BOY (2010) IS A NEW ZEALAND FEATURE FILM DIRECTED BY TAika WAITITi SUITABLE FOR SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS UNDERTAKING ENGLISH, LITERATURE AND MEDIA LENGTH 87 MINUTES

Teachers may also find the film relevant to units of work for middle secondary students in the following VELS domains:

- English
- Arts
- Media
- Humanities
- Physical, Personal and Social Learning

In completing the tasks, students will have demonstrated the ability to:
- analyse the construction of a film and comment on the ways it represents an interpretation of ideas and experiences
- respond to a film both personally and in detached and critical ways
- rationally discuss and compare another culture and cultural differences
- evaluate the creative and cultural impact of a film
- use their own texts to explore concepts and ideas and to clarify their own and others’ understanding.

Teachers are advised to direct students to complete subject-relevant and age-appropriate activities. Teachers should also be aware that Boy has scenes containing moderate violence and coarse language. There are also references to illicit drugs and alcohol.

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1984, and on the rural east coast of New Zealand Thriller is changing kids’ lives.

Boy is a dreamer who loves Michael Jackson. He lives with his brother Rocky, a tribe of deserted cousins and his nan.

Boy’s other hero, his father Alamein, is the subject of Boy’s fantasies, and he imagines him as a deep-sea diver, war hero and close relation of Michael Jackson (he can even dance like him). In reality, he’s ‘in the can’.

Boy spends his days telling tall tales about his dad’s exploits and his nights telling his pet goat Leaf about his own exploits, such as getting a hickey from the girl of his dreams, Chardonnay. In between he suffers the local bullies, his mean aunty and his frustrating younger brother.

Rocky spends his days being weird, hanging out with his dead mother at the cemetery and working on controlling his magic powers, the ones he believes put his mother there.

Alamein has recently been released after serving seven years in prison for robbing the gas station. He has a cool car, a leather jacket, loves samurai warriors and is starting his own gang – The Crazy Horses (so far there are only three members but that’s not the point). He is also infatuated with the movie E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial.

Apart from dealing with Boy’s bullies, giving him love advice and relating the entire plot of E.T., Alamein has another plan. He enlists the help of Boy to dig up the neighbouring paddock to find the money he hid after the robbery. The only problem is he can’t remember how many steps from the fencepost marks the spot or even which fencepost it was. But finding this treasure will mean a new life for Boy and Rocky in the city.

So now, between trying to impress the girl of his dreams and caring for the motley crew of younger cousins, Boy diligently tries to please his father. But the harder he tries, the worse things get.

Before the summer is out, Boy is forced to confront the man he thought he remembered, find his own potential and learn to get along without the hero he had been hoping for.

DIRECTOR’S PROFILE

Taika Waititi, also known as Taika Cohen, is of Te Whanau-a-Apanui descent and hails from the Raukokore region of New Zealand. He has been involved in the arts for several years, working as a visual artist, actor, writer and director. Waititi’s first short film, Two Cars, One Night (2003), was nominated for an Academy Award in 2005. His next short, Tama tu (2005), told the story of a group of Maori soldiers in Italy during World War II and went on to win a string of international awards, making it also eligible for Oscar nomination. His first feature, Eagle vs Shark, was released internationally in 2007 after being picked up by Miramax on the basis of a trailer.

Waititi started developing Boy soon after finishing Two Cars, One Night. It first emerged as a film called Choice (a slang word popular in the eighties that has since been replaced by cool, wicked, awesome, mean and, eventually, by choice again). Instead of making Boy, he went on to make Eagle vs Shark and continued to develop the screenplay for Boy over the next three years.

Waititi has a strong background in comedy writing and performing, and with fellow comedian Jemaine Clement (Flight of the Conchords) has won New Zealand’s top comedy award, the Billy T, and the Spirit of the Fringe Award in Edinburgh.

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

‘Boy is my first feature film. I see Eagle vs Shark as my second film. I learned a lot on the project but it’s a film I made so that I could take people by surprise, because it wasn’t the film they were expecting from me.

Set in a rural Maori community in the Bay of Plenty, Boy is an eleven-year-old boy’s journey to knowing and understanding the adult world of which he will one day become a part. Boy is a character who invents memories to make sense of his place in the world. He tries to better his existence vicariously through the made-

CREDITS – WRITER/DIRECTOR TAiKA WIATITI PRODUCERS ANSILEY GARDINER, CLIFF CURTIS, EMANUEL MICHAEL CO-PRODUCER MERTAK MITA ASSOCIATE PRODUCER RICHARD FLETCHER PRODUCTION COMPANY WHENU FILMS I UNISON FILMS CAST JAMES ROLLESTON (BOY), TE AHO EKETONE-WHTU (ROCKY), TAiKA WIATITI (ALAMEIN), MOERANGI THIRe (DYNASTY), CHERILEE MARTIN (KELLY), RICKLEY WAIKUPU-RUSSELL (CHARDONNAY), HAZE REVETI (DALLAS), MAAKARRIN BUTLER (MURRAY), RAJVINDER ERIA (TANE), MANHERA RANGIAUA (KING), DARYC RAY FLAVELL-HUDSON (HOLDEN), RACHEL HOUSE (AUNTY GRACEY), WAIHORO SHORTLAND (WEIRD), COHEN HOLLOWAY (CHUPPA), PANa HEMA TAYLOR (JULU), TUKURO RANHERA CHRISTIE (MR NEPA), CRAIG HALL (MR LANGSTON), MAVIS PAENGA (LAA), NGAPAKI EMERY (MUM), NGARU-TA PURU (CHE), HOANIHIU TAKOTOHIW (HUCKS), TAINUI CALLAGHAN (KIKO), MANAIA CALLAGHAN (MIRIA), MONTANA TE KANI-WILLiAMS (FALCON CREST)
up exploits of his absent father, Alamein. When Alamein returns, Boy is forced to reinvent his world, memories and self so he can become a young man.

Like Boy, I draw a lot of inspiration from true and imagined memories. This story is personal in that I believe you must write what you know in order to create honest art. Some events are true, some true of other people, most are imagined.

Part of what makes this film distinct is the humour; I want to explore the painful comedy of growing up and interpreting the world. I believe that despite our faults and inadequacies, through all pain and heartache, there is still room to laugh. I think that’s what makes my films different, the feeling that although there is often darkness, there are also little bits of light to encourage hope and hold on to possibility.’

LINKS
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taika_Waititi>
<http://www.boythemovie.co.nz>
<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0169806/>

Video clips relevant to the study of Boy, including trailers, interviews with the cast and Taika Waititi can be watched on YouTube. Teachers should preview video clips to determine that they are age appropriate. Some suggested links are listed below.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBC0bEwlEvg>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHcGYLqOEGw>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuWLI1mrdyU>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMDThqWRgs>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v3igtarDic>

FURTHER VIEWING
Taika Waititi’s debut feature film, Eagle vs Shark, is available on DVD and is rated M. Eagle vs Shark is a romantic comedy that tells the story of Lily, a cashier at a fast food restaurant, and Jarrod, a geek who works in a video game store. After gate crashing Jarrod’s party and proving her skills on the games console, Jarrod asks Lily to accompany him to his home town where he plans to settle an old score.

REFERENCE
BOY

BOY (2010) IS A NEW ZEALAND FEATURE FILM DIRECTED BY TAIA WAITITI

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1984, and on the rural east coast of New Zealand Thriller is changing kids’ lives.

Boy is a dreamer who loves Michael Jackson. He lives with his brother Rocky, a tribe of deserted cousins and his nan.

Boy’s other hero, his father Alamein, is the subject of Boy’s fantasies, and he imagines him as a deep-sea diver, war hero and close relation of Michael Jackson (he can even dance like him). In reality he’s ‘in the can’.

Boy spends his days telling tall tales about his dad’s exploits and his nights telling his pet goat Leaf about his own exploits, such as getting a hickey from the girl of his dreams, Chardonnay. In between he suffers the local bullies, his mean aunty and his frustrating younger brother.

Rocky spends his days being weird, hanging out with his dead mother at the cemetery and working on controlling his magic powers, the ones he believes put his mother there.

Alamein has recently been released after serving seven years in prison for robbing the gas station. He has a cool car, a leather jacket, loves samurai warriors and is starting his own gang – The Crazy Horses (so far there are only three members but that’s not the point). He is also infatuated with the movie E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial.

Apart from dealing with Boy’s bullies, giving him love advice and relating the entire plot of E.T., Alamein has another plan. He enlists the help of Boy to dig up the neighbouring pad-dock to find the money he hid after the robbery. The only problem is he can’t remember how many steps from the fencepost marks the spot or even which fencepost it was. But finding this treasure will mean a new life for Boy and Rocky in the city.

So now, between trying to impress the girl of his dreams and caring for the motley crew of younger cousins, Boy diligently tries to please his father. But the harder he tries, the worse things get.

Before the summer is out, Boy is forced to confront the man he thought he remembered, find his own potential and learn to get along without the hero he had been hoping for.
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

• Did you enjoy Boy?

• Who was your favourite character?

• Which moments made you laugh?

• Which moments made you feel sad?
• Which moments made you feel worried for Boy and Rocky?

• What are the messages of Boy?

Share your answers to these questions with others in the class.

**WHO AM I?**

‘My name is Boy and welcome to my interesting world. My favourite person is Michael Jackson. He is the best singer and dancer in the world. Last month he put out a record called *Thriller*. It sold a gazillion copies and now he lives in a castle with a snake and a monkey. He is so famous that you can see him in the stars. I live in a white house with my nanny and cousins Hucks, Kelly, Miria, Che and Kiko. I have a pet goat called Leaf and I also have a six-year-old brother called Rocky. He thinks he’s got powers. He doesn’t.

Yesterday my nan went away to a funeral. While she’s gone, I’m in charge of the house.

I go to Raukokore School. I have many favourite subjects, including Art, Social Studies and Michael Jackson. My friends are Dallas and her sister Dynasty. They also have a sister called Falcon Crest. Dynasty is the only girl around here with a job. She does after-school gardening work for her dad. Aunty Gracey is my mum’s sister. She has lots of jobs. She’s the tennis coach, the mailman, the school bus driver and she runs the local shop.

My real name is Alamein. I’m named after my dad and he’s named after some place where the Maori Battalion fought.
during World War II. Dad’s brothers and sisters are Faenza, Tunisia and Libya and Michael Jackson. My dad’s not here right now. He’s a master carver, a deep-sea diver, the captain of the rugby team and he holds the record for punching out the most people with the one hand. When he comes home, he’s taking me to see Michael Jackson – live.

The end.’ (Boy)

- What does Boy’s speech reveal about his sense of self and his understanding of his world?
- Just like Boy, write your own three minute ‘Who am I?’ speech.

KEY SCENES

- Working as a class, make a list of key scenes.
- Working in a small group, make a detailed analysis of one of the film’s key scenes. Use the following questions to make notes about the scene you have selected.
  - What is the scene about?
  - Why is the scene significant?
  - How does the filmmaker use film elements to convey meaning?

- ‘How was Japan?’ (Rocky)
The story ends at the cemetery. Boy, Rocky and Alamein sit at Joanie’s grave. What conclusions can we make about the family’s future? Do you think this was an apt way to end the film?

- ‘You could be happy here … we could grow up together.’ Why do you think Boy begins with the above quotation from E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial? What connections can be made between this quotation and the story told in Boy?
THEMES

• Name three themes explored in Boy.

Share your ideas with others in the class and add some of their ideas to your list of themes.

Which theme do you think is the most significant? Why?

CHARACTERS

• Choose three adjectives to describe the main characters.

BOY

ROCKY

ALAMEIN

Compare your responses with a peer and then with the class.

• What statement does Boy make about childhood?

BOY

• What statement does Boy make about family?

BOY

• How do the filmmakers position us to regard the main characters?
ROCKY

What do we learn about Boy and Rocky’s mother?

ALAMEIN

Kelly, Chardonnay, Dallas, Murray, Tane, Kingi, Holden, Aunty Gracey, Weirdo, Chuppa, Juju, Hucks, Che, Kiko, Miria, Falcon Crest, Nan, Mr Nepia, Mr Langston

Who was your favourite minor character? Why?
• Write a detailed character profile of your favourite minor character.

• Draw a mind map that shows Boy’s relationships with his family and friends. You should probably include Leaf in the mind map as well. Begin your mind map by placing Boy’s name in a circle in the middle of your page and then use arrows and words to explain his relationships with his family and friends.

• Why do you think Waititi created the character called Weirdo?

• Write a list of Boy’s responsibilities.

• What were your responsibilities when you were eleven years old?

• Do you think Boy is expected to be too responsible?

• When do we see Boy behaving irresponsibly?

DEVELOPING AN INTERPRETATION

RESPONSIBILITY

• Boy is eleven years old. Write a description of you at that age.
• Some might say that Boy is more responsible than Alamein. What do you think?

• What does Boy learn about the adult world when Alamein comes to stay?

• Why does Rocky spend so much time at the cemetery?

• ‘Hey Chardonnay, want to see some Michael Jackson dance moves?’ (Boy)
Boy worships Michael Jackson. Who did you worship when you were eleven? Share your stories with the class.

• Boy thinks of Alamein as a hero. Describe the fantasy dad that Boy has imagined.

• ‘I have to watch out for my powers.’ (Rocky)
What are some of Rocky’s powers?

Why does Rocky think he has magic powers? Why is this idea so important to him?

HEROES AND SUPERHEROES

• ‘Hey Chardonnay, want to see some Michael Jackson dance moves?’ (Boy)
Boy worships Michael Jackson. Who did you worship when you were eleven? Share your stories with the class.

• Boy thinks of Alamein as a hero. Describe the fantasy dad that Boy has imagined.

FATHERS AND SONS

• Working as a class, make a list of the qualities of a good parent?

> >

> >

> >

> >

> >

> >

> >

> >

> >

> >

> >
‘Find my shit. So I can get the hell out of here.’ (Alamein)
Do you think Alamein only comes back for the money?
Share your answer to this question with the class.

‘Just call me little Shogun.’ (Boy)
When does Alamein impress Boy?

‘I thought I was like you but I’m not. I don’t have any potential.’ (Boy)
When does Alamein disappoint Boy?

‘Alamein is the greatest dad in the world. Just not in this world.’
This claim about Alamein can be found on one of the promotional posters for Boy.
Do you think it is an apt description of Alamein?

‘I will spend more time with those boys. Quality time.’ (Alamein)
Alamein’s in a gang called The Crazy Horses. He insists on being called Shogun. He drives his car as if he’s in The Dukes of Hazzard. He smokes too much dope and he thinks presents are things you steal off other people.

Do you think Alamein has what it takes to be the dad that Boy and Rocky need?

POTENTIAL

Mr Langston tells Boy that he has potential – just like his dad had when he was Boy’s age. Boy looks up the meaning of potential in the dictionary. He is none the wiser.

What does Boy decide potential is?

Do you think Alamein has potential?

How would you define potential?

Has anyone ever told you that you have potential?

How would you define your potential?

Write a personal narrative about potential.

SETTING THE SCENE

Boy is set in Waihau Bay in 1984.
• What’s life like in Waihua Bay?

• What do we learn about society circa 1984?

Taika Waititi uses a variety of settings to tell the story of Boy.

• Working as a class, make a list of the most significant settings.

> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐

Write a description of one of the interior settings. Explain how this setting is used to tell the story.

MAKING THE FILM

• What makes Boy different to other films that you have watched?

• Imagine you had the opportunity to interview the film’s director, Taika Waititi. Compile a list of five questions you would like to ask him about the making of Boy.

> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐

> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
> ☐
‘Part of what makes this film distinct is the humour; I want to explore the painful comedy of growing up and interpreting the world. I believe that despite our faults and inadequacies, through all pain and heartache, there is still room to laugh. I think that’s what makes my films different, the feeling that although there is often darkness, there are also little bits of light to encourage hope and hold on to possibility.’ (Taika Waititi)

Having considered Waititi’s explanation of how humour is used to tell the story of Boy, find dialogue and moments from the film that support this claim.

Symbolism is when something is used to represent something else and can be used to add to the viewer’s understanding of a theme or character. Symbolism can be obvious or subtle.

Can you name one or more symbols that appear in Boy?

‘Like Boy, I draw a lot of inspiration from true and imagined memories. This story is personal in that I believe you must write what you know in order to create honest art. Some events are true, some true of other people, most are imagined.’ (Taika Waititi)

Do you agree with Waititi’s claim that a writer should write about what they know? What do you think he means by ‘honest art’?

Spend time discussing the way animation is used in Boy. Did you find the animation sequences effective?

What meanings do the animation sequences convey?

READING AND WRITING FILM REVIEWS

Visit the website for Boy to see what the critics think of the film. Read the quotations from reviews as they display on the home page. Do these claims match your opinion of Boy?
This study guide was produced by ATOM. (©ATOM 2010) editor@atom.org.au
For more information on SCREEN EDUCATION magazine, or to download other study guides for assessment, visit <http://www.metromagazine.com.au>. Join ATOM’s email broadcast list for invitations to free screenings, conferences, seminars, etc. Sign up now at <http://www.atom.asn.au/lists/>.
For hundreds of articles on Film as Text, Screen Literacy, Multiliteracy and Media Studies, visit <http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>.

Notice: An educational institution may make copies of all or part of this study guide, provided that it only makes and uses copies as reasonably required for its own educational, non-commercial, classroom purposes and does not sell or lend such copies.