

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“Home”

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AREA 1: READING & RESPONDING: HOME

Chapter 1 GENRE

The experiences of Aborigines in Australia are presented in Larissa Behrendt's emotional family saga *Home*. The spiritual journey tracks the abuse and dispossession of Aborigines in the twentieth century. Behrendt employs both Indigenous and European genres of story telling. She combines real and fictitious events and details to present three generations of the Boney family over the twentieth century.

Home is a political novel that conveys a political message about the tragedy that ensues from obstructions to the core values of family, independence, spirituality and belonging through prejudice, misunderstanding and the abuse of power. Behrendt's novel provides insightful comments on the political and legal plight of Aborigines in Australia.

Chapter 2 STRUCTURE

Home is divided into three parts and contains thirty-one chapters. Part One and Part Three are both brief and told from the first person perspective of Candice. This provides a close connection between introduction and conclusion and ties together the many characters introduced in Part Two, which contains twenty-six chapters in which the history of Candice's relatives unfolds.

The timeline is erratic, rather than chronological, and shifts between past and present times for the purpose of enhancing the inter-connectedness of the events. Candice's chapters are set in 1995, which makes an obvious connection to the notion of reconciliation. Part Two, "Through the Years", begins in 1918 when Garibooli is enjoying her childhood with her family at Dunglear Station and covers most of the twentieth century, including World War I and World War II.

The complications in the plot unfold with suspense created through the provision of clues and links at the end of chapters, such as the reference to the death of Patricia as the "misfortune (that) befell Patricia" at the end of Chapter 24. Furthermore, there are many connections between generations of both indigenous and white Australians. The author of the book that Candice buys in Chapter One is also the descendant of Tom Kerrigan, the man who raped Garibooli's mother and cousin, Karrwi, who turns out to be Granny.

Behrendt makes repeated references to various items of European literature including *Wuthering Heights*, *Frankenstein* and *Sons and Lovers* and poetry by Kenneth Slessor and Laurence Binyon. She includes

quotes from such literature and poetry to support her themes of love and war and to further exemplify her three-dimensional characters. Her academic tendencies are evident in the non-fiction passages of lectures and interpretation of legislation and history that appear throughout the novel. Such references have been included to reinforce the reader's understanding of the progress of indigenous issues. Darwin's scientific theories and Marx's political theories are also included to support the understanding the characters have of their world, particularly Bob and Grigor respectively.

Authentic stories of Aboriginal people and Dreamtime stories are scattered throughout *Home* which add to the innovative literary feel of the novel. The stories of the author's own people, the Eualeyai people, are woven into the narrative. Garibooli recalls the stories told by Kooradgie and her parents. The inclusion of such traditional stories aims to demonstrate the important connection Aborigines have with the land. Furthermore, the morals of these stories present significant values such as the importance of sharing and the connection parents have with their children.

Chapter 3 HISTORICAL ISSUES

3.1 Australian Law and Aboriginal Law

After colonization of Australia by the British, Aborigines were dispossessed of the land that was intrinsic to their culture and traditional way of life. Through native title, Australian law came to acknowledge the rights of Aborigines to ownership of land. Nonetheless, inconsistencies between Australian laws and traditional indigenous laws remain. The national Native Title Tribunal investigates claims to land rights by indigenous Australians, but the High and Federal Courts of Australia determine native title decisions. The clash of these two legal systems continues as Australian laws dominate as the basis of legal courts.

The first legislation regarding native title was enforced in 1956, however the principle of *terra nullius*, which disallowed recognition of prior Aboriginal ownership or rights to land, still bound Australian courts. The case of Gove versus the Commonwealth in 1971 was the first legal case in which the judge acknowledged the significance of the Aboriginal system of law. The first Australian law allowing claims to land by Aborigines in the Northern Territory was the Aboriginal Land Rights Act enacted in 1976, which established four Land Councils. In 1992, The High Court rejected the notion of *terra nullius* in the Mabo case as Aboriginal law was given further acknowledgement. In 1993, the Australian legislative system was further altered by the Native Title Act, which differentiated between land rights and native title allowing indigenous people to gain legal ownership of land that holds traditional interest. The importance of land rights to Aboriginal people continues to be underestimated and often interpreted by non-indigenous Australians as a claim for property rights. The spiritual association with the land is the basis of Aboriginal culture through stories and history.