

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

The Australian Long Story **Edited by Mandy Sayer**

Years 10 -12

Background

Malouf's, Winton's and Le's exquisitely rendered stories each explore the rituals of blood, sport and violence that accompany the transition to manhood in small-town Australia. Peter Goldsworthy's harrowing Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam and Garner's redoubtable Honour speak tellingly to each other as examinations of the emotional damage inflicted by different notions of family, while Gillian Mears and Louis Nowra bring a small measure of humour to the selection. Jolley is at her formidable best and Carey brings a dash of 1970s experimentation to temper the realism.

<<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/anthologys-evolution-is-a-long-story/story-e6frg8no-1225787530715>> review by Liam Davison

The editor tells us that although Australia has a rich oral storytelling tradition dating back thousands of years, and an equally rich short story tradition, the long short story is a more recent phenomenon, post 1970 (with a few exceptions).

Two criteria for inclusion are being an Australian author and using an Australian setting, which has meant that the selection covers the last four decades. The range of stories shows Australia 'from a period of great change to cultural and political landscape' (page 10).

The organisational structure starts with the 'elder master', David Malouf, and a setting in the first half of the twentieth century to 'young gun', Nam Le and a contemporary context.

Objectives

At Level 6, students read, view, analyse, critique, reflect on and discuss contemporary and classical imaginative texts that explore personal, social, cultural and political issues of significance to their own lives.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2009) *VELS English Domain Level 6*. <<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vels/level6.html#>>

In the later years students will analyse both the historical genres and literary traditions of Australian literature and world literature and contemporary texts. ACARA (2009) *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English. Literature*, page 9).

Focus

Australian masculinity

Both stories deal with young men - Winton's set in the 1960s and Le's in the present. Compare the two stories set on the opposite sides of Australia, four decades apart.

Winton's is told in the first person by a young woman whose perceptions of Boner McPharlin are her construction rather than his reality. This could be a point of discussion.

- How much does the reader trust Jackie's views? Do we understand why she decided to go in Boner's car? Are they self-serving reasons?

Le's is third person, though largely focalised through Jamie – all the events come to us through him. Both young men are forced into behaving in particular ways, into reinforcing others' views of them.

Below are some suggestions about similarities and differences between the two stories, but students will surely find their own resonances and surprises.

- Similarities – friendships, violence, tribal nature of adolescence, difficulty of establishing relationships with girls, family, discrepancy between self perception and how others see you, strange relationships.
- Differences: social mores, attitudes, pastimes, vices, 'innocence' of the earlier period, 'hippy teachers', etc.

Focus

Epiphany

There are moments of epiphany for both characters. Indeed Le uses the word: *'Only Lester's face brimmed with epiphany – a line had been crossed – and nothing had changed'* (page 531). Discuss what is meant/implied here. The epiphany in Winton's story is Jackie's and an uncomfortable and shocking one.

- Is there betrayal in both stories?

'There are no heroes in Nam's stories. They are full of average people who find themselves playing a role in a tragedy, people who've been thrust onto a stage that just happens to have the immensity of history as its scrim.'

<<http://www.bombsite.com/issues/108/articles/3305>>

Use this quote as a point for exploring both stories. For instance, is it accurate of Le's story and is it also true of Winton's story? How much of the appeal of the stories and their powerful impact on the reader, lies in this ordinariness?

Assessment

The editor tells us that the preference for the story suits a trait of our national character – a restrained laconic voice, and our preference for the appearance of equality.

- After reading the long stories in this collection, as a more recent phenomenon, identify how they confirm such a picture or challenge it.

Students could write this as a review article, an opinion piece, or as a narrative that reveals its point of view (straight or satirical) a pictorial/graphic response, a dramatic response (straight or satirical).

This would be ideal as a group assessment piece.

Further reading

Ford, Richard *The Granta Book of the American Long Story*

Silvery, Craig *Jasper Jones*

Le, Nam *The Boat*

Goldsworthy, Peter *Keep it Simple Stupid; Little Deaths*

Winton, Tim *The Turning*

Interviews with Nam Le

<<http://www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/3695/prmID/1831>>

Richard Ford and Nam Le

<<http://www.themonthly.com.au/nam-le-conversation-cate-kennedy-about-boat-1109>>

NAM LE
TIM WINTON
PETER CAREY
LOUIS NOWRA
GILLIAN MEARS
DAVID MALOUF
HELEN GARNER
ELIZABETH JOLLEY
PETER GOLDSWORTHY