

STUDY GUIDE

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BY
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LOOKING FOR

ALIBRANDO

MY HEART IS
AT ANY
ONE DAY
MYSELF. NOT AS AN AUSTRALIAN AND NOT AS AN

THE ALIBRANDO...
from 1001-1003 on 10/11/11 at 10:00 AM

looking for alibrandi

Looking for Alibrandi is the story of Josie Alibrandi's experiences at school, and her relationships with friends and family during her last year at St Martha's girls' school. This is the year her father comes back into her life, the year she falls in love and discovers the secrets of her family's past. Josie tells us the story of her struggles with her Italian-Australian identity and the highs and lows of teenage life. It's the story of a young girl who feels she doesn't belong. As the

film unfolds, she learns to cope with these feelings of insecurity and learns that everyone has similar feelings at different times.

The film will be of interest to teachers and students from middle to senior secondary school in the following subject areas: English, Drama, Cultural Studies, Studies of Society and Environment or Human Society and Environment, Health and Human Development and Media Studies.

english

This section of the study guide is designed for use in English classes with students in years 9 or 10. It will discuss the themes of the film, such as family and identity. It presents activities based on the central character, Josie, as she struggles to find her identity and resolve what she perceives as her destiny. The activities have been designed to engage students in the study of the film as text and allow them to demonstrate skills for CSF outcomes.

Prior to students viewing the film some preliminary class activities on its themes could be undertaken.

- Once the groups have done this, have them respond to this statement: 'From the moment of birth the individual's future is already mapped out'.

In discussing this, groups should consider what influences affect our lives. How much are we products of our environment? To what extent is our future shaped by our families? What role do our friends play in determining the sort of person we become?

Once the groups have discussed the main idea, have them present their views to the rest of the class. Use this as a means to generate a whole class discussion on whether our



Destiny

Josie Alibrandi, as the title suggests, is looking for her identity. In the process she reacts to family, tradition and her sense of destiny.

Divide the class into small groups and have each consider, discuss, and present their views on the role of destiny in our lives.

- Ask each group to develop their own definition of destiny. What does it mean to them?

destiny is predetermined or a matter of individual choice.

Family

The family unit has a profound influence on the individual. Students may consider the many ways it impacts on them. Rules, customs, religious beliefs, aspirations, income, environment, and many other factors are central to the experience of family. Students may use visual means and prose or poetry to illustrate the positive and negative effects these factors have had on the formation of their



identity. Concept maps, collages, and storyboards can be used. There are also opportunities here for the use of photographs, video and PowerPoint presentations.

The teacher may like to 'direct' the students' viewing of the film. Some questions for students to have in mind while viewing could include:

- Josie says, 'I'm not going to be trapped like them'. Does Josie seem trapped, or 'cursed'?
- Look for examples of tradition in the family and school.
- Why does Josie react strongly to other characters referring to her ethnicity or using the word 'wog', even though she uses the word and is sometimes critical of her Italian heritage?
- How does Michael appear to be adapting to his role as a father?

If the students have also studied or read the novel they may consider the following questions:

- Do characters' appearances, speech patterns and mannerisms reflect your view of what was created in the novel?
- What scenes are different, the same or omitted?
- Is the tone of the novel maintained?

Depending on what follow-up activities teachers intend, they may want to add to this list.

The opening of the film uses voice-over narration to provide insight into Josie's view of her family.

- Watch the opening sequence carefully and note down what Josie thinks.
- What impressions of Josie's family do you form? What reasons does she have for wanting to 'bust out' of family life? Do you sympathise with her feelings?

Through the course of the film Josie must come to terms with meeting her father; she re-evaluates her thoughts about members of her family.

- Produce a diagram that analyses Josie's relationship with the main members of her family. Write Josie's name in the middle of a large sheet of poster paper and then surround it with the names of Michael, Christina and Nonna. Leave room to make notes that consider questions such as:
 - Does Josie change her opinion on each person?
 - How do they feel about Josie?
 - What expectations does Josie have of them and they of her? Are these expectations met?
 - By the end of the film Josie realises she wants (needs) to be a part of the Alibrandi clan. Why does she feel this way?
 - 'I'm loved by two of the strongest women I'll ever know'. What strengths does Josie come to realise Christina and Nonna have?
 - Family is the single most important influence on an individual. How is this demonstrated in the film?



- Josie says to Michael: 'Be angry, be rude but don't pretend I'm not here'. Do Josie and Michael need each other? Discuss.

Responses should be developed through drawing on specific scenes from the film.

Past, Present and Tradition

'You can't let the past rule your life', declares Josie, yet for the Alibrandi women, especially Christina and Nonna, the past is a very powerful influence on the present.

- Produce a 'life history' time line for Christina and Nonna that lists significant events in their lives. At the end of each time line write a discussion of how these events affected their lives as we see them in the film.

Nonna often talks of the past with Josie and goes through her photo album with her. Josie's boredom is eventually replaced with genuine interest. When Josie learns of Nonna's relationship with Marcus Sanford she realises Nonna has experienced love and loss, just as she has.

- Imagine that Marcus Sanford writes Nonna a letter. Write the letter you think he might send.
- What positive and negative aspects of tradition does the film present?

Characters

This film is driven by the characters and their relationships. Most obviously it is Josie's story as she searches for her identity and experiences the pains and joys that mark her personal growth.

'Josie believes that one day, she will grow up and be free of all the traditions and culture that seem to suffocate her',

says Kate Woods, the director. 'This film tracks the year when she comes to understand what 'one day' means'.

- What are the significant people and events that lead to Josie's new understanding of herself?
- What discoveries has she made which change her views of her self, her family, community and future?

Pia Miranda's performance is fuelled by a strong connection to the role. She says:

I meet people all the time who go 'Wow, you're playing Josie, she's my favorite character'. Josie is so real, she is so human and she is someone everyone can relate to ... she is so fearless and yet so flawed. I think everybody feels at a certain time in their life, whether it's because of heritage or other things, that they don't belong. It's the story of a young girl who feels like she doesn't belong, and then learns how to cope with that — and learns the fact that everyone feels like that in a certain way. It's all about growing up and accepting the fact that everyone is different.

Miranda describes Josie as 'fearless and flawed'. What do you think are Josie's strengths and weaknesses? In assessing Josie's character you may want to consider:

- Her different relationships with the other young characters in the film.
- Her relationship with Jacob Coote.
- Her meeting with her father.
- Her fight with Carly.
- Her Italian heritage and its influence.
- Her reaction to John Barton's suicide.

adaption of the novel to the screen

Director Kate Woods said of the novel: 'It's a beautiful story ... I think the most important thing about it is that it is so unpatronising to the people it's aimed at. I really wanted to capture that heart and that spirit so that every teenager who watches it can own it'.

Some students may have read the novel and comparing/contrasting the film and novel may prove useful in extending understanding.

The novel opens with Christina angrily reprimanding Josie for her behavior in Bondi. The film opens with the family all together making pasta sauce.

- What do these different openings do to the reader/viewer? What assumptions might be made about the directions each will take based on the openings?

The executive producer of the film, Tristram Miall, said, 'Getting the script right took an awfully long time, because so much of what happens is inside Josie's head, and making that work without acres of voice-over was a challenge'.

- When is voice-over used in the film?
- Are these moments comparable to the relevant section in the text?
- Do the voice-overs contribute to our understanding of Josie just as effectively as reading her thoughts?
- Do you feel any important insights into her character are left out?

A novel and a screenplay are two different forms of writing. The written text only comes to the screen when directors, designers, actors, editors and a host of other creative people come together. Their work is, of course, partly determined by the screenplay. Melinda Marchetta wrote the novel and the screenplay. She says:

I remember when I got the opportunity [to write the screenplay] ... I thought it would be a lot easier. I thought it would be a case of taking out the 'he said's' and 'she said's' and basically that would be it. I had to find a way of capturing moments with an image and sometimes a whole chapter went on just one image, that's one of the things I had to learn about, the difference between film and prose writing.

Ultimately, the difference will revolve around choice — what to leave in, what to take out, what to add.

- What are the most significant differences between the film and text?

Consider the following points:

- Josie comes to accept Michael more readily in the film than she does in the novel.
- The film makes use of fantasy scenes that are not in the novel.

Select another moment from the novel that isn't included in the film.

- Write a description, prepare a storyboard or produce a section of screenplay that presents this scene and demonstrates your understanding of it. Present this to your class, explaining your approach.

Music Costume & Setting

These are important elements in film as they work to involve the audience and increase understanding of characters.

The film's production designer, Stephen Curtis, says

The whole of Josie's family life revolves around red and different kinds of red. So Nonna's became a



type of magnolia shade on the red scale. Throughout Christina's house there were lots of pinks and reds, and Josie's bedroom — there was a lot of red in that room. I suppose the other side of it is, having established the warmth of Josie's family life, the opposite of that was the school world. As soon as we went out to St Martha's, Kate and I lived it, and all the cold colours were already there. The halls were all carpeted in different shades of blue/green, the stark ivory colored walls, the very dark wood — I worked around those. The same with Michael Wilkinson — that's what motivated the teal blue school uniforms. So we could feel a very definite shift from the cool privilege of the Eastern suburbs and the warmth of the Western suburbs.

Michael Wilkinson, the costume designer, adds:

I guess the most important thing for me was that we were treading a line between 'real' costumes — that didn't feel like they had been super designed and had a bit of real soul, and a gritty reality to them — but also to slightly push things so they made attractive screen images.

- Do these comments from key figures involved in creating the 'look' of the film reflect your reading of the novel?
- Select a scene from the novel that is in the film. Explain how you feel the ideas expressed by Curtis and Wilkinson are evident, or not, in the film.
- Do colour and costume reinforce notions of character and generation differences?

The soundtrack has also been designed to underscore the different emotions and experiences of the three generations of Alibrandi women.

Producer Kershaw says:

It was essential for us to create a soundtrack that reflected and resonated with Josie's world. So we were drawn to) female voices and the energy and drive of Janet (from both Spiderbait and Happyland), Adalita (from Magic Dirt), Chrissie Amphlett (in collaboration with Dave Faulkner) and Cerys (from Catatonia).

Says Alan John of the composed score,

The script seemed to need three things — irony, Italian flavours and emotional punch, and that to me seemed to be evoked in Nino Rota's compositions. The added bonus in drawing from the music of Italy in the '50s was that it matches Josie's ironic take on things in the present ... it links those two worlds in a comic and emotional way.

Music is a significant element of most films. It is used extensively in the film version of Looking for Alibrandi.

- Select a scene from the novel. Decide what music you feel would best enhance that scene in terms of extending understanding of character and theme. Bring the music into class and present your idea about its relevance to the scene as an oral report.
- Students who have not read the novel can still participate in these activities with the teacher making some adjustments to them. Teachers could also work with these activities by making selections of parts of the novel.

Conclusion

By the end of the film Josie appears to be happier and more confident. She is able to accept that life abounds with uncertainty and with this knowledge Josie is able to face the future.

Produce an extended piece of writing that responds to this statement: 'You don't always get what you want'.

What events does the film present that lead Josie to this conclusion?

Additional Topics for Written and Oral Activities

Secrets prevent growth and harm relationships.

We can never accept others until we understand ourselves.

Josie's growth is a result of conflicts and reflections.

We are products of our past and can only understand ourselves, and others, when we accept this.

Our destiny is not entirely in our own hands.

'What's important is who I feel I am'. Who are you?

Josie demonstrates how the 'Australian identity' has evolved from our cultural diversity.

Material possessions and status do not contribute in any significant way to our happiness.

studies of society and environment

Write down a few of your thoughts about the film. Did you enjoy it? Why or why not? What do you think are the key themes? What sections of the film had the greatest impact on you?

- Share your ideas in a class discussion.
- Give the film a score from one to five stars for a film review section of a newspaper.
- Write a brief review of *Looking for Alibrandi* for the newspaper that justifies the score you have given the film.

The Characters

Divide into small groups to write profiles of the major characters in the film. Each group could work on one character and then share their ideas with other class members. The following are some introductory comments, a few questions to guide your discussions and phrases about each character for you to use as starting points:

Josie

Josie is seventeen, illegitimate and a scholarship student in her final year at a wealthy Catholic girls' school. She lives in inner-suburban Glebe, and travels to school in the Eastern suburbs. Greta Scacchi says of Josie,

Josie is a spirited and bright, sparky character, very much like her mother and grandmother — so we see the parallels of the spirit in three generations.



Pia Miranda, who plays Josie, says,

Josie is so real, she is so human and she is someone everyone can relate to ... she is so fearless and yet so flawed! I think everybody feels at a certain time in their life, whether it's because of heritage or other things, that they don't belong.

- Do you agree that Josie is a character that you can relate to? Why or why not? At the end of the film, what sense

do you have of Josie being more comfortable with her dual Italian Australian identity? Has Josie grown up? What does that mean?

Nonna Katia



Elena Cotta, who plays the part on Nonna Katia, says,

... this woman, apart from having a lot of pain, has strength and a sense of humour ... the role of superstition is very strong in this woman ... and is obviously linked to her tradition. She wants the grand-daughter to be able to break this curse.

- What do you think are Nonna Katia's main qualities?
- What is the curse? Do you think Nonna believes the curse has been broken at the end of the film?

Christina

Josie is raised by her mother, Christina, a first generation Italian-Australian. Greta Scacchi says,



Christina's a very strong and brave woman, because she's a single mother but not in the victim sense ... She found herself pregnant at a very young age and ... kept the baby in defiance. It was more because of her rebellious spirit that she kept the child, and being proud and intelligent she was not going to give in to feelings of self-pity....

- Do you think Christina is also looking for her identity? Explain your answer.
- Is Greta Scacchi's view accurate.
- Add your own comments to this view.

Michael Andretti

Michael is the father who Josie has never met, and the father who doesn't know he has a daughter.



- How would you describe Michael when we first meet him in the film?
- At what stage does the audience begin to feel that he really does want to develop a relationship with his daughter?

Jacob Coote

Jacob Coote is the handsome yet scruffy, non-conformist head prefect of Cook High.



- How does his dress and image in the film influence your view of his character?
- Think back to the first scene in which you see him at the amphitheatre.
- How do you think different groups of young people relate to him?
- What is Josie's opinion of Jacob?
- Why does she struggle with her attitude to both Jacob and John Barton throughout the film?

Carly Bishop



Carly could be described as 'the Anglo-Australian princess'.

- What scenes build this view?

Josie secretly wants to be a part of the privileged world of middle-class Australia that Carly belongs to. Leeanna Walsman, who plays Carly, says:

Carly's one of the girls who's got everything money can buy, and she uses it! So she's a bitch, but I think she's one of those people who's really afraid that someone else might have an edge on her, so she's always got to try and get everyone down to size ...

- What are your impressions of Carly?

John Barton



John Barton is a handsome, successful private school boy. Matthew Newton, who plays John says,

I think the pressure he places on himself manifests itself in outward cool, the outward 'I'm together' and 'I'm Mr Wholesome' but not all is as it seems ... He has this really strange relationship with Josie

where they both have an affection for each other but nothing ever develops because of stuff that blocks him and the insecurity that blocks her ...

- Why do you think that Josie is so drawn towards John?
- What factors contribute to John's depression?
- What helps Josie come to terms with John's death?

key movie themes

Culture and Identity

Looking for Alibrandi is a powerful study of multi-cultural Australia and the struggles that each generation of immigrants has with finding their place in Australian society and defining their identity. Josie, Christina, Nonna Katia and in fact all of the characters have a story to tell about culture in Australian society.

- In a class discussion, try to define the concept of 'culture'. Then read these definitions and see if they increase your understanding of the term.

(Culture is) ... the skills, arts, beliefs, and customs of a group of people, passed on from one generation to another.

Culture embraces the beliefs, values, ideals, customs, languages, discourses, artistic products and symbols of a group ... The expression of a people's culture can be found in their traditions, memories, treasured materials and artefacts which can create a sense of personal and group identity.

- Reflect on the various factors influencing the formation of your own culture and identity. These could include: birthplace, family background, ethnicity, class, gender, peers, media and group affiliations.
- What are some of the skills, arts, beliefs and customs of Italian-Australians you see represented in the film?
- How are these traditions passed on from generation to generation?

- What are some of the customs of Italian-Australians that Josie resents? What are some that she enjoys and cherishes?
- Nonna Katia provides a particular window on Australian culture in the past and on the expectations of women's roles. What does she tell us about being a married Italian immigrant in the past? How does she celebrate her cultural origins?
- At the start of the film, Josie seems to be suffocated by the 'Tomato Day' celebrations. How has her reaction changed at the end of the film?
- It could be said that John Barton and Jacob Coote have very different cultural backgrounds and identity. What are the key influences on each of them, and in what ways is their culture similar and different?
- What are the stereotypical views of Italians in the community that we see represented in Looking for Alibrandi?
- What cultural stereotypes are often used to express Australian identity?
- Is there some truth in cultural stereotypes?

Relationships

Looking for Alibrandi is also a study of relationships: between mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters, grandmothers and grandchildren, relatives, girlfriends and boyfriends, and girls together in school.





- Take each of these categories and talk about the factors that can influence all these different relationships.
- Describe and explain the various relationships in these categories in *Looking for Alibrandi*: Josie and Christina, Nonna Katia and Christina, Michael and Josie, Francesca and Christina, Nonna Katia and Josie, Josie and her girlfriends and boyfriends, etc.
- After presenting your explanations, check to see if you have depicted change in the relationships. If not, think again about how and why the relationships change during the film.

The relationships between the three women: Josie, her mother and grandmother, are central to the film.

- Why are these relationships such a 'roller coaster'?
- How does the truth about Christina's father change the relationships?
- How does Josie and her father's relationship grow and develop as the film proceeds?

Adolescence

The dictionary definition of adolescence is: the period between puberty and adulthood; youth.

- What are some of the difficulties adolescents have to deal with at this stage of their lives?
- Which of these issues are raised in *Looking for Alibrandi*?
- Josie is on a roller coaster of emotions at times during the film. To what extent is this due to adolescence?

Immigration

The first immigrants to Australia in Josie's family on her mother's side are Nonna Katia and her husband Francesca. We know that her father has Italian origins, but other than the fact that his family moved to Adelaide, there is very little said about his family.

- What explanations do Nonna and Katia give for their decision to come to Australia?
- Construct a list of all the reasons why people have migrated to Australia through time, including 'push' and 'pull' factors, i.e. reasons why they feel they have to leave their country of origin and why Australia was chosen.
- Discuss why immigration continues to be a hotly debated topic in Australia today.
- Italian immigrants have brought rich cultural traditions to urban and rural life in Australia. Research and describe when Italian people came to Australia and their contributions to social and economic life in your local area and state.

In 1988, there were 605,250 people in Australia of Italian origin, i.e. 6.5% of Australia's population.

- Find out how many people of Italian origin there are in Australia today and the origins of other Australian migrants. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has up to date information
- Find out more about the history of immigration in Australia and the way it has shaped our cultural life
- Invite immigrants from your local community to share their experiences with your class.

Racism or Ethnic Bigotry

Anthony La Paglia, who plays Michael Andretti in the film, looks back on his upbringing in Adelaide and says,

It was difficult. It was twenty years ago, and there was lot of residual stuff from the '50s and '60s — the whole dago/wog routine. In the high schools that I went to it was pretty dominant, it even came from the teachers. It's something that has very much changed. I really don't see it much anymore, which is healthy. It's good.

Pia Miranda says that in her experience,

In Australia everyone seems to be embracing the fact that we are a multicultural society. So as I was growing up I became more and more comfortable with it, the more I saw that there are so many people with different cultures out there. It's what makes Australia beautiful.

- Construct a short survey to test whether Anthony and Pia's views are accurate. You will need to write your questions first and then survey members of your school and wider community.

Links With the Novel

The novel, *Looking for Alibrandi*, was first published in Australia by Penguin in 1992. It is now published in Denmark, Italy, Germany, Spain, Norway and Canada. The novel was awarded the 1993 Children's Book of the Year (for older readers) and numerous other prestigious awards. Conclusive proof of the enormous popularity of the book is that it is reputed to be the most stolen book in Australian schools. Director of the film, Kate Woods, says that the book:

... has a fantastic heart. I think the most important

thing is that it is so unpatronising to the people it's aimed at. I really wanted to capture that heart and that spirit so that every teenager who watches it can own it.

- If you have read the novel, suggest reasons why it is so popular.
- How do you think young people from other countries might react to both the novel and the film? Explain your answer. Think about any of the themes that could be regarded as 'universal'.
- Who do you think the novel and the film are aimed at?
- Write a few phrases or sentences describing the novel before watching the film.
- After watching the film, look at your descriptions of the book and decide if they are just as applicable to the film. If not, what is different about your short descriptions of the film?

When you have read a novel before watching a film version, you often notice the differences and both agree and disagree with the adaptation.

- What differences did you notice?
- How successful is the adaptation?

media studies

Adapting *Looking for Alibrandi* was a long process: three years of script development, six months of national auditioning for the younger roles, and co-ordinating the schedules of the movies' two major stars, Greta Scacchi and Anthony La Paglia. Over 3,000 young people were auditioned for the roles.

- How effective do you think the casting was in terms of the selection of actors who could faithfully depict the characters from the novel?

The colour palette was selected to reinforce the differences between characters and locations.

- What colour palette was selected for the start and the scenes in Nonna and Christina and Josie's home?
- How effective is this technique?
- How is a contrast achieved in the scenes at St Martha's? Think about the colours and style of the school uniforms, the building, walls and carpets.

Production Design

Production designer, Stephen Curtis, comments,

... shooting and editing style and even choice of location heightened emotions ... For me I think the biggest breakthrough with the script was starting to

chart Josie's journey as a roller coaster ride, a series of peaks and troughs — it literally goes from her being the happiest person in the world to the saddest person in the space of a scene. For me that allowed for a whole lot of design choices — I was trying to find ways of physically elevating Josie when she was happy, throwing her down, literally down, when she was depressed.

- Think of different scenes where emotions are heightened and then lowered dramatically. Share your ideas in a class discussion.

Cinematography

Cinematographer, Toby Oliver, says,

... an early reference point for the film's visual style is the work of the legendary film-maker Federico Fellini. ... The Tomato Day scenes exemplify that Italian style of film-making, neo-realist too, in that you think parts of it are semi-documentary but at the same time deliberate and controlled, with the long shots that move from one group to the another ...

- Write a review of the cinematography for a film magazine.
- Write a brief description of what the term neo-realism.

Editing

Editor, Martin Connor, says,

... the teen film genre ... encapsulates the balance between comedy and drama. There's a different type of pacing for those films, a slightly punchier momentary use of shots, not so lingering, tending to cut more on the line and more directly on the reaction.

- Did you find the film 'punchy'?
- What do you think is meant by the term, 'teen genre'? List some recent 'teen movies'.



Further References

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This study was written for ATOM by Libby Tudball, Pauline White and David White

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The novel is available through Penguin Books.

The soundtrack will release early 2000 through Murmur Music.

The film is distributed by Roadshow Film Distributors and will release in cinemas Australia wide on May 4.

Note: www.alibrandi.com.au The official website offers teachers and students detailed information on the film, as well as additional sources for study. The website will also offer a major school incentive, to be launched in February 2000. Stay connected for your school's chance to win computers, software and many other prizes.

School Cinema Group Bookings: All major cinemas will be provided with relevant information supporting the LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI school campaign. Please contact your local cinema closer to release for group booking ticket prices.