



*The prints of Jessie Traill*  
STARS IN THE RIVER

EDUCATION RESOURCE



## JESSIE TRAILL EDUCATION RESOURCE

### INTRODUCTION

*Stars in the river: the prints of Jessie Traill* is an exhibition well suited to the Visual Arts and History subjects in the Australian Curriculum, specifically Years 9 and 10.

This Education Resource is divided thematically into seven sections, each of which includes key works of art and contains questions and activities for the different subject areas. Studying this exhibition is also useful in understanding and applying the cross-curriculum priority of sustainability, particularly the section 'Poetic landscapes'.

All of the questions and activities can be completed by students as pre-visit preparation for viewing the exhibition or as a post-visit follow-up activity.



*The red light, Harbour Bridge, June 1931*

1932 Melbourne

etching and aquatint, printed in brown ink with plate-tone, from one plate;  
additional hand-colouring; on cream wove paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1987

© Estate of Jessie Traill

*Evening Mallecoota, West*

1924 Melbourne

etching and aquatint, printed in black ink with plate-tone, from one plate;  
on cream wove Japanese vellum paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1983

© Estate of Jessie Traill

*Melbourne artist Jessie Traill with her bicycle*

photograph, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane



## SECTION 1 BIOGRAPHY

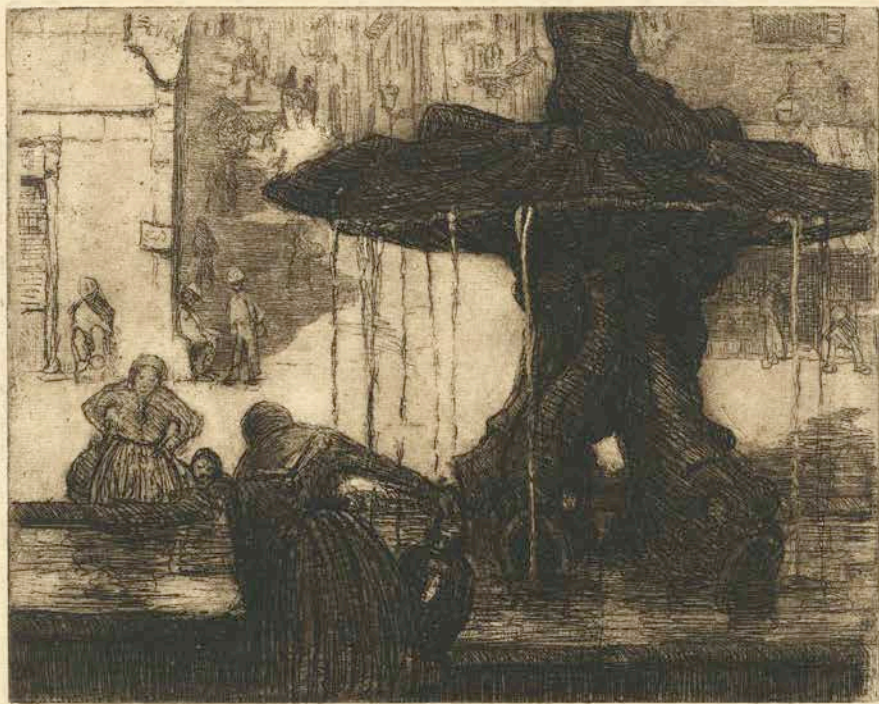
### HISTORY: KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

- The artist had a remarkably independent life for a woman of her time. What were the conditions of her life that allowed her to live and work outside a conventionally feminine role? Describe in one paragraph what life might have been like for an Australian woman born in 1881 into different social and economic circumstances.
- Using the information on this website, and any supplementary sources you can find, create a historical timeline about Jessie Traill's life that includes:
  - two major world events, social movements, or historical developments
  - two major Australian events, social movements or historical developments.

For each item write a brief paragraph describing what this was.

## VISUAL ARTS: MAKING AND RESPONDING

- List all the different printmaking techniques and technologies used by Jessie Traill and formulate a brief definition of each term.  
Once you have a good idea of how each technique is performed, plan and draw a one-page infographic or comic which names and illustrates all the artist's different processes.  
*Hint: search for 'infographics' online for ideas and inspiration. To complete this task you will need to look closely at the captions for each work of art in the exhibition.*
- What is it about printmaking that appealed to Jessie Traill? In your answer, consider the artist's choice of subject matter, her artistic influences and the inherent qualities of printmaking as a medium.
- Write your own definition of the term 'an original print'. Is it different from a photocopy, a poster you purchase from a shop, or a picture you find online and print out on your home printer? If so, how?



3<sup>rd</sup> state.

## SECTION 2 EXPERIMENTATION IN EUROPE

### HISTORY: KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Closely analyse the scene illustrated by the etching *Afternoon in Collins Street* 1911. How might an Australian city of this time have differed from the European cities Jessie Traill visited in her travels?
- Find another Australian artist who portrayed the city streets of Melbourne and describe how urban life was depicted in their works of art. What happened in nineteenth century Australia that shaped Melbourne as a city—and does the artist give you any clues to this in their work?
- Class research activity: Using the detailed timeline provided on the exhibition website, chart Jessie's international travels on a world map. Place a pin, sticker or coloured dot on each country with the relevant date, and discuss with your classmates what some of the differences might have been between that country and the artist's home country of Australia at this time.

*Hint: consider factors like climate, location, political system, status of women and status of artists. A world atlas or encyclopaedia is a good place to start.*

### VISUAL ARTS: MAKING AND RESPONDING

- In Europe Jessie Traill began to explore the dramatic use of tone to create dark, velvety prints with lots of atmosphere. For your own work, choose a subject that contains a strong mixture of light and shadow. Using graphite pencils in a range of grades from HB to 6B or more, create tonal effects in the style of those you can see in Traill's prints. Work into areas of the composition with your hands, a kneadable eraser or piece of Blu-Tak to highlight areas and produce a range of textures.

*Piazza Barberini, Rome [Barberini Square, Rome]*

1908 London

etching and drypoint, printed in dark brown ink with plate-tone with wiped highlights, from one plate; on cream laid O.W.P. & A.C.L. paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1977

© Estate of Jessie Traill



Alfred Stieglitz

Alfred Stieglitz 1914



## SECTION 3 POETIC LANDSCAPES

### HISTORY: KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

- In the exhibition catalogue, author Tim Bonyhady writes that Jessie Traill ‘departed from the “pioneer legend” in her work’. What was the meaning of the ‘pioneer legend’ in nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia? Where did this idea come from—and does it still exist today?
- Name a poet, artist or author who helped to make the ‘pioneer legend’ popular in Jessie Traill’s era and describe how they achieved this within the limitations of their medium.
- From the full gallery of exhibition images, choose a landscape by Jessie Traill that shows evidence of human intervention, and one that does not. Compare and contrast the two, with reference to what you know about white settlement of Australia and the process of colonisation.
- Choose one of the Australian locations depicted by Jessie Traill in her prints. Perform a local history study of the populations that have lived and migrated in this area, using both primary and secondary sources.

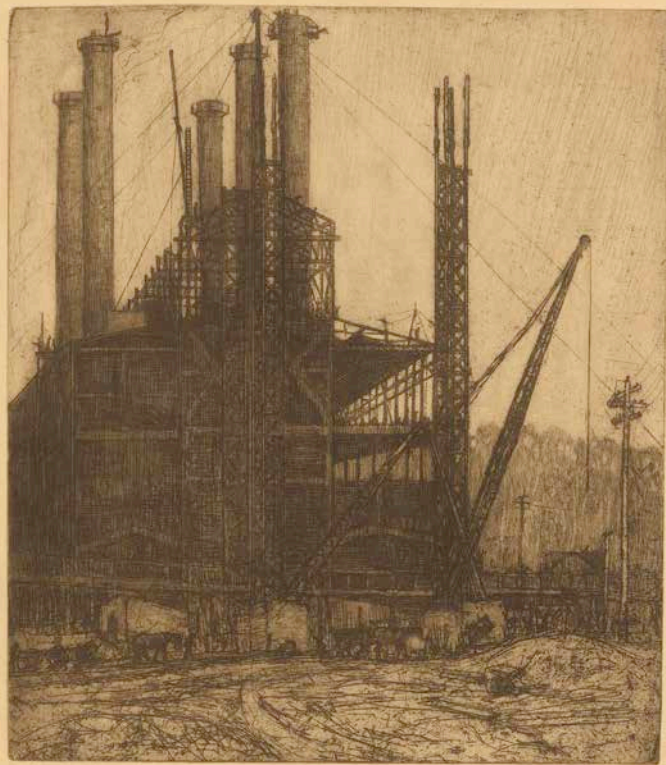
### VISUAL ARTS: MAKING AND RESPONDING

- Do you have any native bushland in your local area that has changed over your lifetime? Create a triptych showing the past, present and future of this place, looking to real historical changes for inspiration.

*Hint: using your imagination, you can exaggerate and expand the timeline for maximum visual drama—for example picturing what your local reserve or park might look like 500 years from now.*

- Jessie Traill creates depth and perspective in several of her landscapes by layering flat tonal areas in varying shades, from light to dark. Create your own collage landscape made of monochromatic tonal layers (that is, one colour in varying intensities, from light to dark). You might like to source your collage materials from one of the following:
  - white paper tinted with one colour of ink in various states of dilution
  - offcuts from ‘blank’ photocopies in various states of exposure
  - newspaper or magazines with text and images in various levels of density.

*Moonlit harvest*  
1914 Melbourne  
etching and aquatint, printed in brown ink with plate-tone, from one plate;  
on thin smooth brown wove paper  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1985  
© Estate of Jessie Traill



Building of a power house

1888

## SECTION 4 DECORATIVE QUALITIES OF INDUSTRIAL SUBJECTS

### HISTORY: KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Can you find any symbols of nationalism in the art of Jessie Trill? What were these symbols thought to represent to the Australian people during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

*Hint: look for things that are unique to Australia—not only in this section of the resource but in the Poetic landscapes section too.*

- From the beginnings of its construction, the Sydney Harbour Bridge was widely regarded as a ‘heroic’ enterprise. Why and how was this perception created? Did it endure through the Great Depression? Why or why not?

## VISUAL ARTS: MAKING AND RESPONDING

- Explore your local area to find something that is unfinished—for example a building covered in scaffolding, a home undergoing restoration, a car being repaired or a building site under construction. Make this the subject of a work of art in your choice of medium.
- Many Australian artists depicted the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in their work. What do you think this project represented to artists of the day? Explore with reference to trends in art and life in Australia at this time.

*Hint: you may need to research the concept of ‘modernism’.*

*The big building, Yallourn, May 1924*

1924 Melbourne

etching, printed in black ink with plate-tone, from one plate;  
on cream wove paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1979

© Estate of Jessie Trill



*Black out 11 (second State)*

*JCA Hall 9/80*

## SECTION 5 LATER VISIONS

### HISTORY: KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Why are there no lights in this city scene? Describe the historical events that this image refers to. Where and when might you have seen a similar sight in Australia?
- What is a ‘rag-picker’? Find the work titled ‘Les chiffonnaires [the rag-pickers]’ 1951 in the online gallery. Define this term and describe its historical context. When and where might Jessie Traill have seen the scene depicted in this image?  
Does such an occupation still exist today? Explain your answer with reference to relevant historical changes, including developments in technology, public health, social policy and urban planning.

*Black out*  
1940 Newcastle upon Tyne, England  
etching and aquatint, printed in black ink, from one plate;  
on thin smooth cream wove Whatman paper  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1977  
© Estate of Jessie Traill

### VISUAL ARTS: MAKING AND RESPONDING

- Part of the impact of Jessie Traill’s art was in her choice of stark industrial subject matter. For your own artwork, choose a subject that is not traditionally considered to be beautiful or appealing. It can be anything you like—from a blister on your toe, to a pile of garbage on the street. Use a cardboard ‘viewfinder’ frame (or take photographs with your phone or a class camera) to observe and study the subject from different angles, perspectives and scales. This will help you identify interesting shapes, lines and other formal qualities of what you are looking at. Choose one of these views to work up into a pen and ink drawing.
- Select a real city from anywhere in the world, one with distinctive features, buildings or landmarks along the horizon line. Create a ‘blacked out’ cityscape silhouette out of black paper or card. If you have a classroom with windows, displaying your cityscapes along the lower ledge can be a fun way to create background and sense of perspective behind the silhouettes. See if you can identify each other’s cities; and give a brief presentation on the major features of each city.
- Name a famous artist who has transformed traditionally ‘ugly’, harsh or unappealing subject matter into something that you find beautiful. How have they done this? Be sure to use the language of visual analysis in your answer.



image 1020

to Miss Hiscock for J. A. Hall 1925

## SECTION 6 CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

### HISTORY: KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Jessie Traill was one of the first white artists to visit the ‘Top End’. What was remarkable about this?
- Can you find any depictions of Australia’s Indigenous population in the art of Traill? What are some possible reasons for their absence? Discuss with reference to Australian politics and society at the time.
- Drought is an enduring theme in Australian art. List the areas of Australia that have been most affected by drought. Create a timeline of drought in a particular region, which contains reference to the artists who depicted it.

*Mirage*  
1928 Melbourne  
etching and aquatint, printed in brown ink with plate-tone, from one plate;  
on medium weight cream wove paper  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1984  
© Estate of Jessie Traill

### VISUAL ARTS: MAKING AND RESPONDING

- Keep a small visual diary or sketchbook in which you record a specific landscape in several different states of its existence (for example: in rain, sun, morning, evening, full of people, deserted). You can refer to historical photos if this gives you a wider choice of subject matter. Once you have a portfolio of different images, write a reflective journal entry on how the mood of this landscape has changed, and how you portrayed this in your artwork.
- Jessie Traill met the famous Indigenous artist Albert Namatjira. Research this important artist and look at some examples of his work. Does it have anything in common with Jessie Traill’s art? Give reasons for your answer, listing the similarities and differences between the work of these two artists.

*Hint: consider factors such as social and cultural context, medium, artistic motivations and the reception of their artwork.*

- The composition of *Mirage* 1928 contains minimal line and form. It is a very simple image. What is the feeling or atmosphere created, and what formal devices are used to do this?

*Hint: ‘formal devices’ are the visual tools the artist has at their disposal—things like composition, perspective, colour and line.*





## SECTION 7 INTIMATE SUBJECTS

### HISTORY: KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Imagine if Jessie Traill time-travelled into 2014. Do you think she would still be considered unconventional? Why or why not?
- Jessie Traill was a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse in the First World War. What was the role of a VAD nurse and what did they contribute to Australia's war efforts?

*Hint: the Australian War Memorial website might be a good starting point for your research.*

### VISUAL ARTS: MAKING AND RESPONDING

- The portrait *Voices* 1912 shows the dignified silhouette of a woman, appearing backlit like a character in a shadow puppet theatre. What do you think this woman's story is? Create a two-part response to this work of art—the first part a brief fictional script telling this character's story, and the second part your own artwork, showing what happens to her next.
- Do you think some subjects for works of art are more traditionally 'male' and some are more 'female'? Why or why not? Has this changed throughout art history? Discuss with reference to a minimum of four prints from this exhibition.
- Investigate the conservation requirements for storing and displaying prints, as opposed to other types of art that can be found in a gallery or museum. In your answer, consider such factors as paper type, lighting, framing, environmental conditions, handling and storage.

*Mother and child*  
1909 Melbourne  
hardground etching, drypoint and fowl-biting, printed in black ink with plate-tone, from one plate; on cream laid Arches paper  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1987  
© Estate of Jessie Traill