



Country Town Rescue



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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ROGER STITSON



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AN ATOM STUDY GUIDE

Series Synopsis

Country Town Rescue is an observational documentary series filmed over a year in the small NSW town of Trundle. To save the town from dying, a small group of dedicated locals get together and try to boost the town's population by enticing newcomers to the area by offering up abandoned farmhouses for just \$1 a week. Over 400 families applied for only five available farmhouses. After much deliberation, five families are chosen and arrive in high summer with temperatures soaring to 45 degrees celcius.

Through renovations, changing seasons and family and farmers disputes, viewers get a ringside seat to this very Australian social experiment.

The families chosen are Nabih and Christie Elemam, a devout Muslim Family from Western Sydney; The Guerkes – Dan, a carpenter, and Kylie,

a Thai cook, plus their four kids; The Gallens – typical Aussie battlers looking for a fresh start; Claire and Tony Moore, nurses from Canberra; and widowed mum Donna Roberts and her kids Tommy and Sammy, the tragic loss of Donna's husband less than a year ago inspiring Donna to make the change.

The houses, the environment and the isolation of the country raises immediate problems that range from the practical – water tanks full of dead frogs – to the bureaucratic, where a stuff-up in paperwork means that Claire and Tony Moore don't get paid, causing them to default on the mortgage on the house they still own in Canberra. The problems faced by the families are agonised over by the Tree Change committee resulting in some riveting television. This series is a compelling snapshot of the problems of living in rural Australia in the twenty-first century.

GENERAL INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This study guide contains a range of class activities relevant to each specific episode. As some activities are relevant to all the episodes, there is a section later in the study guide devoted to a general overview of the entire series (TO COME AFTER THE FINAL EPISODE). There is also a dedicated Media Studies section of activities relevant to the construction, purposes and outcomes of the series (TO BE ADDED AFTER THE FINAL EPISODE). A general list of book, film and website references is at the end of the study guide (WEBSITES TO BE ADDED CUMULATIVELY AS EPISODES ARRIVE. BOOKS AND FILMS ADDED AFTER ALL OTHER SECTIONS ARE COMPLETED).

CURRICULUM LINKS

This study guide is mainly aimed at middle and upper secondary school levels, with relevance to English, Media and Film Studies, SOSE/HSIE, Legal Studies, Civics, Cultural Studies, Philosophy and Ethics, Psychology, Personal and Interpersonal Development.



An Overview

Carry out the following activities (also note that activities about the entire series, from a media studies perspective, are in the Media Studies section):

- First, in general, describe what you have learnt and discovered from viewing *Country Town Rescue*. For example, has the program altered or confirmed your views about small-town life in Australia? (Note that your chance to review the program for the wider viewing audience is found in the Media section, below.)
- Was the country town of Trundle rescued?
- The notes in the program's press kit offer the opinion that, 'This series is a compelling snapshot of the problems of living in rural Australia in the 21st Century'. Write a commentary in which you explore this viewpoint. For example, are the problems faced in the 'bush' regions any different from those faced by larger populations in the 'big smoke'?
- Do you think any of the successful applications chosen for the Tree Change scheme were adequately prepared to take part in it? In what ways might they have been more prepared to face their new experiences?
- Discuss whether the Trundle Tree Change committee selected the most suitable candidates. If they were to repeat the exercise, what types of candidates – and residential accommodation – do you think they'd select, and why?
- Imagine you have seen an advertisement or a news story about a town's Tree Change scheme, and you think you may have something to offer the town's community. What could you contribute that might make you a successful candidate for selection? In pairs plan and create a presentation for a Tree Change committee, as an application to be selected to take part in the scheme. Your application might be constructed on video, or as a display document of text, photos and illustrations.



- Build a *Country Town Rescue* crossword puzzle to test those who have seen the program.
- Would it be possible to turn the various aspects and elements of *Country Town Rescue* into a board or card game? In pairs invent, plan and build a game. Construct the rules and requirements of the



game, then test them by trialling the game with 'guinea pig' players. Where necessary, make adjustments to improve the presentation. If you are adept at computer programming you may consider planning and building a game for electronic display.

- There have been other 'tree change' schemes that have been attempted in other parts of Australia: Levendale (Tasmania), Wycheproof (Victoria), and Cumnock (NSW) are examples. Are there others elsewhere that you know about? Carry out some research then write a report on the types of schemes that have been attempted, and their relative success.

an alternative title, what would you call it, and why?

- Discuss whether the presence of a camera and a film crew is likely to have affected or influenced the on-screen behaviour of the participants. Comment on whether the entire series was presented in 'fly on the wall' mode or not. You may consider, for example, the scenes in Episode One where the participating applicants were notified of their selection.
- The presence of a camera, and the production of a TV series, has the potential to render the 'ordinary' as 'extraordinary'. Discuss, with relevance to *Country Town Rescue*.

- *Country Town Rescue* has been fashioned into a documentary series that has been edited into an identifiable introduction, a lengthy middle section of character, conflict, exposition and plot development, followed by a climax and a conclusion – as in a typical fiction film. Do you agree? Discuss and elaborate on the narrative presentation and development of the series, drawing on examples from the program to support your views.

- In groups discuss the possibilities of a sequel, a follow-up, to *Country Town Rescue*. Formulate a plan and an agenda of ideas, themes and objectives that would be worth pursuing. For example, would you consider another series, or might it be preferable to consider only a one-off program?
- In 350-400 words write a review of the *Country Town Rescue* series for a popular TV magazine or a blog. Your task is to inform the target audience about the program in accessible language.

MEDIA STUDIES

Carry out the following activities. Note that there are also some media/film discussion activities specific to each episode, in the episode activities sections of this study guide.

- Discuss why the filmmakers considered that 'Country Town Rescue' was a suitable title for the six-part series. Do you think the title is appropriate? Does it convey an adequate idea or impression of what the series might be about? If you were asked to give the series



Episode 1



SYNOPSIS

The tree change scheme is launched, and the Trundle Tree Change committee starts reviewing applicants from all over the world. They decide that Trundle's Christmas Fair will double as an open day for the short-listed applicants. On the day, they are inundated with hopeful families and – after a tour of the town – the interviews begin. There are a range of Tree Change applicants including a Muslim family from Sydney.

After a very long day, the Committee retire to the pub and spend the next three days agonising and arguing over the short list. Finally the decisions are made and the families are notified. They are all delighted and one of the families, the Guerkes, tell the Committee they have already packed up their house and arrive shortly afterwards. They waste no time getting down to work stripping floors and washing walls.

The Elemams are the next to arrive. Nabih (the husband) and his mate come ahead of the family with the removal truck. Despite the fact that their farmhouse is one of the ones in the best condition, Nabih looks devastated and tells his mate in Arabic that he doesn't think he'll be back!

INTRODUCTION TO TRUNDLE

- Where is Trundle? On poster paper, draw a to-scale map of New South Wales, showing the location of the town of Trundle. Also label Sydney, and the major towns in the general Trundle vicinity. Add the nearest highways and natural geographical features such as rivers. On the poster paper include basic information such as seasonal temperatures and rainfall, town and region population, and local industry – farming and grazing, and services, etc. (For more information, see 'Trundle' in website references.)
- Carry out research, then, as though for a magazine devoted to local history, write an account of the history and development of Trundle from its beginnings to the present day, adding illustrations as you see fit. Include details about the original indigenous inhabitants of the region. Why, when and how was Trundle founded, and by whom? Why was the town named Trundle? What was its peak population, and at what point in its history did this occur? When did the population begin to decline? Explain the reasons for this decline. What is the situation today? Has, for example, the population of new arrivals from elsewhere risen? Has the local annual birthrate increased?



THEMES AND ISSUES

- At the beginning of Episode 1, the narrator tells us, 'In the heart of the wheat and sheep belt of NSW you'll find the classic country town of Trundle'. Discuss in class why Trundle is referred to as a 'classic country town'. Comment on whether the camera shots shown during this sequence of narration support and advance the concept of what a classic country town might be. Comment on any other Australian towns that, in comparison to Trundle, might also be thought of as classic.



- Create an illustrated travel poster, as designed for a tourist calendar, depicting the image of a classic Australian country town. You might, for example, wish to present it in the style and the look of a particular era, such as the 1930s, the 1950s, etc.
- Write a description of the meaning and the intentions of the Trundle Tree Change. For example, why use the term, 'tree change'? What kinds of new residents are the local citizens attempting to attract to the town, and why? Some of the locals think the scheme will work, and be productive, while others

are more sceptical about the probable outcome. Comment on the range of views presented in this episode. At this point in the series of episodes, what is your view about the general concept and contractual terms of the scheme being planned? Is it workable and likely to succeed? Would you agree to such an arrangement, either as an existing resident or as a newcomer?

- In class, discuss possible alternatives to the Tree Change scheme as a means to attract and induce a range of potential newcomers to the town and the local district.

- From what you have seen in Episode 1, write a short description of the successful Tree Change applicants. Why do you think each candidate was selected? What do they have to offer to the people of Trundle? Do you think they are suitable choices? Why does each family want to come to Trundle? Comment on the reasons given for why the Tree Change committee rejected some of the other applicants. The Tree Changers who were chosen are:
 - o Donna Roberts and her children,
 - o Jo and Andrew Gallen,
 - o Claire and Tony Moore,
 - o Kylie and Dan Guerke,
 - o Christie and Nabih Elemam.

- The narrator says, 'There's one family who really stands out from the crowd, the Elemams from Sydney'. Discuss why the Elemams 'stand out from the crowd'.

- Following from the previous discussion, Cherie Quade, the president of the Trundle Tree Change committee, later observes that, 'This is completely racist but the fear of Trundle people is that they [the Elemams] are going to bring





all of their mates and we are going to be inundated with a culture that we didn't really have.'

Discuss Cherie Quade's comments. Explain the reasoning behind the 'fear' that she says the people of Trundle have, and whether there is any sound logic and rational thought to their feelings. What does she mean by being 'inundated by a culture that we don't really have'? Describe what you think the Elemam's 'culture' might be, in comparison to the general, existing 'culture' of the Trundle townsfolk, or, from a wider perspective,

the 'culture' of the so-called classic country town. Are Cherie's comments 'completely racist'. Should she have not made these comments at all, or, under the circumstances, did she have a right and a need to express the concerns of long-established local residents?

- Of bringing her family to Trundle, Christie Elemam says, 'It will definitely provide challenges, but it will provide opportunities'. From the program, and from your own reactions, discuss both the challenges and the opportunities.
- In 150–200 words each, write two personal accounts of Christie's decision to leave Sydney with her husband and children, Rodah, Zaina and Qasim, from the emotional perspectives of her mother, Jenny, and her best friend, Abby Abdallah.

- Discuss in class the possibilities for plot, themes, style, viewpoint, characters, settings and general approach, then plan and write a short fiction story about a 'tree changer'. You may consider contemporary drama, comedy, satire or even a genre such as horror, fantasy or outback adventure.
- The episode concludes on a dramatic 'cliffhanger'. Describe the cliffhanger ending. Did you find the ending a surprise, or was it to be expected? Why do you think the episode ended on this suspenseful note?

THEMES AND ISSUES

- After viewing Episode 2, discuss in class then write a brief introductory account comparing the ways in which Donna Roberts and her



Episode 2

SYNOPSIS

As the episode opens, Donna Roberts arrives with her children. In an effort to welcome and give the new families a soft landing, the Trundle Tree Change committee has organised working bees for all the houses, so Donna is really pleased to arrive at a sparkling clean 'South Purnim', owned by Tree Change committee member Dol Wright.

Some twenty kilometres down the road, Nabih and Christie Elemam are coming to terms with life in the bush. Nabih was expecting a country farm that would be green and lush, not brown and dry, and their water tank is full of dead frogs. For Claire and Tony Moore, nurses from Canberra, the tree change is an opportunity to introduce their kids Carlo (3) and Grace (22 months) to the joys of the country. The Moore's landlord David Watt has decided to put some money into their house, so in exchange for Tony's labour together they build a new veranda.

For the Guerkes, their veranda is creating activity for all the wrong reasons. The boards are old and rotten, and the Guerkes' kids have broken many of them. Dan's landlord isn't happy and has demanded that Dan replace the boards – in Dan's words the Trundle Tree change 'is turning into a nightmare on Elm Street'.



on Elm Street type of deal'? From what we have seen during the episode, is he right or is he exaggerating? Discuss whether he has contributed to his own problems or not – whether he and his wife Kylie have merely struck a patch of bad luck, and whether or not the landlord's attitude and behaviour is acceptable. Should fault be laid at anyone's doorstep for the badly broken veranda floorboards?

- Following from the previous discussion, you may wish to review the laws relating to the responsibilities and rights of tenants and landlords in New South Wales, the state in which this documentary program is set. Discuss in class whether the arrangements between tenants and landlords, as presented during Episode 2, are in keeping with, or at least in the spirit of, the existing laws. You may wish to compare the rental situation and housing accommodation of the Guerkes to that of the new arrivals, Claire and Tony Moore, when they eventually move into their house later in the episode. (See 'NSW Residential Tenancies Act 1987', in website references.)

- A short time after moving into their new home, Christie Elemam says, 'Maybe it's not such a good idea to move into a house just because you saw it on the internet'. Explain why she makes this comment. What might be the pitfalls, the risks, of moving into a house you have only ever seen on the





internet, even at just \$1 per week rental? What might have been her alternatives?

- Plan and write a short fiction story about a family who decides to buy or rent a house they have only ever seen advertised and promoted on the internet. You may present the story as a drama, comedy, fantasy or horror. Consider your range of characters, settings (in terms of time and location), and themes.
- During a meeting of the Tree Change committee to review the progress of the new arrivals, and the residents' acceptance of them, Dannielle reports a conversation she has had with one of the local women:

'[She] heard that Ben's tenants were Muslim and she said, "Well

the Arabs have moved to Trundle." I was always worried this day would come. Well I don't know if it was a bit tongue-in-cheek or she was a bit serious, you never can tell.'

Comment on the nature of the unnamed woman's observation, and why you think Dannielle 'was always worried this day would come'. Should Dannielle have been concerned or not?

- A scene takes place at the local Pony Club's 'chook and champagne' fundraiser night, in which Dolly Wright (a member of the Tree Change committee, and Donna Roberts' landlady), says, 'The Elemam family aren't going to be able to make it tonight. I believe they don't really attend functions where alcohol may be present'.

Discuss whether these kinds of functions, as a means of the local community getting to know the new arrivals, are suitable for everyone, especially those who don't drink alcohol. Is it reasonable to suggest that this is a case of cultural insensitivity? On the other

hand, are the Elemams contributing to making it more difficult for themselves in being embraced, appreciated and understood by the local community, by not making an appearance?

- From your observations throughout Episode 2, explain the range and extent of Christie Elemam's cultural needs in making a 'tree change' adjustment to bringing her family from the city into a small, rural town. How do you think the townsfolk are depicted in responding to those needs? In particular refer to the shopkeepers and school teachers who appear on-camera during the episode.
- From what is presented on-camera and via the narration in this episode, discuss whether Nabih Elemam appears to be committed to, and comfortable with, the tree





change situation he and Christie have undertaken. Look, for example, at his on-camera demeanour and his response to being offered a temporary job by landlord and farmer Ben Kerin, during the shearing season, and Ben's later reaction to Nabih's failure to appear on-site for the employment.

- When Claire and Tony Moore arrive from Canberra to their new farm house, we are informed by the narrator that it is seventy kilometres out of Trundle. Comment on the issues raised and the problems they may potentially encounter – and

any possible advantages – from this arrangement.

- When Claire and Tony are introduced to their septic tank (not to be confused as rhyming slang for an American), they are told to 'kick-start' the tank by throwing 'a dead cat' into it. Throughout Australian towns and cities today, most people would be unfamiliar with septic tanks as a sewerage disposal system for their homes and work environments. What is a septic tank, and how does it operate? How are you usually supposed to 'kick-start' a septic tank,

and what kind of on-going maintenance does it require? (See 'Septic tanks' in website references.)

- Write a commentary on where you think the new residents are placed, in terms of state of mind and emotion, adaptability, suitability to their new surrounds, and the potential for their future success as citizens of the Trundle region, by the end of Episode 2. Offer reasons for your views.



Episode 3

SYNOPSIS

Besides the Gallens, the Tree Change families are settled, so it's time for the oldest kids to start school. For the Guerkes and the Elemam kids that means Trundle Central Public School, while Tommy and Sammy Roberts are joining Trundle's Catholic School, St Pat's.

The Guerkes' relationship with their farmer, Dale, has deteriorated further and the committee meets to discuss a solution. When Jo and Andrew Gallen arrive, Jo tracks down Dannielle and gets the job of cook at the Trundle Pub; Dannielle is delighted.

The Elemam family have been unhappy since they arrived. Landlord Ben Kerin is doing his bit to help them settle by trying to get Nabih engaged in country life. He takes him mustering sheep, while Christie gets a visit from committee members Cherie Quade and Dol Wright, who are desperate for the Elemams to stay.

At the Trundle Health Centre, Tony and Claire have started work, but five weeks on are devastated to discover that due to a bureaucratic stuff up they haven't been paid, and they default on their mortgage. Tony Moore drafts a letter to the shadow health minister about the situation, and breaks down as he reads it out to wife, Claire.



THEMES AND ISSUES

- After the opening 'teaser' scenes, which are included to give a brief impression of what viewers might expect to see over the next half-hour, Episode 3 begins with the first day of school, 2011. Discuss why you think this event is significant and important to the families depicted on-screen – Donna Roberts and her children, the Guerkes and the Elemams. (More about the topic of Rodah Elemam's integration into the school environment further below.)
- Following from the previous discussion, do you recall your first day at school, or leaving one school and starting somewhere else at another school? First, jot down in note form your memories and impressions. Using this as a starting point, plan and write a short fiction story based on your own experiences, and perhaps the experiences of friends and other members of your family, about what happened on that first day of school.
- Explain why Donna is so emotional





at Tommy's school swimming sports. What are the problems her family is experiencing in their new 'tree change'?

- Describe Dan Guerke's problems, complaints and disputes with the Tree Change committee and his landlord throughout this episode. Discuss in class whether his observations and points of view about the issues in question are valid or not. What is the attitude of the committee to the issues raised? Are their reactions fair or not? Are Dan's disputes purely a matter between him and his landlord, or, considering the manner in which the Guerke family was invited to move into the Trundle community, should the Tree Change committee carry some responsibility for attempting to resolve his situation to everyone's satisfaction?

- Following from the previous activity, the relationship between the Guerkes, the landlord and the Tree Change committee is worked through by negotiation and mediation. Explain what these two terms mean. Offer some examples from the 'real' world outside the boundaries of the *Country Town Rescue* program, such as the workplace environment, where negotiation and mediation is common practice. Comment on where you can observe examples of negotiation and mediation taking place during Episode 3 of *Country Town Rescue*, and whether those processes and outcomes are satisfactory to all parties or not. (See 'Negotiation and mediation' in website references.)
- Define the meaning of 'conflict resolution', and how this bears on events depicted through Episode 3 involving Claire and Tony Moore. How do Claire and

Tony attempt to resolve the situation they are experiencing? What other difficulties or potential problems are they also encountering in their efforts to relocate successfully to Trundle?

- Imagine you and your family were in a situation where you had been employed for many weeks by an organisation such as the public hospital, education, police or a governmental agency, but not yet received your wages or salary. Compose a business-style letter to your employer, or your local member of parliament, explaining your difficulties and requesting assistance and a resolution. Consider the arguments you would present, and the style and approach you would take in striking a balance between emotion and objectivity, and between the personal and professional.





- During the sequences involving Claire and Tony, we are shown a glimpse of the issues faced daily by a medical and hospital service, such as the Trundle Multi-Purpose Health Service, operating in a small rural, regional environment. Write a commentary on this topic. For example, note the observations of long-time nurse at the hospital, Kay Paige, and explain the purpose of the television monitor and camera in the Accident and Emergency Department.
- Either in pairs or individually, devise and create a full-page magazine display of text and images on poster paper, either aimed at Australian city readers, or an overseas audience, calling for qualified medical personnel to seek employment at the Trundle Health Service. The display should seek to promote the benefits and virtues of the service, and of the town in general.
- Discuss the settling-in problems experienced by Christie and Nabih Elemam. Why are they not happy with their situation, why are their plans not working out as they'd thought, and how do members of the Tree Change committee attempt to help the Elemams and to resolve the issues confronting them?
- For Christie and Nabih, an important aspect of a happy integration into the local community is how the children at the Trundle public school will respond to their daughter, Rodah, when she appears, and how she will respond to them. After viewing the relevant sequences from the episode, describe and comment on this. Explain, for example, why the school principal, Cara Cracknell, speaks of Rodah's 'fashion statement'.
- During this episode, Jo and Andrew Gallen and their children arrive, taking up residence in a farmhouse thirty kilometres out of town. In what sense will Trundle be a 'fresh start' for them?
- Following from the previous activity, why does Dannielle, the local publican, refer to Jo's introduction to employment in Trundle as a 'baptism of fire'? Discuss why the filmmakers cut between scenes of Jo in one location, carrying out similar – yet in some ways different – activities as Andrew in another location? Comment, for example, on the issue of traditional gender roles, and the way in which these two intercutting scenes draw attention to those roles.
- Plan and write a short fiction story, or a short verse poem, titled 'Baptism of Fire'. You may wish to discuss in class the range of ideas, subjects and approaches as to how you might go about this writing activity.
- By the end of the episode, what are your general impressions of the ways in which the five 'tree change' families are settling in, adapting to their new environments and confronting their circumstances? From what you have seen so far, comment on which of the families you think are likely to remain, and which might leave, basing your views on possible evidence you have observed in Episode 3. Ensure you are not taking into account your knowledge of events depicted in later episodes.

Episode 4

SYNOPSIS

After many years of drought, 2011 is a bumper year for Trundle. But with the rains comes another problem... a mouse plague. For the Guerkes, it's the first decent rain since their landlord gave them a new water tank. But they're still not happy and have been offered another farmhouse from a local family aware of their woes. It seems everyone in town knows they're moving except their original landlords.

The Tree Changing families are embracing country life, so much so that Nabih Elemam and single mother, Donna Roberts are having a crack at a rural skills course. For Donna Roberts, her rural skills course pays off. She's got a job as a farmhand. But Nabih's hopes to start a halal meat market are now looking less likely with meat prices at a record high. As National Dawah week approaches – a time when Muslims reach out to the community – Nabih and his wife, Christie invite the whole town to hear more about Islam.

Jo and Andrew Gallen now have a very good reason to turn their farmhouse in to a home with news of their impending birth. But it's also an anxious time for the couple who lost a child two and a half years ago. At the pub, cook Jo faces competition when Kylie Guerke scores two nights a week cooking Thai. But will this be one cook too many?

Nurses, Claire and Tony Moore have finally been paid after a bureaucratic stuff-up left them struggling to pay the mortgage on the home they still own in Canberra. Now they face another challenge when three-year-old Carlo's asthma worsens as the seasons change. They face an uncertain future and have a big decision to make. Should they stay or should they go?



THEMES AND ISSUES

- At the beginning of Episode 4 we see Donna Roberts and Nabih Elemam undertaking a rural skills training course. From the episode explain what the course entails. What are Donna and Nabih actually learning in this sequence of the program? In general, how do you think the two participants are responding to the course?
- From this episode discuss how Donna later takes advantage of her training course to progress further in settling into the Trundle community. Comment also on how Nabih's attitude and general state of mind about his circumstances now compares to what we have observed in the previous three episodes of the series.
- As though you were Donna, write a personal email or letter to a friend or relative about your decision, at this point in the series, to take the risk of moving your children into a totally different location and environment from what they've previously known. Take into account that Donna is now a sole parent,

with all the extra responsibilities that go with this.

- Would you be interested in embarking on a rural skills course? What would you like to learn, and why? (You may wish to find out more about the wide range of courses available, and where these courses are held. The course that Donna and Nabih undertook at the TAFE NSW Western Institute, Dubbo campus, may be found under 'Rural skills course' in website references.)





- The second sequence of Episode Two depicts Dan Guerke carrying out some mechanical repairs to another utility truck he has bought. Explain why he thinks it is necessary to buy and own a serviceable and dependable 'ute' as well as the family car. Why does he say on-camera, 'What a dickhead I must look like'? Do you agree, or is he merely having a run of very bad luck?
- Following from the previous discussion, we see Dan enthusing over the breaking of the drought as he stares out at the rain pouring down outside the farmhouse. What positive outcome is he expecting as a result of the rain? Explain why, a short time later, he is very unhappy about the unexpected consequences. Again, is this a

continuation of bad luck – or poor management, not merely by him but by others as well?

- Examine the sequences involving Dan and Kylie Guerke's problems with their rented farmhouse, and the rumours that they have decided to live elsewhere. Why do they want to move? Is it a problem of their own making or not? Consider the ethical issues. Discuss in class then write your own commentary on whether the Guerkes should have discussed with the Tree Change committee their plans to move to another rental house. Do you think the committee has treated both the Guerkes and the Guerkes' landlords, Dale and Cath Curtis, fairly and in an even-handed way? Comment on whether the members of the Tree Change com-

mittee absolved of all their legal and moral responsibilities towards inviting the Guerkes to Trundle, if the Guerkes leave.

- Christie Elemam, assisted by her husband, Nabih, gives a lecture to a group of interested local citizens at the Trundle library during the Muslim-inspired National Dawah Week held in Australia. First, write a description of the meanings of Dawah, and the aims, purposes and objectives of Dawah Week. (See 'Dawah week' in website references.)
- Comment on the types of questions the locals ask Christie during her talk, and how she responds to those questions. If you had attended, what types of questions, or topics of discussion, would you have asked her to speak about, and why? You may wish to present and report the Trundle Dawah event as a written news item for the local weekly newspaper. Format as a newspaper report using desktop publishing software.
- View the scenes of the mice plague. Explain possible causes of the plague. Discuss the way in which the music on the soundtrack during these scenes of the plague, both in barns and inside farmhouses, complements what we see on the screen. Drawing on





these scenes and the reaction of the participants to the mice, plan and write a short fiction story. In class you may first wish to discuss story events, characters, themes, narrative style and point of view. For example, would you write your story from the viewpoint of a mouse?

- At the Trundle hotel Kylie Guerke joins Jo Gallen as a cook in the kitchen, providing an extension of Thai food to the menu. Why does Kylie begin working at the hotel? There is an old saying that, 'Too many cooks spoil the broth'. Is this adage applicable to the arrangements at the Trundle pub? You may also consider writing a short fiction story, or a short verse poem, titled *Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth*.
- Discuss why it has now become necessary for Jo and Andrew Gallen to make their Trundle Tree

Change venture a success. What steps are they taking to ensure this will happen?

- During this episode we discover more about Claire and Tony Moore's employment dispute at the Trundle Health Service. Describe the outcome of the dispute. Why is Tony still angry and frustrated about the entire issue? Why does he believe, for example, that people 'out this way' in rural districts such as Trundle should not continue to regard this kind of situation as 'normal'. What would you do if a similar situation happened to you?
- Claire and Tony's three-year-old son, Carlo suffers from asthma. First, carry out some research if necessary, then write a short report in which you define the meaning of asthma, its possible causes and effects and the extent of the illness in Australia, particularly amongst

children. Are there any regions or localities in Australia that are considered to be especially known for the incidence of asthma? Why can it be a dangerous medical condition? How is it treated? (See 'Asthma' in website references.)

- Explain the possible reasons as to why Carlo's asthma attacks have become worse at the time this episode was filmed (during Autumn of 2011), and why they are facing a major decision by the end of the episode. For example, you may wish to look at Claire's comments about wheat and lupins. (For more on lupins, see website references.)
- Discuss why the episode concludes with a scene filmed in a local Trundle church.

Episode 5

SYNOPSIS

The Annual Show is the biggest day of the year on the social calendar, and the Trundle Tree Changers are getting in on the competition. There's also news for the Guerkes. They've been offered another farmhouse for one dollar a week but they've left a load of gear and a mess in their original farmhouse and their first landlord isn't happy. When Dan finds out the landlord has been inside their house, neither is incensed, and calls a committee meeting.

The Moores are still reeling from young Carlo's recent life-threatening asthma attack. With an impending harvest season, they decide to make the long journey to Sydney to visit a specialist. They're desperate to give country life one last chance.

After months of searching for work, the Elemams receive exciting news. Christie has been offered a job as a solicitor in a nearby town. But Christie's concerned about the 80 kms she's going to have to travel to and from their home in Trundle.

Business is booming in the Trundle pub kitchen. Thai chef, Kylie Guerke shares the kitchen two nights a week with Jo Gallen. But when other kitchens try to poach Jo, publican Dannielle Ward decides to offer her the kitchen on her own. Jo decides that Thai is off the menu, leaving Kylie without a job and the Guerkes back at square one.

Despite being unmarried, Jo and Andrew have been known as the "Gallens" around town ever since they arrived. With the impending birth of a new child, they've decided to make it official.

As the months roll on, Dan Guerke has thrown himself into turning house number two into their dream home. But suddenly there's another bolt of bad luck for the Guerkes.



THEMES AND ISSUES

- During this episode there are two instances of scenes where the filmmakers have purposefully obscured parts of the visual detail appearing on the screen. This has also happened in previous episodes. Find the scenes in Episode 5 where this occurs, then discuss in class why you think the filmmakers have made this decision.
- The episode opens with Trundle's Annual Show Day – the 101st in the town's history. Design and create your own Show poster for the event. Consider the style of presentation, choice, size and placement of image and text, and your use of space and colour.
- Discuss the way in which Donna Roberts and her children are settling into life in the Trundle district. In what way are the sequences involving the birth of puppies on Dol Wright's farm, and the impending birthday of Donna's daughter, Sam, important in demonstrating the success, or otherwise, of Donna's 'tree change'?
- Write a narrative paragraph from the viewpoint of the puppy that Sam picks out from the litter on her birthday.
- Jo and Andrew Gallen come to a major decision that might also be seen as symbolising the success or failure of their 'tree change'. Discuss.
- Describe the issue that Claire and Tony Moore have to confront in regards to the annual crop harvesting that takes place throughout their district in Spring. What does Claire mean when referring to having 'a good asthma plan'? (You may wish to revisit the website links to 'Asthma', which we looked at in the section on Episode 4.)
- Explain the situation that has prompted Dan Guerke to complain to the Tree Change committee about the behaviour of his landlord. Are the Guerkes justified in claiming the landlord is in 'violation' of their rights as tenants, or might there be other circumstances that should be taken into consideration? How do you think the committee handled the meet-



ing? Did they adequately resolve the issue?

You may wish to revisit the website links for 'NSW residential tenancies act', which we first looked at in the section on Episode Two.

- Following from the previous discussion, plan and write a first-person narrative in which you present the incident from the landlord's viewpoint.
- During these sequences in Episode Three, Dan reveals on-camera some very personal details about himself, and the medication he has been prescribed. In your own words describe his long-term situation and how it has affected his general demeanour and behaviour. Why has he usually preferred not to reveal it to other people, and why does he regard it as a 'stigma'?
- You may wish to follow up further on issues raised in the previous activity. For example, carry out some research and write a definition of 'depression' as an aspect of human existence, mood and behaviour (as distinct from other meanings of the word, such as a weather event). Are there varying causes, levels and intensities of depression? Can depression be suitably treated and managed in medical and other ways? Can it be cured? (See 'Depression' in website references.)
- Explain the situation that leads to Kylie Guerke losing her job at the Trundle Hotel. Is it possible to apportion blame to anyone involved, are there any ethical issues to be taken into consideration, or is it merely, as Dannielle, says, a 'business decision', and that she was 'between a rock and a hard place'? Comment on Jo Gallen's decision to employ her own husband in the hotel kitchen.
- Following on from the previous activity, Dan Guerke says of Kylie's dismissal that, 'It just felt like we'd been stabbed in the back'. Discuss whether this is an exaggeration, or not, of what took place. What other metaphorical imagery can you think of that describes a situation that people might

find themselves in? One example might be, 'Up the creek without a paddle'. Plan and write a short fiction story titled, *Stabbed in the Back*. Alternatively, working in groups, devise the script for a short play based on the same title. Rehearse, making script changes as you see fit, then enact your script to the class. If you have written your script entirely for sound (voice, music and sound effects), you might consider recording it as a podcast.

- Explain the cause and effect relationship that results in Christie and Nabih Elemam's decision to leave the Trundle district, and move with their children to the town of Forbes. Do you think they had a choice? Discuss whether you think that the Elemam's have gained and appreciated from their six





months in Trundle, and as tenants of farmer Ben Kerin. What does Cherie Quade, the president of the Tree Change committee, think of the Elemam's decision?

- Christie Elemam says that the town of Forbes will 'still hold the same basic values' that led them to come to Trundle. Comment on what those 'basic values' might be, then, as though you were Christie, write a letter or an email to a relative in Sydney about your experiences and your new plans and hopes.
- Examine the final sequence of the episode then discuss in class

whether the Guerkes have a right to feel, as Dan says, 'cheated', or whether it's possible they may have left themselves open to what has happened to them, in their dealings with their second landlord. Are we aware of all the facts? What else should we know before passing judgement at all on any of the participants in this concluding drama?

- In pairs, re-imagine refashion and rewrite the final sequence as fiction, in the form of the ending of a serialised story.

Episode 6

SYNOPSIS

At the beginning of 2010 five families left their old lives behind to start a new life in the bush. Twelve months later, four out of the five families have lasted the distance. Now there's even a wedding and a baby on the way!

For the Guerke family, the tree change hasn't been easy. They spent months renovating their second home only to be told by the landlord, his daughter would need the farmhouse. With no work and little money, they've had to send one of their children to live with Kylie's Mum over 800kms away.

The Moores are making the most out of country living. Despite their commitment to nursing, Tony has had to resort to his previous career as a geologist and has landed a job at a nearby mine.

Widowed mother, Donna Roberts set out with her two kids for a new life. As Christmas Day approaches, so too does the second anniversary of husband, Steve's death.

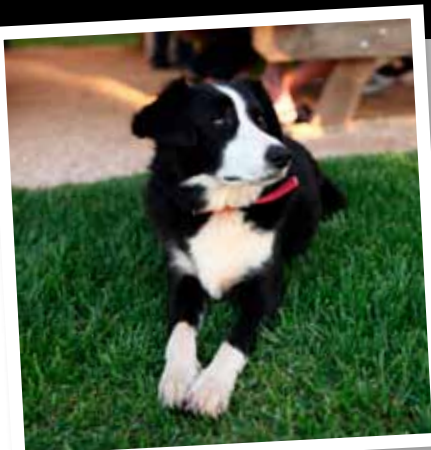
On Jo and Andrew's wedding day, news spreads that the road into Trundle has been cut by floodwaters. As the clock ticks down, it looks like the couple will make it to the church in time. Locals arrive in droves, keen to grab a good seat.

The Trundle Tree Change was always going to be a social experiment. Twelve months on it's now time for the Committee to reflect. Has the scheme been a success and just how many families now consider Trundle home?



THEMES AND ISSUES

- Explain the purpose of the photo shoot involving Trundle's farmers, at the beginning of the episode. Comment on the choice of soundtrack music accompanying scenes of the shoot. What kind of mood does it suggest? Is the choice appropriate?
- From the episode, write a commentary on the way Donna Roberts and her children have become, not Tree Changers, but Trundle 'locals', and part of the community. In what way is the accompanying soundtrack music during the sequence depicting Donna displaying photos of her husband differ, for example, from the music discussed in the previous activity involving the farmers' photo shoot? Explain why the music is of a different style.
- What were the reasons that initially led Tony and Claire Moore to want to settle in Trundle? Describe the continuing problems that both Tony and Claire have in their employment at the Trundle Multi-Purpose Health Service, and how each of them resolves those problems.
- The Elemam family does not feature during this episode, except in a short epilogue-style extract near the conclusion. After viewing this extract, explain their absence from most of the episode, and discuss whether their 'tree change' experience could be considered a success or not, from all viewpoints – yours, theirs, and that of the Tree Change committee.
- During this episode we first see Kylie and Dan Guerke in some emotional distress. Explain what has happened to them, and what they have had to do, and will have to do, to overcome their difficulties. Knowing that the Guerkes left the Tree Change scheme after they moved out of their first farmhouse, discuss whether the members of the Tree Change committee should have continued to take an active interest in the Guerkes' welfare or not. (In discussing this issue, we should consider that we can only know the full situation from what we see in each episode, not from the material that was left out, or





that didn't make the 'final cut'.)

- Following from the previous discussion, Dan says that he and his family wanted was 'a bit of the Australian dream', and that, 'it'll happen later, I suppose'. What does he mean? Define the term 'Australian dream'.
- Tell the story of Kylie and Dan's decision about their seven-year-old son, Morgan, from Morgan's point of view. To carry out this writing or oral activity you will have to decide upon a seven-year-old's understanding and emotional level.
- Describe your reaction to the sequence depicting Dan's home video of the Guerkes packing and leaving, and in particular, Dan's audio commentary. Express an opinion as to whether all the extracts of the video screened during the episode should have been included. For example, is it insulting and hurtful, or are his emotional responses justifiable? As well, why do you think he is making a video record of the physical state of the house before he departs?
- Plan and write a short fiction story based on the words Dan sings in the video, 'Driving a truck to freedom'. You may wish to discuss the range of possibilities as to the approach you could take. For example, could you apply a sense of irony, satire, comedy or even tragedy to the phrase?
- Why do you think the voice-over narrator pointedly informs the viewing audience that 'The Guerkes took off without even saying goodbye'. Discuss the implications embedded within this comment, and the way in which it has been phrased.
- A little later in the episode, Cara, a member of the Tree Change committee, and principal of the local public state school, says, 'For any town that is willing to take it on (i.e. to run a tree change project), don't believe someone who says, "passion", "find myself", or "journey". Just cull straightaway'. Why does she make this comment, and should we take it seriously?
- Plan and write a local newspaper report about the Guerke family's decision to leave the Trundle district. Include a suitable headline, and if required, a photograph with a caption, and ensure your item is formatted with desktop publishing software. Consider carefully the approach you, as the reporter, will take to your subject.
- Comment on the final scene in

which Dan and Kylie Guerke appear, far from Trundle. What does it suggest about finding 'a bit of the Australian dream' – the phrase we heard Dan say earlier in the episode?

- The bulk of this episode features the wedding of Jo and Andrew Gallen. The filmmakers construct the event and everything surrounding it, into a story of drama, suspense, and comedy, with a dash of sentimentality. Do you agree? Discuss, drawing upon examples from the episode.
- Drawing from the previous activity in any way you think best, plan and write a short story – or, working in pairs, a short play script – about an Australian small-town wedding. If you choose to write a script, you should consider using other members of the class to take part in a script reading rehearsal, and then to edit your draft as seen necessary. Consider style, viewpoint and themes.
- From this episode write an account of the changes that have taken place to the Trundle populace and to the town in general throughout the entire year of the Tree Change experiment, and the reasons behind those changes. Look, for example, at the Tree Change committee's reflections on their year.



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