

THE SNOWMAN



A lost father
A thirty-year-old conspiracy
A daughter's journey to uncover the truth

A film by Juliet Lamont



A STUDY GUIDE BY KATE RAYNOR



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'The war is ceaseless. The most we can hope for are occasional moments of tranquillity in the midst of the conflict.'

Introduction

In 1978, 34-year-old Scottish climber Jimmy Graham went to Antarctica with Operation Deep Freeze to train scientists in survival skills on the ice. It was his dream job, full of adventure and challenge. He left his young family in Australia in December of that year, intending to stay at the Pole for six months. Three months later he was shipped home, agitated and paranoid, claiming that he had stumbled onto an illegal nuclear site and that the CIA had given him a chemical lobotomy. His descent into madness was stark and terrifying for those who loved him. Unable to cope with his erratic and dangerous behaviour, Frances, his wife, fled with their two children, Juliet and Sean. Thirty years later, Juliet tries to uncover the real story and reconnect with what is left of the man she called her father. *The Snowman* is her compelling account of this journey. She tracks Jimmy down to a country town some five hours drive away from where she lives in Sydney with her husband and two daughters. He is leading a marginal, alcoholic life and has not worked since his return from Antarctica. Just what happened to Jimmy to push him so irrevocably over the edge? Pieces of this puzzle lie scattered across the globe. Juliet demonstrates the tenacity and fortitude of an Arctic explorer herself, taking us on her sometimes harrowing personal adventure to New Zealand, America, Antarctica, Scotland and Ireland, in search of some kind of truth that might heal the icy rift in Jimmy and their family.

Curriculum Links

The Snowman is an intriguing personal documentary touching on a variety of themes, including: identity; family; relationships; memory; personal history; and madness. It is a valuable text for use in the classroom because of the complex and challenging ways in which it explores these issues. It would be well suited to use in middle



FAST FACTS

ANTARCTICA: McMurdo Station

- Average mean sea-level temperature: -20°C
- Monthly mean range: -3°C in January to -28°C in August
- Stormiest months: February and October

Source: U.S. National Science Foundation

and senior secondary English, Cultural Studies and Psychology, and has particular relevance for the VCE English Year 11 Identity strand.

The family will always be an inherently fascinating topic: at some level, even the most isolated among us are members of this basic unit of human connection and relationship. Reflecting on the family as a primal grouping allows students to explore their own memories and experiences in a wider social context. Madness is also a topic of profound importance. However it might have come about, Jimmy's mental health is in disarray. With some government health bodies claiming that at least one in ten Australians will experience mental health issues during the course of their lives, this film provides a really important forum for exploring and addressing the stigma attached to mental illness.

Teachers please note: the film contains coarse language.

THE SNOWMAN CHARACTERS

JULIET LAMONT – Jimmy's daughter and the film's director
SEAN LAMONT – Jimmy's son, Juliet's younger brother
FRANCES LAMONT – Juliet and Sean's mother and Jimmy's ex-wife
YANNI HOLIASTOS – cafe owner
ZAC VERSEGI – barista
BILL ROWLINGS – publican
HAMISH SMALL – old friend
ANDY COLVIN – climbing friend
SHEILA MCLEAN – family friend
RICK REYNOLDS – hippie
BRUCE WILSON – hippie
TIM OATES – hermit
ELAINE ALLY – Elands resident
LOU SANSON – CEO Antarctica New Zealand
CARL THOMSON – Operation Deep Freeze, Survival Trainer 1978
DREW BROWN – Operation Deep Freeze, Survival Trainer 1978
COLIN MONTEATH – Operation Deep Freeze
RICHARD L. HORTON – Operation Deep Freeze, Public Affairs Officer 1978
JIM LANDY – Operation Deep Freeze, Mechanic 1978
PETER CLEARY – Operation Deep Freeze, Dog Handler 1978
ED HAMBLIN – Operation Deep Freeze, Storekeeper 1978

ANTARCTIC EXPEDITIONS

International agreements

1932–33	International Polar Year
1957–58	International Geophysical Year
1959	Antarctic Treaty System

British Empire/Commonwealth

1901–04	Scott's first expedition
1907–09	Shackleton's first expedition
1910–13	Scott's second expedition
1911–14	Mawson's first expedition
1914–17	Shackleton's second expedition
1921–22	Shackleton's third expedition
1929–31	Mawson's second expedition
1934–37	Graham Land expedition
1943–45	Operation Tabarin
1955–58	Trans-Antarctic Expedition

France

1903–05	Charcot's first expedition
1908–10	Charcot's second expedition

Germany

1901–03	Drygalski expedition
1911–12	Filchner expedition
1938–39	New Swabia expedition

Norway

1910–12	Amundsen expedition
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United States

1928–30	Byrd's first expedition
1946–47	Operation Highjump
1947–48	Operation Windmill
1947–48	Ronne expedition
1955–56	Operation Deep Freeze

(See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Antarctic_expeditions>.)



Activities & Discussion Points

The main aim of this guide is to present a wide variety of teaching and learning opportunities based on the film, ranging in sophistication and complexity. Teachers are encouraged to pick and choose tasks that suit the particular interests and abilities of their students – not to work through the guide systematically. Most of the activities target literacy outcomes: speaking and listening, reading and writing. There are also activities that address film analysis, ICT and creative thinking. The statements presented in quotation marks are intended to be controversial and can be used in a number of ways: as the focus for discussion, debate or oral presentations; and as a direction for further research, analysis or creative writing tasks.

Jimmy: 'Something that burnt a hole in his soul ...'

'I'm OK, sort of.'

– Jimmy

- Write two character profiles of Jimmy, one detailing the kind of person he was prior to 1978, the other describing the man we meet in the film. Where possible, identify the sources of information you use in piecing together the portrait. (For instance, he's described by old friend Hamish Small, who knew him in Scotland, as 'a cocky wee

bugger with a sharp mind and a mischievous sense of humour' – very different to the impression he has created on publican Bill Rowlings who has only known him as a heavy-drinking recluse.)

- How does Jimmy spend his days? Is Jimmy an alcoholic?
- Juliet says that after his return from Antarctica Jimmy was never the same again: 'his mind a blizzard, his heart frozen'. Is Jimmy still capable of love?
- Discuss the account of Jimmy's experience at the anti-Vietnam War demonstration in London, his arrest for the possession of marbles and his subsequent beating by police. What does this anecdote tell us about Jimmy, his background and his beliefs?
- What sort of husband and father was Jimmy prior to the trip to Antarctica? What evidence is there to suggest Jimmy was very focused on his family? Describe Jimmy and Frances' marriage.
- Why was Jimmy's job with the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation particularly important? (It was through this position that he discovered about Operation Deep Freeze.)
- What aspects of mountain climbing did Jimmy specialize in that made him well suited for Operation Deep Freeze? (ice and snow climbing)
- Describe Jimmy's speech patterns and style of speech. Consider his verbal tics, 'whatever', 'sort of', 'mate'. What can we learn about

FAST FACTS

ANTARCTICA:

- Coldest, highest, windiest continent in the world.
- Highest recorded wind velocity: 199 mph (327 km/h), Dumont d'Urville, July 1972.

Source: Australian Government Antarctica Division



him just from listening to him speak? Compile a list of the odd things Jimmy says over the course of the film (a few of my favourites: 'I reckon dogs have got Chinese hats'; 'the marriage of a million years'; and 'I reckon the whales got me'.) Imagine that these are secretly coded messages. Explain the deeper meaning of one of his peculiar utterings.

- Jimmy gives Juliet a book and draws her attention to a particular passage: 'The war is ceaseless. The most we can hope for are occasional moments of tranquillity in the midst of the conflict'. Juliet is moved to tears. What do you think she is feeling here and why do these words touch her so deeply?
- Juliet sends Jimmy a couple of disposable cameras, hoping to learn something about how Jimmy sees the world. What do you think his photos reveal? Do you think this activity allows one to step into

another person's point of view? If someone sent you a camera with similar instructions, what would you choose to photograph and what might this say about you?

- Do you think the experience of making this film and reconnecting with his family has any impact on Jimmy, or is he so shut off in his own world that nothing can really touch him?

Tales of Ordinary Madness?

'I'm going; he's fucking mad.' – Frances

- Do you think Jimmy is mad? Why? What is the difference between mad and sane? Draw up a table with two columns, 'A Guide to the Mad and the Sane'.
- Compile a list of the things that could drive someone mad. (Grief, guilt, isolation, abuse, drugs ...) Do you think it is possible to identify

one key factor, what Juliet calls The Thing, to explain someone's breakdown?

- Juliet says that Jimmy's mind is 'unknowable'. Isn't this ultimately true of all of our experiences of the other?
- What were some of the more extreme manifestations of Jimmy's paranoia? (At one point he thought aliens were after the family and he hid the children in the woods for two days; when Sean was about five, Jimmy came to believe he was not his son and threw beer cans at him; on another occasion he kidnapped Juliet and took her to Scotland.)
- Both Sean and Juliet confess to

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fearing that they too might go mad. Do you agree with Sean that this fear lurks in the back of everyone's minds?

- Has Jimmy suffered more than Frances and his children?
- Do you think Jimmy has ever sought medical attention for his mental problems? Why/why not? Do you think he might benefit from some sort of treatment or therapy?
- Do you think there is anything that could have been done for Jimmy upon his return from Antarctica that might have improved his outcome?
- Several hypotheses are presented to explain Jimmy's dramatic transformation during his trip to Antarctica, including: the CIA administered a chemical lobotomy because he had stumbled upon evidence of nuclear experiments; guilt over an extra-marital affair that might have resulted in a child; and a psychotic drug experience. Which explanation do you find

the most convincing? Why? What evidence does the film present to persuade you? Write your own imaginative account of something that could have happened to Jimmy in Antarctica to push him over the edge.

- What does Frances think actually happened to Jimmy? Why might she prefer to think the CIA destroyed Jimmy's mind over the alternative explanations?
- Define paranoia and discuss the paradox at its heart: one of the symptoms of madness is paranoia, but just because you're mad doesn't mean that someone isn't really out to get you ...
- Juliet includes footage from an American television program called *Close-up* to support the possibility that Jimmy's claim to have been drugged by the CIA might be true. Is this a credible source of information? The drug mentioned is a mescaline-derivative. What can you find out about mescaline and

its effects? It is alleged that the drug was administered in order to induce schizophrenic symptoms. What aspects of Jimmy's behaviour might correlate with this? (Consider, for example, his paranoia and aural hallucinations.)

Mescaline: Psychedelic drug derived from a small, spineless cactus *Lophophora williamsii* of northern Mexico and the southwest USA, known as peyote. The tops (called mescal buttons), which scarcely appear above ground, are dried and chewed, or added to alcoholic drinks. Mescaline is a crystalline alkaloid $C_{11}H_{17}NO_3$. It is used by some North American Indians in religious rites. (See <<http://encyclopedia.farlex.com/Mescaline>>.)

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- It is claimed that the CIA were experimenting in biological and chemical controls of human behaviour. Make a list of all the biological and chemical factors that influence your behaviour. (Think laterally with this one: sleep, diet, caffeine, nicotine, hours of daylight, weather, hormones, medications ...)
- If Juliet could prove the culpability of the CIA in Jimmy's breakdown, do you think he would be entitled to compensation? If so, how much?
- Put yourself in Frances' shoes: what would you do if someone close to you started manifesting psychotic behaviour such as Jimmy's?
- The Sane website factsheet on schizophrenia says: 'The causes of schizophrenia are not fully understood. They are likely to be a combination of hereditary and other factors. It is probable that some people are born with a predisposition to develop this kind of illness, and that certain things – for example, stress or use of drugs such as marijuana, LSD or speed – can trigger their first episode'. Do you think there are aspects of Jimmy's personality prior to his experience in Antarctica that might have predisposed him to such a severe breakdown? (Please note: the film never explicitly names Jimmy's condition.)
- Design a fact sheet on schizophrenia. Include basic, accessible information about symptoms, possible treatments and sources of further information.
- Write up a ten-point guide on how to support someone with a severe mental illness.
- 'Madness can be a refuge or a retreat.' Discuss.
- 'At some level we're all mad.' Discuss.
- Debate topic: 'Madness is the final taboo.'

All in the Family: Relationships, History, Memory

- Discuss Juliet's opening narration, over sweeping aerial shots of the majestic Antarctic landscape: 'When I was seven years old my dad went on a very big adventure'. Write an account of your family life at seven years old and your relationship with your father. Discuss the Jesuit quote that formed the basis of Michael Apted's *7-Up*

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series: 'Give me a child until he (sic) is seven and I will give you the man'.

- Write a biographical account of an experience after which you or your family were 'never the same again'.
- Discuss the ramifications of Jimmy's erratic behaviour on his family and children. What effect did Jimmy's breakdown have on Sean? (Consider Sean's admission to struggling with drugs and depression.)
- Make a 'Cause & Effect Chart', identifying and imagining all the possible effects of Jimmy's madness on his family.
- What effect might Juliet's troubled childhood experiences have had on her as a mother; in her personal relationships; and in terms of her disposition and attitudes to life? Can you trace the effects of certain childhood experiences and relationships on the person you have become?

- Change One Element: re-write the story of Jimmy and his family as it might have been had he not gone to Antarctica. Explore the idea of consequences, how one decision can change the course of lives in ways that cannot be predicted.
- In what sense is Jimmy 'lost' to his family? Do you think he would ever have sought contact with Juliet? Is it possible that Jimmy's loss to his family is somehow even more profound than if he had actually died in Antarctica?
- Why do you think it's Juliet and not Sean who goes in search of Jimmy?
- Write a letter to Jimmy from Frances, explaining how you feel about the end of your marriage.
- How did Juliet come to end up in Australia? (Frances was fed up with the Scottish rain and booked a £99 passage for the family, without consulting Jimmy.) Write an account of how you came to end

up where you are now.

- Jimmy and his family settled in an alternative community in the mountains, called Elands. What is meant by the word 'alternative' here? Alternative to what? What values might we assume people who live this way choose? Was it a good experience for the children of the community? Why/why not? How might Juliet's childhood at Elands have differed to a child growing up in an outer suburb or an inner-city housing commission block? What experiences and locations defined your childhood?
- How does Jimmy react to meeting his granddaughters? Write an account of Jimmy from Juliet's nine-year-old daughter's perspective. What do you think of your grand-

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father? Write an account of your own relationship with one of your grandparents. Does your grandparent value different things and see the world differently because of their age and experiences?

- 'Every family has someone crazy in it: sometimes you just have to dig a little to find them.' Discuss.
- Juliet takes a nostalgic trip to Scotland with her mother and her brother. Imagine you wanted to somehow go back to your roots and explore the early experiences that helped shape you. Where would you go and who would you want to go with you? Design an identity map of key locations in your past.
- Why does Sean find it reassuring to see a photograph of his father as a young man hanging on the wall of a Scottish pub? (It somehow gives him some sort of reality: he was here.)
- Can you understand why it is still

so painful for Frances to contemplate the possibility that Jimmy had an affair some thirty-five years ago? Do you think Juliet is insensitive in how she handles this? Why does Juliet feel she's betraying her friendship with her mother by meeting Shonagh? Why might Shonagh have agreed to meet Juliet? What does Shonagh have to gain/lose from telling the truth about her relationship with Jimmy? Do you think Shonagh is lying? Why does Juliet think this?

A Hunger To See The World: Antarctica and Operation Deep Freeze

- In small groups, research and present a paper on one particular expedition to Antarctica.
- Jimmy was hired as a survival instructor in Antarctica for a six-month period. What can you find out about Operation Deep Freeze

and the work the survival trainers were engaged in?

- It is noted that 260 people went through the survival training course and only one didn't make it. Can you find out what happened to this person?
- What aspects of life in Antarctica could drive a person mad? Discuss the sense of isolation, the great expanse, the silence ...
- Why does Juliet say Antarctica scares her?
- Describe the culture at Scott Base and McMurdo. (The film includes accounts of heavy drinking – industrial alcohol – fighting and drug-taking.) Could this have contributed to Jimmy's breakdown? How?

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- Why did Graham Land in Antarctica hold special significance for Juliet as a child? (Their surname was Graham and she bragged to school friends that it was named after her father.)
- Do you believe the (US Government) tested nuclear facilities in Antarctica in the 1970s?
- The US Government has been at the centre of a variety of conspiracy theories over the last several decades. Explore one of the more plausible claims of illegal acts during covert operations and present your findings to the class.
- 'The South Pole is really a red herring, a distraction from the more troubling story of a man's terrible mental decline and its impact on those who loved and needed him.'

Discuss.

- 'The film's most important landscape is not Antarctica, despite all the many magnificent shots of icy glaciers and snowy peaks; it is the tumultuous landscape of Jimmy's mind with which the film is primarily concerned.' Discuss.

The Film: A Closer Look

'*The Snowman* shows us a very real family with the courage to share their mistakes, their human frailty in the face of the challenges of dealing with the mental illness of a family member and the potential for us all to reach out, before it's too late, to the people we love. My family isn't fixed, but it's less broken. And there's enough hope in that for me. So there's a lot to be said for jumping into the fire.'

– Juliet Lamont

you think motivated her to make this film? (Include your own ideas but also consider comments she makes: having her own children prompted her to reflect on her childhood and compelled her to reach out to Jimmy; his age led her to fear his death and her regrets if she didn't try to contact him ...)

- Juliet had not seen her father for twenty-seven years. What do

- Discuss the structure of the film. Does it have three acts, a beginning, middle and end?

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- What is the mood of the film's ending? Have Juliet's attempts to reconnect with Jimmy been successful? Support your answer with evidence from the film.
- Juliet's film is an adventure, a detective investigation, a ghost story, a paranoid conspiracy story, a glimpse into the heart of madness ... If you were to make a film about your family, what genres might it dip into?
- Make a list of the types of material included in the film: archival footage from Antarctica; still landscape photos; semi-abstract footage of swirling clouds; family snaps; talking head interview material; verité doco footage of encounters and conversations; and animation.
- 'The camera acts as a bridge between Juliet and her father. Without the film, she might never have had the courage, the reason or the resolve to re-enter Jimmy's life.' Discuss.
- Choose one of the animated sequences and analyse its symbolic meaning and tone.
- What steps might Juliet have taken to verify her father's allegations against the CIA?
- Do you think Juliet realised before she began making the film that she would never be able to present one conclusive account of what happened to her father? Is the film disappointing because we never learn exactly what happened to Jimmy in Antarctica?
- 'The Snowman is like a strangely domestic retelling of Conrad's

Heart of Darkness, with Jimmy as Captain Kurtz and Juliet as Willard taking that long ride down the river ...' Discuss.

- Choose someone in your family to make a film about. Write up a treatment, your aims and agenda, the person's qualities and characteristics that might make them an

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Film Credits

Duration: 79 minutes
 Year of Production: 2009
 Director: Juliet Lamont
 Producers: Rachel Landers & Dylan Blowen
 Cinematographers: Rachel Landers & Simon Smith
 Editors: Melanie Sandford & Lindi Harrison
 Composer: Benjamin Speed
 Animator: Sam Challis

interesting subject. Choose three real-life events or incidents that you would want to include for the light they shed upon this relative's character.

- Do you think Jimmy understands he's being filmed? What are the ethical issues involved in making a film with someone whose ability to give consent might be impaired?
- Design a storyboard to illustrate one of the many fascinating anecdotes related over the course of the film. Display these around the classroom during the unit of study. (I would do a sequence on Jimmy thawing out his nine-year-old daughter's frozen hamster in the oven – the mood here is strangely ambiguous: there's the child's grief at the loss of her pet; perhaps her bewilderment at the strange behaviour of a parent; but also something intimate and companionable about the two of them with their faces pressed up against the glass oven door ...)
- Imagine you are the film's producers, Rachel Landers and Dylan Blowen, seeking funding for this project. Write an outline of your intentions, the purpose and value of the film.
- Design a poster to promote this film. Annotate your design choices, font, colour scheme, layout, etc. How would you select a representative image/s?
- Write a review of the film to be published in a daily newspaper.
- Write a fifty-word synopsis of the film to be published in a television guide.
- Who is the audience for this film?
- Consider the film's title. Make a list of other possible titles.
- Consult the list of credits at the end of this guide. Choose one role and write an outline of this person's responsibilities during the production of the film.
- Imagine you had the opportunity to interview Juliet. Write a list of ten questions, focusing on her dual roles as Jimmy's daughter and the film's director. Exchange these with another student and formulate responses.

- What can you find out about Pony Films, the production company that made *The Snowman*? (See <<http://www.ponyfims.com.au>>.)

RESOURCES

Books

- Julio Arboleda-Flórez and Norman Sartorius (eds), *Understanding the Stigma of Mental Illness: Theory and Interventions*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ, 2008.
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- Man Cheung Chung, K.W.M. (Bill) Fulford and George Graham (eds), *Reconceiving Schizophrenia*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007.
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- Larry Davidson, foreword by John S. Strauss, *Living Outside Mental Illness: Qualitative Studies of Recovery in Schizophrenia*, New York University Press, New York, 2003.
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Pacific Air Forces: Operation Deep Freeze:
<http://www.13af.pacaf.af.mil/units/operationdeepfreeze/index.asp>

The United States Antarctic Program:
<http://www.usap.gov>

Map of Antarctic Expeditions, 1772–1931:
<http://www.fram.museum.no/en/default.asp?page=159>

Scott Polar Research Institute – Index to Antarctic Expeditions:
<http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/resources/expeditions/>
Chronologies & Timelines of Antarctic

- Exploration:
<http://www.antarctic-circle.org/timeline.htm>
- Antarctic Connection:
<http://www.antarcticconnection.com/antarctic/science/mterebus.shtml>
- Antarctica New Zealand:
<http://www.antarcticanz.govt.nz>
- Australian Antarctic Division:
<http://www.aad.gov.au/default.asp?casid=24>
- The National Science Foundation:
<http://quest.arc.nasa.gov/antarctica/background/NSF/>
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<http://www.heritage-antarctica.org/aht.htm>
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- The World Factbook*: Antarctica:
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ay.html>
- The CIA
<https://www.cia.gov>
- Mental Health Issues
- Sane Australia:
http://www.sane.org/information/information/factsheets_%2b_podcasts.html
- Schizophrenia:
- <http://www.schizophrenia.com>
 - <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Schizophrenia>
- <http://www.mentalhealth.com/dis/p20-ps01.html>
 This site gives links to a range of information: <http://www.healthinstitute.gov.au/topics/Schizophrenia>
- Chemical Lobotomy
<http://www.sntp.net/drugs/thorazine.htm>
<http://www.freedommag.org/english/vol3711/page08.htm>
- Supporting People With Mental Illnesses
<http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/supporting-someone-with-a-mental-illness>
<http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/Supporting%20People%20with%20Mental%20Illness>
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