



The Sapphires

Wayne Blair, 103 mins, Australia, 2012

Education Resource

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About this resource

This resource has been written by ACMI educator Susan Bye to accompany the screening program *The Sapphires*. It includes a final section: Film Analysis in the Classroom.

THE SAPPHIRES

The Sapphires has been described as a feel-good movie about bad things. Adapted from Tony Briggs' play inspired by his mother's experience as an entertainer in war-torn Vietnam, *The Sapphires* tells the story of four women from an Aboriginal mission community who achieve success entertaining American troops.

Some Background: Filling in the Gaps

History and Stories of the Past

The Sapphires is a wonderful mix of personal, family, Aboriginal, national and international history.

Personal and Family History

Writer Tony Briggs used his mother's personal history of entertaining troops in Vietnam as the launching place for *The Sapphires* story:

I really started writing the story of the Sapphires when I was having conversations with mum, probably in I'd say 2000. I noticed that she would be mentioning Vietnam a lot. And I knew about it, of course, but I'd never really asked her about it. It occurred to me that there was a lot of history that I've been missing out on simply because I haven't been asking. ...

- Watch the ABC interview with Laurel and Tony Briggs. <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2012/s3558633.htm>
- Read the interview with the Sapphires about their experience: <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2012/09/the-sapphires-where-are-they-now/>
- This article in The Australian offers an excellent overview of the creation of *The Sapphires*: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/tony-briggss-film-the-sapphires-is-as-good-as-gold/story-fn9n8gph-1226434996504>

Tony Briggs was 33 before he really started to think about the extraordinary experience his mother, a shy Aboriginal teenager, had had in Vietnam. Sometimes people don't want to talk about the past, and it is important to respect that. However, often people are pleased to have the opportunity to share their stories.

- What are some of the memorable events that members of your family or some of your older friends have experienced in their lives?
- Are there stories that you are missing out on because you have not asked the right questions? Explain.
- How might you go about finding out more about the experiences of people close to you? Why is this important?
- Think about and describe something you have done or experienced that has had a lasting impact. Explain why.

- Watch Jade Colgan's digital story about family stories, their significance and how easily they can be lost: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/education-themes/power-stories/why-do-we-create-stories/my-dreaming>

Aboriginal History after Colonisation

The story of *The Sapphires* is set in Cummeragunja, a mission settlement on the banks of the Murray. In fact, as Laurel Briggs explains in the ABC interview, she grew up in Shepparton. Nevertheless, Cummeragunja plays an important but complex role in the cultural identity of the Yorta Yorta people.

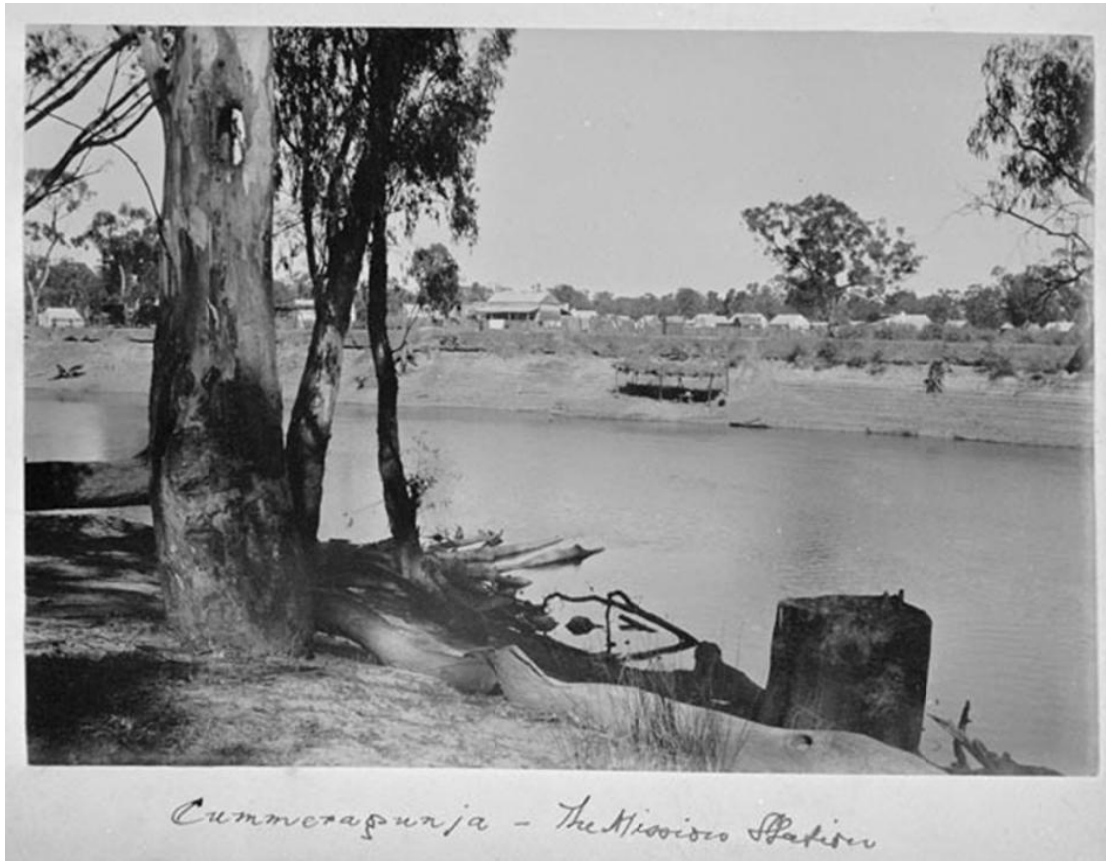


Image from the Museum Victoria collection <http://museumvictoria.com.au/collections/items/794983/photograph-by-a-j-campbell-echuca-victoria-1893>

Research the History of Cummeragunja

- This is a good place to start: <http://www.yynac.com.au/history.php>
- Nancy, Merle and Valda describe their connection to Cummeragunja and to the Sapphires: <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/20826>
- Why were the Yorta Yorta people moved to Cummeragunja?
- What are the details of the Cummeragunja Walkoff? Why is this considered such an important event in Aboriginal history in the post-colonisation period?

Freedom Ride

Ever since the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been engaged in a struggle to assert their rights to the land that they inhabited for generations prior to European settlement.

In the 1960s Indigenous Australians connected with the African American civil rights movement in the United States and staged a freedom ride inspired by the Freedom Riders who travelled through US southern states to highlight ongoing issues of segregation and racist violence.

- Find out more about the Australian Freedom Ride. You might like to begin here: http://indigenousrights.net.au/civil_rights/freedom_ride_1965
- What were the significant events in the United States that inspired it?
- Why did Indigenous Australians identify so deeply with the African American people, even though they have such a different history and experience? Which experiences did/do they share?

Civil Rights

- Find out more about Martin Luther King and his deep significance to the civil rights movement. The horror with which the news of his murder was met is portrayed with great impact in *The Sapphires*.
- Why is the 1967 referendum such a significant moment in the long and continuing process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians? This is a useful place to begin: <http://www.reconciliation.qut.edu.au/issues/referendum.jsp>
- The 1967 referendum did not give Aboriginal people the right to vote. However, this history of the Indigenous vote gives some useful contextual information: <http://www.aec.gov.au/indigenous/history.htm>

The Stolen Generations

The women who were the real-life Sapphires have described the experience of having children removed from their family:

Our aunties - our mother's sisters - were taken away from Cummeragunja. Our grandmother would follow them around. There was a kind man who worked at the Aboriginal Protection Board who would let Nanny know where Aunt Margaret or Aunt May were, and she'd travel to see them. When they were taken away, it nearly killed her. It broke her heart.

<http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2012/09/the-sapphires-where-are-they-now/>

- Find out more about the Stolen Generations by exploring ACMI Generator <http://generator.acmi.net.au/>, Australian Screen <http://aso.gov.au/>, Creative Spirits <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/a-guide-to-australias-stolen-generations> and the National Sorry Day Committee <http://www.nsd.org.au/stolen-generations/history-of-the-stolen-generations/the-history-of-the-stolen-generations>

An important narrative element of *The Sapphires* is the removal of the fair-skinned Kay and the impact this has on her connection to her family and its shared history.

- Find out more about the personal experiences of people who were removed from their family by:
 - Listening to Mick Edwards' story *From the Beginning to the Resistances* <http://generator.acmi.net.au/education-themes/snapshots-australian-history/stolen-generation/beginning-resistances>
 - Watching the clips from Darlene Johnson's documentary *Stolen Generations*: <http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/stolen-generations/>

Family and the Formation of Identity

For a number of reasons, family and heritage are particularly vital to the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

- Why do you think this is the case?
- What is the effect of having both family and cultural history taken away?
- Many Aboriginal Australians can no longer speak the language of their country. How does the loss of language affect a group's sense of identity and belonging?

Australian and International History

The main action of *The Sapphires* narrative is set in Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

- Find out more about this war and Australia's involvement: <https://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam/>

The Vietnam War has left a terrible legacy with many returned soldiers suffering from ongoing trauma.

- Watch *The Sleeping Dragon* <http://generator.acmi.net.au/education-themes/conflict-australians-war/vietnam-war/sleeping-dragon>

In this digital story, Graham Atkinson describes how the trauma of the Vietnam War was exacerbated by the negative reception given to Vietnam veterans on their return. Attitudes have changed and it is interesting to speculate if these changing attitudes might have prompted Laurel Robinson to talk more confidently about her own brief but intense experience in Vietnam and Tony's increased interest in her stories.

- What do you think?

The Sapphires: Exploring the Film



Initial Response to the Film

- What was your initial response to the film? Explain.
- What was your response to the subject matter of the film?
- Which aspects of the film do you consider most distinctive? Which scene was the most memorable?
- The film is a surprising mix of music, humour, romance and war. How did this affect your viewing experience?
- What did you learn from the film? Explain.
- What did you think about the ending? Why?
- Compare your response with your classmates' reactions to the film. Discuss similarities and differences. Support your opinion with evidence from the film, while also considering other students' opinions and observations.

The Message

- How would you describe the main message of the film? Jot your description down.
- Compile the responses on the whiteboard and then, as a class, see if you can decide on a description of the film message that you all agree with.
Don't worry if you can't. Most interesting and complex texts are far from straightforward and not easily 'summed up' in a few words. However, as you discuss the aspects of the story that you consider the most important, you will learn more about the film text and about your own interpretation.

Narrative

The Sapphires is a very rich narrative, featuring a number of characters, many different locations and a range of events and issues.

- Map the events that take place in the story, identifying the events that are purely to do with the personal stories of the fictional characters and those that are connected to actual historical events.
- Choose a scene that refers to an actual historical event (the Stolen Generations, racism in rural Australia, the Vietnam War) and explain how it connects with and adds to the main story of *The Sapphires*.

Newsreel footage is used to communicate the layers of history behind the story of *The Sapphires*.

- Work together as a group to identify the source of each of these pieces of footage and their significance to the story being told.

When watching *The Sapphires*, viewers need to process a lot of information very quickly without losing interest in the story. The filmmakers use our identification with the characters and their journey from innocence to experience to drive the story and our connection to it.

- What are some of the ways that we are encouraged to identify with the five main characters?

Many stories focus on outsider characters, as there are few viewers who have not, at some time in their lives, felt like an outsider.

- Explain how each of the five characters is represented as an outsider.
- How does this contribute to the way the story is told?

Often film narratives focus on the journey of one particular character. Sometimes, in films like *The Hunger Games* or *Holes*, the audience shares this character's point of view; in other films, this character is the one who shows us what the themes of the story are and that the viewers particularly identify with. In *The Sapphires*, we are connected to all of the five main characters but we particularly identify with the character of Gail.

- What is Gail's role in the story?
- Describe Gail's journey and what she learns. What do we learn from her experience?
- How would you describe Gail's relationship with the other characters?
- How does this grow and change. Explain with reference to Dave, Kay, Cynthia and Julie.

The Beginning

Because feature films need to tell a story efficiently – usually in less than two hours, the opening scene is very important in setting up the story.

- What happens in the opening scene of *The Sapphires*?
- When is it set?

- Which characters does it feature?
- What kind of world does it introduce us to? Explain.

The brief opening scene is followed by a montage of black and white newsreel footage.

- Try to identify each of the historic events and people depicted in this rapid-fire sequence that takes us from 1958 to 1968.
- Why do you think director Wayne Blair has chosen to include each of these pieces of newsreel footage? How do they connect with each other?
- How effective is this montage sequence in laying the ground for the story that follows?

The Ending

Many feature films use a process called bookending where the ending refers back to the beginning. This process is usually used to highlight the changes that have taken place in the characters' lives and the knowledge they have gained and also the changes that have taken place in the viewers' own understanding. *The Sapphires* ends as it began – in Cumberagunja.

- Why do storytellers often use the narrative device of the return home?
- How effective is it as a conclusion to *The Sapphires*? What has changed? What has been learnt?
- What expectations are established in the beginning and resolved or remain unresolved at the end?
- Which aspect of the complex story told in *The Sapphires* is highlighted in the film's conclusion?
- How successfully are the issues at stake resolved? How important is this resolution to the viewer's experience of the film and their understanding of the message of the film?

The conclusion of *The Sapphires* not only offers a resolution to the suffering and misunderstanding of the past, but also looks to the future.

- How does it do this?
- What feelings are evoked in the viewer in the concluding scene?
- Why does director Wayne Blair choose to conclude the film with a musical number?
- Why does music offer such an effective way of concluding a film?

Music

The musical numbers in *The Sapphires* are an important element of the film and are integral to our emotional connection to the characters and their story. The music also reveals important information about the story and the characters.

The first song we hear is *Run through the Jungle*. This song was released in 1970 by rock band Creedence Clearwater Revival. This song is considered to be written as a protest against the Vietnam War.

- Do you think it matters that it wasn't written until two years after the events depicted in *The Sapphires*?
- Does it matter that this song is a mainstream rock song written by a white American band?

The first diegetic song we hear is sung by Gail, Kay, Cynthia and Julie when they are children. They sing for their family and community. (Something is diegetic if it is part of the story. In contrast, *Run through the Jungle* is non-diegetic.) This song *Ngarra Burra Ferra* recurs in the story.¹

- When does *Ngarra Burra Ferra* recur?
- What is being communicated through this song at this point in the film?

There is a moment of peace and harmony when the sisters sing *Yellow Bird* with their mother.

- What are some of the things we learn in this scene?
- Why does music and singing play such an important role in this family?

The first piece of advice Dave gives the Cummeragunja Songbirds is: Forget Country and Western music and concentrate on Soul. Soul is a style of music developed by African American people and is specifically connected to the experience and culture of these people.

- When the group prepares for their audition, he gives them a convincing reason for choosing to sing Soul rather than Country music. What does he say and how does what he says connect the struggle of Indigenous Australians with that of African Americans?

The Sapphires is a 'jukebox musical' as it contains no original songs but instead employs well-known, classic songs to tell the story.

- What do these familiar songs add to the viewing experience?

Comedy and Humour

The audience of *The Sapphires* is also drawn into the story through the use of humour. In particular, the three sisters are very funny, especially in their conversations with each other. Gail is particularly quick with verbal putdowns.

- Is it surprising that a story about racism, the breakup of families and war should also be very funny? Can you name other films that combine humour with darker themes?
- What is the role of humour in the story of *The Sapphires*?

¹ In the notes accompanying *The Sapphires* play, 'Ngarra Burra Ferra' is offered as 'a tribute to its "keeper" Aunty Geraldine Briggs AO, a senior Elder of the Yorta Yorta people, leader of the Dhulanyagen Clan of Ulupna and Grandmother of Tony Briggs'.

When Gail and Cynthia are trying to hitch a ride into town so they can participate in the talent contest, a car speeds past without stopping. Gail (correctly) attributes the snub to their skin colour but Cynthia counters: 'No, it's because you're ugly.'

- Why did the writers choose to introduce humour at this point?
- Does the humour cancel out Gail's comment and underplay the sisters' experience of racism or has the point been made?

Focus on some other moments when harsh realities are linked with humour.

- Describe how this works and the effect of this tonal mix. (Tone communicates to the audience the appropriate response to what is happening in the narrative. Sometimes a film can make us uncomfortable as viewers because we are not sure about its tone and the response that is expected of us.)

Genre

The Sapphires draws on many different genres. A film genre has a set of codes of conventions that give the audience an idea what to expect and to help us read and respond to a film. *The Sapphires* uses codes and conventions from the following genres: romance, war, action, musical, comedy, drama, history and social critique.

- In groups, research the codes and conventions that relate to these genres.
 - Each group should focus on a different genre and consider how its codes and conventions relate to specific scenes, camera techniques, narrative elements and character traits.
 - Each group should then choose a scene for close analysis and consider how it displays the codes and conventions of the genre they are exploring.
 - As a class, draw on each group's exploration of genre to consider which genre might account for the main storytelling arc.

NOTE: It would be easy to categorise *The Sapphires* as a musical, but while that would account for the songs, it would not really tell us much about the film and its approach to story and character.

Character

Each of the main characters, with the exception of Kay, is distinguished by a particular kind of comic behaviour or dialogue.

- Explain how this works with reference to each character.
- Why is Kay portrayed as a more serious and less sassy character?
- What aspects of her experience might have contributed to her more restrained personality?
- Alternatively, what aspects of the three sisters' experience might have led them to be more assertive and to present a tougher exterior to the outside world?

When each of the five main characters (Gail, Cynthia, Julie, Kay and Dave) is introduced, we are immediately given an insight into the way they choose to present themselves to the world.

- How is each character introduced?
- What do we learn about them?
- How much does our initial impression of these characters change?
- Does our understanding of some of the characters develop and grow more than others. Explain. Why might this be the case?
- What about representation of African American characters? Are they as developed as the other characters? What is their role? What is the effect of the scene after Martin Luther King's death?

Themes

- As a class brainstorm the themes explored in the film – e.g. war, racism, family, belonging, cultural identity, gender, personal growth.
- After you have identified the themes, consider how each of them is explored in the film narrative.
- List key scenes that develop each theme.
- Explain how character is used to expand the theme.

Family and Belonging

Although the themes of war and racism are integral to the film narrative and the exploration of human relationships, *The Sapphires* places particular emphasis on personal and family relationships.

- What are the most important relationships in the film?
- How do they contribute to the exploration of belonging and identity? (You may like to divide into groups with each group focusing on a different relationship and how it contributes to the themes of family and belonging.)
- How is the community of Cummeragunja represented and how does it add to the theme?
- How does Dave fit into this exploration of family and belonging? What is the point being made in the letter he writes proposing marriage to Gail?

The four young singers leave their homes and travel to a warzone.

- How do they respond to their new environment?

Often leaving home is experienced as a loss and there is no doubt the sisters miss their family in Cummeragunja, but it is clear that they gain more from their experience than they lose.

- What do they gain? Why? What does this new environment offer the young women that they have not previously experienced?

The singers are participating in a war being fought on someone else's land. For the most part, the Vietnamese people and their plight remain in the background of the film. However, in an important scene in the film, a connection is made when Kay speaks Yorta-Yorta to ask the Vietnamese people who have stopped their car for permission to pass through their country.

- What kind of connection is being made between the Yorta Yorta and Vietnamese people in this scene?
- What aspects of Indigenous culture and custom is Kay drawing on at this moment?
- What do Kay's actions communicate about her sense of identity and belonging?
- Why is this moment important to rebuilding the relationship between Kay and Gail?

Performance and Identity

The Sapphires explores the growth in experience and confidence of the four young women that comes from escaping the limitations imposed by the racism of Australian society. But it also emphasises that this growth, their talent and their exuberant self-belief is rooted in the nurturing and rich cultural environment of their home on Cummeragunja mission.

One of the ways that this is communicated is through the way each new performance is presented. The series of performances tell us about the changes taking place in the young women's lives and each new performance is traced back to their earliest performances in front of family and community.

This picks up on the actual experience of Laurel Robinson

My parents and aunts, uncle, grandmother were putting on concerts to raise money. It was just a simple thing - to raise money for - just for food to help the community and that's how we became singers.

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2012/s3558633.htm>

- Note down each performance – beginning with the little girls performing in 1958, moving onto the talent contest in the pub, the audition and then the appearances in Vietnam and the final concert back at home.
- What does this performance trajectory tell us about the singers' growth from innocence to experience? What qualities did the group already have that laid the ground for their success?
- An interesting exercise would be to capture a still image of each performance. As a class, consider how the mise-en-scène (everything you see in the frame) adds to your understanding of the group's journey of discovery.

The Production Context

After achieving enormous success with the stage version of *The Sapphires*, writer Tony Briggs worked with Keith Thompson, an experienced screenwriter, to write the script for *The Sapphires* film.

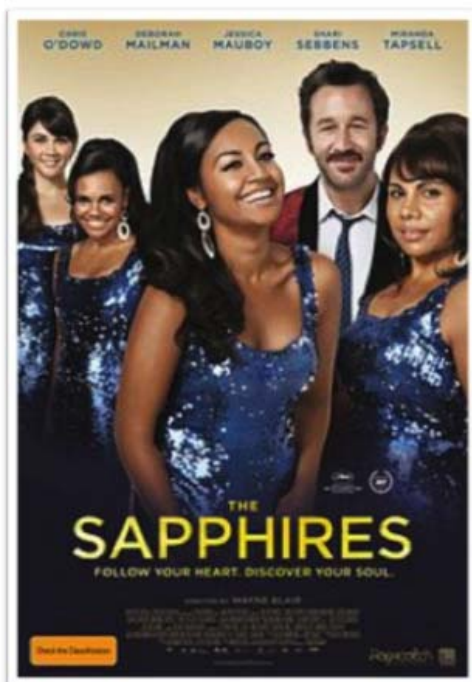
- This Byron Bay Writers' Festival discussion with Keith Thompson offers a great insight into the pre-production process of writing a script
www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2012/08/20/3569238.htm.
- Look up Keith Thompson's writing credits on IMBD.
- Consider the experience and knowledge each member of the writing partnership brought to the project. Explain what they each had to offer the project.
- In the interview Thompson explains that he and Briggs initially wrote Dave as an Australian character and had to rewrite it when Chris O'Dowd came on board.
 - What kind of adjustments would have been required?

- How does the fact that Dave is Irish rather than a white Australian change his connection to and relationship with the women in the group?

The Sapphires was a big production carrying huge expectations and many actors, and aspiring actors were keen to be involved. The casting process for the four members of the Sapphires singing group was exhaustive. Deborah Mailman was the only established actor chosen, while Jessica Mauboy was very well-known as a performer and had appeared in another Indigenous musical *Bran Nue Day* (2010). Miranda Tapsell and Shari Sebbens are both trained actors who made their screen debuts in *The Sapphires*.

In the *Screen Worlds* Exhibition at ACMI, an installation entitled *The Subject Speaks Back* offers an insight into the changing relationship between Indigenous actors, screen narratives and the production team. Indigenous actors describe a move over time from being a powerless object investigated by the camera to a participatory subject taking control of their screen representation.

- Watch, listen to and read interviews given by the stars of *The Sapphires* and consider their contribution to the success of the film.
- Do you think it is particularly important for female Indigenous actors to feel in control of their performance and their representation on screen? Why? Why not? (In this context, students may be interested in the experience of Rosalie Kunoth-Monks who starred in the film *Jedda* [Charles Chauvel, 1955]. Kunoth-Monks has spoken of how little control she had when playing this role.
<http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/kunothmonks/interview3.html>
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/stories/s1307580.htm>)
- Ask students to consider the controversy resulting from the release of *The Sapphires* DVD in the United States. Use the image below of the Australian and the US DVD covers to begin your discussion.



- Students could also focus on the media coverage of the furore created by this DVD cover. They could consider the different points of view offered as part of the public discussion of the DVD cover artwork. (Some people argued that this purely commercial decision may have introduced the film to viewers who might otherwise not have seen it.) Students could debate this topic – but because of the complexity and sensitivity of the topic, would need to run their arguments past a teacher or experienced adult.
- You could begin your discussion with these articles. Here the real Sapphires express their displeasure: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/sapphires-protest-racist-cover-20130804-2r7m7.html>. And in this article, Karl Quinn describes the US cover art as a savvy business decision: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/sapphires-cover-is-not-racist-just-smart-20130805-2ra2o.html>.

Collaboration

Filmmaking is a highly collaborative art form. *The Sapphires* was Wayne Blair's first feature film production as a director and he worked in collaboration with the rest of the team including cinematographer, Warwick Thornton, who is himself a renowned director.

- List the creative and technical roles integral to the success of a film. (You can use the IMDB website as a resource <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1673697/>)
- Focus on one of these roles, find out what it involves and describe the contribution of this individual or team to the film.
- In her review, Fiona Williams briefly acknowledges the work of some of the key members of the team involved in *The Sapphires*: 'Good times rule in Wayne Blair's soulful adaptation' <http://www.sbs.com.au/movies/movie/sapphires>. Write a review of *The Sapphires* that acknowledges the contribution of some of the filmmaking team that you feel made a particularly effective contribution.
- Wayne Blair has worked extensively as an actor. How do you think this might influence his approach to directing?

The supervising sound editor for *The Sapphires* was Andrew Plain who recorded up to 70 different tracks for each song, using both modern and 1960s microphones. These were then mixed down to 12 tracks and played back to the actors on set for them to sing along with during filming. "They weren't allowed to mime, because miming looks quite different as throat muscles move quite differently," Plains says. "Then all of that, the stuff that was sung on set and all the original tracks were given back to us" (From 'A Decade of Soul', *Inside Film*, 28 151, February-March 2013).

- Does this inside information about the recording and design of the music add to your appreciation of the film? Explain.
- Watch this excerpt from an interview with Warwick Thornton and consider the benefits of a film set run on the principles of love: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/gallery/media/warwick-thornton-collaboration>. Do you think this kind of working relationship based on love and respect might be considered particularly important by an Indigenous filmmaker working to tell an Indigenous story featuring Indigenous actors?

Film Analysis in the Classroom

Reading the Film

The Sapphires is a rich film text, exploring a range of topics, events and themes. It is driven by a rapidly paced narrative and rewards close analysis.

- Use this resource to engage in a detailed exploration of the film language and storytelling techniques used in *The Sapphires*.
- Divide the class into groups and ask each group to focus on a particular character or character-grouping and complete the character-mapping exercise.
- After groups report back to the class, discuss and debate the observations made and the conclusions drawn.
- Give each of these groups a different scene or sequence from *The Sapphires*. They should use the prompts and questions in the Film Analysis in the Classroom kit to read and analyse the scene they have been allocated.
- Play each scene to the class, listen to the observations and conclusions reached by the respective groups and then share ideas as a class.
- Following this group exercise, ask each student to present a written response to a particular scene, using close analysis techniques and explaining how the scene relates to the narrative as a whole.

Characterisation

Character Mapping

A character mapping exercise can often help us to understand how the filmmakers have developed a character.

1. View the film, then use a table, such as the one on the following page, to record notes about the personality of the main characters.
2. You might also consider a range of secondary characters and their narrative purpose. Think about how each character is represented then discuss:
 - a. Appearance/physical attributes: How is the character presented visually via facial look, body shape, costuming? What does it suggest about the character?
 - b. Design: How does the design of the character help to achieve believability? How does design encourage the audience to feel empathy for the character?
 - c. Voice: How do the character's words and voice (tone, inflection, and timbre) help to establish the character? What does it suggest about the character?
 - d. Action: How do the character's actions and behaviours help to establish the character? What other personal traits are evident? Describe the character's motivations, fears and desires.
 - e. Role: How does the character relate to the other main character or to other characters? What effects does the character's behaviour have? Describe the character's role in the overall storyline.
 - f. Framing: Where is the character placed in the frame? What else is placed in the frame with the character? What shot types and angles are used?

CHARACTER PROFILE

Character design	Character name	Character name
Physical appearance – key features of character’s face and hair		
Physical appearance – key features of character’s body		
Costume		
Sound of the voice (tone, inflection, timbre)		
Key phrases		
Key movements, mannerisms, gestures		

Other personal traits		
Motivations, fears, desires		
Relationships with other characters		
Effects of the character's behaviour		

Narrative

Setting

- How does the setting relate to the narrative? In other words, why has a background, location or set for a particular scene/sequence been chosen?
- Are any of the props significant?
- How do the mood and ambience of the setting create meanings for an audience?

Structuring of Time

- Investigate how the narrative manipulates time. How are events ordered? For instance, are events chronological or is use made of flashback or flash forward?
- Explore the duration of events, that is, the expansion or contraction of time.
- How frequently are events or scenes shown in comparison with their presumed occurrence and existence?

Point of View (POV) from which the Narrative is Presented

- From whose POV is the narrative presented?
- Do we see the narrative through one character's eyes or more than one? Why? What are the effects of this?
- Is the POV other than that of the characters? To what effect?
- What story information is given or withheld at different points in the narrative?
- What effect does this have? How is POV technically communicated to an audience?

Cause and Effect

- What motivates the characters?
- How do the characters affect the events that take place?
- Describe the events that are out of the characters' control and their consequences.

Opening and Closure

- Are conflicts, motivations and issues resolved or unresolved by the end of the film?
- What expectations are established in the beginning and resolved or remain unresolved at the end?
- How are character developments, themes/issues and resolutions dealt with in the closing sequences?

Narration

- Why do we have a narrator?
- Comment on the tone and the rhythm of the narration.

Themes and Issues

- What themes and issues are introduced and how are they developed and explored?

- Are certain themes and issues exclusively related to particular characters? How do the themes and issues work in with the storyline?

Close Analysis: Production Elements

Camerawork

- What different angles (high, low, eye level, aerial) and movement of shots (shot reverse shot, panning, tracking, tilting) can you identify in a key scene?
- Consider distance of shots (i.e. close-up, mid shots, long shots and extremes of this), shot size and camera movement in a key scene.
- What meaning is created for an audience by using different shot sizes, movement and camera angles?
- Duration of shot on screen: what impact/effect does the concentration of the length of a shot have on the audience?
- How does the camerawork inform the audience about a character's motivations, create identification with characters and communicate their relationship to the story?
- How is an audience's engagement with the narrative created by the choice of camerawork?

Lighting

- Is the lighting natural/artificial, realistic or expressive? How does it set a mood or create an atmosphere?
- Why and how effective is this?
- Are any lighting effects used, for example, to emphasis an object, a character or an action? Explain.

Mise-en-Scène

The way each shot is composed within the frame has an effect on the way we respond to the narrative. Composition relates to the production elements and story elements.

Look at how the following aspects of composition are arranged in particular scenes or in a sequence:

- Setting and set design
- Costumes and objects
- Colours
- Arrangement and movement within the frame
- Spatial relations between objects and characters (spacing)
- Framing: how is the shot framed, that is how is it positioned within the square of the frame?

Freeze-Frame a Scene

For a clear analysis of mise-en-scène, freeze on a selected frame of a scene and discuss the mise-en-scène and its relationship to the narrative. Consider the following in your discussion and analysis:

- Lighting: how are shadows and patterns used to create mood, atmosphere and meanings?
- Framing: What is in the frame? What has been left out?
- Placement of objects: How are objects placed within the frame and why?
- Setting/location: Where is the action located and why?
- Where are the characters placed within the frame and why.

Editing

- How does placement, timing, and the rhythm of the editing affect the mood of a sequence and of the overall film?
- How do the shots relate to each other visually and aurally – image to image, sound to sound, image to sound?

Sound

Listen to the sound of the film.

- How is atmosphere created via the sound design? Consider the music, sound effects (including atmospheric sound) and what they convey. Look at the way any dialogue or narration is recorded.
- How does the soundtrack relate to the storylines, themes and issues of the narrative, characters and plot? Focus on both diegetic and non-diegetic sound.
- Reflect on the use of music – how does it add to the meanings associated with each character?
- How has music been used to support themes and tell the story?
- How do the layers (atmosphere, dialogue, sound effects and music) work together to create the sound design?
- Are there any special or unconventional applications and explorations of sound design? Explain.

Acting/Performance

- How does the actor's performance contribute to the characterisation?
- Does the actor bring associations from outside the narrative to the character?
- What effect does this create in terms of character believability/acceptance?
- Does an audience have empathy for the characters? How is this achieved?
- Are there characters who repel the audience? Why?