
Rabbit Proof Fence

— Year 11 Advanced English —
Gabby

Context of the film

- Based on the novel 'Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence' by Doris Pilkington
- Set in 1930's in Western Australia
- It is inspired by the true-events of the experiences of the children of the 'Stolen Generation' who are taken from their families as a result of the 'Child Removal Policy', which sought to remove 'half-caste' (child born to English and Indigenous parents) and send them to work as domestic workers and on cattle farms
- The film focuses on the historical notions that 'half-castes', were viewed as the "unwanted third race" by many white Australians during the early part of the 20th Century
- The film features the importance of Indigenous cultural connections to land and family and provides insight not just into the Eurocentric worldview, but also that of Indigenous Australians

Director

Phillip Noyce

- Born in Griffith, NSW in 1950
- Attended the University of Sydney and later attended the Australian Film & Television School
- Noyce moved to America in 1991 to seek more job opportunities related to the film and arts and he had much success over there → he directed 6 movies during the 8 years he was there
- Some of his famous films include
 - Heat Wave
 - Salt (with Angelina Jolie!)
 - Dead Calm
 - Back Roads
 - And of course, Rabbit Proof Fence
- Noyce once said of his works, “If anyone ever writes a summary of my work, I hope that they call me a chameleon, because they’d find it totally impossible to categorise me, at least stylistically”

Plot

- Set in 1931, two sisters Molly and Daisy and their cousin Gracie, reside in Jigalong in Western Australia with their families
- However, the 'Official Protector of Western Australian Aborigines' Mr Neville, signs an order to relocate the three girls to Moore River Native Settlement as a result of their 'half-caste' status (born to both white and Indigenous parents) and the belief that they must be bred out and not fit to be looked after by their parents → he plans to place the girls in a camp where they will learn to become labourers and servants to white families
- They are taken by their local constable, Officer Riggs and sent to the Camp at Moore River Native Settlement, which is roughly 90km north of Perth
- During their time at the camp, Molly notices a rain camp and realises that if herself and the girls escape, the rain will cover their tracks
- The camp notices their absence and an Aboriginal tracker Moodoo, is called to find them, yet many times throughout the film, they evade him
- Over the 9 week journey back home, the two sisters (as Grace is recaptured) returns home and go into hiding deep in the desert
- As a result of their escape that has progressed for a long time, Mr Neville eventually decides he can no longer afford the search for Molly and Daisy and gives up

Setting

- Rabbit Proof Fence was set in the south of Western Australia and takes place in a small, village known as 'Jigalong'
- As the film progresses and the girls are taken, it is set in the Moore River Native Settlement
 - Most of Moore River settlement features the natural Australian environment (dirt, red earth) against distinctly British icons (churches, nuns in white etc)
- It is set in the harsh Australian outback and Chris Doyle (cinematographer) made a statement about this
 - "I was looking for something that suggests torment, the cruelty of the girls' journey and the loneliness, the isolation and the expanse of the land" - Chris Doyle
- There is also the 'subconscious setting' of England as much of the story of Rabbit-Proof Fence encompasses issues that arose as a result of British colonisation

Characters

Mr Neville (who the girls call “Mr. Devil”)

- He is a well-dressed, clean-cut man who is in charge of “Aboriginal surveillance” in Western Australia
- He believes that the “problem of half-castes” need to be taken-away from their families as they will not ‘prosper’ under the care of their families
- He is symbolic of white superiority and the imperialist thinking that informed the Stolen Generation

Caretakers (Nuns & Sisters at the Mission)

- Often dressed in all white; to represent not only British culture but also ‘purity’ which they believed they were bestowing on the ‘half-caste’ children

Molly

- The oldest of the three girls and the leader → she was knowledgeable and is regarded as the main reason the girls returned home

Gracie

- The youngest of the three girls and the most vulnerable
- It is believed she found the journey home the most challenging, particularly due to her age and her being so homesick

Themes

Stolen Generation

- Despite not being called “The Stolen Generation” within the film, this is a key aspect of the film
- The film gives insight into the physical, spiritual, social and emotional ramifications of dispossession and the effects of the Stolen Generation

Indigenous Australian Spirituality

- As represented throughout the film
- The idea that Indigenous peoples share a strong connection between the land and their sense of being

Misguided Benevolence

- As seen with Mr Neville, the ‘Chief Protector of Aborigines’ who is compelled to believe he is of great assistance to the Indigenous peoples; when in fact it is quite the opposite

Analysing the film

Rabbit Proof Fence

Analysis of Film Techniques



iitutor



Analysis

- Shot from a low-angle shot which makes Neville and the sister look far more menacing and threatening
- The use of costuming establishes Neville and the sister to be in a position of honour and power
- This scene also reaffirms the colonial belief that the children were 'uncivilised savages' and thus needed to be accordingly reprimanded and trained



Analysis

- The rule of thirds draws us to each face of the girls
- The use of body language outlines the distress and sadness each girl has experienced following their forced removal from their family
- The 'framing' of the window makes them appear almost as if they are 'boxed in' which again reiterates the sense of disempowerment the girls have as a result of colonial actions



Analysis

- There is a clear contrast between the almost glowing white uniform of the sister and the somewhat tatty and unkempt uniforms of the girls. This outlines the power dynamic and the clear distinction of power between the girls and the white colonialists



Analysis

- The symbolism of the girls being juxtaposed behind the bars is symbolic of their physical entrapment due to their race
- By having the girl's body language cooped up and solemn looking, it outlines their dire situation and how they only have each other to rely on for strength and support



Analysis

- The use of dim, dull and dark colours reflects the depressing nature of the home
- The body language of the figures also highlights how a lot of them have their heads down which is indicative of the mood in the home



Analysis

- The use of serene colours reveals the sense of peace and comfort the Indigenous people have when they are together in their natural landscape

