

Teachers Notes

Back on The Block: Bill Simon's story

Aboriginal Studies Press and authors Bill Simon, Des Montgomerie and Jo Tuscano, believe that *Back on The Block* can serve as a powerful teaching tool for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The themes in the book are at times confronting, but they derive from real-life experiences. Not only for Bill Simon's generation, but for many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men today. Teachers should use their discretion as to whether the themes are appropriate for their class, and may choose to adapt the unit to suit their students.

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1. LEARNING STATEMENT

These notes have been developed in accordance with the NSW Stage 5 Standard English syllabus. However, the notes can also be adapted to suit the ESL component of the syllabus. The text also has potential to be used in the NSW standard Preliminary (Year 11) English course, the NSW History Syllabus and Aboriginal Studies Syllabus.

This unit examines the context of an author's life experiences and its impact on his or her life story. The students will be responding to the book, and composing a variety of texts such as expositions, or personal, imaginative and critical responses.

2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

By reading and discussing the text, carrying out personal research, and completing the activities in these notes, students should meet the following NSW syllabus outcomes:

Stage 5 Outcomes

Students learn to:	Students learn about:
1.2 respond to and compose more sustained texts in a range of contexts 1.4 explain their responses to texts and their widening personal preferences within and among texts.	1.11 their own emerging sense of style, personal preference and discernment in responding to and composing texts.
2.7 identify and articulate their own processes of responding and composing.	2.12 the ways different modes, subject areas, media and cultural representation affect their personal and critical responses to texts.

<p>4.1 identify, describe and explain the purpose of texts in personal, historical, cultural, social, technological and workplace contexts</p> <p>4.2 describe, explain and evaluate the composer's choices of language forms and features and structures of texts in terms of purpose, audience and context</p> <p>4.4 experiment with and explain altered perceptions of ideas and information that result from changes in language features and structures</p> <p>4.5 identify purpose, audience and context of texts through consideration of the language forms and features, and structures used in the texts</p> <p>4.7 identify and critically evaluate the use of Standard Australian English, its variations and levels of usage.</p>	<p>4.8 the ways in which spoken, written and visual texts are shaped according to personal, historical, cultural, social, technological and workplace contexts</p> <p>4.9 appropriate language forms and features and structures of texts to use in an increasingly wide range of contexts</p> <p>4.10 the metalanguage for describing, explaining and justifying the composer's choices of language forms and features and structures of texts in terms of purpose, audience and context</p> <p>4.14 the appropriateness of the use of Standard English, its variations and levels of usage.</p>
<p>5.2 compose written, oral and visual texts for personal, historical, cultural, social, technological and workplace contexts.</p>	
<p>6.2 respond imaginatively and interpretively to an increasingly demanding range of literary and non-literary texts</p> <p>6.3 compose texts that demonstrate originality, imagination and ingenuity in content and language</p> <p>6.6 compose imaginative texts based on a proposition, premise or stimulus.</p>	<p>6.9 the ways in which imaginative texts can explore universal themes and social reality.</p>
<p>9.1 respond to and compose texts that reflect their expanding worlds from the personal to the public</p> <p>9.3 describe ways in which their own responses to texts are personal and reflect their own context.</p>	<p>9.6 the ways different and changing views of the world shape meaning</p> <p>9.7 the ways personal perspective is shaped by social, cultural and historical influences</p> <p>9.8 the ways personal perspective shapes meaning</p> <p>9.9 aspects of their own context that influence their responses and compositions.</p>

10.1 identify cultural elements expressed in the language, structure and content of texts drawn from popular culture, youth cultures, cultural heritages and the workplace	10.7 the language used to express contemporary cultural issues
10.2 identify, explain and challenge cultural values, purposes and assumptions including gender, ethnicity, religion, youth, age, disability, sexuality, cultural diversity, social class and work in texts	10.8 the effects of personal, social, historical and technological perspectives on language and communication
10.4 engage with details of texts to respond and compose from a range of social and critical perspectives	10.9 the ways in which particular texts relate to their cultural experiences and the culture of others
10.6 compose texts that reflect cultural attitudes other than their own.	10.10 the ways situational and cultural elements of context shape texts
	10.11 the beliefs and value systems underpinning texts from different cultures
	10.12 how texts sustain or challenge established cultural attitudes.

Preliminary English Outcomes

1. Students learn about the ways meaning results from the relationships between composer, responder, text and context by: 1.3 composing texts for a variety of contexts, purposes and audiences 1.4 recognising the effects of their own language experiences and culture on their response to and composition of texts 1.5 changing the contexts of responding to or composing texts in order to achieve particular meanings.
3. Students learn the language relevant to their study of English including: 3.3 language of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts 3.5 conventions of language.
4. Students learn about the ways language forms and features, and structures of texts shape meaning and influence responses by: 4.1 identifying and describing a variety of language forms and features, and structures of particular texts 4.2 identifying the effects of the language forms and features, and structures of particular texts.
6. Students learn about the ways they can respond to texts by: 6.1 engaging with a wide range of texts in personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts 6.2 relating responses to aspects of human experience 6.3 composing personal responses to texts and considering the responses of others 6.4 discussing and reflecting on the wider issues arising from their engagement with texts.
8. Students learn to compose imaginative, personal and critical texts through: 8.1 engaging with complex texts 8.3 using and manipulating some genre forms for different audiences and purposes 8.5 shaping compositions appropriately to purpose, audience and context.
9. Students learn to assess the effectiveness of processes and technologies by: 9.2 using individual and collaborative processes to generate, clarify, organise, refine and present ideas
10. Students learn to analyse and synthesise information and ideas by: 10.1 collecting, selecting, interpreting and drawing conclusions about information and ideas in a range of texts from personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts

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| 10.2 making connections between information and ideas and synthesising these in a range of texts |
| 10.3 developing and presenting information and ideas in a range of texts and in analytic, expressive and imaginative ways. |
| 11. Students learn to draw upon the imagination in responding to and composing texts by: |
| 11.1 making connections between life experience and imagined experience |
| 11.3 recreating texts into new texts by changing perspective and contexts for specified audiences. |

Key Competencies of the English Years 7–10 Syllabus

Key Competencies are generic competencies essential for effective participation in existing and emerging learning for future education, work and life in general. The English Years 7–10 Syllabus provides a powerful context for the development of these competencies.

Aboriginal and Indigenous content provides all students with the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of indigenous history and culture in Australia and internationally. In their study of English, students explore a range of experiences and achievements of Aboriginal peoples in historical and social contexts and the links between cultural expression, language and spirituality.

3. ABOUT THE BOOK

Back on The Block is the life story of Bill Simon, told by Bill himself to Des Montgomerie and Jo Tuscano. The text reveals some of the effects of assimilation policies, government indifference and Aboriginal poverty on Indigenous Australians like Bill, and his generation.

By telling his story of being taken from his parents aged ten, and placed in what became the notorious Kinchela Boys' Home, Biripi man, Bill Simon, speaks for the thousands of stolen children who were abused and tormented under the government's cultural assimilation policy.

One of the first insider accounts of the now infamous Boys' Home, Bill's voice emerges clearly as he recounts the eight years of terror and misery in state care that shaped every aspect of his life. Nothing at Kinchela fitted him for life beyond incarceration, and the subsequent years of drug and alcohol abuse and failed relationships, is the typical experience of many Aboriginal people who were stolen from their parents 'for their own good'. Especially difficult was his emerging unhappiness as Bill began to understand the extent of the loss of his culture and identity.

However, unlike some stolen children, Bill has been able to change the course of his life. By switching drugs for a Bible, Bill has embraced Christianity and set out on the rocky path towards redemption, though the ongoing legacy of the Kinchela years is his constant battle with his bitterness and anger. On his life's journey, Bill has devoted his time to the forgotten people in our society – drug users, criminals, the homeless and the poor.

Bill became a friend and support to the residents of Redfern, and was ordained as a minister, where he continues to live on The Block with his family. Although he will never forget what happened to him as a child, he now takes some responsibility for his behaviour and the choices he's made, and has learnt to find ways to deal with his anger.

Bill's searing honesty in this account of his life is powerful. More often than not he describes being an aggressive and violent young man. While with the benefit of hindsight and maturity Bill makes some attempt to explain his behaviour, he never excuses it.

4. INTRODUCING THE TEXT

a) Introducing the unit

Use the unit overview to discuss with the class the aims of the unit, and the focus outcomes to be addressed. Include the nature of the teaching and learning activities in which students will be involved, as well as the mode and requirements of the end-of-unit assessment task.

Before sharing the text with students, you should do the following:

- explain why you have chosen the text to share
- discuss with students your objectives for sharing: content, issues, themes, linguistic structures and features
- elicit from the students what they already know about the author or about similar texts
- brainstorm ideas and knowledge that will help students access the text.

b) Research

When students work with texts from other historical periods or other cultures, a ready availability of information about the period helps to provide a context for their reading and comprehension. It is a good idea to have the students undertake text-based research and then report on information about what may have been unfamiliar topics and concepts that they might encounter in the text.

These include:

- The Stolen Generations
- *Bringing them Home* report
- Government policies on assimilation
- Institutions for Aboriginal children (including Kinchela and Cootamundra Girls' Home)
- The history of inner-Sydney Redfern
- The location and history of what's known by the residents and others as 'The Block.'
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Aboriginal people and the criminal justice system
- Domestic violence.

The following links and titles provide information on these topics; however, students should be encouraged to research beyond these resources.

Stolen Generations resources

Beresford, Q. 2006, *Rob Riley: An Aboriginal leader's quest for justice*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

Healy, J, 2009, 'Stolen Generations: The way forward', *Issues in Society*, Volume 289, Spinney Press, NSW.

Pascoe, B. and AIATSIS, 2008, *The Little Red Yellow Black Book: An introduction to Indigenous Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

Paulson, P. 2009, *Binanma: The Stolen Generation*, Education resource kit for Australian teachers, Link-Up (Qld) Aboriginal Corporation, Brisbane.

Read, P. 1981, *The Stolen Generations: The removal of Aboriginal children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969*, NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Sydney.

<http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/publications/StolenGenerations.pdf>

Read, P. 1998, *After 'Bringing them Home'*, Mots Pluriels, (7) 1998.

<http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP798pr.html>

- Rudd, K. 2008, Federal Parliament's Apology to the Stolen Generation, 13 February 2008, *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues, Special issue: The Apology*, 11 (2): 33–4.
- Wilson, R. 1997, *Bringing them Home: Report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney.
- http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf

Government policy towards Indigenous people

- DECS Curriculum Services, *Timeline of Legislation affecting Aboriginal people*, Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia.
- http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au/files/links/Timeline_of_legislation_af.pdf
- Hasluck, P. 1998, *Shades of Darkness: Aboriginal affairs 1925–1965*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Kidd, R. 2000, *Black Lives, Government Lies*, UNSW Press, Sydney.
- Kidd, R. 2006, *Trustees on Trial: Recovering the stolen wages*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.
- Morgan, G. 2006, *Unsettled Places: Aboriginal people and urbanisation in New South Wales*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA.
- NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 2001, *Aboriginal Affairs in NSW: A short history*, NSW Government.
- <http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/about/history.html>

Institutions for Aboriginal Children

- Aboriginal Welfare Board, *Dawn and New Dawn 1952–1975*, A magazine for the Aboriginal people of New South Wales, NSW State Government.
- <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/dawn/>
- Happy Homes: Children make good progress
- <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/dawn/docs/v09/s09/10.pdf>
- A Home from Home: The boys at Kinchela
- <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/dawn/docs/v07/s08/9.pdf>
- Cootamundra Girls: A happy bunch
- <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/dawn/docs/v09/s10/9.pdf>
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001, *The Bungalow Aboriginal Australia: The unfinished business – places*, ABC Online
- http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep4/ep4_places.htm
- Bird, C. 1998, *The Stolen Children: Their stories*, including extracts from the Report of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families, Random House Australia, Milsons Point, NSW.
- Cummings, B. 1990, *Take This Child: From Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Children's Home*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra (currently out of print).
- Haebich, A. and Mellor, D. (eds), 2008, *Many Voices: Reflections on experiences of Indigenous child separation*, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- Hakim, Y. 2008, *Stolen Memories*, Living Black, SBS, Sydney.

http://news.sbs.com.au/livingblack/stolen_memories_548058

Hipkin, B. 2008, *Myths & Memories: Bomaderry Children's Home 1908–2008*, Bill Hipkin, Queensland.

Kociumbas, J. 1997, *Australian Childhood: A history*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.

Muir, H. J. *Very Big Journey: My life as I remember it*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

Radio National, 2006, *Return of the Cootamundra Sisterhood*

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/awaye/stories/2006/1788284.htm>

Read, P. 2003, 'How Many Separated Aboriginal Children?', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*,(49)2: 155–63.

Scroope, L. 2008, 'Cecil Dickson's Story: Brutality and brainwashing', *Yass Tribune*, 27 February 2008

<http://yass.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/cecil-dicksons-story-brutality-and-brainwashing/288606.aspx>

Redfern

Aboriginal Housing Company

<http://www.ahc.org.au/>

Documentary on Sydney's Indigenous community, 'The Block'. This documentary addresses the plans which have been drafted by both the community on the Block and the Government for the future of the area.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niqAZY5__Vg&feature=related

Maximum Diplomacy — The Aboriginal struggle for The Block in Redfern, by Esosa Edmonds, Representative of the United Nations Association.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSoRHFNMK8g>

Redfern Oral History: Community stories from Redfern and surrounds

<http://www.redfernoralhistory.org/>

Redfern, New South Wales, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redfern,_New_South_Wales

The Block, Redfern, *Timeout Sydney*

<http://www.timeout Sydney.com.au/aroundtown/the-block-redfern-28.aspx>

'The Politics of Redfern's Block', PM, Radio National

<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2004/s1046248.htm>

SUPPORTING TEXTS

When introducing longer or more sophisticated texts dealing with a specific concept, the use of simpler, shorter, more focused whole texts can be useful in activating and refining students' prior knowledge. Much has been written about the Stolen Generations in the form of songs, poems, fiction and biography. Provide students with excerpts from these.

Biography

Beresford, Q. 2006, *Rob Riley: An Aboriginal leader's quest for justice*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

Huggins, R. and Huggins J., *Auntie Rita*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

Katinyeri, D. and Anderson, S. 2008, *Doreen Kartinyeri : My Ngarrindjeri calling*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

Muir, H.J. *My Very Big Journey: My life as I remember it*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

Musicians and songs

Kerry Fletcher, 'Sorry Song'

<http://www.sgalliance.org.au/ssng.htm>

Bob Randall, 'Brownskin Baby'

Archie Roach, 'Took the Children Away'

Shellie Morris, 'Swept Away'

Shellie Morris, 'Waiting Road'.

Visual Arts

Nicholls, C. 2000, 'Indigenous Australian Art and the Stolen Generation', *Artlink* 20, no. 1: pp.36–9.

Julie Dowling

www.emsah.uq.edu.au/awsr/awbr/issues/144/uncanny.htm

Brenda Croft

Malcolm Maloney Jagamarra

Gloria Beckett

Activity 1

Have students choose a personal account from one of the members of the Stolen Generations to share with the class. Students should accompany their presentation with a summary of the person and their life, including their experience of being stolen and how the experience affected them.

Activity 2

Based on preliminary research, in groups, students are to research one of the key issues in the book in greater depth and present a report or a poster or a pamphlet or a 3-minute oral presentation. They must include evidence of their research and articles that are connected to this issue.

Outcomes Stage 5

1.2, 1.11, 2.7, 2.12, 4.1, 4.8, 5.2, 6.2, 6.3, 6.6, 6.9, 9.1, 9.6, 9.7, 10.4, 10.6, 10.11, 10.12.

Outcomes Preliminary

1.3, 3.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 8.1, 8.3, 8.5, 9.2, 10.1, 10.2, 10.3.

c) Analysis of the cover and predictions about the text

Before reading the text, deconstruct the information presented by the physical values of the book. This will extend students' critical literacy skills and help them become familiar with the standard conventions of the layout of a book. 'Both print and visual information reveals an attitude to, and understanding of, the text, the reader and their relationship. From book covers, students can predict possible storylines, characters, themes, and from these predictions can utilise their knowledge of text types to predict genre, language, tone. When using this predicting strategy teachers should structure regular opportunities to reflect on and confirm predictions during the "During Reading" phase.' (*Choosing and Using Texts*: <http://wwwfp.education.tas.gov.au/English/choosing.htm>).

This stage of the text analysis has two parts. For less-able readers, the analysis of the book cover takes a more basic and practical form. For more advanced students, ones who are comfortable with the processes of a close study of a text, the analysis can be more abstract and complex. It offers students the opportunity to examine the book cover as a visual text in the way that they will be expected to do in the stage 6 study of English.

A reader who is familiar with the meanings constructed by particular narratives should be able to look at the book cover and extract information in the same way that a fluent reader can do from a written text. In a visual text, responses are evoked by the effect of *visual* codes such as colour, framing, line, angle, perspective and vectors, in other words the 'visual grammar'.

In interpreting meanings from images we are able to 'break the visual codes' in the way that we 'decode' words in a written text. We identify where colour, position, angle, shape have been used to construct meaning, or to evoke emotion.

(Walsh, M. 2005, 'Reading Visual and multimodal texts: How is "reading" different?', Conference Proceedings, Multiliteracies and English Teaching K-12 in the Age of Information and Communications Technology ALEA Conference 2004, University of New England.)

VISUAL TEXT ANALYSIS OF THE FRONT COVER OF *BACK ON THE BLOCK*

An explanation of these terms used by HSC students can be found at:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/english/assets/pdf/grammar.pdf>

Target audience: Readers who recognise Bill Simon, the man; the geographical reference to The Block in the title; and, people who are interested in Aboriginal biography.

Narrative or concept idea: The narrative is bold, simple and clear on the cover. The title takes up half of the cover space. The lower half is a narrative portrait of the subject where Simon is standing in a characteristic stance, that of preaching or addressing an audience. He is positioned in front of a generic row of terraces, presumed to be Redfern's The Block.

Background: The background is divided into two distinct sections – the upper half is an abstract, clean block of black with the title appearing clearly. The background of the lower section is a black-and-white photo of a typical 19th and early 20th century Redfern terrace street scene, with a eucalypt tree that places the image immediately in Australia. The background palette that has been chosen is deliberate, to ensure the overlaid text and images stand out in high contrast.

Salience: The salience of the image has been carefully constructed. The technique is simple yet effective. By using a subdued palette for the background, the highlights of colour stand out. The red colour of the text, the words 'The Block', are strong. This is an immediate attention-getter as people are aware of the area. Likewise, the colours on Simon himself, the strong blue, the yellow of the microphone and the warm brown of his skin bring readers' attention to this figure. Perhaps they recognise him; probably they don't, yet he is an arresting figure and his presence, coupled with the words 'The Block', arouse curiosity.

Vectors: The vectors in an image lead the viewer from one element to another. The cover of Simon's biography relies largely upon the strong horizontal lines of text leading the viewer to scan the words and move down to the image of Simon. The strong note of yellow on the microphone brings viewers' eyes down to the portrait of Simon. They might wonder: who is this man?

Angles — vertical angle and power relationship: The shot of Simon is front-on, at eye-level. Combined with the high modality Simon's, the impression given is that there is no power difference between the subject and the viewer.

Angles — horizontal: The portrait of Simon is an interesting choice. While the angle of the shot is clearly front-on, the angle of the shot makes us wonder what Simon is doing – addressing a crowd of people. Viewers may feel themselves part of the group listening to Simon. We are included in the audience.

Colour (tone and saturation, symbolism): The colour on the front cover is used to maximum effect, using contrasts in saturation and carefully placed notes of colour. The solid, saturated black of the upper part of the cover is in contrast to the muted tones of the street scape. In both parts of the image, colour is used to highlight different sections. In the upper section, the colour red is used to highlight the words 'The Block', whereas in the lower section the strong blue and bright yellow, combined with the warm brown of Simon's skin tones, make his portrait leap out of the suburban background. Blue is reputed to represent peace, tranquillity, dignity and power, attributes which Simon displays in his life's story of a challenging life and salvation. Yellow represents happiness, yet it can also suggest caution and decay, thus implying that the Simon's will be challenging for readers to digest. The red title generates a sense of passion and urgency; as if it is imperative for Simon's life story to be read, not just by those who live on The Block, but also those who feel prejudice and judgment when they see those words.

Lighting (incl. shade and shadow): It is important for the sense of high modality that the Bill's image is not posed. Rather, he is in action; this is not a studio portrait. Perhaps he is preaching to a congregation, or talking to residents on The Block, or to politicians. He is captured mid-sentence, in natural lighting, generating the idea that Simon is an authentic figure with a down-to-earth tale to tell.

Modality: Perhaps the most important feature of the cover is the high degree of modality which is created by all of the elements combined. The cover has a high degree of truthfulness and authenticity and the images look 'real'. Even though the picture is a montage of two separate photos, they are clearly linked. The portrait of Simon is not posed, it looks like he has been captured mid-sentence. His brow is furrowed, his hand is clenched and he looks passionate. There has been minimal manipulation with the lighting and colour saturation and the street scene could have been taken on any day in Sydney.

Framing of shots — intimate (close-up), social (medium), public (long): The cover comprises two shots arranged in a montage. The close-up of Simon places him at an intimate distance from the reader, while the public long-shot of the streetscape implies that the images could derive from any suburban neighbourhood where the pain of the legacy of the Stolen Generations lives on.

Given/new: The left-hand side of the image is referred to as the given, whereas the right side is the new. In this image, the given is the familiar inner-city scene of Redfern's public housing: The Block. It is known as a place where some residents love to live; people who would not want to live anywhere else because of the camaraderie. However, they get frustrated and angry with the racism they feel they have to deal with as well as outside interferences and insensitivities (for example the police, and the media). This can cause friction, anger and frustration. On the right-hand side, Simon's portrait is overlaid on the street scene. He is being introduced as someone who is linked with The Block; perhaps a subject of importance; a controversial figure whose story is difficult to hear, but is important nonetheless and deserves attention.

Ideal/real: The cover is divided into two different divisions of ideal/real. There is the division between the title and the photo-montage below, and the image is divided into the portrait of Simon and the Redfern streetscape. Simon is pictured larger than the houses of the Block behind him; his head reaches just above the terrace rooftops. Thus Simon invokes a sense of hope and aspiration; a beacon of hope amidst the troubled area of The Block in Redfern that has come to represent the negative effects of the Stolen Generation.

Activity 1

As a class, identify and discuss whichever of the following elements appear in *Back on The Block*:

- title
- names and biographical information about the authors
- acknowledgements page
- foreword
- endorsements
- dedication
- front and back covers (including the back cover blurb: the description of what the book is about)
- spine typography
- contents page
- information about the publisher.

With more advanced students discuss the visual elements of the front and back cover:

- narrative or concept idea?
- background (realistic? abstract?)
- salience (what stands out?)
- vectors (the invisible reading lines)
- angles: vertical angle (high, low, straight on) and power relationship
- angles: horizontal (frontal or oblique)
- colour (tone and saturation, symbolism)
- lighting (including shade and shadow)
- modality
- framing of shots: intimate (close-up), social (medium), public (long)
- given/new
- ideal/real.

Activity 2

In pairs, students are to critically analyse the physical elements of the book discussed in class and answer the questions below.

1. What do you notice first? What is there about the cover that might attract readers?
2. From the front and back covers, what facts can you find out about the authors and responses to the book?
3. Describe the visual images used on the front and back covers of the book. How do the layout and images on the front and back covers reflect the book's content.

You will need to consider the use of the following:

- colour
- use of light and shade; colour tones
- boxed information
- positioning of cultural and language symbols, representation of themes
- simple or complex layout?
- front cover image/images—photographs and graphics
- use of camera angles
- font size and style: sans serif or serif; simple or ornate
- use of text integrated into the image as a title
- dominance or title or author's name
- 'blurb', endorsers' comments.

4. What predictions can you make about the contents of the book prior to reading it?

For example:

- What is the purpose of the book? To inform? To instruct?
- Who is the audience? Adolescents? Older adults? An expert on the topic? A literary genre reader?

5. What are your first impressions of the book? Do you think you will enjoy it? Give your reasons.

Stage 5 Outcomes: 1.4, 1.11, 2.12, 4.2, 4.8, 5.2, 9.3, 9.9, 10.1.

Preliminary Outcomes: 1.3, 1.4, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 8.3, 10.2.

5. READING THE TEXT

Due to the length of the text, it may not be practical for students to read the book themselves in the required time, or to cover it during class reading time.

A summary of chapters and events is provided below so that the key events and issues can be explored in greater depth in class time.

The following tips may be useful when encouraging students to read as much of the book as they can:

- Work with students on their planning skills. Deliberately, intentionally, and conspicuously work with students to budget their time in such a way as they can be expected to complete reading a novel in a designated amount of time. I have found that having students keep a time log for a week, and pick out particularly good times in the week for uninterrupted reading actually helps.
- “Sell” the novel; sell it realistically! Will they enjoy it? Will it be on the test? Are all educated people familiar with this work? Will it help them to understand their own lives better? Be honest.
- Encourage students to find their own rhythm for reading and appreciating the novel. Some may read straight through over a weekend, some chapter by chapter. A key is for students to find an enjoyable routine that might become a life long habit.
- On a daily basis monitor students’ progress with their reading. Ask students individually how far s/he has read thus far. I like to ask students about their experience in trying to stop their reading at the end of a chapter. My experience has usually been that authors have so successfully whetted my appetite at the end of a chapter for the next chapter that it is often easier to stop at a section break rather than at the end of a chapter. Comparing reading experiences like that is enjoyable to do, and also cultivates an appreciation for reading. I will also ask questions that I think will connect with readers who have gotten a certain distance in the novel, but questions that do not give away any plot details...”have you met a certain character yet in your reading? Have you gotten to such-and-such an event or place?”
- Buy time for students to complete their longer reading by having short, interim assignments. During the time when students’ major responsibility is reading the novel, do not hesitate to spend classroom time on short stories, essays, poems, song lyrics (which tell stories), working on thematic and genre issues and reminding students we are buying them time to finish their novel.
- If the syntax of a work is unfamiliar, it can be very, very helpful to read aloud to students until they literally “hear” and internalise the flow of words. Read the first few pages aloud to get students all started at the same time.
- Ask students to note favorite passages and places where they laughed. (They can use post-it notes if they are not allowed to write in their books.) They can read these passages aloud in class, not for discussion, but for appreciation, in the time while the class is still reading the book.

Note: These notes were written to aid students in reading novels. Bill Simon’s story is autobiography, a life story, but much of this information is valid for his book, too. This is an opportunity to draw the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction.

Michael D. Gose, ‘Caveats for Teaching the Novel’, *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 9 (1)

DURING THE READING

During the process of sharing a text with a class, you can:

- stop at key moments to discuss events, characters, issues, language features
- encourage students to predict — short-term and long-term anticipation — and reflect (often in the learning log)
- have students check their predictions as you read: ask them to note surprises as well as things they expected
- have students construct character and theme wall-charts and time-lines
- have students create character sketches (print and visual)
- use visualisation techniques to help students imagine characters and events
- keep a class media file of issues connected with the book
- have students keep a record of interesting words and phrases and to comment on their effectiveness.

Aspects for study in *Back on The Block*

During reading draw students' attention to language and visual features and other aspects of narrative. Include features such as:

- the style of writing in the book
- the genre of autobiography
- settings
- characters
- plot and themes.

a) Language, structure and genre

Students examine the use of language in the text, include style structure and genre.

Bill's voice is clear in the straightforward narrative, arguably the most important aspect of an autobiography. The language is relatively informal, almost conversational at times, revealing an honesty and providing accessibility. The reader is addressed directly in the first line: 'If you were to ask me if I had a happy childhood...' and we are drawn in as Bill shares his life. His use of colloquialisms such as 'yarn' and 'whitefella' reflect his personality.

Although the language is straightforward and often blunt, it doesn't lack emotion. At times it is quite brutal, and it is this brutality that makes the story so powerful. Bill's life is often one of being subjected to brutality. An account of a boy being beaten by other boys upon Mr Borland's orders is matter-of-fact and spares the reader none of the violence or pain experienced by the boys. The use of literary devices would rob the incident of its feeling of verisimilitude, or feeling of reality.

The book comprises four parts: the four major segments of Bill's life. His childhood with his family; Kinchela; his years of destructive behaviour; and, his redemption. Although it is an autobiography, Bill's story also gives voice to others of the Stolen Generations. Bill is clear about his writing intentions: he wanted to reveal the particular social and political changes which affected his own life, but reached far beyond it, to affect others. For Bill, the act of writing his autobiography is not a mere literary exercise, it's also a cultural one.

Adding weight to this cultural exercise is the presence of a second anonymous 'authoritative' voice in italics. This voice provides a historical and social context to Bill's experiences such as the government policy on the removal of children and the events leading up to the 2004 Redfern riot.

Activity 1 (language)

Distribute the list below to students and have them try to find examples from the text for each language element:

Metalinguage

Dialogue: direct speech. For example, 'Mum said to Tony, "What are you doin' taking Billy out, giving him drugs and sending him all silly?"', p.99.

Ellipsis: a dramatic pause. This can create tension or even suggest that there are some words that cannot be spoken. For example, 'There was however a small cloud on my picture of perfection...', p.62.

Emotive Language: words that stir the reader's emotions. For example, 'Her every word cut into my soul', p.71

Fractured or truncated sentences: incomplete sentences that increase tension or urgency or reflect the way people speak to each other. For example, 'Sweating again. Terrified. Hot. Cold. Hot. Cold....Very hot now. And very cold. Help me.' p.97.

Bill is hallucinating and terrified.

Hyperbole: the use of exaggeration for emphasis. For example, 'And yet I was the saddest, loneliest man on the planet.', p.96.

Linear: sequential – in order. Bill tells his story as it happens.

Modality: the force with which the words are delivered. High modality is forceful and low modality is gentle. For example, 'I'm gonna kill ya when I grow up!' – high modality.

Narrative: a way of telling a story. Bill tells us of his life using a narrative.

Perspective: a way of looking at individuals, issues, events, texts, facts and so on.

Setting: location of a story – internal and external. A vivid setting enables the reader to visualise a place and time. For example, 'I used to wonder what would have happened had the authorities known about that sad, dark, hot little place of agony...', p.34.

Simile: when two objects are compared using 'like' or 'as'. Comparisons such as this one make it easier for the reader to see a person or a place. For example, 'The streets were like a battlefield. The Block was like a war zone.', p.144.

Syntax: sentence length and structure. When the authorities arrive to take Bill and his brothers away, the sentences are short and fractured to signify tension and urgency. For example, 'They must have been very quiet. We hadn't heard anything at all: no sound of a car pulling up, no crunch of footsteps on the path. They had picked their time. It wasn't the first time they had come.', p.14.

Tense: present tense – set in the present. For example, 'There are issues that I still struggle with today that are a direct result of Kinchela. I have a problem with being told what to do. I buck against authority.', p.154. The present tense makes the reader feel as if everything is happening now.

Past tense – set in the past. For example, 'My mother had a close relationship with Katherine and told her that it was like a knife being ripped through her when they took her children away.', p.156.

Theme: message or moral of a story. Themes make us ponder the big issues in life.

Third person: writing about people or an individual, other than the writer. This enables the writer to appear detached from what is happening.

Activity 2 (language)

Choose a paragraph from the text, or allow students to choose their own. Have students rewrite the paragraph, changing the perspective, the tone and the mood. Discuss with the students the impact of the alterations and choices they have made.

Activity 3 (autobiography)

While biography and autobiography belong to the realm of non-fiction, they remain subjective works. The narrator tells the story from his or her own perspective and recounts events as they remember them. However, memory is not always reliable and can be influenced by factors such as age and emotional state.

Discuss Bill's understanding of his mother's actions with students. Do they think his account of his mother 'abandoning' him is accurate? Why does he feel the way he does? Have students write a letter to Bill from his mother's perspective, recounting the day that he and his brothers were taken away.

Activity 4 (autobiography)

Provide students with articles about Kinchela from *Dawn* and *New Dawn*. These articles portray Kinchela as a happy and healthy environment, whereas Bill's account is vastly different.

As a class discuss how Bill's story (and stories from other children in homes) provide a voice for all Aboriginal people. What are the social implications of people like Bill sharing their story with the Australian community? For Indigenous Australians? For non-Indigenous Australians?

Activity 5 (structure)

According to Tzvetan Todorov, there are five stages a narrative has to pass through:

1. The state of equilibrium or normality (this can be good, bad or neutral).
2. Disruption of the equilibrium (by a character or an action).
3. Recognition that the equilibrium has been disrupted by central character.
4. Central character attempts to repair the disruption in order to restore equilibrium.
5. Equilibrium is restored but, because causal transformations have occurred, there are differences from original equilibrium, which establish it as a new equilibrium.

Stages 2, 3 and 4 may be repeated many times before the final stage of equilibrium is reached.

Todorov, T. 1969, 'Structural Analysis of Narrative', *Novel*, No.3, pp: 70–6.

Give students a table of the five stages of Todorov's Theory of Narrative. Ask them to think about whether Bill's story fits into the Todorov's Narrative, even though it is a work of non-fiction.

Students should provide a reason for their answer and include examples from the text.

Stage 5 Outcomes:

2.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10, 5.2, 6.6, 9.1, 9.6, 9.7, 9.8, 10.2, 10.4, 10.7, 10.8, 10.9, 10.10.

Preliminary Outcomes:

1.4, 3.3, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 8.1, 8.5, 9.2, 11.1, 11.3

b) Setting

The book has several settings: Purfleet Reserve, Kinchela Boys' Home and Kempsey, Redfern and The Block. Brisbane and regional NSW also feature in the book but these are during times of physical transition for Bill, and are not described in any great depth.

Purfleet: Bill was born in 1947 and raised on Purfleet Mission reserve for Aboriginal people until the age of ten. The reserve is near Taree in mid-northern NSW and was a government exercise in segregation, oppression and racism. Although residents had previously been allowed the dubious freedom of coming and going as they pleased, severe restrictions were placed on Aboriginal people when Bill's family lived there. Food was rationed out and the act of supplementing rations with food from hunting was met with punishment.

As a child, and having known no other way of living, Bill was unaware of the severity of his living situation. He learnt little of his heritage and the only time that people

were allowed to live any kind of traditional life was during a camp on the coast for six weeks over Christmas.

Despite these conditions, Bill describes his childhood as happy. He was safe and surrounded by people who loved and cared for him. Even when his family fled to Platt's Estate in Newcastle and his parents undoubtedly suffered from racism, Bill describes life at 'Platto' as one of the happiest times of his life, because he was surrounded by family.

Kinchela: The next phase of Bill's life was Kinchela Boys' Home. In 1957 he was taken with his brothers Murray and David and given a number, which was the way he was identified for the next eight years. The physical setting of Kinchela is never described, although references are made to dormitories, and multiple bathrooms, indicating a large prison-like facility. Bill also talks about boys working on the farm, including the dairy. The only area of Kinchela referred to in any depth is the 'solitary confinement room': a 'sad, dark, hot little place of agony, punishment and grief' which is actually a storage room for sports equipment. 'There was more pain and blood in there than there was sports equipment on any given day...The punishment room was a small, dark, hot room with a tiny window high up, which did not open.' After a beating boys were sent to solitary confinement from anywhere to one to three days, and received only basic rations.

The absence of any other descriptions of the physical setting of the home leave a sterile image, embellished only by Bill's references to grey uniforms, guards, inmates and punishment parades. There is no feeling of camaraderie or friendship. The word 'Home' in Kinchela's title is a harsh contrast with the reality.

The Block: Bill is honest in his portrayal of Redfern; however, it still appears to have more character and spirit than Kinchela, even when Bill tells of his unhappiest experiences. 'Life's fairly tough on The Block. The expressions on the residents' faces tell it like it is: lives in poverty, lives in despair, lives without much hope. And all in a two-hectare area.', p.115.

The Block is literally a block of housing in Sydney's now notorious inner-city suburb of Redfern. It has a long history of poverty.

Redfern is important in two major ways. Firstly, despite Bill's bleak accounts of Redfern, it is the setting that provides Bill with sense of belonging for the first time in his life. It continues to provide a home, and occasional refuge, over the following thirty years, 'calling him back'.

This sense of belonging is due in large part to Bill's relatives who live in Redfern, and the connections that he makes with people like the Reverend Blair. In contrast to Kinchela, Bill is able to connect with people in Redfern in a way that he was prevented from doing at Kinchela. We see his reunion with relatives and friends: his brother, and many ex-Kinchela boys. In his work with the church we also see new relationships develop: ones not based on crime or a mutual love of drinking.

Secondly, the way that Bill's relationship with Redfern changes over time reflects Bill's development over time, and the degree of his personal growth.

Redfern provides a background for some of Bill's most destructive behaviour, but it is also the setting for his redemption. When Bill first arrives at Redfern it is because he is seeking his family. He is a needy, desperately lonely and unhappy young man. However, in his later years it is Bill who ministers to those who are in need. His relationship with Redfern changes and he becomes an important part of the setting, contributing strongly to the community and often acting as its spokesperson. He grows to love and understand the people who live there: not just his family, but all the people who need him.

c) Characters

The characters in *Back on The Block* are never mentioned in great depth. However, it is clear that there are individuals in the book who have been strong influences in Bill's life.

Bill's father: Bill has tremendous and unwavering respect for his father, Isaiah (Ike) Carter. In contrast to his talk of his mother, he never speaks negatively of Ike, referring to him as a wonderful father. Ike is a strong and well-respected man who keeps his children protected from violence and alcohol.

After Bill was stolen from his parents he never saw his father again, although he learned that Ike died as a result of someone telling him that his boys had returned from Kinchela, p.72.

Bill's mother: Bill does not refer to his mother, Grace Simon, with the same fondness as that reserved for his father. It is Grace who is present when he is taken from home, and in Bill's mind it is Grace who had the power to stop it.

Several times in his story Bill recounts the way his mother 'turned her back' on her children. This vision replays itself in his memory, and the subsequent anger Bill feels for her permeates many aspects of his life. Even when he is reunited with Grace, he cannot help but blame her for not doing more to prevent him being taken. He remains unable to have a relationship with her of real depth. 'I understand the history and the policies of the day, the government ideologies. I know it all. But even so, there is a part of me that can't accept what she did that day.', p.154.

Brothers: The impression is given that Bill has only a superficial relationship with his brothers as they are so rarely mentioned in his story. However, Bill refers to his brothers' reluctance to be involved with the book, explaining their absence, p.159. Although they went through the same system at Kinchela as Bill, unlike him, they are unable to talk about their experiences, something they have in common with many of the Kinchela men who find it difficult to talk about their experiences. During his childhood Bill feels an enormous sense of responsibility for his brothers, protecting them at Kinchela whenever he can. They remain a part of his life and make appearances at different times in his story.

Uncle Gilbert: While he is not cast as a major character in Bill's life, Uncle Gilbert remains a constant friendly presence. He is a companion for Bill from his heavy drinking periods through to his work at the asylum and hospice, p.135.

Boxy: Bill's cousin Boxy is present in his childhood and again later in his life. As children at Kendall, Bill and Boxy spend time tearing around together. Although Bill's 'wonderful' life at Kendall is cut short, p.10, his memories of Boxy are vivid, and more detailed than many other characters in the book. Bill is reunited with

Boxy during his first prison sentence, and it is Boxy who informs him that his father is dead, p.67. The two spend time together in prison on various occasions and their friendship is rekindled. Not only is Boxy a link to Bill's past, he is a friend and protector to Bill as an adult. Their lives have taken similar paths, though it is not known whether Boxy was removed from his family. They remain friends even though their lives diverge when Bill finds salvation in religion and Boxy carries on his trajectory of crime and substance abuse. When Boxy commits suicide, Bill is devastated and regrets not being able to help him more, p.157.

Mr Hermann: A white man who visits Purfleet to play music and entertain the kids. Later, he visits Kinchela and shows the boys pictures of the missions he still visits. For Bill, he is a connection to a previous life.

Granny Doris: It is Granny Doris from Kendall who comes to Bill during his drug-induced hallucination and offers him comfort.

Katherine: Bill meets his wife Katherine when he is heavily involved with religion. Unlike his previous relationships, Bill's relationship with Katherine develops slowly. As a result their mutual trust grows and Bill finally feels able to tell her about his life at Kinchela, as well as his past 'sins'. Katherine accepts Bill for who he is, p.128. The two work together to foster their own and others' faith, and to help disadvantaged Aboriginal people.

Katherine is also a support to other men who grew up in Kinchela and acts as a confidant to those still suffering the trauma they experienced, p.129.

In some ways, Katherine is closer to Bill's mother than he is. Bill's mother tells Katherine that it was 'like a knife being ripped through her' when her children were taken away, p.156.

Uncle Jim: Jim is another link to Bill's childhood. He is one of two family members, apart from his brothers, whom Bill has contact with during his incarceration at Kinchela. The two meet by accident at the Kempsey Show and Bill is overwhelmed by his need to be 'close to a relative, someone who actually cared' and he breaks down in tears, p.48.

By the time Bill meets Jim he believes that his parents don't want him, and Jim is unable to talk about the day he was taken. As a result, Bill remained ignorant of the suffering his parents endured and continued to believe that he is unwanted.

Bill met Jim again as an adult, and it is Jim who takes him to see his mother. Jim is a father-figure to Bill; he makes Bill feel welcome and accepted, and reintroduces him to his family.

Activity 6 (setting)

In groups, students are to create a visual or creative representation of one of the settings. This may be in the form of collage, illustration, a model, or piece of creative writing. In their work they should attempt to capture the mood of the setting from Bill's perspective, and think about the time and social context of the piece. For example, the Kinchela from Bill's childhood will be different from the Kinchela he revisits at the reunion.

Activity 7 (characters)

Students are to imagine that they are one of the minor characters in the text. They should present their perspective of Bill's life, or an incident in the text that they were involved in. Students either address the class in character, presenting their perspective as the minor character, or compose a journal entry as the character.

Activity 8 (characters)

'When we read books we encounter interesting characters who invite our empathy and understanding.'

Students select a character from the text, and discuss why they felt an understanding or sympathy for the character. What made them like or dislike this character?

Stage 5 Outcomes:

2.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10, 5.2, 6.6, 9.1, 9.6, 9.7, 9.8, 10.2, 10.4, 10.7, 10.8, 10.9, 10.10.

Preliminary Outcomes:

1.4, 3.3, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 8.1, 8.5, 9.2, 11.1, 11.3.

d) Themes

Personal growth, knowledge and awareness

Personal growth, knowledge and awareness are important themes in the text as Bill matures and begins to take responsibility for his actions and recognise his faults.

Personal growth is not related to age; it is a process that occurs as we mature and reflect on our actions, relationships and challenges in our lives. In Kinchela, Bill's personal growth is stunted (although he does have a strong sense of responsibility for his brothers). Consumed by the need to survive, he has no freedom, nor the emotional means to reflect on his actions or feelings. His response to challenging situations is always to act in anger.

As children, we are supported by those around us and encouraged to become aware of the effect that our actions have on others and ourselves. With no such support, Bill leaves Kinchela ill-equipped to deal maturely with challenges that face him. When angered, he responds with violence. When things don't go his way he blames the world, and his anger intensifies. As a young man he cannot sustain relationships, but takes no responsibility when his partners leave him. When Bill's girlfriend Susie falls pregnant he is relieved, because to him it means their relationship is now permanent. It is as if Bill feels he has no control or responsibility over any part of his life.

When children enter Bill's life he is forced to reflect on his own experiences, triggering the beginning of his personal growth. When Lilly leaves Bill with two children he realises how much both he and they need her. Although he does not take responsibility for the demise of their relationship, instead resorting to anger, he does reflect on what is best for his family. Not wanting his children to feel the same rejection by their mother that he feels, Bill sends Richard and Vicky back to Brisbane with Lilly. It is not an easy decision for him, and it takes maturity and strength.

Although he still reacts to difficult situations with rage and self-pity, as Bill's story and his personal growth progress we begin to see terms like, 'I couldn't have lived with myself if...'; 'I felt terribly guilty...' and 'I was determined not to repeat my past mistakes...' When Bill tells Katherine of his experiences at Kinchela we see that he is finally able to trust a person enough to confide in them, despite his fear of

rejection. At the Kinchela reunion Bill is able to talk about the Home and the years it took of his life, but he is also able to talk about being healed by his faith.

Much of Bill's personal growth is evident in his later reflections. When his relationships fail, at the time he feels 'robbed and cheated'. However, in hindsight, he acknowledges that he 'never stopped to think about the fact that some of my choices and behaviour had led to the situations I was in'. When Lilly returns to Bill with Vicky and Richard in tow only to leave three weeks later, Bill refers to it as one of the worst mistakes and biggest regrets. He can see the way his actions affect those around him and the consequence of making poor decisions. Later in his life Bill seeks forgiveness from the women he has hurt and seeks a relationship with the son that he had with Phoebe.

One of the strongest examples of Bill's personal growth is his reaction to the death of his brother Lenny.

Bill also has a sense of self awareness in regard to his feelings about Kinchela. He acknowledges that he is angry, but that he can deal with it in ways that are not destructive. He has an understanding of the impact that Kinchela has had on his life, without being blinded by rage. 'This period in the lives of stolen boys dominates to a different degree in each of us, depending on the afflictions whilst incarcerated, our character development, our opportunities and behaviour since our release. I still carry painful memories from that period of incarceration, and try as I may I can't get it all out of my system. Perhaps one day I will be completely free of that part of my life.', p.154.

The search for identity

Back on The Block prompts us to reflect on the factors that influence who we are. Most of us have an understanding of where we have come from, and so can begin to construct our own identity. The search for identity is a strong theme in *Back on The Block* as Bill undertakes his journey and process of discovery.

Bill is released from Kinchela late in his adolescence, a time when many people are beginning to question who they are and what they want to be. Adolescence can be a

difficult and confusing time as teenagers seek to make sense of the multiple influences in their life. For Bill it is a particularly difficult time. His search for identity is two-fold. He has been taken from his parents, friends and relatives, undoubtedly the strongest influence in anyone's life. He has also been robbed of his culture. He grows up knowing nothing of his traditional heritage, an understanding that is crucial for Aboriginal people's sense of identity. Without these influences, he is unable to achieve a sense of who he is as an Aboriginal man, or indeed a human being.

Instead of family and culture, the influences on Bill's life have been cruelty and alienation. He is repeatedly told by the guards at Kinchela that black people are scum, and that his parents willingly surrendered him to the home because they didn't want him. He leaves Kinchela an angry and confused young man. For a long time he feels he is 'the saddest, loneliest man on the planet'. His first attempt at finding a sense of identity is to befriend a gang of bikies, and so his journey of violence and alcohol abuse begins. Even when he finds his family this behaviour continues, although it is punctuated with periods of sobriety and the desire to settle down, indicating that although he is far from finding his identity, he is developing more of an understanding of what he wants to be.

For Bill, his need to desperately search for his identity is diminished by his discovery of the church. When he becomes a youth leader at church he feels that 'at last' he truly belongs somewhere. Bill's faith undoubtedly gives him a sense of identity. The experience of being stolen means that he will never have a connection to his traditional heritage. However, he is at least able to define who he is, something that would have been impossible upon his release from Kinchela: 'My reality is that of an urban Koori man out there helping other Kooris in a harsh urban landscape... 'There are times when I wake up and wonder what on earth I am doing — but I know, deep down, The Block, the heart of Redfern, is where I'm meant to be.'

Activity 9 (personal growth)

As a class, discuss the factors that lead to Bill's personal growth. Is he taught implicit lessons or are his mistakes his greatest teacher? How does this apply to your life? What factors have led to your personal growth? Students to write a personal response about a key moment in their lives that has led to personal growth in some way.

Activity 10 (personal growth)

In pairs, students create either a timeline or a graph marking events that they think demonstrate Bill's emotional growth and development. They should identify not only key events but also Bill's responses and attitude to these events. They should also mark incidents that they see as a setback to Bill's personal growth.

Activity 11 (identity)

Students are to compile a list of the factors contributing to their identity. Some of these influences could be:

- cultural background
- where they were born and where they now live
- their heritage
- gender
- age
- social group
- sexuality and relationships
- media
- income
- religion.

Ask each student to rank the influences on their lives from the least to most important and have students compare their ranking of these influences. Students can also discuss which of the above-listed factors influenced Bill's identity, or compile a new list for Bill and then compare it with other class members.

Activity 12 (identity)

'I think history is inextricably linked to identity. If you don't know your history, if you don't know your family, who are you?' Mary Pipher, psychologist

'An identity would seem to be arrived at by the way in which the person faces and uses his experience.' James Baldwin, writer

As a class discuss the above quotes. Using the opinions and ideas raised, students can then debate the quotes. If there are enough students, divide the class into four groups so that each statement can be debated. Give each group sufficient time to compose an argument.

Stage 5 Outcomes:

2.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10, 5.2, 6.6, 9.1, 9.6, 9.7, 9.8, 10.2, 10.4, 10.7, 10.8, 10.9, 10.10.

Preliminary Outcomes:

1.4, 3.3, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 8.1, 8.5, 9.2, 11.1, 11.3.

Note

Back on The Block could be also be used to study the following themes:

- dispossession and displacement
- redemption
- alternative destinies
- outsider/alienation
- changing self.

6. RESPONSES TO THE TEXT

Follow-up activities

Activity 1: Students are to reassess their evaluation of the book cover. Were their predictions accurate? Do they think the cover is appropriate for the text? Students can redesign the cover, aiming it at a particular audience and justify the choices they made using the headings from the visual analysis of the original cover.

Activity 2: Students choose a key event from the text and then make a film story-board for an extract of the text describing the event. They should consider camera angles, close ups, sound, etc., and compose a script to accompany the story-board.

Activity 3: Tell students that ABC's Radio National will be broadcasting a 5-minute interview with Bill Simons. They can compose the transcript for the interview or actually record the interview. The interview must include references to a key issue in the text and why it is relevant to today's society. Students should be clear in the purpose of their interview. Is Bill using his experiences with alcohol as a way of educating young people? Or is he promoting *Back on The Block* to try to dispel the place's reputation? He may be responding to the government's Apology to the Stolen Generation.

Activity 4: Students write a review of the book. They may be impartial about the book or they may have loved or detested it. Whatever the case, they must be able to support their argument.

Have students use the following structure when composing their review:

- Full bibliographic information (author, title, edition, publisher, place of publication, year of publication), often presented as a heading or introductory sentence
- A brief description of the contents of the book
- An assessment of the author's authority / biases
- An evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the book based on the purposes of the author, and using evidence to support the reviewer's argument
- An overall assessment of the book

(*A Concise Guide to Writing a Critical Book Review*, <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/bookreview/index.cfm>)

Note: If students need assistance in writing a comprehensive review, the internet has many resources on how to write, and the purpose of, reviews.

Activity 5: Students are to write an article for a newspaper based on the articles about Kinchela in *Dawn* and *New Dawn*. What sort of lifestyle to these articles portray? Why do they state that children were placed in care?

Students compare the articles with Bill's experience and the experiences in the other biographies from their earlier research, as well as other information they have found about the Stolen Generations. Why did the Aboriginal Welfare Board portray children's homes in such a positive light? What was the reality for the parents and children of the Stolen Generations?

Stage Five Outcomes: 1.2, 1.11, 2.7, 2.12, 4.1, 4.2, 4.8, 4.9, 5.2, 6.2, 6.3, 6.6, 6.9, 9.1, 9.3, 10.4, 10.6.

Preliminary Outcomes: 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 3.3, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 8.1, 8.5, 9.2, 10.3, 11.1, 11.3