

PIKE RIVER EDUCATION RESOURCE

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

FRAMING NARRATIVES

These education resources accompany *Pike River*, a feature film honouring the courage and advocacy of Anna Osborne and Sonya Rockhouse, and remembering the 29 men who lost their lives in the Pike River mine explosion on 19 November 2010.

Designed for Years 10–13, the materials support thoughtful, curriculum-aligned classroom engagement with the film as a work of fiction grounded in real events.

At the heart of this resource is an invitation to engage critically and compassionately with how stories of real tragedy are told. *Pike River* uses dramatic storytelling to explore one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most significant recent events, drawing on emotional truth, careful cinematic craft, and ethical storytelling.

The activities offered encourage students to consider questions of justice, accountability, memory, and civic responsibility, while also developing skills in close viewing, analysis, debate, and creative expression.

The resource is flexible and modular, allowing teachers to select individual activities or build a short unit (1–2 weeks) or extended programme (up to 6–8 weeks).

Activities span English, Media Studies, History, Social Studies, Drama/Performance, and cross-curricular learning, with clear links to NCEA Levels 1–3 where appropriate.

Given the sensitive nature of the Pike River disaster, guidance is provided throughout to support respectful discussion and emotional safety. Teachers are guided to frame learning with care, acknowledge the real people and communities affected, and create space for reflection alongside analysis.

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/)

KEY ROLES

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CASTING DIRECTOR	TINA CLEARY
EDUCATION RESOURCE	NIC MARSHALL, OLIVER BISSON, OSCAR SMIT, ROBERT SARKIES & VICKY POPE

OTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE

THE NZ FILM COMMISSION
<https://www.nzfilm.co.nz/films/pike-river>

THE FILM IMDB
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt31841936/>

MADMAN DISTRIBUTION
<https://www.madman.co.nz/pike-river/>

A MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR ROBERT SARKIES

When we set out to make *Pike River*, we were very conscious that this story had been told — and continues to be told — in many different ways. The narrative had evolved over time: the company framed it as a terrible tragedy waiting to happen; the government focused on recovery decisions while trying to highlight a positive legacy; and the families, most notably Anna Osborne and Sonya Rockhouse, reframed the story through protest, community engagement, and powerful visual statements like effigies and the image of two women at the mine fence. Their voices made the story personal, compelling, and urgent — showing the real power of narrative.

Our challenge as filmmakers was to translate this complex, real-life story into a film that was both ethically responsible and dramatically engaging. We structured the story carefully — with a clear first act, an inciting incident, a midpoint, and a resolution — to help audiences digest events that unfolded over nearly a decade. We focused on Anna and Sonya as central characters because their friendship, courage, and personal journey provided a lens through which viewers could understand the broader tragedy. Their relationship became a way to weave the personal with the public story of Pike River, showing how ordinary people can drive extraordinary change.

In telling this story through drama, we embraced the many tools of cinema. Cinematography, music, sound, editing, and metaphor allowed us to create a sense of authenticity and emotional truth — from the miners' world to the courtroom, the homes of the families, and the landscapes that frame the narrative. We used real locations, real sounds, and subtle visual cues to help the audience feel the reality of the events without sensationalising them. Every choice — from the push into the coal in the opening sequence, to the pauses in music, to the interplay of light and shadow — was made to anchor the story in lived experience while allowing space for reflection and emotional engagement.

Making *Pike River* also raised questions about permission, ownership, and truth. Whose story is it to tell? How do you honour real people and events while crafting a coherent narrative for film? These are questions we invite students to consider as they explore the film: how stories are framed, who has the power to shape them, and how truth can be represented in drama versus documentary?

Ultimately, this resource is an invitation to look closely at story, ethics, and civic responsibility. By examining how *Pike River* was created, students can explore not only the historical and social significance of the events, but also the craft of storytelling itself — and the ways in which narrative can illuminate justice, memory, and human resilience.

CURRICULUM LINKS + LEARNING AREAS

ENGLISH + MEDIA STUDIES

English and Media Studies activities focus on close viewing, narrative analysis, visual language, and critical response. Students examine how cinematic techniques shape meaning, emotion, and ethical perspective, and how fictional storytelling can illuminate real-world events.

This learning supports achievement standards across NCEA Levels 1–3, including —

- Close viewing and analysis of visual texts (AS90857 Level 1; AS91107 Level 2; AS91480 Level 3)
- Understanding how media texts are constructed and framed (AS91107 Level 2; AS91480 Level 3)
- Comparing documentary and dramatic representations of real events (AS91104 Level 2; AS91477 Level 3)
- Developing written responses, including film reviews and critical essays (AS91101 Level 2 Writing; AS91472 Level 3 Critical Response; AS91475 Level 3 Writing for a Public Audience)

HISTORY + SOCIAL STUDIES

History and Social Studies activities situate Pike River within broader discussions of governance, accountability, protest, and public memory in Aotearoa. Students explore how narratives change over time and how civic action shapes public understanding and reform.

These activities align with NCEA Levels 1–3, supporting standards such as —

- Investigating significant events and their consequences (AS91001 Level 1; AS91230 Level 2; AS91434 Level 3)
- Examining perspectives on social issues and responsibility (AS91229 Level 2; AS91431 Level 3)
- Analysing social justice movements and civic responses (AS91232 Level 2; AS91436 Level 3)
- Exploring how communities remember and commemorate events (AS91044 Level 1; AS91283 Level 2)



DRAMA + PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Drama activities invite students to engage physically and emotionally with themes of memory, silence, and ethical representation. Performance tasks are carefully scaffolded to ensure respect, agency, and emotional safety.

These activities support NCEA Drama achievement standards, particularly —

- Devising and performing drama using researched material (AS91214 Level 2; AS91514 Level 3)
- Exploring ethical responsibility in performance and representation (supports AS91216 Level 2; AS91516 Level 3)
- Using performance techniques to communicate complex ideas and emotion, including stillness, sound, and silence (AS91214; AS91514)

Students may work collaboratively or independently, with options to opt out of performance where appropriate.

CROSS-CURRICULAR + INTEGRATED LEARNING

Cross-curricular activities encourage students to make connections across disciplines and apply learning creatively and critically. These projects are well suited to integrated units, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative teaching.

Learning in this area supports —

- Media literacy and portfolio-based analysis (AS91249 Level 2 Media; AS91491 Level 3 Media)
- Critical and creative responses across subjects, including writing, performance, and visual design (AS91101 Level 2; AS91472 Level 3)
- Civic engagement through creative protest, legacy projects, and reflective practice
- STEM-linked inquiry into mine safety, engineering ethics, and social responsibility (aligned with Science and Social Studies learning goals)



DIFFERENTIATION + ASSESSMENT

Activities are designed to be adaptable across year levels —

Year 10: guided analysis, structured discussion, creative and reflective responses.

Years 11-12: formal analysis, debate, performance work, and internal assessment.

Year 13: independent research, comparative study, and critical reflection.

Assessment opportunities include —

Formative: journals, group presentations, discussion, role-play, creative drafts.

Summative: essays, media portfolios, devised performances, research-based projects.

SUPPORTING SENSITIVE ENGAGEMENT

The Pike River disaster is a real tragedy that affected many whānau and communities.

Teachers are encouraged to —

- Acknowledge the real people and events at the centre of the film.
- Offer alternatives to role-play or performance where needed.
- Create space for journalling, discussion, and quiet reflection.

Language Note —

The film includes occasional strong language, reflective of West Coast vernacular and the world of the characters portrayed.



LOOKING AHEAD

As kaiako guide students through *Pike River*, this resource is designed to support more than analysis and activity — it aims to foster empathy, critical thinking, and civic awareness. Students are encouraged to explore how stories of real people and events are told, remembered, and acted upon, and to reflect on their own role as engaged, thoughtful citizens.

The activities balance sensitivity with creative and analytical challenge, inviting learners to respond thoughtfully, reflect personally, and collaborate respectfully.

Through their engagement, students can develop a deeper understanding of the Pike River story and an appreciation for the power of storytelling to shape memory, spark dialogue, and inspire reflection.

This framing positions kaiako as facilitators of learning and reflection, providing pathways to meaningful and lasting classroom experiences.

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