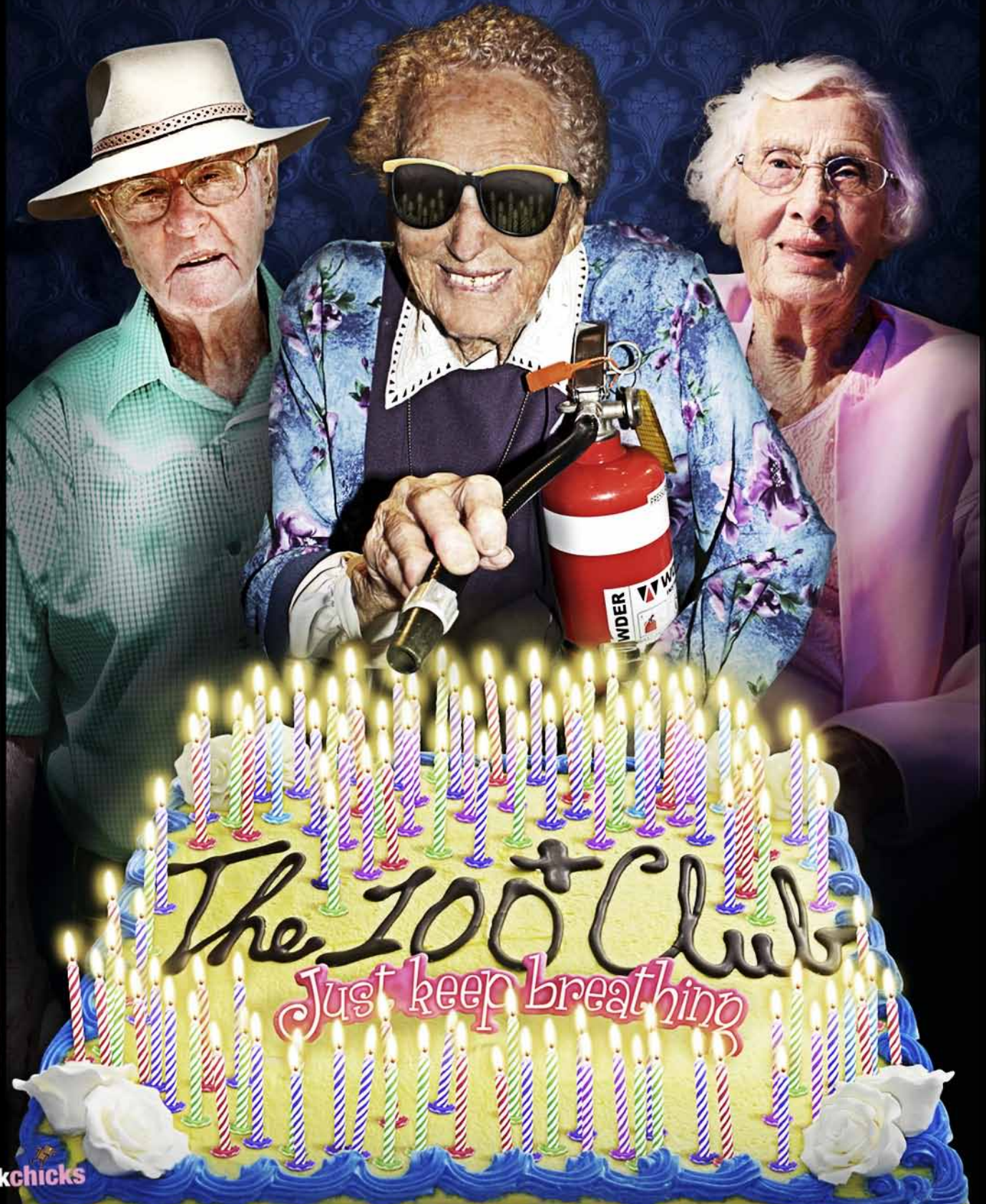


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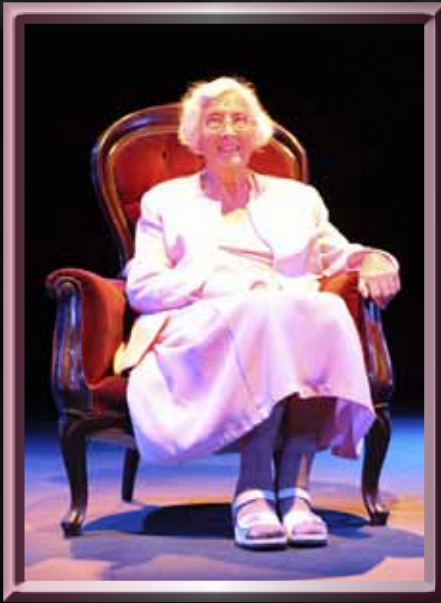
A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ROGER STITSON



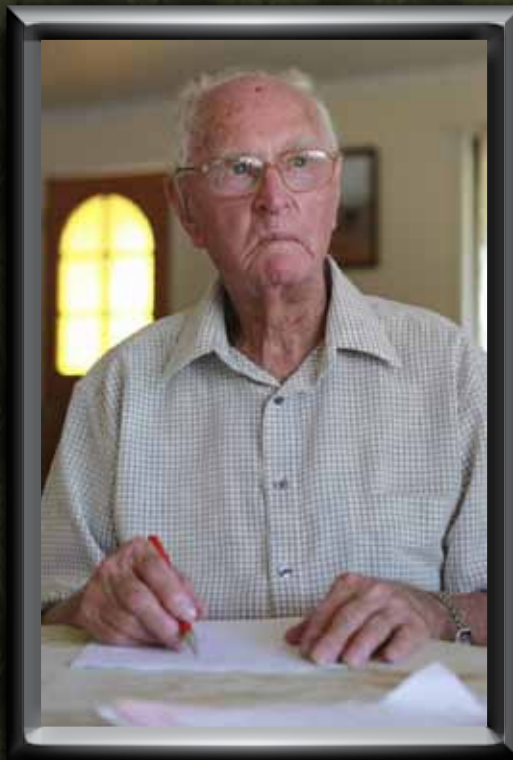
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Olive



Dexter



Ruth

Synopsis

The world's only social club for centenarians, the 100+ Club, has some remarkable members on its books. At a time in their lives when most people have long given up on chasing dreams, **OLIVE** (103), **DEXTER** (a spring chicken at 100) and **RUTH** (101) and are on a mission to complete some unfinished business. Ruth – the planet's oldest competing athlete – is out to break her own world throwing records, all-round entertainer Olive is determined to stage one last performance, while outback author Dexter hopes to finish his fifth and quite possibly final book. Most centenarians insist they're not terribly special ('age is just a couple of numbers on a piece of paper') but as *The 100+ Club* reveals, there's nothing at all ordinary about this group of Australians.

Curriculum links: This study guide is mainly aimed at middle and upper secondary school levels, with relevance to English, Media Studies, SOSE/HSIE, Personal and Interpersonal Development, Health and Human Relations. Other areas of study and research relate to Community and Social Planning, particularly in relation to the ageing of the population over the next century, and what this means for demographics and governmental planning at various levels.



Introduction: centenarians

The program raises some questions about longevity, our attitudes towards and treatment of our elderly, and what this means to us as individuals, families and communities.



- Define the meaning of 'centenarian'. What does it mean within our culture – and in other cultures around the world – to become a centenarian? Do you know any centenarians? If so, tell your class a little about them, their experiences, where they have travelled, and what they have done and seen in their lives.
- Write a short biographical description about the oldest person in your own family.
- Early in the film, one of the main participants, 101-year-old Ruth, says, 'Nobody wants to talk to an old person.' Why might this observation be true? What are the barriers? Are young people – and even middle-aged people – afraid, or too unsure, or uncertain, to talk to someone who seems to them to be very old, especially if they are not part of their own family circle? Has this film changed your attitude toward very old people? If so how?
- Following from the previous discussion point, Ruth explains, '... And to an elderly person to talk to someone, that is one of the greatest things you could give, is the right to talk'. Explains what she means by 'the right to talk'. In what ways might this kind of basic human communication be of benefit to both young and old?
- If you were to meet a centenarian, what would you like to ask them?

- Define 'elderly'. Do you talk to elderly people? Why/ why not?
- Plan and write a short fiction story about an encounter between a young boy or girl and someone who is about to turn one hundred years old. By the end of the story the protagonists will have discovered something valuable and worthwhile about each other from their encounter. Consider the development of your themes, the ways in which the characters will relate and react to each other, the dialogue (if any), the settings of time and location, point of view or perspective, and the style in which the story will be narrated.
- Do you want to live to be 100? How do you hope to 'get there'?
- What do you think the world would be like when you're 100?
- If you turn 100 years old one day,

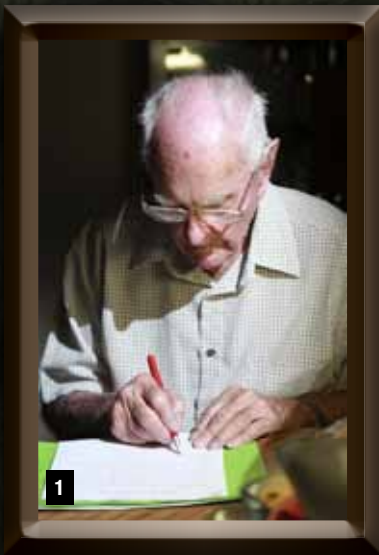
would you consider it to be a special day or not? Would you want a gathering of people to celebrate your 100th birthday with you? How would you best prefer to enjoy that auspicious day? Write a letter to yourself, to be kept sealed and locked away, and not opened and read until your 100th birthday. What would you say to your older self in that letter? What do you think would be the biggest challenges for you at that age – mentally and physically?

- Carry out research, perhaps by examining census figures, to find out how many centenarians there are in Australia, and what percentage this is of the total Australian population. How do these figures compare to those of 50 and 100 years ago? What might these figures be projected to be in perhaps 50 years from now? You may wish to present this as a graph. Discuss in class the possible reasons for the variances in the percentages for each era in the past, now, and those projected for the future. (For some facts, see 'Centenarian statistics' in website references.)
- Which countries have the highest rates of longevity?

1: RUTH FRITH 2: CENTENARIANS AT A 100+ CLUB FUNCTION 3: JOHN SEXTON RECEIVING HIS 100+ CLUB MEMBERSHIP 4: DEXTER KRUGER

The film's participants

The *100+ Club* documentary follows the lives and activities of three central participants in the film, each with helpers who are important to their well-being and success.



1



6



3



2



5



4

The three main participants

1-2: DEXTER 3-5 RUTH 6: OLIVE WEBBER

- Discuss in class then write your own account (characterisation?) of the three main participants in the film. From what you have observed throughout the film, describe their interests, activities, their plans for the future, the general social environment in which they organise their lives, and a little about their biographical background. Are they all completely different from each other in various ways, or do they share anything in common with each other? The three are:
 - **Ruth Frith,**
 - **Olive Webber,**
 - **Dexter Kruger.**
- Explain the circumstances as to why each of (OUT?) Ruth, Olive and Dexter took up their own particular interests so late in their

- lives. What held them back from any involvement in earlier years?
- Ruth, Olive and Dexter share a common motivation to achieve a dream and keep participating in life. Can you identify what drives them? They also share what could be seen as 'old fashioned' values and beliefs. Identify these values/beliefs and debate whether they remain in society. What have you learned about values from this film?
- Drawing on what you have observed about the lives of these three centenarians, plan and write either a short fiction story or a poem in which the moment of decision to embrace a new interest, a new passion in life, becomes a turning point. One of the themes

- you should consider developing for this piece of writing might be to acknowledge a sense of a resilient, unbroken spirit, and a desire to find fulfilment in the days to come, regardless of the infirmities of age.
- Comment in general on the important 'helper' roles carried out during the film by the following participants. Where possible, also include details about their own biographical backgrounds. The participants are:
 - **Helen Searle,**
 - **Ken McDonald and Allan Saunders,**
 - **George 'Bob' Matthews.**
- Discuss the respective motivation of each helper. What impels them to devote such interest, time, energy – and love – to their role?

- We are informed during the program that Ruth's daughter, Helen Searle, is Ruth's athletics coach. In what way is she eminently qualified for this role? Carry out research to write a newspaper report for the sports pages combining both an account of Helen Searle's own achievements in athletics, and as her mother's present-day coach. Include a headline, and if desired a photograph or illustration, and relevant captions. Format and present the news story using desktop publishing software. While researching, note that during her athletics career Helen Searle was known as Helen Frith. (See 'Helen Frith' in website references.)
- Write a news story about Ruth's efforts at the 2010 Australian Athletics Masters.
- Helen says, 'Centenarians are the elite athlete'. Explain why, in her opinion, all centenarians are elite athletes.
- During the program Helen also comments on what would happen to Ruth if she (Ruth) were not involved in athletics. In some ways this observation is very similar to a comment that Bob makes about Dexter's literary activities. From the film, find the relevant extracts of dialogue, and draw a comparison between the two statements, and the resulting sense of responsibility felt by Helen and Bob.
- As with Helen's 'working' relationship with Ruth, Ken is more than Olive's musical accompanist at the piano. He fulfils wide-ranging roles, purposes and responsibilities during the program. Discuss.
- Comment on why Allan offers a humorous comparison of Olive to the famous opera star from the early 20th century, Nellie Melba. What does this observation, and the way in which he makes it, tell us about Allan, and his relationship with Olive? What does it tell us about Olive?
- Discuss in class then write your own commentary on the drama associated with Bob's decision to record all of Dexter's written (and spoken) words, and the effect this has on other aspects of Bob's life both as a family man and an employed teacher. Why does Bob help Dexter?
- Following from the previous discussion, find out the meaning of the word, 'Amanuensis', and then carry out some research on the famous and extraordinary relationship between the ageing and blind British music composer, Frederick Delius, and his amanuensis, Eric Fenby. Discuss in class whether it would be correct or not to refer to Bob as Dexter's amanuensis. (For more, see 'Amanuensis' in website references.) Note also that a short black and white film directed by Ken Russell in 1968, titled *Song of Summer*, dramatises the story of Delius and Fenby.
- Write a short story in any way you think suitable, about an aged person and his or her helper, or even an amanuensis. It may be a comedy, a drama, a fantasy or even a science fiction tale. It may be set in any era or location, and written from any viewpoint.
- Bob says, 'Our older Australians – and I'm fast becoming one of them – are an invaluable resource. We're just letting them go. "Oh he's old, oh she's old." The wisdom, the knowledge, the resource that they are is dreadfully wasted.' In what sense are we 'just letting them go'? Is this true everywhere, around the world, or is it specific only to particular societies? You may wish to compare the treatment of, and attitude to, aged people within the Australian context to that experienced in other countries and cultures.
- Following from the previous activity, explain why Bob says that our ageing citizens are an 'invaluable resource', and that they are 'dreadfully wasted'. Discuss what could, or should, be attempted to prevent this loss and waste, and what the desired purpose and outcomes of these attempts might achieve. For example, is it feasible and realistic to embark on a nationwide program of recording interviews with everyone over a given age? Should an expansive (and perhaps expensive) program be funded to catalogue and archive life-long collections of personal and family photographs and other documents, as primary records of social history?
- What do we have to learn from our older Australians?

The helpers



1: BOB AND DEXTER
2: OLIVE AND KEN
3: RUTH AND HELEN



The 100+ Club

The title of the documentary is derived from the name of a real, live, social club. Perhaps we should acquaint ourselves with its history, its objectives and activities.

For more, see '100+ Club' in website references.

- As though for a Sunday newspaper magazine supplement, plan and write an item for general weekend readership on when, where, how and why The 100+ Club was born. Who runs the organisation? How, and by whom, is it funded? What are the qualifications and criteria for membership? How many members of the club are there, what does the club offer them, and what types of activities does the club carry out? From the film if necessary, name
- some famous people who have belonged (and still belong) to the club. Include illustrations and photos as required, and use desktop publishing software to format your item into a magazine presentation.
- Imagine you have a relative about to turn 100 years old. Write a letter from the president of the 100+ Club inviting your relative to become a member on the day of your 100th birthday. You may wish to include selected details from what you have pieced together in the previous activity.
- Either working by yourself or in pairs, and in any way you think suitable, plan and write a short fiction story, a poem, a song with lyrics, or even a short comic strip story which in some way features The 100+ Club.
- Would you like to be a member of this club? Why? What are you going to do to try and make it into this club?



1: RUTH 2: DEXTER 3: MANDY, DAVE, MARGIE WITH KEN AND OLIVE

'You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old.'

George Burns

Further topics & themes



'Age is just a couple of numbers on a piece of paper.'

Ruth (above)

Carry out the following activities related to, and derived from, the contents of *The 100+ Club*.

- Construct a timeline of great world and Australian events, plus inventions and developments in technology and social progress that have taken place during the lifespans of the three central participants in the documentary. What do you think the greatest achievement has been in that time? Why?
- You may wish to add illustrations to the timeline presentation. An alternative may be to work in groups to plan, create and edit a one-minute audio or video montage of 'sound bites' and visual 'grabs' of photographs and newsreel available from the internet.
- In the documentary's press kit there is a quotation from the famous American stage, radio, film and TV comedian, George Burns, who lived to become a centenarian (1886-1986). The quote is: 'You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old'. Discuss what you think he means.
- Following from the previous discussion, plan and create a poster display that in some way, through word and image, illustrates the meaning and intention of the George Burns quote. Your poster may either be designed for a senior citizens' magazine or newspaper, or even designed as a display to promote a comedy film in which ageing and longevity is a central theme.
- In some ways George Burns' quip about getting older, as distinct from getting old, may be similar to Ruth's view, expressed during the film, that, 'Age is just a couple of numbers on a piece of paper'. Do you agree? What is she really saying, here, about old age? In class, see if you can come up with your own, original observation or quote about ageing, getting older, or the meaning of old age.
- During the program Olive makes two observations about what she

believes is necessary for a fulfilling life:

- ‘If you’re well you’ve got to do something with your life; you can’t waste your life. And it is necessary to have a project, something to work on.’
- ‘You’ve got to have somebody. Somebody who still loves you. That’s what’s necessary, love is necessary.’

Comment on the truth of these two observations, and whether they are played out and exemplified in various ways throughout the documentary. Discuss in class the possibilities for style, genre, plot events, themes, settings and characters, then plan and write your own short fiction story, drawing in any way you think best, on one or other – or a combination of both – of Olive’s views.

- Is it possible to decide whether those people who live to a hundred all have certain characteristics in common – perhaps a combination of ethnic and geographical background, or a genetic predisposition, or a particular diet, or abstaining from tobacco and alcohol etc – that allow them to attain a very advanced age? Carry out some research then write an expository, essay-style article examining this question. (For details on this issue see ‘Centenarian statistics’ in website references, in particular the third-listed site.)
- Why do centenarians generally dislike being asked about the secret of making it to a hundred years old? What do you think is the secret to longevity?
- After viewing the program write five questions you think would be worthwhile to ask Ruth, Dexter and Olive about their lives, experiences and observations. (You will, of course, not ask the question that centenarians don’t enjoy being asked.)
- Write a commentary on what you think you have learnt, or newly appreciate, from viewing *The 100+ Club*.



‘You’ve got to have somebody. Somebody who still loves you. That’s what’s necessary, love is necessary.’

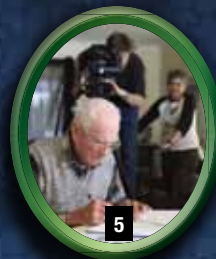
Ruth (above)



‘If you’re well you’ve got to do something with your life; you can’t waste your life. And it is necessary to have a project, something to work on.’

Olive

Media studies



Carry out the following activities.

- Comment on whether the title, *The 100+ Club*, captures an adequate impression of the documentary's subject matter and themes. If you were asked to give the program an alternative title, what would you call it, and why?
- View the opening title credits sequence, which involves an animated graphic. Write a description of what you see on the screen, then explain the significance of the animated graphic. What does it suggest to us about the content of the rest of the program? Is it appropriate? How would you design the opening titles?
- Describe, discuss and explain the consistent style used throughout the documentary of transitioning

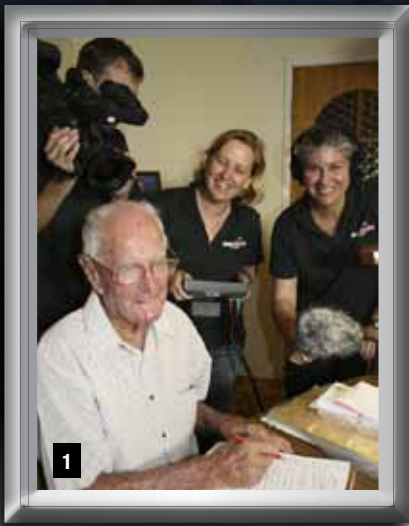
from one sequence to the next. For example, what is the significance or purpose of the old-fashioned picture frame imagery that appears in every transition?

- A number of times during the program the camera shots have been carefully framed and arranged visually for emotional effect. Find some instances where this occurs in the film, and write an analytical discussion of the intention and impact of these shots. For example, you may wish to view particular scenes of Dexter alone in his house, and Ruth after her events at the Australian Masters Athletics Championships.
- Write a commentary on the way in which accompanying soundtrack

music is used to effect in specific sequences throughout the film. Look at the style of the music and its placement on the soundtrack at particular points in the narrative.

- Comment on why you think the filmmakers have chosen to conclude the program by presenting the final credits accompanied by

1: RUTH IN COMPETITION 2: OLIVE WITH THE FLICKCHICKS PAPARAZZI 3: OLIVE AT THE TWELFTH NIGHT THEATRE 4: OLIVE WITH CAMERAMAN DAVE 5: DEXTER AT HOME



1: DEXTER WITH THE FILM CREW 2: DAVE RUSSELL SITS IN FOR OLIVE 3: DAVE IN ACTION

a video clip of Olive singing the popular song, *The Impossible Dream*.

- Write a commentary on the special problems you think the producers, director, writer, editor and film crew might have experienced when planning, filming and post-producing *The 100+ Club*.
- In the film's press kit, the director, Mandy Lake, says, 'Some motivation behind this film was to help highlight a few issues that our older Australians face, as well as to help defy expectations and bust a few myths... We wanted to show what they *can* do, not what they can't do.'

Explain Mandy Lake's motivations. For example, what does she mean by helping to 'defy expectations and (to) bust a few myths? Explore

what role can the media play in furthering this motivation. Do you think the elderly are represented fairly in the media? What sort of stories do we tend to see about our elderly? Do they tend to be negative or positive?

- Discuss in class those fiction narrative films you've seen that examine the theme of old age. In what ways does popular, or mass-audience cinema present and interpret images of old age on the screen? You may wish to compare Hollywood films to films from other countries and other cultures around the world. Consider, for example, the Japanese film, *Ran* (loosely based on Shakespeare's play *King Lear*) and the American

fantasy film *Cocoon*. (See details of both titles in the film references section.) Harold and Maude?

- Either working in pairs or individually, plan and construct a display poster to promote *The 100+ Club* to a general viewing audience. Consider the thematic message you might develop, and how you would attempt to capture viewer interest through text, image, layout and use of colour. **ROGER:** Would you like a copy of our poster in the kit as a comparison?
- In 300-400 words draft, edit and complete a review of the program for the TV liftout section of a daily newspaper or weekly magazine, aimed at a wide viewing audience. You may wish to use desktop publishing software to format your review for final presentation.



**4: RUTH'S SPECTATORS
5: RUTH AND PRODUCER MARGIE
6: OLIVE AND ALLAN REHEARSING**



References and further resources

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For a list of documentary films about old age, see website references.

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