



**DELTA**  
SPECIALIST ENGLISH TUITION

# Sample Resources

**COMMON MODULE: GO BACK  
TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM**

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**The following is a sample of Delta's full course materials. It includes comprehensive, state-ranking level research and analysis tailored to the new syllabus.**

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# HSC: Common Module (Texts and Human Experiences)

## Lesson 3: Go Back To Where You Came From (i)

## In This Lesson

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Students will begin with a overview of *Go Back To Where You Came From*, with particular emphasis on Episode I. Before this however, we will address the core contextual and formalistic notions relevant to the text, then move onto a broad introduction to the different categories of human experience examined in the episode. Using Episode I as a basis, we will then consider how the series confronts the enduring human experience of identity. As a result, the structure is as follows:

- Plot overview to *Go Back To Where You Came From*.
- Contextual Introduction.
- Close study: Episode I.
- Introduction to the Essay.
- Critical Perspective: Jeni Thornley.
- Homework.

## Plot Summary

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Below, an overview of the text written by the Australian Screen Organisation is included:

*Go Back to Where You Came From*, hosted by Dr David Corlett, invites participants to challenge their preconceived notions about refugees and asylum seekers by embarking on a confronting 25-day adventure, tracing in reverse the journeys taken by refugees now settled in Australia. Six ‘ordinary Australians’

take up the challenge. Having no idea of what is in store for them and without money, phones or ID the six are divided and billeted out with former refugees now living in Australia. The Masudi family from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo and a group of immigrants from Iraq who share a modest flat, welcome the participants into their homes and openly answer questions about why they are now living in Australia and how they got here.

The participants, some of whom have never before left Australia, begin their journeys. They are rescued from a leaky boat off the coast of Darwin; live with refugees in Malaysia before bearing witness to a raid; discover the daily struggle to survive in one of the world's biggest refugee camps in Kenya; and experience life in the slums of Jordan. In the final episode, protected by UN Peacekeepers and the US military, they experience for themselves two of the world's most dangerous cities, Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Baghdad in Iraq.

SBS news presenter Anton Enus hosts a studio-based, follow-up program *The Response* in front of an audience which includes families and friends along with refugees and advocates. The participants are invited to revisit and comment both on the experience itself and on the public response.

**(Source: The Australian Screen Organisation - <https://aso.gov.au/titles/tv/go-back-to-where-you-came-from/notes/>)**

## Contextual Introduction: History

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### **Australian Immigration Policy**

Indigenous Australians have been living on the Australian continent and in the Torres Strait Islands for 40,000 – 60,000 years, thought to have originally migrated by foot, across a now submerged landbridge connecting the Asian and Australian landmasses. Since the 16th century, Europeans began visiting the continent, with limited interaction with the indigenous population until 1778 when the British established a penal colony in what is now Sydney, and began a colonisation of the entire continent. During this colonial period, migration mostly stemmed from the British Isles, but also included some migration from Chinese and Pacific Islander peoples.

With the federation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, the country instituted a White Australia Policy, which restricted non-European migrants from relocating to Australia. The enormous disruptions caused by World War II and later the Vietnam War, the White Australia Policy started to be slowly dismantled toward the second-half of the century – with migration opening up firstly to migrants from countries such as Italy, Greece, and Poland. In 1973, the discriminatory policy was abolished altogether, and what began was a new period of multiculturalism where migration was open to people of all ethnicities.

By the 21st century, Australia had become one of the most multicultural nations in the world. But the process hasn't been without conflict. Many European-Australian communities have resisted non-European migration, responding with discrimination, racism, and violence. Amongst the most contentious groups of migrants however, and the most relevant to *Go Back To Where You Came From*, are refugees and asylum seekers.

What are refugees? The UNHCR defines a refugee as the following:

“A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.” (Source: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>)

On top of this, an asylum seeker is an individual seeking refugee status, but who has not yet had their claim processed.

Throughout the world, most asylum seekers cross into other countries over land borders – but Australia is unique because the entire country is an island. Most asylum seekers come to Australia by plane, but over the years the Australian population and

media have been most interested in discussing those asylum seekers that attempt to enter Australia by boat. This group of asylum seekers have been characterised as ‘*boat people*’ within the popular imagination.

### **A Short History of ‘Boat People’:**

The first wave of ‘boat people’ to receive substantial interest in Australia were the Vietnamese refugees fleeing the effects of the Vietnam War. The bulk of Vietnamese refugees who came this way migrated between 1978 and 1979, but migration continued sporadically into the 1990s as well.

The ethnic makeup of refugees seeking asylum by boat has changed over the decades in response to geopolitical conflicts. In 2001, the Howard Government controversially refused entry to a group of 433 predominantly Hazara refugees – from Afghanistan – who had been rescued by the Norwegian freighter MV *Tampa*. The Howard Government operated on the assumption that the asylum seekers were attempting to enter Australia illegally, and therefore were ineligible for refugee processing. Following this, the **Children Overboard Affair** became one of the most highly publicised and controversial asylum seeker affairs in Australian political history. In the lead up to a Federal election, the incumbent Howard Government alleged that seafaring asylum

seekers had thrown children overboard in a presumed ploy to secure rescue and passage

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to Australia. Since then, both Liberal-National and Labor governments have taken strong stances against asylum seekers attempting entry to Australia by boat.

The variety of conflicts that have spurred individuals to seek asylum are too complex and numerous to address at this stage, but a number of them are touched upon within the program. The major takeaway from this short history, at least for the purposes of *Go Back To Where You Came From*, is an understanding that refugee boat arrivals have since become an incredibly highly politicised issue within Australia. At each election, both major parties are expected to address the issue of boat arrivals, and their policies on this issue receives enormous media attention. Subsequently, boat arrivals have become a highly contentious cultural issue, with many Australians holding strong views on the issue.

While some Australians believe that asylum seekers arriving by boat have a legitimate claim to entry and subsequent refugee status, others characterise the boat arrivals as ‘queue jumpers’ who are attempting to circumvent the proper processes. These conflicts and more are explored in depth throughout the course of *Go Back To Where You Came From*.

## An Introduction to Human Experiences in the Text

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Reflecting over the previous two lessons, the most notable feature about the new Texts and Human Experiences area of study is its breadth. Containing such a diverse range of ideas, experiences, and tensions, it would be impossible to record the totality of them in a single essay.

Below, we will begin to foreground some prominent human experiences represented in *Go Back To Where You Came From*. Importantly, this list is not exhaustive – students are expected to supplement the presented ideas with their own unique perspective on the experiences represented in the text, enabling the individual analysis that differentiates a student in the HSC.

## The Provocative Nature of Identity

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*Go Back To Where You Came From* looks at six individual Australians and their reactions to the conditions endured by the world's asylum seekers. These six Australians however, were *not chosen at random*. Far from it. Taken from different parts of the country, and each from differing socio-political, and socio-cultural conditions, each participant represents a different **Australian identity**. We will look at these differing

identities more closely in the substantive content, but what is important to understand at this point is the way in which identity influences human experience.

But firstly, how is identity formed?

Identity is influenced by both **internal** and **external** factors:

- **Internal:** This refers to the inherent traits that make up our personality: essentially what makes you ‘you’ on the most basic level. For example, are you a loud or a shy person? Are you adventurous, or do you prefer to remain within your comfort zone? It is difficult to determine how much of these aspects are the product of genetics, or other factors, but it is hard to deny that we all seem to have an inherent ‘inner’ identity that is with us from the moment we are born.
- **External:** This refers to the environmental factors that help shape identity. This might include the economic or social conditions you were raised in. For example, do you come from a poor, or a wealthy background? What school did you go to? What are your parents’ political views, and did they impose these upon you growing up or did they keep them private? Do you feel like you belong to a particular ethnic, social, or political grouping? All these factors are not necessarily inherent, but are the results of interactions with the external world

around us - but they can be just as important, if not more important, factors when it comes to self-identification.

Each of the participants identify as Australian. With this identification bracket comes certain assumptions about lifestyle, attitude, and physical appearance. The ways in which each participant interacts with their world; the extent to which the value their experiences, and the extent to which they feel comfortable within their environment, is therefore defined by the way they identify themselves. However, what we will learn, is that the idea of an **Australian identity is not a fixed concept**. That is to say, each participant offers a different version of Australian-ness.

Furthermore, each participant is forced to confront and contend people who come from foreign and often unfamiliar identity categories: such as, Iraqis, Afghanis, and Sudanese. These encounters challenge each participant's conception of their own identities, and the concept of identity more broadly – leading, for some, to realise that there is a common humanity that transcends differing identity categories.

In any case, the series prompts us to consider the following questions:

- 1) Is identity something fixed, imposed on the individual by factors beyond their control, and unyielding? or,

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- 2) Is identity instead something contingent, in a permanent process of re-negotiation depending on the immediate requirements of the individual?

Pay particular attention to the ways each participant's view of themselves and their identity changes (or remains the same) over the course of the series. We will begin to explore this in detail in this lesson.

## Prejudice

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So what are the factors that contribute to identity, and how then do these factor into the notion of prejudice? Among the most important of these identity groups is 'race'. Although race is a malleable, largely social, phenomenon, for the purposes of this series we might think of it in terms of **collections of physical characteristics that markedly distinguish one group of people from another, with special emphasis on skin, eye, hair colour, and facial appearance**. The key word in this description, and the key concept relevant to prejudice, is the notion of *difference*. Physical differences are typically the **most easily and immediately recognisable** difference between people, therefore they are often the starting point for many racist assumptions.

Secondly, beyond physical appearance, cultural and religious differences are also a source of discomfort for many people throughout the world. These elements are often expressed through clothing, cuisine, or worship practices, and are often just as noticeable as racial differences. You will see in this series that it is these *cultural* differences that are the source of much discomfort for some of the participants. They expect people of different races to *assimilate* into Australian culture – that is; adopt the cultural traditions of European Australians, while largely shedding their own.

As we saw in our discussion of historical context, Australia following European colonisation has been a country primarily made up of people with white skin; descendent overwhelmingly from the British Isles. The introduction of people from other racial groupings, and the physical – and as we'll see, cultural – differences that subsequently became apparent, were the source of some conflict. As will be revealed over the course of the series, **difference and unfamiliarity often leads to acts of hatred, discrimination, or exclusion. We call this *prejudice*.**

**Prejudice is a part of human experience, because the way we understand the world is defined by the manner in which we interact with others. If our ability to live our lives with freedom is restricted by the prejudices of others, then our experiences are also subsequently restricted. Prejudice can give rise to**

**experiences of anxiety, alienation, and violence. But prejudicial worldviews can also be changed, as we will come to see.**

**Audience Experience:** The program is also designed to challenge the **audience's** perceptions of prejudice. By witnessing the experience of a refugee, those who previously held prejudicial worldviews are challenged to reconsider these ideas. For those who are victims of prejudice, the programme hopefully gives hope through the idea that prejudicial worldviews can be changed, and that this series is an important tool in bringing about that change.

### **The Experience of Confronting The Unknown**

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How might identity and prejudice change? Through confrontation with the 'unknown'. Fear, suspicion, and hatred are often the result of **ignorance** – that is, having not educated oneself about, or experienced fully, the experiences of others. You will see that many of the participants in the series live quite **insular** lives. This means that they rarely interact with anyone outside of their immediate community, and that that community is often racially, culturally, and economically **homogeneous**. The concept of 'suburbia' as a metonym for insulation and being sheltered is a recurrent theme throughout the series, and one we will discuss in more detail later.

In order to escape ignorance, one must **confront the unknown**. But this task is inherently **scary, because the individual fundamentally *does not know what will happen to them***. Uncertainty therefore breeds anxiety, which leads inevitably, to fear. Yet human experience is a **constant process of confronting the unknown, because it is only through confronting the unknown that we are able to grow and change as individuals**.

What we will see throughout the series is two types of confrontations with the unknown:

1) **Unknown Experiences:** This is primarily concerned with putting the participants through the types of life-threatening experiences endured by refugees. Typically, the participants have lived quite **safe** lives, where their physical safety or their health were never in danger. The path of an asylum seeker is however fraught with physical dangers, such as violence, unsafe transport, limited food, and weather. Consider how confronting these unknown experiences *changes* the participants, their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

2) **Unknown Cultures:** Secondly, the participants come to confront unknown cultures. Much of the fear of asylum seekers stems from a fear of them bringing

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unknown cultural practices to Australia, that potentially conflict with the Australian way of life. Many of these fears are able to persist because the participants have had little interaction with these other cultures, and therefore do not know what they entail. The series therefore seeks to expose them to these cultures, and we want to consider how the participants' respective viewpoints change as a result.

**Audience Experience:** The show not only exposes its participants to unknown situations and cultures, but also its audience. Though there is obviously a large difference between physically interacting with the unknown, and watching people interact with the unknown, the mere act of witnessing unfamiliar cultures can go a long way for building bridges between two otherwise separate groups.

### **The Inherent Subjectivity of the Human Experience**

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Perhaps the most interesting, and most complex human experience addressed in the series is the notion that human experience itself is subjective. What do we mean by this? Subjectivity refers to concepts and experiences that are **not fixed** and which change according to time or person. Every single individual is fundamentally different, whether due to genetic differences, or simply differences in life experience. Where we were born, how we were raised, and what experiences we have encountered throughout

our lives fundamentally changes the ways in which we perceive the world. This can be as simple as disagreements on tastes in movies, or it can be as significant as conflicts over the validity of religious beliefs. As a result of this, **multiple people may go through the exact same experience, and come out of it reaching different conclusions.** We see this time and time again in *Go Back To Where You Came From*.

**It is therefore impossible to say that any one person's perspective on the world is 'correct' or 'incorrect'. Each perspective is merely the culmination of one person's individual experiences, and because these experiences are different from person to person, no one 'experience' can be considered the 'correct' one.**

However, this does not mean that we are unable to challenge or change other people's perceptions of the world. Just because there is no **one coherent and objective truth**, does not mean that experience is meaningless. The more experiences one exposes oneself to, the more informed they are, and the more comfortably they are able to find confidence in their own perspectives.

**What is important to take away from this idea, for the purposes of *Go Back To Where You Came From*, is that all six participants undergo more-or-less the exact same experiences, and yet each come away from the program with slightly**

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**different perspectives on the world. This is most evident in the final episode *The Response*, but is a concept that is present the entire way through the series.**

This realisation can be a confronting one. If no singular experience is more or less valid than any other, then what meaning is there to be derived from the series in the first place?

The show prompts the audience to embrace is a **holistic understanding** of the world. One in which we are able to respect and recognise the plurality of experiences and perspectives, then ***work together to reach common understanding***. This does not mean simply letting everyone believe what they believe, but confronting, challenging, and interrogating each other's experiences, whilst in the process interrogating our own, so that through this process we might recognise the **common humanity** that unites us all.

**Over the next five weeks, we will deal with each of these issues individually, examining how they appear in the series and creating scaffolds that can be used for essay paragraphs. NB: Each of these themes has clear links to the enduring human experiences of individuals and collectives, so would be strong bases for building your thesis.**



## Contextual Introduction: Form

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### Documentary

Documentary film and television is founded upon a simple enough premise: to inform. Documentaries aim to educate the audience on a certain topic, and achieve this by examining **empirical evidence** through a range of interactions with the real world, for example: interviews, archival footage, and recreations or dramatizations. However, to say that a documentary's purpose is solely to inform would be naive. Fundamentally, documentaries wish to inform the audience, by presenting information in a way that is *intelligible and easy to follow*.

What are the implications of this? Well, it means that documentarians must make *editorial choices* about what they include and exclude from their final product. The world, as it stands, is a chaotic and expansive place, and capturing *everything* that occurs at any one given moment is physically impossible. As a result, when a documentarian approaches a topic, they must choose what footage to include and exclude, lest they wind up with an impossibly long film or television series. This means that inevitably, **certain events and perspectives will be omitted from the final product**.

A documentarian may be forced to omit footage simply out of spatial and temporal restrictions. However, a documentarian may also be compelled to include some evidence and exclude evidence in order to strengthen their own personal viewpoint.

This leads us to the following conclusion: **documentaries are rarely completely neutral. They are designed to persuade the audience.**

We call a documentarian's persuasive motivations their **agenda**. Having an agenda is not necessarily a bad thing, but we must be at least aware of their agenda, and take this into account as we analyse their work.

***Go Back To Where You Came From* is a documentary in so far as it is a 'social study' designed to inform the audience on issues pertaining to refugees and asylum seekers. The series heavily utilises empirical evidence, as well as testimony from experts, in an attempt to communicate the 'reality' of the asylum seeker experience.**

### **Reality Television**

I'm sure we are all, to some extent, familiar with the concept of reality television. It has come to saturate the Western media landscape in the past twenty years, from shows like *Big Brother* to *Keeping up with the Kardashians*. But what is reality television? The category has become diluted over the years, but we might define it broadly as the

following:

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Television shows that purport to represent unscripted, real-life situations and which features a cast of individuals who are otherwise not professional actors. These shows aim to represent the natural dramas and conflicts that arise from everyday interactions between so-called ‘ordinary people’, absent of scripting or directorial manipulation. (Source: Wikipedia).

The difference between documentaries – which also purport to represent ‘real life’ – and reality television, is that the latter’s primary objective is simply: **to entertain**. The majority of reality television does not claim to be examining any one particular interest or topic, it simply wishes to create entertainment out of everyday occurrences.

There is a flaw here though: what if ‘real life’ ends up to be boring? Reality television creators have a commercial incentive to make their show as entertaining as possible, so that as many people watch it as possible. But reality television is unscripted, and so the producers have no way of knowing whether or not their cast of ‘ordinary people’ will end up producing entertaining content.

As such, reality television is routinely criticised for fabricating drama – either through scripted events or through editing – in order to ensure guaranteed entertainment. If the events on a reality television show are being manipulated either at the time by directors, or after the fact by editors, how can we accurately describe it as ‘reality?’

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# TWO WEEK TRIAL



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*Go Back To Where You Came From* also qualifies as a reality television show.

While the various scenarios encountered by the participants are planned, the experiences and reactions of the individuals are purportedly, entirely unscripted.

The aim of this is to see how ‘real Australians’ would genuinely react to the experiences of a refugee. But as we watch the series we must keep in mind the extent to which the producers of the show are nonetheless motivated by a desire to make the series entertaining. We must consider how ‘reality’ is manipulated through editing and directorial decisions, in order to make events appear more compelling and more dramatic than they possibly were in ‘real’ life.

- 1) Based on what you know of *Go Back To Where You Came From* so far, do you think it fits more neatly into the documentary category, or the reality television category? Why?

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### Textual Analysis: Episode One Summary

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Over the next five weeks we will analyse *Go Back To Where You Came From* in full.

Students are advised to watch the episodes in advance of the lesson detailing them, so as to get the full understanding generated by our analysis. As always, remember these interpretations are not exhaustive: a single piece of evidence can beget a potentially infinite range of understandings, and students who recognise something unique in an element of the text would do well to pursue it in their analysis.

**This episode introduces us to the six participants and the host, and establishes the basic premise of the series.** Each participant has their phone, wallets, and passports taken from them, and spend the episode meeting a number of settled and yet-to-be-settled refugees now living inside Australia. They meet their families, listen to their stories and their experiences, and then at the end of the episode reflect upon how their views of refugees have changed since the beginning of the experiment.

### Analysis: Opening Titles

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**Summary:** These remain the same across all episodes and serve one primary function: to ground us. The titles expose us to little pieces of information designed to familiarise us with context and content.

- **News Footage:** The use of news footage in the opening title sequence establishes the series as a **documentary** and locates the action **within a recognisable, real life context**. In doing so, the composers invite the audience themselves to reflect upon the human experiences – this is just as much about **our** experiences as audiences as it is the characters in the show. The use of news footage **signals to the responder** that what they are witnessing has real world consequences. That they might **learn** something that they can then apply to their real lives. Furthermore, the footage **juxtaposes** the public statements of a number of different recent Prime Ministers. This further locates the topic within our current political discourse – suggesting that even the experiences of political figures may change as a result of the show – in this sense, the show has **cultural currency**.
- *“Refugees. Asylum Seekers. Boat People.”*: **Tricolon:** the use of a list of three (or ‘tricolon’) in this statement is designed to highlight the plurality of labels – and therefore perspectives and experiences – that are attached to the topic of refugees. It communicates how little agreement there is over this complex topic

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- these are murky waters. It creates an **uncertainty** in our own perceptions and challenges us to take reconsider our own experiences in light of the program.
- *“What do we know of those who risk life and limb to reach these shores... fifty people are feared dead”* : Part of human experience is constantly re-evaluating what the individual **does** and **does not know**. The narrator of the opening sequences has established that there is plenty of uncertainty surrounding our knowledge of refugees; both in their stories and their treatments. This statement helps to **ground us in a position of ignorance: the use of the inclusive third person ‘we’ extends this ignorance to the viewer**. The narrator is suggesting that the entire country is in a place of ignorance and inviting us to rectify this problem by watching the television show.

**Signposts: The show now exposes us to little snippets of information. These aren’t designed to inform or persuade us, but to simply signpost what type of topics will be discussed in the upcoming sixty minutes.**

- **Adam:** *“Very apprehensive, 25 years of my life I’ve been very very sheltered”*

Ignoring at first the personal aspect of this (we will discuss the participants later) what this statement is designed to do is to continue communicating a **position of ignorance**. The idea of being **sheltered** is very important

throughout the series: it is the idea that we can and often do live in a state of

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social and cultural ignorance – protected from the dangers of the ‘outside’ world.

- **Body language:** It should be noted that this line is delivered with a **smile and a laugh** – suggesting a level of **self-awareness**. The participant is aware of his own ignorance and is willing, although nervous, to have this ignorance challenged.
- Raquel: “*Africans everywhere it's not an Aussie place anymore*” Again, we will explore this more in depth later – but the use of this snippet of audio in the opening sequence is important as it **sign posts** the idea of ‘**Australian-ness**’ and **cultural identity** as important talking points in the show to come.
- Ray: “*Suburban*” The idea of ‘**the suburban**’ is important to keep in mind – it is almost synonymous to ‘**sheltered**’. Suburbia is a place where families go to escape the physical and environmental dangers of urban life, while surrounding themselves with the infrastructure and community structures unavailable in rural areas. It is a halfway point, characterised by stability and homogeneity. It often has **pejorative connotations** as a place that is **hostile to outsiders**, ‘**white**’ and **financially well off**.

**1.) In 3 sentences, explain how the opening title sequence uses editing to create a sense of *context*. Use a minimum of 2 pieces of evidence.**



**They serve simply as signposts for broader socio-political ideas. The snippets of audio are reductive. Each person represented acts a soundboard for a slightly different perspective on the refugee issue.**

**Individually, each viewpoint is limited and lacking nuance – but when juxtaposed and placed together they represent a broader portrait of opinions on the issue. Furthermore, I want you to consider how each cast member reflects a different aspect of the Australian identity:**

***Raye (63) Social Worker: “Serves you bastards right” (SA)***

- The first person we are introduced to is Raye – a social worker from South Australia. She is a white Australian with a rural lifestyle – for many, she represents the pioneering and pastoralist beginnings of white settlement Australia. The work she does has its roots back with the First Fleet.
- There is immediately a level of dissonance however. She is a retired *social worker* – a role which itself has a number of connotations: typically positive. Social workers are generally characterised as caring, trustworthy and non-judgemental – they are among the most ‘trusted’ of careers by the general public (along with nurses and teachers). In analysing this you might note the **symbolic connotations of her profession.**

- However, these presuppositions come into conflict with Raye's unsympathetic view of refugee deaths – going so far as to use the insult 'bastard.'
- We might begin to take away from this that people's experiences of the world are *complex* and number of factors come into play when informing an individual's perspective.

*Roderick (29) Aspiring Politician: "I'm afraid of coming across as a massive leftie"*

*(QLD)*

- Roderick is young and politically engaged. He is a representative of the political discourse from which earlier footage of past Prime Ministers belong to. Like social workers, politicians have their own connotations: they are typically among the *least* trusted of careers. Within anti-authoritarian Australian culture, politicians are typically characterised as self-serving, corrupt and out of touch. Roderick plays into these stereotypes by engaging in the **partisan rhetoric** that many Australians dislike – he wants to distance himself from the 'left wing' of politics as much as possible.
- There is also the implication here that the left are more sympathetic to refugees, possibly to a fault. Roderick doesn't want people to think he belongs to this category. 'Leftie' is generally used as a **pejorative**. That said, he delivers this in a



jovial and joking tone – suggesting that this partisanship is more friendly and light hearted than a puritanical devotion.

***Raquel (21) Unemployed “I guess I am a bit racist. I just don’t like Africans” (Western Sydney)***

- Raquel’s introduction is certainly the most controversial. Australia is a multi-cultural society and there have been massive efforts from the 1970s onwards to change perceptions of Australians as racist and intolerant. Because of this, to proclaim oneself as racist is generally considered **taboo** and even criminal in certain contexts. Raquel speaks in a blunt and honest manner, without filtering or regard for **social decorum**.
- As with the other two cast members so far, Raquel’s occupation (or lack of) and her location carry specific connotations. At their most extreme, western Sydney-siders are often derogatively characterised as belonging to the lower socio-economic classes, uncultured, uneducated and ignorant.
- Notice how Raquel is introduced as being from **Western Sydney** whereas the cast members from outside of Sydney don’t have their locations detailed in such specificity. Journalist Sean Trende describes this group of people as **cultural traditionalists**. Raquel fulfils these **stereotypes** and therefore represents **something of a mouthpiece for these views**.

- Raquel is also unemployed – though it is never explicitly stated why. This uncertainty fuels more stereotypes of western Sydney-siders: the unemployed are often characterised as “**lazy ‘bludgers’ unwilling to do their ‘fair share’ of work**”. Raquel belongs to a social group that is often as equally maligned by the mainstream as ‘boatpeople.’ Despite this, she is one of the most vocal against refugees.

***Darren (42) Businessman: “People who come here without any documentation by boat should be immediately expatriated” (Adelaide)***

- Darren comes across as anti-‘boat people’ but in this introduction is characterised as **rational and pragmatic**. Whereas Raquel and Raye appear to be lead more by emotion and gut feeling, Darren is driven by calm reasoning. Unlike Raquel, he uses verbose and specific legal terms like ‘expatriated’.
- His occupation as a businessman further aids this characterisation. Business is somewhat of a nebulous term, but generally carries with it connotations of pragmatic decision-making. His assessment of the refugee situation is not personal – like Raye’s ‘bastard’ comment – but founded in a respect for law and order.

***Gleny (39) Singer: “I think we have the capacity to take perhaps more refugees”***

***(Newcastle)***

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- Gleny is the only member of the cast who is outspoken in her support for refugees; she provides a stark counterpoint to each of the other opinions presented so far. It is important to consider why there is only one pro-refugee voice included in this documentary to begin with. We will discuss her role in greater detail as the course develops.
- Gleny is categorised as a ‘singer’ – locating her firmly in a tradition of the arts. Unlike Darren, who is a pragmatic businessman, Gleny’s work is driven by the interpretation and expression of emotions through music. She probably belongs in the ‘leftie’ category that Roderick seeks to distance himself from.

***Adam (26) Lifeguard: “We’re spending millions of dollars on housing these criminals”***

***(Cronulla)***

- Adam is something of a hybrid of Darren and Raquel. His intentions are rooted in the same field of pragmatism that Darren inhabits – that is, a respect for law and order and due process. However the delivery of his views are a lot more blunt and in the vein of Raquel’s style of speaking.
- He is a lifeguard from the Shire – which, like Western Sydney, carries with it many connotations. I will note again that only Raquel and Adam have their locations specified in such detail – this is because the show recognises it will have a largely Sydney and Melbourne based cosmopolitan audience, who at least

in the former will be aware of these specific areas and their cultural connotations.

- The Shire is sometimes characterised as being **insular, religious and discriminatory**. Cronulla was the site of the 2005 Cronulla race riots, which saw hundreds of white young men converge on Cronulla beach in response to reported sightings of Middle Eastern men causing trouble. This will be discussed in depth later, but the event has come to characterise the Shire permanently as a place of racism and hostility to outsiders.

*Dr David Corlett - Melbourne Academic and Refugee Expert: “More than 30 million people... it’s one of the big issues of our time, so what better way to understand the refugee experience than living it”*

- Lastly, we are introduced to David – the moderator of the social experiment. He is an academic and an ‘expert’ and therefore carries with him an air of **authority**: if the cast members represent **ignorance**, David represents **knowledge**.
- David also outlines the purpose of the experiment: to achieve understanding through ‘living it’. He forecasts a specific type of experience: **HUMAN EXPERIENCE AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE**.
- Furthermore, David outlines the purpose of the journey: social obligation. He

describes it as one of the biggest events of our time, and because of this we – as

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members of society – have a sort of obligation to understand it and have opinions on it.

- *“Beliefs will be challenged in extreme situations... and at times they will turn on each other.”* This foregrounds the transition from ignorance to knowledge that characterises the coming experiences, but it also highlights the dramatic element to the show. It would be remiss to view the show as simply informative documentary – it is also **entertainment**.
- *“Join us on a journey that will change their lives forever.”* A very explicit invitation to participate in the experiential process. This final sentence caps off the opening sequence and therefore forms the lens through which the rest of the show is viewed. The show is not to be seen as an insular and irrelevant documentation, but rather an active and dynamic challenge to cultural perceptions. **This is not just about the experiences of the cast members, it is equally about the experiences of its audiences.**

**What can we take away from the character introductions? The editors of this documentary series emphasise a few things:**

- **Geography** influences our human experiences. Where we have grown up, and the values and attitudes associated with that location, influence our experience of the world.
- **Occupation** also influences our experiences. The creators of this show felt it necessary to make known the profession of each participant. The assumption here is that each job carries with it certain experiences, which in turn influence how the participant understands the issue.

## Textual Analysis: In the Bunker

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### *Core Human Experience: Fear of the Unknown*

**Summary:** Dr David Corlett now takes them to a disused bunker in Sydney to give them more information on the experiment, and to kick-start the ‘journey in reverse.’

*“You have all agreed to take part without knowing what will happen. What have you got yourself in for?”*

- **Setting:** In gathering all the participants in the disused bunker, the producers of the show unite the cast members, each with their disparate views, in the same physical location. This physical location therefore becomes **symbolic** of their shared ignorance.
- **Symbolism:** If we wanted to read into this choice of location deeper, we could argue that the bunker – being underground – represents a **wilful seclusion** and separation from the outside world. Think again on our discussion of the term ‘sheltered.’ If suburbia is a more abstract version of being sheltered, then the military bunker is a **concrete and literal** version of sheltering.
- **Experience:** Although this is a documentary and largely unscripted, it is important to consider how these elements of deliberate design (in this case, setting) help to construct a certain narrative.

- All the participants express a distinct **fear of the unknown**.

**Let's consider what the cast are afraid of encountering specifically: perhaps they are afraid of finding themselves in a physically compromising situation, where their safety is in danger. Perhaps they are afraid of learning that what they previously believed was simplistic or untrue. Perhaps it is a combination of these and other factors.**

**We should note that the only person who doesn't express a fear is Gleny – consider maybe why this is. Perhaps she is the least afraid of having her preconceptions challenged.**

*“You will not be able to contact your families”*

- This is a revelation in two ways: firstly, it is a condition to the experiment that the cast members were unaware of when they signed up. **Their expectations have been changed, and the fear of the unknown amplified.**
- Secondly, these conditions give insight into the hardships faced by real refugees who are often unable to contact their families for months, even years at a time. It is the first instance of ‘experience as knowledge’ so far in the show.



***“Comfort zones”***

- **Earlier we discussed the role of suburbia as a concept and the notion of being ‘sheltered.’ The ‘comfort zone’ also plays into this idea – it being a place where your ordinary activities and values remain unchallenged. It represents a state of insularity and limited experience.**

***“A little utopia” – Raye in the Adelaide Hills***

- Now the show offers us a little more insight into this concept through the case study of Raye – although it should be noted that she lives in a more semi-rural to rural environment than suburban. As mentioned earlier, Raye represents a certain type of Australian – one that is connected to the nation’s pastoral roots and has invested her time in the physical, natural environment of the nation. Her property is a ‘little utopia’ in that it is relatively untouched natural land, free from the threats of physical development or human disruption.

**Narrator:** *“Until her neighbours moved in...”*

**Raye:** *“I could go over with a gun and shoot them... isn’t that terrible”*

- Now Raye discusses the detention centre that has opened up near her property. She expresses her concern that the inhabitants of the centre are treated too well considering that they have come here illegally. There is the implication that she sees this as an injustice – that people who haven’t worked for the comfort, and

who have deliberately evaded the ‘proper’ processes, are being ‘rewarded’ with luxuries.

**Journey in Reverse:** Now is a good time to discuss how the show is structured in order to reflect human experience. The show isn’t simply exposing the cast members to traumatic experiences without any guidance or direction, it is established in a certain way to both build a story as well as moderate their journeys. In order to achieve this, the journey of the refugee is taken in reverse.

The effect of this is that **many details are kept deliberately a secret**, to both:

- **Mimic the experience of the refugee:** Therefore, the show is constructed in order to maintain a semblance of **verisimilitude**. **As well as emphasise the experiences of both the participants and the viewer.** We are constantly left wondering where the cast members will go next, what they will encounter and what they will learn. By feeding us information bit by bit we are kept ignorant longer, and the transition from ignorance to knowledge protracted.

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