

Queen of the Desert



A STUDY GUIDE BY 360 DEGREE FILMS

Queen of the Desert



27 minute documentary

360 Degree Films

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Producer: Josephine Wright

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CURRICULUM RELEVANCE

Humanities: Stories about contemporary life for indigenous young people

Social Studies: Example of contemporary youth programs

This film offers an insight into Indigenous perspectives on the consequences of white settlement for Aboriginal Cultures and a window in to contemporary life on remote indigenous communities in the Australian desert.

Age appropriate: Secondary/Tertiary.



INTRODUCTION

Queen of the Desert takes us on the road with the fabulous and larger than life hairdresser trainer and youth worker Starlady Ngungari.



Starlady first began her hair salons in the remote Kintore community in 2002. They were a big success. She decided to undertake five years of training in Melbourne so she could return to run professional hair dressing training in Central Australia. When she returned to the desert in 2010 to finally pursue her dream of working as a youth worker her employees were initially worried that Starlady was too outrageous and they were unsure her salons would work. Starlady proved them wrong as the salons were a huge hit.

Starlady now drives thousands of kilometers a year and is in hot demand as she takes her hairdressing salons out to some of Australia's most isolated teenagers. This time she's on her way to Areyonga a remote Pitjantjatjara community, 230 kms west of Alice Springs. Here she has an ambitious

plan. Can she succeed in staging Areyonga's first ever fashion parade at the end a week's training.

Upon arrival Starlady discovers that many of the local leaders are away on cultural business and so she is left to manage the salon on her own – wrangling kids and dogs on a daily basis. Eventually the pace catches up with her and she gets sick. Fortunately the local ladies have a special bush cure and Starlady is back in action getting the town ready for the big parade.

It remains to be seen whether Starlady can convince the young men and shy young women to participate in the parade. But at the end of the day Starlady Ngungari, the real 'Queen of the Desert' ensures that the show must go on.



CHARACTERS

Starlady

Starlady Ngungari grew up in country Victoria. When she moved to Melbourne she changed her name to Starpower.



Judy Brumby

Judy Brumby is a senior Pitjantjatjara woman. She works as an interpreter and cultural consultant as well as being the elected representative for Areyonga on the McDonnell Shire Council, which governs Areyonga.



CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

Warning pre film:

Australian film, documentary, news and current affairs television programs are often preceded by advice stating that the program about to be shown may contain images of deceased people. This issue is central to the laws and customs of many Indigenous communities. Included in this guide is information from the ABC's Indigenous web pages. It provides an explanation of the complexities and importance of this issue for many people.





Viewing questions about QUEEN OF THE DESERT:

1. What did the management say at first about Starlady?
2. Does Starlady like football?
3. How many skin names does Starlady have and what are they?
4. What community does Starlady visit and where is it?
5. What is Starlady's ambitious plan?
6. What did the local people used to do with their hair many years ago?
7. How many people live in the Areyonga?
8. What does men's business mean in Aboriginal culture?
9. Where are Anthea and Caitlin going soon?
10. Who is shy in Aboriginal communities?
11. What is the biggest problem facing Aboriginal people according to Judy?
12. What are some of the things that may contribute to youth suicide according to Judy?
13. What are some of the many names Starlady has called herself?
14. When she was an activist what types of things did she do?
15. When and where did she run her first hair salon?
16. What do Starlady and the ladies have to eat at the waterhole?
17. Why are people given skin names?
18. Why do the boys light a fire and what happens to them?
19. When Starlady is sick how does she get better?
20. Why does Starlady like being in Aboriginal communities?
21. During the fashion parade where do Anthea and Caitlin go?
22. Why does Judy call Starlady Queen of the Desert?





UTJU / AREYONGA –

Areyonga, also known as Utju is located in a spectacular valley, about 220 kms west of Alice Springs. With a population of around 300 people the community was founded in the 1940s when Pitjantjatjara people were forced to leave the Docker River area by long running drought, moving first to Hermannsburg, and then to the Utju area partly due to the water available via natural springs located in the area and the Lutheran Church founded a settlement at Utju.

The Lutherans closed the mission in 1990, with the remaining local people reclaiming control of the community as part of the Haasts Bluff Aboriginal Land Trust. Areyonga also has a number of Arrernte and Walpiri residents.

Despite a relatively small population, it is a thriving community with an arts centre, swimming pool, community hall, weekly air service and the very popular Areyonga Tigers Football team.





CLASSROOM RESEARCH

1. Remote Indigenous Communities

There are many remote indigenous communities throughout Australia, particularly in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

As a classroom project research 3 remote communities including Areyonga. Explore their history of before and after white settlement and their unique culture. What are some of the challenges facing these communities today?

2. Gender

Starlady is a transgender woman. Explore what it means to be transgender and why Starlady may have been abused as a young person. Why do you think Starlady is accepted by Aboriginal people when she has had trouble being accepted in white society?

3. Bush Medicine

In the film we see Starlady being healed by the Aboriginal people who collect medicinal plants.

Research some of the bush medicine that is used today by Aboriginal people. Explain the symptoms and how plants might be able to heal these symptoms.

List 10 plants that are often used by Aboriginal people to prevent or cure illness and explain how they work.

4. Indigenous Young People

Suicide is one of the major problems facing many indigenous communities today. Research the prevalence of suicide and depression and explore how communities are implementing programs to solve this problem.

Apart from suicide what are some of the other problems young people face and what are some of the ways that indigenous communities are providing activities for young people.

How could social media and the internet assist young people if they are depressed or in need of support?

There have been several feature films which have told the stories about indigenous young people.

View any of the following and write a film review.

Samson and Delilah
Beneath Clouds
Bran Nue Dae
Toomelah

5. Hair and Style in Aboriginal Australia

Research why hair has always been important to Aboriginal people. Explore some of the many hairstyles that existed in various language groups and why those styles might have been used. Hair was often used for other purposes such as belts, rope and so forth. Research this subject and see how many cultural practices you can uncover about the use of hair.

Explore some of the present day hairstyles and fashion trends common in Aboriginal communities.

6. Language and Culture

How many indigenous languages were there before white settlement?

Name some of the language groups that are active today and research some of the words used.

The people who live in Areyonga speak Pitjanjatjara. Pitjanjatjara is spoken in the Central Desert across northern South Australia, southern Northern Territory and the far east of Western Australia. Whilst it is one of the stronger indigenous languages, still spoken by over 2500 people and taught in some schools, Pitjanjatjara is also considered to be an endangered language.

In Queen of the Desert some Pitjanjatjara words are used.

Mangka – Hair

Kata - Head

Kungka – Girl/Woman

Palya – Ok/Fine

Uwa – Yes

Wiya – No

Irmangka Irmangka – Bush Medicine

Pikatjara – Sick

Can you research some other words that are common in Pitjanjatjara?

In Australia today the most common use of Aboriginal words is in place names. Explore the names of 10 places and discover how they got those names.

7. Skin names

In Aboriginal culture skin names are very important. Research how skin names function in indigenous society and why they play an important role in defining people's roles and relationships within their society.

8. Men's and women's law and culture

Explore how the role of men and women differs in indigenous communities and what specific cultural practices are still alive today.

When indigenous people refer to men's or women's law what does this mean and how does this function in everyday life?

Why would Aboriginal men and women often have separate places and country that is only for their use?





Indigenous languages and Pitjantjatjara

Australia was once home to over 300 distinct languages. Each indigenous person was likely to speak at least 3 languages in addition to their own. In the last 218 years Australia has suffered the largest and most rapid loss of languages in the world. The percentage of Indigenous people speaking an Indigenous language decreased from 100% in 1880 to 13% in 1996, and in most cases this trend is worsening.

Today, only 145 indigenous languages are still spoken in Australia, of which 110 are critically endangered. A language is listed as critically endangered if there are only a few remaining speakers and no intergenerational language transition. While around 17 languages are not currently considered endangered, all indigenous languages face an uncertain future if immediate action and care are not taken.

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References

Central Australian Organisations:
Indigitube Great collection of indigenous films
<http://www.indigitube.com.au>

Ngapartji Ngapartji Ninti Site: Learn Pitjantjatjara online
<https://vimeo.com/channels/ngapartji>

CAAMA: Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
<http://caama.com.au/>

McDonnell Shire
<http://www.macdonnell.nt.gov.au/>

CAYLUS – Central Australian Youth Link Up Service
http://www.tangentyere.org.au/services/family_youth/caylus/



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ABC

Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Television



Australian Government



Northern Territory
Government



**SCREEN
TERRITORY**



FILM VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA

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