



GROWING UP AND GOING HOME

Synopsis

Alemayehu, Sisay and Eleni are three young Ethiopians who were adopted in the mid-1990s by an extended Australian family.

At the time, part of that life-changing experience was recorded in an award-winning documentary (*Little Brother, Little Sister*).

Ten years on, the two brothers (aged 19 and 16) and their 14-year-old sister are returning to their homeland—with their adoptive parents and siblings—to reconnect with the family, friends and culture they left behind.

In Addis Ababa they are finally reunited with their elder sister Bizunesh and grandmother.

Through the family's recollections, we discover the details of why and how the three children came to be in Australia. From the teenagers themselves, we find out how they feel now and who they have become. In particular, we hear from Alemayehu, who was a streetwise 11-year-old, already working to support his family, when he left Ethiopia. His transition to a new life has been fraught, but what will it be like for him back in the homeland he so desperately yearns for? And how will his experience compare to his younger brother Sisay's, whose dream is to represent Australia on the sports field? Or to Eleni, who seems happily settled in her beachside life?

Exploring contemporary issues surrounding inter-racial adoption and immigration, this is a poignant story of identity and belonging, as the teenagers discover whether it is possible to find a place in two different worlds.

Curriculum Links

Curriculum links include SOSE/HSIE, English and Media.

Recall Questions

1. List the descriptions of Eleni, Sisay and Alemayehu that appear in screen captions at the beginning of the program.
2. In which Ethiopian city were Sisay and Eleni living when they were adopted by Anne and Steve?
3. Who did the two children leave behind when they came to Australia?
4. Describe what happened to the children's natural parents.
5. Explain the pressures Alemayehu experienced after he arrived in Australia, and the problems he encountered at school. Where does he now work?

6. What is Sisay's 'number one dream'?
7. Describe Lizzie's feelings about Alemayehu's behaviour after he found himself in trouble with the police.
8. What do Eleni, Sisay and Alemayehu each think about returning to Ethiopia after many years absence?
9. How old is Bizunesh and what is her profession?
10. When Alemayehu arrives back in Ethiopia, what does he discover about his friend Johannes, and how does he react to this news?
11. Bizunesh had been afraid of what would happen to Alemayehu had he not gone to Australia. Explain why.
12. Explain why Eleni finds it so difficult to enter the family home.
13. How does Sisay react when he meets his grandmother?
14. Explain why Sisay remains silent when his childhood friend says he, too, would like to come to Australia.
15. What prompts Sisay to say that 'no kid should be going through that at all'?
16. In Anne's view, what does Eleni experience from her visit to an orphanage?
17. Why does Eleni want to return to Ethiopia for an extended time?
18. Back in Australia, what part-time job does Sisay have, and what does he plan to do with the money he earns?
19. Why does Eleni say, when speaking of Bizunesh, that 'it's about time that we looked after her'?
20. What are the three siblings hoping will happen by the time Eleni turns 16 years old?

Discovering Ethiopia

Much of the program is filmed and takes place in the nation of Ethiopia, which is in a region known as the Horn of Africa. When viewed on a map, this region bears a resemblance in outline to the horn of a rhinoceros.

- Draw a map of Africa plus the surrounding region to the north and west (including the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, Saudi Arabia etc). Outline and highlight Ethiopia on your map, in order to display it in relationship to the entire region.
- Now on large poster paper draw a map of Ethiopia itself, showing the major cities and important land forms such as lakes and river

systems. On the poster, display a picture of the Ethiopian flag, with a brief explanation of what the colours of the flag may represent. Also include a list of facts and statistics about Ethiopia, such as:

- Population (including dispersion into rural and city)
- Currency and average income (with a comparison to Australia's)
- Main sources of primary, secondary or tertiary production, industry or wealth
- Literacy rates
- Dominant languages, ethnic groups and religion

Across the bottom of the map present a general timeline of the most significant events in Ethiopian history. (Until some decades ago Ethiopia was known as Abyssinia.)

- Research and write an article of 300-400 words, including explanatory photographs or illustrations if necessary, on one of the following topics about Ethiopia, as suggested from viewing the program:
 - School education
 - Child labour and employment
 - Poverty and crime
 - Role and status of females in Ethiopian society
 - Health issues (including the extent of AIDS)
 - Traditional costumes or music (or a combination of both)
 - Traditional art
- Select and research another topic from the previous activity, using it as a basis for drafting, editing and proofreading a short fiction story set in Ethiopia. The story may take place either in the past or today. You should consider plot, themes and characters, plus the relationships not only between characters but also of characters to their environments and communities.

Inter-country adoption

Australia is one of the economically rich nations of the world. Many Australians feel that, in this situation, they should be helping homeless and seriously disadvantaged children in less fortunate countries, such as Ethiopia, by offering to adopt and to bring them to Australia, where they will be accepted and loved within the family unit, and offered chances in life they would not enjoy in their country of birth. However, there are strict

regulations applied to adopting children from other countries. Sometimes, before the process is completed, it may take years of checks, inquiries and personal interviews for all the criteria to be met by those wishing to become adoptive parents.

- Discuss in class, then write a list of the issues that should be taken into consideration when adopting a child from another country, from the viewpoint of everyone involved—the prospective adoptive parents, their own families, the Australian community in general, the federal and state governments and most importantly the children to be adopted. A selection of questions to look at may be:
 - Should those wishing to adopt children only be married couples?
 - Should the number of birth children prospective adoptive parents already have be a factor?
 - Should the amount of income prospective adoptive parents earn be relevant?
 - Should single adults be permitted to adopt children?
 - Should the adopted children be given access to the culture, language and heritage of the country they leave behind, or raised to have an entirely Australian identity?
- Research and prepare a double-page item for a popular magazine for teenagers on the general topic of The Hague Convention on inter-country adoption of babies and children. This may be made up of a number of short written pieces linked by various sub-headlines, all under one large banner headline.

You will need to draw attention to: the regulations defined by the Convention; when they were drawn up, why, and by whom; the countries (including Australia) that have agreed to abide by the regulations; and the worldwide importance and relevance of the regulations. Include commentary on the practice of 'baby trafficking', which has been condemned by the Convention. You may illustrate the item as desired, and, if possible, present it in desktop publishing format.

- In pairs, research and write a report describing your state's laws, regulations and requirements for inter-country child adoption. Include in the report whether they are different from the inter-country adoption laws of other Australian states, and, if necessary, any recommendations you would make for improvement of your state's laws. (Note that the SBS *Insight* program, titled 'Babies Without Borders', contains a discussion on state laws. See website references.)
- In the following scenario you are a six-year-old

child who has been placed into an orphanage in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. An Australian couple you have never seen before are arriving to meet you; you have been told by the orphanage workers that one day you may be adopted by the couple and taken to live with them as their child in Australia, a place you know nothing about. In your own words, write about the experience of meeting the Australian adults, what you thought of them, your range of feelings, and of what the future may hold for you.

- Using the same scenario as above, but from the viewpoint of one of the Australians, write an email to a relative at home about your experience of visiting the orphanage and meeting your prospective adopted son or daughter. Have your thoughts and feelings about the possibility of adopting a child altered, or have they merely strengthened and become more definite? Have you realised, discovered or learnt anything from your experience that you hadn't previously considered? Have you reassessed your own motives for adopting a child?
- Describe in writing, as though you were a child or young teenager speaking to a school friend, the 'learning curve' that you may have to experience, and the adjustments to be made, after your parents bring into their home an adopted child from another country and culture. You may also include comments and questions by your friend.
- In groups, find out about inter-country illegal baby trafficking and work together to plan and script a short fiction play about it, of between five and ten minutes duration. Rehearse and present a play reading to your class, using extra members of the class as actors if necessary. As it is a play reading and not a stage performance, you may need to include a narrator to read out stage instructions and other information, such as descriptions of scene changes and settings. If desired, you may also provide 'live' or recorded sound effects to add to the production.
- Imagine there is a self-funded organisation in Australia called 'Children Without Borders'. CWB is devoted both to informing the public about the plight of dispossessed and homeless children in poorer countries who could be adopted by Australians, and to campaigning to make the process of adoption more streamlined and efficient than it is at present. Prepare a large wall-poster display for CWB that promotes an awareness of these issues to the Australian public. The display would be suitable for positioning at railway stations, bus stops etc, where it would be seen by many people.

An alternative to this activity, for those with

computer skills and software, is to present the display as a promotional web page, or even to present it in recorded sound format only, for 'radio' playback on the school's intranet.

Eleni, Sisay & Alemayehu—their journey

The individual journeys that Eleni, Sisay and Alemayehu each take in leaving Ethiopia for a life in Australia, then returning to their homeland, and arriving back in Australia, are not only physical and geographical. There are wider and deeper dimensions of this journey through time and space that extend into personal growth, maturity, knowledge, a quest for identity—the rites of passage.

- Discuss in class, then write an informative essay-style article of 500–800 words (depending on your year level) on the ways in which you think each of the three siblings have changed, grown and developed from before they return to Ethiopia, to after they have come back to Australia. Ensure that you draw attention to how they reflect upon their experiences and what they have discovered about themselves, their past and their cultural background.
- Share your observations about the ways in which each of the siblings express their connection to their Ethiopian heritage through mode of dress and fashion. Write a descriptive piece of 200–300 words that includes reference to visual on-screen examples from the documentary.
- Discuss in class, then write a short commentary on the necessity of a language interpreter and translator to be present during the scenes taking place in Ethiopia. What issues does this requirement raise for everyone involved—the three siblings, their Australian and Ethiopian families, the local residents and even the interpreter and the film crew?
- As they grow older, Eleni, Sisay and Alemayehu are experiencing what it is like to live in two contrasting cultures separated by thousands of kilometres. After discussing in class the possibilities for events, themes, characters and settings, draft a set of fictional personal diary entries titled 'My World, My Two Worlds', where you look at both the positive and negative aspects of encountering this kind of experience. For example, is it possible to be fully accepted by others in both environments? Is there resentment, jealousy, racial ignorance and prejudice? Can you incorporate the best that one culture offers into another? Do you see yourself as, perhaps, building a 'bridge' between two cultures that may be to everyone's advantage?
- During the program we hear about the fate of Alemayehu's boyhood friend, Johannes. Using

this situation as a general starting point, in pairs write a play scene for two, depicting a meeting in the prison between two young people, one a prisoner, and the other an inter-country adopted child who has returned to his or her country of birth after many years.

Rehearse and present the scene to the class—or, if possible, stage and record the scene on video for playback to the class. Your setting would be one room, a table, perhaps with a grille across it, two chairs, a closed door. A prison guard may be watching nearby. Attempt to draw out the range of conflicting emotions, some of them unspoken, between the two central characters.

- Towards the end of the program we discover that the siblings' adult sister, Bizunesh, has been asked to join them in Australia. Write two letters:
 - The first letter should be written to you by your sister, expressing her feelings and thoughts about leaving home for a new life in a strange world, and asking you questions about what she might expect on arrival. Remember that she is very likely to be unsure of making such a huge decision.
 - The second letter should be to the Australian Minister for Immigration, presenting a case for your sister to come to Australia and to be accepted as an Australian citizen.
- Using the program's contents as a basis, write a short story in which the central character is an ageing grandmother whose younger, surviving family members are now all departing, or have already left, for a life far away in Australia. Tell the story in the first person style, from grandmother's viewpoint.
- In the following scenario Bizunesh is about to arrive in Australia. Prepare a 'human interest' news item for the local suburban newspaper about her arrival, the reunion of her family, the two Australian families involved, and any relevant background details and 'colour'. For example, the report may even include comments that a documentary film team have been following their life story for some years! Present the item in formatted newspaper style, with headlines, news columns and even, if possible, captioned photographs (or illustrations that take the place of photographs).

Media, documentary and narrative

Growing Up and Going Home continues and expands upon the story of Ethiopian siblings adopted by an Australian couple, first seen in director Belinda Mason's 1998 documentary, *Little*

Brother, Little Sister (see reference list).

Growing Up and Going Home includes scenes inserted from the previous film, a method of presentation that allows us, as an audience, a deeper insight into the story unfolding before our eyes.

- Discuss in class, then write an analysis of how and why *Growing Up and Going Home* is structured and presented in terms of chronological time over exactly one calendar year. Include a comment as to the purpose of 'flashback' scenes that are inserted into this chronology, and their effect on the audience. You should select one of these flashback scenes and discuss it in detail.
- Following from the previous activity, discuss in class then write a commentary, looking at specific examples in detail, on the use of the camera as an observational tool. Questions to examine may be:
 - Is the camera intrusive, or does it respect the trust, dignity, privacy and space of the on-camera subjects?
 - Does the camera allow scenes to happen 'naturally' without affecting or influencing the behaviour of the subjects?
 - Does the camera draw attention to its own presence and to the presence of the filmmakers themselves, or does it try to be 'invisible'?
- Imagine you are a director of a documentary film like *Growing Up and Going Home*, where you are dealing not only with logistical issues such as travel and equipment, but the feelings and concerns of your human subjects. Write a collection of personal diary entries about the range of considerations and difficulties associated with setting up, planning, filming then editing such a program, and screening the finished product to your subjects for their reaction.
- The following activities, carried out in pairs, ask for you to plan interviews and to use computer technology to record and edit them for playback. You should also familiarise yourself with the difference between 'open-ended' questions and 'closed' questions as a means of developing an informative interview where your subject is allowed to speak freely and to express opinions and ideas on various topics. (See the references section for sample websites on open-ended questions.)

In *Growing Up and Going Home* some interviews with the three siblings are conducted, although we do not hear the interviewer's questions. The interviewer does not appear

on-camera, and is not heard off-camera. Eleni, Sisay and Alemayehu sometimes appear directly on-camera while speaking, although at times only their voices are heard on the soundtrack while we are watching something else on-screen, a process of film editing called a 'cut-away'. First, examine the program for incidences of these interviews and, in pairs, discuss and write notes about the purpose of this interviewing, editing and filming method as a documentary technique.

From what you have observed and discussed, plan interviews with each other that will either be recorded purely for sound, or recorded with a video camera. Your questions should be open-ended, allowing as much as possible for a flow of ideas, thoughts, opinions and feelings on one topic. Record the interviews. Edit the resulting material so that you are able to remove the interviewer's questions, allowing as far as possible only the subject's responses, to give the impression as much as possible of an unbroken commentary. You may have to rearrange the recorded content in various ways to achieve this. If you are recording on video, you may wish to tape other scenes later that could be used as 'cut-away' camera shots, where your subject continues to speak on the soundtrack during those shots.

A wide range of interview topics that may be suitable for development, in consultation with your teacher, are:

- Hobbies, cultural and sporting interests, travel experiences, the books of a favourite author or the works of a favourite musician or artist
- Views about school, learning, education, growing up, hopes for the future, relations with the opposite sex, parents, siblings, friends
- Opinions about politics, events in the news, complex issues such as multiculturalism, racism, world poverty or religious values
- Design and create a promotional wall display poster for *Growing Up and Going Home*. Decide the overall theme of the poster. Choices may be: family, search for identity, growing up, breaking down the barriers, multiculturalism, child adoption, the migrant experience.
- Write a two-minute review of *Growing Up and Going Home*, designed for viewers of a popular TV information program for young teenagers. Rehearse then present and video-record your review on-camera. An alternative to this may be to write a review of 350-400 words aimed at readers of a popular weekly magazine for young teenagers.

References and Further Resources

Books:

- Jennifer Burn and Sudrishti Reich, *The Immigration Kit: A Practical Guide to Australia's Immigration Law*, 7th edition, The Federation Press, Leichhardt, NSW, 2005
- Christian Clark, *UNICEF for Beginners*, Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc, New York, 1996
- Patrick Gilkes, *Conflict in Somalia and Ethiopia*, Wayland, Hove, East Sussex, 1994
- Myles Harris, *Breakfast in Hell: A Doctor's Experiences of the Ethiopian Famine*, Picador, London, 1986
- Steven Gish, *Ethiopia*, Marshall Cavendish Corporation, New York, 1996
- Donald Horne, *10 Steps to a More Tolerant Australia*, Penguin Books Australia, 2003
- Chandran Kukathas (ed), *Multicultural Citizens: the Philosophy and Politics of Identity*, The Centre for Independent Studies, St Leonards, NSW, 1993
- Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald, *The Many-Sided Triangle: Adoption in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic, 2001

Film/TV:

- Jennifer Cummins (director), *From Korea With Love*, Iris Pictures/Film Australia, Sydney, 2002
- Gail Dolgin and Vincente Franco (directors), *Daughter from Danang*, Independent Television Service, USA, 2002
- Dai Le (director), *Operation Babylift*, Film Australia, 2005
- Belinda Mason (director), *Little Brother, Little Sister*, Alfred Road Films/Film Australia, 1998

Websites:

- Books about inter-country adoption:
www.fishpond.com.au/Books/Health_Wellbeing/Family_Relationships/Adoption/?page=6
- Ethiopia - history, politics, geography, culture:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia>
- Ethiopia - famine and poverty:
www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=CHO20010910&articleId=366
- Films about inter-country adoption:
www.abc.net.au/tv/documentaries/stories/s185080.htm(Little Brother, Little Sister)
www.daughterfromdanang.com

Inter-country adoption - Babies Without Borders:

<http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/archive.php?daysum=2006-03-28#>

Inter-country adoption - general information and Hague Convention:

<http://www.aacasa.org.au/adoption-faq-s.html>

www.bellybelly.com.au/forums/showthread.php?t=3913

<https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionabroad/en/hague-convention.html>

http://www.unicef.org/media/media_52823.html

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/letters/give-families-a-say-in-overseas-adoption-reforms/2006/07/09/1152383606419.html>

www.adoption.com

Open-ended questions:

<http://au.reachout.com/>

<https://student.unsw.edu.au/job-application-tips-and-examples>

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~macinnis/scifun/projects.htm>

For information about Film Australia's programs, contact:

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Growing Up and Going Home

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Narrator: Tara Morice

Writer/Director: Belinda Mason

Producer: Mary-Ellen Mullane

Executive Producer: Penny Robins

Duration: 52 minutes

Year: 2006

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