

# 5 Australian stories

Stories form a crucial part of any culture. They inform, entertain and educate. Stories help shape, confirm, challenge and change beliefs within a society. Stories entrench cultural values and shape a nation's cultural identity. Through various forms of media narratives, Australian stories have been doing this for over a century. These narratives include moving image, still image, spoken word, print and the rapidly increasing number of digital/online ones.

In this chapter, both fictional and non-fictional Australian media screen stories will be examined. Also examined is

how the process of creation to establish meaning combines with the process of audience reading to establish understanding. Australian stories are as diverse and multicultural as the country's streets, cities, towns and rural areas. In the beginning, these stories reflected a mostly British heritage. The Australian media stories of the twenty-first century now reflect a much more diverse culture. They do not reflect an agreed and limited history of Australian culture and identity, but explore and argue about what our identity actually was, is now and will be in the future.

Archy played by Mark Lee, about to go over the top at the battle of the Nek in the film, *Gallipoli* (1981)



## 5.1 History of Australian screen stories

The history of Australian screen stories started in the late 1890s. Less than a year after Auguste and Louis Lumière began screening films in Paris, Melbourne audiences were seeing films flicker across the walls of the Athenaeum Hall in Collins Street.

### ACTUALITY FILMS

Like the early films of the Lumière brothers, Australian films started as curiosities or to record historic events and slices of Australian life. Screen Australia refers to this genre of films as 'actualities'. So, just as the Lumière brothers screened the arrival of a train at La Ciotat in 1895, in 1899 Australians audiences could see the arrival of the Newtown train at Petersham station in Sydney's western suburbs. While some of these early actuality films were produced by individual film pioneers, many others were commissioned by institutions.

In October 1898, the Queensland Government's Department of Agriculture funded a film production project, which was an early screen contributor to the story of Australian identity and its links to the Australian outback. The project was undertaken by two cinematographers, Frederick Charles Wills and his assistant Henry William Mobsby, who produced over thirty films using a camera designed by the Lumière brothers called a *Lumière cinematographe*. The films made by the pair present a variety of topics, including Queensland farmers dipping sheep in arsenic; South Sea Islanders cutting sugarcane; the opening of Queensland's parliament; and a film entitled *Boer War Transvaal Contingent* (1899), which features the only surviving footage of Australian soldiers departing for the Boer War in South Africa.



**FIGURE 5.1.1** Still from *South Sea Islanders Cutting Cane* (1899). [Source: Australian Sound and Screen]

An 1896 actuality documentary film of the Melbourne Cup is the first of many screen stories of the Melbourne Cup. The story was subsequently told through Australia's first fully local issue of the Movietone newsreel (see Figure 5.1.2), which featured the famous images of Phar Lap winning the 1930 race. Since 1956, the story has also been told through television news and sporting programs, including the first live television broadcast of the race in 1960. Feature film told Australians the Melbourne Cup story through the *Phar Lap* (1983) film and the biopic *The Cup* (2011). Such media storytelling and retelling reinforces the importance of events like the Melbourne Cup in defining Australia's identity.



**FIGURE 5.1.2** Poster for Movietone News, Melbourne Cup Special, 1940s [Source: Museum Victoria]

## Learning activity

Australian Screen Online is an Australian Government database of film clips from Australian cinema history. Access the site and locate the Historical titles section. Download and watch as many of the actuality films as you can. After viewing them, choose five and answer the following questions:

- What is the name of the film?
- What is the topic of the film?
- Where was the film made?
- Who made the film? (This information is not available for all films.)
- What is the story of the film?
- Considering all of the films in the collection, what story was starting to emerge about Australian identity?

## SALVATION ARMY FILM PRODUCTION

It may surprise modern audiences to know that the Salvation Army was at the forefront of film production in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1892, the Salvation Army formed a theatrical department of sorts called the Limelight Department. Originally it used slide presentations to accompany Salvation Army speakers, however it soon adopted the new art of filmmaking. In 1897, the Limelight Department set up Australia's first film studio in Melbourne. In 1900, the Salvation Army premiered *Soldiers of the Cross*, which included thirteen short films, more than 200 slides, orations, hymns and music. It is interesting that even at this early stage in Australian screen storytelling, filmmakers and producers were using the medium (and others) to publicise their ideas, philosophies and values, ultimately to recruit people into the Salvation Army.

## FILMMAKING IN THE EARLY 1900s

In the early 1900s Australians were telling fictional narratives in short film format. However, in 1906 the Australian filmmaker Charles Tait produced what is widely acknowledged as the world's first feature film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang*. The film ran for between forty and sixty minutes, depending on the speed of the projection. In the following five years, film production in

Australia boomed. In 1911, 52 narrative fiction films were released, including *Girl of the Bush* (1921) (see Figure 5.1.3). This level of film production would not be achieved again until 1975.



FIGURE 5.1.3 *A Girl of the Bush* (1921).

## BUSHRANGER FILMS

Many of these early films featured bushranger stories and, in what may have been an early recognition of perceived media influence, the South Australian, New South Wales and Victorian governments banned such stories. The governments believed that bushranger films glorified crime and might erode people's respect for the law. In 1917, soon after the bushranger film ban, federal film censorship officially began with the appointment of a three-person, part-time censorship board based in Melbourne. This board was the forerunner to the Office of Film and Literature Classification, which has now become the Classification Board. While the motivation of institutions like the Classification Board is not to tell stories, they are definitely influential in shaping them.

The story of Ned Kelly and his gang has been told by every generation of Australians since Kelly's death in the Melbourne Gaol in 1880. The various tellings of the story—through newspapers, radio, television, feature film and online—vary in their support or condemnation of Ned Kelly. However, all seem to have contributed to the Kelly mythology.



# Frank Hurley

Frank Hurley was a Sydney-born filmmaker, photographer and adventurer. In the early 1900s he began to earn a reputation for the high quality and technicality of his photos. In December 1911, he travelled to Antarctica on an expedition led by Douglas Mawson to shoot the documentary film *Home of the Blizzard* (1913). In 1915–1916, Hurley documented Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expedition in *In the Grip of Polar Ice* (1917), bringing the world the first images of the wild and spectacular South Pole. After returning from the Antarctic, Hurley joined the Australian Imperial Force and became Australia's first official war photographer, documenting the experiences of the Australian forces on the Western Front during the First World War and later photographed the Second World War as well. After the war, Hurley became a successful cinematographer for Cinesound, working with the renowned Australian director Ken G. Hall on feature films including *On Our Selection* (1932) and *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934).

## STORY AS HISTORY

While Hurley is remembered for his brilliant cinematography and still photography, he is also a controversial figure in the history of Australian screen stories. During the First World War, Hurley manipulated images of war scenes from the Western Front to give audiences what he considered to be a more realistic view. He used the technique of combining negatives of several photographs to make a composite (see Figure 5.1.4). The planes, explosions and both sets of soldiers climbing out of the trenches were taken from the negatives of different photographs (see Figures 5.1.5, 5.1.6 and 5.1.7) and superimposed to create an image showing Australian soldiers under heavy attack as they leave the trenches to advance against the enemy.



**FIGURE 5.1.4** Frank Hurley, Over the Top [Source: State Library of NSW, picture collection image number 72]



**FIGURE 5.1.5** Frank Hurley, Shrapnel Bursting amongst Reconnoitering Planes. One of the images Hurley used to create the composite image shown in Figure 5.1.4 [Source: State Library of NSW, picture collection image number 42]



**FIGURE 5.1.6** Frank Hurley, Wave of Infantry Men Going over the Top. One of the images Hurley used to create the composite image shown in Figure 5.1.4 [Source: State Library of NSW, picture collection image number 38]



**FIGURE 5.1.7** Frank Hurley, Men Leaving a Trench by Frank Hurley. One of the images Hurley used to create the composite image shown in Figure 5.1.4 [Source: Australian War Memorial Collection]

Australia's official war historian Charles Bean disapproved of the practice and referred to the images as fakes. Hurley explained his reasoning for using the composites in *Australian Photo Review*:

None but those who have endeavoured can realise the insurmountable difficulties of portraying a modern battle by the camera. To include the event on a single negative, I have tried and tried, but the results are hopeless. Everything is on such a vast scale. Figures are scattered—the atmosphere is dense with haze and smoke—shells will not burst where required—yet the whole elements of a picture are there could they but be brought together and condensed.

### Learning activity

Fact or fiction? Access the archive collections of Frank Hurley's photographs online at the Australian War Memorial and the State Library of New South Wales. You will notice that many do not show action. However, they do portray the death, destruction and horror of the First World War. After looking at the images and considering both Frank Hurley's and Charles Bean's arguments about the photos, answer these questions:

- Are Frank Hurley's composite images an early form of fake news or are they a legitimate representation of a Western Front battle in the First World War? Explain your answer.
- Would Hurley's non-composed photos have communicated the horror of the war and the bravery of the ANZACS just as well as the composite image? Choose two photos to download and refer to in your answer.

## 5.2 Creating and telling Australian stories

Creating and telling Australian stories is important for Australia's economic, social and cultural wellbeing and is influenced by many factors.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN SCREEN INDUSTRY

In 2016, a report by Screen Australia, 'Screen Currency: Valuing Our Screen Industry', highlighted the economic, social and cultural value of the Australian film television and online screen industry.

#### ECONOMIC

Screen Australia estimates that the screen industry contributed around A\$3 billion dollars annually to Australia's economy in 2014/15 as well as 25 304 full-time jobs. This figure includes the film and television content that is under Australian creative control, worth A\$2.6 billion and 20 000 full-time jobs. It is important to note, however, that this amount does not include the activity and revenue of the advertising industry.

The report estimated the industry also contributed to the international tourism industry or around 230 000 tourists, whose estimated expenditure was A\$725 million. Australia also exported content (feature films, television dramas and documentaries) and this was worth around A\$252 million, excluding reality television and sport.

#### SOCIAL OR AUDIENCE VALUE

The report found that Australian audiences value Australian content—they recognise and appreciate its uniqueness and diversity. Ninety-eight per cent of respondents watch Australian content, which makes up over half the viewing of nearly 65 per cent of people. Australian audiences overwhelmingly believe that the Australian Government should support the screen sector. Australian audiences place an estimated value of A\$17 billion annually on local screen content.

#### CULTURAL VALUE

The report also indicated that Australian screen stories do not just have economic and social benefits but also cultural benefits, both in Australia and worldwide. Australian audiences place an 'option value' on the benefit of having the choice to view Australian content even if they do not currently watch it—this is estimated to be worth A\$511 million annually. There is also an 'existence



**FIGURE 5.2.1** Long-running Australian children's television program, *Play School*

value', which is worth A\$415 million annually—this is the value that Australian audiences place in others being able to watch Australian content (e.g. adults valuing children's access to Australian programs such as *Play School*).

There is also the value Australia gains from the global exposure of screen industry talent and Australian destinations, stories and culture. This exposure strengthens Australia's international brand, beyond tourism. This value is sometimes called 'soft diplomacy', whereby the ability to shape preferences and opinions of others is via appeal and attraction.

The cultural benefits of Australian content can also be measured qualitatively as follows:

- Instrumental value: Direct social and/or economic impact from screen stories such as *Go Back to Where You Came From* and *That Sugar Film*.



- Institutional value: The extent to which Australian content can help organisations or institutions gain trust and esteem by engaging with the public, especially from films such as *Gallipoli* (1981).
- Intrinsic value: The capacity for Australian content to entertain, dazzle, challenge, elicit emotion and engage imagination on a subjective level; for example, from screen stories such as *The Sapphires* and *Brides of Christ*.

## THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY

Screen Australia COO, Fiona Cameron has stated: 'To plan where we're going, we need to understand where we've been. Digital innovation and the vast challenges and possibilities of the online space are rapidly changing the screen industry landscape—from SVOD to YouTube, online gaming to virtual reality platforms—making this a timely report'.

We're seeing success after success here and overseas, stemming from big ideas and bold choices. The strength of a story so utterly Australian as *The Dressmaker*—about a Paris-trained dressmaker tackling 1950s country town parochialism with her Singer sewing machine—was enough to cross cultural boundaries opening to audiences in 26 countries beyond our shores. And now we have Australia's first onscreen Indigenous superheroes appearing on Netflix across the US in *Cleverman*. The world is watching us.

Screen Australia, Screen Currency:  
Valuing Our Screen Industry

## Learning activities

- 1 Do you agree with the authors of the Screen Currency report that Australian content has cultural benefits? Justify your response and provide examples in your answer.
- 2 Imagine an Australia in which there were no Australian screen stories.
  - What content would be on our screens?
  - How would that affect Australian culture and identity?

## INFLUENCE OF CLASSIFICATION ON AUSTRALIAN STORIES

In classifying Australian films and computer games, the Classification Board must take into account the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* and the National Classification Code.

### CLASSIFICATION ACT 1995

Under the Classification Act, each of the following matters must be taken into account in classifying films and computer games:

- The standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults.
- The literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the publication, film or computer game.
- The general character of the publication, film or computer game, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character.
- The persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

### THE NATIONAL CLASSIFICATION CODE

Under the National Classification Code, classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:

- Adults should be able to read, hear and see what they want.
- Minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them.
- Everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive.
- The need to take account of community concerns about:
  - depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence and
  - the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner.

The needs of the Australian public are varied and the guidelines seek to strike a balance between permitting adults to make choices about their viewing, gaming and reading habits, while at the same time respecting that others need not see material that they find confronting and protecting children from inappropriate content.

## Classification in action

*The Dressmaker* (2016) received a classification of M with the consumer advice: mature themes, violence, coarse language and sexual references. Figure 5.2.2 shows how the Classification Board classified each classifiable element of the film. If the story were presented differently the classification may also have been different. For example, if the story had involved a drug-addicted character and this was depicted at a high-impact level it is reasonable to assume that the classification would have been MA15+ with the consumer advice: mature themes, violence, coarse language and drug use. If the violence and sex were high impact as well then the classification would probably have been R18+ with the consumer advice: high-level violence and sexual themes, drug use and coarse language. Both of these re-imaginings of *The Dressmaker* would result in a different story being told to different audiences.

	Very mild impact	Mild impact	Moderate impact	Strong impact	High impact
Themes			✓		
Violence			✓		
Language			✓		
Drug use		✓			
Nudity					
Sex			✓		

**FIGURE 5.2.2** Classification for *The Dressmaker* (2016)  
[Source: Australian Classification]

## Learning activity

Log on to the Australian Classification website and download the classification guidelines for film (G, PG, M, MA 15+, R18+, X18+) or computer games (G, PG, M, MA 15+, R18+).

Now think of three films or computer games that you know well. Find out the original classification for each. Your task now is to change the classification of each film or computer game by changing the content. You may need to change the basic story or add or delete certain scenes. Change each of your three films or computer games into G, M and MA15+ versions.

## FUNDING AUSTRALIAN SCREEN STORIES

Having a good understanding of Australian media stories requires an understanding of the context in which these stories are produced. Media productions take place within defined boundaries. Television series and films are produced within certain budgetary guidelines which, in turn, will affect the creative decisions directors and producers make.

Drama in terms of Australian screen stories refers to fictionalised narrative stories. These stories include dramas like police shows (*East West 101*), relationship dramas (*Offspring*) and narrative comedies (*Upper Middle Bogan*).

According to Screen Australia's 2015/16 Drama Report, Australian television producers made 561 hours of drama at a cost of A\$376 million. That is an average cost of A\$670 232 per hour in 2015–16. Australians produced twenty-nine feature films at a cost of A\$194 million at an average of A\$6.7 million per film. Producing screen stories is a costly business and those who provide the money do so with expectations and demands, which, in some cases, will affect the creative decisions made in the production process. Sometimes the funding will even decide what stories will feature in the film or television drama produced.



**FIGURE 5.2.3** ANZAC Girls





**FIGURE 5.2.4** *The Waler: Australia's Great War Horse* (2014)

### FUNDING 'EVENTS'—GALLIPOLI LANDING CENTENARY

Leading up to the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landing in 2015, several television networks commissioned drama and documentary productions about Gallipoli and the ANZACS. This meant that in 2015 Australian screens featured several ANZAC stories including *Gallipoli*, *Deadline Gallipoli*, and *ANZAC Girls* (see Figure 5.2.3). Those three programs represent over eighteen hours of production and approximately A\$15 million dollars of production cost. This can be viewed in two ways. If that money has been allocated to stories about the First World War then it will not be allocated to stories about something else. So something that is happening in the Australian community has a big influence on what stories do and do not get told. A second way of looking at this might be that, if the commemoration did not happen, then maybe that A\$15 million dollars would not have been spent on television storytelling at all.

### The Waler: Australia's Great War Horse

The documentary film *The Waler: Australia's Great War Horse*, which screened on ABC television in 2015, tells the story of the horses that served in the Australian Light Horse during the First World War. The story is both interesting and moving as it explains the heroism of the men and the Walers and the heartbreak of the soldiers when forced to put down their horses after the army decided that it was too expensive to bring them home. The documentary was commissioned as part of the ANZAC Centenary Commemorations and partly financed by the Department of Veteran's Affairs. It was developed and produced in association with the ABC, the Australian Government through Screen Australia and the West Australian Government through Screenwest. It is arguable that without the ANZAC Centenary Commemorations the funding would not have been available and this Australian screen story might never have been told.

## FUNDING SOURCES

Australian screen stories are funded by various sources ranging from government funding bodies like Film Victoria through to private investors. According to Screen Australia's Drama Report 2015/2016, the past five-year average funding for feature film and television drama production can be broken up as follows:

FUNDING SOURCES FOR FEATURE FILMS AND TELEVISION DRAMAS	
FEATURE FILM	
Government funding (including federal and state agencies)	12%
Australian private investors	4%
Producer offset (an incentive in the form of a tax rebate)	29%
Australian film and television industry	15%
Foreign investors	41%
TELEVISION DRAMA	
Government Funding (including federal and state agencies)	9%
Australian private investors	<1%
Producer offset (an incentive in the form of a tax rebate)	12%
Australian film and television industry	61%
Foreign investors	16%

Screen Australia figures show that foreign investors have provided the highest proportion of funding for feature films. Foreign investment can include backing from major studios and co-productions being funded by both foreign and Australian investment. The producer offset is a tax concession that allows film and television producers to claim tax rebates on the money they have borrowed from banks and financiers to make their stories.

The figures relating to television drama tell quite a different story. Over the same five-year period since 2010, the Australian film and television industry provided 61 per cent of the funding for television drama. The majority of this comes from the free-to-air television networks. In the 2015–16 financial year there were fifty-seven television drama titles produced. The ABC financed twenty-one of the fifty-seven. Subscription television financed six titles and SBS, streaming video on demand makers, distributors and production companies provided the rest of the money.

The intention of the Producer Offset Tax is to encourage and increase screen production in Australia. The tax incentive offers producers and companies a generous tax offset if their production meets certain conditions. Some of these include having significant Australian content (including the subject of the film, who is involved and its locations), being an Australian co-production and having had production expenditure in Australia (such as for land use or goods and services used during the three stages of production).

### Learning activities

- 1 The Producer Offset Tax is only one aspect of the three offsets available under the Australian Screen Production Incentive. Research what the purpose and aims of the Australian Screen Production Incentive are, including what other benefits are involved.
- 2 Create a PMI chart for the Producer Offset Tax.

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING

- 3 What things about Australia would you promote to international producers to entice them to make films here? Make a short promotional video or develop an oral 'pitch' to highlight our nation's best features.
- 4 What is your opinion of Australian films?
- 5 Research the types of films that are likely to be funded by the film bodies (e.g. Film Victoria, ScreenWest, Screen New South Wales, etc.) in different Australian states. What seems to get priority?
- 6 In your opinion, is it more important to make films that 'tell our story' as a nation or ones that are enjoyable and profitable?

## CONTENT REGULATION

The average cost of producing an hour of Australian television drama is over A\$600 000, while many Australian dramas cost well over A\$1 million per hour to produce. The average cost of buying a drama from the USA is between A\$200 000 and A\$300 000 per hour. From an economic point of view, it would be cheaper for Australian broadcasters to simply buy screen stories from the USA and Europe. The reason that Australian television free-to-air networks like Channels 2, 7, 9, 10 and SBS and subscription networks like Foxtel do not simply buy all of their programming from overseas is due to Australia's legislated rules of content regulation.

The licence conditions for broadcasters specify legislated amounts of Australian content, locally produced drama and children's programming. The intention of such content legislation is to encourage a strong film and television industry in Australia. Having minimum levels of local content written into the broadcaster's licence conditions ensures that jobs are created in the Australian media production industry. It also provides a creative platform through which Australians can tell each other Australian stories. This means that Australian media storytellers can contribute to the cultural identity of Australia. Content regulation includes levels of Australian drama production, documentary production, overall Australian content percentages and specific content quotas for children's programming.

**FIGURE 5.2.5** *Nowhere Boys* (Series 3), an Australian television drama series aimed at the teen market was commissioned and broadcast on the ABC.

## AUSTRALIAN PROGRAMMING TRANSMISSION QUOTAS

Australian content for commercial free-to-air television is regulated by the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (BSA), Australian Content Standard (ACS) and Television Program Standard 23—Australian Content in Advertising. The BSA requires all commercial free-to-air television licensees to broadcast an annual minimum transmission quota of Australian programming for both their primary and non-primary channels between 6 a.m. and midnight—55 per cent Australian programming for primary channels and at least 1460 hours of Australian programming for non-primary channels.

### Sub-quotas

In addition to the programming transmission quotas, the Australian Content Standard 2016 regulates and sets out the minimum sub-quotas for the amount of Australian drama, documentary and children's programs that all commercial free-to-air television licensees must broadcast.

### Learning activity

Access the Australian Communications Media Authority website and answers the following questions:

- What is the amount of Australian content required on commercial free-to-air television?
- What are the Australian content requirements for Pay TV networks?
- What is the required amount of children's drama on commercial free-to-air television and Pay TV?





# Ned Kelly

The story of Ned Kelly and his gang has been told many times and in many media formats. Each telling of the story reinforces Kelly's place in Australian history. Indeed Ned Kelly was even featured as part of the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. While the fictional narratives of the story, presented in film and on television, have generally shown Kelly as an Australian legend and hero, the documentary format has tended to be much more measured in its portrayal.

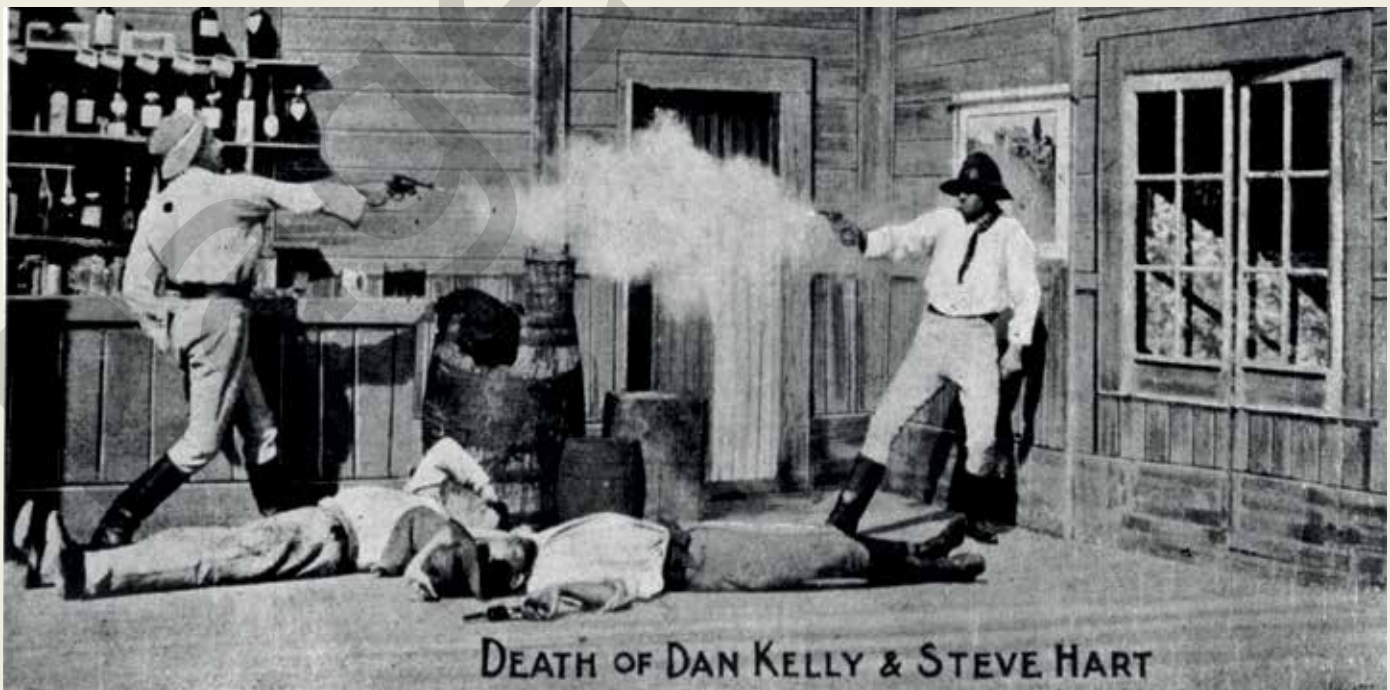
## FILM AND TELEVISION

In 1906, Charles Tait's *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (see Figure 5.2.6) was the first feature length film about Ned Kelly. The 1980 television mini-series *The Last Outlaw* presents Ned Kelly in a romanticised, heroic light. The authorities of nineteenth-century Victoria, particularly the police, are portrayed as corrupt, cruel and doing the bidding of the wealthy English landowners, while Ned and his family represent the downtrodden Irish immigrants who are seeking freedom and a fair go in Australia. The young and handsome actor John Jarratt plays Ned sympathetically. In the 1970 film version of the story, Ned Kelly was played by Rolling Stones lead singer Mick Jagger. In the 2003 feature film version of the Ned Kelly story, Kelly is again portrayed sympathetically, this time by the popular Heath Ledger.

## DOCUMENTARY

In 2003, director Mark Lewis released a documentary version of the Ned Kelly story entitled *Outlawed: The Real Ned Kelly*. This telling of the story examines both sides of the argument. Historians and Kelly descendants describe Ned as an Australian version of revolutionaries like Michael Collins or Che Guevara, fighting for freedom, against tyranny. Other historians argue that Kelly was nothing more than a horse thief, bank robber, murderer, police killer and even a terrorist.

It is important to note that in the re-enactment scenes of most documentary tellings of the Ned Kelly story, an unknown actor plays Ned. This allows the audience to concentrate on the information or evidence presented to them. In contrast, it is a convention of the fictional storytelling format to cast popular actors knowing that their popularity and acting ability will help the audience build a relationship with them. When telling real-life stories this convention can sometimes position the audience to be more sympathetic to the real-life characters than they otherwise would be.



**FIGURE 5.2.6** Charles Tait's *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906). This early silent film was the precursor of the Australian film industry.

## FICTIONAL STORYTELLING VERSUS REAL LIFE

A convention of fictional storytelling is to include some element of romance. Though Kelly was not married and there is no evidence of him having been involved in a relationship with any woman, film director Gregor Jordan throws Heath Ledger's Ned into the arms of Naomi Watts (see Figure 5.2.7). Watts plays the fictional character Julia, a married woman with whom Kelly has a love affair. The romance storyline also gives Ned an alibi for the disputed shooting of Constable Fitzpatrick. The real-life Ned claimed he did not shoot Fitzpatrick because he was not there. Fictional storytelling may also rely on the conventional telling of the Hero's Journey. This kind of storytelling almost guarantees that the central character will be viewed heroically. While there is nothing essentially wrong with producing stories about heroes and their adventures it might be problematic if audiences read dramatisations of Australian history as documented historical facts.



**FIGURE 5.2.7** Director Gregor Jordan included a fictional romance in his version of *Ned Kelly* (2003).

## Learning activity

After viewing *Ned Kelly* (2003) and *Outlawed: The Real Ned Kelly* (2003), prepare an analysis of the two texts comparing the fictional and documentary story techniques. In your analysis, consider and discuss how the:

- production elements of camera, acting, *mise en scene*, editing, lighting and sound have been used by both directors to engage their audience in different ways
- story elements including character development and point of view are used by the filmmakers to engage their audiences. (Note: In the documentary format the interviewees and experts can also be considered to be characters.)
- audience would have received each story:
  - Would there be a different expectation from the audience from the fictional narrative and the documentary narrative?
  - Do you think that audiences would view the fictionalised version of the Ned Kelly story as entertainment full of artistic licence or as a version of reality?
  - While the documentary version attempts to present a factual telling of the story, many more people will see the fictional version. Does this mean that the fictional storytelling of real events will have the most influence over what people believe to be true?

# ANZAC and Gallipoli stories

ANZAC Day on 25 April is a national holiday of remembrance. The day was chosen because it was when Australian troops landed at Gallipoli. Typing 'Gallipoli' into the search engine of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia brings up hundreds of results. The story of the ANZACS and the Gallipoli landing has been told in countless feature films, television dramas, documentaries, news reports, ANZAC services broadcasts, radio documentaries, newspaper and magazine supplements, books, graphic novels and online. It would be impossible to discuss the complete telling of the story by everyone who has attempted to tell it. It is a story that is said to have forged Australia's national identity.

## SCREEN VERSIONS

The telling of the ANZAC story on screen has changed over time, reflecting in part the points of view of different generations.

### The Hero of The Dardanelles

The first screen version of the Gallipoli landing was made at Tamarama Bay near Sydney less than a month after the actual landing took place by director Alfred Rolfe for his feature film, *The Hero of The Dardanelles* (1916). Similar to all of the Gallipoli stories that were to follow, the film tells of the patriotism and bravery of the ANZACS. In the film Will Brown, played by Guy Hastings, enlists in the Australian Army, gets engaged to his sweetheart, encourages his mates to join up, trains with fellow recruits, travels to Egypt and then—along with his brave comrades—attacks the Turkish lines at Gallipoli. The film was made with the support of the Minister of Defence. Troops from the army training camp at Liverpool were used in the production of the film.

*The Hero of The Dardanelles* was positively received by audiences and used as a recruiting tool for the war effort. The philosophy of the film can be seen in the scene where Will's mates give him a send-off in an inner-city pub. In the scene, Will encourages his friends to join up and puts a poster on the wall of the hotel that reads 'He did his duty. Will you do yours?' A pacifist tears the poster down, prompting Will to throw him out of the pub. The film portrays such anti-war sentiments as cowardly and unpatriotic.



FIGURE 5.2.8 *The Hero of the Dardanelles* (1916)

Will's behaviour reflects the sentiments of many Australians and the Australian government at the time, as both prime minister Joseph Cook and opposition leader Andrew Fisher had pledged Australia's support for Britain should war be declared. In a speech in July 1914 Fisher stated: 'Should the worst happen, after everything has been done that honour will permit, Australians will stand beside the mother country to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling'. Other films to portray the same pro-war sentiment followed, including *Within Our Gates* (1915) and *The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell* (1916).

### Forty Thousand Horsemen

In 1939, Australia was again at war to support Great Britain and, in 1940, Charles Chauvel made his First World War epic *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940). This film featured Chips Rafferty, Grant Taylor and Pat Twohill as members of the Australian Light Horse fighting in Sinai. The film culminates in the famous Australian victory at Beersheba when the Light Horse charged the Turkish/German emplacements.





**FIGURE 5.2.9** *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940)

The prologue of Chauvel's film sets the tone of the story to come.

When Germany stretched greedy hands towards the Middle East in the war of 1914–1918, a great cavalry force came into being.

They were the men from Australia and New Zealand—The ANZACS—the 'Mad Bushmen'—the men from 'Downunder'. Call them what you will—their glories can never grow dim.

They met the Germanised Army in the burning desert of Sinai.

They fought and suffered to emerge triumphant—the greatest cavalry force of modern times.

To these dauntless riders and their gallant horses this story is dedicated. To them with pride, their own sons are saying today—

'The torch you threw to us, we caught and now our hands will hold it high. It's glorious light will never die!'

*Forty Thousand Horsemen*, similar to films before it, depicts the ANZACS as brave and effective soldiers. The film acts as a rallying cry for Second World War recruitment. It received praise from both critics and the public and became Australia's first worldwide feature film success, winning critical acclaim in both London and New York and screening in countries from Singapore to Denmark. *Forty Thousand Horsemen* confirmed in Australian hearts the bravery and honour of the First World War ANZACS and stirred the next generation into action in the Second World War. In doing so, the film represents the ANZACS as anti-authoritarian larrikins who saved their discipline for the fields of battle. These sentiments would be echoed in later ANZAC stories, however. the theme of unquestioning support for Britain would change dramatically.



FIGURE 5.2.10 *Gallipoli* (1981)

## Gallipoli

One of the most recent and well-known tellings of the ANZAC legend is Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981), starring Mel Gibson (Frank) and Mark Lee (Archy). While remaining true to the honour of the ANZACS, *Gallipoli* seriously questions not only the British command of the campaign but also Australia's decision to go to war at all. Peter Weir represents the war as the futile and horrific waste of life that many modern Australians believed it to be. According to the Australian War Memorial, 416 809 men enlisted to fight in Europe and the Middle East. Sixty thousand of them were killed and 156 000 were wounded, gassed or taken prisoner. The death toll of 60 000 represented 12 per cent of Australia's population. In an early scene from the film, Archy and Frank walk across an outback desert as far away from the fields of France and the shores of Turkey as Weir can depict. They argue about why Frank should or shouldn't join up.

ARCHY

I've got mates who'd be lucky to run the hundred in 12 and they're gonna do their bit. So why shouldn't you?

FRANK

Because it's not our bloody war!

ARCHY

What do you mean not our war?

FRANK

It's an English war. It's got nothing to do with us.

ARCHY

You know what you are? You're a bloody coward.

Like so many young men, they both enlist despite Archy being underage and Frank seeing no logical sense to go. When they get to Egypt the Australian attitude of anti-establishment larrikinism is represented in a scene reminiscent of *Forty Thousand Horsemen* when Frank and his mates mock the British officers by wearing monocles and putting on British accents. Later in the film, the British are portrayed as ruthlessly using the ANZACS as cannon fodder to create a diversion for an English landing further up the peninsula. Weir uses the camera, actors, music and editing to bring the film to its climax at the tragic battle of The Nek. He tells, reflecting the modern Australian perspective, that were it not for the British command the horror of the Gallipoli campaign might not have happened.

I wanted to make a film about the first World War ... The remembrance of the battle of Gallipoli was a very stuffy, almost religious sort of ceremony that would occur every year in school, and we really didn't know what it was all about. So I did some research, actually went to Gallipoli, which is one of the only battlefields in the world that's still intact because it's still a military zone. There were bullets and knives and forks and bottles ... There was no one else there, so I went down to the beach, stripped down and had a swim, and the first thing I thought when I was underwater was, 'This is where you would want to be if you were being shelled,' and I wrote a scene based on that ... then I walked up shrapnel alley on to the battlefield and thought 'I've got to make this!' You know it's one thing to read about the moon and going to the moon, but it's another thing entirely to go to the moon yourself ... It gave me a sense of time and reality in a very eerie way. Later, I went to Egypt and went inside one of the pyramids, and there saw graffiti written by Australians who were there during the war: 'A.I.F., Australia, 1915,' you know.

Peter Weir, *The Hollywood Interview*,  
Alex Simon and Terry Keefe

## Learning activity

Watch *The Hero of the Dardanelles*, *Forty Thousand Horsemen* and *Gallipoli* and describe how the representations in the film send very different messages to the audiences about the ANZACS' involvement in the First World War.

# Gender and Australian screen stories

Who is telling Australian stories? And whose stories are being told? Are women adequately represented in key creative roles and positions of influence in the Australian screen industry? If not, why not, and what can we do about it?

*Gender Matters: Women in the Australian Screen Industry*, Screen Australia, 2015

Many in the film and television industry argue that there is a gender bias on Australian screens and behind Australian cameras. On screen, particularly on television, stories about Australian women are arguably at the highest levels we have ever seen. The success of television series like *Offspring*, *Wentworth* and *Love Child* seems to indicate that Australian audiences want to watch stories about Australian women as much as stories about Australian men. Not only is there an increase in the number of programs featuring women, arguably they feature stronger characters than those of previous television generations.

## TELEVISION STORIES

Consider the Australian television drama series *Offspring*, which follows the lives of Nina Proudman and her extended family. The main character Nina, played by Asher Keddie, is an obstetrician. Her sister Billie runs the family real estate business with her father Darcy. They are capable women, as is their mother Geraldine. If anything, it is the Proudman men, Darcy and brother Jimmy, who are the less stable characters.

Increasingly, Australian television dramas, even those with male lead characters like *Rake*, are presenting women as strong and capable. In *Rake*, Richard Roxburgh's character Cleaver Greene is the most flawed character in the show, while the female characters including his ex-wife Wendy, girlfriend Missy and fellow barrister Scarlett are all represented as strong, capable and independent.

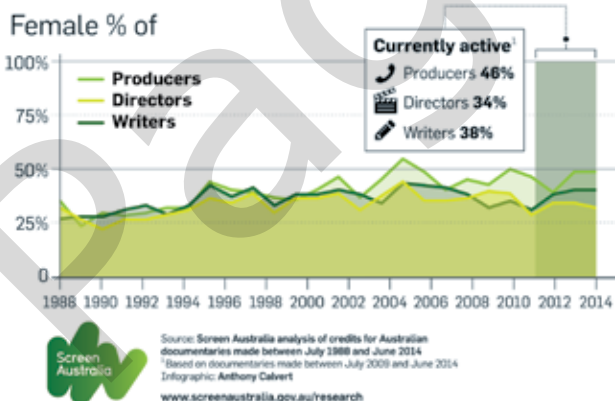
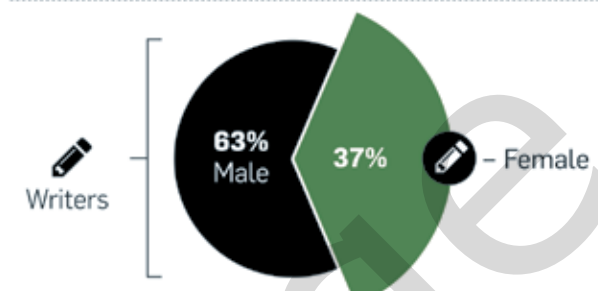
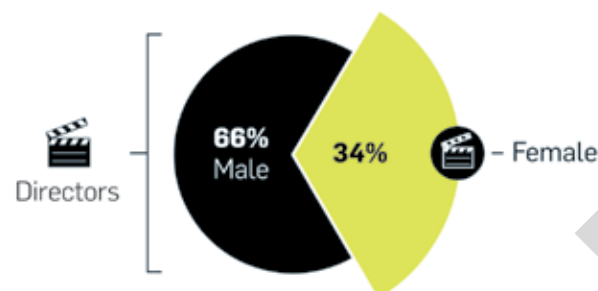
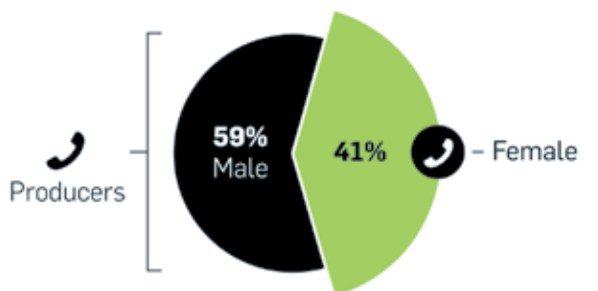


FIGURE 5.2.11 A scene with Billie (Kat Stewart) and Nina (Asher Keddie) Proudman, *Offspring*



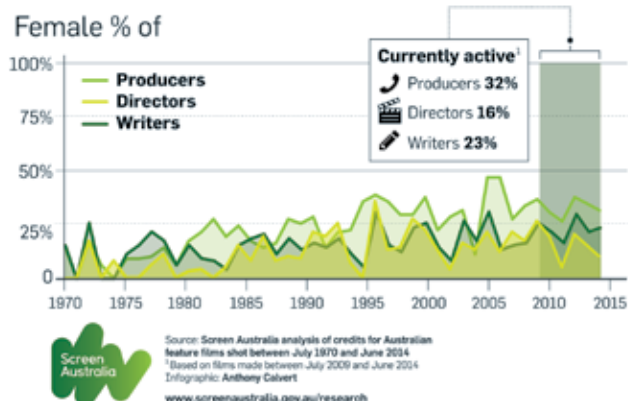
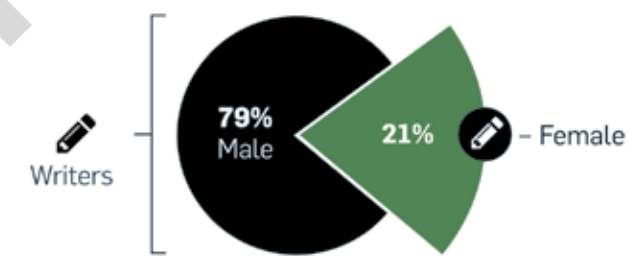
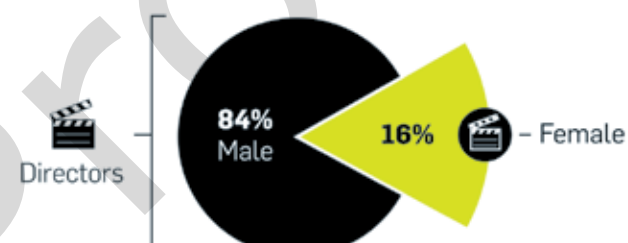
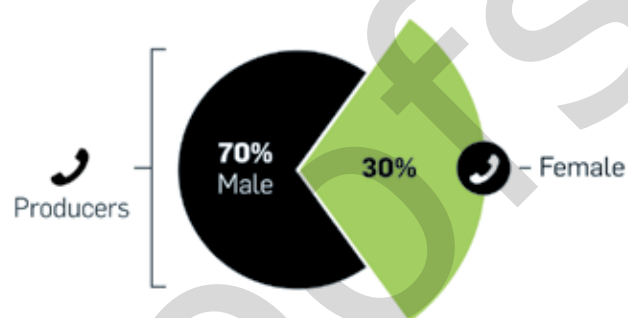
## Women working in key creative roles

### Documentaries 1988-2014



## Women working in key creative roles

### Film 1970-2014



**FIGURE 5.2.12** Infographic from Screen Australia report, *Gender Matters: Women in the Australian Screen Industry*, showing the proportions of women and men in key roles in documentary making and filmmaking from 1988 to 2014

Female characters are now starting to feature in screen roles that would have previously been written as male, such as the character of Robin, played by Elisabeth Moss in the 2013 drama *Top of the Lake*. This short series tells the story of a detective returning to her hometown, where she investigates the mysterious death of a young local girl.

## FILM STORIES

Current Australian film has examples like director Jocelyn Moorehouse's *The Dressmaker* (2015), which tells the story of a strong woman surviving and triumphing in the hostile environment of a small country town. *The Dressmaker* was based on Rosalie Ham's novel and written for the screen by Jocelyn Moorehouse and P.J. Hogan. It was directed by Moorehouse and produced by Sue Maslin. The original story, the producing, the writing of the screenplay and the direction of the film were all undertaken by women. The result is an entertaining and financially successful Australian screen story, which also has a female lead character.

## WOMEN BEHIND THE CAMERA

Figure 5.2.12 shows that women are under-represented in the key creative roles of the Australian screen industry, particularly in feature film. In the five years previous to the report, only 32 per cent of films were produced by women, 23 per cent written by women and 16 per cent directed by women.

Associate Professor Lisa French, in her article 'Does Gender Matter?', published in Issue 14 of the journal *Lumina*, identifies a strong relationship between the gender of the filmmakers and that of their lead characters. Her research of Screen Australia finance found that approved feature films and feature documentaries showed that female directors featured female lead characters or subjects 74 per cent of the time, while male directors featured them only 24 per cent of the time. So it would seem that encouraging more women into the creative roles in our screen industry would result in more Australian screen stories about women. To that end, Screen Australia has developed a five-point plan aimed at achieving a 50 per cent representation of women in creative roles by 2018.

## Learning activities

- 1 Download *Gender Matters: Women in the Screen Industry* from the Screen Australia website. Summarise Screen Australia's five-point plan to increase the number of women in creative roles in the screen industry.
- 2 Choose ten Australian-made screen stories. They could include dramas, comedies or documentaries from television (free-to-air or pay), film or online. Undertake an audit of the ten stories to establish how many women worked in the creative roles. Then audit the main characters or subjects to decide if these were presented from a male or female point of view. What conclusions can you make from your audit? Do your results agree with those published by Screen Australia?

## 5.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander screen stories

Prior to the year 2000, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander screen stories have been told from a white Australian perspective, however this is beginning to change.

### TIMELINE OF SCREEN REPRESENTATIONS

#### 1930s AND 1940s

Up until Charles Chauvel's 1955 feature film *Jedda*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had appeared in fictional screen narratives as either incidental characters in the background of the story or as dangerous characters.

In 1936, Chauvel made *Uncivilised*, in which he depicted Indigenous people as dangerous. The story was about the Australian Mounted Police, who according to the opening titles had to 'penetrate to the heart of this country and learn the movements of the tribes—of these natives wanted for spearing cattle—stealing women—or for murder'.

Similarly, the 1950 film *Bitter Springs* (see Figure 5.3.1), directed by Ralph Smart, tells the story of a pioneering family travelling into a hostile territory full of dangerous natives to establish their cattle property. Fierce battles are fought between the 'native people and the settlers' culminating in a battle in which the Aboriginal people have surrounded the King family, whose only hope of rescue is that the troopers will arrive to save them. If this story sounds familiar, it is probably because it has been told time after time in the American Western genre. In a way, Chips Rafferty as Wally King was a John Wayne-type figure and the Indigenous actors in the film were Australian versions of the Apaches.



FIGURES 5.3.1 AND 5.3.2 *Bitter Springs* (1950) and *Fort Apache* (1948). The Indigenous Australians in early Australian screen stories can be compared to the Native Americans of the Wild West film genre.

### Learning activity

Compare the posters for the Australian film *Bitter Springs* (1950) and the American Western *Fort Apache* (1948).

- What similarities can you find?
- How have the white characters been portrayed?
- How have the indigenous characters been portrayed?
- Explain the technical codes that were used by the poster artists to achieve these portrayals.



## 1950s—JEDDA

*Jedda* (1955) was the first fully Australian funded and made colour feature film. It was also the first Australian film to be selected for the Cannes Film Festival. However, perhaps, more importantly, it was the first Australian film to cast Indigenous actors in lead roles.

*Jedda* tells the story of an orphaned Indigenous girl raised by a white woman on a remote cattle station. Jedda, played by Rosalie Kunoth, although happy, is attracted to the mysterious and traditional Marbuck played by Robert Tudawali. Although the casting of Rosalie Kunoth and Robert Tudawali was a significant moment in Australia's film history, *Jedda* still includes stereotyped representations of Aboriginal people. Modern audiences would now find much of the language in the film offensive. Indigenous children are called 'piccaninnies' and Indigenous women are referred to as 'lubras'.

Jedda's boyfriend, Joe, is the son of an Aboriginal stockman and an Afghan woman and was raised and educated by whites. The character is played by white actor Paul Reynall. Reynall was made up in blackface for the role and sounds more like an Englishman educated at Oxford than an Aboriginal boy brought up on a cattle station. Joe is portrayed as a loyal and intelligent young man whose love for Jedda is true while Marbuck is portrayed as wild, uncivilised and dangerous.

In the first scenes of the film, the Indigenous women wail and cry, mourning the death of the white station owner Sara McCann's baby. Mrs McCann, meanwhile,

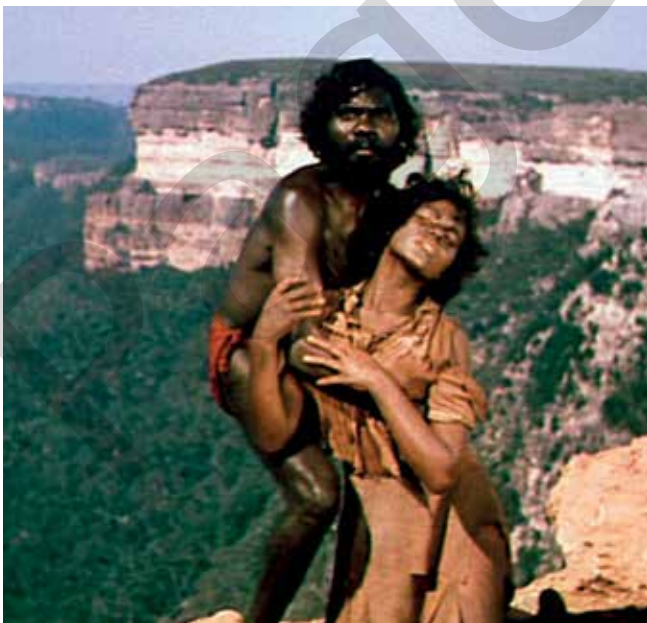


FIGURE 5.3.3 *Jedda* (1955)

stoically radios the flying doctor service to request a death certificate so that she may bury the child. Chauvel's representation of the black and white characters implies an inner strength in the white Australians and an inner turmoil in the black Australians.

## 1960s—A CHANGING RACE

In 1964, the ABC screened the documentary *A Changing Race*, produced by Therese Denny. The documentary looked at the issues around assimilation facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is probably the first Australian program in which the only people seen on screen are Indigenous.

This clip highlights the issues Aboriginal peoples in Central Australia faced in the 1960s, as the pressure of assimilation bears down upon them. Removed from their lands, families and cultures and placed into government reserves or Christian missions, Aboriginal peoples suffered great emotional pain and physical hardship.

Jimmy Little's voice-over is aimed at making us accept as fact that Aboriginal people represent a 'dying culture' that can only be saved by the intervention of the missions. All the while the camera voyeuristically follows people on a community. They are shown in European clothes and not engaged in any obvious activity. This is meant to reinforce the idea of a lost or defeated people with little future. It makes for discomfiting and dispiriting viewing.

Ironically, with hindsight we can see the assumption of the narration was wrong. Instead of discarding their cultural knowledge, traditions and practices, Aboriginal elders passed on the wealth of their cultural heritage to their descendants so it could survive.

National Film and Sound Archive,  
Curator Liz McNiven, Notes about *A Changing Race*

## 1980s

In 1987, the ABC established its Indigenous Programs Unit in order to produce high-quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander television. Its first programs included *Blackout* (1989–95), *Kam Yan* (1995–96), *Songlines* (1997) and *Message Stick* (1999–current). In 1988 Imparja TV began, concentrating at first on news before broadening into entertainment and education programming.



**FIGURE 5.3.4** *Family Rules* (2016), commissioned and shown on NITV

## THE 2000s AND BEYOND

### National Indigenous Television

National Indigenous Television or NITV started in 2007 and now reaches 2 million viewers per month.

NITV is a television channel run through SBS broadcasting television and produced by Indigenous television-makers and filmmakers. NITV states on its website that it is:

a channel made by, for and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Through us, you will discover a channel for all Australians. NITV informs, educates and entertains its Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences about the issues that matter the most to Indigenous Australians. NITV provides a rich diversity of cultures, languages and talent.

NITV hosts the only daily national news service covering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories across Australia. The channel also either commissions or acquires content primarily from the Indigenous production sector. One of the most recent commissions was *Family Rules* (see Figure 5.3.4) about an Indigenous Australian family of nine daughters and their mother.

### Ten Canoes

*Ten Canoes*, directed by Rolf de Heer in 2006, was a landmark moment in Australian Indigenous storytelling because it was the first Australian feature film performed in an Indigenous language. The film was a critical and box office success and was screened at various film festivals around the world including Cannes, Berlin and Toronto. The film also inspired the website 12 Canoes.



**FIGURE 5.3.5** *Ten Canoes* (2006) was the first Australian Indigenous language feature film.



## INDIGENOUS FILM AND SCREEN STORYTELLERS

Increasingly, Indigenous stories in feature films such as *Samson and Delilah* (2009), *The Sapphires* and *Bran Nue Day* (1991) and the acclaimed television drama *Redfern Now* are being told by Indigenous Australians. These Australian stories have been created by Indigenous writers and directors and, unlike Charles Chauvel's white imaginings of what it is like to be an Indigenous Australian, filmmakers like Warwick Thornton (*Samson and Delilah*), Rachel Perkins (*Bran Nue Day*, *Mabo* 2015), Leah Purcell (*Black Chicks Talking* 2002) and Wayne Blair (*The Sapphires*) are bringing Indigenous stories to Australian screens through an Indigenous set of eyes.

'Indigenous media is critical to demystifying Indigenous culture and strengthening our identity,' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda said today.

Marking International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples and the 2012 theme of 'Indigenous Media, Empowering Voices', Commissioner Gooda said Australia's Indigenous media outlets played a valuable role in challenging stereotypes.

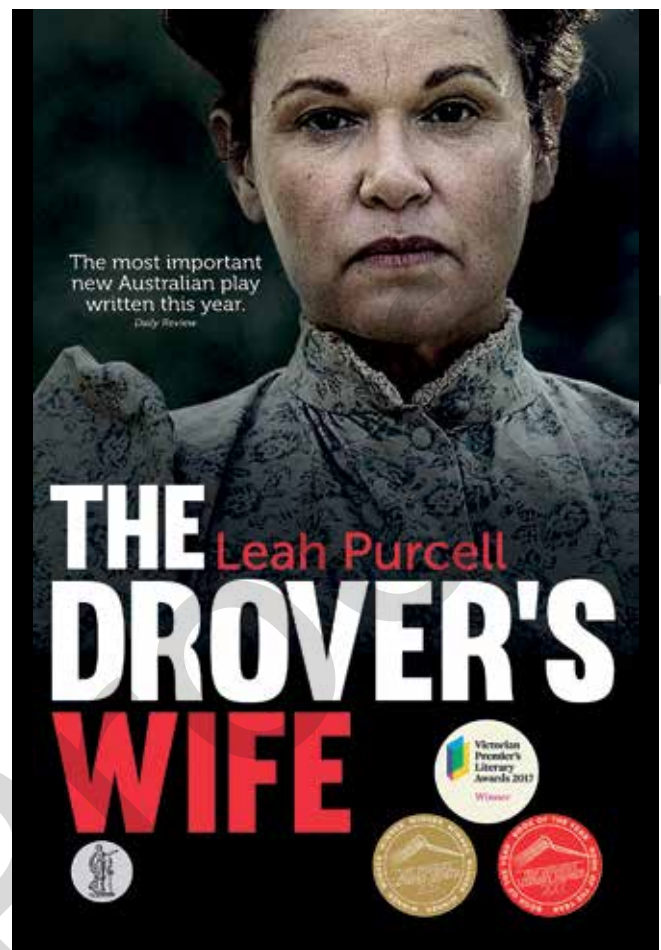
'It's often complex for mainstream media to portray Indigenous issues accurately and realistically, and sometimes, despite good intentions, this portrayal reinforces damaging stereotypes,' Commissioner Gooda said.

'Australia's Indigenous media outlets have a vision and breadth which gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the information we need on the things we're interested in, through an Indigenous lens.

'The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has called on nations around the world to create and maintain opportunities for Indigenous peoples to articulate their perspectives, priorities and aspirations,' he said.

'I call today on Australian governments to support these efforts by fully implementing the Declaration.

Extract from Australian Human Rights Commission media release 'Indigenous media strengthens identity' media release, 9 August 2012



**FIGURE 5.3.6** Leah Purcell, in *The Drover's Wife*, a Henry Lawson story she adapted for the theatre. It brings the Indigenous characters sidelined and stereotyped by Lawson to the centre.

### Learning activities

- 1 Watch *Jedda* (1955) and answer the following questions:
  - How would you describe the portrayal of black and white Australians in the story?
  - What technical codes and story conventions have been used to communicate these ideas to the audience?
  - How would modern audiences respond to the portrayal of Indigenous Australians in *Jedda*?
- 2 Research NITV and profile three of its programs.
- 3 Explore the website 12 Canoes.
  - Describe the content on the website.
  - What are the stories featured on the site? Explain.



## 5.4 Diversity of Australian stories

Historically, Australia's early screen stories reflected a very white and very British–Australian identity. Australia is now a very multicultural society—however, this cultural reality is not always reflected in Australian screen stories.

### SCREEN STORIES AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In 2016, Screen Australia undertook a study entitled 'Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in TV Drama', examining five years' worth of Australian television drama programming. The research focused on cultural background, disability status and sexual orientation/gender identity.

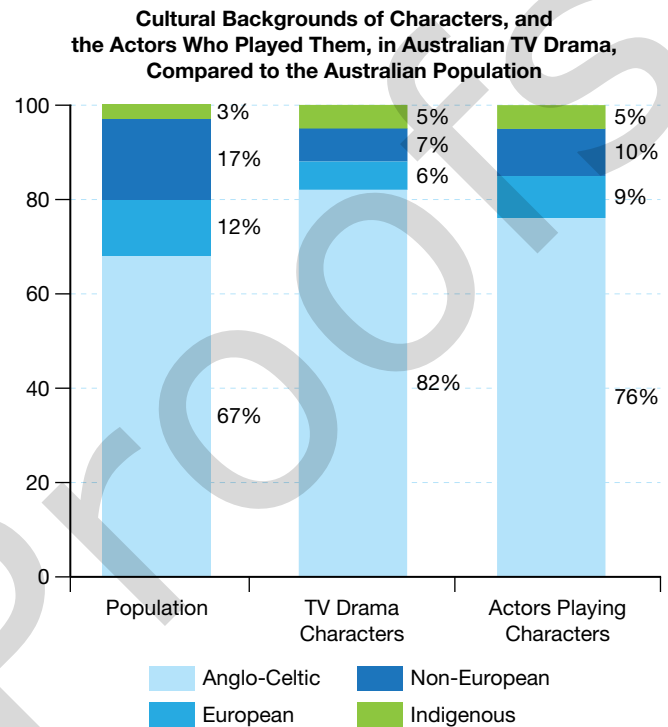
The study showed that Australia's minorities (people from non-European backgrounds—Asian, African or Middle Eastern) and marginalised communities (people with disabilities) are under-represented in television drama compared to the population. The report also noted that Indigenous Australians are well-represented onscreen compared to their proportion of the population. Both children's programs and comedies generally showed more diversity than drama programs.

#### CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The Screen Australia report used four categories of cultural background, Anglo-Celtic, European, Non-European and Indigenous, to capture cultural diversity on Australian television. The main findings of the report were that cultural diversity on Australian television is not a reflection of the wider Australian community, as outlined in Figure 5.4.1.

Further findings of the report noted:

- Second-generation Australians from a non-Anglo-Celtic background are 32 per cent of the population, but only represent 18 per cent of the main characters in television dramas.
- Approximately 12 per cent of Australian's population is from a European background, yet only 6 per cent of characters onscreen are European.
- Approximately 17 per cent of Australian's population is from a non-European background, yet only 7 per cent of characters onscreen are non-European.



**FIGURE 5.4.1** Cultural background of characters and the actors who played them in Australian television drama, compared to the Australian population

- Approximately 3 per cent of Australian's population is Indigenous and 5 percent of characters on screen are Indigenous.

The roles that actors are playing generally reflect the cultural background of the actor. However, there are examples of Anglo-Celtic characters who are played by European or non-European actors—this is sometimes called 'colour-blind casting'. Five per cent of actors identified as Indigenous and this figure matches with the number of Indigenous characters appearing in television dramas.

Programs where the main characters were predominantly from an Anglo-Celtic background is around 36 per cent. This means that 64 per cent of programs have a main cast member from a non-Anglo-Celtic background. Indigenous main characters were clustered in a few programs.

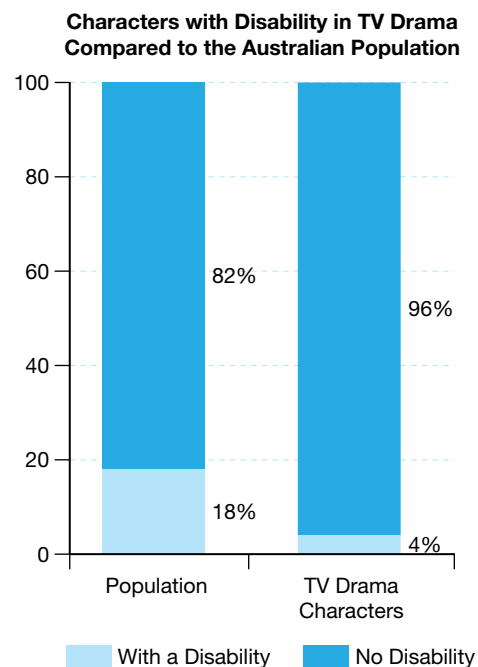


**FIGURE 5.4.2** *East West 101*

The study indicated evidence that the stereotyping of minority cultural groups was decreasing and there were examples of all occupational categories for characters of all cultural backgrounds. *East West 101* (see Figure 5.4.2) was a police drama shown on SBS that told the story of a crime squad made up of detectives with varying cultural backgrounds.

### DISABILITY STATUS

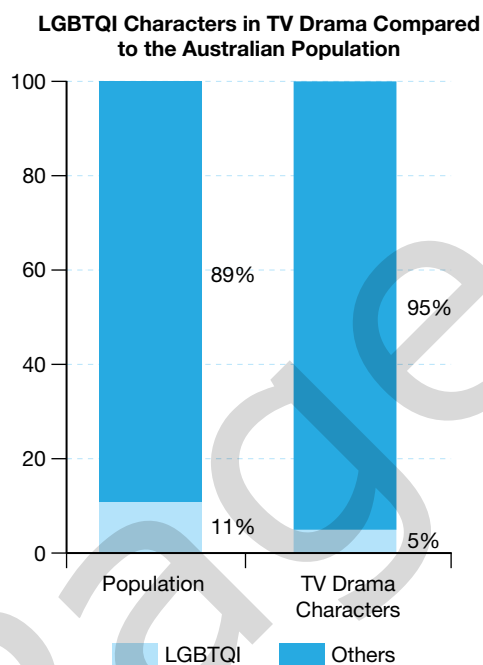
The Screen Australia report used the *Disability Discrimination Act* to define disability—this incorporates physical, psychological, intellectual and sensory limitations and restrictions and impairments. The main findings of the report were that the number of characters with a disability on Australian television is not a reflection of the wider Australian community, as outlined in Figure 5.4.3. The report noted that at least 10 per cent of programs included a main character with a disability.



**FIGURE 5.4.3** Characters with a disability in Australian television dramas, compared to the Australian population



**FIGURE 5.4.4** *Please Like Me*



**FIGURE 5.4.5** LGBTQI in Australian television drama, compared to the Australian population

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION/GENDER IDENTITY

The Screen Australia report used the definitions from the *Sex Discrimination Act* and 'LGBTQI' refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (or questioning) and/or intersex. The report found that the number of characters who identify as LGBTQI on Australian television is not a reflection of the wider Australian community, as outlined in Figure 5.4.5. The report noted that 27 per cent of programs had one LGBTQI character. *Please Like Me* (see Figure 5.4.4) is one of the rare Australian dramas that includes more than one LGBTQI character, as well as characters with a disability.

### Learning activity

Choose one of the areas of diversity outlined in 'Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in TV Drama'.

- Conduct your own survey on five television shows you regularly watch. Include genres like reality television, news and live entertainment.
- Do your results agree with Screen Australia's? Explain, referring to your findings and statistics.



## 5.5 Online stories

Content creators are responding to the fact that audiences are increasingly accessing stories via online streaming and are watching what they want when they want.

### ACCESS AND VIEWING STORIES

The way in which audiences access and view screen stories has become varied and very much driven by the user. Teenagers and twenty-somethings view screen stories when and where they want. While feature films are still viewed in large numbers at cinemas, television stories are moving more and more to internet-enabled devices. An example of this is *The Katering Show* (see Figure 5.5.1), a send up of the many cooking shows on mainstream television. *The Katering Show* episodes are of a non-traditional television length, running at around 10 minutes per episode.

Virtually all of our free-to-air and Pay TV networks provide opportunities for audiences to view programs on an internet platform at a time that suits them. Now that streaming content providers have entered the Australian market, the idea that the viewer chooses the time and place of viewing will become more and more the norm rather than the exception. It seems clear from recent surveys that more and more Australians, including those of older generations, are adopting this new mode of viewing. As you can see from Figure 5.5.2, 50 per cent of Australian internet users are watching film and television online. All age groups are now watching content online, with the biggest percentage being in the 25–34 age group.

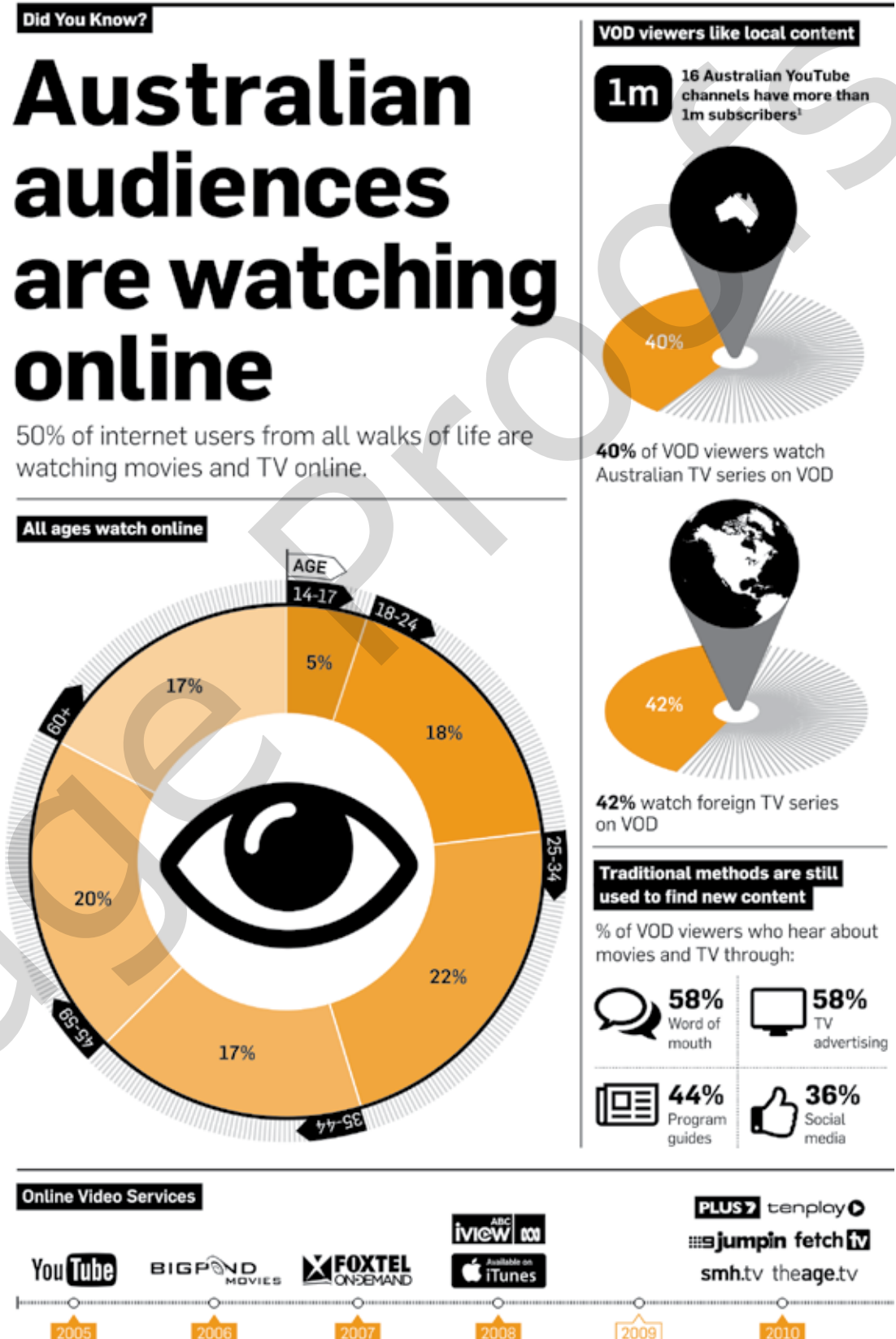


FIGURE 5.5.1 *The Katering Show*

The growth in online viewing has been noted by content creators and we are now seeing the emergence of screen content produced specifically for that. Creators not only include private YouTubers, but also traditional creators like

the ABC. The emergence of video-on-demand streaming services like STAN has also seen the production of made-for-streaming content like *Wolf Creek*.

**FIGURE 5.5.2** What Australian audiences are watching online

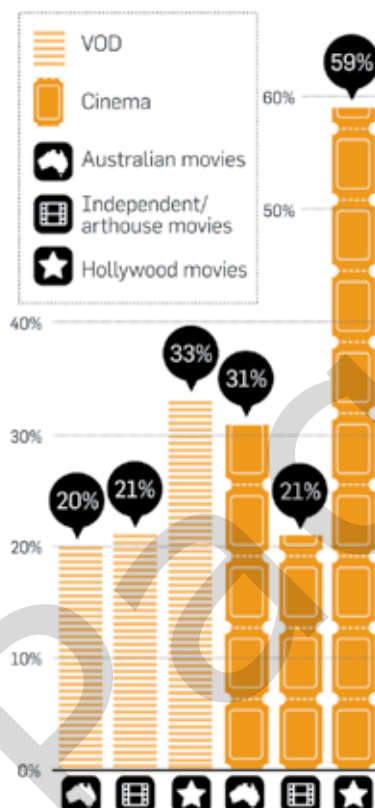


### Top 5 services used by VOD viewers:

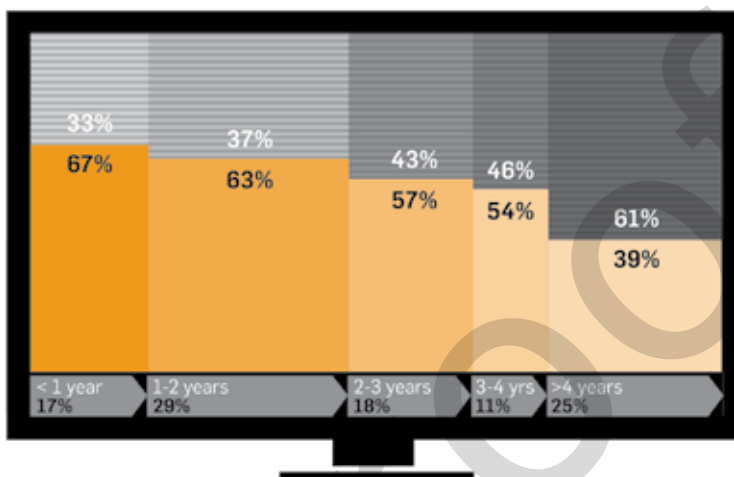
<b>You Tube</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>ABC iview</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>PLUS 7</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>SBS ON DEMAND</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>tenplay</b>	<b>38%</b>

### Hollywood is less dominant online than at the cinema

% of VOD viewers who watch:



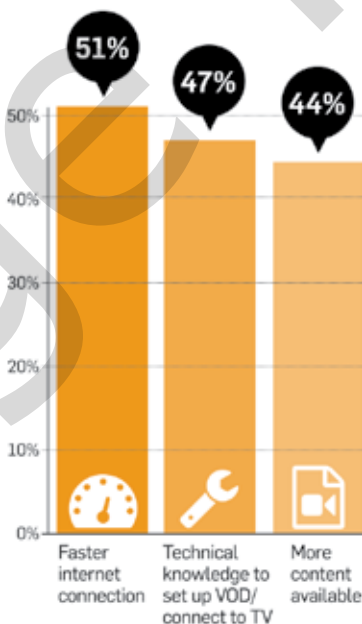
### Newcomers are more likely to choose legal services



% of VOD viewers who have been watching for: % that only use legal VOD services % that have used illegal services

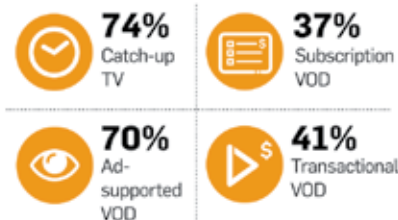
### Barriers to watching online can be overcome

% who would watch more VOD with:

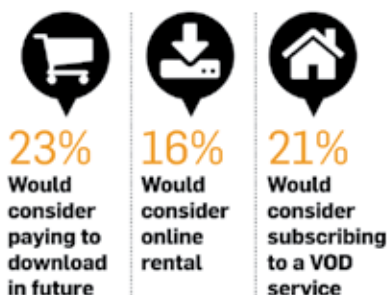


### Free-to-view VOD is the most used

Percentage of VOD viewers who use:



### But there is interest in the paid services



Source: Screen Australia analysis of Nielsen data, 2014  
Infographic: Anthony Calvert  
<sup>1</sup> vidstats.com/youtube-top-100-most-subscribed-australia-au-channels

www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research



## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Australia has a rich culture of narrative screen storytelling. Australian stories have arisen from our history and often reflect the perceived Australian identity of the time in which they appear. The First World War film *Hero of the Dardenelles* represents an Australian identity tied to England. The idea of fighting in Europe in 1915 is presented as the natural Australian response to defending 'Mother England'. The 1981 film *Gallipoli* presents an independent Australian identity in which fighting in Europe is represented as foolish and tragic.
- Australian stories are influenced and shaped by various institutions, including government funding bodies, government and industry regulators, media corporations, network producers and audiences. Few audience members are aware of the influences of government bodies such as Screen Australia or Film Victoria. Their funding decisions often decide which Australian stories make it to our screens and which will not.
- The personal style of media creators including screenwriters, directors and producers influence the way in which narratives reflect reality. Peter Weir's direction of his 1980 film *Gallipoli* concentrates on the friendship of two young men deciding to join up and fight in First World War. Indeed, the greater part of the story takes place in Australia and Egypt. Presenting the pair's journey to Gallipoli and developing their friendship makes the final scene all the more tragic.
- Australian audiences value diverse Australian stories being brought to our cinema, television and online screens. As outlined in the key findings of the Screen Australia report, 'Screen Currency: Valuing Our Screen Industry', Australian screen stories contribute billions of dollars and thousands of jobs to the Australian economy. The report also found that Australians support the idea of government funding for Australian stories.

## ASSESSMENT TASKS

- 1 Undertake a diversity audit of Australian screen stories. Compare the ethnicity of the characters in at least three television programs from each of the channels 2, 7, 9 and 10. Include drama and reality television programs. Compare your results with those of Australia's last census. Present your findings in an essay, short film or podcast.
- 2 Write an analysis of the way in which two Australian feature films or documentaries have used technical codes and story conventions to create meaning and engage their audience.
- 3 Create a profile of a famous Australian screen storyteller. You might present this as a magazine piece, academic essay, short film or podcast. It should include an in-depth discussion of the screen storyteller's contribution to Australia's cultural identity.