

TOMORROW

WHEN THE WAR BEGAN

TEACHERS' NOTES

This educational study guide complements the online materials and study DVD for the film *Tomorrow When The War Began*. Designed for students of English, Media and PSHEE at ages 12–16, the resources encourage young people to reflect personally and critically on the characters, relationships and ideas presented in the film. Activities are organised into subject areas using a range of the film's assets and some tasks are designed to be used in conjunction with Film Education's *Tomorrow When The War Began* study clips on DVD. For further information about these resources, contact secondary@filmeducation.org.

This resource places a strong focus on student-led discussion so the PSHEE activities are also suitable for English teachers aiming to promote speaking and listening opportunities.

SYNOPSIS

Tomorrow When the War Began follows the journey of eight high school friends in a coastal country town whose lives are suddenly and violently upended by an invasion that no one saw coming. Cut off from their families and their friends, these eight extraordinary teenagers must learn to escape, survive and fight back against hostile military forces.

ENGLISH AND MEDIA

Activities in this section explore how character and narrative are established across a range of texts, including the film poster, trailer and the key clips on the Film Education study DVD. The sections are designed to develop students' skills in reading and responding to multimodal texts.

These activities are ideal for students of English and Media aged 12–16.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Tomorrow When the War Began is based on the first book in a best-selling series that is well known in Australia.

- What does the film's title suggest to you? Do you notice anything unusual about the title? How does the title convey a sense of a 'sequence' or series?
- Australian audiences will already be familiar with the characters and the stories and will have certain expectations of the film. In other countries, the film's poster and trailer will need to establish themes and characters to help audiences know what to expect when they go to see the film.
- Take a look at the poster for the film on page 2. What first impressions do you get about the characters and the story?

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Take a look at this poster for the film. What first impressions do you get about the characters and the story?



When we analyse film posters, we should look closely at exactly what we see, as well as considering what the image makes us think and feel. Remember, the film poster has been carefully designed to help give viewers a sense of the characters and story from just a single glance at the image.

- 1 Make a list of all the things the poster denotes – what it actually shows. List the different elements of the image: the use of colour, light and dark and the text and font used.
- 2 Look again at the features you have observed in the poster and try to explain what thoughts, feelings and ideas each element of the image creates for you – that is, the ideas the poster connotes. Think about where you might have seen images like this before and what associations they have for you.
- 3 Now, using these ideas, explain what ‘genre’ or type of film you think this will be. Action? Science fiction? Thriller? Drama? ‘Buddy’ movie? War movie? Teen romance? Something different...? Remember that films can mix several different genres together.

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WHO'S WHO?

Now that you've explored the poster, you have a sense of the different characters that feature in the film. Each character has a distinct personality and a role to play as the narrative unfolds. But can you tell by appearances what personality traits each character might have? Try to match each of the character descriptions below to the characters you see in the poster on page 2.

ELLIE is the lead character in the film. Brave and loyal, Ellie thinks about the consequences of her actions and tries to support her friends.

CORRIE is Ellie's best friend. She shows her emotions more than Ellie, and is devoted to her boyfriend Kevin.

KEVIN is Corrie's boyfriend. Although used to a country life, Kevin doesn't always respond well to pressured situations.

HOMER and Ellie are close friends, having grown up next door to one another. Homer is a strong personality who doesn't shy away from trouble.

FI comes from a wealthy family who live in the town. Though she lacks the practical skills of the rest of the group, she is modest, kind and hardworking.

ROBYN is the youngest member of the group. She has been brought up in a strict Christian household, has strong moral values, and is a loyal friend.

LEE tends to keep his thoughts and feelings to himself, but shows great strength and bravery under pressure.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Film trailers are designed to introduce the viewer to central characters and key relationships. In a short space of time, they can convey a range of information through the images and sounds used, as well as the pace of the editing – the movement between different types of shot.

Watch the trailer on Film Education's *Tomorrow When The War Began* website or on the study DVD. Spend a few moments thinking about what you have seen and heard, and then answer the questions below. You can use the **character development chart** to help you organise your ideas as you watch.

- 1 Watch the first 35 seconds of the trailer, then pause the video player.
 - What do you discover about the relationships between the characters from what you have just seen?
 - What about the mood and atmosphere of their adventure?
 - How would you describe the genre of these first 35 seconds and who do you think it is aimed at?
- 2 Now watch the whole trailer again.
 - How do the characters and their relationships change and how is this change communicated to the audience?
 - What observations can you make about the roles and development of the male and female characters?
 - What about the mood and atmosphere of the trailer?
 - How would you describe the genre(s) and who do you think it is aimed at?

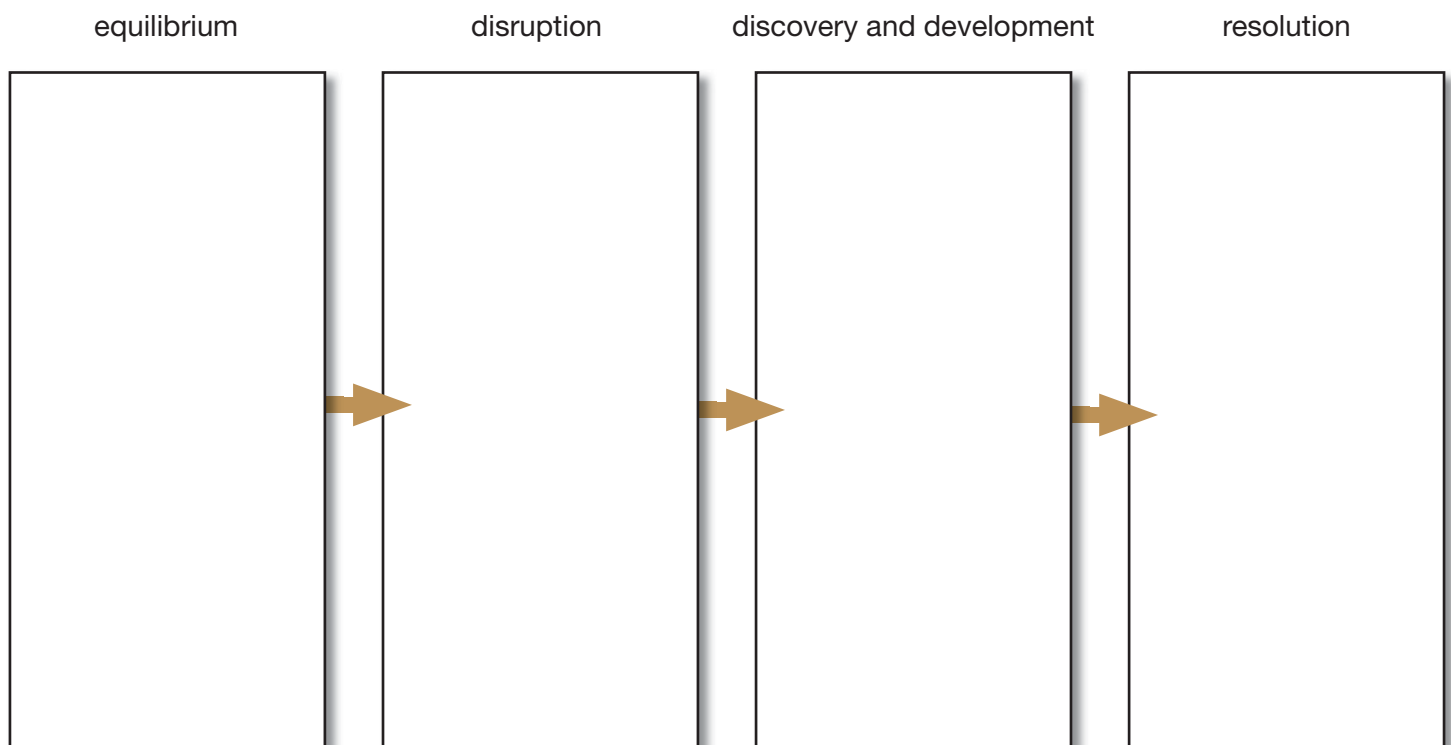
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STORY STRUCTURE

There are many different ways of telling a story, but most narratives will tend to follow a similar structure. In the early stages of a narrative, we are introduced to the characters and the setting. We can call this the 'equilibrium'. Then, something happens which sparks a change to these circumstances: we can call this the 'disruption'. The consequences of this change are played out – the 'development'; finally, we have the 'resolution' where the events reach an end point.

From your work on the poster and trailer, and using the film synopsis on page 1 to help you, fill in the narrative flow chart for *Tomorrow When the War Began*. If you have not yet seen the whole film, put your predictions for the ending into the 'resolution' box.



CLIP ACTIVITY

Film Education's *Tomorrow When The War Began* study DVD features eight key clips from the film. The clips are taken from different stages in the narrative and provide a rich resource for exploring character, narrative and film language.

Watch the clips on the disc and follow the **sequence analysis tasks** on the website, to guide your viewing. You may wish to work in groups and divide the questions, or the clips, between you.

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PSHEE

Activities in this section are designed for KS3 and KS4 PSHEE. Exploring stills and clips from the film, as well as an interview with one of the young actors, this section considers the moral and ethical problems that the characters face as well as exploring how teenagers are represented on the screen.

INDEPENDENCE

At the start of the film *Tomorrow When The War Began*, seven teenage characters seek independence from their parents when they go on a camping trip to an isolated location. On the trip, they can enjoy their freedom but they also face a range of potential hazards – from slips and scrapes to poisonous snakes. Some members of the group are better equipped than others for dealing with the challenges of living outdoors. Little do they know that, when they return home, their survival skills will be tested to the extreme.

The characters are:

ELLIE, the central character, who lives on a farm with her parents

CORRIE, her best friend, also a country girl. The trip is her idea

KEVIN, Corrie's boyfriend, who has grown up on a farm

HOMER, who also lives in the country, and has a reputation as a troublemaker

FI, a girl from a wealthy family who lives in the town

ROBYN, who has had a strict Christian upbringing

LEE, a boy from school who Ellie is interested in

On Film Education's *Tomorrow When The War Began* [website](#), watch the extract from the trailer (the first 35 seconds) and discuss the questions below:

- What potential risks and challenges might the group face on their camping trip in the Australian wilderness?
- For each risk, give two suggestions of ways the group could minimise potential harm.
- What skills do you think the group will need? Which of the characters seems prepared for these challenges?
- Which of the group do you think will need help and support from their friends?

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TEEN HEROES

Although the friends have enjoyed their independence on the camping trip, nothing could prepare them for what they find on their return. Discovering that invading forces have captured their families, the teenagers have to take tough decisions with no adults to guide them.

On Film Education's *Tomorrow When The War Began* website, watch the clip of Caitlin Stasey (who plays the part of Ellie in the film) talking about how the filmmakers have tried to portray teenagers, and then answer these questions:

- What does Caitlin tell us about the portrayal of teenagers in the film?
- Do you agree with her when she says teenagers should be shown in a 'better light' and that 'most people think we are quite useless'? Give evidence to support your ideas.

MORAL CHARACTER

As their struggle against the invading forces becomes more violent and risky, all the characters go on their own moral journey and their courage and friendships are tested by the situations they confront.

Look closely at this still from *Tomorrow When The War Began*, then, using the prompts on page 7, try to comment on what is suggested about the characters in the image. It is taken from a moment in the film when the teenagers are trying to escape from the armed invading forces. Lee, who you can see in the background, is injured; Robyn and Ellie, in the foreground, have to find a way to help him and themselves out of the situation.



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- 1 What qualities do you think are being displayed by the characters? Look closely at their body language and facial expressions.
- 2 What qualities do you think would be needed in a situation like this? What emotions might make the situation harder to deal with?
- 3 How would you react in this situation and why?

After you have seen the whole film, you will appreciate that some of the characters experience profound conflict between their personal moral codes and their fight for survival and the instinct to protect those they love. Talk about one or two examples of this from the film explaining your response to their situation and the choices the characters made.

BEING A SOLDIER

Realising that the enemy forces will either capture or kill them, the group is forced to take difficult decisions. Do they give themselves up, or do they stand and fight?

As the teenagers absorb what has happened to their town, Homer says, *'We have to start acting like soldiers.'* Look at the two still images from the film on this page and on page 8 then using the prompt points on page 8, talk about what you think Homer means.



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- 1 What do these images tell us about the work of a soldier? How do you react to this work?
- 2 Compare the two images showing Homer and the uniformed soldier pointing a gun. How are they similar and different?
- 3 What do you think the filmmakers are trying to say about war and the individual in these images?
- 4 From what you know of the story, do you think Ellie, Homer and their friends are justified in taking up arms? Why?

CLIP ACTIVITY

Watch the study clips on the DVD and discuss the questions that follow:

- 1 Different cultures and societies identify the transition from adolescence to adulthood in different ways. These transitions are often referred to as 'rites of passage'. In *Tomorrow When The War Began*, the characters do have to make a transition from innocent teenagers to hardened soldiers. What do these clips suggest about how 'rites of passage' will feature in the film?
- 2 How do the different situations faced by the characters highlight elements of their personalities and their attitude to risk-taking? How do you react to these characters and why? Think about the conflict between fear and bravery.
- 3 From watching these clips, do you think this is more a film about war or more about young people moving from adolescence to adulthood? Give evidence for your answer.