

FilmAustralia

TEACHERS NOTES

THE FABRIC OF A DREAM

The Fletcher Jones Story

Synopsis

This is the story of how a shellshocked World War One veteran, who'd left school at 12, took to the road as a hawker and ended up creating a national icon.

The clothing design, retail and manufacturing business that he established in the small Victorian town of Warrnambool would, at its peak, encompass 55 stores around Australia and employ over 2750 people.

It was called Fletcher Jones & Staff, because the staff actually owned the company. Fletcher Jones set up the business as a workers' co-operative, based on principles of fairness, decency and integrity. His emphasis was on value, quality, service and scientific innovation but his primary concern was for people—both his customers and his workers—and they, in turn, were intensely loyal.

This documentary celebrates the life of an inspiring man with bold and imaginative ideas, whose entrepreneurial skills and marketing acumen became legendary.

It also looks at those who helped him achieve his dream, exploring his relationship with Japanese reformer Toyohiko Kagawa—one of the most remarkable social activists and thinkers of the early 20th century—and highlighting the vital contribution of migrant workers to the ragtrade.

It's a story carried along on the tide of 20th century Australian history: the aftermath of war, the challenge of global capitalism, the impact of immigration and the rise and fall of modern industry.

Curriculum links

Curriculum links include Studies of Society and Environment, History, English, Media, Business, Work, Marketing and Management.

Formative years

As we see early in the program, Fletcher Jones' early years—a working class, Methodist environment; a witness to the exploitation of labourers in the Bendigo goldmines; experiencing ridicule from other children due to a speech impediment; suffering from shellshock during World War One and finally enduring the indignity of being regarded as totally and permanently incapacitated for employment—had a profound influence not only on how he wanted to live the rest of his life, but how his life might be of worth to the greater community around him.

- In pairs, research and write an article for a popular history magazine about the working conditions of labourers in the goldmines of Bendigo (and elsewhere in Australia) before World War One. Ensure you draw attention to respiratory diseases, death rates, the average age at which miners died, the attitude of

miners to the mine owners and vice-versa, working hours in unventilated mine shafts, importance of trade unionism, safety and health precautions, provision of sick leave entitlements and workers' compensation.

- Replay Jones' anecdote about the family who left a coffin at the front door of a mine owner. Discuss in class the symbolic purpose of this act, then, drawing upon it in any way you see fit, plan and write a fiction short story about working class life for families in goldmining towns such as Bendigo, in the era before government legislation and union campaigning provided for improved living and working conditions.
- In order to gain some background awareness of the issue, research the incidence of stammering, or stuttering, as a voice impediment, its possible causes and treatment. In pairs or small groups devise an educational awareness program for other students in your school that 'demystifies' the complaint, and helps to reduce the likelihood of anyone being ridiculed, harassed, belittled and regarded in any way as inferior.
- Write a set of personal diary entries as though you were a young Fletcher Jones growing up with a speech impediment, and what you feel you may need to tackle, overcome or learn to accept.
- Working in pairs, prepare a two-page, illustrated article for a magazine or website aimed at young teenagers, about the causes, effects, diagnosis and treatment of shellshock, a term originating during World War One, comparing past attitudes about this to current views on what is now referred to as 'combat stress'. Include details about what it meant not only to be diagnosed with shellshock but regarded as totally and permanently incapacitated (TPI), and whether there was any social stigma attached.
- Discuss in class his Jones' reaction to becoming a TPI pensioner, then plan and write a short story about a World War One veteran confronted by this situation. (Alternatively, you may update the times and settings of the story for a contemporary, modern equivalent.)
- Discuss in class the meaning of Fletcher Jones' belief: 'Debt makes a slave of a man and he can no longer think creatively'. Offer examples not only of how and where this may be true, but whether you agree it is always true or not, in all circumstances. Comment also on both the benefits and the dangers of signing an agreement to take out a finance loan.
- Imagine you are in Fletcher Jones' position, having taken to the road as a travelling salesman (or 'hawker') in a horse-drawn wagon, struggling to make a living, but with dreams of building a successful business. Write a letter home to your fiancée, and write her reply.
- We are informed in the program that 'Jones came to realise that compromising on quality was false economy'. Discuss in class what you think this means.

Write a short scenario on how this view may be played out in another field of endeavour.

- When Fletcher Jones first set up business in Warrnambool he found himself in competition with five other tailors, and as we see in the program, devised schemes to promote and market both himself and his wares. You would like to set up a small business, either in a physical location such as a suburb or town, or online, on the internet. First discuss in class the possibilities for types of enterprises that would be suitable. Examples may be: florist, second-hand comic book or music retailing, computer repairs and parts, tutoring, party supplies, food catering, etc. In small groups, construct a promotional and marketing plan for your new business. How much financing and initial expenditure will you need? Will you require a loan? Will you be able to plan for and cope with the pressures of debt? Have you carefully considered the availability of a ready market for your goods? Will you require business partners and hired staff?
- Jones left school at 12, after very little formal education. Discuss in class how both this factor and his speech impediment impacted on him years later when struggling to build his business during the 1920s, and what he attempted to do about it. Discuss the value and purpose you place in your own school education and its relevance to the rest of your life to come.
- Write a personal essay of 600-800 words on the importance and worth to you of reading books. Discuss in your essay examples of books that may have influenced, inspired or affected you in any way. Are there books in mind you intend to read (without being told to by a teacher)? Include in your discussion whether you believe that when you finally complete your formal schooling you will continue to read for enjoyment, personal education and for other reasons. Should book reading be a lifelong habit?

Toyohiko Kagawa and the cooperative model



As Fletcher Jones' retail tailoring business developed, so did his profits. Influenced during childhood by both his Christian Methodist upbringing and the exploitation by mine owners of their employees in Bendigo, Jones believed that the acquisition of financial wealth should

be put to positive social purposes, to building a fairer society, especially in times such as the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s when many people were struggling to survive. He discovered the writings of Japanese Christian socialist reformer, Toyohiko Kagawa. A personal meeting with Kagawa showed Jones how he could answer the question he had been asking himself, 'How can I serve God with all the money I've got?'

- Research the life work of Toyohiko Kagawa then create a wall poster display of his biography and achievements. One way of doing this may be for each member of the class to work individually or in small groups on a different aspect of Kagawa's life, in order to produce a combined display of posters that do not overlap in detail. This may include his visit to Australia and his meetings with Fletcher Jones. Posters may be illustrated where applicable.
- Kagawa was one of a number of progressive thinkers who developed and put into practice the concept of the cooperative. Research the types, purposes and aims of cooperatives in general and, in class discussion, build up an overall definition of what cooperatives are, what they provide and how they operate. From this, write your own one-page description of the cooperative model.
- In pairs, carry out research on one existing cooperative business venture (e.g. housing, workers, credit union) that exists either locally in your own region or community, or elsewhere. Prepare and deliver a short talk to the class about the cooperative, using photographs, pamphlets and other items where appropriate. (An American example of a cooperative network of workers is provided in the website references for you to look at, but you should find another example to write about for this activity).
- Cooperatives may be set up by groups of like-minded people wherever a need is felt to share various kinds of resources. For example, a group of filmmakers may form a cooperative to pool equipment, and to fund, distribute and promote each others' film productions and to share in any rewards that arise from their ventures. (See example in website references.) In small groups, plan and devise a small, workable cooperative of benefit to people in your local community, sports group or school. Examples may be: local community radio station; low-interest loans for members; creating and running an amateur acting company or artists' exhibition group. Discuss other examples and possibilities with your teacher. Your group should jointly present a written report, defining, discussing and explaining the purposes of your venture, how you would go about organising it and how you would monitor its effectiveness.
- View the documentary, *The Take*, and write a review of it, discussing its presentation and viewpoint of the concept of workers' cooperatives, and whether the issues raised have any relevance to Australians. (Note that this film has been screened on SBS TV.)

Fletcher Jones & Staff

We see from the program that although World War Two intervened, eventually Fletcher Jones put into business practice the concepts and structures of the cooperative model, whereby his employees were provided with a voice in how the business operated, an offer to invest in it and therefore a chance to share in the financial profits.

- Research the range of employment conditions and programs offered by Fletcher Jones to factory workers, then design either a half-page newspaper or a 30-second radio advertisement drawing on this information, calling for potential employees to attend a job interview. Your task is to make the offer of employment highly attractive. You may use illustrations in the newspaper advertisement, or include dialogue between two actors for the radio version.
- Research, then discuss in class, the meaning and purpose of 'management by consultation', the system set up by Fletcher Jones lawyer Neil Symons. In your discussion, compare this system to more traditional versions of management-labour relations, and point out the relative merits and disadvantages of each.
- Following on from the previous activity, the class members should acquaint themselves with the central elements of workplace negotiation skills, i.e. methods of planning and carrying out negotiations amongst workers, and between workers and management, to solve problems through discussion without anyone being disadvantaged. Form into pairs and carry out the following workplace negotiation and problem-solving scenarios. You will need to plan individually and together, and not only to argue your own viewpoint but to anticipate and to listen to the viewpoint of your negotiating opposite partner. You may not always agree or come up with a resolution immediately; this may take more than one meeting. You may also both find it necessary to compromise on certain points. Keep notes of your negotiations, your ideas and plans, and when you reach a resolution, both of you should prepare and write a signed agreement.
- Two workers require access to the same computer, occasionally at the same time. Attempts to work out a timetable have failed because when your usage time has expired it has been necessary to continue in order to finish a particular job. Negotiate an agreement on computer access that is fair and workable to both of you, until such time as another computer arrives, and between the pair of you, prepare a written submission to your supervising manager for a new computer, with the realisation that the money for this may not have been provided for in your work section's budget. (Note: This activity has been adapted from an exercise scenario in the TAFE National Communication Module, Negotiation Skills, NCS009.)
- Discuss in class the possible scenarios where negotiation skills and problem solving in your school environment (comprised of students, staff, school administration and school council) may arise between two parties. Select one of these issues, ensure that the problem is fully defined, and, as in the previous negotiation exercise, work towards a satisfactory outcome and a written agreement. An example may be a desire by the Student Representative Council to argue on behalf of students for space to be provided for extra bike racks at the expense of a section of the teachers' car park, when in fact there may be a need by staff management to find space for parking a new school minibus.
- From what you have observed during the interviews conducted throughout the program, discuss in class the prevailing attitudes of FJ employees towards the business, and to Jones himself, and to Jones' treatment of them. Draw on this discussion to write a descriptive piece of 400-500 words on the importance of morale, trust, pride, loyalty and a sense of self-worth in the work force, where both employer and employee mutually benefit.
- A year after you have arrived in Australia and immediately found work in the Warrnambool factory, write a letter to a relative overseas about your employment experience with FJ.
- Listen again to Gaetano Remine's story of what happened when 'the old man', Fletcher Jones, heard Gaetano and his fellow employees singing at work. In pairs, devise two short drama scenes of a minute or two each, depicting a similar employer-employee situation. The outcome, or denouement of the second scene should be completely different from the first, showing a different style of management control, attitude, authority and individual character. With others in the class as required, rehearse the scripts and either enact the two scenes or carry out a play reading.
- What kind of employment world do Australians live in today? Research and write a brief description on the introduction of the system of individual workplace agreement contracts, as it affects both employers and employees throughout Australia. Discuss how this is generally different from the Fletcher Jones model



described in the program, and whether it provides any advantages over such a model.

- In pairs, negotiate an individual employment contract between an employer and an employee where you both bargain on one or more conditions involving working hours per week and per day, times at which the working days begin and end, and trade-offs on lunch breaks and holiday leave, and negotiated provisions for maternity leave, sick leave, study leave and leave without pay. Jointly prepare and sign the contract.

The 'lolly parade'—protectionism and tariffs

After World War Two Australia instituted a 'populate or perish' immigration program, but there was no point bringing new migrants in from Europe if there weren't any jobs waiting for them on arrival. To ensure those jobs were available, Australian industries such as the garments manufacturing business were heavily protected by Federal Government legislation from cheap imports of goods from overseas. This system provided mass employment, and was one of the reasons why Fletcher Jones & Staff flourished so successfully. (See website reference to a Film Australia documentary from 1949, called *Tomorrow's Australians*, about the 'populate or perish' intentions of the Government over the next 25 years.)

- Research then define in class the Australian national policy from Federation (in 1901) to the 1970s of 'protectionism' and 'tariffs', and its connection to high employment in Australian manufacturing, and the creation of a common wealth and a contented, affluent populace. Following this, discuss, then write a short informative essay on how tariffs work, providing some examples, and the benefits and disadvantages of the tariff system. For example, is it a system that produces in the population a true sense of self-reliance and achievement or does it merely cushion us all artificially from the realities of international business competition and life?
- Research then discuss in class and write notes on the purpose behind Australia's post-war 'populate or perish' immigration program.
- Drawing on the previous two activities, use desktop publishing software to prepare a two-page, illustrated article, designed for a magazine aimed at young teenage readers, about the Fletcher Jones success story from the viewpoint of Australia's immigration and protectionist policies.
- Create a 'populate or perish' immigration poster display that the Government may have designed as part of a public awareness program for Australian citizens.
- Write a short story from any viewpoint you think is

relevant, drawing on the image of Fletcher Jones representatives being at the wharves to recruit immigrant labour as soon as the passenger ships from Europe docked. (An alternative to this may be to work in pairs to plot one or more scenes for a short film, and to construct an annotated storyboard for it.)

'Fair dinkum stuff'—decline of local manufacturing



As we see in the program, the 'lolly parade', as referred to by Peter Garner, a Fletcher Jones factory manager, came to an end when the Australian Government began to remove the protectionist tariff system during the 1970s. In particular the garments manufacturing industry declined over following decades, to the point where almost all clothing was produced and imported from overseas.

- Research and discuss in class the reasons for the change in Australian government policy from the 1970s onwards towards protectionism of industry and manufacturing, and the effect of this on businesses such as Fletcher Jones. From the program include discussion on whether there are any aspects of protectionism itself that led directly or indirectly to FJ's downturn.
- In pairs or small groups, research and prepare a written report about the current state of the garments industry in Australia. For example, are any clothes manufactured and directly retailed in Australia or are they all manufactured and imported from overseas? Are Australians trained and skilled locally, via apprentice or other education schemes, in various aspects of the garments industry? If possible, provide graphs or other statistical evidence to compare the current situation about any of these issues to what it may have been in previous decades.
- In the program Peter Garner refers to the personal toll of severe depression, alcoholism and marriage break-up, as a result of not only being ordered to sack Fletcher Jones workmates, some of whom were his friends in the local community, but of himself then being made redundant when the company was facing liquidation and receivership. Plan and write a short fiction story, in any way you think relevant, about these themes.



Fletcher Jones' legacy

During the program Phillip Adams says, 'I didn't know of another company like [Fletcher Jones] anywhere else in the western world'. As well, according to The F.J. Foundation (see website references), Fletcher Jones donated much of his wealth anonymously. Testimony to the regard in which the founder of the business was held were the scenes that took place at his funeral in 1977.

- Discuss in class the viewpoint that Fletcher Jones has earned the right to be considered as a 'great Australian icon' whose character, vision and achievements may outrank those of many famous Australians whose names may instantly come to mind. Following this, either create a poster display, a web page or a short speech about the relevance of Jones' beliefs and achievements to us today. (Rather than presenting this as a biography or an obituary, consider this activity an assessment of someone whose life and works may be of contemporary relevance to us either individually and personally, or as a society, in some way.)
- Plan and write a short discursive essay on whether Fletcher Jones' life-long attitude that 'people before profits' is not only relevant in today's industrial climate, but possible.
- Discuss in class the wide variety of plot, character and thematic possibilities, then write a short fiction story set on the day of Fletcher Jones' funeral.

Media studies

What is the filmmaker's view, throughout *The Fabric of a Dream*, of Fletcher Jones' life, achievements and legacy? Does the film present a particular viewpoint about Jones? Is it sympathetic, critical, objective, subjective? Are our own emotional responses throughout the program derived purely from the historical facts of the story, or from the way in which the filmmaker constructs, selects and orders the raw material and the narrative. And how can we tell?

- Discuss in class and write notes on the relevance, purpose and need for re-enactment scenes throughout the program. Do you consider these scenes provide a sense of authenticity and accuracy? Do they illustrate

and add to our understanding and appreciation of the Fletcher Jones story?

- In pairs, select any part of the program not presented as a re-enactment, and construct a scripted storyboard re-enactment scene of it, maintaining accuracy and veracity as closely as possible (i.e. you should avoid obvious fictionalising). For example, you may wish to base the storyboard on the comments of one or more of the interviewee subjects, or on the scripted voice-over by Wendy Hughes.
- Film is an audio-visual medium. Discuss in class and write notes on the relevance, necessity and use of archival film and photographs throughout the program, and the recurring image of Fletcher Jones tape-recording his thoughts.
- The image introduced by the film director of a movie projector is seen at the beginning and end of the program. Discuss in class the purpose of this as a motif.
- View in class then write a discussion on the Australian comedy film, *Spotswood*, examining its treatment of the themes of labour, management-worker relations, conflict and problem-solving in a moccasin factory, and whether the storyline, plot and outcome presents more of a nostalgic fantasy wish-fulfilment than a depiction of reality in the workforce. Ensure you discuss the image and purpose of 'moccasin' as metaphor.

References and further resources

PRINT

'100 Most Influential Australians' in *The Bulletin*, July 4, 2006

Renee Byrne, *Let's Talk About Stammering*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1983

Ann Capling and Brian Galligan, *Beyond the Protective State: The Political Economy of Australia's Manufacturing Industry Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1992

Justin Healey (ed), *Wealth and Inequality*, The Spinney Press, Thirroul, NSW, 2005

Fletcher Jones, *Not By Myself: The Fletcher Jones Story*, Wentworth Books, Surry Hills, 1976

Toyohiko Kagawa, *Meditations on the Cross*, Willett Clark & Co, Chicago, 1935

Gary Lewis, *People Before Profit: The Credit Union Movement in Australia*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 1996

Aphrodite Matsakis, *I Can't Get Over It: A Handbook for Trauma Survivors*, New Harbinger Publications, Oakland, California, 1996

Jocelyn Pixley, *Citizenship and Employment: Investigating Post-Industrial Options*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Victoria, 1993

Joshua Smith, *The Rise and Fall of Australian Socialism*, Joshua Smith, Sydney, 2006

Jenny Stewart, *The Lie of the Level Playing Field: Industry Policy and Australia's Future*, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1994

FILM/TV

Mark Joffe (director), *Spotswood*, 1992

Avi Lewis (director), *The Take*, 2004

WEBSITES

Australian Government: Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources
www.industry.gov.au

Cooperatives:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative>
www.nobawc.org
www.lafco.tv

Documentary film about workers cooperative:

The Take
www.thetake.org

Enterprise education (includes project development and negotiation skills):

www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/DD1ADBFF-8AF2-4261-A777-04DDCC3559DB/671/secondary.pdf

Fletcher Jones:

www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140662b.htm
www.abc.net.au/rural/news/stories/s1180329.htm
www.thefoundation.com.au

Toyohiko Kagawa:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toyohiko_Kagawa
<http://zaidan.unchusha.com/e/index.html>

Shellshock:

<http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWshellshock.htm>
<http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWmental.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Combat_stress_reaction

Speech disorders—stuttering:

<http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/asrc/>

Tomorrow's Australians:

(Film Australia documentary from 1949)
<http://video.google.com.au/videoplay?docid=7134061664078851909>

Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensioners

(TPI): www.tpifed.org.au

Working conditions in Bendigo goldmines (scroll down):

www.theage.com.au/news/Victoria/Eaglehawk/2005/02/17/1108500206424.html

Workplace relations and industrial reforms:

www.careerone.com.au/jobs/job-search/job-market-insider/pid/1797?matrix=1143418184713

The Fabric of a Dream— The Fletcher Jones Story

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Writer/Director: Dennis K Smith

Producer: Melanie Coombs

Executive Producer: Penny Robins

Narrator: Wendy Hughes

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For information about Film Australia's programs, contact:

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