

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
PAIRED COMPARISONS

Tracks / Into the Wild

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SAMPLE

TEXT 1
Tracks

AUTHOR NOTES

Due to the autobiographical nature of the text *Tracks*, much of Robyn Davidson's life and background is outlined throughout the story. This perspective is, however, a biased and personalised perspective of a short period of time in her life and her many and varied opinions about the Australian way of life, feminism, the treatment of Aboriginals at the time and Australian politics.

Biography

Born (6 September 1950) and raised on a cattle station in Miles Queensland, Robyn Davidson spent her childhood growing up on the station. She was predominantly raised by her Aunt after her mother's suicide when Davidson was 11 and attended a Brisbane girls' boarding school. After leaving school, she studied Zoology before moving to Sydney to live as a member of the Push, a left-wing intellectual subculture that existed from the 1940s to the early 1970s. It was in 1975 that Davidson set out on her vision to obtain and train camels to trek across the Australian outback. She spent two years living in Alice Springs and training the camels before commencing the trek. During her time in Alice Springs, she was involved in the periphery of the Aboriginal Land Rights Movement.

Since the trek, Davidson has moved around the world frequently, having lived in Sydney, London and India. She currently resides in a small country town in central Victoria, Castlemaine. She has consistently split her time between living in Victoria and the Himalayas.

Career

Davidson is known most for her writing career and her study of the nomadic lifestyle in India, Australia and Tibet. Though she has no clear qualifications in social anthropology, her experiences of travelling and living with nomads has been extensively recorded in a number of books and articles; further cementing her career as a writer.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Understanding the historical context of any text is important, yet imperative when reading non-fiction. *Tracks* is predominantly set in Alice Springs and the remote land leading across Australia towards Carnarvon in Western Australia. The journey itself starts in 1975 with two years spent in Alice Springs, followed by 9 months in the desert in 1977. Australia, at the time, was undergoing massive social rights changes, many of which Davidson would have been involved with as a member of Push and which she depicts in the text as trying to stay out of while living in Alice Springs. At the time, there was a drive for women's rights along with Indigenous rights and land ownership. Davidson provides some of her opinions on the issues whilst telling her personal story.

The social and political movements underway in Australia in the 70's, reflect the broader changes occurring across Western countries. The Australian perspectives on immigration, sexual morality, war, the environment and the role of women, were undergoing radical changes which continue to shape Australia today. It was in 1972 that Australian troops were withdrawn from the Vietnam War, an era that saw much controversy over the use of conscription and the threat of communism. There was a great deal of opposition to the Vietnam War in the early 70's and large scale protests were held across Australia.

Politically, Australia was also undergoing radical reforms during the era of Gough Whitlam. His Government took power in 1972 after 23 years of Liberal rule and came to an end in 1975 when he was dismissed by the Governor-General, John Kerr, leading to public outrage over the capacity for the British Head of State to dictate over Australian politics. This event is now considered one of the most controversial in Australian political history. During the Whitlam era, he instigated major changes through health, education, immigration, Indigenous rights, foreign affairs and industrial relations. Whitlam was responsible for the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam and reduced the national voting age from 21 to 18. His abolishment of the White Australia Policy also led to significant change throughout Australia, with the increase of non-white migration and rapid growth of multiculturalism throughout the country. Though Whitlam had given greater voice to the younger generations and increased the arts funding, many citizens held him responsible for the high levels of inflation and unemployment.

From 1975 until 1983, Malcolm Fraser took power; he continued to support Indigenous rights and the increase in migration, including from refugees. He was also a strong campaigner towards the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Indigenous Australian Rights

The living conditions of Indigenous Australians throughout the 70's was appalling and led to many Indigenous rights campaigns, which only saw significant gains made in the recognition of Indigenous people and the land rights struggle. In 1971, for the first time, Indigenous people were counted in the census and in 1976, the Aboriginal Land Rights Act was established. This Act recognised that there were some circumstances when Aboriginal people had a right to claim control of the land. It was also in the 70's that Aboriginal people began to reach political prominence, including Neville Bonner, the first Aboriginal Australian to be elected to federal parliament.

Women's Rights in Australia

As women continued to challenge the traditional gender roles that limited women to the home and traditional women's roles, the fight for equal rights and wages also began to unfold throughout the 1970's. Though women made up one third of the workforce, they were still paid significantly less than men. The Whitlam Government ruled that individuals should be paid the same amount for the same work and in 1979, the Fraser Government signed off on paid maternity leave for women. However, women were still rarely paid the equivalent, or employed in high-status positions.

Throughout both the 60's and 70's, the core focus of the women's liberation movement was;

- The right to have the say over reproduction, including the use of contraception and the choice regarding abortion
- The right to free contraception
- The right to free childcare
- The right to receive the same pay as a man who does the same work
- The right to the same level of education as men.