

# The Dream Of Love

SCREEN EDUCATION

# This is a story about marriage. It's a story about a commitment and it's a story about love.

**T**HE *Dream of Love* is a personal and emotional story of love, marriage and commitment.

Motivated by a need to know more about his family, particularly his parents, Lawrence Johnston explores the nature and dynamics of his parents' fifty-nine year marriage and its impact on the romantic aspirations of his brothers and sisters.

**For Johnston, asking family personal and intimate questions about their experience of love and relationships was one of the hardest things he has ever had to do.** It is through these interviews with his parents and siblings that Johnston offers honest and telling observations about human relationships. Johnston does not avoid the truth, revealing the often-tempestuous nature of his parents' relationship. His siblings speak of the arguments and abuse that caused them as children to live with fear and uncertainty. As his parents near their sixtieth anniversary Johnston contemplates whether his parents were in love with each other and whether they love one another now.

A journey of strong emotions, both positive and negative, *The Dream of Love* offers a hopeful statement given that Johnston and his siblings have been able to make positive decisions about love and relationships.

This study guide to accompany *The Dream of Love* (Lawrence Johnston, 2005) a documentary by Rough Trade Pictures, has been written for middle and senior secondary students. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in English, Health and Human Development, SOSE, Religious Education and Media Studies.



*The Dream of Love* was produced in association with SBS Independent, the Indigenous Unit of the Australian Film Commission, the FFC, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services. *The Dream of Love* premiered at the Message Sticks Festival in June 2005 and has since screened at the Melbourne International Film Festival and film festivals in Auckland, Wellington and Brisbane.

## About the Filmmakers

Lawrence Johnston is an internationally award winning Writer, Director and Producer who began his career as a film repairer at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Film credits include *Night Out*, *Eternity* and *Life*. He has also worked for the Australian Film Commission as a project manager in Film Development. Johnston is currently developing a

number of projects including *Night*, *The Famous Spiegeltent* and *Rainbow Run*.

Peter George is an award winning producer. His credits include *Original Schtick*, a documentary about American artist Bob Fischer and its sequel *Schtick Happens*. George has also worked as the Victorian Editor of *if* magazine. He is currently producing the short film *William*.

# USING *THE DREAM OF LOVE* IN THE CLASSROOM

TEACHERS MAY SELECT FROM THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS' VIEWING AND CLOSE ANALYSIS OF *THE DREAM OF LOVE*.

## Before viewing the documentary

For some students in the class, viewing a documentary about the hurt that can be a part of families breaking down may be upsetting. Teachers need to respect the personal circumstances of these students and remain aware of their sensitivities.

## After viewing the documentary

- Is love just a dream? Is it a dream that can become a lived experience? What does Johnston's documentary suggest is the truth?
- When does *The Dream of Love* challenge your views and values?
- What are the central concerns of the documentary?
- Who do you think the documentary is trying to communicate its messages to?
- Why make such a documentary? As a class discuss the purpose and also the power of *The Dream of Love*.

- Create an A3 collage of words and images that offers your response to the ideas explored in *The Dream of Love*.

## Close Analysis

### Colin and Gloria

*'Mum and Dad have been married for fifty-nine years ... In this day and age I wondered why they'd been together so long. There were so many things we didn't know about them growing up and so many things we wanted to ask. So I've asked them to tell me their story.'*

Colin Johnston was born in Cunnamulla, Queensland in 1926. He is an indigenous Australian, and while he now proudly calls himself a 'blackfella', Johnston has acknowledged that during his childhood his father's background was not discussed. Colin spent most of his working life as a rigger on construction sites. Gloria Johnston was born in the Brisbane suburb of Wynnum in 1928. She has

spent most of her adult life raising her six children.

- Recall Colin's and Gloria's stories of meeting, courting and deciding to marry. What do their memories reveal about their relationship?
- After six months of marriage, Colin and Gloria's relationship became troubled. Discuss their very different accounts of this difficult time.
- In Brisbane in the 1950s, Colin took up boxing and then because of his brother's influence he began drinking. He explains 'one led to another one'. Consider Colin's recollections of his behaviour and discuss whether he shows any remorse. How did Gloria respond to her husband's aggressive and violent behaviour? How has Gloria been affected by years of domestic violence?

*'I'll punch you. I'll kill you.'* (Gloria)  
*'He'd hit her like a man.'* (Barry)  
*'There's no way I'd put up with what mum put up with.'* (Trish)  
*'It had to affect you ... it wasn't entirely right.'* (Colin)



**LEFT: COLIN AT 12 IN CUNNAMULLA;  
INSET: LAWRENCE PICTURED IN CANNES**

## The Johnston Children

*'I never dreamed I would one day make films. I never dreamed I would one day tell this story.'*

- *The Dream of Love* begins with Lawrence Johnston's story. His narration takes us from his birth in Wynnum in 1965 to Melbourne in 1980 and then shifts to the 1990 Cannes Film Festival. Why does Johnston choose this as his starting point?

Gary Johnston is the filmmaker's eldest brother and lives in Wynnum with his long time partner Faye. Gary has six daughters from a previous marriage. Like Gary, Barry Johnston left school and Wynnum when he was a teenager. Barry has been married twice. He has children from both relationships. Barry currently lives in Townsville with his wife, Kylee. Anne Jefferies is one of Johnston's twin sisters. Anne lives in Wynnum with her husband, Rob, and daughter, Grace. Patricia Bowles lives in Tingalpa in Brisbane. She is married to Ross and has two children, Gabriel and Lindsay. Johnston's other brother Terry chose not to appear in *The Dream of Love*.



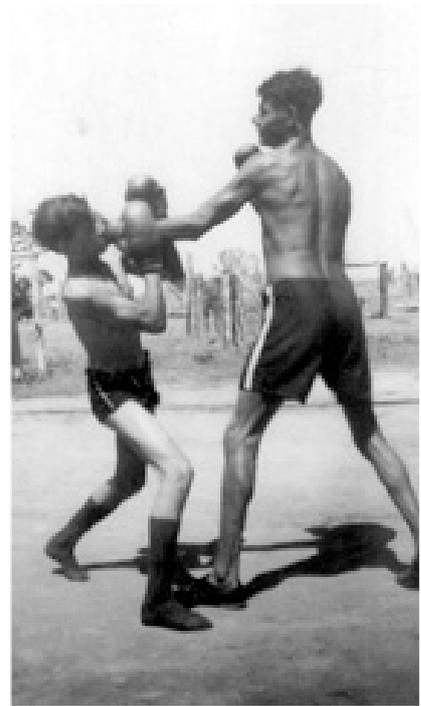
- In *The Dream of Love*, members of the Johnston family share their memories of domestic violence. What do their recollections tell us about Colin and Gloria's relationship, family life and the impact of growing up in a home compromised by fear and uncertainty?

***The Dream of Love* begins with Lawrence Johnston's story. His narration takes us from his birth in Wynnum in 1965 to Melbourne in 1980 and then shifts to the 1990 Cannes Film Festival**

- What does *The Dream of Love* tell us about the personalities of each of Johnston's siblings?
- *The Dream of Love* makes significant use of family photographs. List the various uses made of family photographs and discuss the symbolic nature of these images.

## Love

*'Really I didn't fall in love. I thought I was in love.'* (Gloria)  
*'This love stuff's a lot of shit.'* (Colin)



**In Brisbane in the 1950s, Colin took up boxing and then because of his brother's influence he began drinking.**

discover their view of love and romance. Present your findings to the class in the form of either a videotape, audiotape or written report.

## Marriage

**ABOVE: ADA JOHNSTON WITH FAMILY; ABOVE RIGHT: COLIN BOXING**

- Johnston's intention was to discover whether his parents were in love and whether they are now in love. What does *The Dream of Love* reveal to be the case?

*'I'm sure they love each other.'* (Trish)  
*'There must be love there.'* (Barry)  
*'They don't show love in the way we would like to see love.'* (Anne)

- How do the Johnston children view their parents' love now that they are adults?

*'Romantic love means to me to be able to kiss and hug somebody and to*

*passionately love them and to spend every moment with them. To be able to sit on the couch; to be able to put your arm around somebody and mean it.'* (Anne)

*'In this world today romantic love is only for the young dreamers, cause life's a bit harder than that.'* (Gary)

*'I loved to be loved ... I've got that now.'* (Barry)

*'Flowers and chocolates and candlelit dinners.'* (Trish)

- How has their parents' marriage shaped the Johnston children's view of love?
- Interview a range of people to

- As a class discuss the views of marriage expressed by Johnston's siblings. How has their parents' marriage shaped their relationships and marriages?
- Marriage by definition is the legal union of a man and a woman in order to live together. How do you define marriage? What place does marriage have in contemporary Australian society?

*'... for better or for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live...'*

- There has been a shift away from traditional marriage vows. Why do you think this is the case?

Are these vows irrelevant? Colin and Gloria probably recited these vows at their wedding. Consider the nature of their marriage within the context of these vows.

- Examine the weekly magazines that chronicle the marriages of celebrities. Discuss how the articles and photographs portray marriage. Do these accounts shape contemporary expectations of marriage?
- Work in a small group to create a media production that tells the story of a marriage and its impact on others.

## Commitment

*'In this world each of us have decisions to make about our relationships. Whether to stay or leave. Whether to love or not love. But as we know, love's more complicated than that. For better or worse, mum and dad have decided to stay [together].'*

*'I don't think divorce is a word they know.'*

*'It's an ugly word to them.'*

- There were times in their marriage when Colin cleared out. What brought him back? What is Colin's view of divorce? What is Gloria's view of divorce? Is divorce an unconsidered option for Colin and Gloria? Why?
- While Gloria approved, why did Anne and Trish find it difficult to leave home and embark on their lives as adults? In shaping a response consider their brothers' decision to move out of the family home and away from Wynnum.
- 'Dad's done the right thing by the family to help us through.' Does this view surprise you?
- How do the Johnston children explain their parents' decision to stay together?

## Racism and Violence

- How has Colin's life been marked by racism?
- Gloria's father disapproved of her relationship with Colin because

he was 'dark'. How did Gloria respond to her father's racism? Is contemporary Australian society more tolerant of relationships between people from different cultures?

- Anne and Trish share their experiences of racism. Recall their stories and discuss how their father's indigenous background has affected their lives.
- Is contemporary Australia a less racist society?
- Are the Johnstons proud of their indigenous identity?
- The Johnston children talk candidly about their experience of domestic violence. What do their differing accounts reveal about the impact of domestic violence on a marriage, a family and a home?
- What does *The Dream of Love* tell us about the connection between racism and domestic violence? And about the connection between alcohol and domestic violence?
- Investigate the organizations that support individuals and families who are victims of domestic violence in the city or regional area where you live.

## Production Values

- Consider the context in which the documentary was created and discuss how this context has shaped all we see and hear.
- The documentary's priority is to explore the complexities and complications of a marriage. How do the production values of the documentary reflect this aim?

*'At the end of the street where I grew up was the sea, and further on an island off the coast of Brisbane, the islands of green, St Helena and Stradbroke. They seemed far away, but somewhere I dreamed of disappearing to, of running away, of becoming something else.'*

- What expectations did the opening scene create? How were you positioned as a viewer?
- Johnston reveals his family's sto-

ries and views through interviews. Evaluate the effectiveness of this technique. How does Johnston share his perspective?

- Examine the narrative structure of *The Dream of Love* and consider how the documentary tells the story of Colin and Gloria's marriage.
- What is the role of the narrator? How does the narration shape your response?
- How do images work in a symbolic way to reveal the concerns of *The Dream of Love*?
- How does music contribute to the telling of the story?
- Watch the closing sequence of *The Dream of Love*. What is the filmmaker's intention and how is this intention achieved?

## Extended Responses

- '*The Dream of Love* is a journey of strong emotions, both positive and negative.' Discuss.
- '*The Dream of Love* is a hopeful statement.' Do you agree?

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This study guide was produced by ATOM (damned@netspace.net.au). For more information on *Screen Education* magazine or to download other free study guides visit [www.metromagazine.com.au](http://www.metromagazine.com.au) For hundreds of articles on Media Studies, Screen Literacy, Multiliteracy and Film Studies, visit [www.theeducationshop.com.au](http://www.theeducationshop.com.au)

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