

# POPULATE OR PERISH

**Subject Areas:** Environmental Studies, History, Australian Studies and Contemporary Society, and in particular, themes and concepts including national identity, immigration, racism, economic growth, urban development, and ecological sustainability will find Film Australia's *Populate or Perish* offers rich material for discussion and further investigation.

**Levels:** Students studying Years 10-12 SOSE

*Populate or Perish* explores the insularity and fears which motivated the twentieth century catchcry of 'populate or perish'. It examines why this movement has changed today to one opposed to increasing population, on the grounds of environmental unsustainability and cultural explosiveness.

After nearly fifty years of continuous population growth, mainly due to immigration, the political and social landscape of Australia is irreversibly changed. The film explores some of these changes, and examines the debates about Australia's future.

**Executive Producer:** Sharon Connolly  
**Producers:** Susan Ardill, Clare Bonham  
**Director:** Susan Ardill  
**Duration:** 55 minutes  
**Year of Production:** 1995

## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

It will be beneficial to discuss the following questions before you watch the film, and then to discuss them again after watching the film.

### IMMIGRATION

- Australia's policies regarding immigration have changed over time according to Australia's needs and global obligations. Discuss the following factors and how they may influence policies: family life, the economy, business needs, refugees.
- Migrants have come to Australia because of a number of 'push-pull' factors. In small groups, draw up a table on which you record those factors which 'push' migrants out of their countries, and those factors which 'pull' them to Australia. Discuss the tables as a class.
- Do you think migrants have contributed to Australia's growth as a nation?

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- Find a map of the distribution of population in Australia. Describe the pattern of that distribution.
- Why is Australia's population distributed in this way?
- What implications does this have for population growth and spread?
- Why do most Australian choose to live on Australia's eastern seaboard?
- Why is there still unlimited space in Australia's interior?
- What do you think are the major problems facing large Australian cities now?
- What do you understand by the term 'infrastructure growth'?

## RACISM

- How is Asia a key element in Australia's future population composition?
- What problems does this create in some people's minds?
- What advantages does our proximity to Asia have for Australians?
- The danger of using stereotyped remarks when talking about certain sections of our society can lead to misinformation. Can you think of any examples of such remarks?
- What do you understand by the term 'scapegoat'?
- How can this be seen to contribute to racist attitudes? Can you provide any examples of migrants being used as scapegoats for social, environmental and/or political problems?

## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

### POST-WORLD WAR 2

- The Minister for Immigration at the time, Arthur Calwell, believed that 'We either fill this country or we lose it'. Explain his mass migration policy.
- In what respects could his policies be seen to be racist?
- In what occupations were the post-war migrants largely involved?
- What was the connection made between economic growth and mass migration?

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- In Sydney, and in other large cities in Australia, there is now a debate about the positives and negatives of growth. What are these factors, and what is seen to be one of the major issues to be considered now?
- Why have migrants become the scapegoats for overcrowding in Sydney?
- What is the connection made by Dr Tim Flannery between urban consolidation and the increasing rate of extinction of Australian mammals?
- Since Australia is a democracy, can we stop people living where they wish?

## ENVIRONMENT VS DEVELOPMENT

- What reasons are given for the increasing air traffic in Sydney?
- Why doesn't better planning occur?
- What are the major issues raised in the film in the debate between the environment protection supporters, and the developers?
- Consider the example of Tibooburra. What argument is given by the Sturt National Park District Manager, Paul Jennings, for limiting population growth in the area?
- How does the desire for uncrowded, spacious comfort in the suburbs contribute to an environmental problem?

## WHAT IMPACT WILL POPULATION GROWTH HAVE ON AUSTRALIANS' QUALITY OF LIFE?

- Why do people want to live in cities?
- What benefits and advantages does this provide people?
- What problems does this present concentration of population in large urban areas cause with people's quality of life?
- How can some of these problems be overcome? (e.g. through medium-density housing? better public transport?) Make a list of possible solutions, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.

## FINDING A SOLUTION

- Both the 'far right' and the progressive environmentalist movement believe that Australia needs to stop immigration in order to find a 'solution'. List the arguments presented by each group, and comment on their validity.
- Many believe that it is not a population ceiling that Australia needs, but that the lifestyles of its people need to change. How?
- The millions who have come to Australia have given Australia its difference and diversity. Having heard the opinions in the film, what do you believe is now our national self-interest?

## CONCLUSION

Different people have different ideas on the future of Australia but it would be useless to debate them before you have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the issues. While you will already have ideas about the questions and issues raised in the film, they need to be researched further. Choose one area of interest to you and prepare a detailed presentation on it. Decide, from your research, what conclusion you would reach about your vision of Australia's optimum population and its future.

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