**Australian Rules**

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| **Year Level:** | Senior Secondary and Tertiary |
| **Curriculum Study Areas:** |  |
| **Themes/Topics:** | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Australian studies; belonging; bullying; character; communities; multicultural perspectives; social responsibility; stereotypes; storytelling |
| **Description:** | The feature film Australian Rules is adapted from Philip Gwynne’s book, “Deadly Unna?”. The book won the Children’s Book Council of Australia’s Book of the Year for Older Readers Award in 1999, and was highly praised for its reconciliation message. The film is a story of mateship and love that is both confronting and sensitive. It clearly takes a strong anti-racist stance. |
| **Resources:** |  |

**About:**

Australian Rules is the story of 16 year old Gary Black – average football player, budding wordsmith and reluctant hero. It is set in a remote South Australian fishing town in the week before the biggest event to occur in the town for a long time; the Football Grand Final. Gary helps his local team win the local championship by accident, but celebrations turn to violence when Gary’s Aboriginal best friend, Dumby Red, is denied the “Best and Fairest” medal because of the racism of local officials. In a night when the town’s long-simmering racial tensions boil over, Dumby Red is shot and killed and Gary, making a courageous personal stand, confronts the insidious racism in the town and his own father. Australian Rules offers a rich examination of identity and ‘manhood’ in Australia, and a powerful study of race relations.

Australian Rules encourages the development of detailed and balanced understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but also issues and concerns we all share.

Gwyne used real nicknames and drew on a real incident in which a white publican in a 1977 pub shooting killed Two Point Pearce youths. Because of this, the book and the film, directed by Paul Goodman, have excited a great deal of controversy. These are explored in the article by Peter Ellingsen.

Other controversies have been about the depiction of indigenous characters, violent scenes, and the depictions of domestic violence. Clearly though, there is evidence that young people find the film engaging and thought provoking, and are very willing to talk critically about the issues. Students are moved by the power of the story, and see the film as a very strong statement encouraging the message of reconciliation.

Film is a powerful medium through which to confront and motivate young people to think critically about indigenous issues. Teachers often admit to feeling inadequately prepared to design and deliver teaching and learning activities about these issues. So films opening up these themes are of considerable value, particularly if they are able to celebrate stories of reconciliation as well as face unpleasant truths. Australian Rules also lays bare the stresses of family and social life in a fringe rural seaside community, where many of the young people are bored and aimless and others, like Gary Black, simply don’t fit into local social mores.