Tracks

The text


Additional resources

- ABC TV, Talking Heads with Robyn Davidson, 1 Oct 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMWBYYqcsVI
  (Note: This video contains images of deceased Indigenous people.)

The following questions are intended to provide a broad starting point for developing a Comparing Texts unit plan.

Themes, issues and ideas

What are the central themes, issues and ideas in the book that connect with Into the Wild? A few examples might be:

- **Themes** (broad concepts): freedom, rules, commercialism, family, social expectations, human interaction with the environment and animals, happiness and fulfilment, personal journeys, respecting Indigenous culture
- **Issues** (question the themes): What effects do money / connection with others / social expectations have on our happiness? Can a person ever be truly free? Is it possible to live without money? Can you ‘heal yourself’ with a journey alone through nature?
- **Ideas** (points of view on the issues): Being isolated from other people is dangerous. Social conventions do more harm than good. Survival in the wild requires more than determination.

Which of these intersect with those explored in Into the Wild? Do they present the same perspectives or do they contrast? Map out the development of each key theme, issue and idea as it is explored in each text and discuss how the comparison raises questions about these central themes that might otherwise not be evident from a study of only one of the texts.

Features

How would you describe the genre of the book? Is it a memoir? A travel story?
The narrative structure
How do the sections help to map Davidson’s journey? Why are they titled in this way? Are they of even length with the same number of chapters in each? What timeframes exist in each? Are they chronological? What additional content is included and where? (Consider the epigraph, the map, Rick’s photos and the postscript.)

Characterisation
How is Davidson portrayed? Are we supposed to like her? Want to be like her? How is her family portrayed? Who does she connect with? Who is she annoyed, repulsed or frightened by? What language does Davidson use to describe these people? What does each of the characters add to our understanding of her character and the central ideas of the text? Are the animals also characters? Consider the roles that Diggity and the camels play.

The geographical settings
Where does Davidson go? Was she properly prepared? How do the locals respond to her in each place? What is her attitude to the land she crosses? How might the landscape (or aspects of it) represent specific stages of her emotional journey? If the landscape/s might be thought of as a character in the text, what role does it play?

The social context/s
When and where is the book set? What is valued and by whom in each of the places she travels to and through? What is considered normal? What expectations are placed on young women in these places at this time? What glimpses do we get of Davidson’s upbringing and life before the journey? Does the film offer a critique of Australian society generally, or only of certain aspects or places?

The literary features
What impact does the first-person narration have on our connection with the story? Do you think the use of the past tense (and the fact the book was written some time after her journey, and based on her diaries) has an impact on the way in which the story is constructed? Is there a sense of ‘reconstructing’ a tale about the trip? Does this give some distance and perspective that lessens the urgency and tension? How do the letters (first person, present tense) and quotations that she incorporates balance or contrast with the first-person, past tense narration? Explore Davidson’s use of description and imagery – does she achieve her stated aim of remaining ‘dispassionate’ about her experiences?

The intertextual elements
How do the references to literary works impact on the reader’s view of Davidson? How do they help viewers to understand her ‘quest’?

Big questions to discuss in your faculty
- How will you deal with the inevitable discussions about the restrictions placed on young people by society, especially if you are in a conservative school?
- How will you navigate the potential trigger issues of violence, racism, misogyny, depression, suicidal ideation and death? Are there students or staff who might need support?
- How will you address the racism against Indigenous Australians that Davidson describes – especially when there is no direct parallel explored in Into the Wild?