- Why was this location chosen?
- Why are Indigenous people from the United States involved?
- Closely describe the different people attending the ceremony. Do you get a sense of their feelings?
- Why did the filmmakers use still photographs?

Ceremonial wrapping of the bones (39:45 to 50:48)

- Why does Jacob Nayinggul want to make the whole ceremony public?
- Jacob is seen conversing with his eldest son Alfred. Explain why Alfred's presence is important.
- Describe the local men and women preparing the bones, paying close attention to how they might be feeling.
- Jacob says that they are 'dressing the bones'. What does he mean?
- Why is Jacob addressing the bones? What languages is he speaking? Why is he speaking these languages?
- Are men and women wrapped together?
- Were you surprised by the way they prepare the bones?
- How did you feel when watching the footage of people handling their ancestors' bones?

Burying the bones (51:00 to 01:03:16)

- What was it about Jacob Nayinggul that allowed him to play the major role in organising and creating the ceremony in Gunbalanya? Give several reasons.
- The bones were buried in the old mission cemetery on the day after their wrapping. Describe the audience and their reactions to the ceremony.
- What does Julie Narndal communicate in her speech?
- How do you account for the Christian element in the ceremony?



Preparing graves for the repatriated bones in 2011.

Before the bundles of bones are finally laid in the graves, Jacob delivers a final speech in English (57:27 to 58:48)

So what I would like to say, one thing: these bodies, Balanda [white people] was here, and some of them, some bodies were stolen. I heard about this.

Stealing people's bones and taking them away for study, well it's no bloody good. No right. My father and his uncle didn't say yes. But good, they're back, and we — I can now — second generation — I can now bury them. But I feel sorry that they were stolen. Stealing is no bloody good, to everybody. We should leave stealing and live together, black and white, live together in a beautiful country like this. No mucking around stealing or whatever.

Jacob Nayinggul's speech

- What are the main ideas that Jacob Nayinggul is putting forward?
- In your eyes, what is the most forceful idea?
- What is Jacob Nayinggul calling for?
- What is the tone of his speech?



Elders painted in traditional ochre for the burial ceremony in 2011. Photo Glenn Campbell.

IX. LEADERSHIP

Traditional owners are owners of land primarily by virtue of descent. The land has been handed down through families over generations. Being a traditional owner entails rights and responsibilities.

Etched in Bone introduces two traditional owners of the west Arnhem region: Jacob Nayinggul and Julie Narndal.

Jacob Nayinggul, traditional owner

The first images of Jacob Nayinggul in the film are shot on his country near Cahills Crossing (commencing at 07:20). Listen to Jacob Nayinggul explaining what being a traditional owner meant for him. Give examples of his responsibilities for the land.

Being a traditional owner bestows authority. Drawn from the Latin *auctor*, the terms 'author' and 'authority' have the same etymology. *Auctor* refers to 'master, creator, one who brings about, one who makes or creates' as well as 'authority, dignity and gravity'. In the film, two ceremonial leaders are great creators and show gravity and authority when performing the ceremonies: Joe Gumbula in Washington and Jacob Nayinggul in Gunbalanya.



Joe Gumbula discussing Arnhem Land paintings at the Smithsonian Institution in 2010. Photo Adis Hondo.

Joe Gumbula, traditional owner and musician

- Explain how Joe Gumbula was given authority (21:32 to 24:00).
- Joe Gumbula later explains people's relationship with the bones in the Yolngu world and what happens after somebody 'becomes a dead person' (01:04:52 to 01:05:42). What are the main points of his explanation? What do you think he means?

Jacob Nayinggul's authority

- Describe the many ways in which Jacob Nayinggul embodies authority in the film.
- Show how Jacob's and Joe's knowledge as leaders give them authority.



Jacob Nayinggul after the burial ceremony in 2011.

Final sequence

At the very end of the film, we are looking across a huge vista from an escarpment: this is Jacob Nayinggul's country (01:06:22 to 01:09:30).

- Describe the landscape and the mood.
- The last time we hear Jacob Nayinggul's voice, we cannot see him. Why did the filmmakers decide not to show him?
- Describe Jacob's voice.
- How do you feel about hearing his voice only? What is the effect created?
- What is the main message of his last words?
- How is the mood conveyed by the music?
- How can this final mood be interpreted?

Ceremonies and leadership

- Think about the final words of the voiceover. How can the film and the ceremonies it depicts be important for the future?
- Can you think of any way that the film could be used to foster leadership within communities?

Final still photographs (01:09:32 to 01:10:34)

- The final images of the film are still photographs taken in 2018. Describe the people who are in these images.
- What are they doing? Why?
- In what way do these images reveal Jacob Nayinggul's posthumous authority?



Jacob Nayinggul at Gunbalanya in 2011.

'It is a good point for me to spread the story instead of being hidden'

X. FURTHER ACTIVITIES

Last impressions

After the completion of study of the film, students should be asked:

- What is the most powerful image that stays with you?
- What is the most moving moment that stays with you?
- What is the main thing that should be remembered by any viewer?

Film review

Ask students to write a review of *Etched in Bone* relying on the work done with this study guide. A film review should have the following elements:

Introduction

Start with a compelling observation or image to get the reader's attention straight away. Provide basic information about the film, and include the title, the director's names and the main protagonists. You should start evaluating the film and put forward the central idea and analysis of your review.

Plot summary

Without too much detail, give a brief summary of the plot.

Description

Tell the story of your personal experience of the film, emphasising what stood out to you.

Analysis

Analyse the form and the content of the film – narrative techniques, sound, story – and explain how they affect your experience of the film.

Conclusion

End on a catchy sentence which sums up your evaluation and impression of the film. Say if you recommend the film and if it is worth seeing.

Organising a debate

Many communities around the world have asked former colonising powers to return artefacts and/or stolen human remains. Present to the class a hypothetical scenario of an Indigenous group claiming ancestral remains from an international institution. Get students to prepare and organise a debate that will allow people in the following roles to voice their perspectives:

- (1) Museum curator
- (2) Representative of an Indigenous community
- (3) Researcher
- (4) Politician
- (5) Lawyer
- (6) Scientist

When preparing the arguments of each party, students should draw on the work done on the film and conduct further research if required.

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Etched in Bone Study Guide Credits

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Co-director

Béatrice Bijon

Cinematographers

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Composer

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Australian Distribution

Ronin Films

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For further information on Gunbalanya, visit the website of Injalak Arts: <https://injalak.com>