



# SAMSON & DELILAH

— TRUE LOVE —

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY GARY SIMMONS AND VYVYAN STRANIERI



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STILLS PHOTOGRAPHER: MARK ROGERS

**CURRICULUM LINKS:** *Samson & Delilah* is suitable for middle and senior secondary students studying: Australian History, English, Studies of Society and Environment / Human Society and its Environment / Social Education, Indigenous Studies, Media Studies.

**WHY STUDY SAMSON & DELILAH?:** This study guide provides a framework for discussion and writing, teaching and learning material, a running sheet and classroom activities to help teachers and students develop an understanding of Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences in Australia as they are delineated in *Samson & Delilah*. The film simultaneously explores the gaps, but also the bridges that exist between two worlds. Given the Central Australian location of the film and its remoteness to the majority of viewers geographically and personally, this study guide has been written to enhance understanding of a world that is more often than not glossed over or misconstrued or subject to sometimes reductive conclusions via newspaper and television news reports in the large cities where most Australians live.

## INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC ACCLAIM

**A**T THE TIME of the publication of this study guide there is a lot of speculation on the film winning an Oscar at the 2010 Academy Awards where it has been nominated as a candidate for Best Foreign Language Film.

*Samson & Delilah* won the prestigious Camera d'Or award at Cannes (2009) and has had success at Toronto, Zurich, Munich and Telluride Film Festivals. It will also be screened at the London Film Festival.

*Samson & Delilah* is not only written and directed by Warwick Thornton, it is his debut feature after several short films which also have won national and international acclaim and prizes.

*Samson & Delilah* recently won Best Feature Film award at Saint-Tropez's Cinema des Antipodes Festival and its young stars, Rowan McNamara and Marissa Gibson, took out the male and female acting awards. Australian actor Anthony LaPaglia, who was on the jury, intimated:

*I think it should become a part of the Australian school curriculum and all kids should have to watch this film to get a greater understanding of their country and where it is at right now.*

Warwick Thornton, the director, puts it so honestly and accurately in one of the many interviews he has done in the wake of the film's success. In an interview with Jim Schembri (*The Age*, 21 October 2009), Warwick Thornton asserts,



*We gave Australians access to a place they'd never been before. The only time they'd ever been to that community or met kids like Samson and Delilah was on the five o'clock news! It's made me so proud and so happy that people were watching this film and getting access to information they didn't have before.*

In light of the Rudd Government's official 2008 apology to Australia's indigenous people for past wrongs, Thornton believes *Samson & Delilah* can also be seen as a back-handed post-Sorry film.

"'Sorry' doesn't fill fridges, either," he says. "It makes a lot of people stronger and makes them take bigger steps towards their future, but in my camp it pretty well doesn't mean anything."

*The 'sorry' word was designed for our grandmothers, and it did work. But for the Samson and Delilahs of the world it doesn't mean shit. When you're starving on the streets and you're homeless, that word just doesn't cut it.*

## SYNOPSIS

Samson and Delilah live in a remote Aboriginal community in the Central Australian desert. In a small Indigenous community, everything seems to happen in a cycle. There are daily rhythms which are repeated and despite a phone link into the community, this is a world which is out of sight and out of mind, except for those who live there.

Samson is a mischievous, yet shy, fifteen year old who yearns for something more. Although boredom set in long ago, Samson's spirit is often expressed via his humour, his love of music and an awkward and growing love for an initially reluctant Delilah.

Unable to express his desire for something more, Samson's personal escape comes in sniffing petrol. When a violent outburst takes place at home, Samson breaks the cycle and his journey begins.

Sixteen-year-old Delilah is the sole carer of her artist grandmother, Nana fancies Samson for her son-in-law. When Nana passes away, Delilah is held responsible and the traditional punishment is harsh. After a period respecting Delilah's grief, Samson feels compelled to step into the breach and in his own way protects Delilah from the ostracism of the community.

In a stolen car with no food, money or idea where they are headed they turn their backs on the community and head towards the desert horizon. The next day, out of fuel, they walk into the closest town.

The two teenagers soon discover that life outside their community can be harsh. Lost, hungry and marginalised, Samson and Delilah sense a growing love which fills the void in their lives. But this love is tough love, given their predicament, their vulnerability and their place on the margins.

Delilah searches for a way to improve their situation and begins to paint. She tries desperately to sell her work, but fruitlessly. In frustration, she pushes her work at potential buyers aware of their discomfort. Samson is caught between his addiction and his love for Delilah. Delilah also succumbs to petrol sniffing after the trauma of male violence and violation.

They are separated for a short time when Delilah is injured but Delilah re-appears like an angel of mercy as Samson slowly self-destructs alone and under the bridge. But ultimately and hopefully, Delilah's love guides him away from the nemesis of addiction and takes him home.



## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

### ‘Let’s be honest’

What is your first hand experience of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations? For teachers it might be participating in the Long Walk organised by Michael Long, the former Essendon AFL footballer, who walked from Melbourne to Canberra to speak to the Prime Minister. Further back in time, it might have been the mass Reconciliation walks that attracted participation and provided a public focus for the reconciliation of versions of history as well as reconciliation and acceptance of the effects of the forced removal of Indigenous children by draconian Government policies for over 100 years.

Perhaps there is the public profile of the Close the Gap lobby group whose aim is to close the seventeen-year gap between the life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

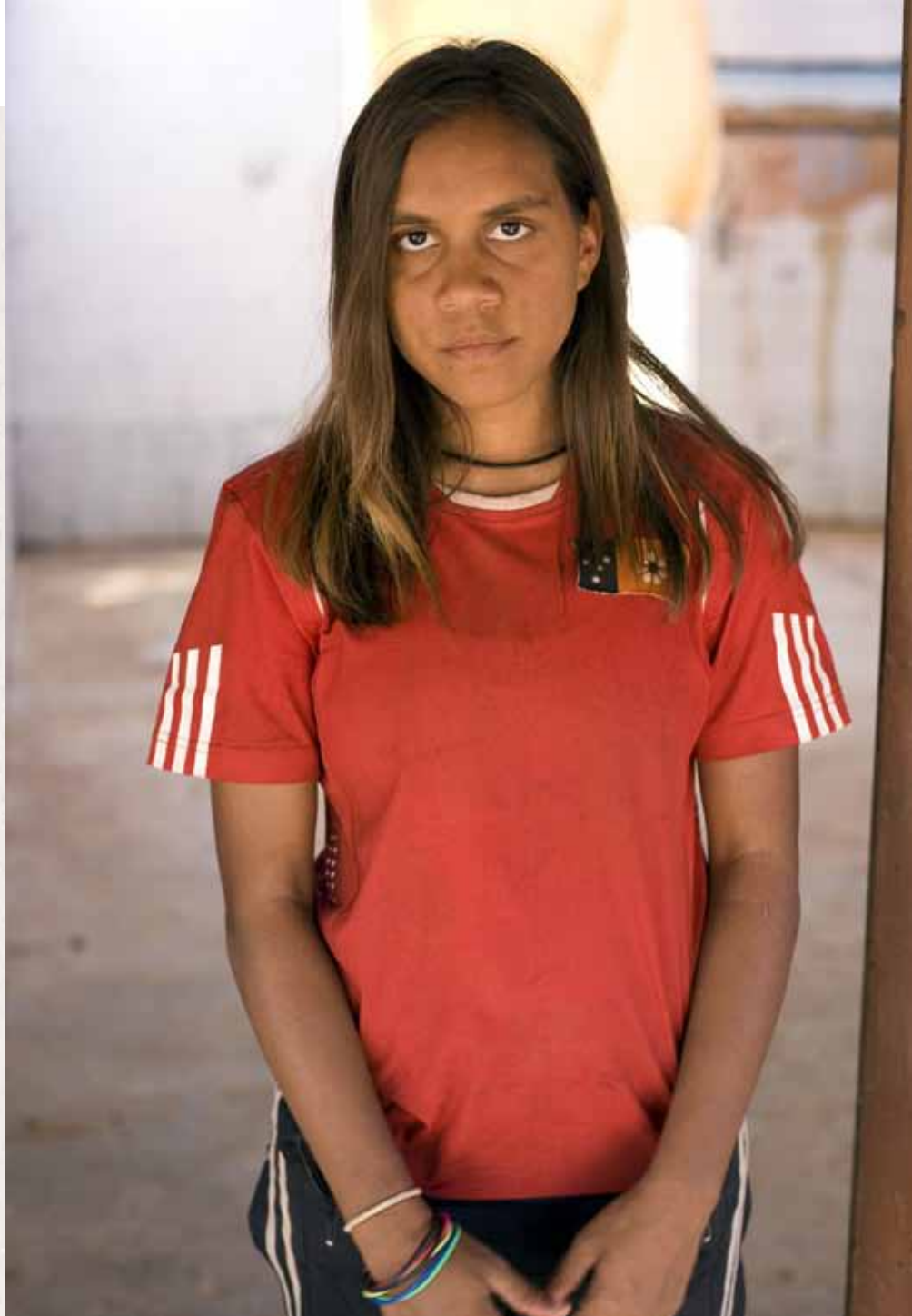
Perhaps you like the Bangarra dance troupe or Indigenous painting or the songs of Archie Roach. Perhaps some of your sporting heroes are Indigenous.

Perhaps you have read books like *Home* by Larissa Behrendt or *Burnt Stick* by Anthony Hill or Doris Pilkington’s *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence* which triggered the important film on the stolen generations.

Perhaps you have watched films like *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Phillip Noyce, 2002), *Ten Canoes* (Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr, 2006) or *Beneath Clouds* (Ivan Sen, 2002).

Perhaps you have heard the young hip hop act, Tjimba and the Yung Warriors.

Perhaps you have heard or read the ideas of Indigenous leaders Pat or Mick Dodson, Noel Pearson who has just written the most recent *Quarterly Essay*, Larissa Behrendt or Lowitja O’Donoghue.



### Activity

- Make a list of all the points of entry to Indigenous experience that the class can bring together, including direct personal experiences with Indigenous cultures. It must be remembered that there is a multiplicity of Indigenous cultures and languages.

### Activity

#### Who and what frames culture?

The notion of culture or cultures is in-

herent in all lives. *Samson & Delilah* as a film challenges the assumptions not only about cultures but also perceptions of cultures. As an idea and a reality, ‘culture’ is often framed by Western and non-Indigenous interests and criteria. This can lead to what is called ethnocentrism; a narrow perception of culture in which the dominant culture is always the cultural benchmark.

But culture is a lived, living and breathing experience which, while it can invite comparisons, is autonomous and specific to a time, place and the inhabitants of that time and place. So culture is not really singular or

EXPERIENCES	PERSONAL DEFINITIONS
GRIEF	
SURVIVAL	
COMPASSION	
LOVE	
DESPAIR	
LOSS	
BLAME	
SPIRIT	
SELF-KNOWLEDGE	
DESIRE	
HOPE	
ANXIETY	
REDEMPTION	
FEAR	
FATE	
CHANCE	
CHOICE	
COMMITMENT	
RESPONSIBILITY	

#### ITEM 1

one-dimensional.

- How do you define your own culture?
- How would you define identity?
- What influences your culture and identity?
- What do you understand of Indigenous identities and culture prior to watching *Samson & Delilah*?
- There are cultural stereotypes which have been perpetuated about Indigenous identities and culture.
- Why do you think these attitudes and stereotypes existed in non-Indigenous, mainstream circles in the first place?

### Suggested starting points

#### Activity

- Make notes on each of the following human experiences, emotional spaces and ideas before watching the film. Compare and contrast your notes with those of your friends.  
**See ITEM 1.**
- Write your personal definitions in the right-hand column. Most of these are open to interpretation, as you will discover when comparing your individual responses with those of other students.
- Return to these at a later date and

write short responses on how these concepts are realised in the experiences of characters in *Samson & Delilah*.

### Forerunners to *Samson & Delilah*

The screen is a cultural marker and refractor of Indigenous identity. In cinema, there is a continuum of the representation of Indigenous experience and identity. This continuum on the screen starts from the ethnographic/anthropological gaze of non-Indigenous filmmakers in the late nineteenth century and goes to the emergence of screen narratives that privilege and promote heterogeneous Indigenous identities and voices. More and more of these films are being made by Indigenous filmmakers such as Warwick Thornton.

This study guide recommends two relevant websites that will provide information on this continuum of films. These websites have comprehensive lists of films made by both non-Indigenous and the growing number of Indigenous filmmakers.

Both <http://australianscreen.com.au/indigenous/> and <http://www.creativespirits.info/resources/movies/index.html> have this information.

Look for early films like *Uncivilised* (1936) and *Jedda* (1955) made by Charles Chauvel. Elsa Chauvel also worked on the second of these films. Have a look at a recent film like *Beneath Clouds* and you will get a strong sense of this continuum.

#### Activity

- Browse the list of Indigenous filmmakers, read the synopses of the films and present an overview of five films that have captured your attention. If you have access to the web in your classroom show some clips of these films that can be found at <http://australianscreen.com.au/indigenous/>.





*Delilah* <<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s2542612.htm>> and write down the issues you can identify that the film might explore.

## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

### First impressions

If you take the time to respond to these simple questions on just about any text that you study, you will have a sound basis for writing any essays or tasks set for you in class.

### Activity

#### Preliminary questions on *Samson & Delilah*

- 1 What ideas, themes and issues does the film explore? How are they analysed or explored?
- 2 How does the narrative structure of the film work to support its ideas? Is the film linear? Do we have to fill in gaps?
- 3 How do the physical setting and the cultural context work in the film to develop its themes and ideas?
- 4 Are characters represented sympathetically? Do they change? Are the characters stereotyped? Are they polarised? Do we feel ambivalent about them?
- 5 How do voice, dialogue, action and image (visual cues and codes) and their interaction define character? Look here at the mood created by the use of colour or lack of colour at particular moments.



- 6 What values seem to be transmitted in *Samson & Delilah*? How is the viewer positioned? Or to put it another way, what are you as viewer invited to accept or reject in the representation of the world of *Samson & Delilah* and its closure?
- 7 Who or what is missing from the story?
- 9 What does it say about children, adults, males, females, and cultures?

#### Issues in *Samson & Delilah*

##### Introduction

The theatrical trailer to any film will whet the appetite of the viewer and usually foreshadow the characters and ideas that are being represented in the film.

- Watch the trailer of *Samson &*

##### Love

What follows is an extract from the *Samson & Delilah* press kit in which Warwick Thornton talks about his ideas that generated the making of the film. Read what Warwick has to say about the love story.

*Samson & Delilah is a love story, but perhaps not in the traditional sense. It is a story that deals with life on a remote Aboriginal community and the ways in which one young couple manage to escape from this mundane existence. The central theme that I wanted to explore is love, but not in the conventional sense, not a usual sort of love – a love that develops out of survival.*

*It is a story about the many different ways in which love grows. Samson and Delilah have a very unusual relationship and their love is strong but understated and it develops as their trust develops. But will it save them?*

*It's a film about people who are classed not even as people – let alone people who are allowed to love or have emotions. They're not allowed to be human. They are the untouchables.*

*I believe that the story of these two young lovers, Samson and Delilah, is an important and unique story to tell – it's an untold story. In the end, even though life is going to be hard, I want*



the audience to feel like there are real possibilities of success for them ... A new life ... Hope.

### Activity

- What kind of a love story do you see in *Samson & Delilah* and how does it differ from a conventional cinematic love story?

### Exploitation of Indigenous art

There has been a real boon in the commercial growth of Indigenous art. The film explores the commodification of Indigenous Australian art, which is the strongest sector of Australia's fine arts industry with an annual turnover of about \$100 million a year in 2007. Investors have capitalised on the popularity of Indigenous art, and in some cases have been accused of profiteering from Indigenous artists.

In the film, this is revealed in Delilah discovering one of Nana Kitty's paintings in a gallery run by a non-Indigenous owner. The price tag on one of her paintings is \$22K.

The brutal indifference of the owner is also revealed in the scene in which Delilah tries to sell one of her own paintings. Warwick Thornton also addressed this issue of exploitation in his short film *Mimi*.



### Activity

There is a quite vociferous debate over what happens to Indigenous art. Here are just some of the views of the sale of Indigenous art.

- Should Indigenous art be for private sale and profit?
- Should it only be exhibited in public galleries?
- Should there be fairer prices paid to the artists?
- How can this be guaranteed?
- What are the cultural and ethical considerations that surround Indigenous art?
- What do you think?

This link <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2008/s2314182.htm>> will take you to a website that outlines a *Four Corners* episode on ABC TV which investigates this very issue.

### Activity

Find out about the work of an Indigenous artist such as Emily Kam Kngwarray or any other prominent Indigenous artist and present a data show or virtual gallery to the class that shows some of the artist's work. Get the rest of the class to talk about what they like about the works.

In *Samson & Delilah*, the shot of the dead bird references one of the most important Indigenous visual artists and filmmakers, the late Michael Riley from the Wiradjuri/Gamileroi nation.

Michael Riley is known for his evocative and lyrically symbolic photographs and his stunning documentary representation of his own wider community, in which his portraits capture the beauty and strength of his subjects.

To explore Michael Riley's art, visit the National Gallery of Australia website for a comprehensive investigation of his work.

### Activity

- Why might Warwick Thornton have chosen to reference Michael Riley?

### Petrol sniffing

Like the film *Yolngu Boy* (Stephen Johnson, 2001), *Samson & Delilah* confronts petrol sniffing head on. The perpetual image of Samson inhaling fumes addictively, reinforced by Delilah's own use of petrol to obliterate the pain of violent assault provides a clear picture of a social problem, that while not endemic, must be recognised and confronted in young Indigenous lives. This honesty is one of the strengths of the film. There is no skirting around petrol sniffing and its consequences. Interestingly enough, it is Delilah who is the catalyst in Samson's detox. She removes the temptation and the source of Samson's addiction in more ways than one.

It is very easy to jump to conclusions on any sort of substance abuse. Warwick Thornton has decided to grasp



the nettle on this issue and subvert prejudices and stereotypes that surround those who fall into substance abuse. One of the messages of the film is that the petrol sniffer is someone's friend or family. In the case of Samson, there is also a young man with a generous spirit who is being extinguished by his addiction.

Read the following outline on petrol sniffing and write a report for a newspaper which investigates petrol sniffing with its personal and social costs <<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/health/petrol-sniffing.html>>.

### Role of Christianity in Delilah's life

There is a sequence in the film in which Delilah wanders into a church. She looks at all the iconography with a kind of reverence. Throughout, the clergyman looks on without saying a word and watches her leave without any attempt to comfort her, given her state of mind and her physical injuries.

At the end of the film, Delilah places a cross on the tin wall.

### Activity

- Why do you think Warwick Thornton decided to include these sequences in the film?
- Research the influence and impact of the Christian church on Indigenous people.
- To explore how Indigenous artists have represented imposed Christianity in their communities look at <[http://www.flinders.edu.au/artmuseum/documents/edpack\\_holy.doc](http://www.flinders.edu.au/artmuseum/documents/edpack_holy.doc)> which represents the exhibition *Holy, Holy, Holy* a focus on: *... the enduring influence of Christianity on Aboriginal people looking primarily at contemporary visual art, contextualised by historical material. The first contact that many Indigenous people had with white society was with missionaries. These missionaries went with the objective of converting Aboriginal people to Christianity.*



### Cultural practices

As distant observers, we might be puzzled by some of the cultural practices that are integral to the community in which Samson and Delilah live. You might have been puzzled by the cutting of hair by both Delilah and Samson at an intense moment of sadness. You might have been puzzled by the attack on Delilah by the 'aunties' on Nana's death. You might be puzzled by the lack of verbal communication between Samson and Delilah (even in the context of Samson's apparent inability to speak). You might be unfamiliar with Nana's reference to the matching skin or kinship of Samson and Delilah.

The official website <<http://samsonanddelilah.com.au/faqs.php>> will provide you with responses to these elements of the film which you might have found outside your own experience.

### Activity

- Before going to this website, develop a collective series of questions which have perplexed you as a class. Then, go to the official website and find the explanations to the questions. If the question is not dealt with, teachers can join *Samson & Delilah* on Facebook and those questions can be answered.



## Violence against women

Without wanting to reduce this to just an issue, violence against Indigenous women is clearly illustrated in the sequence in which Delilah is abducted and violated by the young non-Indigenous males.

There are two contexts in looking at this sequence.

The first is that there has been a lot of adverse publicity in the press about violence against Indigenous women in Aboriginal communities and nearby towns as if the perpetrators of violence are usually Indigenous males.

The second context is the history of violence against Indigenous females by non-Indigenous males going back centuries.

### Activity

- Why did the filmmaker include this sequence and why did he not reveal the violence first-hand?

### Inequality

There are obvious moments in the film in which the inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are highlighted.

Some of these moments in the film are highlighted when Delilah sits watching the two schoolgirls eating ice cream and using a mobile phone. Delilah is so near yet so far. There is a gaping chasm between Delilah and the girls here. The indifference and discomfort of non-Indigenous diners in the cafe strip is another moment in which this divide is tangible.

In the community, it is the very basic health care services. Nana is merely given prescription drugs as a panacea. It is the basic housing and lack of any infrastructure which might also draw attention to the inequalities.

While the film is both personal and political, there is a stronger emphasis on the human story of Samson and

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TODAY are the most disadvantaged group of people in Australia. On all the major indicators such as health, housing, education and employment, Indigenous people are significantly worse off than other Australians.

In 2007, the statistics highlight some of the big gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

- Life expectancy is seventeen years less for Indigenous people: that's 59.4 years for Indigenous men vs. 76.6 years for all Australian men and 64.8 years for Indigenous women vs. 82.0 years for all Australian women.
- Infant mortality (the rate at which babies die) is three times as high, and Indigenous babies are twice as likely to be low birth weight, which makes them much more vulnerable to illness.
- There are significantly higher rates of chronic diseases, communicable diseases, disabilities and mental health problems amongst Indigenous people.
- Indigenous students are half as likely to stay at school until the end of Year 12 as other students.
- The average Indigenous household income is only 62 per cent of the national average (this means Indigenous households get an average of \$364/wk compared to \$585/wk for other families, as of 2001 Census), and over half of Indigenous people get most of their income from government welfare.
- The Indigenous unemployment rate is about three times higher than that of non-Indigenous people. Many Indigenous people also rely on government-funded work unemployment programs, like the Community Employment Development Program (CDEP).
- Indigenous people are much more likely to be renting a house (63.5 per cent vs. 26.6 per cent overall) rather than owning their own home (12.6 per cent vs. 40.5 per cent overall).
- Overcrowding in housing is a major problem. This is worst in remote communities where up to seventeen people can share a three-bedroom house.
- Indigenous people are much more likely to be victims of violence, for example Indigenous people make up around 15 per cent of murder victims, even though they only make up 2.3 per cent of the population.
- There are much higher levels of substance abuse, family violence and suicide in Indigenous communities.
- Indigenous young people are more than four times more likely to be sexually abused.

**ITEM 2. Source:** <<http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/education-kit/about/>>.

Delilah. However, the film should make you think further about these inequalities and perhaps about what should and can be done to overcome these inequalities.

### Activity

Read the following data at <<http://www.closesthegap.com.au/information.php>> as well as the text in **ITEM 2** and present a paper to the class on these

inequalities.

### Moving forward

Over the last few years, some measures of Indigenous wellbeing have improved, for example more Indigenous children are completing school than in the past.

But Australia has also gone backwards in other measures. For example, more



Indigenous people are being locked up than ever before. Between 2002 and 2006, the imprisonment rate for Indigenous women increased by thirty-four per cent and the imprisonment rate for Indigenous men increased by over twenty per cent.

Other measures, like health and life expectancy, have only gotten a little better. Australia compares badly to other similar countries in terms of the ongoing treatment of its Indigenous peoples. In Canada and New Zealand for example, there have been massive improvements in areas of disadvantage like life expectancy. In these countries the gap between how long Indigenous and non-Indigenous people live has narrowed from about twenty years to seven years. This shows that real change is possible – and Australia could do a lot better.

### Indigenous languages

The conversations between Nana and Delilah are in their own local language. This adds an authenticity to the film and underlines a film made to privilege Indigenous experience.

#### Activity

- Find out what this language is and see if you can learn a few words of it.

### A peripheral issue – The Northern Territory Intervention

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response (also referred to as ‘the Intervention’) is a package of changes to welfare provision, law enforcement, land tenure and other measures, introduced by the Australian federal government under John Howard in 2007, nominally to address claims of rampant child sexual abuse and neglect, as well as addressing children’s health issues in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. Soldiers and extra police were sent into Indigenous communities. There have been claims of lack of consultation with Indigenous communities on the way in which it has been introduced and implemented. There are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who regard this intervention as paternalism.

The package was the Federal government’s response to the Territory government’s publication of *Little Children are Sacred*, but implemented only two out of ninety-seven of the report’s recommendations. The response has been criticised, but also received bipartisan parliamentary support. The current Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has and continues to support the response, though he did make some adjustments to its implementation.

- Go to YouTube and search for “‘Stop this Intervention” Larissa Behrendt – Indigenous Law Professor & Author Talks Sanity’. This will provide an Indigenous response to the Intervention <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1Vw4Qo47Oo>>.

#### Activity

- What is the raft of issues that surround this issue and why has it created such an outcry?

### IN CONCLUSION

#### Activity

- With a film like *Samson & Delilah*, there will be the ideas of the filmmaker and your own ideas that can be drawn from the film. Read the full article at <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/film/samson-makes-tilt-at-oscar/2009/10/20/1255891813701.html>> and write your response to the points of view being expressed in this article.

### Style and the language of film

One of the differences between *Samson & Delilah* and many other films that you will watch is the use of natural rhythms of both the day and the night to register human experience. Quite often the light of a dying campfire will become a cue that indicates the dying day and this precedes the dawn of a new day with its fresh and intense light.

There is also a focus on image, given the paucity of dialogue.

Warwick Thornton’s evocative visual style seems a perfect medium for telling his stories. The use of the visual medium has a tangible link to the Indigenous tradition of oral story telling. Film is the storyteller of the twenty-first century and has become a vehicle for foregrounding Indigenous experience.

Stylistically, Thornton uses wide-angle





long shots and extreme close ups. The camera lingers and caresses characters lovingly. He records the reactions, those reflective moments that betray flickers of understanding and growth. You can see and feel the aching heart at times, the inner pain, the tension and confusion, the rhythms of a growing affection.

Warwick Thornton trained at the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) in radio and filmmaking, he then went on to study cinematography at the Australian Film Television and Radio School in NSW (AFTRS). The first film that he shot was for Rachel Perkins from the Arrente, Kalkadoon nation: the award-winning *Radiance* (1998).

Warwick Thornton likes to spend considerable time on his projects during the pre-production stage. Rather than writing his script, he photographs how he sees his films.

### Activity

- How does this work process affect the look and feel of *Samson & Delilah*?

### Activity

- Warwick Thornton allows the viewer to get close to his characters. How does the camera position the viewer in specific sequences? Use the segmentation at the end to refresh your memory.

## Soundtrack and sound design

The sound of the wheels of cars as they hit bumps in the bitumen as they pass over the bridge, the sounds of the natural world are all part of the organic soundscape of *Samson & Delilah*. The film also relies on music to tell its story. The music of Ana Gabriel, a Mexican singer, is important to Delilah. She swims in this music.

Here is the list of tracks and their sources.

'Nightblindness' by Troy Cassar-Daley  
Written by David Gray (Chrysalis Music/Mushroom Music Publishing)  
Licensed courtesy Tarampa Music Pty Ltd

'We Have Survived'  
Performed by Scott Thornton.  
Written by B. Willoughby (Mushroom Music Publishing)  
Bart Willoughby in 1978 formed the seminal Aboriginal reggae/rock band, No Fixed Address. No Fixed Address opened the door for many artists to follow, as one of the first and successful Aboriginal bands to secure commercial airplay and tour internationally. He also starred in the Australian film *Wrong Side of the Road* (Ned Landers, 1983).

'All I Have To Offer You Is Me' by Charley Pride.  
Composed by Dallas Frazier, A.L.  
'Doodle' Owens.

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By kind permission of Warner/Chappell Music Australia & Sony ATV Tunes  
Licensed courtesy SonyBMG Music Australia Pty Limited

'Jesus Gonna Be Here'  
Performed by Scott Thornton  
Written by Tom Waits  
Published by Jalma Music  
Licensed courtesy of Universal Music Publishing MGB Pty Limited

'Crystal Chandelier'  
Performed by Scott Thornton  
Written by Ted Harris  
© Plainspoken Music  
Used by permission of Southern Music Publishing

'Talisma' by Ana Gabriel  
Written by Paulo Massadas / Miguel Plopschi / Michael Sullivan  
Published by SonyATV Music Publishing Australia and © Edicoes Musicais Tapajos Ltda  
All rights admin & licensed by EMI Music Publishing Australia Pty Ltd  
Licensed courtesy SonyBMG Music Australia Pty Limited

'Como Olvidar' by Ana Gabriel  
Written by Gabriel  
Published by SonyATV Music Publishing Australia  
Licensed courtesy SonyBMG Music

Australia Pty Limited

‘Sunshiny Day’ by Charley Pride  
Written by Ben Peters  
Published by Ben Peters Music (USA)  
/ Fable Music Pty Ltd (Australia)  
Licensed courtesy SonyBMG Music  
Australia Pty Limited

‘Little Baby Jesus’  
Performed by Marissa Gibson  
Traditional

‘Tjamu Tjamu’ by Ilkari Maru  
Written by Warren Tunkin, Larry Brady  
Courtesy CAAMA Music Pty Ltd

‘Wasting Your Life’ by The Tableland  
Drifters  
Written by Joe Davey, Lexie Holt  
Courtesy CAAMA Music Pty Ltd

‘Warlpiri Woman’ by Lajamanu Teen-  
age Band  
Written by Alfred Rose, Kenneth  
Martin  
Courtesy CAAMA Music Pty Ltd

‘Black Girl’  
Performed by Scott Thornton  
Written by Jimmy Chi

‘Come Back Again’  
Performed by Gregwyn Gibson, Mat-  
thew Gibson, and Steve Brown  
Written by Shannon Gallagher, Greg-  
wyn Gibson

Desert Mulga Band Track One, Two &  
Three  
Performed by Gregwyn Gibson, Mat-  
thew Gibson, and Steve Brown  
Written by Shannon Gallagher, Greg-  
wyn Gibson, Matthew Gibson, Steve  
Brown

### Activity

- Take three of the songs and write about the importance of each song to the film and its characters.

### Images and their effectiveness

A useful way to start thinking about the film after first viewing is to identify the images, dialogue or sounds that

made an immediate impact on the viewer. Explaining why these aspects of the film (the microcosm) made an impression and then speculating on how the emotional effects and traces are deposited in the viewer. This will provide a framework for crystallising an understanding of the film’s broader perspective (the macrocosm).

The following exercise will help you delineate your first impressions of *Samson & Delilah* by identifying and recording the indelible and memorable moments in the film. Write about five of your lasting images or impressions from the film. There is an example to start you off.

### Activity

- **WHAT – the image, sound, dialogue.**  
(The reflection of Samson in the water when Delilah is bathing him ...)
- **WHY – the reason that the impact was profound**  
(I wasn’t expecting to see this reflection. Warwick Thornton likes to suggest rather than show everything. He arouses curiosity in the viewer by ...)
- **HOW – the ways in which these emotional effects are created**  
(There is great tenderness in this sequence. They are both enjoying the moment for a range of reasons. And as a ritual, it is also washing away their pasts.)

### Four key scenes for close analysis

In a film like *Samson & Delilah* in which the dialogue is sparse, the soundtrack, the silences and of course the images are heightened in importance. There are conversations between Delilah and her Nana, Kitty, in her local tongue and Gonzo verbalises aloud as he tries to prise Samson and Delilah open. These words are of course significant but there is an image-based narrative that demands the viewer’s active attention. Images in *Samson & Delilah* wash over the viewer in cinematic waves, determining our understanding of both the narrative and the characters.

Opening sequences will introduce characters, foreshadow ideas and set up expectations for the viewer. The endings of films reveal any growth in moral courage and/or self-knowledge. Sequences in which an epiphanous or ‘lightbulb’ moment for one of the characters occurs are also worth studying closely.

View the following sequences which are time coded. Use the prompts provided for each excerpt to develop a close analysis. When responding to the prompts, think about the effects created by the director’s choices. There is a visual language that is used by Warwick Thornton to tell the story which you must understand. Use the prompts to write brief notes OR discuss the following elements of four sequences

Another day (0.00 – 5.10)

- » The colours used in the credits
- » The position of the camera when Samson wakes and the effects of this closeness
- » The soundtrack and its specific commentary
- » The ways in which Samson’s movements are followed by the camera
- » The sense of life’s rhythms in the community that are established in the opening sequence
- » The ways in which Samson’s character is established
- » The comparisons between Samson’s life and that of Delilah and how they are made
- » The use of natural organic sounds
- » The relationship between Delilah and Nana and how this is established by both actions and the way the camera films their relationship
- » Why the camera closes in on character rather than opens up the setting in this sequence

Listen to the music  
(19.09 – 21.57)

This sequence registers the first tangible interest and connection between Samson and Delilah. She has previously made it clear that she will



continue to exclude him from her life. However, in this sequence the flames of their love are kindled.

- » The importance of the radio and music in Samson's life
- » Delilah's glance across to Samson's house
- » The choice of music that immerses Delilah
- » Samson's dance to his own music and what it says about him
- » Delilah's response to Samson via her unseen gaze
- » The blending of their respective soundtracks
- » The privileging of Delilah's soundtrack and the blocking out of Samson's soundtrack as she watches him dance
- » The intervention of Samson's brother and the response of both Samson and Delilah to this moment which subverts so much of what has been revealed about their lives

The marginalised  
(54.00 – 61.10)

This long sequence set in Alice Springs reveals a divided world. Gonzo, Samson and Delilah live rudimentary lives under the bridge where food and reminiscences are shared. The venture into the non-Indigenous world is one where they experience indifference, hostility and violence.

- » The photo of Gonzo and his daughter that Samson looks at
- » Delilah's reaction to his invasion of Gonzo's meagre possessions
- » Gonzo's character and qualities and how they are manifested and represented in the film
- » The advice given to Samson and the context in which it is given
- » Gonzo's reflections on love
- » The lighting in this part of the sequence (the fire is a common prop in the film)
- » The holding of hands as an extension of Gonzo's yearnings
- » The use of the space under the bridge as a set and setting
- » The visit to both the art suppliers and the gallery and how Delilah is

- framed by the camera
- » The shots of the well-heeled schoolgirls and the reasons for their inclusion. Delilah's reaction to them.
  - » The slow tracking shot past outdoor cafe as Delilah tries to sell her own art

Home (87.30 – 93.22)

- » The role of Delilah in Samson's renewal
- » Her tears as her signature music is played
- » The palpable strengths of Delilah and how they are recorded
- » The placing of the cross on the tin wall
- » The bathing of Samson and how the tenderness of this sequence is elicited by the filmmaker
- » The message to Samson from his father and Samson's reaction
- » The shared gaze and its impact
- » The final song and its clear statement
- » The sense of hope and how it is conveyed

## Characters

### Landscape as character

Landscape is naturally imbued with meanings and stories. What might look like the middle of nowhere for one person can become the middle of somewhere for someone else. A landscape can enter the inner world of lives. Humans can feel it and breathe it. It can trigger memories and desire and transform minds, souls and hearts. The landscape can go from being real to being a metaphor for something else.

### Activity

- Write a comparison of the landscapes of the community in which Samson and Delilah live and their life in Alice Springs.

### Characters in brief

- Write a fifty-word character portrait for each of the four main characters

in the film. Use the segmentation to reveal which moments in the film define them as characters.

- Samson
- Delilah
- Nana
- Gonzo

### Segmentation of *Samson & Delilah*

Opening credits with red title on black background

1. Samson stirs to the ironic refrain, 'When I wake up in the Morning ...'
2. Samson sniffs petrol to start the day.
3. Samson emerges from his bedroom and picks up an electric guitar, which is abruptly removed by his brother. This is one of the few times that Samson is vocal. He is excluded.
4. Delilah stirs embers and supervises Nana Kitty's medication.
5. Samson commandeers a wheelchair from another boy.
6. Kitty and Delilah paint traditionally.
7. A non-Indigenous art dealer and storekeeper approaches and greets Kitty. He drops off blank canvasses and picks up completed paintings.
8. Samson sits in the wheelchair outside the general store and lets a public phone ring.
9. Delilah walks past Samson without acknowledging him. She rolls her eyes once she has passed him.
10. Delilah leaves the store. Samson gazes at Delilah and ultimately throws a stone, which hits her in the back.
11. Samson writes 'S for D' in black texta on the wall of the store. The storekeeper orders him to leave.
12. Delilah wheels Kitty to the make-shift health centre and waits outside.
13. Kitty sits before a Christian cross.
14. On the way back home, Samson races past Delilah and Kitty in his wheelchair.
15. Samson sits and watches the band jam.
16. Night falls and Samson lies on his bed with Indigenous radio on in the

- background.
17. Delilah tends to Kitty and keeps the fire burning before retreating to a car and listening to a signature song as she closes her eyes.
  18. Samson sits in the middle of the dusty road as headlights approach and flash.
  19. Next morning Samson wakes slowly. There is a drumbeat outside. He opens a near-empty fridge. Again, he intently sniffs petrol.
  20. Kitty wakes slowly and takes her medication reluctantly. A public phone rings.
  21. Samson plays guitar discordantly, until it is removed from him again. Samson shows resentment at this.
  22. Samson waits outside the store as Delilah passes. He has written 'S and D only ones' on the wall and is checking Delilah's reaction to this.
  23. Delilah leaves the store and throws Samson a packet with a snack. He follows her and she throws stones at him.
  24. While Kitty and Delilah paint, Samson sits on the fence. He is the topic of conversation. Kitty urges Delilah to go off with Samson and assures her that Samson is the right skin.
  25. Samson follows Delilah and Kitty to the health centre and waits outside with Delilah. Ants swarm on the red dirt.
  26. Samson follows Delilah and Kitty to the church. He throws stones on the roof while Kitty is inside.
  27. Samson returns to his room and sniffs petrol.
  28. Delilah sits outside listening and watching before returning to the car to play her favourite song.
  29. Samson emerges and dances vigorously to a strong beat. Delilah is fascinated by his dance movements, until he is unplugged. Her music and his music merge in this scene.
  30. Morning. Samson takes his mattress to Delilah's but she shuts the gate on him. There is an extended conflict over his intention to stay with her.
  31. Kitty laughs at their struggle. Ultimately Samson wins. Samson appears triumphant. Delilah watches him with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension.
  32. Samson bathes in a sandy waterhole he has scooped out. He spies and kills a kangaroo, which he takes back to Delilah as a gift. He finds his mattress outside the fence.
  33. Delilah prepares canned fish on Samson's arrival. Kitty refers to him as Delilah's 'husband'. Delilah relents and offers Samson some fish.
  34. The roo cooks over an open fire.
  35. Samson places his mattress close to that of Delilah under the veranda. There is a silent dispute over territory and Samson's mattress is out in the open. But by morning he is close to Delilah.
  36. Delilah tries to wake Kitty but she has died during the night.
  37. Delilah caresses Kitty, her grief growing ever more visible.
  38. Delilah cuts her hair with a knife in a ritual of mourning.
  39. Samson wakes and immediately knows what has happened. He is deeply respectful and his sympathy is palpable.
  40. He leaves and returns to his room. He sniffs petrol and emerges in a rage in which he smashes a branch over his brother's head and starts destroying the musical instruments and equipment.
  41. Samson resumes sniffing before retaliation occurs, with Samson being beaten.
  42. Women in the community beat Delilah, accusing her of not looking after Kitty and of being responsible for Kitty's death.
  43. A painting is burned on a fire.
  44. Samson has retreated to a vantage point overlooking the community. He is nursing his injuries.
  45. Samson is badly lacerated and bruised. He showers the dirt and blood from his face.
  46. Samson is chased away by a brother and he goes to Delilah. She is covered by blankets and is sleeping. He pulls the blankets back gently and she, too, is cut and bruised.
  47. Samson swabs her wounds. Angered by Delilah's beating, he goes on a rampage in which he randomly destroys property.
  48. As the police arrive, Samson retreats to his lookout, sniffing petrol continuously.
  49. Samson steals a vehicle at night and leaves the community with Delilah, who sleeps on the front seat.
  50. Samson siphons petrol from a car at a roadhouse and continues driving until he runs out of petrol in the middle of nowhere.
  51. Samson and Delilah walk in silhouette through first light to the nearest town.
  52. Delilah buys food at a supermarket. Samson has stolen extra food, which they eat.
  53. They make their way to the undercarriage of a bridge.
  54. They watch Gonzo, a homeless man, with interest but do not speak to him.
  55. When Gonzo leaves, Samson rifles through his suitcase. He cuts a plastic bottle in half, sniffs petrol and moves in on Delilah, only to be pushed away.
  56. Eventually Delilah kisses Samson on the forehead, much to his delight.
  57. Gonzo returns and cooks them some noodles. He sings/recites a verse about surviving the white man's world.
  58. Delilah waits outside Coles. Samson shoplifts.
  59. Delilah is fascinated by Indigenous art in the window of the Native Affairs Gallery. There is a painting by Nana (Kitty) selling for \$22,000.
  60. Under the bridge, Samson again looks through Gonzo's belongings and sees a photo of a younger man with his daughter. Delilah throws a stone at Samson in disapproval.
  61. Gonzo wakes up. He admonishes Samson for sniffing petrol as he himself drinks wine from the skin from a cask.
  62. Gonzo talks and sings about a love he once had. Samson and Delilah look on.
  63. Morning. Delilah is awake as Samson sleeps. She removes the



- plastic container of petrol and holds Samson's hand.
64. Delilah steals some art materials and paints on canvas. She tries to sell her work but a non-Indigenous gallery owner dismisses her.
  65. Delilah sits in a mall. Well-heeled schoolgirls are immersed in their own world of relative privilege.
  66. Delilah unsuccessfully tries to sell her painting to diners in the mall.
  67. Young white males in a car abduct Delilah. Samson is oblivious until it is too late. He futilely chases the car. He vomits from nausea.
  68. Samson returns to the camp under the overpass. In the darkness he sniffs petrol, listening to Gonzo talk in his sleep. Samson passes out.
  69. Delilah returns bruised and beaten, presumably sexually assaulted.
  70. Delilah scoops out a hollow in the sand and sleeps in it. In the morning, she gets up, takes the container of petrol and sniffs for the first time.
  71. Gonzo prepares spaghetti and refuses to share it because Samson and Delilah won't talk and join in.
  72. Finally, after being chided by Gonzo, Samson utters his name with touching difficulty.
  73. Samson and Delilah try to phone home but no one answers
  74. Samson and Delilah leave. Delilah is sniffing heavily now. She aggressively thrusts one of her paintings in the faces of diners. They are unnerved. Delilah is asked to leave by the waitress, who threatens to call the police.
  75. They arrive at a church. Delilah is drawn inside. She sees an Indigenous Madonna and child and religious iconography. The priest stares and follows her movements until she has left.
  76. Samson walks ahead of Delilah, oblivious of her being hit by a car. He keeps walking in his petrol-induced fog.
  77. Samson stays in the fog for over a day. He sees the skid marks on the road and assumes that Delilah has been killed.
  78. He cuts his hair off as he mourns.
  79. Gonzo returns with news that he has found accommodation with Christians. Gonzo leaves Samson his meagre food supply.
  80. Samson is visibly shaken by Delilah's 'death', sobbing convulsively.
  81. Delilah appears like an apparition, leg in a brace. Samson's brother has arrived to take him home. Samson is carried to the car. As he passes, he smiles at Delilah. She removes the bottle of petrol and pours it on the ground, throwing away the container.
  82. Samson and Delilah drive home. They stop at a service station for petrol and the fumes get to Samson, who is told 'no more'.
  83. Samson reveals a half smile as he looks out the window at the new day. Delilah embraces him and touches him affectionately.
  84. On arrival, one of the women in the community vents her anger at Samson for his irresponsibility. But Samson is going to Delilah's country with her to start again.
  85. Delilah packs. She hears the public phone ring and answers it, taking a message. This is the first time the phone has been answered in the whole film.
  86. Samson and Delilah are dropped off at a small shack in her country.
  87. During the night, Samson has made his way to the petrol tank of the 4WD and lies prostrate next to the vehicle in the morning.
  88. Delilah places Samson in a wheelchair, pours cold water over him and drives the 4WD out of harm's way.
  89. Delilah weeps as her signature music by Ana Gabriel plays.
  90. She activates the windmill and water flows.
  91. Delilah gets the house in order and places a cross on the wall. She takes a gun and shoots a kangaroo, which she brings back for food. Samson looks at Delilah with a tear in his eye. Hunting kangaroos is men's business and he feels ashamed that he can no longer do this and that Delilah has to do it.
  92. Delilah bathes Samson, rubbing soap over his skin with gentleness. Samson is groomed and wears fresh clothes.
  93. Delilah cooks a meal that they share. Samson listens to local radio and gets a message over the airwaves that his father is coming home in six months. Samson is gleeful at this news. Delilah paints.
  94. There is an ease between them as they enter each other's lives.

## WEBSITES

<http://www.samsonanddelilah.com.au>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Samson-Delilah/57868371709>

[http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/special\\_ed/20071105/intervention/default.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/special_ed/20071105/intervention/default.htm)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/10/26/2724120.htm?site=indigenous&topic=latest>

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/index.html>

<http://melbourne.citysearch.com.au/movies/1137657033871/Interview+with+Warwick+Thornton>

<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/cinetology/2009/05/12/interview-with-warwick-thornton-writerdirector-of-samson-delilah/>

<http://www.creativespirits.info/resources/movies/making-samson-and-delilah.html>

<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/issue90/9405>

<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/issue92/9558>

[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/film/london\\_film\\_festival/article6876615.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/london_film_festival/article6876615.ece)

<http://www.blacklist.org.au/index.cfm>

### Australian Centre for the Moving Image

<http://www.acmi.net.au>

ACMI's new permanent exhibition, Screen Worlds, has many displays

which explore and celebrate the rich cultural history of Indigenous moving image making, called *Dreaming in Colour*, it includes ethnographic films, music, community media as well as interviews with established and emergent filmmakers in the Blak Wave interviews. Warwick Thornton is just one of the many filmmakers, actors and artists represented.

#### **Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA)**

<http://caama.com.au>

#### **Michael Riley**

<http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/riley/>

<http://cv.vic.gov.au/CV/Themes/Indigenous-Culture/?t=8977>

<http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au>

### **RESOURCES**

Australian Film Commission, *Dreaming in Motion: celebrating Australia's Indigenous filmmakers*.

Bruce Isaacs, 'Screening "Australia":

#### **Companion study guides available from ATOM**

<<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>> and <<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>>

- *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

- *Beneath Clouds*

- *Yolngu Boy*

- *First Australians* (a study guide is available for each of the seven episodes)

*Samson and Delilah*, *Screen Education*, issue 54, Australian Teachers of Media, 2009.

Kate Jennings, *Sites of Difference*, AFI, 1993.

Marcia Langton, 'Well I Heard it on the radio and I saw it on the televisions ...' – an essay for the AFC on the policies and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things, Australian Film Commission, 1993.

Scott Murray (ed.), *Back of Beyond: discovering Australian film and television*, Australian Film Commission, 1988.

Nicholas Rothwell, *Another Country*, Black Inc, 2007.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The DVD version of *Samson & Delilah* is available for sale from 25 November. The package also includes Beck Cole's *Making Samson & Delilah* and some of the short films of Warwick Thornton.

Other works by Warwick Thornton include his shorts *Payback*, *Mimi*, *Green Bush* and *Nana*. He has also directed and shot many diverse documentaries including *Rosalie's Journey* about the star of the film *Jedda*, Rosalie Kunoth Monks.

The Australian Mediatheque at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image is also an extensive resource. Here you can view diverse films and videos both nationally and internationally from the collections of ACMI and the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia. Just like Screen Worlds at ACMI, it is free.



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