

CARRY THE FLAG

This is a rich and powerful story of a man whose design created meaning for a people once invisible to mainland Australia, the people of the Torres Strait.



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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY FIONA HALL



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BERNARD NAMOK AT ST PAULS, MOA ISLAND.



BERNARD NAMOK SNR, DESIGNER OF THE TORRES STRAIT FLAG, 1992.



SEAMAN DAN WITH BERNARD NAMOK

Synopsis

Bernard Namok Jnr, is a Senior Broadcaster and presenter of 'Mornings with Bala B' at the Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association – TEABBA. Every day he speaks to thousands of Indigenous Australians across the Northern Territory but he feels disconnected from his own culture and family. When he sees the Torres Strait Islands flag flying, it is for him, not only the symbol of identity of his people, but a poignant reminder of his home and the father he hardly knew.

Bernard Namok Senior won the Torres Strait Islander flag design competition in 1992. A year after his flag was formally recognised, at 31 years of age, he died leaving behind a wife and four young children. Bala B was just ten at the time but as the oldest in the family, the role of carrying the flag came early to him. He only has a few cherished childhood memories of his Dad, sitting up late night after night doing sketches of the flag that he and his sister were not to touch.

Bala B journeys back home to the Torres Strait to seek out those in his family and community who can shed light on his father and the meaning stitched into the design of his father's flag. Bala B talks to members of Torres Strait Island Flag Anniversary Committee to discover why it was so important for Torres Strait to have their own flag. One of

the judges Romina Fujii describes how their purpose was to capture for her people the same passion and hugely successful outcome achieved by the black, red and yellow flag for uniting and empowering Aboriginal Australians.

We learn of the important influencers on Bernard's flag design including that of celebrated leader and Torres Strait referendum activist, Ettie Pau. Bala B's mother, Bakoi Namok recalls conversations with her father Ettie and her husband about Torres Strait identity. Both men vehemently believed there was no point fighting for a better lot for their people until they had a flag, which would give Torres Strait Islanders a shared identity.

The Torres Strait Islander flag was officially recognised and presented to the Torres Strait Island people on the 29th May 1992 at the 6th annual Torres Strait Cultural Festival on Thursday Island. Just in time for one of the most significant events of recent Torres Strait Islander and Australian history, the Mabo decision (June 3 1992). The flag was the perfect symbol to celebrate this historic event.

'*Carry the Flag*' is an intimate, observational film that reveals much about a period of dynamic change in the lives of Torres Strait Islander people. At its heart is the journey of a son in search of the father he hardly knew, but a man who left a legacy that is the most powerful symbol of identity and aspiration to all Torres Strait Islanders.

Curriculum Links:

'Carry the Flag' can be linked to the following areas of the Australian National Curriculum:

- Year 9 and 10 History
- Year 9 and 10 Visual Arts

'Carry the Flag' is also recommended as a supplementary text at Years 9 and 10 English when studying concepts related to 'Identity and Belonging'.

Please note: Prior to commencing viewing and study of 'Carry the Flag', teachers should remind Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that the documentary contains images of deceased persons.

Specific Links to Year 9 History:

Depth Study 2: Australia and Asia

Making a nation

- The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACDSEH020)

Specific Links to Year 10 History:

Depth Study 2: Rights and Freedoms (1945 – present)

- Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (ACDSEH104)



- The significance of the following for the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: 1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology (ACDSEH106)
- Methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the role of ONE individual or group in the struggle (ACDSEH134)
- The continuing nature of efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (ACDSEH143)

Specific Links to Year 9 and 10 Visual Arts:

Conceptualise and develop representations of themes, concepts or subject matter to experiment with their developing personal **style**, reflecting on the styles of **artists**, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **artists** (ACAVAM125)

Manipulate **materials**, techniques, **technologies** and processes to develop and represent their own artistic intentions (ACAVAM126)

Develop and refine techniques and processes to represent ideas and subject matter (ACAVAM127)

Plan and design artworks that represent artistic intention (ACAVAM128)

Present ideas for displaying artworks and evaluate displays of artworks (ACAVAM129)

Analyse a range of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing **viewpoints** and enrich their visual art-making, starting with Australian artworks, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider international artworks (ACAVAR131)



BERNARD NAMOK AND HIS UNCLE MICHAEL NAMOK AT ST PAULS, MOA ISLAND



BERNARD NAMOK.



BERNARD NAMOK WITH FAMILY.

Activity: Focus on The Torres Strait Islands

As a class, brainstorm what students know about The Torres Strait Islands. Following this, present and discuss the following information:

Situated between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea, the Torres Strait Islands are the only part of Australia sharing a border with another country. The Torres Strait Islands are part of the State of Queensland. The islands were annexed comparatively late: those within 97 kilometres of the coast in 1872, the remainder in 1879.

Torres Strait Islanders are not mainland Aboriginal people who inhabit the islands of Torres Strait. They are a separate people in origin, history and way of life. From the waters of the Strait, where the Coral and Arafura Seas meet in one of the most fragile and intricate waterways in the world, rise hundreds of islands, islets, cays, reefs and sandbanks.

All these are traditionally named, owned and used. No two islands are identical, each being shaped by its unique landscape, stories and history. In the past many more islands were inhabited. Islanders live today in 18 permanent communities on 17 islands although they continue to visit their traditionally owned islands for fishing, gardening, and food collecting, camping and recreation.

In pairs, students are to conduct research and complete a padlet page (www.padlet.com) on The Torres Strait Islands. Areas and images to include:

- Geography (location, natural features, a map/relevant images, economy).
- Population
- A brief history of the Islands
- Prominent Torres Strait Islanders
- Other interesting facts.



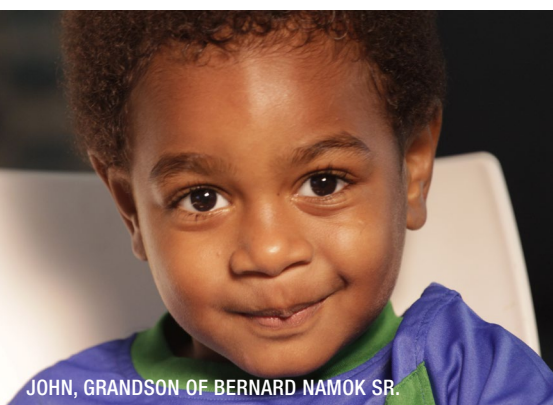
AKA DORA, BERNARD NAMOK'S GRANDMOTHER.



BUA MABO.



KERNISHA NAMOK.



JOHN, GRANDSON OF BERNARD NAMOK SR.



BONA FUJII



SANDRA, GRANDAUGHTER OF BERNARD NAMOK SR.

Activity: Focus on the Torres Strait Island Flag and Cultural Identity

In 1994, in response to local demands for greater autonomy, the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) was established to allow Torres Strait islanders to manage their own affairs according to their own 'ailan kastom' (island custom) and to develop a stronger economic base for the region. The TSRA is made up of 20 representatives elected by Torres Strait Islanders living in the islands.

During '*Carry the Flag*' we hear from those who were close to him talk about their memories of Bernard Namok Senior. As we know, Bernard designed the winning entry for the Torres Strait Islander flag in a competition held as part of a Cultural Revival Workshop, organised by The Islands Coordinating Council in January 1992. The flag was officially presented to the people of the Torres Strait at the sixth Torres Strait Cultural Festival on 29 May 1992.

The flag was recognised by the former national body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in June 1992 and given equal prominence with the Aboriginal flag.

In July 1995, the Torres Strait Islander flag was recognised by the Australian Government as an official '*Flag of Australia*' under the 'Flags Act 1953'.

- As a class, discuss why the design and official recognition of their own flag was significant for the Torres Strait Islanders.
- Why do you think flags are such an integral part of a culture's sense of identity and belonging? Refer to quotes from Bernard Namok Junior and other people we meet in '*Carry the Flag*' in your answer.

- Complete an annotated visual display that explains the elements and symbolism in the Torres Strait Islander flag. Suggested site to begin research:

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/torres-strait-islander-flag>

- Interview fellow class mates, friends or family about their own feelings towards their country's flag. Compare and discuss the answers, noting any similarities and differences in the responses.
- Read the following article about the repeated theft of a Torres Strait Islander flag on mainland Australia. Why do you think flags can stir such strong emotions in people?

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/north/torres-strait-islander-flag-repeatedly-stolen-from-park-in-heidelberg-west/news-story/b4ee4e597becd5ed4b9fd542c9280a36>

- In pairs, conduct research into the design, development and official recognition of the Australian Indigenous flag. Explain the cultural and symbolic representations within the flag.
- There has been ongoing debate about the Australian flag and how representative and culturally inclusive it is in modern day Australia. In pairs, research this debate, outlining the reasons why people support and reject the current Australian flag. Discuss as a class.
- Plan and design your own version of the Australian flag. Annotate it, ensuring you include explanation of your design decisions. Display around the classroom and invite students to explain their flags to each other.



NAMOK FAMILY (LTO R) KERNISHA, BAKOI, BERNARD, MICHAEL AND SANDRA.

Activity: Focus on Recognition of Indigenous Australians and their land.

When Bernard Namok Senior was born in 1961, Torres Strait Islanders were not Australian citizens, did not receive unemployment benefits nor related social security payments, could not vote in State or Federal elections, were underpaid, denied education, could only leave their home island with written permission and suffered under an oppressive, colonial regime administered by the Queensland Department of Native Affairs. Torres Strait Islanders were not even included in the national census. Island communities existed to provide a labour force for the marine industries, chiefly pearling. In the Outer Torres Strait Islands there were no telephones, electricity, airstrips, television, radio, outboard motors nor motor vehicles. Islanders saw few white people. The communities were largely self-sufficient and, for the most part, spoke traditional languages.

Thirty years later, Torres Strait Islanders had thrown off colonial rule and enjoyed full citizenship rights. They lived and travelled freely throughout Australia and overseas. Their children graduated from high school and university. Pearling was gone but Islanders had established an enviable reputation in a range of employments; the defence force, railways, nursing, sport. Torres Strait art was experiencing a renaissance with young artists returning to traditional motifs and designs. The lifestyle/living standards in Outer Island communities reflected that of mainstream communities. Traditional languages were in decline replaced by 'YumplaTok' [Torres Strait Creole] a lingua franca which brought Islanders together.

As a people they had demanded independence from Australia in 1987/8. They asserted that they had the will and means to achieve sovereignty and Bernard provided the flag. The Australian Government conceded moves towards autonomy and recognised Torres Strait Islanders' unique position and identity within the Australian community. The great Torres Strait Cultural Festival of 1993 was a triumph of Torres Strait kastom and unity of purpose. And everywhere you looked, on shirts and hats and flying above from multiple flagpoles, was the flag which Bernard had created.¹

- Students are to research and prepare a detailed written report that explores the following topic: 'Recognition and Rights of Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.' 'The report should include the following:
- The nature of the relationship of indigenous peoples with their land and their response to perceptions of, and feelings about, the arrival of the colonisers.
- The basis on which the colonists claimed sovereignty and imposed control, including conquest, treaty and the doctrine of 'terra nullius'; and the consequences for the legal status and land rights of Indigenous peoples.
- The nature of government policies and their impact on indigenous peoples, for example protection, assimilation (including the Stolen Generations), and self-determination.

1 'Carry the Flag' Press Kit, Tamarind Tree Pictures, 2017.



FILM CREW ON LOCATION ON MOA ISLAND, TORRES STRAIT.

- The role of individuals and groups who supported the movement for indigenous recognition and rights, including the methods they used and the resistance they encountered.
- The economic, political and social challenges and opportunities indigenous peoples have faced, including the role of cultural activity in developing awareness in society.
- The achievements of indigenous Australians (including Torres Strait Islanders) at the end of the 20th century, including the right to vote, land rights/native title, and attempt at reconciliation.
- The continued efforts to achieve greater recognition, reconciliation, civil rights, and improvements in education and health.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights leaders fought for greater equality and helped bring about considerable change in the status and lives of their people. In pairs, conduct research into Eddie Mabo. Create a digital biography of this prominent Torres Strait Islander, including the following: A timeline of his life and achievements, his push for land rights recognition, the outcome and lasting impact on Australian society. Include relevant images and clips and share with the class.



BERNARD NAMOK AND WRITER/DIRECTOR DANIELLE MACLEAN

Activity: Writing Tasks exploring 'Identity and Belonging'

As we see throughout 'Carry the Flag', the recognition of culture and connection to family and land are crucial in helping people feel a strong sense of identity and belonging.

Incorporating events and people from 'Carry the Flag', students are to select one of the following prompts and write an expository response of 500 – 700 words.

- It is difficult to possess a sense of belonging when we are unsure of our own identity
- Our identity determines where we belong
- Conflict is often a result of justice and wrongdoing
- Discovering our identity is a challenging journey
- Our earliest memories help shape our sense of identity and belonging
- It is only when we know where we've come from that we are able to truly feel a sense of belonging.

References:

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

www.padlet.com

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/torres-strait-islander-flag>

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