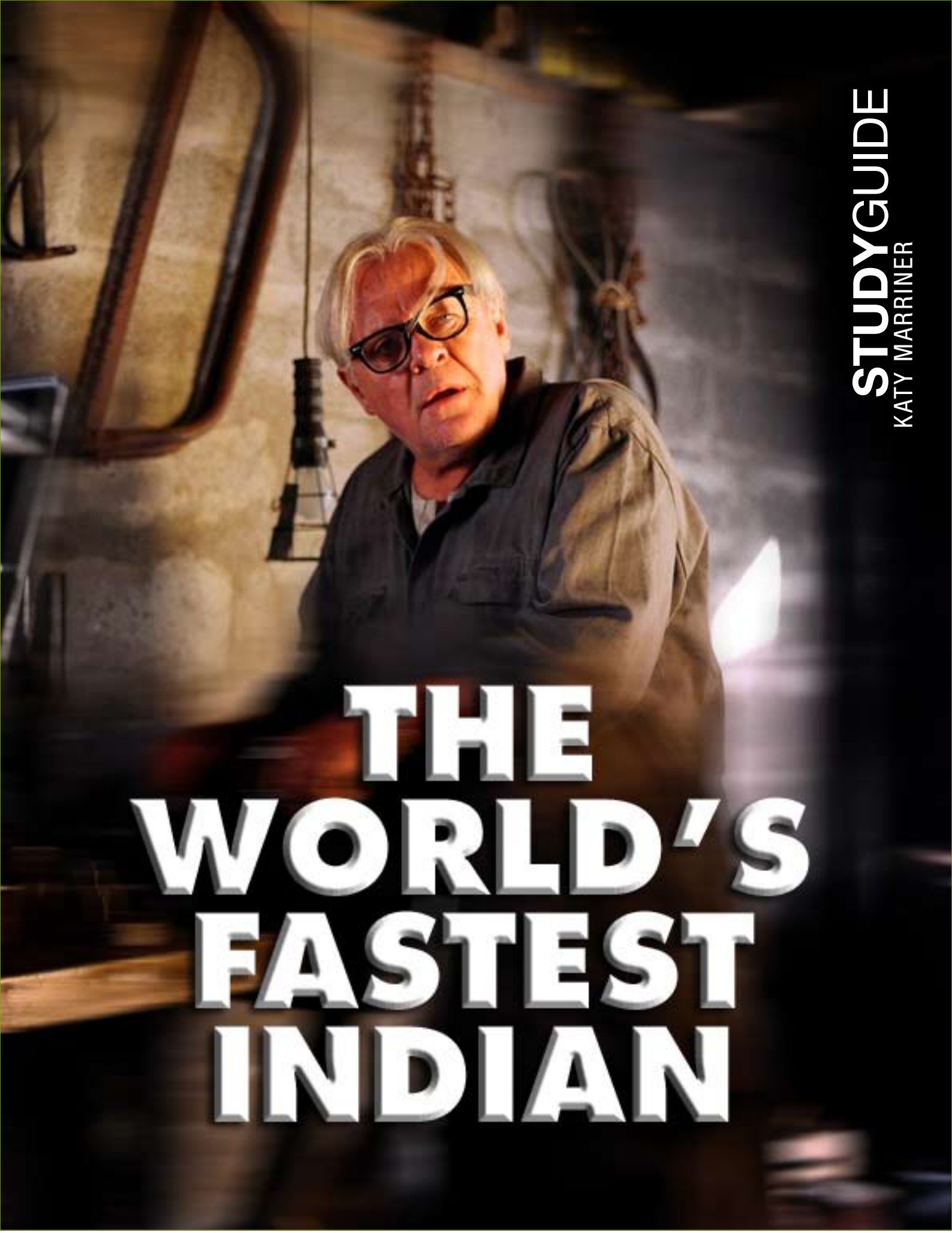


THE WORLD'S FASTEST INDIAN

STUDY GUIDE

KATY MARRINER

AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA INC.

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Introduction

This study guide to accompany *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005), a film written and directed by Roger Donaldson, has been written for junior and middle school secondary students. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in English.

About the Film

Burt Munro's 1967 world record remains unbroken and his legend lives on today. (Promotional material)

After a lifetime of perfecting his 1920 Indian Twin Scout motorcycle, Burt Munro left Invercargill, New Zealand, to test his bike at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah. Despite the odds being against him, he set a new land speed record, making his motorcycle the fastest bike on earth. *The World's Fastest Indian* is based on Burt's trip to Bonneville in 1967.

Burt bought his first motorcycle, a Douglas, in 1915. He bought the Indian in 1920 and in 1926 began modifying it, using rather unorthodox methods. After experimenting with streamlining, Burt completely enclosed the Indian in a shell. Burt loved racing motorcycles and was very talented in not only riding them but also making them go fast. When Burt purchased the Indian its top speed was 55mph. When he first qualified to race at Speedweek at Bonneville, the Indian clocked 190.07mph, the fastest ever officially recorded speed on an Indian. Burt loved the thrill of speed and claimed that you could live more in five minutes on a motorcycle going at high speed than you could in your whole lifetime. Clearly his




Roger Donaldson

philosophy on life was to live it to the full.

Burt died in 1978. His legacy is a legendary story of ingenuity, courage and perseverance. Burt's story offers a sense of hope that it is possible to achieve a dream, even one that most think is an impossible one.

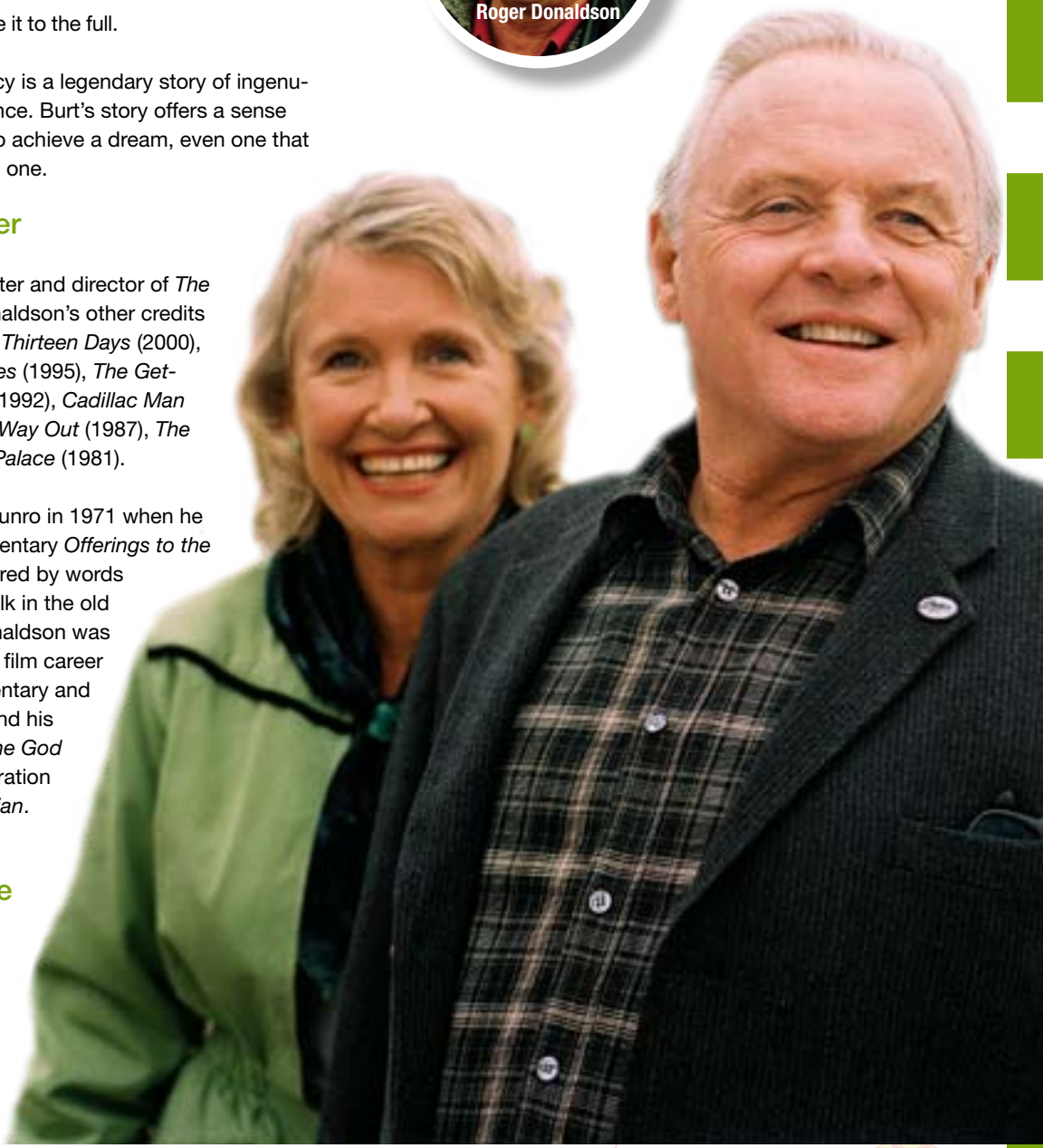
About the Filmmaker

Roger Donaldson is the writer and director of *The World's Fastest Indian*. Donaldson's other credits include *The Recruit* (2003), *Thirteen Days* (2000), *Dante's Peak* (1997), *Species* (1995), *The Getaway* (1994), *White Sands* (1992), *Cadillac Man* (1990), *Cocktail* (1988), *No Way Out* (1987), *The Bounty* (1984) and *Smash Palace* (1981).

Donaldson first met Burt Munro in 1971 when he was working on the documentary *Offerings to the God of Speed*, its title inspired by words that Burt had written in chalk in the old shed in which he lived. Donaldson was only at the beginning of his film career when he made the documentary and felt he had not done Burt and his story justice. *Offerings to the God of Speed* became the inspiration for *The World's Fastest Indian*.

Using *The World's Fastest Indian* in the classroom

Teachers may select from the following activities to support students' viewing and close analysis of *The World's Fastest Indian*.





Before viewing the film

- Ask the class to share their knowledge and opinion of motorsports.
- What are your hopes and dreams for the future? Ask students to write a letter to themselves. Invite them to share their thoughts with others in the class. Encourage them to regard the letter as a keepsake that they could read one day in the future.
- 'Courageous people are to be admired.'
  'Courageous people are foolhardy.'
  What statement do you most agree with? Why?
- Ask students to keep a journal that records their personal response to the film.
- Give students two 'extreme' words related to the film. For example: eccentric and normal; passionate and passionless; hopeful and hopeless. Students then (possibly with the help of each other, a dictionary or a thesaurus) fill in the middle with words that fit on a continuum between these poles. Ask them to justify their choices.
- *The World's Fastest Indian* was shot in Invercargill and Bonneville. Use an atlas to find these locations. As a class use written texts and the Internet to find out more about Invercargill and Bonneville.



After viewing the film

- **Inside-outside Circles:** Students stand in two circles facing each other. The teacher poses a question. Students discuss with their partner for a set time, and then rotate to a new partner for the next question.
  - What was your favourite moment of the film?
  - Who was your favourite character? Why?
  - What did you think was the most exciting moment of the film?
  - What did you think was the most moving moment of the film?
  - What were you feeling when the film ended?
- Is there one pivotal scene in this film?
- Draw and label a plot graph to show the important events and climaxes in the film.
- What are the central concerns of the film? How do you know?
- Why do you think the film is rated PG?
- Choose one word that you think best describes *The World's Fastest Indian* and explain why you have chosen this word.
- Write a one-minute plot summary to be read aloud to the class. Try reducing your plot summary to thirty seconds, then twenty, then ten seconds.
- What tagline would you use to promote *The World's Fastest Indian*?
- Just A Minute
  After studying the film, attempt to speak impromptu for one minute without irrelevancies or repetition on a concern of the film.
- On a large sheet of paper draw around a group member to create an outline of a character from *The World's Fastest Indian*. Brainstorm and write down inside the body all the words you can think of to describe the character's personality. Brainstorm and write down inside and around the head area all the words you can think of to describe that character's feelings. Brainstorm and write down outside the body all the external influences on that character. Pin your sheet to the wall for others to read and comment on.
- Design a symbol for one of the main characters. Be prepared to explain your decision to the class.
- Compile a list of key quotations from *The World's Fastest Indian*. Make sure that the list is revealing of the film's situations, concerns and characters.

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Close Analysis

Burt Munro

All my life I've wanted to do something big … something bigger and better than all the other jokers.

- What sort of a man is Burt Munro? As a class develop a character profile of Burt. Start by brainstorming a list of words to describe Burt. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to improve your list. Find examples from the film to endorse your choices. Use these details to write a feature article about Burt Munro for an Invercargill newspaper.
- What moments capture Burt's eccentric nature, his creativity, his determination and his charm?
- Design a poster symbolizing Burt's journey.
- Design and write a booklet, including quotations from *The World's Fastest Indian*, entitled *My Philosophy on Life* by Burt Munro.
- Write a speech that you think Burt Munro might have given at an assembly at his old school.
- Use the Internet to find out more about Burt Munro.

Burt's influence on others

- What do the Invercargill locals think of Burt?
- Write a paragraph that explains Tom, Fran, Tina and Jim Moffet's relationship with Burt. Consider what other minor characters might say about Burt. Use these accounts to shape an episode of *This is Your Life*.
- As one of the film's characters, write and present a monologue in which you give your views on life. Share your thoughts and emotions about your relationship with Burt Munro and his influence on you and your life decisions.

- Write the conversation Burt and Tom might have had about his adventures, after Burt's return from Utah.
- Write a diary entry as Tom, ten years on.

The importance of living a dream

If it's hard, work harder; if it's impossible, work harder still. Give it whatever it takes, but do it.

- What does *The World's Fastest Indian* reveal about Burt's extraordinary belief in himself and his dream?
- Some would say that the odds were against Burt Munro achieving his dream. Do you agree?
- Write a letter from Burt in Utah to Fran, after he has broken the record.
- Hold the press conference that may have followed Burt Munro's creation of a new land speed record at Bonneville in 1967. Allocate roles so that each student can play a part in the event. Use a video camera to record the press conference.
- After studying the language of newspaper reports, write two newspaper articles, one that might have appeared in an Invercargill newspaper and one that might have appeared in a Utah newspaper after Burt Munro broke the land speed record in 1967. As a class, discuss the similarities and differences between the two reports.
- Write a speech about the significance of pursuing your dreams.

Creative Responses

- Brainstorm words associated with *The World's Fastest Indian*. Use these words to write a poem about a concern of the film.
- Design a collage based on an important idea in the film.
- Choose a scene from the film and use this scene to write an interior monologue showing what a character might have been thinking at the time. Rewrite your favourite scene as a piece of prose.
- Working in a group, script and present a talk show episode with characters from the film as guests.
- Design a card or board game based on *The World's Fastest Indian*.
- Storyboard a promotional preview for *The World's Fastest Indian*.
- Design a poster advertising the film.
- Imagine that *The World's Fastest Indian* is to be screened on television. Write a synopsis of the film for publication in a television guide.
- Write a film review of *The World's Fastest Indian*. Spend some time researching the qualities of a film review before you begin.
- At the end of the film, we learn that Burt returned to Bonneville nine times. Working in a group write a scene that could be part of a sequel to *The World's Fastest Indian*.

Analytic responses

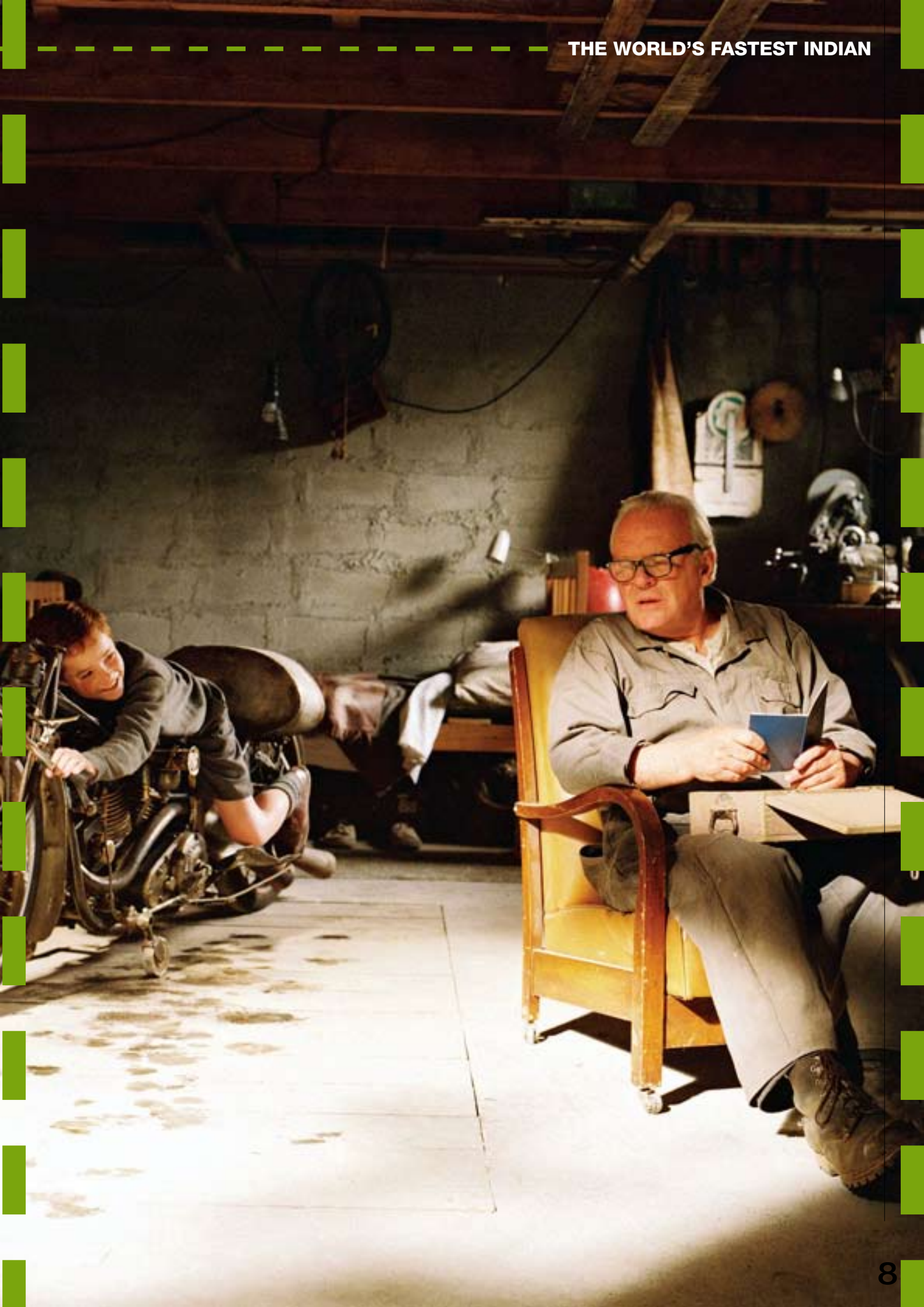
- 'Burt Munro never let the dreams of youth fade.' Discuss.
- 'They don't make them like Burt anymore.' As a class discuss the implications of this claim and then consider whether or not you agree.
- 'I think this is what the spirit of this film is about – the great passion of life that some people have.' (Anthony Hopkins). Do you agree?

Critical responses

- Locate reviews of *The World's Fastest Indian* on the Internet. Do you agree with the views expressed in the reviews?
- 'The appeal of *The World's Fastest Indian* is universal.' Do you agree?
- 'He has taken the life force of Burt and put it up on the screen.' (Roger Donaldson on Anthony Hopkins) Do you agree?
- 'It's a fine script that he wrote.' (Anthony Hopkins on Roger Donaldson) Spend time discussing the elements of any script and then consider why Hopkins' has made such an assessment.
- 'I wanted to make an entertaining film without any compromises – an uplifting and inspirational story in the spirit of such films as *Rocky* [John G. Avildsen, 1976], *Billy Elliot* [Stephen Daldry, 2000] and *Chariots of Fire* [Hugh Hudson, 1981].' Has Donaldson achieved his aim?

Production Values

- Write down some important questions that you would like to ask the director of *The World's Fastest Indian*. Put your questions in a letterbox. Take it in turns to be the director and answer a question posed by a student in the class.
- Brainstorm a list of all the things you see and hear in the opening sequence. What does the opening sequence tell us about Burt Munro? What expectations does the opening create? How are you positioned as a viewer?
- As a class view a sequence, such as when Burt drives on American roads for the first time.
  - Describe the setting.
  - What is the tone/atmosphere of this sequence? How is it created?
  - What does sound contribute to this sequence?
  - What is the effect of the use of certain shots in this sequence?
  - How does this sequence contribute to character development?
  - What important ideas are highlighted in this sequence?
- Now working as an individual, view a sequence, then discuss the design and its importance to your understanding of the film.



- Choose a shot and freeze it. Explain what and how information is conveyed.
- '*The World's Fastest Indian* is visually impressive.' Discuss.
- Why do you think Donaldson chose to tell the story of *The World's Fastest Indian* in this way? Keep in mind he had already told Burt Munro's story in the 1972 documentary *Offerings to the God of Speed*. Does the format of a feature film provide an effective narration of Burt Munro's story?
- What do you think music adds to *The World's Fastest Indian*?
- Think, Pair, Share
  Ask students to arrange the following statements in order of importance based on their viewing of *The World's Fastest Indian*. Students should then discuss their choices with a partner and try to come to a consensus. Each partnership should then share their decisions and the reasoning behind their decisions with the class.
  - The most important aspect of a good film is the script.
  - The most important aspect of a good film is the direction.
  - The most important aspect of a good film is the acting.
  - The most important aspect of a good film is the cinematography.
  - The most important aspect of a good film is the special effects.
- View the closing sequence of the film. What is Donaldson's intention and how is this intention achieved? Discuss what makes the ending satisfying.
- Storyboard a scene of *The World's Fastest Indian*.

Going Further

- Read and view other stories about people who have pursued their dreams.
- Research the history of a particular model of motorcycles. Work as a group to complete the research and prepare a multimedia presentation. Use KWL (what we know; what we want to know and what we learned) as a research strategy and as a way to document the work of the group.
- Design a tourist brochure for one of the locations featured in *The World's Fastest Indian*.
- How is *The World's Fastest Indian* like other films such as *Billy Elliot*, *Rocky* and *Chariots of Fire*?
- Visit the film's website: www.worldsfastestindian.com

Katy Marriner



ATOM
AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA INC.

This study guide was produced by **ATOM**
damned@netspace.net.au

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