

aftershocks

'Aftershocks' is a film examining the experiences of eleven people who were in the Newcastle Workers' Club at the time of a serious earthquake in December 1989. Neither a re-enactment nor a documentary, the film uses the words of these survivors, interspersed with TV news film, to construct a compelling examination of the impact of such an event on the people who were touched by it. The words of the eleven survivors featured in this film are spoken by actors, but there is a sense of immediacy and credibility that makes it difficult to believe that the speakers were not the actual participants in this drama.

"We were not attempting to make a disaster movie", says producer Julia Overton. "What we have attempted is the story of the experiences of people who speak with authority and remarkable good humour on how we might all face unaccountable and tragic circumstances. We see how single minded heroic action begets a flood of complex emotions - not least of all how to rescue the heroes"

'Aftershocks' offers opportunities for valuable and sensitive learning experiences in English, Geography, Social Studies, Psychology, Media and Drama. The film falls naturally into three sections - the actual earthquake, the rescue, and the long term impact of the events of the people involved. The film could be shown as a whole or the three



sections could be viewed separately and students could be asked to respond to each section.

What Actually Happened in Newcastle on December 28, 1989?

At 10.28 on Thursday December 28th, 1989 an earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter scale shook the NSW coastal and port city of Newcastle for approximately ten seconds. The epicentre of the earthquake was just five kilometres west of the centre of Newcastle but its impact was felt as far away as Victoria and Queensland. The greatest damage occurred in central Newcastle and in the adjoining suburb of Hamilton. Shops, public buildings, hotels and even the Royal Newcastle Hospital all suffered





On Thursday that spirit and Newcastle's pride in it were given the ultimate test. Never for a moment was there ever a hint that spirit would fail."

The people involved in 'Aftershocks'

John Constable (Jeremy Sims), a young cleaner at the Club who risked his life to save two of his fellow workers.

Lyn Brown - one of the managers who was trapped for over an hour, after most of her office simply disappeared.

Kerri Ingram, barmaid and Marg Turnbull, cashier, who cared for the injured outside the club and **probably saved several lives.**

Howard Gibson a long time worker at the Club who was trapped under sheets of plaster but managed to dig his way out.

Elaine Gibson, a cashier who had worked the night before the earthquake The area where she worked was completely crushed and several of her fellow cashiers lost their lives.

Bob Asquith, a cellarman at the Club, who was initially trapped - "it was like being inside a dead cow", but who managed to find the stairs and get out.

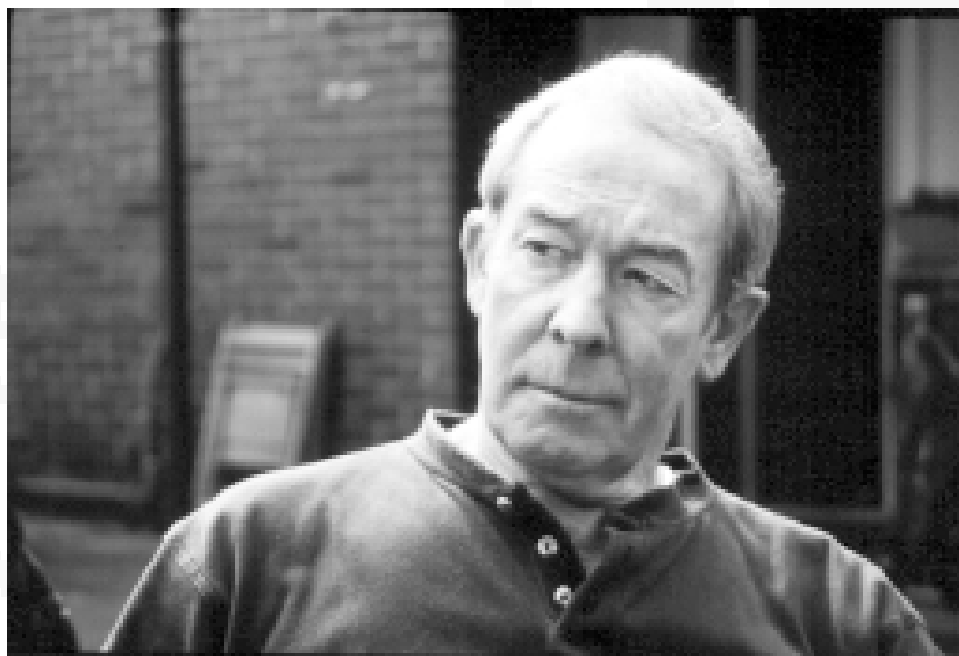
Fay Asquith, Hoy assistant who was on duty when the earthquake struck. She got out then went back in to find her mother who was sheltering under a table.

extensive damage, but by far the scene of the greatest devastation and tragedy was the Newcastle Workers' Club.

On the day of the quake, Newcastle was crowded with holiday makers enjoying the break between Christmas and New Year. Thursday was pension day and a larger than usual number of visitors frequented the Workers' Club, playing the pokies or taking part in a game of Hoy (similar to Bingo). A crew was setting up for that evening's concert by Split Enz and Crowded House in the Club's auditorium.

In the ten seconds after the quake struck, the top two storeys of the Workers' Club collapsed and the west side of the building crumbled, trapping an estimated 50 people. By the end of the day some 40 people had been rescued from the Club but there were still bodies trapped in the rubble.

Ultimately 12 people died as a result of the earthquake (9 of them in the Workers' Club), 140 people were injured, 15 seriously, and the people of Newcastle faced a damage bill of \$1.5 billion. Less measurable but no less significant was the social and psychological impact of this tragedy on the community. Nevertheless, there is a sense of pride and satisfaction at the way in which the people of Newcastle responded to the crisis. "Ögradually the pieces will be picked up and life will return to normal" wrote Mr Denis Butler in the Sydney Morning Herald on Saturday December 30th. "And this return to normality will be fostered by the community spirit on which Newcastle has so long prided itself.



Nina Bailey, a Club member who was playing the 5c machine when the walls started to crumble around her.

Eddie Seymour, a Board member of the Club who flew back from Perth as quickly as he could when he heard what had happened.

Stan Gill, the Hoy caller who was trapped in the building and suffered permanent physical damage.



Before Viewing the Film

Teachers:

Provide students with an explanation of the causes and consequences of earthquakes. Many Geography or Geology texts offer explanations in varying degrees of detail according to the level of the students.

Information is also available on the internet. (One example is the geography section of hi.com.au)

Students:

Read the account of the Newcastle earthquake (above) then imagine that you are in your own home when an

earthquake hits. You are initially trapped but you manage to escape with minor injuries. You then discover that your brother is trapped in the garage and, with the help of several neighbours including a doctor and a nurse you get him out just before a wall collapses. You are hailed as a hero and you are interviewed on a TV current affairs program. Give an account of the interview in which you:

Describe the physical damage to your home and surrounds.

Give an account of your actions and thoughts in the 10 minutes following the earthquake.

Explain your feelings as you helped to rescue your brother.

Comment on what impact you think the experience will have on you.

You could record the interview on video.

Synopsis of the Film

The film opens with some of the survivors talking of their experiences on the day of the earthquake. The recording of these reminiscences in 'ordinary settings' - a kitchen, a back garden, a verandah- helps to establish the image of these people as unspectacular participants in an extraordinary series of



events. These is a quiet resignation about them, an unwillingness to accept the obviously deserved title of 'heroes.'

The first section of the film uses a combination of interviews and TV film to show the actual quake and its immediate aftermath. There are the usual 'luck escape' stories. John did not want to clean the lights and only did so when Lyn insisted, otherwise he would have been in the auditorium where the greatest devastation occurred. Howard went one way when the floor collapsed, and escaped unhurt, Alf went the other way and was pinned under a slab of concrete.

What do you learn about the impact that an earthquake can have on a building?

Identify the different reactions of three of the people, to the initial impact of the 'quake. What factors could explain their different reactions?

How effective is the setting and the 'talking heads' format in helping to build up an empathy with the characters?

If you had been in the Workers' Club, near an opening and easily able to escape what would you have done?

The film then moves into an examination of the rescue attempt, as it involved and affected the key



characters. There are accounts of remarkable heroism and courage but they are all related in a matter of fact manner. "I don't know where it all came from" says Marg Turnbull, a cashier, of the way in which they coped, "but it did and at the right time I suppose." In the midst of tragedy and horror, including the death of two much loved characters Barry and Lenny, there are touches of normality. Lyn chides John for swearing even as he is in the process of saving her life; a lady who was playing Hoy when the quake struck, stops Fay as she searches for survivors, to ask whether she will get her dollar back; Fay laughs about finding her mother hiding under a table.

Where do you think the courage and ability to cope did come from?

Can you think of other examples (from well known incidents or from your own experience) where ordinary people have gained extraordinary courage and wisdom to cope in times of crisis.

Not everybody behaved with courage and integrity. Give two examples of incidents that show a more negative side of human nature.

Adopt the persona of Lyn during the time that she was trapped in the remnants of her office. Write an account of your feelings.

The final phase of the film explores the longer term impact of the event on



English Section

1. Some of the themes explored in this film include fear, courage, loyalty, greed, heroism, mateship and loss. Write each of these themes down the side of a page and, as you watch the film, note people, incidents or words that reflect these themes. Are there any themes that you can add to the list?

Explain the significance of the title 'Aftershocks'. Can you suggest another title that

those who were so intimately involved in the quake and the rescue process. Each of the eleven characters has been scarred in some way by the disaster, and it is here that a second layer of meaning in the title 'Aftershocks' can be found. Most of the interviewees have returned to work in or to use the rebuilt Club but not John Constable or Stan Gill. For them the events of December 28 1989 seem to have cast a long shadow.

What were some of the medium and long term reactions that these people experienced after the earthquake? Did any of them surprise you? Why?

Describe, in your own words, the range of reactions that John experienced from the time that the 'Copper' would not let him back into the building to his decision not to attend the anniversary.

How would you interpret John's dream?

Which of the characters seems to have had the most profound response to the tragedy? Can you suggest why?

Imagine you are a close friend or relative of either Lyn, Howard or Kerri. Script a dialogue of a telephone call between you and the survivor, several hours after the tragedy. Try to offer constructive advice rather than just sympathy.

Why do you think that John and Stan have not been keen to return to the club

could

convey the experience of the earthquake as well as the chosen title?

After viewing the film and listening to the accounts, what image do you have of

the Workers' Club and its clientele? Draw up a script for a radio advertisement

encouraging Newcastle citizens to join the Club.

Compare the reactions of Lyn and Alf to the disaster and its aftermath. Script a

dialogue between Lyn and Alf in which Lyn tries to encourage Alf to return to work at the Club.



Which of the characters is most real to you? Explain how this has been achieved.

History Section

Imagine that one hundred years from now, the only evidence left from the Newcastle earthquake is this film. What could you learn about the event? Australian attitudes, values and culture? The way in which buildings were designed and constructed?

What does this film teach you about the nature and value of primary historical evidence?

What other evidence would require, one hundred years from now, in order to gain a better understanding of the earthquake and its consequences.

3. Even though all of the words used in this film are the words of people who were involved in the event, there are some contradictions in the stories they tell. Identify two such contradictions and attempt to explain them.

4. Chose an event or issue, from the period of history



you are studying, on which there are differing interpretations. Outline the different points of view and explain why two different views could exist. (eg contradictory accounts of the Eureka stockade from a



miner and a soldier; differing perspectives on the Vietnam war from a soldier and an anti-war protester).

Geography Section

Research the causes of earthquakes and find out about earthquake prone areas:

In Australia

Elsewhere in the world

Present your information in map form.

What does the film tell you about the physical damage done by the Newcastle earthquake?

Use library resources and the internet to discover more about the damage caused in Newcastle.

How would the damage have been different if the epicentre of the earthquake was:

In a sparsely populated desert area?

Near a small group of islands in the Pacific?

In a mountainous region with scattered small settlements?

3. Research another natural disaster that has caused devastation and loss of life in the past thirty years (eg Cyclone Tracey; The Kobe Earthquake; The New Guinea Tsunami) Compare this disaster with the one in Newcastle, using the following headings:

Severity

Lives lost



Number and nature of injuries
Damage to buildings and infrastructure.
Environmental damage.
'Miracles'
Impact on the community in which it occurred.

Psychology Section

All of the people interviewed suffered varying degrees of trauma as a result of their involvement in the destruction of the Workers' Club.

Identify the various psychological reactions of the participants, to the disaster.

How do you explain the wide range of reactions? Refer to three of the characters in your response.

Is there any connection between the severity of a person's experience and the degree of that person's psychological reaction? Explain with reference to two of the characters.

Identify the person whom you feel was most severely affected. Imagine you are that person and write a letter to a close friend, outlining your feelings, fears and experiences, about three months after the earthquake.

Imagine you are one of the survivors of the earthquake and you have been asked to speak to a group of young people who witnessed their schoolmate drown on a school excursion. Outline the

address you would present.

Taking the role of another of the survivors, use your experience to give advice to the Newcastle City Council about a disaster plan being developed to help the city cope with future natural or man made disasters.

Media & Drama Section

This film uses an unusual technique for conveying the drama and heroism of ordinary

people in the aftermath of a disaster. Describe the technique and comment on the value of this technique in terms of:

Conveying information about what actually happened

Giving insight into the feelings of the participants

Building a sense of drama and suspense

Building a rapport with the people involved in the disaster.

With which of the characters do you develop the greatest empathy? How is this empathy created and sustained?

Consider the music that is used as a background to the various extracts of TV film of the

Rescue operation. Is it appropriate? What mood does it create? Try turning off the sound and experimenting with different types of music to create different moods (eg panic).

4. View a different type of disaster film or series based on another Australian event. (eg 'Day of the Roses' based on the Granville Train Crash). Make a comparison of the two styles, identifying the differences in terms of:

Extent to which the audience is engaged

Potential for telling the true story

Ability to develop empathy with the characters.

Ability to show the long term impact of the disaster on the people involved.

Geraldine Carrodus

Newcastle: At least 120 injured and 13 dead. CBD evacuated, people trapped in buildings. Other buildings in danger of collapsing. Rail services cancelled but buses operating. Power services cut. Almost every building damaged in King and Hunter Streets.

Stockton Bridge: Dropped 5 cm in quake.

BHP Plant, Mayfield: Fire in blast furnace. Two injured. Steel plant shut down.

Royal Newcastle Hospital: Two wings closed. Patients evacuated to Belmont, Mater, Wallsend and Maitland Hospitals.

PACIFIC HWY

FORT HUNTER

HUNTER ST

NEWCASTLE

HAMILTON

KING ST

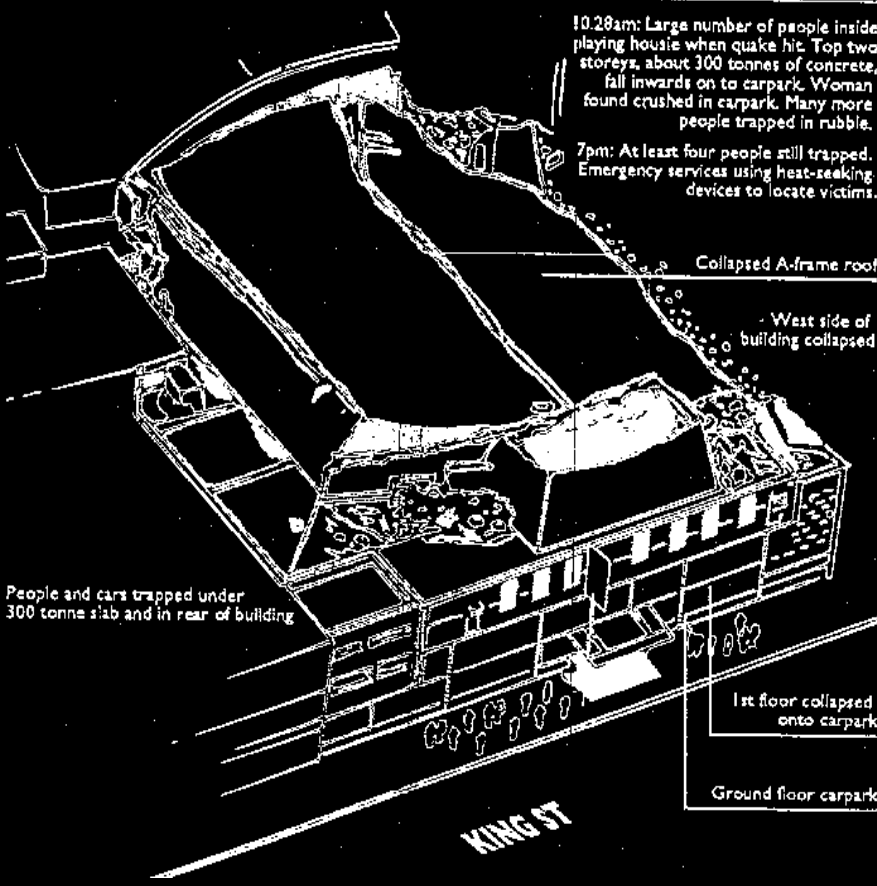
COOKS HILL

BEAUMONT ST

PACIFIC HWY

Hamilton: Two dead in Beaumont Street. Street closed. Telephone exchange damaged with one wall collapsed.

Lingard Private Hospital: Receiving casualties.



10:28am: Large number of people inside playing house when quake hit. Top two storeys, about 300 tonnes of concrete, fall inwards on to carpark. Woman found crushed in carpark. Many more people trapped in rubble.

7pm: At least four people still trapped. Emergency services using heat-seeking devices to locate victims.

Collapsed A-frame roof

West side of building collapsed

1st floor collapsed onto carpark

Ground floor carpark

People and cars trapped under 300 tonne slab and in rear of building

KING ST