



CROKER ISLAND Exodus



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ATOM



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CROKER ISLAND Exodus

INTRODUCTION

In a wartime exodus, ninety-five Indigenous children and three missionary women fled Croker Island off the north-east coast of Arnhem Land and travelled 5000 kilometres by boat, foot, canoe, truck and rail to safety in Sydney.

Croker Island Exodus is a true story that weaves historical footage with interviews and re-enactments to paint a surprising and uplifting portrait of children who were part of the stolen generations and grew up on Croker Island Mission. The film is set in the Northern Territory during World War Two before and after the bombing of Darwin. The film is partly based on letters written by young 28-year-old missionary Margaret Somerville to her Sydney parents. The letters described the epic journey across Australia that she and the children completed and were published as a book, *They Crossed a Continent*.

Croker Island Exodus is told through first person eyewitness accounts as the now-elderly travellers recall their epic journey.





ABOVE: (L-R) ALICE BRISTON, NETTA CAHILL AND JESSIE LYONS.

Curriculum links

Croker Island Exodus is suitable for primary students in Year 6 and secondary students in Years 7–12. The film offers students the opportunity to develop an understanding of the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their identity, and the continuing value of their culture.

The film not only deals with the social and emotional dislocation experienced by Aboriginal children who were removed from their families but also the resilience of the children who grew to adulthood on Croker Island Mission. *Croker Island Exodus* is about the search for identity, the importance of family and the implications of belonging to a larger social group, whether it be a culture, a family or a group of friends. It promotes and deals with many aspects of intercultural understanding by allowing the student to consider ‘How would I feel if this were me?’

For students in Years 6–10, *Croker Island Exodus* has relevance to units of work in the learning areas of English and History and addresses the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

The film can be used to teach students about the Stolen Generations and reconciliation, the role of missionaries in the lives of Indigenous Australians and the impact of World War Two in Australia. *Croker Island Exodus* is directly applicable to the required study of Australia as a Nation in Australian Curriculum: History at Year 6, and Rights and Freedoms (1945 – the present) and World War Two in Australian Curriculum: History at Year 10.

For students in Years 11–12, *Croker Island Exodus* has relevance to units of work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Cultural Studies, English, Australian History, Media, and Religion and Society.

In English, *Croker Island Exodus* can be used to teach film as text or as a supplementary text to complement the study of other texts about the Stolen Generation. The film is recommended as a resource to explore the contexts of identity and belonging, and to prompt discussion of the importance and ways of telling personal stories. Teachers may also use the film to discuss and analyse the issues raised by the story.

In History and Media, *Croker Island Exodus* can be used to discuss historical accuracy, representations of the past, and the roles and responsibilities of documentary filmmakers.



The film draws on a broad range of primary and secondary historical material from 'home movies' shot by missionaries, government war propaganda footage, newsreel to personal and official photographs and reenactments with the grandchildren of the original Croker Island children.

Teachers should approach the discussion of the Stolen Generations with care. Some students' relatives may have been forcibly taken away from their families. These students may want to share their experiences with the class. For others, sharing their hurt in a classroom setting may be too confronting.



The story of *Croker Island Exodus*

1941, all white women and children are evacuated from Darwin. Japanese invasion is imminent. On a tiny Methodist mission on Croker Island in the Arafura Sea, the superintendent and three cottage mothers are responsible for ninety-five Aboriginal children allocated to their care by the government.

The missionary women are given the option of evacuating, but how can they abandon the children placed in their care?

Food supplies are running dangerously low and no help comes through the long wet. February 1942, a message by pedal radio, Darwin has been bombed; the missionaries will now have to move the children off the island themselves. So they begin their perilous journey.

After borrowing some fuel, they are able to secure the mission boat, *The Larrpan*, and sail to Barclay Point in Arnhem Land. They spend their first night on the mainland facing the threat of saltwater crocodiles. A young Margaret Somerville, one of the cottage mothers, remembers in her letters home, 'What a strange crowd we looked, lying down in all our clothes on a sandy strip of beach on the top of Australia! How quiet and lonely it seemed.'



ABOVE: BETTY FISHER (IN WHEELBARROW), LORNA TENNANT, DAISY CRAIGEN, CLAIRE HENTY, NETTA WATERS, ROSIE COBB, ALICE CARROLL, DAISY MURPHY

Their first destination is Oenpelli Mission, now called Gunbalanya Aboriginal Community. This requires a trek over many miles of open savannah and the harsh beautiful stone country of Arnhem Land. When the old truck becomes bogged, the children must help push it to harder ground.

Netta, one of the mission children, looks back more than seventy years later and laughs, 'Somebody found a half dead goanna and we were fighting for that goanna, we want the tail, somebody wanted the leg, Alice wanted the head'. The children gather armfuls of waterlily stalks and climb for berries in the bush plum trees. Margaret Somerville remembers, 'It was the resourcefulness of the children that kept us fed.'

At night they make camp, using their dwindling supply of flour and yeast to make damper. It will still be many miles walking. At Oenpelli they expect to stay three days but it is weeks before word that government trucks can't get through and they will have to walk another hundred kilometres to meet them. With help from the traditional Aboriginal men they cross the flooded East Alligator River by dug-out canoe. The river is home to saltwater crocodiles, but despite falling into the river they make it across safely. After many days walking they meet up with the government trucks. But arriving in Pine Creek they find an American army base, no beds just the so-called 'Butcher's Paddock' on the outskirts of town. They are forced to stay in this one-tree paddock until they can board a cattle train en route to Alice Springs and their final destination, a Methodist Farm in Otford on the outskirts of Sydney.

In forty-four days, these brave women and their young charges travel from Croker Island across the Australian continent. This is a truly heroic and untold journey.

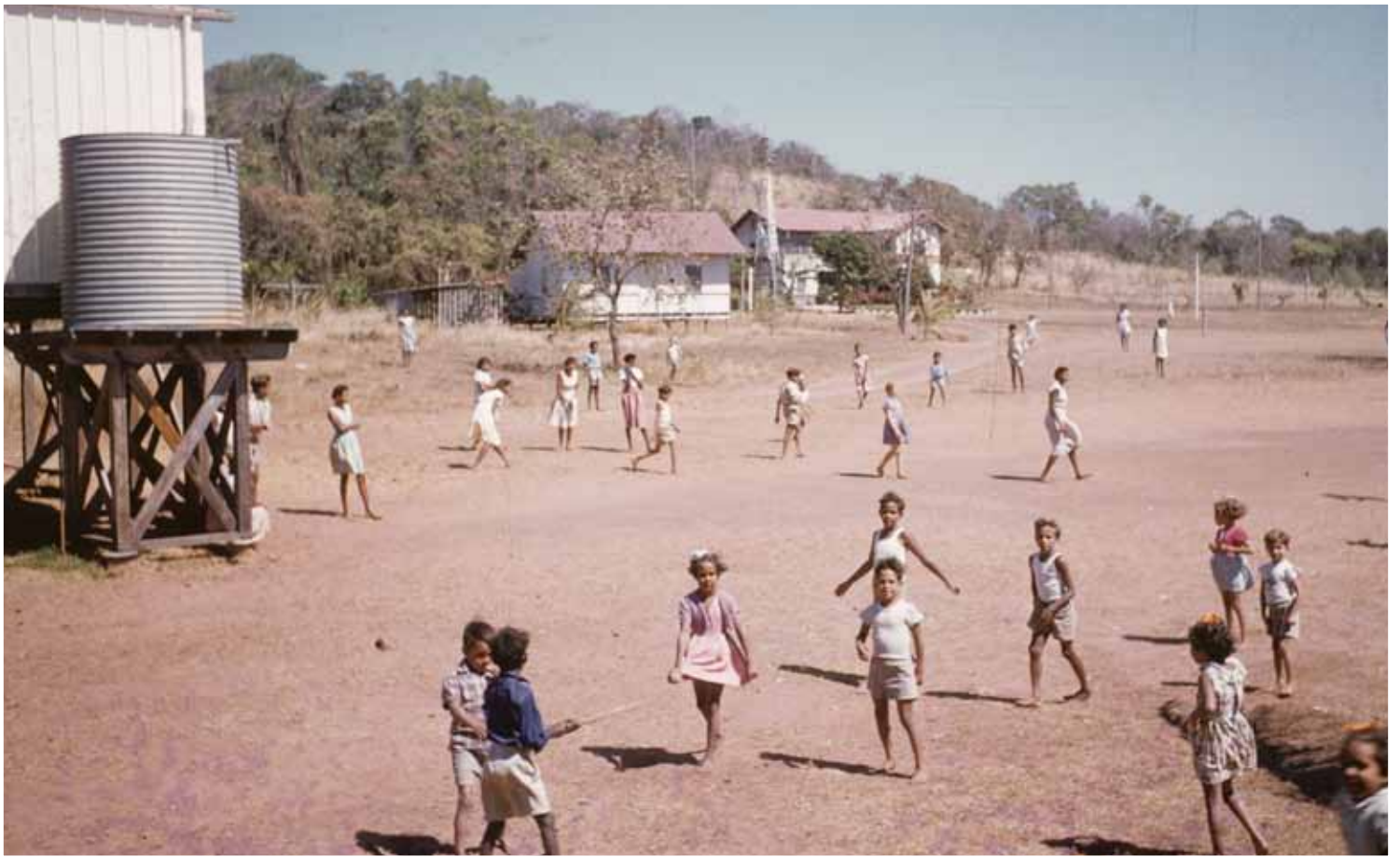
But it is also an epic story of human endurance, strength and resilience.

After the war, Margaret returned to Croker Island with sixty-nine children including Alice, Netta and Jessie. She stayed on the island until 1965 when she returned to Sydney to look after her parents. A year later there was a government decision to close the Mission and move all the remaining children to church homes in the suburbs of Darwin and Adelaide.

Alice, Netta and Jessie are now in their 80s. They have endured so much in their lives but the friendships forged on Croker remain strong and feisty. These Aboriginal women still call Margaret, now 100 years old, 'Sister'. It is their shared stories of love, humour and compassion that are central to this film.



ABOVE: SCHOOL ON A TRUCK AT 'THE BUNGALOW', 1930S



ABOVE: CROKER ISLAND MISSION, 1950S

About Croker Island

Croker Island is an hour's flight north of Darwin at the meeting place of the Arafura Sea and the Timor Sea. The traditional owners are the Yammirr people. Many Aboriginal people acknowledge Croker Island as the birthplace of the Rainbow Serpent, one of the most important spiritual beings in the Dreamtime. The island is covered with tropical rainforest, fringed by sandy beaches and coral reef. Birds like brolgas and jabirus are abundant.

The Methodist Overseas Mission started building a mission at Croker Island in 1940 to house children of

'mixed descent'. The mission on Croker was designed as a children's home with cottages instead of dormitories and groups of children placed under the care of 'cottage mothers'.

With war approaching, considerable government pressure was put on all the churches to take children as quickly as possible. Children from government institutions like Kahlin Compound in Darwin and Bungalow Half-Caste Institution Alice Springs and holding camps in Pine Creek were allocated to different religious groups. As Roman Catholics took children to Bathurst Island, the Church of England to Oenpelli and Methodists to Croker, this meant that brothers and sisters were often separated.

The children allocated to the Methodists were first sent to Croker Island in 1941. In April of 1942, the children and missionaries at Croker Island were forced to evacuate amidst fears of Japanese invasion.

Many of these children were returned to Croker Island in 1946. Children of mixed race continued to be sent to the Mission for the next two decades.

Croker Island Mission was closed in 1966, with those who still remained on the Island being transferred to Lentara Children's Home in Magill, South Australia, or into foster care and adoption around Australia.

Today Croker Island is the home to the Aboriginal community of Minjilang, located on Mission Bay on the east coast.



Before viewing

- *Croker Island Exodus* tells the stories of people who identify themselves as part of Australia's Stolen Generations. What do you know about the Stolen Generations? What would you like to know? Have you read any novels about the Stolen Generations? Have you watched any films that tell the stories of Aboriginal children who were separated from their families? Do you know of any songs that are about this period in Australia's history?

- An extract from the 1997 *Bringing them Home* report notes,

It is necessary in the interests of accuracy to quote the language of the times. Much of this language was and is offensive to Indigenous people. The terms 'full descent' and 'mixed descent' were not used. Instead categories of 'full blood', 'half caste', 'quadroon' and 'octoroon' were applied. However, we use the terms 'full descent' and 'mixed descent' to convey the policy and practice distinctions made at the time between what were perceived as quite different groups. The term 'Indigenous' was not used at the time either. We use that generic term throughout this report to include all Aboriginal groups and Torres Strait Islanders

Source: <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/stolen/stolen08.html>

What do the terms referred to in this excerpt mean? Who used these terms? Why were these terms used and what do the terms tell us about how Indigenous Australians were viewed? Why wasn't the term Indigenous used to describe Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders?

Look at the map of the children's journey online at <http://www.crokerislandexodus.com.au/story/>. Have you ever travelled to the places identified on the map?

- Use print and electronic resources to learn about the geography of Croker Island. Share your findings with the class. Write a description of the geographic characteristics of Croker Island.
- What words best describe the geography of the landscape that the children travelled through to reach Alice Springs?
- Just ten weeks after Japan's invasion of South-East Asia in December 1941, Australia became the target of air and sea attacks. On 19 February 1942 Japanese bombs fell on mainland Australia for the first time. Over the next twenty months northern Australia was to endure almost a hundred air raids, and Japanese

submarines attacked merchant vessels off the coast of eastern Australia.

Visit the Australian War Memorial online at <http://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/underattack/> to learn about this period in Australia's history.

Was the decision to evacuate Croker Island justified?

After viewing

- Did you enjoy *Croker Island Exodus*? Share your thoughts and feelings about the film with others in the class. Did you laugh or cry?
- What moments of *Croker Island Exodus* do you want to talk about? What questions do you have about the film?
- Why is *Croker Island Exodus* an important film?
- What do you think is the message of *Croker Island Exodus*?

Discussing key characters

- Share your impressions of the characters of *Croker Island Exodus* with a peer and then with the class.
- Drawing on moments and statements from *Croker Island Exodus*, discuss:
 - The circumstances that led to Netta, Jessie and Alice's separation from their families.
 - The consequences of separation for the women as children and as adults.
 - The consequences of separation for the women's families.
 - Netta, Jessie and Alice's healing process.

Netta Cahill

'At the Bungalow we used to snatch food off one another. We were like little puppy dogs picking up apple cores and skin. The Government did not do much for me but the Church has really lifted me up and gave me my strong character and they showed me how to love and respect one another.'

Born in the late 1930s, Netta was on walkabout with her mother visiting her Grandmother in Oodnadatta when she



Jessie Lyons

'I'm grateful anyway for what the missionaries did for me; they taught us how to look after ourselves, look after our children. I mean there's a lot of other things I think about but I don't say anything about it.'

Jessie was taken to the 'half-caste pick-up station' at Charlotte Waters but unlike Netta, she doesn't remember being taken away. In *Croker Island Exodus*, Jessie remarks, 'I never seen my mother again and I never met my father until 1974. When someone told me my father was down in Katherine I said; who's my father? I didn't know I had a father for heaven's sake. Sad...'

was picked up by police and taken to Charlotte Waters, a pick up station for half-caste children. She recollects, "They gave us the surname 'Waters' because Charlotte Waters was the pick-up station". Netta believes she was four or five years old at the time and has vivid memories of this traumatic event. Netta was sent to the Bungalow institution in Alice Springs.

Much of Netta's young life was spent on the newly formed Croker Island Mission and she recalls happy days with the other children, 'I don't think I was strong enough to be their guardian sisters but we still cared for each other, because we were taught and we had nobody else to love us. We loved each other...'

Sent south to escape the threat from Japanese fighters during World War Two, she returned to Croker Island after the war and stayed on the Island until around fourteen years of age when she was sent into Darwin to work. Netta married and had four children. At the age of forty-five she received an unexpected message; the mother who she believed long dead had been into the Native Affairs Office in Alice Springs asking of her welfare. So, at forty-five, Netta met her mother again. She has fond memories of the reunion, although she was shocked at the impoverished conditions that her family was living in. Netta now has sixteen grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren and is still enjoying her life in Darwin.

Jessie was sent to the Bungalow Mission in Alice Springs and when the war broke up was sent up to Croker Island Mission. She remembers, 'Croker Island was so beautiful, paradise. We looked after the younger ones when they come to Croker Island. Well I was a cottage mother when I was still going to High School'.



Jessie had eight children and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren; there's so many she's stopped counting. She still lives in Darwin and her children affectionately call her 'car dog' because when anyone is going bush for a drive, Jessie is always the first one in the car.



Alice Briston

'It was Native Affairs that picked two coloured kids up, that was Ruby Palmer and me and this bloke held two of us in his hands, took us away from my mother up to Kahlin Compound beach, there was a track from the beach up to where the home was, so anyway we got left there.'

Alice was sent to numerous half-caste institutions before ending up in the care of the Methodist Church at Croker Island. She shares fond memories, 'And we used to have good fun in the creek, and the water over us. It was lovely. And I reckon it was a very nice place to live. It was home

for me, our home.'

Alice was evacuated with all the other children to Otford and returned to live at Croker Island Mission until she reached sixteen years old. Then she was sent to Darwin and worked as a domestic before meeting her husband and going on to have eleven children. Today she has a large extended family of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Given all that she has experienced, Alice wonders, 'I don't know how I survived up to now. Having children and looking after them and growing them up you know, we respectable people'. A life-long supporter of the Darwin Buffaloes AFL football side, Alice can still be found most weekends supporting her beloved team.

- Why do Netta, Jessie and Alice deserve our respect?
- What word best describes each woman's character? Link the word you have chosen to a moment in *Croker Island Exodus*.
- 'Netta, Jessie and Alice are more than friends.' Do you agree?

Margaret Somerville

Born in 1912, Margaret Somerville was the daughter of a Methodist Minister. She was employed as a cottage mother at the Croker Island Methodist Mission from 1941–65. She arrived in the Northern Territory in late November 1941. Three months later, on February 19, 1942, Darwin was bombed. A young woman with zeal, generosity and compassion, she was one of three cottage mothers who helped



ABOVE: MARGARET SOMERVILLE (REAR RIGHT) WITH HER 'COTTAGE FAMILY' ON CROKER ISLAND, EARLY POSTWAR PERIOD.



ABOVE MARGARET SOMERVILLE ON HER NINETY-SIXTH BIRTHDAY

evacuate the children from the mission to safety in Otford, New South Wales. Like the other women, she was determined that they would not leave without the children. *They Crossed A Continent* was based on letters Margaret wrote to her parents en route during the evacuation. When she launched the reprint of the book in 2010, Governor-General Quentin Bryce remarked, "This is one of the greatest of all Australian stories of love and compassion."

When the war ended, Margaret returned to Croker Island with sixty-nine of the children. She was the only one of the original cottage mothers to do so. She dedicated the rest of her life to working with children. In 1965, Margaret returned to Sydney, accompanied by two foster children who later returned to their family. She was awarded an MBE for her work on Croker Island and the Somerville Homes in Darwin are named in her honour. In September 2012 Margaret turned 100 and is still going strong.

- When were you most impressed by Margaret Somerville's work as a cottage mother to the Croker Island children?



ABOVE: CHILDREN AT 'THE BUNGALOW', ALICE SPRINGS, LATE 1930S. MANY OF THESE CHILDREN WERE TRANSFERRED TO CROKER ISLAND

Exploring key themes

THE STOLEN GENERATIONS

The term 'Stolen Generations' refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were forcibly removed, as children, from their families and communities by government, welfare or church authorities and placed into institutional care or with non-Indigenous foster families. Many of these removals occurred as the result of official laws and policies aimed at assimilating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population into the wider community. The practice of taking Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children began as early as 1804 and continued until at least 1969.

In 1911, the Commonwealth gave the Chief Protector the power to act as the legal guardian of every child of mixed descent in the Northern Territory. As a result of these policies, children were forcibly removed from their families and placed into government and church institutions. Tens of thousands of Aboriginal children across Australia were taken under duress from their families by police or welfare officers. Most were under ten years old and many were under five.

When John 'Black Jack' McEwen was appointed Minister for the Interior in 1937, he toured the Bungalow Institution and the Half-Caste Homes in the Northern Territory. He was shocked by the conditions, 'I know many stock-breeders who would not dream of crowding their stock in the way that these half-caste children are huddled.' McEwen proposed what he termed a 'New Deal' for Aboriginal people based on economic and social assimilation. Responsibility for the children was handed to the churches with government funding to support missions along the north coast.

With the commencement of World War Two, McEwen's policy proposals came to an abrupt end. After the war, the forcible removal of Indigenous children recommenced. Patrol officers were required to report on the presence of children of 'mixed descent' living in Aboriginal communities and make arrangements for their removal.

Croker Island Exodus tells the story of how each of the women featured in the film were taken.

- What were you thinking and feeling as you learnt these stories?
- How did you react when you saw Netta watching herself as a young girl be offered jam by a policeman and her mother crying as she was taken away?
- How did you feel when Alice talked about being taken from an Aboriginal camp to Kahlin compound? What did you think when she told this story from the location it happened, a garden seat opposite what is now the Marina in Darwin.
- Imagine what it would have been like to be one of the Croker children who were taken from their families. Adopt the persona of a child, who was taken, or the mother or father of that child. Convey your thoughts and feelings about the separation in a letter to your family or to the authorities.

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families was established in May 1995. Its 1997 *Bringing them Home* report found that forcible removal of Indigenous children was a gross violation of human rights, which continued well after Australia had undertaken international human rights commitments:

Their motives were to ‘inculcate European values and work habits in children, who would then be employed in service to the colonial settlers’ (Ramsland 1986 quoted by Mason 1993, p.31). In 1814 Governor Macquarie funded the first school for Aboriginal children. Its novelty was an initial attraction for Indigenous families but within a few years it evoked a hostile response when it became apparent that its purpose was to distance the children from their families and communities.

The *Bringing Them Home* report found that the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities has had life-long and profoundly disabling consequences for those taken, and has negatively affected the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. For many of the children, removal meant that they lost all connection to family, traditional land, culture and language.

The Report acknowledged that ‘Indigenous children have been forcibly separated from their families and communities since the very first days of the European occupation of Australia’ by governments and missionaries.



ABOVE: CHILDREN ON CROKER ISLAND, 1950S

Your task is to create a detailed timeline that depicts the history of the policies and practices of forcible separation.

You may choose the format of your timeline. You should use both words and images to depict this passage in time. You may use sound. This is your chance to be creative but keep in mind that the timeline must be historically accurate.

Before you begin, make a list of the events that you will include on the timeline. Spend some time researching each event using print and electronic resources.

Why do you think this practice continued right through to the 20th century? Investigate whether your answers to this question can be proven by historical evidence.

Working as a class, survey people about their awareness of The Stolen Generations. Each student will be responsible for video-interviewing one person. Spend time writing the questions that will form the survey. Edit the individual interviews to make a short documentary. Use title cards to introduce the issue of The Stolen Generations, to state the questions of the survey and to offer a conclusion about people’s awareness of and views on the issue.

In 2007, in a landmark case in the State Supreme Court of South Australia, Bruce Trevorrow became the first member of the Stolen Generation to win compensation. The South Australian government appealed but in 2010 the Full Court affirmed Trevorrow’s right to compensation. To date, this case appears to be the only legal precedent for compensation.

MISSION EXPERIENCE AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCHES

Margaret Somerville was twenty-eight years old when she listened to what she describes as ‘the call of god’ to become a missionary ‘cottage mother’ on Croker Island.

- Why did the government hand responsibility for the children to the Church?
- What were missions?
- Why were missions established?
- Where were missions located?

Begin your research at http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/general/missions_and_reserves_background/default.htm

Find out more about the mission experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in various parts of



ABOVE: CROKER ISLAND CHILDREN IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS, SYDNEY 1944

Australia. For study reference there is a field map of Aboriginal reserves and missions at <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/missions/map.html>.

How might you investigate the impact of placing children together from different cultural and language backgrounds at a mission?

- How does contemporary Australian society view this period in Australia's history?
- Towards the end of *Croker Island Exodus*, Netta describes seeing Margaret, 'It was very emotional meeting up with her but you know through her, we wouldn't have been alive today.' Alice says, 'To think you know she lived her life for us you know. Never got married, never had children, she was a lovely person.' Jessie remarks, 'I'm really thankful to the missionaries ... I mean they stuck with us, they could have left us. They had a chance to go, but they just stayed with us – which was good of them eh?'
- Drawing on the women's comments, describe and explain the way they think of Margaret Somerville.

RECONCILIATION

In *Croker Island Exodus* Netta says, 'I'm glad that we set an example. You know we never complained about anything, we never said poor fellow me and that, we said we had to go on with life and our children have – most of them have followed our footsteps.'

There does not appear bitterness in the way that Netta reflects on her experiences. Did Netta's attitude surprise you? What does this statement reveal about Netta and the others, and the way that they have decided to live their lives?

The Sorry Books are an initiative of the group, Australians for Native Title (ANT), which was formed in June 1997. View the Sorry Books online at <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/sorrybooks/introduction.html>.

The Sorry Books were seen as an opportunity for ordinary Australians who wanted to do something in response to the then Federal Government's refusal to make a formal apology to the Stolen Generations. There are a small number of negative statements from those who felt that they could not apologise or saw no reason for an apology. However, their comments are greatly outnumbered by an overwhelming positive response to the books.

- On the 10th of August 2004 the collection of 461 Sorry Books held by the AIATSIS Library was inscribed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register. Why do you think these books were placed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register?

Working as a class, make your own Sorry Book.

On 13 February 2008, the then Prime Minister, the Honourable Kevin Rudd MP, moved a motion of Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples with specific reference to the Stolen Generations. The Prime Minister described it as an occasion for 'the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence in the future'.

The motion honoured Indigenous Australians and reflected in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations:

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

View the footage of the official government apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 at <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>.

- Did you watch The Apology on television or listen to it on the radio?
- Why was The Apology important?
- Why was the word 'sorry' an important part of the Apology?
- What effect do you think the apology had on Australia's relationship with Indigenous Australians, particularly those who identify themselves as members of the Stolen Generations?

INTERPRETING HISTORY

At one point in the film Netta and Jessie disagree about which of the children got bitten by a jellyfish and whether



ABOVE: CHILDREN ON CROKER ISLAND, 1950S

it happened on Croker Island or the mainland. This humorous scene raises many questions about how we remember history, contested facts and the perception of eyewitnesses.

- What is the role of historical interpretation?
- What is the difference between official and unofficial history?
- What steps do you think documentary filmmakers need to take in order to gather information? Do you think these should be the same steps a historian would take? How can historians be sure information is accurate and reliable? How can documentary filmmakers be sure the information they are presenting is accurate?
- Historical sources are known as primary sources and secondary sources. What are primary sources? How would a historian gain access to these?
- What primary sources are referenced in *Croker Island Exodus*?
- What are secondary sources? What secondary sources are referenced in *Croker Island Exodus*?
- Which do you think are most reliable – primary sources or secondary sources? Can you turn a secondary source into a primary source?
- In the film the Croker Island evacuees and their families watch home movie footage shot by the missionaries of the children at the Otford camp in the 1940s. All the children appear happy and smiling. How did you react to this footage? What did it tell you about the experience of the children? Can this footage be taken as historically accurate and an authentic record of the children's experience?



ABOVE: YOUNG MARGARET SOMERVILLE (EDEN THOMSEN) TALKS TO DIRECTOR STEVEN MCGREGOR

RESPONSIBILITIES OF DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

Read the transcript of an interview with Co-writer and Director of *Croker Island Exodus* Steven MacGregor:

Can you tell us about the genesis of your film?

This film came from one of the producers, Danielle MacLean, whose aunty was one of the kids on the journey. It immediately captured my interest, the scale of the journey, the friendships forged and the bond that binds them together.

Please describe your film for us.

The film is about the strength of the human spirit and enduring friendships that span a lifetime.

As a documentary maker, how do you build up a relationship with your subject/s?

I build relationships with the characters; I don't like the word subjects, through respect. You have to earn respect to receive it.

Which parts of the filmmaking process do you enjoy the most? The least?

I really like the filming but I also enjoy the editing, to see the film come together. There are some surprises in the edit, some good, some not so good. The least enjoyable part about the filmmaking process is trying to raise the money.

What were your biggest challenges and surprises whilst shooting *Croker Island Exodus*?

The biggest challenge was trying to condense the story into a manageable shape. It is such an epic story.

What do you feel your responsibility is to your subject/s after filming has finished?

I want the people who have entrusted us with the story to feel that we have done right by them. I want them to feel we have respected their story; I want them to be proud of their film.

Which films/directors do you think have most influenced your work?

I don't have one particular director that I look to, though I do like the Coen Brothers. There are lots of directors that have influenced me. For this film, John Sayles' film *Lone Star* was a huge influence. I'd watched it at film school and was blown away by it, the way he seamlessly transitioned from the present to the past was something I'd never seen before. I wanted to try it in a film somewhere down the line. But I had to wait for the right film, to force it on a film would have been wrong but this film was perfect.

- What insights does this interview provide about documentary filmmaking?
- Why should a filmmaker feel responsibility to their subjects? Is this ethical responsibility any greater for an Indigenous filmmaker than a non-Indigenous filmmaker?
- Did you find the seamless transitions from present to past an effective way of telling the story of *Croker Island Exodus*?



ABOVE: ON LOCATION, GUNBALANYA (OENPELLI) NORTH EAST ARNHEM LAND

Resources

Teachers are advised to use the *Croker Island Exodus* website – <http://www.crokerislandexodus.com.au> – to support the analysis of the film.

Follow *Croker Island Exodus* on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Croker-Island-Exodus/443449775676748>

View an on-location report on the making of *Croker Island Exodus* on ABC TV. <http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2011/10/11/3337243.htm>

Margaret Somerville, *They Crossed a Continent: The story of a wartime exodus from Croker Island to Sydney*, Shady Tree, Darwin, 2011. © Somerville Community Services
Phone: (614) (08) 8920 4100 PO Box 42644, Casuarina, NT 0811 email: scs@somerville.org.au

Listen to an interview with Margaret Somerville at <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/951410>. In this sound recording, Margaret Somerville is interviewed by Frank Heimans for the *Bringing them Home* oral history project.

Silent Cries for Croker, Our Island Home: <http://salinkup.com.au/media/pdf/crokerdisplay.pdf> offers an overview of the Croker Island story in poster form. The resource was created as part of South Australia Link Up's 2003 reunion of former residents. Link-Up provides a range of services to members of the Stolen Generations, their families, and foster and adoptive families. Learn more about the organisation at <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/fhu/linkup.html>.

Claire Henty-Gebert, *Paint Me Black: Memories of Croker Island and Other Journeys*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005.

<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/aspbooks/paintmeblack.html>

In 1997, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (now the Australian Human Rights Commission) released its report *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Following this, the Commission received extensive requests from teachers for information about the report. The resources can be located at http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/bringing_them_home/index.html.

Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families can be accessed at http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/index.html.

Visit the Australian government website about the importance of Sorry Day and the Stolen Generations: <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/sorry-day-stolen-generations>

Video clip – Lois O'Donoghue was born in 1932 in a remote Aboriginal community. She never knew her white father and, at the age of two, was taken away from her mother, who she was not to see for 33 years: <http://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1029/>

Information about the child removal policy: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stolen_Generation

Information about the legislation and protection reports that changed Aboriginal people's lives: <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/remove/index.html>

Extensive curated links to links to web sites across a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies areas: <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/links.html>

Stolen Generations by Peter Read Sixth reprint of Professor Peter Read's landmark paper *The Stolen Generations* first written in 1981. Available as PDF download: <http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/publications/53.html>

History of Northern Territory (available as PDF download) provides a background to the policies and practices that authorised the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/bringing_them_home/8_historyNT.html

National Archives information about John McEwan's 1939 *New Deal for Aborigines*: http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/publications/research_guides/nt-guide/chapter8/8.3.html

The *Bringing Them Home* Oral History Project ran from 1998 to 2002 and served to collect and preserve the stories of Indigenous people and others, such as missionaries, police and administrators involved in or affected by the process of child removals. <http://www.nla.gov.au/oh/bth/>

The Northern Territory Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation (NTSGAC) was formally incorporated in 1998 to respond directly to the needs and concerns of members of the Stolen Generations, their families and communities. This website provides information on the services NTSGAC provides and general information on the history of the Stolen Generations. <http://www.ntsgac.org/>



CROKER ISLAND EXODUS CAST AND CREW

About the filmmakers

Steven McGregor | Writer & Director

Steven McGregor is an Indigenous writer and director from Darwin and a graduate of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. He was the director on the award winning documentaries *My Brother Vinnie* and *5 Seasons*. His most recent production was the acclaimed three-part documentary series, *In a League Of Their Own*. Steven's fifty-minute drama *Cold Turkey* screened in festivals all over the world and was nominated for two AFI awards. He worked as a script advisor and Indigenous consultant on Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* and has written for the new ABC series, *Redfern Now*. He is soon to direct *George Rrurrambu*, the story of the legendary front man of the Warumpi Band.

Danielle MacLean | Writer & Producer

Danielle MacLean is an Indigenous writer/director and producer from Darwin. She

directed many CAAMA productions before writing and directing *For Who I Am: Bonita Mabo*, *My Colour Your Kind* and the award-winning drama *Queen of Hearts*. She has written for the new ABC series *Redfern Now*.

Anna Grieve | Producer

For eight years, Anna was Executive Producer at Film Australia and Screen Australia. Her slate covered all genres with a particular focus on investigative history, drama documentary and online. Her extensive production credits include the multi award winning *Dhakiyarr vs the King*, *Mobidocs* with the NFB and four films with Peter Butt including *Who Killed Dr Bogle and Mrs Chandler?* Recent highlights include 2012 SXSW Interactive award winner, the multi-platform documentary *Big Stories, Small Towns*.

Credits

Director
Steven McGregor

Writers
Danielle MacLean & Steven McGregor

Producers
Anna Grieve & Danielle MacLean

Editor
Bill Murphy ASE

Director of Photography
Allan Collins ACS

Production Design & Wardrobe
Emma Fletcher

Composer
Geoge Papanicolaou



ABOVE: JESSIE, ALICE AND NETTA BY A POINCIANA TREE NEAR PINE CREEK

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