

LAND MINES

a love story

PG

Parental guidance recommended
for persons under 15 years.
Mature Themes.



STUDYGUIDE
SALLY CAMPBELL

a film by Dennis O'Rourke

(director of CUNNAMULLA, THE GOOD WOMAN OF BANGKOK and "CANNIBAL TOURS")

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www.landmines-a-love-story.com

www.roninfilms.com.au

Synopsis

Habiba and her husband, Shah, live with their young family in the war-torn city of Kabul, Afghanistan. Both Shah and Habiba are landmine survivors. Shah is a former Mujaheddin soldier who stepped on a landmine during combat, while Habiba lost her leg chasing a cow on the outskirts of a minefield. Plagued by their struggle to feed their children, Habiba turns to begging on the streets of Kabul, and Shah takes a small loan to begin business as a cobbler. Despite their struggle to survive, their story is one of powerful matrimonial love and hope for the future. *Land Mines—A Love Story* (Dennis O'Rourke, 2005) is about human dignity in a context of acute poverty and suffering caused by years of war. Set in 2002 during the American invasion of Afghanistan, the injustices inflicted by armed conflict on ordinary people is the core focus of the film.

The Filmmaker

DENNIS O'ROURKE has created a unique body of work, which depicts the collision of cultures in Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands, South East Asia and now Afghanistan. These films show an overwhelming commitment to the lives and problems of the people they are about, yet bear the unmistakable stamp of their maker's personality.

These films are situated, as O'Rourke says, 'in that shifting terminus of civilization, where modern mass-culture grates and pushes against the original, essential aspects of humanity; and where much of what passes for "values" in Western culture is exposed, in stark relief, as banal and fake.'

In his more recent films (*'Cannibal Tours', The Good Woman of Bangkok* and *Cunnamulla*) O'Rourke also directly addresses questions of the role of the documentary storyteller and the purpose of documentary films *per se*.

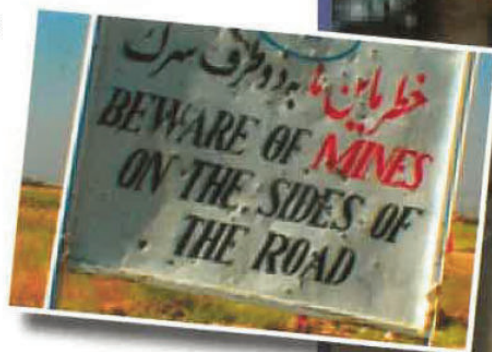
O'Rourke's films defy categorization and his solo filmmaking methods challenge the very framework of documentary story-telling practice. 'I don't make the film, but the film makes me,' he says.

More information on Dennis O'Rourke and his films can be found on his website:
www.cameraworklimited.com

About this Study Guide

Key themes discussed in this Study Guide are: poverty, disability, landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), gender, politics and war.

The Study Guide includes questions and activities to be explored prior to and after watching the film. The questions can be incorporated into classroom discussion or students can provide individual written responses. The activities in the Study Guide include a mixture of individual investigation, class discussion and small group work.



Curriculum Links

This film will be of interest to teachers and students from middle to senior secondary school in the following subject areas: English, Geography, History, Social and Cultural Studies, Studies of Society and Environment, Health and Human Development, Media Studies and Religious Studies. Some scenes in the film are graphic and may be disturbing to students.



Before Watching the Film

Before viewing *Land Mines—A Love Story*, teachers may want to prepare students by considering the following key themes and issues. The suggested activities related to these topics aim to enhance students' understanding of the film by introducing its central themes.

Social & Cultural Context

Afghanistan is one of the most conflict-affected countries in the world. It has suffered more than twenty years of invasions and civil war, including the Soviet invasion (1979-1989), civil war (1989-2001), and military operations against Al-Qaida and the Taliban (since October 2001). The impact of these successive conflicts has devastated the country's infrastructure. People's homes have been destroyed and public services like clean water, electricity, hospitals, schools and food are not easily available to many Afghan people.

The impact of conflict has been most severe for the poorest and most marginalised members of Afghan society, many of whom were not able to escape the country during the conflicts. For poor families, the children are needed to help earn an income and cannot go to school. Schools are not always local and in some cases are not easily available to whole communities. Likewise, hospital care and other essential services are difficult to access. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sixty-five per cent of Afghans do not have access to health facilities.¹ Whole tracts of land are infested with landmines, making it impossible to farm in many areas. Key access roads have been blocked and destroyed so that transportation throughout the country is difficult and sometimes impossible. Some families go for days without eating properly.

Activities

- As a class, identify Afghanistan on a map. Consider surrounding countries. What factors might affect Afghanistan's development by virtue of its geographic location?
- In small groups discuss:

- o What do you know about Afghanistan? Research more about the country. What are its similarities and differences to Australia?
- o What do you think the word 'poverty' implies? Does the word mean something different to you in Australia than for countries like Afghanistan?
- Imagine that you are put in charge of Afghanistan's development. What services would you focus on improving first? Why? Write a strategy detailing your plan for Afghanistan.

Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)

Landmines and UXO are a problem of epidemic proportions in Afghanistan. All sides of the conflict used the weapons, leaving an estimated 4 million landmines behind. They continue to function long after soldiers stop fighting and create a long-term danger for people living in affected communities. Ninety per cent of casualties

from landmines and UXO are not soldiers but ordinary civilians, like children and their families trying to live off the land.



There are many different kinds of landmines and UXO. Anti-personnel landmines are those designed to detonate by the pressure or proximity of a person. Anti-personnel landmines are de-

signed to injure, rather than kill, but the impact of a blast is more forceful for children (who are smaller and stand closer to the ground) and can result in death. The enormous loss of blood caused by an anti-personnel mine injury can also cause death, which is common for people living in remote areas who cannot easily access emergency health care. Anti-tank mines are those designed to detonate by the weight of a vehicle and they have a much stronger explosive force than anti-personnel landmines. The explosive force can injure or kill a car full of people.

UXO are weapons such as bombs, grenades, and other types of ammunition that do not explode as they are intended. They lie active on the ground, ready to explode at any time, and are highly volatile. The explosive force of UXO is much stronger than that of landmines, typically causing death.

Some types of landmine (such as the anti-personnel 'blast' mine or anti-tank mines) are buried underground so they cannot be seen by the naked eye, while others are placed above ground and use difficult to see tripwires to ensnare their victim (such as the anti-personnel 'fragmentation' mine).

The human toll of landmines and UXO is a man-made problem. These weapons are implanted by hand or dropped in canisters by the thousands from the air. The strategic value of anti-personnel landmines for military operations is no longer considered to be valid. Today, they are most commonly used by guerrilla fighters, who find landmines a weapon of choice because they are cheap and easy to make, rather than by government forces. On the other hand, anti-tank mines and UXO are still an accepted and widely used part of government military arsenals.

Since September 2001, Afghanistan has suffered from new threats, including American cluster bomb munitions and landmines freshly laid by the Northern Alliance, Taliban, and Al-Qaida fighters.

Activities

- In small groups, investigate other countries that are affected by landmines. What do these countries have in common?
- Reflect on the impact that landmines and UXO would have on Afghan citizens. Consider the way their lives might be affected and how they might make decisions to avoid landmine/UXO-affected areas.
- A respected expert on landmines recently has stated, 'The claim that anti-personnel landmines have no military value is patently absurd, since they would not have been used on such a wide scale if they weren't useful.'² Are there any situations where the use of landmines might be justified? Debate the issue as a class.

Landmine Survivors & Disability

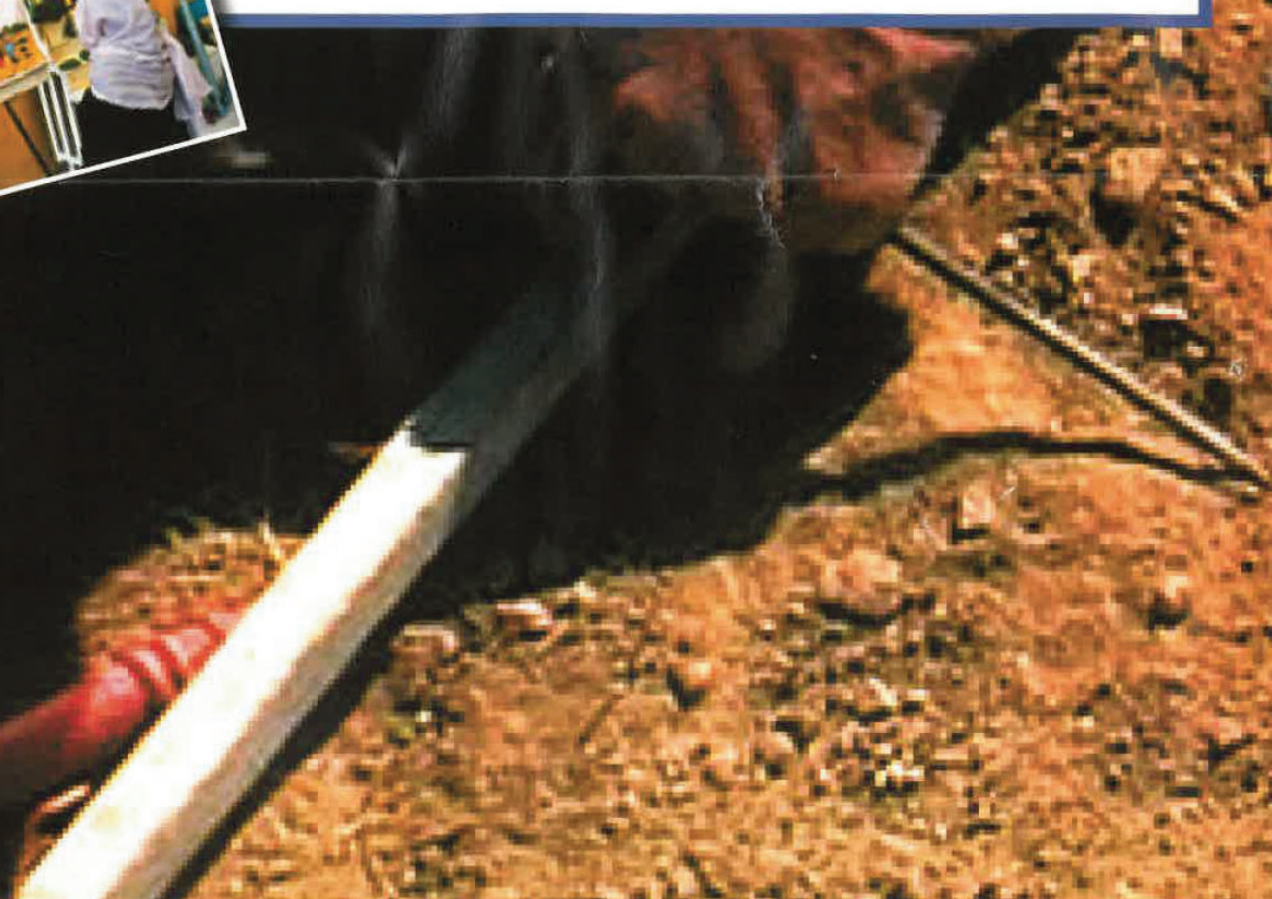
Globally, there are an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 new landmine casualties every year across at least 75 countries. In Afghanistan, approximately 100 civilians are killed or injured by the weapons

every month. In 1999, an estimated 800,000 people (or four per cent of Afghanistan's population) were disabled, including approximately 210,000 landmine-disabled people.³

In landmine-infested areas, everyday survival becomes a life-threatening task. The top causes of injury include tending animals, travelling by vehicle, playing or recreation, collecting firewood, farming and travelling by foot. These common sources of injury mean that men, women and children are all equally at risk.

A landmine incident can cause different types of injuries, including loss of limbs, blindness, deafness, and chest and spinal injuries. Many landmine survivors have had one or more limbs amputated. They require ongoing orthopaedic assistance and physiotherapy to fit prosthetic limbs and to learn how to cope with their disability. They also need training to help them learn new skills so they can make a living regardless of their disability. The psychological trauma they have experienced also needs to be addressed.

Many of the countries affected by landmines do not have adequate services to meet these needs. In



Afghanistan, only one in every hundred landmine survivors receives assistance.⁴ Without the proper support, the disabled are often marginalised and are subjected to a life of poverty. The assistance they desperately need is generally unavailable to them.

Activities

- Imagine that you have become disabled as a result of a landmine incident. Write a journal entry describing a day in your life and your hopes for the future. E-mail your entry to AUSTCARE (landmines@austcare.org.au) to help raise awareness among Australia's youth.
- Discuss the types of services that landmine survivors require. What occupations are needed to provide disability services? Compare the services available in Australia to those of Afghanistan.

What is being done?

In 1997, governments gathered together to sign an international Treaty Banning Anti-Personnel Landmines. Within five years, this Treaty has arguably become the most successful arms control mechanism in history, achieving enormous gains towards eliminating anti-personnel landmines. More than 145 governments, including Australia, have committed never to use, stockpile, produce or transfer anti-personnel landmines. These governments have also committed to help each other clear landmines and provide assistance to landmine survivors. Landmine clearance programs are underway in affected countries around the world, clearing large swathes of contaminated land. Clearance efforts are focused on improving the safety of communities and reducing the rate of casualties from landmines. The international community is also ensuring that programs for the disabled are being improved to appropriately assist landmine survivors through the implementation of holistic rehabilitation programs.

The Government of Afghanistan joined the Treaty in 2002. It has one of the oldest and most successful landmine clearance programs in the world, established in 1989 and fuelled by the careful work of Afghan de-miners. Afghanistan also runs successful education programs to teach communities about the risk of landmines. These awareness programs have been integrated into school curricula but are also available through community programs to reach those who are not attending school. The International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is one of the major providers of landmine awareness education and assistance to landmine survivors, including through the production of prosthetic limbs and orthopaedic services profiled in the film. The ICRC hires disabled staff to run its rehabilitation centres.

There is still so much more that needs to be done. Australian organisations are at the forefront of many efforts to assist in eliminating landmines. Australian schools have helped raise awareness about the issue and provide funds to support landmine programs in the most severely affected areas. Landmine Action Week is an annual initiative of the Australian Network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (AN-ICBL) and AUSTCARE to raise awareness about landmines and UXO in Australia. Get involved. Every initiative is a great help in the fight against landmines.

Activities:

- Countries such as China, the United States, Russia, India, Pakistan and Israel have not signed the Treaty Banning Landmines. Why not? How might it affect the overall effectiveness of the Treaty?
- Discuss ways of providing landmine programs in a country that has a very weak infrastructure. How might you access remote areas? What risks might be involved?
- The Treaty Banning Landmines has been called 'the People's Treaty' because of the important role played by the public in raising awareness about the issue. Research and discuss.
- Princess Diana was a major supporter of the ban on landmines. What were some of the things she did to raise awareness? What other famous people were involved? In small groups, discuss how the involvement of famous people can help or hinder the advancement of a cause.
- You can help in the fight against landmines and UXO. Here are some ideas:
 - o Hold a school forum to explore activities to create awareness about landmines and UXO in your community. Contact landmines@austcare.org.au to share your activity with other youth.
 - o Have a look at the Landmine Action Week website (www.landmine-action-week.org). Think of activities that your school could run as part of this annual event.

After Watching the Film

- Write down a few of your thoughts about the film *Land Mines—A Love Story*. How did you react to the film? Did you enjoy it? Discuss your views with other members of the class.
- What do you think are the film's key themes and issues?
- Have the issues in this film been presented evenly? Should they be?
- What is the role of religion and superstition in the film? How are the two distinguished from one another?
- What aspects of disability from landmines are most memorable about the film? Why?
- Discuss the filmmaking techniques used to create *Land Mines—A Love Story*. What are some of the difficulties the filmmaker would have encountered?
- *Land Mines—A Love Story* is a film without narration: does this approach work better than a film with narration?
- *Land Mines—A Love Story* has no narration but still expresses a certain point of view: how would you describe that point of view?
- The filmmaker says that *Land Mines—A Love Story* is an 'anti-war' film: how is this message conveyed?
- In many other recent high profile documentaries (eg. *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Super Size Me*) the filmmaker has a significant on-camera presence in the film. Why do you think the filmmaker chose not to appear on camera in *Land Mines—A Love Story*? Do viewers still get a sense of the filmmaker's personality or point of view?

Key Themes in the Film and Issues Arising from Them

Politics

The film opens with the announcement by United States President George W. Bush of the American invasion of Afghanistan. It then introduces life in Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul.

- What contrast do you think the filmmaker is trying to capture in the opening scenes?
- What impression do you gain of life in Kabul?

An American reporter interviews an Afghan woman and asks her if she feels the bigger threat is from US forces or the Taliban.

- Why do you think the filmmaker includes this scene in the film?
- In small groups, prepare an interview of the same Afghan woman. What questions would you ask her? Role-play the interview with one group asking the questions and the others answering what they feel the Afghan woman would answer.

In another speech, President Bush stresses the importance of helping 'the poor souls in Afghanistan.' Later a Pentagon spokesperson states that it is unfortunate that the unexploded cluster bombs are the same colour as the food packets. He is referring to a serious problem that arose when the United Nations World Food Program discovered that American munitions were now the same colour as its emergency food aid, increasing the risk of injury to innocent civilians.

- What is the message the filmmaker is sending?
- Discuss the language used by President Bush. Is it appropriate? Do the words themselves carry a bigger meaning than the reality they represent?

Throughout the film we follow the opinions of an Afghan shoeshine boy.

- Discuss his role in the film. What unique perspectives does he offer on some of the issues presented?

At the end of the film, Shah says: 'There will never be peace in Afghanistan. We will carry the seeds of war and so will our children.'

- Discuss his perspective. Do you agree?
- As a class, discuss ways to build peace. What peace-building activities are important in Australia that

might be useful elsewhere?

Poverty

In the first images of Habiba and Shah we are introduced to them anonymously as a beggar and a cobbler. Without knowing their story we are presented with the reality of their lives.

- How did you interpret the image of the begging woman? Did you find that you judged her?
- What are your impressions of Shah? Why is he unable to re-pay his loan?
- When we first see Habiba, she is wearing the traditional blue burqa. Later in the film, the audience is able to see all of Habiba's face. Why do Muslim women wear a burqa? Why might Habiba choose to take her burqa off when being interviewed by the filmmaker?
- Describe how your impressions of Habiba and Shah have changed by the end of the film. What aspects of their story might have changed from your initial impression at the start of the film?

Later in the film Shah and Habiba describe how they feel about her begging.

- Discuss the different views of Shah and Habiba about her decision to beg. What do you think is the most compelling reason given for her decision? Did she have a choice?
- Discuss the ways in which belief in God influences the lives of Shah and Habiba.

Several scenes in the film focus on the home and livelihood of Shah and Habiba.

- Describe the home of Shah and Habiba and share your images to form a class description.
- What does it mean to be a squatter? What risks does it present for the family?

Habiba's cousin Mairy says that Habiba and Shah are 'flowers from the same garden.'

- What does she mean? How does this help them?
- What is special about Habiba and



Shah's relationship? What makes them unique?

Disability

A major focus of the film is the lives and struggles of the disabled in Afghanistan.

- Discuss the problems encountered by the disabled in Afghanistan. What particular challenges do Habiba and Shah face?
- Both Habiba and Shah are disabled. How do their experiences differ because he is male and she is female? To what extent are their experiences typical for men and women in Afghanistan?
- Compare Habiba's attitude towards her injury to that of Shah. How do their perspectives differ?
- What is the role of external assistance in the film? Is it effective?
- Why is it necessary for governments outside Afghanistan to provide assistance?
- Do you think women, the disabled, and orphans should be given priority for assistance programs? Why?
- Describe the process that Habiba and Shah go through to get her a pension. Explain how Habiba and Shah must have felt about the result of the process.
- According to the film, does Habiba ever get the pension she is owed?

Landmines and UXO

There are many clips throughout the film that give different perspectives on landmines.

- As a class, discuss the different aspects of landmines presented by the film. How does the filmmaker go about integrating the subject of landmines into the film? Does this technique effectively inform the audience about the impact of landmines?

Several scenes in the film show landmine awareness classes being taught in a school setting.

- Discuss the methods used by the teachers to communicate with the students. Do you think this is an effective way to ensure they understand the dangers of landmines?

- Compare the teaching methods to Australian schools. What are the similarities and differences?

At the end of the film the work of deminers is shown.

- Landmines are cheap to make and can be easily planted, but they are very expensive to clear. What did you notice about the de-mining technique being used?
- Research the tools and techniques used to clear landmines. What techniques not shown in the film might be useful to Afghan deminers?

At the end of the film, Habiba says, 'The people who make these landmines should stop. They must know, surely they can see, how people have lost their legs, arms and eyes.'

- Research the activities of Australians to help end the scourge of landmines.
- As a class, make a plan for what you can do to support the campaign to ban landmines and landmine programs being implemented around the world.

References

Landmine Monitor 2004, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 2004.

Stuart Maslen, *Mine Action After Diana: Progress in the Struggle Against Landmines*, Pluto Press, London, 2004.

Resources

Australia

See the official web site for the film www.landmines-a-love-story.com

AN-ICBL <http://australia.icbl.org>

AUSTCARE www.austcare.org.au (02-9565-9111)

Landmine Action Week: www.landmine-action-week.org

Australian Youth Against Landmines www.aplaceof.info/tayala

International

Adopt a Minefield www.landmines.org

International Campaign to Ban Landmines www.icbl.org

Landmine Monitor www.icbl.org/lm

United Nations Mine Action www.mineaction.org

Footnotes

¹ *Landmine Monitor 2004*, p. 89.

² Stuart Maslen and Landmine Action, *Mine Action After Diana: Progress in the Struggle Against Landmines*, Pluto Press, 2004, p. 26.

³ *Landmine Monitor 2004*, pp. 67-97.

⁴ *Landmine Monitor 2004*, p. 55.

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