

CLASSIC AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE: lessons for life

Suitable for Grades 5-7

Seven Little Australians *Ethel Turner* 1894

SUMMARY

Seven Little Australians describes the life of a family, in particular its seven children in early outback Australia. The setting is a house nicknamed 'Misrule' and 'Yarrahappini' the house of their grandparents. Written from first person narrator we follow the adventures of Judy, Pip, Nell, Bunty, Meg, baby and 'General' with a focus on their characters and relationships.

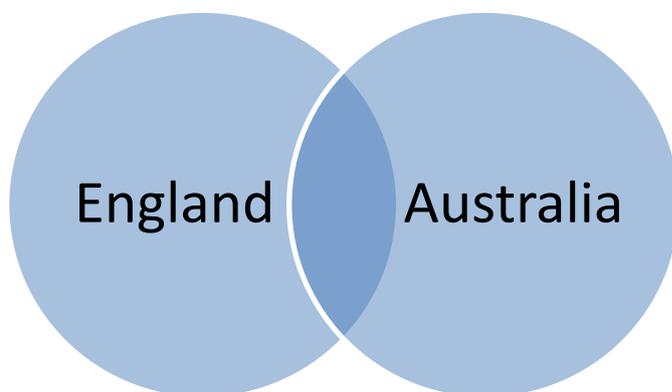
THEMES

Bush hardship
Christian virtue – soft forgiving nature vs hard purity
Sacrifice and death

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

CHAPTER 1

1. Compare the narrator's view of England and Australia in either a venn diagram or table



	England	Australia
Adjectives		

Pop quiz vocabulary

Slatternly *lazy, undisciplined, fat*

Pelisse *fur trimmed jacket used by soldiers*

Larrikin *rascal*

Babel of voices *refers to tower of babel, cacophony or chaos*

Will o the wisp *light phenomenon that flashes - said to be a mischievous spirit*

Bon camaraderie *good company*

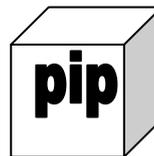
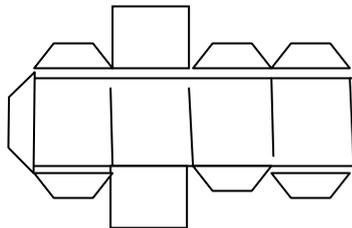
2. Descriptive passage – look at the highlighted phrases and rewrite in your own words what they mean:

*' it may be that the **miasmas of naughtiness** develop best in the **sunny brilliancy** of our atmosphere. It may be that the **land and the people are young hearted together** and the children's spirits not crushed and saddened by the **shadow of long years sorrowful history...there is a lurking sparkle of joyousness and rebellion and mischief in nature here and therefore in children**. Often the light grows dull and the bright colouring fades to neutral tints in the dust*

*and heat of the day. But when it survives play-days and school days, circumstances alone determine whether the **electric sparkle shall go to play will o the wisp with the larrikin type or warm the breasts of the spirited single hearted loyal ones who alone can 'advance Australia'***

What is the narrator trying to say about the children of Australia?

3. Create a character map into which descriptions of each child are added with reference as the chapters progress. One method is to cut out a cube for each character and write words on each side or illustrations

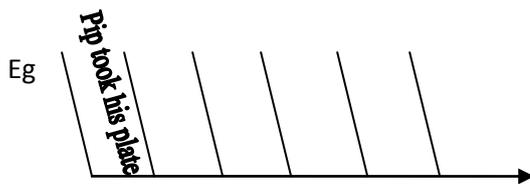


CHAPTER 2

The opening words come from a monologue in the W.S. Gilbert play 'The Baffled Gambler'. Read the whole page and discuss how you think it ties into the events of the chapter.

This chapter describes a comical misadventure from the seven children as they trick their father into giving them 'fowl' for dinner.

1. Write a timeline of the children's 'fowl' adventure each child on a line



2. Write a short story – one page – of a family dinner you remember. Note the passage in chapter 2 – the dialogue of each character carries the plot AND helps the reader to know more about each character

CHAPTER 3

1. Bible references – look up Judy's words 'let us shave our heads and don sackcloth'. What does this mean? 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' is also used to refer to what?
2. This chapter outlines the children each in different ways 'being good'. List the ways each child tries to impress their father. The narrator concludes '*the results were so exceedingly bad that the young Woolcots determined never again to assume virtues that they had not*'. What do you think about their behaviour?
3. There is a descriptive paragraph about Judy that gives insight into her unique character. Let's have a look at the narrator's words:

'He went in again slowly, thoughtfully. Judy always mystified him. He understood her the least of any of his children and sometimes the thought of her worried him. At present she was only a sharp, clever and frequently impertinent child; but he felt she was utterly different from the other six and it gave him an aggrieved kind of feeling when he thought about it...he remembered her own mother had often said she trembled for Judy's future. That restless fire of hers that shone out of her dancing eyes and glowed scarlet on her cheeks in excitement and lent amazing energy and activity to her young lithe body would either make a noble daring brilliant woman of her or else she would be shipwrecked on rocks the others would never come to and it would flame up higher and higher and consume her. 'Be careful of Judy' had been almost the last words of the anxious mother when in the light that comes when the world is going out she had seen with terrible clearness the stones and briars in the way of that particular pair of small eager feet. And she had died, and Judy was stumbling right amongst them now and her father could not 'be careful' of her because he absolutely did not know how'

using these colours highlight words or phrases in the above passage:

adjective phrase  metaphor  dramatic verbs  allegory  symbolism

Helpful hints to writing a short story – 4 steps to plot

Opening situation Pip grumbles at dinner



Development each child goes in to father



Climax Judy sends General in to father, General makes a scene



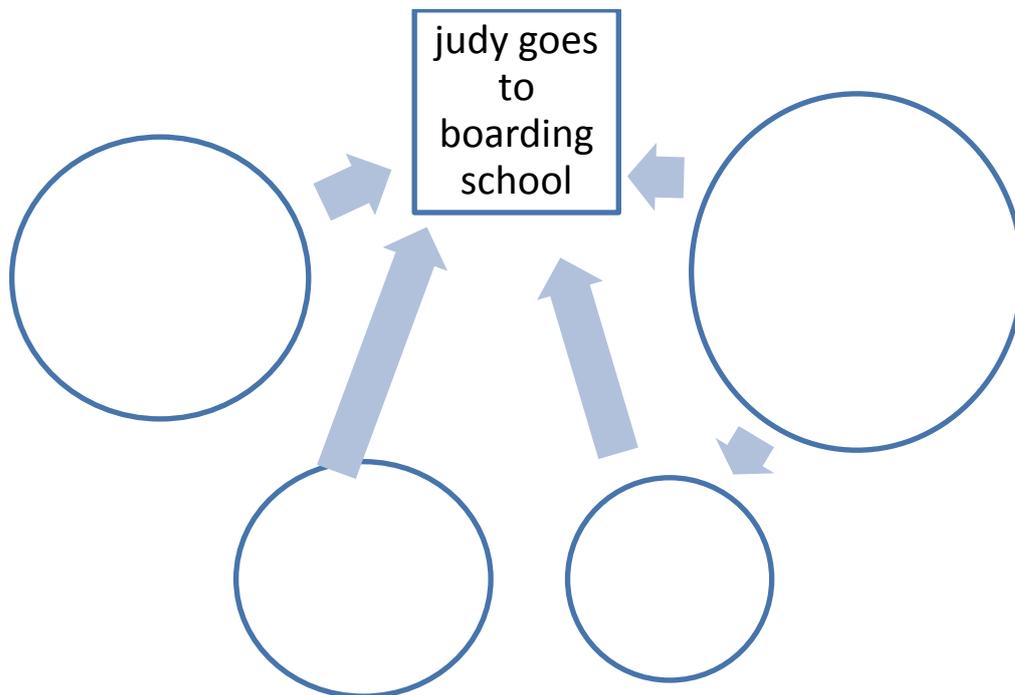
Exposure father punishes all

CHAPTER 4

The opening words are taken from W.S Gilbert's play *'The Mikado'* act 1 part 10

Read the rest of the speech and respond in your own words – what do you think the author is trying to say by placing this here?

1. This chapter contains the circumstances which lead to Judy the eldest being sent off to boarding school. In your own words, write a summary of what happened. You could fill in a cause and effect graph if you like:



CHAPTER 5

1. list the adjectives and phrases which give a sombre mood to this chapter of Judy's departure eg: *'she looked like a miniature tragedy queen going to immediate execution'* (a simile)

CHAPTER 6

The opening lines are from Shakespeare's play *Merchant of Venice* act III scene 7 spoken by Portia. Portia has a long speech in the play. Read her words in this scene and summarise their meaning in one sentence. This chapter is a tale of peer pressure and Meg is the protagonist. Aldith is her new found friend. Find words spoken by Aldith which give the reader an idea of her 'character':

1. What is the issue with wearing a corset?

2. The narrator makes a comment on the nature of Australian girls ‘ *Australian girls nearly always being to think of ‘lovers and nonsense’ ...long before their English sisters do. Whilst still in the short frock period of existence and while their hair is still free flowing they take the keenest interest in boys’*

Do you think the narrator/author is presenting an opinion on this subject? How is this demonstrated? eg what words are used to persuade the reader.

Nb: Later in chapter 8 when Alan challenges Meg on her ‘game playing’ of sweethearts, the previous passages like that above seem like ridicule and satire.

CHAPTER 7 & 8

1. Meg’s embarrassing moment – her struggle to make the right choice. Meg doesn’t find anyone in whom she can confide her woes. What would have been the best person for her to tell? Imagine the exchange and write a short dialogue between them. .
2. Aldith’s sarcasm hits the spot ‘*you’re just twelve, Marguerite. You’re not a bit more than twelve. You’d better get a roll again and a picture book with morals. I’ll ask Andrew to buy you one and a bit of cord too to tie you in your high chair in the nursery’* In her desire to be older, more worldly and mature Meg agrees to go with Aldith. But when Alan meets Meg and scares her, the flirtation ends and Meg realises how horrid she has been.
3. USING ALLITERATION WRITE A SENTENCE DESCRIBING THE EVENTS OF THESE TWO CHAPTERS some to start you off:
Aldith assumes....
Meg mustn’t...

CHAPTER 9

The opening lines to this chapter refer to Lord Alfred Tennyson, a British 19th poet. His poem titled *Margaret* sets the scene for the events of Meg in the chapter. List some features of Tennyson’s ‘Meg’ and compare with the character in the novel

TENNYSON’S MEG	TURNER’S MEG

CHAPTERS 10 -13

The opening lines '*I know him to be valiant...*' come from Shakespeare's play 'King Henry Fifth' scene VIII. Look at the surrounding dialogue in the play. Does it help with understanding the events in chapter 10 - Judy's long trek home? In what way?

1. Judy's escape from boarding school, her long trek home and discovery in the barn is told primarily through her interaction with Bunty. He is sent to get food and items from the house and is punished for his good intentions. '*he could hardly have believed had anyone told him previously that he could have done anything so absolutely noble and the thought comforted him*'. What 'noble' thing is he talking about?
2. The reader is in suspense many pages before the climax of the Captain finding Judy hiding in the barn. But the threat of being sent home is overshadowed with one sentence that sums up her future '*for the handkerchief that the child had taken from her lips had scarlet horrible spots staining its whiteness*'. What does this mean?

The end of this chapter is a turning point and could have been vastly different. Use your imagination to write just one sentence to replace this last one. Look at the preceding one that leads into it '*he caught his breath and grew pale under his bronze, for.....[now you finish!]*

CHAPTER 14

'juxtaposition' describes two very different ideas or thoughts or images placed next to each other. The first two phrases of this chapter are an example of visual images contrasted ie '*dogcart*' with '*warm soft food*'

using two columns fill in other contrasts listed in this passage

Eg in the dogcart

Warm soft food

CHAPTER 15 & 16

Yarrahappini – stockman, cottage and station

'up near the house the trees were green and beautiful and the flowers a blaze of colour. But all the stretching plain between was brown. Brown burnt grass with occasional patches of dull green, crisscrossed here and there with fences ;that ran up the little hills that in places broke the plain's straight line and disappeared in the dips where rank grass and bracken flourished the head station consisted of quite a little

community of cottages on the top of a hill...a big stone cottage reared itself slowly right in front of the little old place with its bottle cored garden plot...a beautiful cottage it was with its plenitude of lofty rooms its many windows and its deep veranda. The little home was kitchen and bedrooms for the two women servants and was joined to the big place by a covered way. A hundred yards away there was two roomed cottage...farther still two bark humpies stood back to back. Tettawonga, a bent ol black fellow lived in on and did little else than smoke and give his opinion on the weather every morning...two of the other station hands lived in the other cottage...close to the house was a long weather board building with a heavy padlocked door...

Draw a plan or illustration of the station layout as described in this passage

CHAPTER 17

The opening words are from 'The Sick Stockrider' by Australian poet Adam Lindsay Gordon. Look at the whole poem. What picture does it paint? Does it help with understanding the book *seven little Australians*? How?

1. This chapter focuses story on Pip's initiation into manhood. The events of shooting rabbits and cattle-drafting provide a lively tale of ' manifold perils' for pip who '*swung himself into his saddle in close imitation of the oldest stockmen and thought if only he could have a black evil looking pipe like Tettawonga and the rest of the men his happiness would be complete and his manhood attained*'

The stockman or drover is very common iconic image of the Australian male. Can you think of any others? Does this match reality?

Vocabulary quiz

'cockatoo' *sitting aside the fence*

'On the wallaby' *nomadic life*

Aide de camp *camp assistant*

Sallied forth *kept going determinedly*

Well groomed roan *horse*

Bush monarch *king of the bush*

On the burst agen *drunk*

Underline the simile and highlight the metaphor in the following list:

'Tired as a dozen dogs and a dingo'

'a sea of wildly lashing tails and horns'

'running fire of stockwhip'

'like lightning the men made a line behind'

CHAPTER 18

1. The bunyip is one of many animals described at Krangi Bahtoo 'duck water'. List the others and look up in dictionary if you do not know what they are

2. Bunyip is an Australian legend –research about it and write a descriptive paragraph of what you think it looks like

3. the passage about the lonely bark hut of a stockman helps the reader to get a sense of place ie how it felt to be at that time in history in that place. Go through the passage and underline anything you do not recognise. Make a KWL table like so and fill in the objects you know, the ones you are not sure of and then after researching place in end column, have learnt. You could access a local museum or heritage centre for information.

Know K

Want to know W

Have learnt L

If you have the centenary edition of 1994 you will note an aboriginal narrative from the original edition that was omitted from all other versions:

'The Woolcot children, while holidaying at the cattle station, listen to Mr Gillet telling an Aboriginal story he "got at second-hand" from Tettawonga, the station's Aboriginal stockman. "'Once upon a time' (Judy sniffed at the old-fashioned

beginning), 'once upon a time,' said Mr. Gillet, 'when this young land was still younger, and incomparably more beautiful, when Tettawonga's ancestors were brave and strong and happy as careless children, when their worst nightmare had never shown them so evil a time as the white man would bring their race, when--' 'Oh, get on! muttered Pip impatiently. 'Well,' said Mr Gillet, 'when, in short, an early Golden Age wrapped the land in its sunshine, a young kukuburra and its mate spread their wings and set off towards the purple mountains beyond the gum trees...'

Why do you think the early publishers left this story out?

CHAPTER 19

Symbolism – blue hair ribbon

Meg struck up a friendship with Mr Gillet . This passage highlights the different character of Meg and Mr Gillet.

1. List some adjectives for each person
2. Mr Gillet asks to keep Meg's blue ribbon ' I know the conditions that attach' what do you think he meant by that?
3. The next paragraph has Meg dreaming of her purity and influence for good. This passage is describing her thoughts and hopes. But her pride takes a fall when she discovers that Mr Gillet has not lived up to expectations and improved himself ' *all her castle came tumbling about her ears, dealing her sharp bitter blows*'. What do you think this line is about?
4. Meg endures her second rebuke in the book as Mr Gillet advises her that forgiveness and kindness are often more effective than being 'high and mighty, hard and cold' ' *it is only women like you, Miss Meg and angels who can keep to the path always...the world has a beautiful frown of its own and an endless vocabulary of cold words- wouldn't it do if the sisters left it the monopoly of them?*'

What do you think he is referring to?

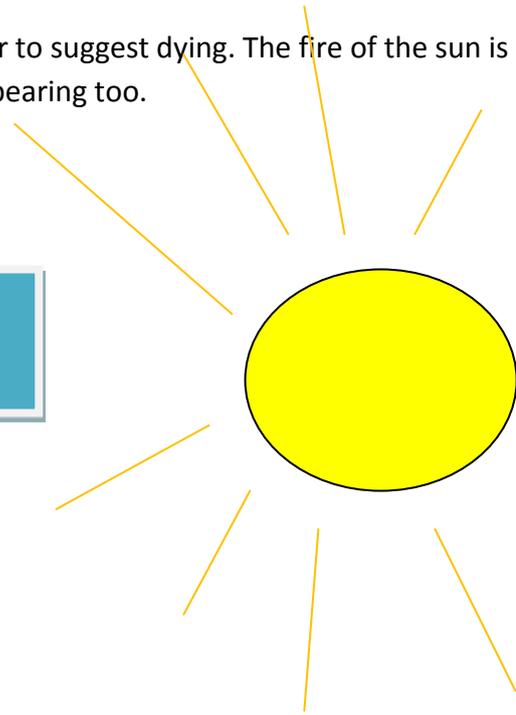
Do you agree?

CHAPTER 20 & 21

This chapter races along to the climatic event of the falling tree , where Judy flings herself over General to prevent his injury. Meg is left to stay with a fatally injured Judy while the others go for help. The reader is left with Meg's distress and flailing attempts to console Judy as she is dying. Then Meg remembered the 'most beautiful hymn in the world' which is *Abide with Me*.

NOTE The sunset is a visual image used by the author to suggest dying. The fire of the sun is described as waning just as the 'fire' in Judy is disappearing too.

Then sings my soul by Robert j Morgan tells the whole story of hymn writers such as Henry Francis Lyte who wrote *Abide with Me*



CHAPTER 22

*'She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years...'*

1. This is a famous poem '*A slumber did my spirit seal*' by William Wordsworth 1799. Read the last verse as well and try to work out what it means.
2. Using the following adjectives write your own description of a natural scene eg: sunrise, storm, rainbow, flood

Paling sombre dying glory indistinct vivid streaks motionless flaming delicate veil

There are two changes in relationship noted in the last few sentences which occur as a result of Judy's death. What are they?

ASSESSMENT IDEAS

Write an expository essay on the theme of fire in the novel 500w

Oral /podcast persuasive talk on why you would like to live in Misrule

Imaginative writing 300w Pip's letter to his friend after one of the events of the novel

Draw up a comparative table between the depiction of Australia in the novel and the miniseries

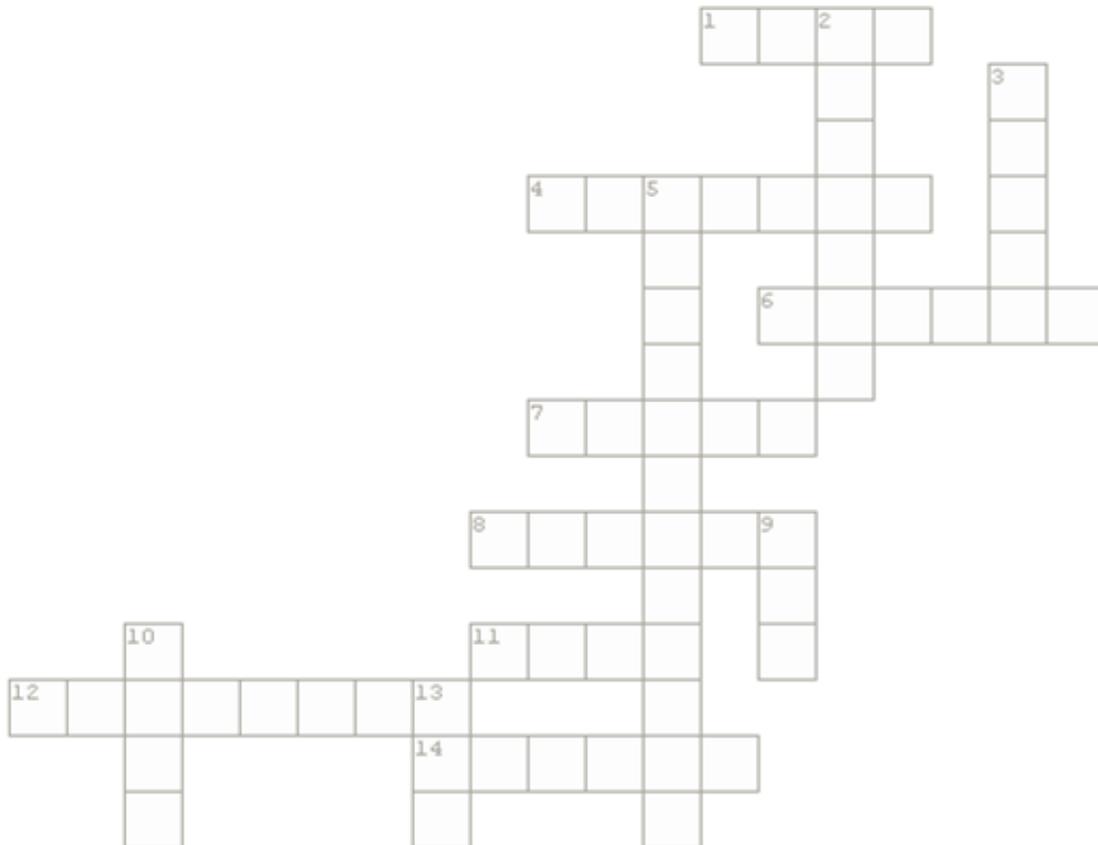
Create a Powerpoint or Prezi that highlights the visual language used in the miniseries

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

Name: _____

seven little australians

Complete the crossword below



Across

1. interrupted dinner
4. house name
6. caused meg's faint
7. smuggled food to judy
8. rumoured to live at duckriver
11. meg's ribbon
12. place pip and judy absconded
14. stepmother

Down

2. family name
3. hundred miles of trainride
5. miles judy walked
9. wore a knife and whip
10. killed by a falling tree
13. romantic

TEACHER'S GUIDE:

Seven Little Australians is available for free download from project Gutenberg. There is also a 10 part miniseries available through ABC 1973 that closely follows the text.

Although the miniseries is not referenced in this workbook it would be of benefit to students to perhaps view the version after examining the text. This would allow comparison between written and visual texts which is a common component of the Australian Curriculum

The Centenary edition of the text published in 1994 contains previously unpublished text that is worth examining for its portrayal of indigenous Australians.

It must be noted that this novel contains much that could be described as 'moralistic' in its tale but this should not deter the teacher from using this text; rather it is a common feature of early Australian writing as an attempt to educate and create virtue in a harsh lawless land. Some value therefore can be found in comparing authorial intent then and now; there are many examples of current novels and picture books that show an obvious theme or message that is a product of our social environment. In fact 'morality' is promoted now in different ways to address bullying, discrimination, racism etc.

Seven Little Australians is a novel which contains a wealth of references to poetry, plays, and sacred texts. It is worth familiarising yourself with the quotes in the novel as they allow the reader greater insight into the thematic intentions of the author and the social context of the time. Listed below are the referenced texts

William Wordsworth 'A slumber did my spirit seal'

Adam Lindsay Gordon 'The Sick Stockrider'

Lord Alfred Tennyson 'Margaret'

Shakespeare 'Merchant of Venice - Act III Scene 7 and

'King Henry Fifth' Act 5 scene VIII

Henry Francis Lyte 'Abide with Me'

W S Gilbert 'Mikado' Act I scene 10 and 'A Baffled Gambler'

Book of Matthew Chap 13 verse 42

The links to Australian Curriculum 'literature and context' are found at:

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/Curriculum/F-10?y=5&y=6&y=7&s=LT&c=1&c=4&c=5&c=7&p=1&layout=1>