

STUDYGUIDE
ROBERT LEWIS



The Lore of
Love

The Lore of Love (Beck Cole, 2005) is a 25-minute film that directly addresses a key issue facing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia today – the place and relevance of traditional Aboriginal culture in the life of young Indigenous people who are choosing to be part of the modern Australian world.

Do young Indigenous people today accept the old ways? Do they reject them? Or do they respect them but live in a way that suits their place and role in a modern society?

By focusing on one modern young woman's trip to her cultural roots, *The Lore of Love* provides a manageable and realistic case study that will give students a sound basis for addressing this sensitive, difficult and important issue in their society today.



The Lore of Love



SYNOPSIS

Jessie Bartlett is about to take a journey back to her Pintupi grandmothers' homelands where she will learn about the lore of love – traditional way.

The central characters in the film are Jessie Bartlett, a shy 18-year-old who lives a contemporary urban lifestyle and her Pintupi grandmothers Mijili, Nancy and Kumanjayi.

Jessie travels out to her grandmothers' homelands where they teach her about love the traditional way. The three old women lived a traditional Pintupi lifestyle up until the 1960s when they first made contact with white civilization. Anthropologist Donald Thompson came out to Lake Mackay and met up with the women. He took photographs of them, and some of these are included in the film.

Although Jessie has had a lot of contact with her Aboriginal culture throughout her life, this trip is unique because it is a 'coming of age' journey. Her grandmothers recognize that she is ready to learn about the responsibilities of love and relationships and take her out to their isolated birthplace to teach her these important skills.

There is a great amount of humour

in the film – one of the central topics discussed by the women is jealousy and ways in which to deal with this intense emotion. Mijili and Nancy were both married to Jessie's grandfather at the same time – they were co-wives. This was a usual practice within traditional communities and Jessie and her grandmothers discuss this and other intimate details of courting and relationships throughout the film.

Due to the fact that many of these practices are quite complex, Jessie provides narration throughout the film, which makes it easier for an audience to grasp some of these systems. Jessie also speaks openly about her own feelings about relationships and her place in her family and traditional culture.

The film has been translated and subtitled from the Pintupi and Warlpiri languages into English.

CURRICULUM RELEVANCE

The Lore of Love is a resource that can be used to explore and illuminate issues of tradition and modernity in culture and identity in:

- English
- Society and Environment

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that the film includes images of people who are now deceased.

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

The Lore of Love is a film about four key ideas. Students could start thinking about these ideas in their own lives, and then look at the film to see how they apply in a different context.

The key ideas are Journey, Lore, Family, and Tradition and Culture. Below are suggested ways to start students thinking about them.

Journey

The film is about a journey.

- 1 Have you ever been on a trip that was a physical one, but which also involved your gaining some extra knowledge from it? For example, it might have been a first visit to the home of a friend whose parents were from another country, and who did things differently to you. Or it might have been to a new place, such as an Aboriginal area, where you saw aspects of Aboriginal culture for the first time.

Explain to another person what the journey was, and what you learned from it. Listen to them doing the same to you.

Lore

The film is also about 'lore'. Lore is a body of knowledge, especially of a traditional, anecdotal or popular nature, on a particular subject. In families there is often family lore – stories about members of the family that are passed on from generation to generation.

- 2 Talk to your parents and grandparents and see if there is any family lore in your family.

Family

The film also focuses on family, and the influence of the older generation on a young woman.

- 3 Who influences you most in your family? Make a list and decide who has most influence, and in what ways.

Tradition and culture

The film is also about tradition and culture – the old ways of doing things.

- 4 Are there any traditions in your family – ways that things used to be done in the past, and are still done today? Are there any aspects that used to be traditional, but have now been given up or changed? If so why? And what have been the benefits and the costs of that change?

By thinking about these ideas in your own life you will be better able to understand what Jessie in the film *The Lore of Love* is going through.

EXPLORING ISSUES IN THE FILM

The Lore of Love is structured in short segments, each of which deals with aspects of the four ideas discussed above.

Teachers could show the film to students, and then focus on the discussion of these themes and ideas.

1 The trip

Jessie is on a journey. It is a trip from her home in Alice Springs to her grandmothers' traditional lands near Lake Mackay.

- 1.1 Print a blank map of Australia from the National Geographic website.

(www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html?Parent=oceani&Rootmap=austra&Mode=d&SubMode=w)

- 1.2 Use an atlas to identify where Lake Mackay is. Mark it on your map.
- 1.3 Find two ways of getting from Alice Springs to Lake Mackay, one from the east, and one from the south. What are the difficulties associated with each? Which to you think would be the better way to go?
- 1.4 What is the purpose of the trip that Jessie takes?
- 1.5 Why do you think Jessie wanted to go on it?
- 1.6 Why do you think her grandmothers wanted her to go on it?

RELATING IT TO TODAY:

- 1.7 Is there any similar journey that you could take to find out about your past and culture?

2 Fighting and jealousy

From the film we learn that the Pintupi had a tradition of one man having several wives.

- 2.1 Why did this custom exist?
- 2.2 One of the strangest aspects of the film for modern audiences is the grandmothers' account of jealous fights, and their attempt to make Jessie and Lizzie learn how to do this. Why do you think the grandmothers want to do this?

- 2.3 How does Jessie react to this element of the old culture? Why do you think she reacts in this way?

RELATING IT TO TODAY:

- 2.4 The custom was born in a particular place in particular circumstances. Should it be continued today? Why should our tradition of monogamy be preferred to it? If you stop this custom, does the traditional culture suffer? Explain your ideas.

3 Skin names and relationships

The Pintupi had strict laws about marriage between different groups, determined by skin groups.

- 3.1 Why do you think this existed?

RELATING IT TO TODAY:

- 3.2 Is there any modern equivalent in Australian society today? Explain your ideas.

4 Life at Lake Mackay

In the film we see the area around the salt lake at Lake Mackay.

- 4.1 What are your impressions of the place?
- 4.2 What would daily life have been like for the people living there in the past? Give specific examples mentioned in the film.
- 4.3 What difference did white contact lead to in their lives – good and bad?
- 4.4 Why do you think the grandmothers have such a strong attachment to the place?

RELATING IT TO TODAY:

- 4.5 Is there any place in your life that you feel a special attachment to? Why?

5 Traditions and Customs

In *The Lore of Love* we learn some-

thing about men's and women's places in Pintupi society in the past.

- 5.1 List some of the features or characteristics of traditional Aboriginal culture that are revealed in the film.
- 5.2 We see how a Dreamtime story could pass on messages and meanings to the listener. What was the message of the story of the hawk and the lovers?

RELATING IT TO TODAY:

- 5.3 Are there any ceremonies today that serve a similar purpose to those described by the old women to bring young people together?
- 5.4 How are rules passed on in stories in your life today?

6 Attitudes to marriage and birth

In Pintupi society women married young, and had children early.

- 6.1 Suggest reasons why that might have been the case.
- 6.2 Jessie says about a 'boy-mad' friend: 'Can't they wait, just be boyfriend and girlfriend?' How would a traditional Pintupi have answered this question?

RELATING IT TO TODAY:

- 6.3 What pressures exist in society today for early marriage and childbearing? What pressures act against this?

7 In Alice Springs

Near the end of the film we see Jessie in her own home environment at Alice Springs.

- 7.1 Does anything about her life surprise you? If so, try to explain why.
- 7.2 We see Jessie's white grandmother's influence as well. How is this similar to and different from her Indigenous grandmothers' influence?

RELATING IT TO TODAY:

- 7.3 During the film we hear Jessie make these comments:

'My nanas take it seriously but me and Lizzie are just having fun.'

'I guess I'd have to see it to believe it.'

'Even if he was the wrong skin I'd still be with him, because I think these days I should be able to choose my own boyfriend.'

'I don't know what I expected, but it was good because I learned more about my nanas, gained more knowledge and respect.'

'I want to respect my nanas' ways, and I also want to follow my own heart.'

What is Jessie's final attitude to the Lore of Love that her Indigenous grandmothers have been explaining to her?

ASSESSING THE FILM

- 1 *The Lore of Love* is a documentary film in the 'fly on the wall' style – we do not see the filmmakers, and we seem to see exactly what happened without any rehearsal or scripting. Do you think it is a good film? Explain how these elements of the film help create its overall impact:
 - The subject matter
 - The structure or editing of the film
 - The use of Jessie as a narrator
 - The use of Indigenous language
 - The focus on a limited number of people as the subjects of the film
 - The camera angles and style
- 2 Write a review of the film, OR write a synopsis of it to replace the one at the start of this Study Guide, OR critically evaluate and comment on that synopsis.
- 3 Do you think the film has a good title: *The Lore of Love*? Suggest an alternative one, and decide which

is better, and why.

- 4 Many films about modern Indigenous people stress the disintegration that is so common in many communities – the alcohol, violence and hopelessness; others romanticise Indigenous culture and stress the special connections to land, Indigenous wisdom, and the strength of community and culture. What is the attitude of this film towards Indigenous culture? Explain your ideas.
- 5 The film is about the clash of old and new, traditional and modern. At the end of the film Jessie seems to choose the modern over the traditional. Do you think this choice will have any beneficial and harmful effects on her life? Will it have any beneficial and harmful impacts on the traditional culture? Explain your ideas.
- 6 Does Jessie make a good choice? Explain your ideas.

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