

Frohe Ostern! (Happy Easter!)

A story of joyful Easter camping rituals celebrating how a group of German families have made their home in Australia over the last 40 years.



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ROGER STITSON



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Synopsis

A LARGE GROUP of more than fifty family and friends have camped in the same spot on Australia's Murray River every Easter for the last forty years.

Within the very Australian Easter tradition of camping holidays, their own German and unique rituals have evolved. They effortlessly carry out a fixed routine of activities; nest-making for the Easter Bunny's eggs, an enormous Erbsensuppe (pea soup), silly Sunday competitions, a decadent formal afternoon tea and a magical lantern walk on Sunday night.

Started by fourteen young German migrants in 1969, three generations have keenly kept these habits up and, amidst a social climate of dying traditions, the youngest seem likely to maintain them. Time is gently explored and danced with through a goldmine of material that conveys traditions and people growing and a landscape changing over four decades. *Frohe Ostern! (Happy Easter!)* (Anna Jeffries, 2008) is a high-spirited micro-history that celebrates migrants becoming Australians over three generations, and their growing families embracing the German heritage.

Background

The events depicted during the entire program, covering the Easter seasons from 1969 to 2007, take place on a camp site on the banks of the Murray River near the Victorian town of Yarrawonga. The participants at each yearly camp are German immigrants and their Australian-born descendants (children and/or grandchildren).

- In order to place and visualise the location geographically, on poster paper draw a map of the Murray River. On the map, indicate the relative positions of the states of South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, and mark the major cities and towns situated along the Murray, emphasising Yarrawonga. (It is not necessary to draw each state's borders in full.) Ensure you give your poster an appropriate title heading. You may also wish to include relevant illustrations or photographs.
- In pairs find out more about camping sites along the Murray in the Yarrawonga vicinity, and write a report of your findings in 300–400 words. For example, how popular are they, generally, during the various holiday seasons of the year? Is there overcrowding? What facilities and amenities are provided for campers? Is camping at these sites free? Are they maintained and regulated by local government



councils and state government environmental and conservation agencies? Have conditions on these camping grounds, and in the location in general, changed over the years from 1969 to the present? For example, is the river and the local wildlife affected by drought and pollution? Are there now regulations concerning the responsibilities and behaviour of campers that may not have been in place in 1969?

- For a range of reasons, German people have emigrated and settled in Australia, particularly in South Australia, mainly since the late 1830s. In brief summary, because of British patriotism during World War One (1914–1918), those Australian citizens of German background were regarded by the dominant Anglo-Australian community as suspicious. Many were interned, and many German place names were altered. This general anti-German attitude continued into World War Two (1939–1945) and, as is mentioned during the program, was still apparent in the wider community well after the war had concluded. Carry out appropriate research, discuss in class then write a short commentary on German

CURRICULUM LINKS >

This study guide is mainly aimed at middle and upper secondary school levels, with relevance to English, Media Studies, Drama, History, SOSE, Civics, Personal and Interpersonal Development, Human Relations.



migration to Australia during the 1950s and 1960s. Explain the reasons for German immigration during these years, in comparison, perhaps, to the German immigration movements of the nineteenth century. How many Germans settled in Australia during this era? Which parts of Germany did they come from? Where did they settle? Were they considered refugees or not? (Remember that after World War Two Germany was split into two national political blocs and ideologies.) Find out whether German migrants from these years suffered racial and cultural persecution or prejudice.

- Following from the previous activity, and drawing from the program where possible, plan and write a short fiction story, in diary or letter form, as though written by a member of a German family who are recent immigrant arrivals to Australia in the 1960s. Consider such narrative elements as cultural and language differences, the strangeness of being on the other side of the world, loneliness and home sickness, the reversal of the seasons, the type of food, whether it is easy to be accepted into the community, the attitude of the wider populace, whether there are any other families of German origin nearby to offer emotional support etc.

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bush.’**

**– Voice-over on
*Frohe Ostern!***

example, does ‘Australian’ in this context mean ‘Anglo Australian’? Find out, if you can, population figures of Australians living in regional, rural, country or ‘bush’ locations compared to those designated as living in urban residential locations. Have the relative percentages altered over the decades? What do you think most Australians know about living in the bush? How popular is bush camping in Australia? Explain whether or why there are specific times of the year when bush camping is more popular than at other times. And what, in fact, do we mean by ‘bush camping’ – do we like to take all the comforts of home away with us (such as caravans connected to electricity outlets, portable television sets etc), or do we really ‘rough it’ in outdoor environments? Who are the group of people known commonly these days as ‘grey nomads’, and what does this relatively recent term mean?

- Write your own views, in 200–300 words, of the Australian bush and what it means to you and to Australians generally. For example, in people’s minds is it more a mythical entity, a collection of dreamlike images, or a harsh, difficult reality?
- Re-read the quotation at the beginning of this section of the study guide, and look at the opening shots of the film where the quote is spoken. Do you think the introductory sequence creates a ‘magical’ and ‘typically Australian’ mood and atmosphere in keeping with the words? Plan and write your own short fiction story drawing on the concept of the Australian bush being ‘something magical’. It does not necessarily have to derive directly from the contents of *Frohe Ostern!* Consider characters and character relationships, story events, story time and narration time, point of view, themes and settings, and the way the story will conclude. You may include illustrations as desired. An alternative to writing a story is to form into pairs or small groups and prepare a short drama script that could be rehearsed, revised, then performed in class or delivered in class as a script reading.

The Great Australian Outdoors

Early in the program, before the title credits appear on-screen, we hear a man’s German-accented voice-over on the soundtrack saying that it is ‘something magical, something natural, and it’s something typically Australian to be in the bush’.

- Discuss in class your view of the above comment, and write notes in response. For example, what do you think the speaker means by ‘magical’, ‘natural’ and ‘typically Australian’? For



Tradition and Ritual

One of the most observable themes throughout *Frohe Ostern!*, around which the program is structured, is that of tradition, ritual, custom, memory and repetitive behaviour, and the fluid, unknown possibilities within these certainties and fixed points of human communal life for change and growth.

- Discuss in class and write notes generally on what you consider to be the meaning of the words, 'tradition' and 'ritual', providing a range of different examples of both in religious (or sacred) and non-religious (or secular) activity, without drawing on details from the program. How and why does a particular event or sequence of events, become traditional and ritualistic? What are the advantages and disadvantages, the positives and the negatives, of traditions and rituals?
- Prepare a short talk to the class about a tradition that you observe (or have observed in the past), and explain, if you can, something of the history of that tradition, and why you observe it. For example, it may be a form of ritualistic activity, such as a family holiday at the same location every year, or derived from being a member of a sports club or a cultural organisation. It may even be related to the school of which you are, or have been, a student. Is there a compulsory element to observing this tradition or not? That is, do you feel it is imposed upon you by those in authority or by peers, or do you accept and participate in it unquestioningly? What might happen if you were to question this tradition, to alter it, to ignore or even to do away with it, or to move to have it banned?
- From the program itself, as a class draw up a list of all the traditions and rituals presented from the arrival of the German campers on the Thursday before Easter, to their departure from camp on Easter Monday, with a short description of each one. Comment on the extent to which pre-Christian (or 'pagan'), Christian religious observances and even contemporary non-religious (secular) activities play a role in these traditions. Ensure you also make your own notes arising from class discussion. How did these traditions and rituals begin at the Easter camp, and why did they persist and develop?
- In pairs carry out research and write a description about the ways in which the various days and nights of the Easter season are, or have been, traditionally observed in various regions of Germany. You may wish to include illustrations that display or depict any of these Easter festivities. From viewing the program, also explain and describe whether the activities ob-



- served and carried out by the German-Australian community on their Murray River camp are derived from those ancient traditions that have been in place in Germany over many centuries, or whether they are unique to that community.
- Following from the previous activities, discuss in class and write notes on whether there are any 'traditional' and 'ritualistic' activities or forms of behaviour during the program that are not obviously regarded as such by the campers, but which might be observed by us as unconscious. (For example, you may wish to consider gender roles.)
- A comment made during the program is that 'there are not as many traditions in Australia ... for children growing up in Australia ... Psychologists say that if you look at the root of childhood things that happen at the same time every year, in the same way, actually give them a really good family base'. Discuss in class then write a commentary as to whether 'typically Aussie' children growing up in Australia lack a sense of tradition within their family and community upbringing, of the sort presented during the program, and that this may have negative consequences for them. Conversely, discuss whether children from non-Anglo migrant cultures could be caught between the expectations of their own community and those of the wider Australian society.
- Near the end of the program one of the campers says, of the traditions they observe every Easter, that, 'It has to change, because it can't stay the same forever. But I wouldn't like too much of it to change. I'd like to keep some traditions ... and maybe a few new ones'. Discuss in class then write your own commentary on why you think she believes 'it can't stay the same forever'? From the program, describe and explain those aspects you think might change, or disappear. Do you think the inevitability of change and of perhaps losing a memory of the past is saddening, or to be

One of the most observable themes is that of tradition, ritual, custom, memory and repetitive behaviour.



encouraged? What kinds of changes might be introduced over future years and decades? Are some changes already evident, from what you've noticed in the program?

- Imagine you are a reporter for a local regional newspaper. Plan, invent and write your own 250–350 word newspaper report about this year's Easter gathering on the banks of the Murray River. You may include interview material. Ensure your report has a suitable headline, a byline, and is conveyed in standard newspaper style (for example, active voice and short paragraphs). Use desktop publishing software to present the report in newspaper columns.
- Plan and write a short fiction story about the effects and influences of tradition on an individual or even a community. You may draw from the program itself, or from elsewhere, or you may invent your own dramatic scenario. Your story may examine the positives or negatives of tradition. Consider characters and the relationships between them, narrative point of view, time and location settings, elements of personal and group conflict, and how you will develop your narrative thematic concerns.

Identity, Heritage and Family

Throughout the program questions as to who we are as individuals, members of communities and the inter-generational roles and responsibilities within our own families are raised.

Also evident, and part of the mix, is the extent to which the past, and national heritage, upbringing, language and even our accents define us (sometimes by others, whether we like it or not), and either make us different from or similar to those around us.

- Developing from the above introductory comments, how would you define or try to explain



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your own sense of identity, or that of a family member? In about 200 words, write a description of your identity, or that of one of your parents. An alternative may be to construct a visual impression, showing interconnecting, diagrammatic circles of identity, with the addition of explanatory text, on poster display paper.

- Discuss in class and write notes on the purpose, the reasons behind and the effects of the German campers' display of flags over their tents and caravans. To what extent does this define a sense of personal and family identity and heritage, a difference from other Germans in the same camp, yet at the same time creates an overall sense of community and solidarity? What might others outside the group think of this display of flags? We are told during the program the German national flag was initially not flown at the camp. From the program and from your own discussions in class, offer explanations as to why. Find out what the national German flag looks like, then verify whether or not it is shown in the film. Which non-German flags are mentioned or shown on camera, and what purpose and meaning could we construct from this?

- Following from the previous discussion, carry out some research on the identifying flags of various regions and cities of Germany, perhaps from those either mentioned or those you could identify from the program. Write a short description of the heritage and historical background and meanings of some of these flags, ensuring you include colour illustrations of each relevant flag. You may wish to carry out this activity on poster display paper.
- From the program discuss in class the importance and relevance of the roles played within families by grandparents and parents in fostering a sense of identity and certainty into the lives of children.
- In pairs or small groups draft the scenario for a short play about the importance of the older generation's influence on the education and general family upbringing of children. Ensure you place your story, characters, events, conflict situations and themes into a specific location and time, to give it some immediate believability. You may draw ideas from what you have observed during the program, from your own experience, or from elsewhere. Carry out reading rehearsals, revising the dialogue and other aspects of the script as required, then either present a performance or a completed script reading to the class.
- One of the campers says, 'Because we left Germany such a long time ago, we realised that when we went there for holidays we don't really fit in there any more, because we are Australians'. Another camper says, 'We speak the German language all the time. In that way I will never be an Australian, but we are much, much freer here, that's what I think ... So in that way I call myself an Australian too'. Discuss in class what the first speaker means by his comment that 'we don't really fit in there [in Germany] any more'. What subtle changes may have occurred over the years that the German migrants to Australia have not realised were happening, both to themselves, and to the people in their own homeland? In what ways have the German migrants become 'Australianised'? Why does the second speaker suggest that her natural language is a barrier to being Australian, yet she is nevertheless able to call herself an Australian? What do you think she means by saying 'we are much freer here'?
- Following and building from the previous activity, plan and write a set of fictional personal diary entries from the viewpoint of any one of the original campers from 1969, as they reflect and respond to their experiences of returning to their homeland for a holiday, and upon what has happened to them, and later to their children and grandchildren in Australia over the ensuing decades. Examine the range and depth of their feelings.



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Media Studies Activities

Carry out the following activities.

- In the press kit for *Frohe Ostern! (Happy Easter!)*, the film's director, Anna Jeffries, comments that she is interested in making documentary films 'where genre is transcended and true life is expressed via unconventional storytelling.'. In class discuss and write your own notes on what you think she means. Provide examples of sound effects, camera shots, scenes or sequences from the film that support or help to define and to elaborate on her comments. Consider, for example, whether you would regard *Frohe Ostern!* as a 'typical' documentary. (You may first need to define what a documentary film is, and whether *Frohe Ostern!* conforms at all to this expectation.) Also look at whether all on-screen sounds are incidental (recorded simultaneously while filming) or inserted from elsewhere (dubbed) in post-production.
- *Frohe Ostern!* is a mixture of archival home movie film and photos going back to 1969, and footage filmed by director Jeffries and her crew during Easter 2007. Of this, Jeffries comments that, 'I was compelled to make a film that is about time, place and above all, people'. Write an analytical commentary on the ways in which the old and new material are used in combination with each other. How can you tell the difference between the archival film footage and Jeffries' 2007 footage? Why is the old and new footage intercut within the same scene? What is the purpose of this, and what effect might it have on viewers? (As an example you may wish to carry out an initial shot-by-shot examination of the opening few seconds of the program.)
- Comment on the purpose throughout the film of the fade-out to black, and the fade-in from black as markers or 'signposts'. At what moments in the program is this filmic technique

consistently used, and why?

- Write an analysis of the purpose of the many long-held shots of the natural scenic elements, and those of sunrise and sunset, where nothing much appears to be happening on-screen.
- Discuss in class why Jeffries prefers to place the spoken words of the German campers of 2007 on the soundtrack only, rather than to show them speaking on-camera as 'talking heads'. (In many of these moments you should observe closely what is actually appearing on-screen simultaneously with the voice-over.)
- Either working in pairs or individually, plan and construct a display poster to promote *Frohe Ostern!* to a general Australian audience. Consider the thematic message you might develop, and how you would attempt to capture viewer interest through text, image, layout and use of colour.
- In 300–400 words, draft, edit and complete a review of the program for the television lift-out section of a daily newspaper or weekly magazine, aimed at a wide viewing audience. You may wish to use desktop publishing software to format your review for final presentation.

References/further resources

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Frohe Ostern! (Happy Easter!)

is available on DVD from:

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