

Why 'My Place' is good for teachers . . .

By Deborah Cohen and Rachel Kennedy

The *My Place for Teachers* website (www.myplace.edu.au) is an exciting resource for both teachers and students and provides a rich resource to support exploration of the recently launched *My Place* television series. The TV series is adapted from the *My Place* children's book written in 1988 by Nadia Wheatley and illustrated by Donna Rawlins to celebrate Australia's bicentenary. The *My Place*, TV series 1 (2008–1888), extends the *My Place* book by adding two new characters: Mohammed in 1998 and Lily in 1988.

The *My Place for Teachers* website supports teachers of years 3 to 6 and beyond to explore the television series' content through a variety of pathways. The nature of the website allows teachers to determine their depth of investigation of the content to support their individual school and class situation.

Teachers can explore content within each episode and investigate stories and issues that are unique to each decade (2000s-1880s). By using the *Decade timeline*, teachers are able to complement episode content by examining historical and political, scientific and technological and social and cultural contexts of the time.

The events of each decade underpin the stories of the children in the clips and the growth of Australia as a nation. While the *Decade Timeline* presents a range of historical content across each nominated decade, it also provides a snapshot of events of the episode year within that decade, providing clear links to episode content.

The *Teaching Activities* section of the website provides a range of History and English activities related to selected clips from each episode. These activities aim to expand upon students' understanding of the themes, contexts and issues explored within the 39 selected clips across the 13 episodes from 1888 to 2008. Student activity sheets and additional resources allow for further investigation of the clips and contexts.

Teachers may choose to explore content by viewing *Teaching Activities* and the associated clips selected from each episode or through a thematic approach. While some teachers may choose to investigate only one or two clips based on themes that integrate into other curriculum units, many may choose to create an inquiry unit using the rich resources within the site to be investigated in parallel with the screening of the television series.

Alternatively, teachers may wish to present clip content through the *Themes* section. Clip content has been categorised into three key themes; Family and Community, Lifestyle and Technology. By exploring clips thematically, teachers can view content across the 13 episodes and gain an understanding of contexts and perspectives over time. This approach also supports teachers in integrating the *My Place* content into other units and topics within the teaching and learning program. Each of the three key themes presents content across a range of sub-themes:

Family and Community sub-themes

- Australians at war
- Indigenous perspectives
- Social order & education

- Gender roles & stereotypes
- Beliefs
- Historical events
- Politics
- Multiculturalism
- Language & scripting
- Character
- Relationships

Lifestyle sub-themes

- Culture
- Customs & traditions
- Chores, business & employment
- Fashion
- Celebrations
- Food
- Art, music & literature
- Entertainment & games

Technology sub-themes

- Currency
- Inventions & electronic media
- Transport

The *Behind-the-scenes* section gives teachers an opportunity to hear Penny Chapman talk about how the *My Place* TV series was produced and the reasons why she and co-producer Helen Pankhurst selected locations in Sydney. She also speaks about how the eight different screenwriters for the series adapted elements of the original stories to build a complex and compelling drama representative of each decade. The key elements in the TV series are the fig tree, house and canal.

This section also provides video of Nadia Wheatley talking about the writing of the *My Place* book and what inspired her. She also reads those chapters from the book that are pertinent to this series. Teachers will also find a clips bank and stills gallery among other interesting content to excite students in the telling of their own stories about *My Place*.

The *Our Place* section of the website provides a dynamic zone for teachers to contribute ideas and stories to share with the wider education community. Teachers can work with students in developing their own *My Place* stories and upload these to *Our Place* as well as view teaching strategies and ideas for exploring the *My Place* content within classrooms.

The book and TV series highlight Australia's multicultural past and pay reverence to the original indigenous inhabitants. It is anticipated that *My Place* series 2 (1878-1758) will begin production in mid-2010, to be screened on the ABC in 2010/2011.

ABC3 developed a wonderful interactive website for children to explore the series: <http://www.abc.net.au/abc3/myplace/>. In this site you can discover what each room looked like in each era and play a quiz to identify significant objects and events of the past. It has information on the characters and their relationship to family and friends.

You can purchase the *My Place* TV series from the Australian Children's Television Foundation (www.actf.com.au) which has also produced a *My Place* Teacher's Guide (DVD ROM). The DVD ROM

resource contains the education content from the website with additional teaching activities for media studies. The *My Place* picture book is also available within the education package of TV series and DVD ROM resource and can also be purchased as a class set.

My Place (series 1), 13 episode series, children's drama

EPISODE SYNOPSIS
<p>Episode 1: 2008: Laura Laura accidentally sinks a dinghy in the canal. The ashes of the owner's beloved dog are lost in the muddle. She can't find a way to own up. Meanwhile, her mob get together to listen to the Prime Minister's apology to Indigenous people.</p>
<p>Episode 2: 1998: Mohammed Mohammed is a mad-keen bowler and is desperate to join the cricket team at his new school. However, there are no available places and so he ends up playing with the girls, who prove to be the better side.</p>
<p>Episode 3: 1988: Lily Lily's cousin Phoung arrives with her parents from Vietnam. But the trophy cousin turns out to be a real threat to Lily's status at home and at school.</p>
<p>Episode 4: 1978: Mike Mike knows a lot about Australian muscle cars from 1968 to 1978. The other kids think he's odd and Mike believes he only has one friend, Ben, but is Ben a real friend?</p>
<p>Episode 5: 1968: Sofia Sofia is a spy for the yayas and she's determined to get rid of her brother Michaelis's non-Greek girlfriend before he leaves for Vietnam.</p>
<p>Episode 6: 1958: Michaelis Michaelis's family is from Kalymnos. He wants to be Australian, not Greek, but even more than that he wants a television so he can watch <i>The Adventures of Robin Hood</i>.</p>
<p>Episode 7: 1948: Jen Jen's dad died in the war. Now her mum is planning to marry Wal. Even though Wal has a car, in Jen's eyes he definitely doesn't match up to her real dad.</p>
<p>Episode 8: 1938: Colum Colum has two big ambitions: to stop his best mate Thommo's family from being kicked out of the house next door, and to get up the nerve to ride his billycart down Brickpits Hill.</p>
<p>Episode 9: 1928: Bridie Kath and Lorna are the best of friends. The two set off on a day of harmless relaxation, wheeling Kath's baby brother in his pram with her annoying younger sister, Bridie, in tow.</p>
<p>Episode 10: 1918: Bertie Bertie wants to buy a special gift to welcome his brother Eddie home from the war. He thinks that a pair of brown brogue shoes is just what his brother will need. Bertie is doing all he can to save the money, including putting on a magic show.</p>

Episode 11: 1908: Evelyn

Evelyn can't wait for bonfire night. This year, for the first time, her father can afford to buy the family their own box of fireworks. Unfortunately, Evelyn shows the box to her disbelieving neighbour Freddie.

Episode 12: 1898: Rowley

Rowley longs for his father to come home. Convinced that good deeds will be rewarded, he'll do anything to help his mother and his neighbours. His goal seems close, but then he discovers that his father may never come home at all.

Episode 13: 1888: Victoria

Victoria and her family have just moved into the terrace house that her father has built. She'll do anything to ensure that they stay there forever and she has an idea.

Deborah Cohen is the Education Manager with the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

Rachel Kennedy is a Curriculum Advisor with Education Services Australia.