



# CROSSING --- THE LINE

## STUDYGUIDE

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Front Cover Photo by Paul Joffe

# Synopsis

**C**ROSSING THE LINE is a film that documents the experiences of two Tasmanian medical students when they take up an eight-week placement in an Indigenous community on Mornington Island in north-west Queensland.

The two students, Amy and Paul, are given training to prepare them for their move into a completely different world. The pre-placement training covers the types of health, social and economic issues on the Island. However, the general medical principle of 'professional distance' is challenged by the overwhelming needs of the Indigenous people they meet and Amy and Paul feel they need to 'cross the line' to work effectively with the community.

After several weeks, Amy and Paul establish relationships with the local Indigenous people who use the hospital, hearing their often shocking stories. They become accepted by Elders and other key people and begin to move out of the hospital and into the community. Paul visits several Elders in their home, building a feeling of mutual trust and respect but also discovering the pall of suicide that hangs over the community.

Amy is driven to learn more about the people of the Island and how their lives came to be so dysfunctional. She hears the stories of missionaries who removed children from their families and stopped them from living their culture as they had for thousands of years. This challenges Amy's own strong Christian faith and brings her closer to the people of the Island.

Paul and Amy refer to these experiences in their weekly de-briefing session by teleconference with their supervisors. The supervisors are concerned that they have become too close and involved, and caution Paul against 'building up an expectation that you're going to make a change'.

Without consulting the Elders, the supervisors decide to pull both students out of the Community before the placement is due to finish. They leave them little time to say their goodbyes to the people who had accepted them into their lives.

Crossing the Line explores one of the most difficult issues facing any health professional – what level of emotional involvement is appropriate and useful? – in the context of an even more complex issue: relationships between Indigenous Communities and non-Indigenous people and institutions meant to serve them.

## Curriculum Links

This film will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at Secondary and Tertiary levels. Curriculum links include: Indigenous studies; Australian History; Health; SOSE/HSIE; Legal studies; Media studies and English



# BEFORE WATCHING

## About Mornington Island Location and Climate

A map of the location of Mornington Island (or Mornington Shire) is available at: [http://www.mcmc.qld.gov.au/community/documents/morningtonisland\\_3.pdf](http://www.mcmc.qld.gov.au/community/documents/morningtonisland_3.pdf)

Mornington Island is an Aboriginal community located in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is 444 kilometres from Mt Isa, Queensland and is the eighth largest Australian island. The only access to Mornington Island is by air or sea.

## History

### PRE-CONTACT

The Lardil people are the Traditional Owners or Custodians of Mornington Island. The Lardil people lived in family

groups (clans) of up to 15-20 people. They moved according to seasons and the boundaries for their clan group. Each clan owned a portion of the water and land.

The Lardil people, like other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia, understood how the land, sea and all within it was created by their Spirit Ancestors, the Dreaming. This information was passed on through Dreaming stories, songs and dances. These stories also told people who they are (what clan they belonged to), the area of land and sea they belonged to, and how they must look after it, as well as their totems.

Totems are the physical representation of a person, or clan's Spirit Ancestor, Dreaming. They are passed down from generation to generation with strict rules about how they are to be respected. Thuwathu, the Rainbow Serpent, is an example of a Spirit Ancestor, who the Lardil people believe created all the landmarks, food and water.



### Key Terms and Vocabulary

- Lardil:** traditional people of the Mornington Island
- Yangkaal:** traditional people of neighbouring islands
- Kaiadilt:** traditional people of neighbouring islands

## POST CONTACT

In 1914 Aboriginal people from across mainland Australia were forcibly removed to Mornington Island. The Kaiadilt and the Yangkaal people from neighbouring islands were also moved to Mornington Island and onto missions. Their removal was part of a government policy called 'Protection'. Various Australian state and territory governments put in place protection policies at different times, but with the same outcomes.

Aboriginal people from different groups and country had to live together in government and Church run missions and reserves. They could no longer move, live and support themselves as they had done for many thousands of years. The Government argued this policy was in the interests of Aboriginal people as they were a 'problem' in the wider community.

In Queensland, pastoralists were taking huge areas of land to clear and use for their cattle. Aboriginal people were being denied access to their traditional food, water sources and their sacred sites as the land was opened up and 'settled'. Many people were hurt and killed as Aboriginal people resisted what they saw as an invasion and destruction of their country and sacred sites.

The Government's response was to segregate many Aboriginal people on to reserves and missions where they would work relentlessly for the financial benefit of Government and Church. Indigenous people not in missions would become part of a Government controlled labour force servicing pastoralists and industry at a much lower cost than non-Indigenous labour. This they argued was 'for their own good'.

The Queensland Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was established in 1897. This Act gave the Queensland Government the power to declare any Aboriginal person a ward of the State and control every aspect of their lives. An example of this is in the current legal action against the Queensland Government for 'Stolen Wages' – money taken from Indigenous people by Government authorities 'in trust' and never returned. Around 1904, the Queensland government decided Indigenous workers' wages would go directly to the Police Protector, apart from pocket money retained by the employer to distribute. From 1910 the government took levies from the already small wages of mission inmates and after 1919 it levied any Indigenous person earning a wage. The descendants of those affected by this official Government robbing, ostensibly in the 'protection' of Aboriginal people, are now negotiating with the Queensland Government for compensation to families of affected workers.





The Act also meant Government authorities controlled where an Indigenous person lived, worked, who they socialized with, and where they went.

There were other pieces of legislation designed to control Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples developed over the decades after the 1897 Act, including the Reformatory Schools Act and Vagrants Acts and legislation related to Indigenous Land Rights at State and Commonwealth levels.

Land rights legislation was a step towards recognising the damage done to Indigenous communities by past legislation and actions that separated Communities from their cultural, spiritual, ceremonial and economic base – the land, their people's Country for tens of thousands of years.

## Health

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia kept themselves physically and spiritually well for many thousands of years before contact with European people, their new foods, diseases and medicines. Clan groups moved within their boundaries and according to the seasons. People kept themselves well by hunting and gathering various foods according to the seasons. Many traditional foods were, and still are, high in essential nutrients.

Elders with special knowledge about bush medicine and healing also played an important part in keeping people well. They passed on knowledge about bush foods, the seasons, hunting, gathering and fishing. People followed strict rules about these activities so that the environment was looked after. These rules were taught to all members of the community, including children, so that the land and sea and all within it were carefully nurtured.

Caring for country, and in doing so the physical and spiritual health and well-being of its people, was an important part of everyday life. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples understand physical health is closely tied to spiritual health and caring for country. Through story, art, dance, songlines (songs that taught about clan boundaries, food and water spots throughout country etc) and Elders' teachings, people were clear about how to look after themselves, the whole group and their country.

Today, the people of Mornington Island, and many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia, have been forced over time into a very different lifestyle. Most communities now rely on stores that provide Western foods at inflated prices. Highly processed foods and alcoholism have caused serious chronic illnesses. While some people of Mornington Island still have a strong knowledge about how to hunt, fish and gather bush foods and continue to pass on traditional stories, the culture was systematically destroyed years before and the Lardil de-



scendants disconnected from its rich history encompassing thousands of years.

As Rosalind Kidd, a noted historian and researcher says:

*So when we hear talk of 'extra' money going to Aboriginal communities today, of positive 'discrimination' in funding to address appalling health and housing and living conditions endured in so many Aboriginal communities, be well aware that this money is not 'for Aborigines'. It is to redress deficiencies in government management. It is to redress money withheld – both through intention and through negligence – during a century of government control. Acknowledging the truth of the past has nothing to do with self-defeating guilt. It is about living honestly in the present. Surely the body which controlled all aspects of Aboriginal lives for all of this century must be questioned as to why its guardianship created and sustained the worst outcomes on all social indicators for those people who they decided to call 'wards of state'?*

(<http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd/site/Speech7.htm>)

## Research

Investigate how the people of Mornington Island came to live there.

Read more about Mornington Island at [www.evfit.com/](http://www.evfit.com/)

[mornington.htm](http://mornington.htm)

Read *From Hunting to Drinking*, David McKnight, Routledge, 2002.

## True or False

Compared with non-Indigenous people, Indigenous people:

- Die older
- Have higher rates of heart disease
- Have lower rates of degenerative disease
- Drink more alcohol per head of population
- Experience lower rates of unemployment
- Are less likely to use mainstream health services
- Have less income per head
- Have similar levels of home ownership

# AFTER WATCHING

## Suggested activities

### First Impressions

Allow the group to offer their views on what they have just seen. Map the main themes of what is being discussed.

The following can be used to guide discussions:

- How do you think Amy and Paul felt about being taken from the Island before their placement was completed?
- Do you think they behaved appropriately or not in their interactions with Indigenous people? Give examples to support your opinion.
- What is the line that Amy and Paul are accused of crossing as referred to in the title of the film?
- Why do you think Amy and Paul wanted to build rela-

tionships with individuals and the community as part of their job?

- Did the Community want Amy and Paul to 'cross the line'? Give examples from the film.
- What are the reasons given in the film for removing them early?
- Which reasons given by their supervisors? Do you think are reasonable?
- What are some of the challenges facing Indigenous people living in remote communities?

### SOSE/Legal Studies

Summarize the impact of the Queensland Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (1897) on Queensland Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.





Describe how they were treated differently under the law compared to non-Indigenous people.

Find out about other legislation designed to control the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples since the 1897 Act. Is there any legislation specific to Indigenous people still existing today? Has this legislation been to the benefit or detriment of Indigenous people?

Timeline of relevant legislation: [www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au/files/links/Timeline\\_of\\_legislation\\_af.pdf](http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au/files/links/Timeline_of_legislation_af.pdf)

How the 1897 Act led to the stolen wages of Indigenous people: [http://antar.dovenetq.net.au/05\\_involved/facts.html](http://antar.dovenetq.net.au/05_involved/facts.html)

Summary of the 1897 Act: <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item.asp?sdlID=54>

Summary of laws affecting Indigenous people since colonization – also compares to laws as they affected the rest of the population: [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/bth/text\\_versions/map/laws/qld.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/bth/text_versions/map/laws/qld.html)

Discussion of the history of protection policy for Indigenous people in Queensland: <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd/site/Speech7.htm>

Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council, which has Indigenous perspectives on Government legislation and policies related to Indigenous people: <http://www.accq.org.au>

## SOSE/English

Describe life for the Mornington Island community before contact with the mainland and life after they came under the authority of the Queensland Government.

Use words and pictures to tell the story from the point-of-view of an Islander and that of the 'Protector of Aborigines'; make a play with scenes that shows what happened before and after contact.

Read *From Hunting to Drinking*, David McKnight, Routledge, 2002; or a summary of issues in the book at: [www.evfit.com/mornington.htm](http://www.evfit.com/mornington.htm)

Why do you think there are protocols about research in Indigenous communities? When Paul started interviewing members of the Community without an Indigenous mentor there, what was he told by his supervisor during a teleconference de-brief?

Find out what the protocols are for approaching the Indigenous Community in your area. Contact the local Aboriginal Co-operative or Aboriginal Health Service to find out.

## Health

Research the approach used by Indigenous Health Workers in working with Indigenous people (importance of relation-



ship; availability outside normal work hours; importance of building connection with Community). Interview an Indigenous health worker at an Indigenous health service or large hospital.

Read the doctor's code of ethics at: <http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/tag/amacodeofethics>

Is there anything in there about professional distance? Had Paul or Amy breached the code of ethics? If not, find out where the concept of 'professional distance' as mentioned in the film, comes from.

Do you agree with Amy that Indigenous Communities 'need more than just the traditional role of doctor'? Give some reasons for your answer.

Amy and the Community Mentors express frustration about the level of alcohol disease on the Island. Research an Indigenous community that has introduced *alcohol free communities* through an Alcohol Management Plan. Find out their reasons for using this strategy and the positive, negative and interesting outcomes. Compare outcomes to a community where an Alcohol Management Plan has been imposed by Government.

Chart the statistics for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in relation to:

- Heart disease
- Lung disease

- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Eye disease
- Life expectancy
- Infant mortality

(add more categories that you find)

Read about Indigenous Health Statistics at Australian Indigenous Health/*InfoNet*: <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au>

The Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council in Queensland website has Indigenous perspectives on Alcohol Management Plans in Communities and other alcohol-related issues: <http://www.accq.org.au>

The Queensland Government's Meeting Challenges Making Choices website has information about Alcohol management Plans and other Government/Community relationships: <http://www.mcmc.qld.gov.au/>

Google search for: 'Liddy Clark' Queensland Government Aboriginal Policy Minister – to research the controversy around her taking wine to an Aboriginal community Onemda – VicHealth Koori Health Unit; the Unit pursues a research practice philosophically grounded in Koori cultural values that supports Koori self-determination. Website includes aims and strategic goals, newsletter and other publications: <http://www.chs.unimelb.edu.au/koori/>

Aboriginal Culture for Health Workers – a Training Manual. Gordon O'Brien & Daniel Plooj, Flinders University, SA (written in 1973 but still relevant in many ways – set out



as a series of interactive multiple choice questions):

<http://www.medicineau.net.au/AbHealth/>

Victorian Koori Health Web Site – policy and on-line publications: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/koori/>

Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health: <http://www.crcah.org.au/>

Australian Government Indigenous Portal: <http://www.indigenous.gov.au>

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission: [www.hreoc.gov.au](http://www.hreoc.gov.au)

Australian Social Trends 2002 – Mortality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs%40.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/cd784ff808c14658ca256bcd008272f6!OpenDocument>

## Media

How are Indigenous people represented on television and in newspapers?

Map over a three week period the types of stories on Television and in newspapers that feature Indigenous people and issues.

Describe whether the media uses largely positive or negative language and images. Summarize what most people would assume about Indigenous people if they only based their information on what they saw and read in the media.

Compare Indigenous controlled media with mainstream media in terms of its content, approach to Indigenous issues, depiction of Indigenous people, presentation and style etc.

Choose a medium (radio, audio-visual, print) to create a communication that promotes the positives of being an Indigenous person.

Choose a medium, as above, to demonstrate how Indigenous people have become so marginalized and are worse off in terms of health, income and home ownership compared to non-Indigenous people.

Make a 30-60 second video aimed at non-Indigenous health professionals about how to best work with Indigenous people.

Message Stick program which has excellent video stories of all aspects of Indigenous life produced and presented by Indigenous people: <http://www.abc.net.au/message>

Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA): <http://www.caama.com.au>

Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association funded under the Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme: <http://www.teabba.com.au/bracs/>

SBS Indigenous Media Unit has a number of Indigenous news related programs: <http://news.sbs.com.au/livingblack/>

A youth oriented Indigenous publication: <http://www.vibe.com.au>

The National Indigenous Times is a newspaper distributed around Australia: <http://www.nit.com.au>

An Indigenous newspaper that circulates mainly around the eastern states of Australia – even though the word Koorie relates to the many Indigenous cultural groups in Victoria and parts of NSW: <http://www.koorimail.com> (ph: 02 6622 2666)

ICAM (Indigenous Cultural Affairs Magazine): <http://www.sbs.com.au/icam/>

**Go back to the True or False section on page 6 and review your original answers.**

## Further Reading and Resources

### Web Sites

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC): <http://www.atsic.gov.au>

SOFWeb – an initiative of the Department of Education and Training, Victoria – provides links to many Indigenous



oriented web sites: <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/sose/history/fed100/resources/resoururls.htm>

Hidden Histories Home Page, sponsored by Museum Victoria and the Department of Education and Training, Victoria: [http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/hidden\\_histories/histories/](http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/hidden_histories/histories/)

International Diabetes Institute – This site contains information about the causes and prevention of Diabetes: <http://www.diabetes.com.au>

Statpak Online contains references to current Australian Bureau of Statistics publications about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Websitedbs/D3310116.NSF/a91a469056624a32ca256eb000026ca7/9d64a6d901169839ca2567f900009eed!OpenDocument>

## Books

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Reynolds, H., *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1982.

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Reynolds, H., *Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1989.

Reynolds, H., *This Whispering in Our Hearts*. Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1998.

Reynolds, H., *Why Weren't We Told?* Viking-Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1999.

## Videos

*Frontier Series Parts 1, 2 & 3* (ABC Shop)

*Women of the Sun* (ABC Shop or SBS)

*Mabo – Life of an Island Man* (ABC Video)

*Scholar, Athlete, Warrior – Life of Charles*

*Perkins* (Message Stick, ABC Video)

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