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The past is illuminated and the cruel government policies are given a context in the film. There are obvious contrasts in the film between the girls and their innocence and spirit, and those who purport to look after their interests, such as Western Australia's Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville ('Mr Devil' to the girls at Moore River).

However, the White characters are not all condemned. If they are condemned, they are condemned implicitly for

their ignorance and misguided attitudes. Throughout the film, there are acts of kindness from both Indigenous and White characters that help to ensure the girls' survival.

This is a poignant and compelling story, one that has at last made its way on to the screen from Doris Pilkington Garimara's 1996 book, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, and one that will be influential in framing the move towards genuine reconciliation in this country.

Moodoo and A.O. Neville.



## questions activities tasks

- 1 If you believe that an apology to the Stolen Generations is necessary, write a letter of apology addressed to all Indigenous Australians.
- 2 Divide an A4 page into two columns labelled Indigenous and non-Indigenous. List all the characters who helped or advised Molly, Daisy and Gracie on their journey and indicate how they helped.

### Story theatre

- 3 Form groups of three and choose three characters from the film. The whole story or a part of the film's story needs to be told through these different voices, allowing the characters to voice thoughts and feelings on common experiences or experiences voiced through entirely opposing points of view. Perform a brief sketch to your class with each student taking on a different voice.
- 4 Imagine you are one of the Indigenous women waiting outside A.O. Neville's office in Perth. Role-play what you are going to say to him.

# Rabbit-Proof Fence posts

Each scene in a film is meticulously ordered to create meanings. The craft of making a film is similar to the process in which writers order and shape words, paragraphs and chapters of novels.

It is important for you to be able to speculate on why the filmmaker has included or excluded particular images, to understand how they have been sequenced, and to analyse the effects that all of this has on the audience's response to and understanding of the narrative. Every film has a sequence of markers (or fence posts) that the viewer navigates.



Moodoo at Moore River Native Settlement.

## How well can you remember the film?

These questions are the sequenced fence posts of the film:

In what year is the film set?

What does Molly successfully hunt?

What is the name of the young Constable whom we meet both at the beginning and the end of the film?

Who says, 'You tell that Mr Neville (Devil) if he want half-caste kid, he make his own'?

Which girl do you see looking out of the rear window of the car after the three girls have been abducted?

What is a 'quadroon', according to A.O. Neville?

What is the name of the girl who is thrown into the 'boob' and what is her other punishment?

Where is Moodoo's country?

What song do the children sing to A.O. Neville just prior to the skin inspection?

What does Molly attempt to steal from the white farmer?

What does A.O. Neville mean when he says, 'Just because they use Neolithic tools, doesn't mean they have Neolithic minds'?

Who is the young domestic who is sexually abused by her employer?

Who says, 'If they would only understand what we are trying to do for them'?

What does Maude point at the young Constable at the end of the film?

What happens to Molly ten years after the events of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*?

Answers are available at [www.hi.com.au/engproj](http://www.hi.com.au/engproj).

# What to look for in a film

## Film language and *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

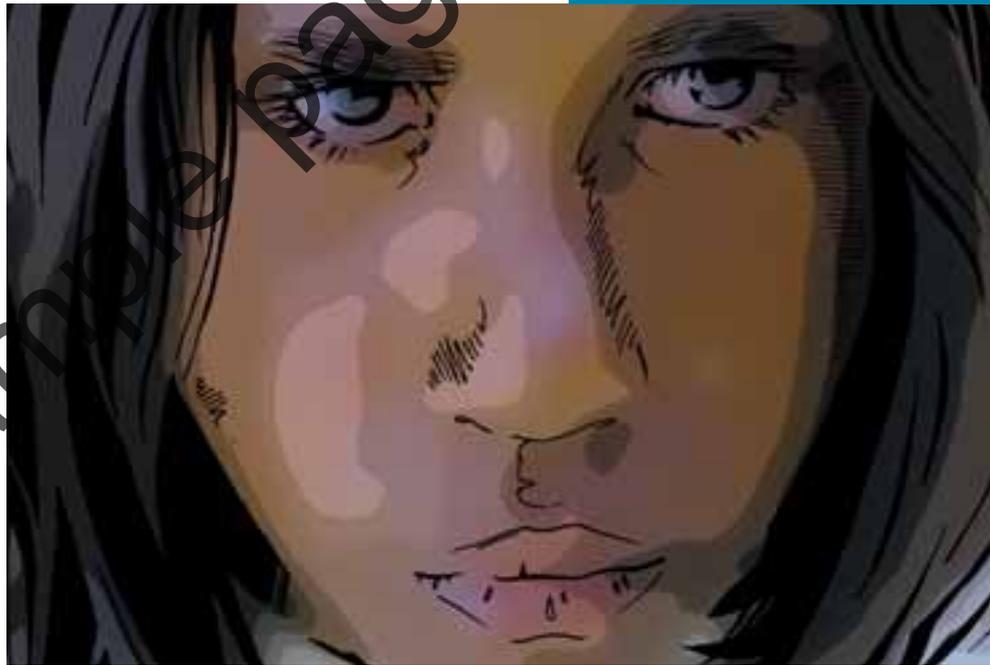
There are some particular terms and concepts that are useful for talking and writing about films. While you must be careful not to lose sight of the basics of any story, such as plot and character, some analysis of the visual elements of film also needs to be included in discussions and writing about the meaning of films. How a film is put together cannot be separated from what is being expressed or articulated by the narrative.

### Framing—what is in the frame?

Framing is the sum of everything that is seen through the camera lens at any given moment in a film. Imagine your film being frozen at any point in time. Within the frozen frame, you need to pay attention to the lighting, camera angle, make-up, costumes, props and the positioning of characters. It is like looking at a painting in this sense. There is a structure and purpose in each frame of a film. Nothing is ever left to chance. Framing defines the image through the use of various shot types, for example:

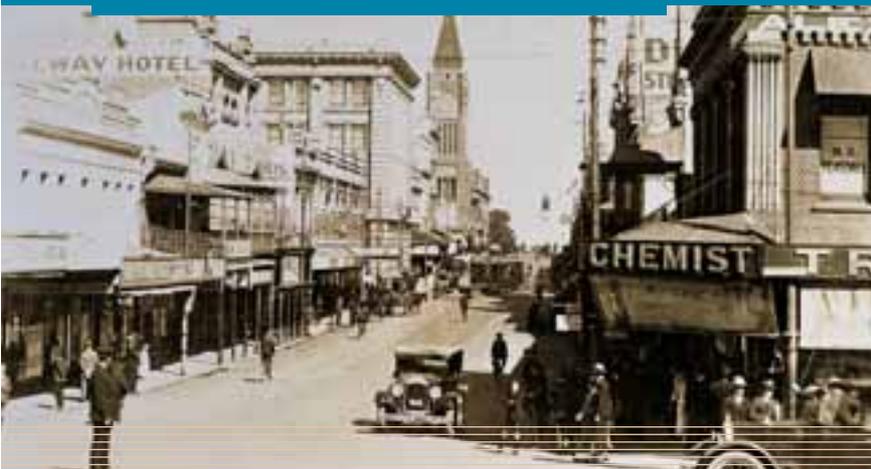
- **wide shots** are often used to establish location and time
- **close-ups** are used to show detail and facial expressions.

In *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Molly's eyes fill the entire screen as she recovers consciousness on the salt plain. The film is framed this way to alert the viewer to the fact that Molly is literally waking up, and that her eyes are fixed first on the spirit bird and then on her destination.



Molly.

### Perth in the 1930s.



### Setting and props

Setting and props provide a context for viewers. The physical and cultural setting of a film situates the viewer in a particular time and place. Similarly, props provide the viewer with cues and clues about a character or a particular time and place. The inclusion of archival footage of Perth in 1931 helps to create a sense of time and place in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

## Lighting

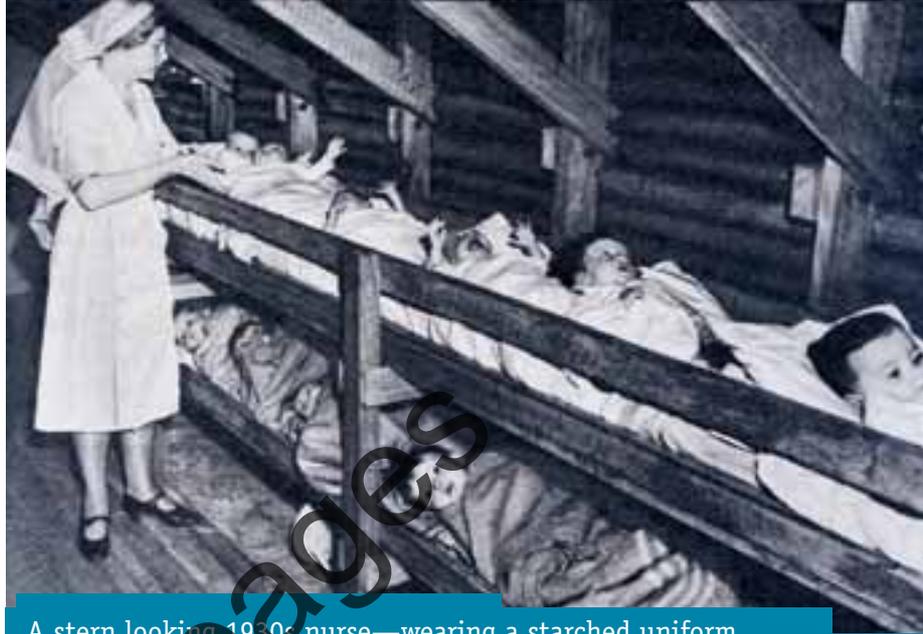
Lighting creates atmosphere. **Back lighting** creates a halo effect. **Front lighting** eliminates shadows, giving a flat look to images. **Side lighting** sculpts the characters' features and gives shape to objects. Mood and atmosphere are created by these choices, which can be heightened by the use of colour filters.

For example, the lighting at the end of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, when Riggs goes to find out what the noise is about, is very dark. He is stumbling in the dark and it is obvious to us that he feels very vulnerable in the dark. The lighting helps to create a sense of disorientation for Riggs.

## Costumes

Costumes and make-up give the audience visual cues or information about characters' background and status.

For example, the white starched uniforms of the matrons at Moore River are almost like straitjackets. They are prim and proper and clean and part of the 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' ethos that is being imparted to the children.



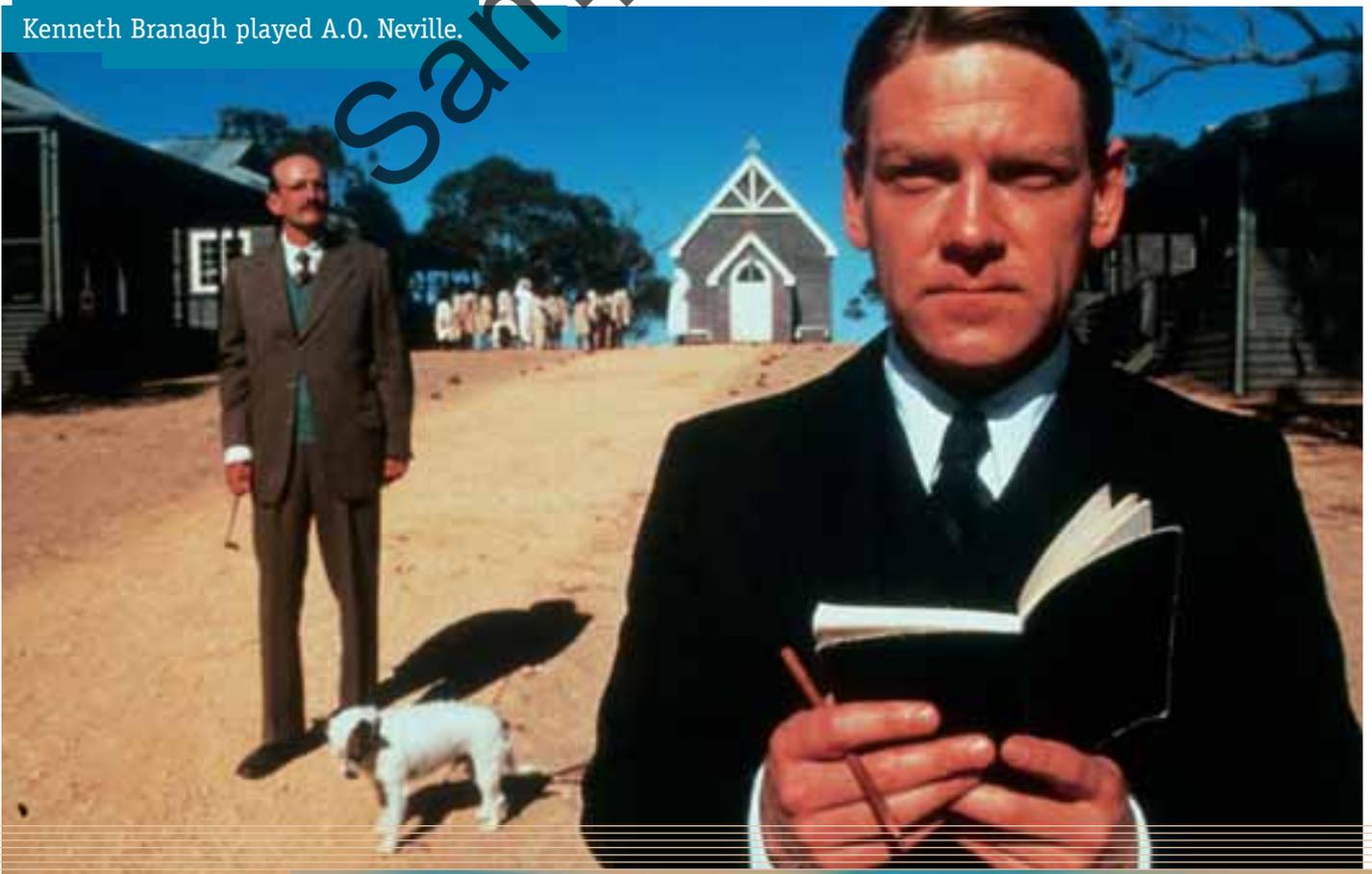
A stern looking 1930s nurse—wearing a starched uniform.

## Performance of the actors

Performance informs the audience about the characters and introduces the viewer to the characters largely through the actions, body language and facial gestures of the actors.

Kenneth Branagh, a well-known Shakespearean stage and film actor, is able to make the character of A.O. Neville completely credible through his performance.

Kenneth Branagh played A.O. Neville.



## Camera angle

The position of the camera in relation to the subject establishes a point of view. The perspective provided by the camera establishes a relationship between the viewer and the screen and invites the viewer to identify with particular characters.

**Horizontal angles** suggest a degree of involvement. A character presented from a **frontal angle** appears as part of our world. The scenes with the fencer, just prior to the abduction scene in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, are like this. The camera suggests that the girls and the fencer have an equal relationship.

Vertical angles suggest a power relationship. A character or object seen from a **high angle** can seem vulnerable or powerless. On the other hand, a character or object presented from a **low angle** can appear strong and powerful or even frightening. Eye level suggests an equal relationship. In *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Constable Riggs is filmed sitting on his horse, from a low angle, suggesting that he has power. Near the end of the film, there is a shot of Molly from a great height, suggesting that she is extremely vulnerable and that the spirit bird is her powerful protector.



Constable Riggs is filmed from a low angle, indicating that he has power.

Molly struggles to carry Daisy on the salt plain.



## Camera movement

The camera moves in relationship to the framed material. Since framing defines the image, viewers often see themselves moving along with the frame.

<b>Pan or tilt</b>	the camera rotates on the horizontal or vertical axis.
<b>Tracking</b>	the camera, as a whole, follows the movements of a person or the action. One example of this sort of shot occurs at the start of <i>Rabbit-Proof Fence</i> when the camera follows Molly, Gracie and Daisy as they run away from the car that will be used to remove them.

## Lens

Lenses can alter the magnification, depth and scale of objects within an image.

<b>Wide-angle lens</b>	distorts size and shape.
<b>Normal lens</b>	avoids distortion.
<b>Telephoto lens</b>	reduces depth and width of vision.
<b>Zoom lens</b>	allows variation of the shot without stopping the camera.

## Editing

Shots are sequenced through the technique of editing: the cutting from one shot to another. Editing is used to develop a narrative or evoke an emotion.

### Editing to control time

Filmmakers are able to manipulate time and space within a film. Through the use of editing, filmmakers can take the viewer backwards and forwards in time, or lengthen or shorten time.

<b>Shortened time</b>	in <i>Rabbit-Proof Fence</i> the journey of eight weeks is compressed to ninety film minutes.
<b>Passing of time</b>	this is often suggested through the use of fades, wipes and dissolves.
<b>Simultaneous time</b>	shots in different locations are shown in sequence, so that they can be interpreted by the viewer as happening simultaneously.



A sequence of shots in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

In *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, effective editing provides the viewer with a number of points of view when the girls are being removed from their family. Editing is also used to compress time, given that events take place over many weeks.

### Transitions

<b>Fade</b>	a shot gradually darkens as the screen goes black or dark, or the screen gradually brightens as a shot appears.
<b>Wipe</b>	a transition shot in which a line moves across the screen covering the first shot and revealing the next one.
<b>Dissolve</b>	a transition between shots in which the second shot gradually appears as a superimposition while the first image gradually disappears.

### Soundtrack

The soundtrack can be composed using any combination of sound effects, which are often recorded separately: dialogue, which is recorded during filming; music; and silence. Filmmakers use dialogue, sound effects, music and silence to develop the narrative, evoking an emotional response in the audience. Films demonstrate the power of the soundtrack to evoke emotional responses and also to create images in the viewer's imagination. A film's soundtrack can provide an interpretation of what is being shown visually, or it can conflict with or undermine what is being shown on the screen.

In *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, discords and thumping drums are used in the chase scene at Jigalong depot. This helps to create a sense of mayhem and panic for the audience, reinforcing the images they are watching.



## questions activities tasks

- Go to [www.hi.com.au/engproj](http://www.hi.com.au/engproj). Here you can download a form that allows you to take an important scene of your choice from *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and make notes on:
  - camerawork
  - editing
  - soundtrack
  - the visual and emotional effects created.
- Imagine you are the director of the film. Take a key scene from the film and write your planning notes on how this scene developed and what other alternatives you had in mind as you were planning this scene. (These planning notes should allow you to think about what has been included in the film as well as what has been excluded.)
- Sketch or describe a storyboard that creates another scene from the film that did not make the final cut, i.e. a deleted scene.

