THE WOLVES ALWAYS COME AT





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Summary

Title	The Wolves Always Come At Night		
Director	Gabrielle Brady		
Release date	2024		
Category	Hybrid Documentary		
Classification	TBC		
Length	96 minutes		
Language(s)	Mongolian		
Year levels	Years 10–12		
Synopsis (short)	After a devastating storm wrought by climate change forces them from their home in the Mongolian countryside to the city, a young couple are forced to adapt to a new way of life in this breathtaking and heartbreaking hybrid film.		
Learning Areas	This study guide is designed to accompany the hybrid documentary <i>The Wolves Always Come At Night</i> and is aimed at secondary school students in Years 10-12. It is suitable as a text for: • English • Media Arts • Geography (while the film touches on issues of climate change and desertification, this is not the central focus and would be suitable as a supplementary text).		
General Capabilities	Intercultural Understanding		
Cross-curriculum priorities	 Sustainability Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia 		
Key themes/topics explored	 Human experience Connection to culture and family Effects of climate change 		
Learning intentions	The intention of this study guide is to provide students with an understanding of the documentary filmmaking process in relation to telling compelling stories of the human experience. By the end of this study guide students should be able to: Identify and describe filmic techniques used to engage audiences. Analyse how media codes and conventions are selected and applied to create representations. Develop an appreciation for different cultures through storytelling. Develop an understanding of the film production process and explain how the hybrid documentary was constructed to engage audiences. Discuss the impact of climate change on everyday lives. Consider the importance of cultural/ancestral traditions, and the challenges of maintaining these traditions in the modern world.		
Advice/warnings	The Wolves Always Come At Night requires a mature audience capable of appreciating the cinematic approach taken. This hybrid documentary also includes images of deceased animals which some student may find distressing.		
Official trailer	youtube.com/watch?v=oanzjJfQV04		





Synopsis

Seamlessly blending documentary and fiction, *The Wolves Always Come At Night* is a timely reminder of the sometimes-tenuous foundations of the places we call home. Born to generations of herders in Mongolia's immense Bayankhongor region, young couple Davaa (Davaasuren Dagvasuren) and Zaya (Otgonzaya Dashzeveg) are raising their four children as they were brought up: with an intimate connection to the land and the animals they share their lives with.

After an unexpectedly severe sandstorm leaves a devastating impact in its wake, Davaa and Zaya must make a once-unthinkable decision that will irrevocably change their family's lives.

With herding now untenable, they relocate to the city for work, as hundreds of thousands have done before them. For Davaa, this includes selling his beloved stallion whose absence leaves a lingering hole in his heart. Once in Ulaanbaatar, the family sets up in the ger district, a sprawling yurt settlement

on the city's outskirts where most of the former herders now live, and where overpopulation and pollution thrive.

Director Gabrielle Brady lays bare the emotional ruptures of climate change and urban migration on Mongolian herders, told through the experiences of one family. Dagvasuren and Dashzeveg, also credited as the film's co-writers, are revelatory. The quiet heartbreak they endure is etched on their faces as they drift ever further from the herding life and culture they deeply love, yearning for a day they can return to their home and hoping, likely in vain, that it doesn't cease to exist.

Jason Ryle

TIFF International Programmer, Australia and New Zealand, and Global Indigenous Cinema.

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Curriculum links

The Wolves Always Come At Night is a subtle narrative that explores the effects of climate change through the human experience. It is suitable for secondary school students aged 15 and above who can appreciate the intentional use of media codes and conventions to convey a loss of identity and nomadic way of life. Due to the observational nature of the documentary, it is recommended that students focus on key scenes (outlined below) to understand the storytelling and media production process.

This documentary is suitable for English and Media Arts, and as a supplementary text for Geography. While the film touches on issues of climate change and desertification, this is not the central focus.

Teachers should consult the Australian Curriculum and relevant state or territory specific curriculum guides.

English

The Wolves Always Come At Night can be used as an individual or supplementary text for close reading to explore themes of the human experience and global dilemmas in real world and fictional contexts. This documentary provides scope for critical understanding of how texts, language, visuals and audio are influenced by context and perspective.

Australian Curriculum Key Outcomes

Unit 1

- Understand the relationships between purpose, context and audience and how these relationships influence texts and their meaning.
- Investigate how text structures and language features are used to convey ideas and represent people and events in a range of texts.

Unit 2

 Understand the ways in which ideas and attitudes are represented in texts.

Unit 3

- Understand relationships between texts, genres and contexts.
- Investigate the effects of different conventions and mediums on responses.

Unit 4

- Understand how content, structure, voice and perspective in texts shape responses and interpretations.
- Examine different interpretations of texts and how these resonate with, or challenge, their own responses.

Activities in this study guide provide opportunities for:

- · Group discussions of storytelling techniques.
- Identifying and discussing key elements of the documentary to demonstrate understanding.
- Interpreting and analysing themes, plot sequences and hybrid structures to understand audience experience.





The Arts (Media Arts)

The Wolves Always Come At Night can be used as an individual or supplementary text to explore and respond to the ways in which media creators use codes and conventions to convey meaning to audiences.

Activities in this study guide provide opportunities for:

- Identifying and describing the ways in which the filmmakers construct representations of people and places.
- Analysing the selection and application of media codes and conventions to engage audiences.
- Analysing the approach the filmmakers have taken to making the film and how this relates to both artistic intention as well as ethics.
- Exploring the film production process in relation to the institutional context and how this shapes distribution and audience engagement.

Geography

The Wolves Always Come At Night can be used as a supplementary text for Geography to illustrate the effects of climate change and how people perceive and respond to challenges.

Activities in this study guide provide opportunities for:

- Discussing and reflecting on environmental changes and the challenges they pose.
- Analysing and reflecting on the implication of environmental management.

General capabilities

Intercultural Understanding

Cross-curriculum links

- Sustainability
- Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia

Glossary terms

ANTAGONIST The main or central character who opposes or challenges the protagonist. The antagonist is often the villain within a narrative.

DESERTIFICATION The transformation of fertile land into desert or arid waste because of

GER Mongolian nomadic tent.

HYBRID DOCUMENTARY

human activity.

A narrative that uses observational filming and fictional recreated scenes to create a representation of events to tell a story.

NOMAD A person that moves around frequently rather than living in the one place for extended periods of time. In relation to the film, a Mongolian nomad is someone who moves seasonally, in search of sustenance for their livestock.

NOMADISM A way of life where people move frequently or do not live in a fixed location.

PROTAGONIST The main or central character(s) within the narrative.

RETROSPECT Looking back or reviewing past events.

STALLION An adult male horse.

Before viewing

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The seed for this film grew over fifteen years ago when I lived in Mongolia, working as a TV producer for a kids show. I was spending a lot of time traveling the countryside and staying with herding families. The nights were filled with fabled stories about the region's wolves; both a creature who demanded respect as well as posing the biggest threat to herding life. But over the years the stories changed, the threat had become something altogether different.

I returned a decade later while I was pregnant and intent on reconnecting with some of the families I once stayed with. I discovered many of the same herders were now living in the city's ger districts after having left their homelands. Eyes would glaze over as they shared memories of the lands they left. I met with an old friend who told me that every night he dreamt only of the countryside and his animals that had died in one of the erratic storms hitting the country. His dreaming life existed solely in the landscape he had left. It was as though his body had never arrived. I was deeply moved and taken into the memories of what had been left behind.





In the experience of becoming a mother during the process of making the film, I was somehow feeling the loss with heightened urgency and could more closely touch the edges of this deep emotional rupture.

The families I visited were part of a bigger upheaval. Hundreds of thousands of Mongolian herding families had been forced to leave their homelands over the last years after losing animals to the devastating effects of climate change. When herders arrived to the city they would live in a kind of liminal space, seen as illegal settlers and often unable to find work. They were living as herders without animals.

I was aware in the years of research that there might not be a way to tell this story; that there may not be the images that allow an audience to fully grasp the type of deep loss that people were experiencing. I wondered how this grief could be shown, when it seemed to be a haunting that was felt in people's bodies but had little words or images.



Then I met Davaa and Zaya, just days after they had arrived to the city from the countryside. In spending time with Davaa, I had the feeling of a kind of mythical watchman. The person sitting at the watch-post, witnessing the advancement of an uncontrollable destruction.

Pre-viewing Activities

- Read the <u>synopsis</u> on page 3. Brainstorm what you think the title could mean in relation to the synopsis. Write down your observations or expectations for the film.
- What are some of the characteristics of a documentary film? What media codes and conventions are you expecting to see used within this film to engage audiences?
- What do you think the term hybrid documentary means and how will it impact the narrative or creative choices?

Davaa was witnessing what was coming and he needed other people to see it.
The witness needed to be witnessed.

He and Zaya invited us to begin filming the very next day. Davaa told me he had been waking at night in the city to the sound of his stallion, believing inexplicably that the horse had found his way back continued to appear as apparitions in this new daily life. Davaa's haunting had become physical.

What also struck me was the deep love that Davaa felt – for the horse he had left behind, for the landscape that was so deeply inside of him. It was a love that permeated from him and his family. In Davaa I witnessed a person longing to hold on to all that was being taken from him. And a will for it to still exist, even as he watches it disappear.

Gabrielle Brady, Director

Key themes

The Wolves Always Come At Night is a hybrid documentary film exploring the environmental impact of climate change through the intimate and personal journey of the protagonists Davaa, Zaya and their young children.

A herder's lifestyle requires a profound knowledge of the land and the needs of livestock. Moving constantly is not a choice, but a necessity to ensure access to food and water for their animals. This hybrid documentary explores the relationship to the land that many herders carry as part of their identity.

Harsher weather patterns and more extreme seasons due to climate change are causing nomadic Mongolians to reconsider a generational way of life. Many herders are relocating to informal settlements on the outskirts of large cities such as the nation's capital Ulaanbaatar to find work to support their families. According to the United Nations, 54 per cent of Ulaanbaatar's population live in ger camps without basic services and access to health resources.

Working closely with the protagonists Davaa and Zaya, the film asks audiences to consider how someone can be expected to stay on the land when it isn't physically possible to survive and how this can affect a person's sense of self.





Desertification

Desertification is the degradation of fertile drylands, transforming them into desert or arid landscapes. More than 40 per cent of the earth's habitable surface is categorised as drylands.

There are many factors impacting the expansion of desert landscapes including human activity such as urbanisation and farming, as well as changing environmental factors such as global warming and the increased length and intensity of droughts. For the herders living in regions such as the Bayankhongor Province of Mongolia this means the increase of sandstorms, which affects the growth of crops and livestock.

In Australia, where much of the landscape is arid drylands, dust storms are more likely during periods of severe dry weather. Droughts, low levels of rainfall and agricultural grazing loosens the top layer of soil, making it much easier to be swept up during high winds. In 2020, a significant dust storm swept across parts of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, affecting air quality and visibility, turning the sky orange and blanketing the states in red dust carried by winds from Central Australia.

While *The Wolves Always Come At Night* focuses on the Bayankhongor Province of Mongolia, desertification is not a new global crisis. In the 1930s, the Midwest and Great Plains of America were hit with severe drought and environmental disasters that led to intense dust storms. Known as 'The Dust Bowl' this period of environmental disaster lasted many years and affected the growth of crops and livestock during The Great Depression.

For more information about desertification, visit the National Geographic website: <<u>nationalgeographic.</u> com/environment/article/desertification>

Activity

Watch the short video: 'Would You Stay if Your Home Became a Desert?' – National Geographic <youtube.com/watch?v=uUCD19mEliU>

 Write a brief explanation of desertification and how it is affecting herders living in the Gobi Desert. In pairs discuss your answer.

Research The Dust Bowl in America in the 1930s.

- Write a brief explanation explaining:
 - What caused this environmental disaster?
 - Who was affected by the dust storms?
 - How was this environmental disaster overcome?
 - What did people learn from this experience and/or what changes have been made to people's behaviour to avoid similar disasters in the future?

View footage of the storm rolling in across New South Wales: 'Dust storm barrels across regional NSW' – Nine News Australia

<youtube.com/watch?v=drQgQpk_Jd8>

 Describe what you think a dust storm would feel like. In your response, describe what you would see, taste, smell, hear and feel. If you have experienced a dust storm before, use this knowledge to reflect on your experience.

While viewing

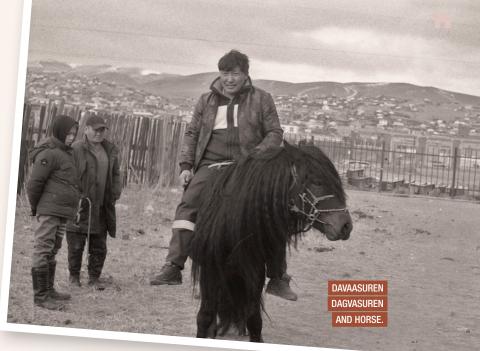
APPLICATION OF CODES AND CONVENTIONS

Media codes are the tools used to construct meaning. They include camerawork, acting techniques, mise en scène and visual composition, editing techniques, lighting and sound design.

Media conventions are the rules or generally accepted ways of constructing form or meaning. They include form conventions, genre conventions and narrative conventions such as character arcs, story structure, cause and effect, point of view and the structuring of time.

Using Table 1 (following page), take notes on the use of media codes while viewing the documentary.

► Jump to Table 1 on page 10



After completing Table 1, explain how media codes are used to adhere to or convey genre, form and narrative conventions. Each response should include a different media code.

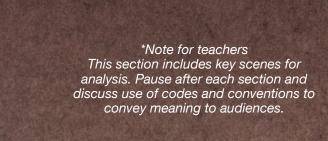
- How does the use of one media code listed above convey the documentary format?
- How does the use of one media code establish the hybrid documentary genre?
- How does the use of one media code communicate a narrative or storyline?



YOU CAN COMPLETE THIS PAGE IN ACROBAT

YOUR NAME

	Describe one scene where this code is used effectively E.g. Landscape shots are often extreme wide shots, compared to inside the ger where the family is framed in mid and close-up shots. ▼	What meaning is created through the application of this code? E.g. Wide shots are used to show the expanse of the desert, whereas the close-up shots of the family establishes their connection and strong relationship.
MEDIA CODES		connection and strong relationship.
Camera		
Body language/ facial expressions		
Mise en scène		
Editing		
Lighting		
Sound		
Music		



Close viewing – key scenes

[00:00-08:39]

OPENING SCENE

The opening sequence is an important element of a production to set the tone, genre and establish the audience's engagement.

- How is the audience introduced to the main character Davaa? Discuss with the person next to you how one media code is used to introduce Davaa.
- Compare the use of the handheld tracking shot with the static wide shots used within this scene.
 Why do you think the director chose to begin the film in this way?
- Describe the sound design within the opening sequence. What diegetic and non-diegetic sounds have been used to create a sense of urgency?
- Explain the point of view of the documentary.
 Whose perspective is the focus of the narrative and how does the audience know this?

As a class discuss your understanding of the genre conventions of a documentary – Does this film conform to or subvert genre conventions? Explain your answer referring to media codes.

[29:21-39:30]

SANDSTORM

From the director:

Tension was an important element for me in the cinematic approach. I was recalling my experiences of living in Mongolia and the mythical stories around wolves, who could arrive and take it all in one blow. I wanted to play with tension as a building sensation of the oncoming sense of something big, unpredictable and unseen. Something that would ultimately take everything.



- Describe the camerawork used in this scene What shot types have been used and what do they convey?
- Describe the sound design How is the intensity or lack of wind used to engage the audience?
- Why is there no non-diegetic music used in this scene?
- Describe the editing structure explain why the scene cuts between Davaa in the desert and inside the ger.
- Describe the mise en scène. How is colour used to communicate loss to the audience within this sequence?
- Describe Davaa and Zaya's performance how does their body language and facial expressions evoke an emotional response from the audience?
- As a viewer, did you feel that something negative or bad was about to occur? Explain how this tension effected your viewing experience. For example, did you feel a sense of dread?

Production

- How do you think this scene was created by the production team?
- Do you think the actor Davaasuren Dagvasuren who plays Davaa would have found this scene challenging to shoot?

As a class discuss some of the ways a production team ensures actors or crew are not further traumatised by scenes certain scenes. You may wish to refer to other films or documentaries you have seen.







GOODBYE TO ANIMALS

In small groups, choose to focus on either Davaa selling his stallion or Zaya saying goodbye to the goats and discuss how media codes are used to communicate elements of their character and relationship to the animals.

- How do the animals reflect the characters?
- What emotions are trying to be communicated to the audience? Explain your answer.
- Describe how media codes have been used to communicate Davaa or Zaya's loss or despair.
 Explain why you think these scenes were shot so differently.
- Describe the causes that have led to this scene, what effect do you think it will have on the rest of the narrative?

As a class, come together and share your observations. Consider what the audience learns from this scene.

[1:00:04-1:12:37]

DAVAA AS EXCAVATOR – RELATIONSHIP TO LAND

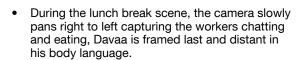
From the director:

In spending time with Davaa
I had the feeling of a kind of
mythical watchman. The person
sitting at the watch post,
witnessing the advancement of
an uncontrollable destruction.
Davaa was witnessing what
was coming and he needed
other people to see it. The

witness needed to be witnessed.

- Describe the costuming choices within this scene. How is costuming used to establish a shift in identity?
 Consider the symbolic meaning associated with costume design.
- At the start of this sequence, non-diegetic construction noises play as Davaa walks to work. How is editing used to foreshadow the rest of the scene?
- Davaa says, 'I will just dig up rocks' as he starts his new job. Why is this line significant for his character development? How does it compare to his old lifestyle? Think back to the action-based opening sequence.





- a) Describe Davaa's body language how do we know he is distant from his coworkers?
- b) Describe the camera movement why has this stylistics choice been made and how does it engage the audience?
- The next scene [1:03:27] transitions with the return of the haunting soundtrack and includes a slow handheld zoom of an empty road as horses cross from left to right.
 - a) How do you feel watching this scene? Use three words to describe your emotional response.
 - b) What is the intention of this scene is it real or imagined from the character's perspective? Refer to media codes to justify your answer.
- In the second part of this sequence, we see Davaa stopping work to admire the landscape.
 - a) Explain why this scene is a significant moment for the protagonist. How is the director representing a herder's relationship to the land?
 - b) Compare this version of Davaa with the start of the film. What changes have occurred through the narrative?



[1:28:17-1:32:28]

CLOSING SCENE

From the director:

And here they create an alternative ending, one that is alive in Davaa's imagination.

Where he is again with his stallion, riding through the boundless landscapes of his homeland. This sacred bond, unbroken.

- Why does the director use a cut to black to link the previous scene with the closing sequence?
- Is this scene real or a dream? Explain your answer referring to media codes.
- What could be the symbolic meaning of riding off into the distance?
- Explain how music is used to heighten this scene. How do you feel while watching?
- Thinking back to the opening sequence or refer to your notes – What is the director trying to say about a herder's relationship to the land?





Post-viewing activities

Gabrielle Brady notes in the director's statement:

I was spending a lot of time traveling the countryside and staying with herding families.
The nights were filled with fabled stories about the region's wolves; both a creature who demanded respect as well as posing the biggest threat to herding life.
But over the years the stories changed, the threat had become something altogether different.

- Using your knowledge of the film and the director's statement,
 - Explain your understanding of the film's title referring to your pre-viewing predictions. Has your understanding changed? Discuss your response in pairs.
- Now that you have seen the film, has your understanding of desertification changed? Are you sympathetic of the farmers whose identity is attached to cultivating the land?
- The film is categorised as a hybrid documentary. Now that you have viewed the film, what elements conform to the documentary format and what elements subvert the form? Discuss your response as a class.
- The documentary focuses on the effects of climate change through desertification.
 Undertake research into the effects of desertification. Your research should focus on:
 - a) The main factors of desertification. What is it and how does it occur?
 - b) Other parts of the world where desertification is changing the way people live. What affect is it having on the world?
 - Ways that desertification can be managed and prevented for future generations.

Present your research as a short report or presentation. Include images and a bibliography.

- Mongolian herders use the term dzud to describe periods of extreme climatic conditions, which lead to the deaths of large numbers of livestock.
 - a) What are dzuds? Where are they prevalent?
 - b) How does it affect the herder's ability to raise their animals?



- A central theme of The Wolves Always Come At Night is the connection to culture and ancestral traditions. Research nomadic herding in Mongolia.
 - a) What is nomadic herding?
 - b) How is a herder's life different from yours or from people who live in urban environments?
 - c) Write a short paragraph of an imagined day in the life of a herder.
- Ancestral traditions and storytelling are key component of Davaa and Zaya's life.
 - a) Explain the story of the lone ger at [08:39– 11:38]. What is the warning or message in the story that the children are telling?
 - d) Are there fables or folk stories in your culture that are used to explain or caution people?
 Retell a story from your culture to the person next to you.
 - e) Could The Wolves Always Come At Night be considered a fable or folk story? Is there a warning or message for the audience to consider?
- In a modern world, ancestral traditions often become a key connection to cultural and cultural identity:
 - a) Are there any ancestral traditions your family recognises or practices?
 - b) In small groups discuss these traditions and how they bring family and friends together.
 Are there any similarities or differences with the people around you?
 - Do these traditions help you to feel connected to your culture? Explain why or why not.
- What are some of the difficulties of moving to a new place? How does it affect your connection to your identity or cultural upbringing?



HOW THE FILM WAS MADE

The Wolves Always Come At Night is a hybrid film, moving between observational documentary and reconstructed scenes.

When we first met Davaa and Zaya they were transitioning from the countryside to the city. The very first scenes we filmed were of them arriving to the city and setting up their new home. Over the next few weeks we filmed as they were attempting to adapt to life in their new reality.

From this beginning, grounded in documentary, we explored how we could further create the story to bring people inside of their experience. They made it clear we needed to return to their homelands and show life 'as it was' and to document the situation in retrospect.

I had worked with the form of 'filming in retrospect' on my first film Island of the Hungry Ghosts with main collaborator and protagonist Poh Lin Lee. We were working with people seeking asylum who were in highly tense and unpredictable situations and so to work in retrospect meant we could create safety, while also shaping a cinematic vision for the film.

With The Wolves Always Come At Night, I had similar intentions with the hybrid approach. It was clear early on that to film a family losing their animals in real time had the potential to create more harm.

The question we were grappling with, was if someone could give full consent to filming while being inside of a traumatic situation. Our intention was that Davaa and Zaya have agency within the making of their story. So in working together as co-writers, we were able to shape the story together.

They would share ideas for what could be filmed and I would translate this into the cinematic language for the film.

For the second block of filming, the family invited us back to their homelands in the Gobi Desert where their family members were still living. It was spring and birthing season, where the stakes are always high. A lot of what we filmed was very observational; the town hall meeting that happens every week, the birthing of the animals, and nervously checking on them at night. Within this time, we also constructed some of the key scenes of what led the couple to leave their homelands.

Gabrielle Brady, Director

Comprehension questions

- Explain how the documentary takes an observational approach to filming. Give an example of where this occurred in the film.
- Explain how the documentary uses reconstructed scenes. Use an example from the film where this has occurred.
- The filming process is often non-linear or shot out of order from the way it is viewed by the audience. Which scenes were shot first and why do you think the production team made this decision?
- What are some of the ethical issues with filming a documentary with reconstructed scenes?
- How did the director ensure the protagonists were protected from further trauma?



HYBRID DOCUMENTARY

A hybrid documentary draws on film making techniques from a range of documentary categories. In *The Wolves Always Come At Night* observational documentary techniques are combined with fictional scene recreation to represent the story to audiences. Shooting took place over six weeks in the Bayankhongor Province and in the main city Ulaanbaatar.

An observational documentary takes a 'fly-on-the-wall' approach, where participants are captured candidly living their life. In *The Wolves Always Come At Night* some of the very first scenes were shot of Davaa and Zaya transitioning from nomadic herding to city life. Observational documentary techniques were again used for the second block of filming, when the production team were invited to their family's homelands in the Gobi Desert. Scenes such as the weekly town hall meeting, animal births and nighttime checks were also observation based.





An important element

throughout the documentary is ensuring the main protagonist had agency over their story. Davaa and Zaya worked as co-writers helping to provide a distinct perspective of their lived experience, that complemented the artistic choices made by director Gabrielle Brady.

Drawing on Davaa and Zaya's experiences of loss and devastation, scenes were created in retrospect to explain why the family had to leave their ancestral lands. Waiting for a dust storm to film the destruction as well as recreating the loss of animal life, helps blur the lines that defines the hybrid documentary format.

Activity

Read through the interview articles below and answer the questions.

TIFF Interview, by Christopher Llewellyn Reed, 17
September 2024 < filmfestivaltoday.com/interviews/
tiff-interview-gabrielle-brady-of-the-wolves-alwayscome-at-night>

- What is director Gabrielle Brady's connection to Mongolia?
- Which scenes were filmed using observational documentary techniques, and which were filmed in retrospect?
- What was the role of Davaa and Zaya within the film production? Why was it important that Davaa and Zaya were co-writers?

- Explain how the sandstorm scene was filmed:
 - a. What production decisions were made when shooting this scene? How was loss of animal life constructed by the production crew?
 - b. How did the director ensure that the protagonists Davaa and Zaya were not retraumatized by the loss of animals?

'Filming in Retrospect' by Amarsanaa Battulga. <documentary.org/online-feature/filming-retrospectgabrielle-brady-discusses-wolves-always-comenight>

- Explain why it was important for the documentary to be a Mongolian co-production.
- Why did the director Gabrielle Brady choose to work within the hybrid documentary genre? How did this help to establish an authentic narrative?

STYLISTIC APPROACH

Style is an important element within this hybrid documentary. Style refers to the unique ways in which a director uses media codes and conventions. Examples could be the equipment used to shoot the film, or perhaps the use of colour or framing. The next section breaks down key stylistic choices used in *The Wolves Always Come At Night*.

Cinematography

The film was captured using an ARRI ALEXA Mini LF, a lightweight and compact camera that still allows for large format recording.

Director of Photography Michael Latham notes:

Gabrielle had expressed the desire to capture the film in the most organic and filmic manner possible. Something that would be timeless, matching the worn and textured landscape we would be capturing. I have tested numerous cameras and have found ARRI's older ALEV3 sensors to produce the most organic-looking images to my eye. We chose to combine an ALEXA Mini LF with vintage rehoused Russian optics – the Richard Gale Clavius lenses. Lenses that create a beautiful, soft, flary, textured image that maintain a simplicity and neutrality, complimenting the story we were looking to tell.

Activity

Watch the opening sequence [00:00-08:39]

- Why was it important to use a lighterweight camera to for this production?
- How has this technology choice helped to shape the audience's experience of the film? Do you think the aesthetic affects your engagement?
- Director of Photography Michael Latham describes the image as 'soft, flary and textured'. List three other words you would use to describe the cinematography.
- What role does a director of photography play in a film production? Research the main characteristics of this job.



Sound design and music

Mongolia's ancient musical traditions are known for their distinct qualities, such as throat singing. However, director Gabrielle Brady sought a different approach for the score, opting not to use traditional Mongolian music.

Film composer Aaron Cupples explains:

To create a connection between Mongolian traditional music and the forces of nature – especially the wind – I constructed custom flutes that utilise the overtone series, a harmonic scale prevalent in Mongolian music but very rare in Western compositions.

By layering multiple flute tones, I aimed to build a rich, textural foundation that gives voice to the wind and the landscape, while also highlighting or evoking the magical aspects of the film's narrative. Later in the film, the music evolves to become more emotional and melodic, mirroring the audience's deepening connection with the personal human stories.

Activity

- Describe the style of music used within this documentary. How is it used to establish context for the audience?
- Music is used very intentionally throughout the documentary, often only occurring during transitional scenes and rarely with dialogue. Why do you think this is the case?
- Why did Davaa and Zaya need to re-record sections of dialogue? Think back to some of the desert scenes – What environmental factors could have impacted dialogue and voice recording?

Landscape as character

Director Gabrielle Brady notes:

The homeland of Davaa and Zaya is a character within the film. The growing desert of the Gobi that has slowly engulfed the entire expanse. The ancient rocks scattered across the open planes. These are ancient lands that have seen little change over millions of years and are suddenly witnessing an immense transformation.



Activity

- · Where did filming take place for this film?
- Do you agree that the landscape can be considered a character within this documentary? Explain using an example.
- Explain how the change in setting affects the main characters.

Cinema has a long history of characterising the landscape, often in the role as antagonist with the central aim of challenging the protagonists throughout the narrative. This challenge often comes in the form of survival, especially in Australian cinema where the landscape is represented as a conflicting force that needs to be overcome. Some examples include: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975),

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994) and Mystery Road (2013).

- How does the landscape challenge Davaa and Zaya in The Wolves Always Come At Night?
- Find three Australian films that feature the landscape or setting as a main character.
 Watch the trailer for each and describe how the landscape or setting is portrayed.

Landscape is also mythologised in American cinema. Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014) tells the story of the Earth's future where a second Dust Bowl is has made the planet uninhabitable. Drawing on real interview footage from Ken Burn's 2012 documentary *The Dust Bowl, Interstellar* uses the landscape as a way to challenge and motivate the main characters.





Interstellar is a fictional narrative that draws inspiration from historical experiences to represent a catastrophic dust storm.

Watch the dust storm scene [17:30–19:41] from Interstellar <<u>clickview.net/secondary/videos/2624037/</u> interstellar>

- Compare this scene with the sandstorm scene from The Wolves Always Come At Night [29.21– 32.55]. What are some of the similarities and differences in the use of media codes to represent the storm to audiences?
- Read the article 'The climate films shaping society' by Becca Warner <bs/>
 <bs/>
 bbc.com/future/ article/20221021-how-climate-change-in-filmshape-society>
 - What is the Good Energy Playbook?
 - How does the representation of climate change or climate crisis in cinema affect audiences?
 - What are some of the ways the article highlights that cinema can help change the narrative of climate change to have a greater impact on audiences?

 Drawing on your own knowledge of films or television series you have seen, list three narratives that feature climate change as a theme or topic.

Discuss some of the similarities and differences as a class between each representation.

Wind as narrator

Director Gabrielle Brady notes

The wind of the Gobi is our unseen narrator. Its ebb and flow shifting and changing in the twists and turns of the story – a motif of what is to come. The wind guided composer Aaron Cupples in his approach to the score and Carlos García in the sound design. In the wind we created a sense of calm order in the world and then a sense of complete chaos.

Activity

 If this documentary had a narrator, what do you think it would sound like? Write a short opening script from the perspective of the wind.

Production credits

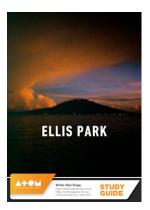
SCREEN AUSTRALIA presents in association with WEIRANDERSON FILMS and STORMING DONKEY PRODUCTIONS and with support from BBC STORYVILLE SWR and CHROMOSOM FILM / GURU MEDIA / OVER HERE production THE WOLVES ALWAYS COME AT NIGHT

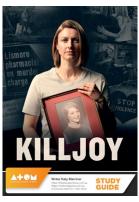
Director Gabrielle Brady • Writers Davaasuren Dagvasuren, Otgonzaya Dashzeveg and Gabrielle Brady • Featuring Davaasuren Dagvasuren and Otgonzaya Dashzeveg • Director of Photography Michael Latham • Production Sound Zendmene-Erdene Ichinnorov • Sound Designer Carlos E García • Original Music Aaron Cupples • Field Producer / Lead Researcher Dorjpagma Dugar • Editor Katharina Fiedler • Producers Julia Niethammer, Ariunaa Tserenpil and Rita Walsh • Co-Producers Gabrielle Brady, Oyundari Khurelbaatar • Executive Producers Deanne Weir, Alexander Wadouh, Stefanie Plattner, Emma Hindley and Dan Cogan

Endnotes

- 1 United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) – Mongolia <unhabitat.org/mongolia>
- 2 Nunez, C., 'Desertification, explained', 1 Jun 2019, National Geographic <nationalgeographic.com/environment/ article/desertification>
- 3 'Dust storms could be around the corner, how science can help us prepare', 12 Jul 2023, NSW Government <www.2.environment.nsw.gov.au/news/dust-storms-in-new-south-wales>
- Slessor, C., 'Dust storm engulfs parts of SA, Victoria and NSW as weather bureau warns of damaging winds', 22 Jan 2020, ABC News, <abc.net.au/news/2020-01-22/duststorm-engulfs-parts-of-outback-sa-victoriaand-nsw/11890320>
- 5 History.com editors, 'Dust bowl', 27 Oct 2009, *History.com*, history.com/topics/great-depression/dust-bowl

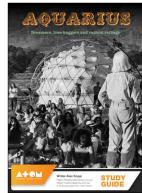










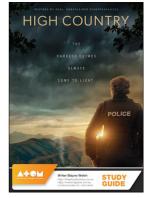
















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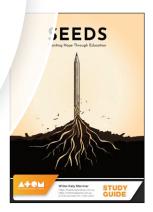
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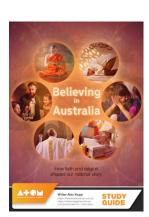
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HOW TO POISON A PLANET



