



Revision Notes: *Rainbow's End*

Aim of revision notes:

For students:

- To enhance their understanding of the concept of 'human experiences' in *Rainbow's End* by Jane Harrison
- To make clear the techniques employed in *Rainbow's End* to represent human experiences


Outline of workshop:

- How *Rainbow's End* relates to human experiences
- How the setting relates to human experiences
- How language forms and features relate to human experiences



How *Rainbow's End* relates to human experiences

- ❖ Depicts misunderstandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- ❖ This prevents Indigenous Australians from developing a sense of security and connection with other in a white-dominated society.



How *Rainbow's End* relates to human experiences

Misunderstanding and exclusion

- Difference in cultural values and ideas
- Segregation and inequality

Security, education and connection

- Government policies create insecurity
- Lack of Aboriginal education
- Education, the key to a better life

The strength of family

- Inner strength and resilience are closely linked to the strength of the family and the relationships within the families.



Misunderstanding and exclusion

- Gladys listens to the radio.
- Hears Queen Elizabeth II expressing her joy at being among the people on 'Australian soil'.
- Ironically, the reference to 'birthplace of a nation' neglects to acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal people before European settlement.



Difference in cultural values and ideas

- The 'family tree' is symbolic of the misinterpretation of cultural values and ideas.
- Nan Dear presumes that a family tree refers to the 'biyala', the 'spirit tree' with 'branches hanging low over the river'.
- Nan Dear understands family through its connection to the earth as the provider of life.
- Homework requires a more Western interpretation of a family tree.



Segregation and inequality

- Segregation of Aboriginal community prevents connection within the dominant white society.
- Gladys, Dolly and Nan Dear live in a humpy on the other side of the tracks to the white community, in a floodplain.



Segregation and inequality

- Images of separation and inequality emphasise the differences between Aboriginal and white society.
- In Gladys' speech at the end of the play, she wonders why 'we have to prove we can live like whitefellas, before we get the same opportunities'.



Segregation and inequality

- Dolly warns Errol that they will be looked at if they go to the dance together, as she is Aboriginal and he is not.
- The inspector's view is that Aboriginal people should assimilate into white culture by being 'absorbed into the community ... until he learns to live like us'.



Security, education and human experiences

- One of the greatest problems facing Nan, Gladys and Dolly is their insecure housing situation.
- The flooding of their humpy and the lack of electricity mean their living standards are much lower than those of the white community.



Government policies create insecurity

- Government policies perpetuate the status quo as Aboriginal people are not able to move forward and gain control of their lives like the rest of society.



Lack of Aboriginal education

- Many Aboriginal people like Gladys are unable to write letters (as the inspector suggests).
- Gladys unable to read or write because the mission managers where she grew up were neglectful, and she was sent off into domestic service.
- Education was not a priority for Aboriginal people of Gladys' generation.



Education, the key to a better life

- Gladys' perceives education as the key to improving the quality of life and to in some way belong.
- Shown through her determination to provide better opportunities for her daughter, and through her own attempt to read and write.



Education, the key to a better life

- Gladys begins to develop 'power' when she strongly voices her opinion on the state of Aboriginal housing at the shire council meeting broadcast over the radio.
- The chairman attempts to cut her off and silence her, but she is persistent.
- Her final triumph is demonstrated through her reading of the petition at the public meeting in place of her father.



Education, the key to a better life

- Hopeful resolution that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will move forward together in a new partnership.



The strength of family

- Inner strength and resilience are closely linked to the strength of the family and the relationships within the families.



The strength of family

- Errol thinks to take Dolly away from her family in order to give her a better life.
- Suggests they get a small flat in the city with a sitting-room and a 'real stove', with no room for visitors to stay.
- He thinks it would be better than what she has now.
- Errol thinks material possessions will provide Dolly with a 'real home'.



The strength of family

- Dolly is horrified at the thought of leaving the river and her family.
- To her, a home is not defined by the objects in it, but by the people she loves and spends time with.
- She rejects his offer, saying that 'This is my place. I am staying right here with my mum and my Nan'.
- Later, when Errol returns, he demonstrates his understanding of her family bond, saying, 'where you belong, and your family, is important'.

How the setting relates to human experiences

- The setting illustrates the difficulty Aboriginal people have connecting both physically and emotionally within the dominant white society.
- The setting is rural Australia in an Aboriginal housing estate. The play takes place in three main locations.
 - The Flats
 - Rumbalara
 - Daisch's tip



Setting: The Flats

- This is the area between Shepparton and Mooroopra where Aboriginal people live on the fringes of society. The Flats are on the floodplain.
- The play opens as the family is recovering after the devastation of another flood.



Setting: The Flats

- Their home is 'sodden' and 'mud-splattered', possessions destroyed.
- The family cannot settle down, not only because they hope for better housing, but because the floods invariably lead to movement.
- Despite this insecurity, their sense of family in their home at the Flats is what gives them a sense of belonging and security.



Setting: Rumbalara

- The new housing estate that Nan, Gladys and Dolly move to has houses made of concrete which are 'featureless' and 'anything but lovable'.
- It is an oppressive place to live as the rent collectors constantly invade the inhabitants' privacy and tell the inhabitants what to do.



Setting: Daisch's tip

- Dolly goes to the tip to collect things for the home.
- Dolly is humiliated at the school dance by Nancy, who publicly declares that Dolly's dress was made from curtains her family discarded at the tip.
- She collects lino for the new house at the tip.



How language forms and features relate to human experiences

- The various techniques highlights:
 - The barrier to connection within the dominate culture the Aboriginal people experience
 - Their determination to have a voice within the dominant culture.
- Some language forms and features include:
 - Stage directions
 - Symbolism
 - Imagery

How language forms and features relate to human experiences

Stage directions

- The stage directions provide for several dream sequences which give insights into the spirit of these characters and the effects of their human experiences in society.
- Represents the harsh realities of their lives.



Stage directions: Dream sequence

- Gladys imagines herself meeting the Queen, presenting her with flowers.
- When the lights come on she is holding weeds.



Stage directions: Dream sequence

- Symbolically represents the limitations of her dreams becoming a reality.
- She does not belong in the dominant culture, despite her desire and attempts to connect with others.



Stage directions: Dream sequence

- Gladys is the eternal optimist - her dreams reflect this – shows her struggle to overcome the adversity she faces in her life because she is Aboriginal.



Stage directions: Dream sequences

- The juxtaposition of Dolly at the tip and her dream of the salesman selling expensive linoleum represents the wasteful nature of people in society who hold the power and the wealth.
- The lino also symbolises Dolly's desire for secure ground to live on.
- She wishes that she did not have to scrounge for things at the tip, but could afford to buy possessions like the wealthy (white) members of society.



Symbolism: Material possessions

- Racist attitudes are represented through the material possessions that are withheld from the Aboriginal people.
- This represents their marginalisation in society.
- When Gladys is at the bank, the bank manager pours a cup of tea into one of the two china cups.
- He hands her an expensive fountain pen which she does not know what to do with.



Symbolism: Mink stole

- The mink stole Gladys dreams of winning on the quiz show represents her desire to be part of the dominant culture and be valued within that society.



Symbolism: Encyclopaedias

- To Gladys, the encyclopaedias represent an opportunity for her daughter's advancement.
- Nan Dear reads these books when Gladys is not around.
- The destruction of the encyclopaedias shows the difficulties Aboriginal people face in overcoming their adversity.



Symbolism: Cork trees

- The cork trees symbolise the disillusionment of the Aboriginal people.
- Represents the insecurity and the obstacles to living prosperously in a society that so severely marginalises them.



Symbolism: Cork trees

- The trees are a place where disillusioned Aboriginal people meet.
- Their pain and frustration are destructive forces, causing violence and dissipation.
- Shown when Ester goes to drink under the cork trees when one of her boys is taken from her.



Symbolism: Cork trees

- Also shown when the cousin who tries to lure Dolly under the trees accuses her of thinking she is too good for the rest of the community.
- Dolly's family is trying to fight against the destructive elements in their own culture and those of the dominant culture as well.



Symbolism

- It seems that no matter what they do, they cannot rise above their circumstances.
- However, through strength of will, the family create better opportunities for the future as Dolly is awarded a scholarship for nursing and Gladys learns to read.



Imagery

- Harrison uses metaphors, similes and visual images to represent the ineffective system of providing government housing for Aboriginal people.

Imagery: The hessian

- During the Queen's visit, hessian is placed along the road to cover up the poor state of the Aboriginal housing, like a 'band-aid over a sore'.
- The temporary housing:
 - maintains the disadvantage of the Aboriginal people
 - is a source of embarrassment for the government during the Queen's visit.
- The hessian illuminates the humiliation and embarrassment the Aboriginal people would have felt daily.



Imagery: connection to the land

- The connection to the land is at the heart of human experiences for Aboriginal people.
- Gladys speaks on the radio: “I’m not an interloper—I belong here—this is my land!”:
 - Gladys will not be silenced by those in power in society
 - She shows that she belongs through her connection to the land and her home.



Imagery: connection to the land

- The authorities consistently attempt to prevent Aboriginal people from belonging and being valued in society through their control of the land and homes they live in.



Imagery: Family and human experiences

- Images of family show the strength of the family unit in creating a sense of love and connection.
- Their sense of belonging is often disrupted by the ineffective government policies of the time.



Imagery: Family and human experiences

- Ester's boys take Errol's bike and they all pile on top of it, in an image of solidarity.
- The bike is a novelty for the children and provides simple enjoyment.
- Contrasted with the image of Ester, down at the cork trees, getting drunk after her boy is 'taken away'.



Imagery: Unity of Aboriginal community

- Gladys encompasses the unity of her people when she reads the petition.
- She repetitively refers to 'we' and uses concrete imagery to create an image of the poor living conditions of the Aboriginal community.



Imagery: Unity of Aboriginal community

- Gladys says that 'we're watched over like a bunch of cheeky kids' and not even granted citizen status.
- She shows that Aboriginal people do not even have freedom in their own homes.



Imagery: Unity of Aboriginal community

- When Gladys begins to read from the petition, the language she uses changes to a more formal dialogue.
- This is the language of the dominant culture and serves to show that the Aboriginal people can also have control in this society and be successful.



Imagery: Unity of Aboriginal community

- Gladys concludes the petition with her own ideas on how to improve the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people:
 - She wants her mother to not be served last in the butcher's shop
 - For people to say 'Hello' to each other on the street,
 - And for white people to not 'cross the road to avoid us like we're lepers'.



Imagery: Unity of Aboriginal community

- The union between Errol and Dolly at the end of the play symbolises this idea of unity.
- There is hope for the future.

More Information

- **Writer:** Shelley McNamara
- More resources by the presenter
 - www.qwiller.com.au
 - *NSW HSC English: Common Module – Texts and Human Experiences* (includes a chapter on *Rainbow's End*)
 - *NSW HSC English Standard Modules NSW HSC Advanced English Modules*
 - *NSW HSC English EAL/D Modules* (includes a chapter on *Rainbow's End*)