

A FIELD GUIDE TO BEING A 12-YEAR-OLD GIRL



TEACHING TOOLKIT

ABOUT THE FILM

There are 7,515,284,153 people on this Earth. 3,726,125,235 of those people are female. That means that half of the population was once or will one day be a *12-year-old girl*. With this profound fact in mind, Tilda Cobham-Hervey and a collection of twelve 12-year-olds set out to study and celebrate this curious and unique creature. Together they conducted a range of experiments and created a detailed Field Guide for the public.

It is about the future and the past, gender and politics, periods and pimples, and will make you laugh and maybe even cry. This guide may change your life. But mainly it is just about 12-year-old girls.

These twelve girls are in their final year of officially being labelled children. They are on the cusp of change and throughout this documentary we see that they actually represent a turning point for humanity in every generation. These girls are our future. One day they might be mothers or grandmas, they might climb a very tall mountain, break every bone on the left side of their body, create a new style of dance, learn to make a great shepherd's pie, or become the next female prime minister. But right now, they are 12-year-old girls and have some things to tell you.

A Field Guide to Being a 12-Year-Old Girl is a cross-disciplinary work that acts as an archaeological dig into what it is to be a 12-year-old girl in this day and age. This hybrid documentary was created by Tilda Cobham-Hervey in collaboration with twelve diverse 12-year-old girls from around Australia.

USING THIS RESOURCE

A unique blend of documentary and theatre, *A Field Guide to Being a 12-Year-Old Girl* is a detailed study into the fascinating creature commonly known as the 12-year old girl. It features real Australian girls discussing their lives, pondering questions large and small, and articulating what it feels like to be twelve. This contemporary short film is a thought-provoking mix of narrative and documentary, and is a perfect inclusion for units on personal and social identities.

This resource will support Year 6 and 7 teachers in examining the film's construction and themes with students. Learning tasks are mapped to the Australian Curriculum, and draw on content from English, Health and Physical Education and Media Arts.



LEARNING TASKS



TASK 1: PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before viewing *A Field Guide to Being a 12-Year-Old Girl*, encourage students to activate their prior knowledge by discussing the following questions with a partner:

- What is a field guide? What is the purpose of this text type?
- If you have previously read a field guide, what was the topic?
- How might the filmmaker incorporate the language features and text structure of this written text type into a film?
- Based on what you know about 12-year old girls, what content do you expect this film to address?
- If you are not a 12-year old girl, how do you feel about watching a film with this title? Curious? Open-minded? Ambivalent? Reluctant?
- After viewing the film, facilitate a class discussion on how these connections helped students to better understand the text, how prior knowledge differed among individuals, and how the film might help their text comprehension in the future.

TASK 2: AUDIENCE & PURPOSE

Before viewing the film, distribute copies of the Director's Statement (page 17) to students. Working in groups, have students read and discuss this statement to help them identify the filmmaker's audience and purpose.

Coming back together, ask groups to share their thinking with the wider class. Prompts for further class discussion include:

- This film documents the lives of twelve 12-year old girls: is this demographic also the film's primary audience? Is there more than one intended audience? Locate evidence in the Director's Statement that supports your thinking.
- How might the emotional and intellectual responses of target audiences differ? For example, consider the possible responses of current 12-year olds compared with adults, or girls' responses compared with boys' responses.
- Tilda Cobham-Hervey set out to create a film that 'walked the line of fact and fiction'. How do you think she will achieve the dual purposes of entertaining and informing viewers?
- Revisit this topic after viewing the film and discuss whether students feel the filmmaker achieved her purpose/s.



TASK 3: SPIRIT ANIMAL

Clip: 02:20 – 02:27

Navya believes her 'spirit animal' is a tiger because 'they're brave and beautiful creatures, just like me'. This Native American belief has been co-opted by pop culture in recent years to mean an animal that either represents a person's existing traits, or traits they would like to develop.

Ask students to independently reflect on their personal identity – their backgrounds, personalities, interests, strengths, and aspirations – then select a spirit animal that has similar qualities. Have students then write a short persuasive text that justifies their choice, composing a separate paragraph for each trait they share with their chosen spirit animal.



TASK 4: HOPES AND DREAMS

Clip: 12:15 – 12:54

Mabel Jean reads aloud a collective list of the girls' hopes and dreams for the future. Ranging from the achievable to aspirational, they want to survive puberty, get a dog, travel the world, and put an end to poverty.

After discussing the varied responses presented in this clip, provide students with the following sentence starter: 'In the future, I hope...'. Prompt students to finish this sentence and continue writing to explain and expand on their ideas. If they are comfortable doing so, invite students to share their work with the class. Listen for commonalities or emerging themes and discuss.

The class could then create their own collective list of 'hopes and dreams' by contributing one sentence each. This could be displayed on a poster or in a class book.





TASK 5: THE FOURTH WALL

Clip: 13:42 – 15:53

Apparently frustrated by the narrator's commentary, Audrey unexpectedly initiates a conversation with her. Mabel Jean takes this a step further by literally 'pulling back the curtain', revealing the shocked narrator sitting off-stage. The audience sees the narrator's scripts, microphone, and her nervous attempts to set the film back on course. In another shot, viewers see cast members and a selection of props hidden in the wings. After reminding the girls to stay in character, the narrator addresses the audience directly, admitting: 'This isn't supposed to be a part of it.'

While highlighting the curiosity of 12-year old girls, these scenes also serve to remind the audience that they are viewing a constructed work of fiction. In theatre and on screen, this narrative technique is called 'breaking the fourth wall'.

The fourth wall is a performance convention in which an imaginary wall separates the audience and the actors: the audience can see through this 'wall', but usually the actors cannot. The other three walls are the left, right, and rear of the stage.

A written text that directly address the reader or draws attention to itself as a work of fiction is can be called metafiction. Metafictional elements include the author addressing the reader directly, commenting on the story while telling it, or writing characters who are aware they are in a fictional story.

To learn more about this narrative technique, the class could:

- Discuss the possible purpose and effects of breaking the fourth wall
- Reflect on how this clip made them feel – amused, surprised, confused, inspired, or something else
- Brainstorm other visual or written texts that use similar techniques
- Experiment with incorporating metafictional elements in their own writing.

TASK 6: NARRATION

Clip: 13:42 – 15:53

Every story has a narrator. In fictional texts, authors choose a narrator based on how they want their story to be told, and the point of view they want the audience to experience.

The camera itself is a narrator in film and television, revealing the story objectively through the eyes of a third person observer, or subjectively through a specific character's perspective. Cinematography builds the narrative by showing the audience what is happening (or not happening), and when, and how. While a narrator tells the story, the camera shows it.

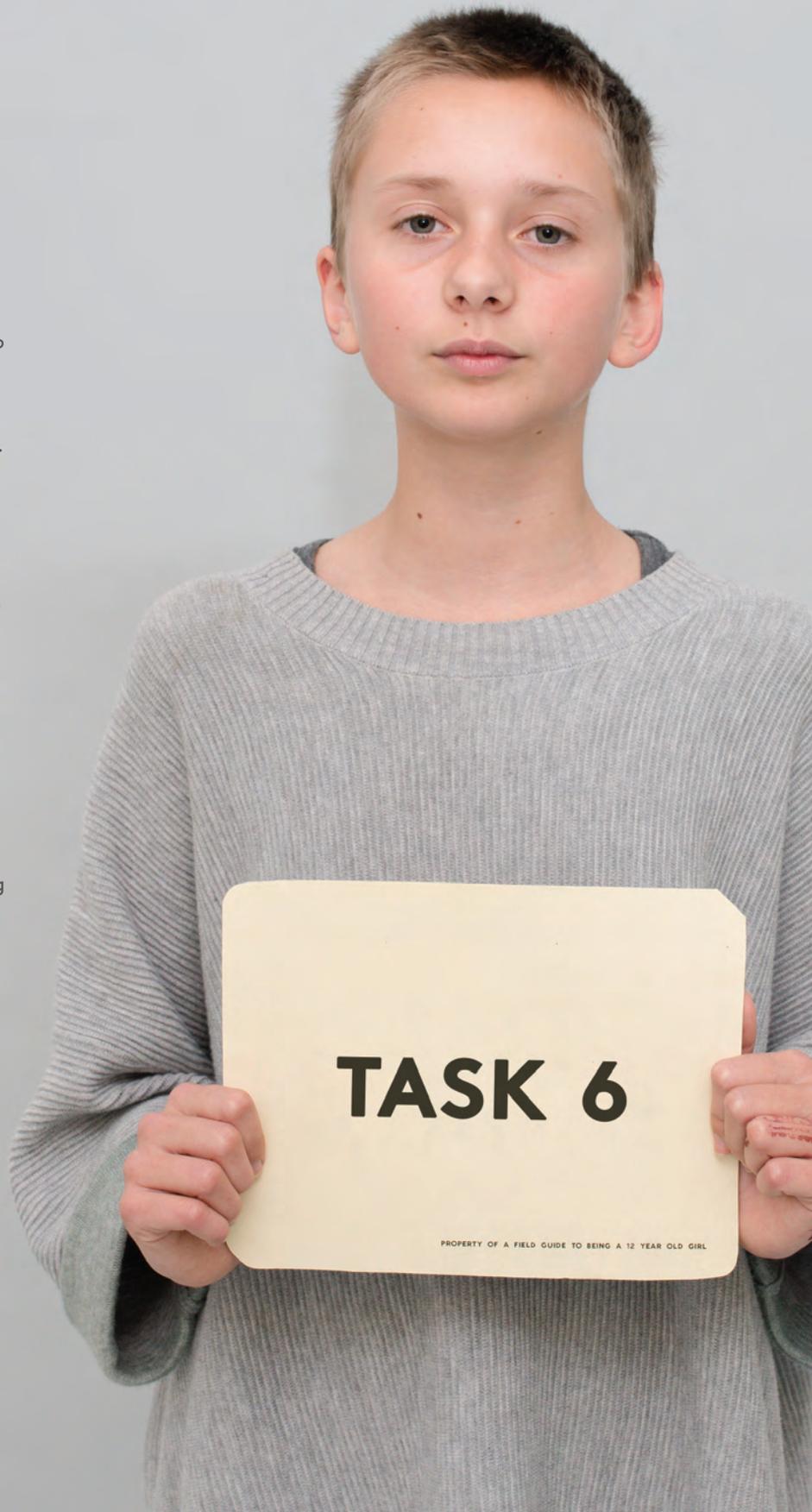
Writer / Director Tilda Cobham-Hervey plays the part of a literal narrator in *A Field Guide to Being a 12-Year Old Girl*. Initially she is an all-knowing third person observer; removed from the story, and able to provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of all twelve characters. She speaks with authority about the 'fascinating creature commonly known as the 12-year old girl', using the tone and objective language of a knowledgeable scientist reporting facts. However, in the clip listed above, the narrator's role changes completely. The girls' actions see her thrust into the on-screen story, becoming a character herself and changing the narrative point of view.

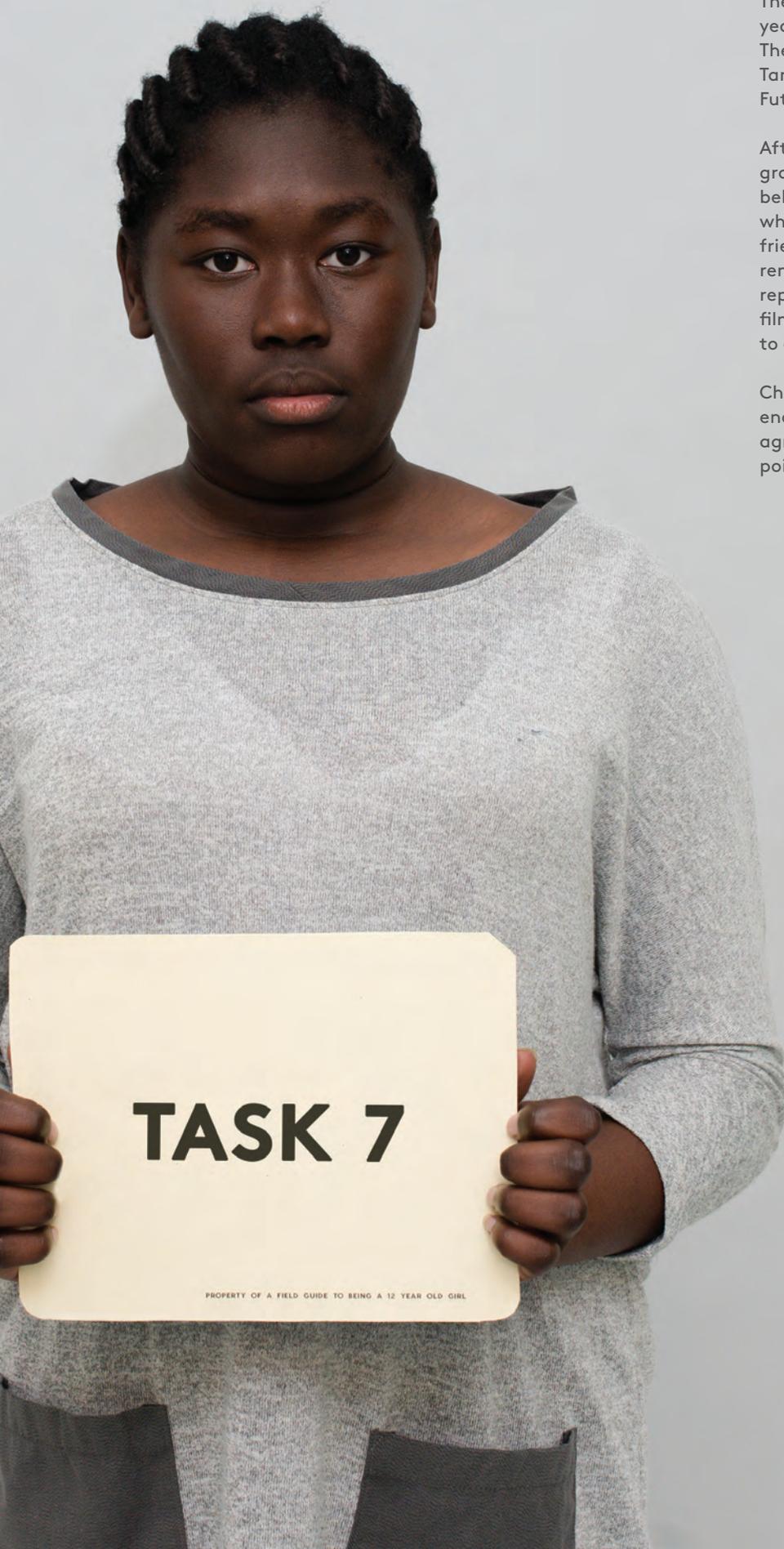
In a class discussion, have students consider the purpose and effects of undermining the narrator in this way. Can she still be trusted to objectively report the facts? Is she now an 'unreliable narrator'?

In an independent task aimed at consolidating understanding of narration, have students quietly read a section of one their current books. Ask them to:

- Identify the narrator/s in the text
- Locate evidence that supports their thinking
- Establish whether the text features first, second, or third person narration
- Consider whether there is anything problematic about the text's narrator.

Students could record their findings in a reading journal or share with a partner or small group.





TASK 7: TEXT STRUCTURE

The film presents the common features of 12-year old girls through the following 'headings': The Beginning, Appearance, Natural Habitat, Taming a Girl, Sad, Happy, Anger, Fear, The Future, and Questions & Answers.

After viewing the film, split the class into groups to critically examine the choices behind this structural choice. Reflecting on what is most important to themselves, their friends, and peers, would students add or remove any headings to build a more accurate representation of 12-year olds? How do the film's structure and language features help to achieve the purpose of the text?

Check in with each group during discussion, encouraging students to identify their areas of agreement and difference, and to justify their points of view.

TASK 8: LABELLED IMAGES

Analytical images like figures, tables, diagrams, maps and graphs are often used to support written or verbal information in persuasive and informative texts. For example, Cadence points to an image of the earth when referring to its 3,726,125,235 female inhabitants, and uses a hand drawn map to introduce her home. Share the following labelled images with students, discussing the content and the tone of the text. Do the images improve their understanding of these characters?

Using available software, have students create their own labelled photo to document aspects of their personal identities. Mirroring the content in the provided images, students could compose labels that document their physical appearance, experiences, thoughts, aspirations, and/or other people's perceptions of them. The final images could be presented collectively in a class display.



Specimen One

HANNAH

• Dreams of making the whole world turquoise colour with hope.

• Hannah enjoys watching TV shows about dancing. She is going to be a choreographer one day and she considers this task essential research.

• Favourite smell is her "mum's hair".

• These arms are often embraced in a hug.

• Hopes to give birth to twin boys and one girl when she is older.

• Has extremely flexible legs and has been known to contort into a formation that resembles a pretzel.

• Legs are often seen dancing.



Specimen Two

MABEL JEAN

Wants to be the Prime Minister one day.

If she does not become the Prime Minister she would like to be a fashion designer because she is also very creative.

Whenever she has a question about the world she asks her Nana. Her Nana knows the answer to everything.

Is a proud Pinjura and Kurna woman.

One of the naughtiest things she has ever done was hit her brother.

Likes to play footy with her brothers although she would never admit it.





TASK 9: PLAN A FIELD GUIDE

As a class, discuss how Writer / Director Tilda Cobham-Hervey innovates on the language features of a 'field guide' to create this hybrid narrative / information text. Like in an information report, she:

- Uses present tense and a passive voice
- Describes, observes, and makes generalisations
- Objectively presents 'factual' information to inform the audience about a specific topic.

Unlike an information report, Cobham-Hervey also exaggerates aspects of the girls' characters. She does this to achieve humour, to offer insight into the girls' feelings, and to build empathy among the audience.

Following this discussion, have students apply their understanding of text structures and language features when planning their own anthropological field guide. This guide might centre on an aspect of the students' own social identity (e.g. 11-year old boys, junior basketball players), or could document another 'creature' that students have significant insight into (e.g. Year 7 teachers, 8-year old sisters).

Using their preferred planning method – brainstorming, mind mapping, listing, or a combination of these – have students plan their topic, introduction, subheadings, and conclusion. They could also jot down key phrases or behaviours / observations to include, and consider including a table of contents, glossary, index, and/or diagrams. Remind students to keep a clear audience and purpose in mind, and to remain respectful and kind in their characterisations.

If time permits, students could draft and publish their field guides in subsequent lessons.

TASK 10: STEREOTYPES

When introducing the film, the narrator states: 'As you can see, there are many variations of the 12-year old girl. And we have decided it is time that all forms and varieties are celebrated and appreciated appropriately.' The film clearly intends to document a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences and interests.

After viewing, use the 'four corners' strategy to gauge students' opinions about the film's representation of 12-year old girls. Label each corner of your classroom with one of four signs – Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Then have students move around the room to express their points of view about statements you will read aloud. Statements could include:

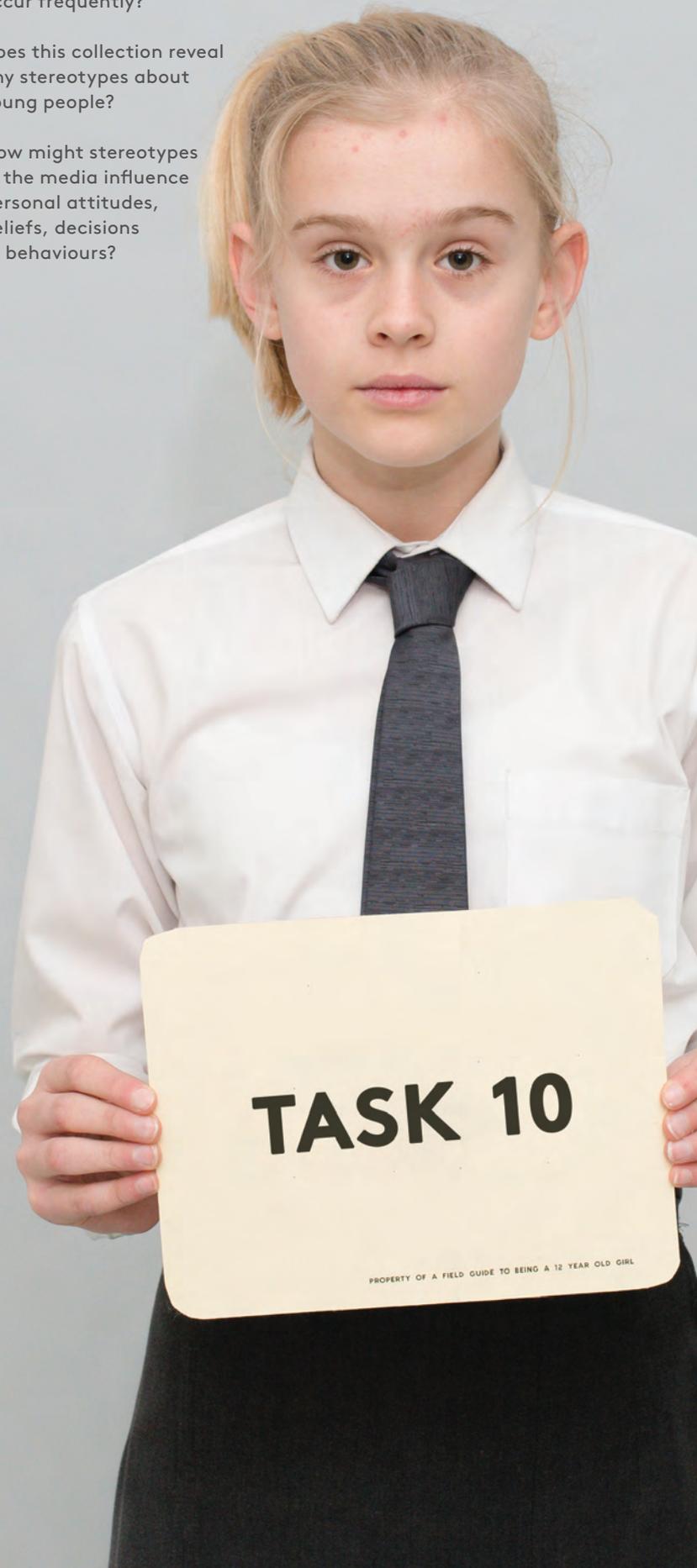
- The film accurately represents 12-year old girls.
- I haven't seen girls portrayed like this in other media texts.
- The film challenges gender stereotypes.
- The film challenges stereotypes about young people.

Allow time for a short discussion after students have selected their corner, and then ask each group to briefly explain their thinking. As a whole class, reflect on this activity and discuss.

If time permits, the class could further explore media representation and stereotypes in subsequent lessons. Over the course of a week, have students examine a broad range of Australian media sources for portrayals of young people. This might include newspapers, magazines, social media, blogs, television programs, films, or radio programs. Ask students to collect evidence to display in a class 'gallery walk' (such as photos, articles, advertisements, illustrations, social media posts, video content, memes, and so on).

In the gallery walk, have students walk around the room to observe their peers' contributions. Ask them to identify commonalities, and to consider whether anything is missing from these portrayals. Have students share their findings in a class discussion, then ask:

- Do any images or descriptions occur frequently?
- Does this collection reveal any stereotypes about young people?
- How might stereotypes in the media influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions or behaviours?



AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM LINKS

	YEAR 6	YEAR 7
ENGLISH	<p>Understand the uses of objective and subjective language and bias (ACELA1517)</p> <p>Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects (ACELA1518)</p> <p>Identify and explain how analytical images like figures, tables, diagrams, maps and graphs contribute to our understanding of verbal information in factual and persuasive texts (ACELA1524)</p> <p>Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways (ACELT1618)</p> <p>Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions (ACELY1709)</p> <p>Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text (ACELY1711)</p> <p>Analyse strategies authors use to influence readers (ACELY1801)</p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience (ACELY1714)</p>	<p>Understand how language is used to evaluate texts and how evaluations about a text can be substantiated by reference to the text and other sources (ACELA1782)</p> <p>Analyse how point of view is generated in visual texts by means of choices, for example gaze, angle and social distance (ACELA1764)</p> <p>Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1619)</p> <p>Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view (ACELT1620)</p> <p>Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character and influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (ACELT1621)</p> <p>Create literary texts that adapt stylistic features encountered in other texts, for example, narrative viewpoint, structure of stanzas, contrast and juxtaposition (ACELT1625)</p> <p>Analyse and explain the ways text structures and language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose (ACELY1721)</p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, selecting aspects of subject matter and particular language, visual, and audio features to convey information and ideas (ACELY1725)</p>
HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION	<p>Recognise how media and important people in the community influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions and behaviours (ACPPS057)</p>	<p>Investigate the benefits to individuals and communities of valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity (ACPPS079)</p>
MEDIA ARTS	<p>Explain how the elements of media arts and story principles communicate meaning by comparing media artworks from different social, cultural and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media artworks (ACAMAR065)</p>	<p>Analyse how technical and symbolic elements are used in media artworks to create representations influenced by story, genre, values and points of view of particular audiences (ACAMAR071)</p>

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

BY TILDA COBHAM-HERVEY

The concept of time is something that has always fascinated me. It is a concept that humans created yet we never seem to have enough of it. When we are young, we are desperate to get older and as soon as we consider ourselves older, we are suddenly struck with a desperate desire to go backwards. Therefore, the age of twelve is an inherently intriguing time in any human's life as it is the last year that we are officially labelled as a child.

Using the guise of a field guide I wanted to have a frank discussion with our next generation of females about the future. I wanted to devise a work that walked the line of fact and fiction. A work that tried to dissect the intangible things that we claim define us, the things that we claim to live for and basically start a discussion with a group of young people about the point of it all.

As adults we often yearn for our childhood. It is hard not to look back on your pre-teen years with sense of distant whimsy and nostalgia. Writing this piece of work was like writing a love song to my childhood. When I was twelve, I felt like I understood so much more about the world than I do now. There was a clear sense of right and wrong, black and white but now I spend most of my time living in a state of grey.

As I look back now making this field guide, it was perhaps more about me asking them for guidance than the other way around. These brave, inspiring, awkward, proud girls are our future and that statement couldn't make me any happier. As the little prince taught us; "All grown-ups were once children... But only few of them remember it." I believe remembering to be a child is of utmost importance and I want this tribe of adolescent leaders to teach us how to view the world like we are just at the beginning again. I also want to create a space for this generation to discuss the world around them as this isn't a piece just about 12-year-olds but a piece about age and time and how we choose to define ourselves and the world around us.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written and Directed by **TILDA COBHAM-HERVEY**
 Produced by **KATRINA LUCAS**
 Executive Producers **SOPHIE HYDE** and **JAN STRADLING**

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