

PIKE RIVER EDUCATION RESOURCE

CROSS-CURRICULAR + INTEGRATED ACTIVITIES

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES | YEARS 10–13

Find more information, downloads, and material at
[HTTPS://WWW.MADMAN.CO.NZ/PIKE-RIVER/EDUCATIONAL-RESOURCE-KIT/](https://www.madman.co.nz/pike-river/educational-resource-kit/)



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“WHAT STRIKES ME ABOUT **PIKE RIVER** IN A CROSS-CURRICULAR SETTING IS HOW THE STORY NATURALLY MOVES BETWEEN DISCIPLINES — THE ANALYSIS, THE CREATIVITY, THE MORAL WEIGHT BENEATH EVERY CHOICE. FOR ME, IT’S A CHANCE TO EXPLORE HOW PERSPECTIVE SHAPES TRUTH, AND HOW CURIOSITY AND CRAFT CAN WORK TOGETHER TO BRING HIDDEN LAYERS TO LIGHT.”

ROBERT SARKIES | DIRECTOR

MEDIA ANALYSIS PORTFOLIO

OBJECTIVE

Develop critical literacy across subjects.

DESCRIPTION

Students gather a range of media items covering Pike River from 2010 to the present (e.g., RNZ news clips, newspaper articles, advocacy websites, political speeches, or documentary pieces).

Analyse each source for —

Tone — Is the coverage urgent, sympathetic, factual, defensive?

Imagery — How are miners, families, or officials visually represented?

Framing — What is emphasised or left out (e.g., corporate responsibility vs. personal tragedy)?

Language — How are words like *disaster*, *tragedy*, *justice*, or *closure* used?

Compare findings to the film's portrayal of similar moments, such as —

- The USB sequence showing the mine's interior.
- Families at the fence waiting for updates.
- Miners' routines before the explosion.

Prompt a discussion with guiding questions —

How does news coverage differ from the film's dramatisation?

What role does perspective (journalist, family, government, activist) play in shaping memory?

In what ways does media shape — and sometimes reshape — collective understanding of events?

TASK

Compile an annotated portfolio of 3–5 media items, each with a short analysis (200–300 words).

Write an 800–1000 word essay synthesising insights and comparing media coverage to the film's storytelling.

OUTCOME

Students will —

Strengthen critical thinking, media literacy, and cross-disciplinary analysis.

Learn to evaluate how truth, empathy, and accountability are shaped by both journalism and film.

Engage with the Pike River story as a living case study in how societies remember and narrate tragedy.

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

OBJECTIVE

Support ethical and emotional engagement.

DESCRIPTION

Students keep a personal journal throughout the Pike River unit, writing short reflections after screenings, discussions, or creative workshops.

The journal encourages them to process complex themes of justice, empathy, accountability, and social responsibility.

Prompts might include —

- How does this story connect to accountability and justice?
- What emotions arise for me, and how do I process them?
- What lessons from Pike River can apply to our lives and communities today?

Create a safe space by making clear that journals are private, unless students choose to share extracts.

TASK

Write regular reflections (1–2 paragraphs) after key lessons or screenings.

Optionally, students may choose to share selected entries in small groups or as part of a closing circle.

OUTCOME

Students will —

Develop metacognitive skills by thinking about their own learning.

Strengthen emotional literacy, recognising how stories of trauma and resilience affect them personally.

Consider ethical awareness and sensitivity when engaging with real-life tragedies in a classroom setting.



THE POWER OF A FRAME

OBJECTIVE

Analyse how visual framing shapes meaning.

DESCRIPTION

Select a still image from *Pike River* — there are examples on madman.co.nz/pike-river/educational-resource-kit/.

- **Examine** the composition — how characters and objects are placed within the frame.
- **Analyse colour and lighting** — consider how shadow, natural light, or muted palettes affect mood and tone.
- **Identify symbolism** — e.g., the fence as a physical and emotional barrier, or the courtroom as a stage for accountability.
- **Compare** the film still to real news photographs of Pike River events to explore similarities, differences, and how framing shapes audience perception.

TASK

Produce a visual analysis report (written or oral), incorporating annotated stills and photographs.

Reflect on the impact of framing — What emotions are heightened or suppressed? How does the frame guide what we notice — and what remains unseen?

OUTCOME

Students will —

Refine visual literacy, learning to decode images critically.

Deepen their understanding of narrative communication, recognising how both film and journalism use framing to influence perception and memory.

Gain an awareness of the subtle power of images in shaping public understanding of real events.



JOURNALISM & MEDIA ETHICS

OBJECTIVE

Explore ethical reporting on tragedy.

DESCRIPTION

Role-play as journalists covering the Pike River disaster in 2010, taking on perspectives of **corporate-aligned**, **activist-aligned**, and **government-aligned** outlets.

Analyse how tone, language, and framing differ depending on perspective, and how these choices affect public perception.

Discuss the ethical responsibilities of journalists, including truthfulness, sensitivity to victims' families, and the impact of sensationalism.

Reflect on the power of media to shape collective memory and to influence policy or public opinion.

TASK

Produce three contrasting articles from the assigned perspectives.

Participate in a guided discussion evaluating ethical choices, potential harm, and audience trust.

After sharing the articles, debrief as a group — How did stepping into each perspective shape the way you reported events, and what did you notice about bias, omission, or emotional impact?

Encourage students to reflect on responsible storytelling — How can journalists balance truthfulness and public interest with sensitivity to victims' families, avoiding sensationalism while still conveying urgency?

OUTCOME

Students will —

Develop critical media literacy, understanding how narrative framing shapes public understanding.

Practice ethical reasoning in communication and explore the role of journalism in society.

Reflect on responsibility, empathy, and accountability in reporting real-life events.



CREATIVE LEGACY PROJECT

OBJECTIVE

Develop a lasting creative response to *Pike River*.

DESCRIPTION

Students design digital or physical memorials inspired by the events, themes, and people of Pike River.

Options include —

- Short films or animations portraying key scenes such as miners at work, the fence, or the trial.
- Digital storytelling websites or interactive timelines documenting events and memorials.
- Murals or illustrated zines capturing the human and social impact.
- Soundscape compositions using news audio, protest chants, or ambient sounds from the mine and commemorations.

Explore symbolism, emotional resonance, and civic impact, reflecting on how creative works can preserve memory and foster empathy.

Encourage collaboration and integration of skills across History, English, Media Studies, and Drama.

TASK

Present final projects in class, with a school exhibition, or digital showcase.

Include a rationale explaining creative choices, intended audience impact, and ethical considerations.

OUTCOME

Students will —

Synthesise cross-curricular knowledge into a tangible creative response.

Develop ethical awareness, creative expression, and civic engagement, producing work that communicates memory, respect, and reflection.

Encourage personal connection, empathy, and sustained engagement with the story of Pike River.

