

**IT DON'T MEAN A THING IF IT AINT GOT THAT ZING!
WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO.**

Introduction: Read the first chapter... listen to Geoffrey Rush's voice over.

Welcome and my background.

I am teaching at Xavier College, on the fringe of Gawler. We have been established for 10 years with senior classes beginning in the fourth year, 1998. I started teaching 1971 and have been involved and focused on changes that have been occurring during that time. When I started we were very much into the FR Leavis era, where much more emphasis was placed on the importance on the author's intention and on the words of the text itself. When I returned to work in 1986 we were focused on the students' personal responses to a text and there was a strong emphasis on adolescent fiction and students making sense out of that. Now there seems to be a strong focus on critical reading of a text and how we make meaning and how that is shaped by such factors as the type of text, its context, its purpose and audience, and our understanding of other texts. Now the meaning of a text is located within relationships between text and context, composer and responder. Texts can be said to intervene in the world, presenting particular versions of it and thereby suggesting how it is or should be. The social and political changes that overtook the world of the 1960s and 1970s and the following three decades challenged the dominant approach to literature. New ways of reading evolved.

Cultural materialism

Feminism

New Historicism

Post Colonialism

Post Modernism

Psychoanalysis

Reader Response

See explanatory handout...adapted from Thomson-Nelson 2003, *Textual Journeys: Exploring Senior English*, Herrett, Kelliher, Simon

NEW WAYS OF READING TEXTS:

CULTURAL MATERIALISM- questions the past, but insists we return to the present to explore meaning. Cultural materialism will focus on the racism, sexism, and social exploitation that texts deliberately or unwittingly reveal.

FEMINISM:- questions the past in terms of the representation of women and the relationship between men and women, rereading texts for the assumptions of gender that underpin them.

NEW HISTORICISM:- questions rather than accepts the representation of the political and social conditions of the time in which a text was produced. What is missing and what is actually present?

POST COLONIALISM:- questions the notion of what is considered 'worthy' literature and insists that the dominance of texts in the English language ignores the rich traditions of other cultures. It also challenges the way minority or previously colonised cultures have been depicted in English language texts and insists on the value of hearing previously silenced voices.

POST MODERNISM:- Challenges the idea of meaning as a reflection of deeper values and suggests that meaning is in fact constructed through textual connections between texts. It questions the distinction between popular culture and so called high art.

PSYCHOANALYSIS:- sees meaning in terms of the psychological profile of the author; the text is a symptom of the author's conscious and unconscious desires and needs. Since it is through language that we attempt to understand our world, and ourselves there is always a gap between the real and the naming of the real.

READER RESPONSE:- emphasises the effect of a text on the individual reader and the way meaning is made by the reader in response to the text. The reader is seen to bring knowledge and understanding to the text rather than receiving these things from the text. Readers are asked to empathise with characters and to question how their own values and context shape their understanding.

Our school has many students who don't read or engage with literary texts. Many of their homes are without books and their caregivers do not value academic knowledge etc.

Why did I risk using the movie with a group of year 11 students?

Peter Carey had just won the Booker Prize for the second time; this time for *The True Story of the Kelly Gang*. I had seen the movie, *Oscar and Lucinda*, and loved it but remembered struggling to read the novel when it won the Booker Prize in 1988. However, I was very conscious of Carey as an Australian expat author and Gillian Armstrong as an Australian director. I was also thinking that the young people of today have such a steady diet of American, I wanted to promote some excellence that was Australian.

I had reservations, though because the response of the theatre audience on the night I saw the movie was one of confusion and bewilderment.

?? Play the last words of the movie

The last words of the movie are voice over from Geoffrey Rush: 'A dream; a Lie; A Wager; Love.'

This is the story of two unusual people. It is a romantic movie-a love story. The characters are eccentric and we are often uncomfortable in their presence. But we sympathise and empathise with them both. The narrative traces both an allegorical journey- and a real journey of self-discovery for Oscar - an awakening. It is biography- focuses on the origins of one family as the narrator explains the fate and fortunes of his great grandfather and how the family came about. It is ironic and satirical, as it pokes fun at traditional religion and British values. It scrutinizes the role of women in traditional society. The photography of the Australian landscape is spectacular. In a sense it is the story of young Australia

Synopsis:

'The movie opens in England in the youth of Oscar Hopkins and follows his education as a clergyman and his consequent journey across the world to Australia, and into the outback. On the way to Australia he meets Lucinda, owner of a glass works and defier of conventions; these two characters share a great deal, not the least of which is a mutual obsession with gambling. Incorporating an aboriginal viewpoint, and a sharp awareness of "the outrage that was committed on these people" (Carey, from Geoffrey Dutton, "Carey and the Cringe". The Weekend Australia 20—21 February 1988, p7), Oscar and Lucinda explores the infancy of white Australia and the harsh realities, racial, sexual, and social, of that time. It is both a beautiful and tragic love story, and a searing indictment of colonial practice.' From ehlt.flinders.edu.au/english/Peter_Carey/Synopses.html

?? Read other reviews.

I began with the word **eccentric** and all of its synonyms. This gave me the opportunity to teach about abstract nouns and adjectives and also to promote the use of thesaurus and dictionary (may seem really obvious to all of you)

Eccentricity, abnormality, caprice, foible, idiosyncrasy, nonconformity, oddity, peculiarity, quirk, strangeness, unconventionality, waywardness, weirdness.

Erratic, freakish, idiosyncratic, peculiar, strange, abnormal, anomalous, bizarre, capricious, outlandish, unconventional, queer, strange, uncommon, weird, irregular, unique, whimsical, quaint, oddball, insane, aberrant

We discussed some of the meanings and classified into negative, positive, neutral.

I asked them to discuss the following questions in pairs. (SACSA- IDENTITY)

Why is it that eccentricity is frowned on and considered strange and outlandish?

?? Would you like to be called eccentric? Why?

?? Do you speak, dress, walk and otherwise behave in order to stand out from the crowd or to fit in with it?

?? Do you think most people would answer 'yes' 'or 'no' to the previous question? Why?

?? Make a list of eccentrics you know. How do you feel about these people?

?? Do eccentrics deliberately behave differently?

?? If, right this minute, you decided to behave eccentrically, what are some of the things you would do? How would you feel as you were doing them? How would your classmates feel? What might they do?

?? In what ways does society discourage eccentric behaviour?

Discuss the responses and then pose similar questions about stereotypes.

I had to explain 'Plymouth Brethren' and fill in some background about 1848. Have asked students to research. Later, we also estimated what the year may have been when Oscar grew up and traveled to Australia and placed it into the context of what we knew about Australian history (expeditions) Discovery, Gold Rush – a mini England in Australia.

We viewed the movie first and students completed the narrative scaffold (from Heinemann, Eather, *In Focus, Reading and Viewing film and video texts*). (handout)

Groups were formed to discuss the structure of the movie, each group being responsible for a single area. They used the sheet 'Sound effects and camera angles log' and used the recording on this to discuss the questions:

View the movie in chunks and stop for discussion by various groups.

?? Let's view the first ten minutes.....

Use the sheet while viewing and record at least one sound effect and one example of camera work.

ORIENTATION: What kind of world of the characters does the movie establish?

Oscar's world of asceticism- the Plymouth Brethren. Read from the novel.....

Discuss the Christmas Pudding and his motherless childhood.

What about Lucinda's world? The contrast between the gloomy seascape and the free sunny scape of the Australian bush. Both orphaned, one by naïve prayer/gamble? the other circumstances. How does the movie do this? How are we introduced to the characters? Lucinda's outlandish clothing, her frequenting of gambling establishments and her association with men rather than women.

What do we learn about the characters? Oscar's obsessive scarecrow like behaviour.

How are we introduced to the physical environment? What do we learn about the physical environment? Fear of the sea. Is there anything unusual about the setting? How are we shown the relationships between characters?

Contrast Lucinda's love of the water.

What problems are foreshadowed in the orientation?

COMPLICATION:

What goes wrong? He rejects his father's religion. Oscar begins to gamble- his naiveté. How does the problem start? How is the problem important to the lives of the central characters? Lucinda buys a glass factory with her inheritance- independent woman dresses differently. Oscar believes she love Mr Hassett.

Focus on cause /effect.

SERIES OF EVENTS:

Identify each of the events that lead to the climax. The wager about the successful arrival of the glass church. The quest to be fulfilled... Is this a type of fantasy? Do we see Oscar cast as the knight rescuing the damsel in distress? How do these events build tension or excitement, sadness or sympathy? What do these events reveal about the characters in terms of their personality and /or motivations.

How do these events give shape to the climax or conclusion?

CRISIS or CLIMAX:

Explain how and which events have led to a situation where nothing could be worse or more dangerous, or more hopeless. Killing of Mr Jeffris Which event is the climax? Only one? Is this consistent with the setting and the characters? Is it believable? How has the series of events so far suggested how the climax or crisis might be resolved?

RESOLUTION:

What is the solution to the problem?

CODA:

What larger issues or ideas have been commented on?

(Watch the beginning of the movie) Regroup. See if the group can use the various questions to read the movie in different ways.

Could use a jigsaw process to read the film. Explain.

Start with READER RESPONSE

How do you respond to the text? Which characters do you empathise with in the text? Which characters do you dislike and why? What connections can you make between this text and your own experiences? How did you feel about the ending of the movie?

Can we focus on it from a CULTURAL MATERIALISM point of view where the focus is on racism, sexism, and social exploitation that the text reveals? Who holds the power? What does the text reveal about the society of the time? What does the film say about racism or status in society? Who is socially exploited? Refer to the Chinese gambling venues. Compare them to the houses of the British .

NEW HISTORICISM; questions rather than accepts the representation of the political and social conditions of the time in which a text was produced. Discuss the role of minister and support by the parish etc... Can we read the beginning in this light? Inequality? Class struggle? Etc.

FEMINIST READING: What does this text suggest about the position of women at the time in which the story is set? Lucinda, the servant women, the minister's wife, women in the colonies, aboriginal women
What ideas of romantic love does this text represent? How are the relationships between men and women represented? How are different versions of masculinity and femininity presented by Carey? Armstrong?

POST COLONIAL ISM the journey across uncharted territory and the slaughter of the aborigines. How does the film draw our attention to the brutality of the situation? How does it tell the story of the aborigines?

PSYCHOANALYSIS- How does the story provide an insight into Carey's state of mind?

PRACTICAL CRITICISM: -what does Carey have to say about honesty/truth and love and compassion and tolerance of differences?