The Mosque Next Door
STUDY GUIDE BY ROGER STITSON
SOUTHERN PICTURES
For many non-Muslim Australians, the mosque is a symbol of growing fears that Islam is antithetical to the Australian way of life, even dangerous. But many Australians have never stepped inside a mosque, let alone seen what goes on there.

Now with exclusive, unprecedented 24/7 access for the first time, this 3 x 1-hour observational documentary series goes inside one of Australia’s oldest mosques, the Holland Park Mosque in Brisbane, to join a community rarely seen from the inside.

We meet its cricket-loving patriarch, mosque leader Imam Uzair; his best mate and community fix-it man, Ali Kadri; as well as a diverse congregation, including outspoken change-maker, Galila Abdelsalam and fourth generation mosque-goer Janeth Deen.

Filmed over the course of a year like no other, we join our larger-than-life cast as they go about their daily religious practices and lives. Along the way, they must also tackle Islamophobia, extremism, as well as a host of other everyday adventures, challenges, romance and tragedy. As their mosque comes under increasing pressure, both from inside and out, this is a never-before-seen look at a community on the frontline of seismic change in Australia and the world today.

This study guide contains a range of class activities relevant to each specific episode. As some activities are relevant to all the episodes, there is a section later in the study guide on a general overview of the entire series, and a Media Studies section relevant to the construction, purposes and outcomes of the series.
This study guide is aimed at middle and upper secondary school levels, with relevance to Studies of Religion, English, Media Studies, Health and Human Relations, Psychology, Social Studies, Society and Culture, Family and Community, and Values Education.

The three-part documentary series, *The Mosque Next Door*, looks at contemporary Muslim Australians from the context of a diverse community of new migrants from many parts of the world, and of long-settled multi-generational families, whose existence, daily life, belief structures, religious observances, faith and cultural-ethnic values and backgrounds are touched and affected by the wider Australian community around them, and of which they are a part. This is set against a contemporary rise in pan-Islamic radicalism and fundamentalism, and, in Australia, a consequent reaction and backlash against Muslims from elements within the majority non-Islamic Australian community. For most Australian Muslims, it is necessary to navigate a path between these conflicting forces, while finding their own Muslim and Australian identity.

Relevant to *The Mosque Next Door*, the Australian National Curriculum addresses some aspects of Australian immigration and multiculturalism under General Capabilities: Intercultural Understanding:

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped, and the variable and changing nature of culture. Intercultural understanding involves students learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect.


In Year 9 Civics and Citizenship: Citizenship, Diversity and Identity, students explore: “How and why individuals and groups, including religious groups, participate in and contribute to civic life”. (ACHCK079)

In Year 10 Civics and Citizenship: Citizenship, Diversity and Identity, students explore “the concept of ‘cohesive society’ using examples of contemporary events in Australia or in other countries to identify factors that support cohesiveness”. (ACHCK094)

In Year 10 History: The Globalising World: Migration Experiences (1945-present), students examine, “the contribution of migration to Australia’s changing identity as a nation and to its international relationships”. (ACDSEH147)

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) subject, Religion and Society (Units 1, 2, 3 and 4), is of general relevance to a study of *The Mosque Next Door*.


From the course study design document, “…religion is defined as a community organised around beliefs related to ultimate reality and the consequent beliefs, practices, principles and codes for behaviour. Adherence to particular beliefs, practices, principles and codes can form an important part of individual identity. They can determine membership of the religion and the transmission of meaning, both individual and collective, from generation to generation.”
In general Units 1, 2, and 3 are historical, ethical and philosophical in nature, while Unit 4 examines the ways in which religion and society are challenged by change, and is of more direct relevance to the documentary series.

Unit 1 (The Role of Religion in Society) includes the following relevant group topic: Abrahamic religions (for example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

Of relevance in Unit 1 are Area of Study 1 (The Nature and Purpose of Religion), and Area of Study 3 (Religion in Australia).

Unit 2 (Religion and Ethics): Area of Study 2 (also titled Religion and Ethics).

Unit 3 (The Search for Meaning): students may select from one or more of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism. Area of Study 1 (Responding to the Search for Meaning), and Area of Study 3 (Significant Life Experience, Religious Beliefs and Faith, are of relevance.

Unit 4 (Religion, Challenge and Change): “In this unit students explore challenge for religious traditions generally over time and then undertake a study of challenge and change for one or more than one religious tradition or denomination. Religious tradition/s or denomination/s are to be selected from one or more than one of the following: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism.”

The Higher School Certificate (HSC) subject, Studies of Religion (Units 1 and 2), Stage 6, syllabus (NSW), is of relevance to a study of The Mosque Next Door.

From the course description, the Studies of Religion syllabus, “investigates the significance of the role of religion in society and, in particular, within Australian society… This syllabus enables students who live in a multifaith and multicultural society to progress from a broad understanding of religious traditions to specific studies within these traditions. The syllabus provides a focus on religious expression in Australia and, also, investigates religion’s place within the global community.”

Preliminary course (Religious Tradition Studies 1 or 2): students select two or three from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism. Relevant to the documentary series, topics for the study of Islam are:

- Origins of the religion,
- Principal beliefs,
- Sacred texts and writings,
- Core ethical teachings,
- Expression of faith.

HSC course (Religious Tradition Depth Studies 1 or 2) students select two or three subject areas from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism. Relevant to the documentary series, topics for the study of Islam are:

- Significant people and ideas,
- Ethics,

HSC course (Religion and Peace): students select two from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism. Relevant to the documentary series, topics for the study of peace expressed through sacred texts are Qur’an and Hadith.

Pre-viewing Questions

Carry out some research if necessary, then respond to the following.

• What is an Imam? What authority does an Imam have? What role and functions does an Imam fulfil?

• Describe each of the Five Pillars of Islam. What do they consist of, and why are they important? Note that questions about further common Islamic terminology (such as “Jihad” or “Ramadan” etc) will be found in the Episode sections of this study guide, where they are referred to during each respective episode. (See “Five Pillars of Islam” in website references.)

• Find out the names of the five daily Islamic prayers, the times of the day they are recited, their purpose and what each prayer means. (See “Five daily prayers of Islam” in website references. Note that Imam Uzair speaks about them in Episode 1. Islamic youth worker Robbie Maestracci also refers to their essential nature and purpose in Episode 2.)

• Find out and explain the meaning of Pan-Islamism. Where did it develop from, how far back into history does it extend, and what are the forces or the reasons for its contemporary resurgence and spread? To what extent is Pan-Islamism evident in Australia, in comparison or contrast to other parts in the world? Comment on the extreme reaction to Pan-Islamism, referred to as “Islamophobia”. What does this term mean, why did it arise, in what ways has it been evident in Australia, and how is it manifested? (See “Pan-Islamism” in website references.)
Episode One

Holland Park Mosque is the oldest mosque on the east coast of Australia, and has been the bustling heart of a Muslim community for over a century.

At the centre of it all is the cricket-loving mosque leader Imam Uzair, who everyone turns to for spiritual guidance and advice – and his trusted sidekick, community spokesperson, Ali Kadri.

This year, the mosque finds itself in the firing line as never before, as it faces increasing hostility from the wider Australian public and spiralling pressures from within. The end of the Muslim holy month coincides with a Federal Election, and just down the road, firebrand politician Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party have stormed into parliament on an anti-Muslim ticket.

With no time to waste, Ali Kadri is determined to tackle the misconceptions head on, starting with halal. He rounds up some of the younger congregation and heads to the streets of Logan, which borders Hanson’s electoral stronghold.

Back at the mosque, 74-year-old matriarch Janeth Deen is determined to show that mosques and Muslims are as Australian as everyone else. She’s on a mission to erect the Australian, Queensland and Aboriginal flags at the mosque for all to see. Unfortunately for Imam, her chosen spot is his beloved MCG – or mosque cricket ground. And unfortunately for Janeth, the biggest hurdle she faces is inside her own family...

Janeth is not the only strong-minded woman at the mosque. Men and women pray separately at the mosque – but during the weekly congregational prayers (held on Friday for Muslims rather than Sunday for Christians), Aunty Galila decides to take a sneaky look at the men’s facilities. What she sees infuriates her and she makes it her mission to get better facilities for the women.

The mosque is more than a place of prayer – it’s also the centre of a diverse community, with a strong duty of care to its most vulnerable members, especially in today’s political climate. Heading the charge here is Robbie, an ex-bikie who converted to Islam five years ago, and who has found a new lease of life as a youth worker with the Islamic Council.

It’s just the start of what proves to be a very busy and tumultuous year...
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Before we look more closely at Episode 1 in particular, and also the other two episodes of *The Mosque Next Door*, carry out the following introductory background activities.

• From the program and from further research, write a short account of the history of the Holland Park Mosque. For example, when was the mosque first built, by whom, and why? You might also need to find out more about the 19th century and early 20th century Afghan cameleers, and why some settled in Brisbane. (See “Holland Park Mosque” and “Afghan cameleers” in website references.) What does this tell us about the history of Islam in Australia?

• The first episode begins with the federal election campaign of 2016, which coincided with the Muslim annual holy month of Ramadan. From the program and elsewhere, explain what Ramadan is, what it means, what time of the calendar it is practised, and how it is observed by Muslims.

• From the program and elsewhere if necessary, explain the meaning and the purpose of two other Islamic terms under discussion during this episode – Halal and Sharia.

MAIN PARTICIPANTS

Carry out the following introductory activities about the main participants who appear on-camera in Episode 1.

• Write a short account of the importance of the following participants in our understanding and appreciation of the main issues and themes arising from this episode. You may also draw from their appearance in the other episodes if relevant.
  - Imam Uzair
  - Ali Kadri
  - Janeth Deen
  - Galila Abdelsalam
  - Maryam Elshemy
  - Robbie Maestracci
  - Lamisse Hamouda
  - Jason Baxter

• Imam Uzair is described early in the episode as the “spiritual leader” of the Holland Park Mosque. First, explain what you think this entails, and whether we observe any examples of it in practice during the episode. At the same time throughout the episode the Imam is also shown to be quite a “normal” human being, just like everyone else. How does this reflect the role of the Imam in Islam? How different (or not) is it to other faith traditions?

• Describe Ali Kadri’s role at the Holland Park Mosque, and where it differentiates with Imam Uzair’s role. Offer some examples of where we see this in action.

• We are told that when growing up in India, Ali lost a family member because of religious persecution and violence. Explain why Ali, after having lived in Australia for the past 14 years, is now suddenly fearful that the same thing could now happen in Australia. In his view, what is it that has recently occurred (as conveyed in this episode) which raises these concerns?
• In the event, Ali organises and runs the “Halal snack chat” campaign. Why does he need to tackle the issue of halal? What is the relevance of halal to Australia today?

• Explain how Janeth Deen is intimately connected to the century-old history of the Holland Park Mosque. Describe her intentions for the mosque precinct, and the reasons behind them. Why does she have problems in discussing her views with her immediate family members? How common do you think her niece’s views are?

• At Holland Park Mosque, the men and women are segregated during prayer time. How common is this practise? The program shows that the congregation hold different views about this? How necessary is segregation to Muslim sexual ethics? What are the arguments for and against?

• Explain why Galila Abdelsalam’s daughter, Maryam Elshemy, describes Galila as “a bit like a bulldozer…with a heart”. Are there any scenes during the episode where this is exemplified, and if so, how, and for what purpose? Why does she refer to the women’s section of the mosque, in comparison to the men’s section, as “indirect discrimination”, and what does this tell us about her world view, from a wider perspective as a woman, not only as a Muslim woman?

• Comment on how Maryam Elshemy defines the non-Muslim stereotype image of a Muslim woman. What does she think of this stereotype?

• Describe Robbie Maestracci’s role at the Holland Park Mosque. In what ways do you think he is suited to, and qualified for, this role? Comment on what his belief in the Islamic faith has brought him, and where he might be now if this had not happened.

• Comment on whether Lamisse Hamouda conforms to what might be a stereotypical young Muslim woman, at least from the viewpoint of a non-Muslim, offering examples from the episode. In responding, note that Maryam Elshemy defines what she believes to be the stereotype during the episode; you should take these comments into consideration.

• Explain why Jason Baxter had been invited to visit the mosque for Friday Prayers. Discuss the effect the visit to the mosque has had on him, and why? From the episode, listen again to what he says on his Facebook postings. Do you think his visit might alter the style and content of his Facebook videos? What do you think he would say in his next posting? You might try writing an example of his own commentary.
Themes and Issues

Carry out the following activities arising from your viewing of Episode 1.

• Although Pauline Hanson does not appear on-camera, in person in this episode, nor in the remainder of the series, her presence, one way or another, is constant. She is heard in the pre-title sequence in each of the three episodes, and at the beginning of Episode 1 as a voice on Ali Kadri’s car radio, heard on the night of a very significant day.

• Discuss in class the way in which Hanson is presented throughout the episode, in voice, vision and as a verbally evoked entity, both as an individual person and as a phenomenon, a symbol, a force or a representation of something else in a wider context. Overall, what kind of image of Hanson exists in the minds of the on-camera participants, and in the general portrayal of her by the filmmakers?

At the end of the episode we hear part of Hanson’s maiden speech to Federal Parliament in September 2016, in which she speaks of Australia being “swamped by Muslims”. Having viewed the entire episode to that point, discuss your reaction and your response to her words, taking into account the context, on-screen, in which we hear the speech being delivered. Comment on whether the preceding content of the episode has affected, altered or deepened your response to her words. Give reasons as to why or why not.

• “Communication” is a key word deriving from this episode. In what ways does the image of Hanson motivate the participants in Episode 1 to attempt to reach out and to communicate in person to the wider, local, non-Muslim community? Consider, for example, the scenes relating to the Halal Snack Chat, the flag-raising ceremony, the supervised school excursions, the invitation extended to Jason Baxter. Comment on the outcomes of each of these on-camera examples.

• Following from the previous activity, discuss and interpret the scenes that show Janeth Deen attempting to communicate with her own family members in their own home environment. Comment on whether her efforts, as shown on camera, are a success, or end in frustration for everyone. What do you think are the central issues throughout this situation?

• The program draws a direct link between Janeth’s altercation with her family members, and the Facebook postings of Jason Baxter. Discuss what you think these connections are.

• Comment on why there is a sequence filmed at the mosque precinct, in which a cricket match takes place. In what way is this sequence relevant to any of the major themes and topics raised throughout the episode – or is it included for any other purpose?

• During the episode Maryam says, “I think if you’ve come new from overseas the first place that you look for is the mosque. I mean anywhere else in the world it would be a place of prayer, but in Australia especially it is a community space where people come together.”

• Comment on why Maryam, Galila Abdelsalam’s daughter, distinguishes between mosques elsewhere in the world with mosques in the Australian context.
What does she mean by saying the mosque is a “community space”, not simply a place of prayer? In what manner is it a community space? Discuss whether her views are borne out, shown, or exemplified during this episode.

• Discuss then write a commentary on the extent of women’s rights projected throughout the episode. Would you interpret the on-screen portrayal and commentary by the participants in terms of feminism? Comment on whether the presence of a filming crew, and a camera, is of any significance in influencing the women’s attitudes, behaviour and stated opinions.

• Imagine you were in Galila Abdelsalam’s position as the CEO and founder of the Islamic Women’s Association. Plan and write a letter on behalf of the other women attending the mosque, intended for the Imam to read, expressing their views about the situation they are experiencing, in comparison to the men’s space in the same building. Present your opinions, arguments and desired outcomes in a rational, logical, coherent way, as a means of initiating positive action from the Imam. You may wish to draw on the Qu’ran and/or other Islamic texts in your arguments.

• From the episode, review Robbie Maestracci’s biographical details. Drawing from them in any way you think is appropriate and valid, plan and write a short fiction story about a person whose life looks like it is heading down a path towards self-destruction and ruin, and whether it can be turned around in any way through an awakening or self-realisation. Your story does not necessarily have to be Robbie’s; it may develop in different ways, with different outcomes, for good or for bad. Consider how the story will be narrated, the place and time settings, the characters and the character relationships.

• At Friday prayers, Imam and Ali discuss the different clothing worn by the mosque congregation and in particular the prevalence of beards, which they describe as “prophet fashion”. How does this comment reflect Islam’s attitude to the prophets, and the Prophet Muhammad in particular?

• During the episode there is a scene in which a group of non-Muslim schoolgirls visits the mosque. Discuss what you think they’ve learnt from the experience, and whether it altered their perception of a mosque, and what happens within its walls.

As though you were one of the schoolgirls, plan and write either a blog entry or a personal diary entry on the effect your visit to the mosque, and what you saw and heard there, affected you.

• The ever-present spectre of Islamic terrorism is raised in a direct and specific way towards the end of the episode. Describe
the context, involving an immigrant Muslim taxi driver, in which the issue is raised. Why is the individual in question placed under government surveillance, and what might be the consequences for him if the government security personnel consider him to be a threat to the Australian community? How is he reacting to the situation in which he finds himself, and what is he doing about it? What kind of help do you think he is asking for, from both Imam Uzair and Ali Kadri? (Note that these questions are related to Episode 1. This story thread continues in detail in Episode 2.)

- Discuss what you have learnt from your viewing of the entire episode. For example, has what you have seen and heard altered or confirmed your awareness and knowledge of life in and around the mosque for the local Islamic populace? Do you think the episode answers any questions you may have had about the subject?
One of the congregation, Jamil, is reported to the National Security Hotline, as the mosque and its leaders, Imam Uzair and Ali Kadri, confront the fault lines between Muslim immigration and terrorism.

At the Islamic Council Youth Worker’s office, ex-bikie Robbie has also been helping a local refugee family, guiding and mentoring a 17-year old son who has drifted from the faith and has recently been in trouble.

Lamisse, who works with Robbie as a youth worker, is also struggling with her faith and place in modern Australia. Turning her back on her Muslim identity in her late teens, she is only just finding her way back. For the first time, Lamisse has decided to talk openly about her battles.

As the year draws to a close and Christmas approaches, a controversial YouTube video stating that it’s wrong for a Muslim to wish others Merry Christmas, has gone viral amongst the Muslim and non-Muslim community. Ali is determined to confront the extremists on both sides head on, but because of the backlash in his own community, turns to Imam for advice and support.
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Before we look more closely at Episode 2 of *The Mosque Next Door*, carry out the following introductory background activities.

- During this episode, we find out that Afghan refugee Jamil, has been placed on a “terrorist watch list” after being anonymously reported via the National Security Hotline. First, define what you think the term “national security” means. Is there an official, governmental or Australian Federal Police (AFP) meaning of the term?

- Carry out some research about the National Security Hotline. What is it, when was it set up, by whom, and why? What are its primary functions? What happens when and after a member of the public rings the hotline to make a report? What are members of the public asked to report, and are they expected to provide evidence of what they are reporting or alleging? Are you able to measure the extent of its operations, its effectiveness, and who it is especially aimed at – or is information about its workings difficult to publicly access? (See “National Security Hotline” in website references.)

- What is the terrorist watch list? Who maintains and manages it? By what circumstances are people placed on that list, and what happens to them after they are placed on the list? Are their names made public? Are they given reasons, by the authorities in charge of the list, as to why their names are on it, and are they given permission to defend themselves against being on the list? Do we know which groups of people in the Australian community make up the bulk of those on the list? Are there, for example, any non-Islamic people or groups on the list? If you are on the list, what do you need to do to prove that you should not be on it?

- Plan and write a short fiction story about someone who finds that he or she, or a work colleague, friend or relative, has been reported to the National Security Hotline. You may present the story in any genre and narrative style you wish.

- This episode explores the experience of Lamisse as a young Australian Muslim woman, who is recently divorced and trying to reconcile her Muslim and Australian identities. Explain how her situation reflects Muslim sexual ethics in relation to divorce and how she may also challenge conventional expectations.
Carry out the following introductory activities about the main participants who appear on-camera in Episode 2.

• Write a short account of the importance of the following participants in our understanding and appreciation of the main issues and themes arising from this episode. Some participants who appear in this episode have featured prominently in the previous episode, therefore it is not necessary to repeat what you may already have noted. However, you may wish to comment further here, if you think more information is required.
  o Imam Uzair
  o Ali Kadri
  o Robbie Maestracci
  o Lamisse Hamouda
  o Jamil
  o Asha
  o Asha’s 17-year-old son

Comment on the wide and diverse roles and activities in which we see Imam Uzair participating throughout this episode, from preaching to his congregation to attending an Australia vs Pakistan cricket match with an Australian flag – yet wearing identifiably Islamic garb – to replacing a number plate on his car. Discuss the intention of these latter scenes.

• What do we find out about Ali Kadri at home, and what does this tell us about him, his family, and his cultural and ethnic history? Why do you think he maintains that he will not marry a woman from his own culture?

• Comment on why Robbie Maestracci says his new-found religious beliefs have turned his life around. How does this connect with the Islamic Youth Support work he now does with Lamisse Hamouda? Explain what he believes is the absolute, most basic requisite young wayward Muslim men need to do to achieve, find or reclaim a sense of guidance and control in their lives.

• Describe Asha’s background, where she has come from, and why. What was the situation in her homeland, which led to her eventually arriving in Australia? Describe the emotional support system she now has in Australia, such as being able to be with relatives, or friends from within her own community.

Imagine that Asha is writing a personal diary about her new life in Australia, and the problems she faces. Plan and write the diary, ensuring you include four or five different entries spread out over some weeks or months, in order to demonstrate a sense of continuity to her story, her feelings and thoughts, over a period of time.
• Discuss why Asha’s 17-year-old son is having so much trouble with the law, and in not finding that “guidance” mentioned by Robbie in the previous discussion activity. Where might “guidance” come from, and why does it seem to be lacking in her son’s life? Consider, for example, the issue of growing up from childhood without older male role models, as distinct from male peers of similar age. Is this relevant to his case?

• What kinds of outside forces are operating on him, attracting and pulling him away from people such as Robbie, and his own family members, particularly his mother? How might this be interpreted, in Ali Kadri’s words, as an “identity crisis”?

• Comment on possible reasons as to why the filmmakers have masked Asha’s son’s face, and not identified him by name throughout the series.

• Discuss why Lamisse says that growing up as a Muslim in Australia is hard because of the Australian lifestyle and culture. In what ways is she discovering and working out how to be a Muslim woman and an Australian, in her own way?

• Explain in detail why Jamil was reported to the National Security Hotline, and placed on the terrorist watch list. Discuss, from what you see in this episode, whether these events were justified or were an over-reaction by those involved (both the members of the public who reported the incidents, and the authorities who responded). What impact has it had on him and his family?

• In the episode, Robbie encourages Asha’s son to pray on the lawn outside his home. Using the episode and other references, explain the key Islamic tenets about prayer. What are the rules? How much flexibility is there? (You may also want to refer back to the previous episode.)
Carry out the following activities arising from your viewing of Episode 2.

• During this episode we see Imam Uzair speaking to his congregation at the mosque in response to the backlash from both the non-Muslim community and the mass media reports of extremism. Explain the advice he gives to them about how to react and respond to any sort of criticism and provocation. Why does he say that being “tested” here, in Australia, is a very minor issue for them to contend with, compared to elsewhere?

• “Don’t lose your cool”: explain the Imam’s comment that if one Muslim gets angry or “doesn’t smile” in the Australian community, it will not only reflect badly on him or her with non-Muslims, it will negatively affect the entire Muslim community. How and why would the entire Muslim community be affected by one person’s behaviour or attitude in public? Have you seen any evident examples of this in the wider Australian news media? Why does the Imam emphasise that Australian non-Muslims can show discontent to Muslims, but “we can’t” show the same feelings, and “we don’t have the same credit”? What does he mean by “credit”?

• Most Muslims attending the mosque are caught on one side between the backlash coming from Australians with anti-multicultural views, and from the other side coming from hard-line Muslims. Comment on the types of extremist and “hard-line” commentary Imam Uzair and Ali Kadri have to contend with, and how they attempt to respond to it, and argue against it. Where are these hard-line views coming from, and why do both men dismiss those who are perpetrating these messages?

• Explain the issue relating to saying “Merry Christmas” to non-Muslims during the Christmas season. Why does the Imam see his approach to responding to this issue, as being in a wider context, which he calls the “global village”?

• Explore the issue of wishing “Merry Christmas” and the Imam’s response in the context of the rise of pan-Islamism, Salafi ideology and the ongoing influence Muslim Brotherhood leaders, in particular Sayyid Qutb.

• Putting together the issues of extremism, backlash responses, provocation anger and resentment, and the free giving and receiving of a Christmas greeting, towards the end of the episode the Imam refers to “building bridges between communities”. Comment on whether we see this sentiment or objective being put into practice at any point during this episode – not only involving Imam Uzair and Ali Kadri, but others, such as Lamisse Hamouda.
• Drawing from this episode, plan and write a short fiction story in which an important theme, and perhaps plot events and character actions, relate to “building bridges between communities”. One way to present this story would be to personalise the issues, dramatically or in comedy, through individual characters and their relationships.

• Taking the final scene of the episode as a starting point, where Jamil waits at the airport for his wife and children to arrive from Afghanistan, prepare and write his story as a newspaper report for a national newspaper. What will be the “angle” you will feature as the way to attract the reader’s attention? You should attempt to encapsulate this “hook” in an appropriate headline. Which elements of his “back story” will you elaborate on? Will you use direct quotes? How will you approach the issue of him being reported to the National Security Hotline as an alleged or potential security risk? Will your story demonstrate an element of sympathy for he and his family? Will it allege an unfair system of how someone might be reported? You will have to consider these types of questions in fashioning your written item.

Use desktop publishing software to create your report in the style of an actual newspaper item, with body text, headline, photograph and caption.
Tensions are bubbling at the mosque as its leader Imam Uzair and his right-hand man Ali Kadri try to steer their community through the headwinds of Muslim and nationalist extremism. It seems everyone’s ready to take offence as Ali struggles to reconcile attitudes to the hijab or head scarf and Imam addresses extremist death threats from abroad, all the while dealing with the deeply emotional everyday dramas of life, love and death.
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Before we look more closely at Episode 3 of *The Mosque Next Door*, carry out the following introductory background activities.

- In this episode the topic of Islamic women’s dress apparel is raised, particularly the hijab, and also the niqab. From the program and elsewhere if necessary, explain the difference between the two (and other variations of them, if you wish), and what their respective purposes are. (For more, see “Hijab” in website references.)

- One of the young men Robbie Maestracci looks after is Jessie, who has changed his name to Jihad. Explain what the term “Jihad”, often means to non-Islamic westerners, and why. Explore the meaning of “Jihad” in Arabic, and the various ways in which the word has been interpreted in the Islamic faith, from traditional orthodoxies to more recent definitions, including Sayyid Qutb’s. (See “Jihad” in website references.)

- During this episode there is a sequence towards the end of the program where a crowd gathers at the mosque to observe the image in the sky of a crescent moon. View the relevant sequence in the episode (at approx. the 50-minute mark), and carry out further research if necessary, to discuss the significance of the crescent moon and its relationship to the Islamic monthly calendar, and particularly to the month of Ramadan. (For more, see “Crescent moon” in website references.)

- Also in this episode we see a sequence referencing the Australian citizenship test, where a recent arrival is studying to pass the test. Carry out some research then write a commentary on what the aims and purposes are behind the test. What is it testing? Who is being tested? Who (or which organised body) writes and manages the test? Where is the test held, how often is it held, and how is it conducted? For example, is it similar to a school and classroom test? Is there a pass and fail judgement on those who take the test? What happens if you pass or fail the test? What does passing the test qualify you for? Are there any public criticisms of the content of the test (See “Australian citizenship test” in website references.)

Some sample citizenship tests are available on the internet (see the website references mentioned above). You may wish to try doing a test, and to report back to your class the results, and your views about the test’s questions. What kind of test did you expect, and how did it compare to the reality? Was it easy or difficult for you? Were the topic questions acceptable for new migrants (in some cases refugees) to be expected to know, and to tackle? Comment on whether there were any types of questions that you think should, or should not, have been on the test.
Carry out the following introductory activities about the main participants who appear on-camera in Episode 3.

• Write a short account of the importance of the following participants in our understanding and appreciation of the main issues and themes arising from this episode. Some participants who appear in this episode have featured prominently in previous episodes, therefore it is not necessary to repeat what you may already have noted. However, you may wish to comment further here, if you think more information is required after viewing Episode 3.
  o Imam Uzair
  o Ali Kadri
  o Galila Abdelsalam
  o Maryam Elshemy
  o Robbie Maestracci
  o Asha and her daughters Khadija and Batool
  o Sara
  o Jessie (also known as Jihad)
  o Ayda and Abla (sisters)

• Discuss why Asha sends her daughters, Khadija and Batool, to lessons at the mosque, in addition to their standard daily primary school attendance.

• Explain the issue that Ayda has with a question on the Federal Government’s practice citizenship test, and why Ali Kadri and others at the mosque show little concern about it. (See more about the citizen test above, in the “Introduction and Background” section to Episode 3, and also in website references.)

• After viewing the sequences involving the “matchmaking” by Galila Abdelsalam, which brings Ali and Sara together with a view to marriage, plan and write a short fiction story in which a matchmaker tries to bring a couple together. You may either write the story as a comedy, a drama, or a satire. You may also wish to discuss in class first, the general concept, “rules” and procedures of matchmaking, and whether this is a relevant or an outdated custom today. You might also want to compare or contrast these customs to the concept of an arranged marriage.
Carry out the following activities arising from your viewing of Episode 3.

- Explain what Imam Uzair means, at the beginning of the episode, where he says that he and Ali Kadri are Muslims in the “crossfire” of opposing forces. Explain what or who these opposing forces are, and why he and Ali are in the crossfire. Throughout the episode, how are they dealing with, or attempting to counter these forces? One example to look at should be the sequence in which the Imam, with his brother, who is also an Imam, together view a video of a speech or sermon being delivered by IS leaders in the Middle East (at approx. the 14-minute mark). Why does he find the video “disturbing”? How does he interpret the video’s purpose in being seen in Australia? How does he suggest dealing with it, and how does he, himself, attempt to counteract the video’s messages?

- Imam Uzair later says that “extremism is deprived of compassion… mercy and love”. Plan and write a short fiction story drawing from this statement as a central theme of the story.

- View the sequence in which Robbie Maestracci speaks of his plan to implement a support group for Muslims in jail (approx. at the 17.30 minute mark). Discuss his reasoning, and the intended purpose of this plan, showing how it relates to his own experiences of being a “crim” before he converted to Islam. He says that in jail there are “so many obstacles and hoops you have to jump through”, in order to change. Comment on what those obstacles and hoops might be.

- Following from the previous discussion activity, explain Ali’s view that, “Any community is as strong as its weakest links”. How does this connect to Robbie’s plans to build support groups for those in jail?

- During this episode, we see sequences of children being taught the Qur’an at the mosque (note the scenes relating to Khadija and Batool). Discuss how the long-term purpose of these lessons and general learning experiences at the mosque is, itself, a potential safeguard against radicalisation later in life.

- Drawing from all the previous discussion points, plan and write a short fiction story derived from the theme that, a community is only as strong as its weakest links. Consider characters and character relationships, setting (time and place), narrative approach (first or third-person narration), genre style, story events, conflict and resolution.

- Early in this episode (approx. the six-minute mark) there is a sequence in which a public billboard promoting Australia Day 2017 features a photograph of two girls wearing hijabs, an image which incites threats to burn the billboard down because the hijab is considered “un-Australian”.

- First, you may want to discuss the issue of what is considered to be an “Australian” cultural value, and what might be considered to be an “un-Australian” cultural value, and why. Where did these values develop from,
when and why? Who decides what these values might be, and how they are to be upheld and imposed? Is there, for example, a law or a rule that lays out and explains what being “Australian” or “un-Australian” means, or are these values, beliefs and concepts merely states of mind held individually by each of us across a wide spectrum of attitudes?

What is the difference between a monocultural society and a multicultural society, and where does Australia legally and culturally fit into these polar opposites? Where does the image and the wearing of the hijab legally and culturally fit into the Australian landscape?

- Describe your reaction to the report that some people expressed a desire to burn down the Australia Day billboard. What do you think the meaning, purpose and intention of the billboard was, to those who planned, assessed, and created it?

- Following on from the previous discussion, listen carefully to what Ali Kadri says about Australian modes of dress in this sequence of the episode. Why does he refer to “cultural Nazis”, and what does he mean? Comment on his view that “there is no dress code to being an Australian”, and that “a woman wearing a hijab is as Australian as a woman wearing a bikini”.

- Discuss in class the possibilities, then plan and create your own Australia Day promotional poster, ensuring that it would appeal, from a multicultural viewpoint, to as wide a spectrum of Australian citizens as possible. An alternative would be to work in pairs to create a script and even a storyboard for a 30-second promotional video. If you have access to the appropriate technology, you may even want to work in larger teams to produce and edit your video from the script and the storyboard.

- Maryam says that when she was 15 years old she deliberately wore the hijab as a “political statement”. Explain what she means? How might an item of dress be interpreted as a political statement? In a democratic, multicultural society such as Australia professes to have, should a Muslim (or anyone else, from whatever cultural background) deliberately wear an item of dress in order to identify themselves as a member of that faith? Is it necessary? Is it deliberately provocative, drawing attention to yourself as being “different”, or even “special”? Should everyone else be expected to take notice and to be aware of that person’s faith and culture?

- Why do you think the story of Ali’s matchmaking engagement to Sara is followed, and presented in some detail throughout this episode? Consider, for example, the issues of normalisation, personalisation and romantic love, multiculturalism, tolerance and respect for cultural customs.
• How closely does Ali and Sara’s romance adhere to Islamic sexual ethics? How does Imam’s advice also reflect this? What does it suggest about the place of Islamic ethics in the Australian Muslim community today?

• In this episode, one of the mosque matriarchs loses her husband to cancer. What do we learn about Muslim attitudes to death and dying? Discuss in relation to your own study of Islam.

• View the final sequence of Episode 3, in which Imam and Ali discuss whatever progress has occurred over the past year. How do they feel as to where they’ve “travelled” over the year, and where they are now? Discuss whether they are optimistic, pessimistic, hopeful, worried. Comment on the extent and manner of their relationship.

• Discuss how the background, accompanying soundtrack music in the final scene plays a role in defining the relationship between Imam and Ali, and in directing the emotional mood and setting. How does the fall of night, and the final, sweeping, circling, high angle camera shot, offer a sense of closure and completeness?

• Discuss what you have learnt, discovered or appreciated from your viewing of Episode 3.
Carry out the following activities on the series from a media perspective.

- Discuss why the producers considered that The Mosque Next Door was a suitable and relevant title for the documentary series. Explain, for example, the meaning the additional words, “next door” in the title, might be intended to impart to a potential viewing audience. Give the series a suitable alternative title, and explain your choice.

- Comment on the intended viewing audience you think the filmmakers are aiming at, providing examples of sequences from any of the episodes that seem to fulfil these objectives. For example, is the series specifically aimed only non-Muslim, Anglo-European Australians? Is it aimed at women rather than men? Is it aimed at the younger rather than the older demographic?

- Carefully view the opening sequence, which runs for about 1.45 minutes at the beginning of each episode, up to the point where the series title appears on the screen. You may want to make written notes of the quick flow of images and accompanying sound bites, music soundtrack and the on-screen voice-over commentary.

- From this opening sequence only, what kind of program, content and themes are being suggested to viewers by the filmmakers? What would you say are the filmmakers’ intentions? What are the dominant visual and audio images throughout the sequence? Comment on the choice and style of accompanying music.

  Comment on the very fast “flipboard” interchange of particular words shown in the on-screen title graphics at the end of the sequence. What might be the purpose of this?

- There is a definite story-time structure to the presentation of this three-part series. To observe it on-screen, review the first few minutes of Episode 1, beginning at the point where the title credit appears, and the closing minutes of Episode 3, before the final end credits. You should be able to see direct connections between the two sequences. Comment on what you have noticed, and discuss why you think the filmmakers have chosen this story-telling structure.
• The documentary filmmaking procedure throughout the series is to observe the participants, to allow them to speak for themselves, and not to be interventionist nor judgemental both in commentary and in the editing process. Is this an accurate summation? Discuss, drawing on various parts of the series to demonstrate your opinions.

• One of the program’s producers, Ross Wilson, says, in the series press kit, “I remember very well the day, a month into shooting, that Imam Uzair told the congregation to forget about our cameras and carry on as normal – they could trust us.”

• Comment on the kinds of processes, behaviour, attitude, emotional atmosphere, may have been required by the on-location filmmakers over a month, to gain the trust of the mosque congregation. In what sense might trust, itself, have been a major issue? What might the participants, those appearing on-camera, have been concerned about in having cameras and sound equipment pointed at them, and then later appearing, in edited fashion, on-screen?

• Two recurring motifs throughout all three episodes of The Mosque Next Door are outdoor aerial or high angle camera shots of the Holland Park Mosque, and the voice of Pauline Hanson either from audio taken from radio or TV interviews and speeches. Comment on when and where these motifs are edited into the episodes, and the purposes they might be intended to create. Look, for example, at what we see as “bridging” visuals and sounds in order to connect one sequence of narrative with another, and to indicate a passing of time.

• We have already referred to the use of accompanying music on the soundtrack during the introductory sequence of each episode. Select a range of other sequences from the series and discuss the choice and intention of the additional music. Does it, for example, sound “typically” Islamic, or does it have other resonances and connotations? (Note that this activity relates to music added to the soundtrack, which may have been composed for the series, not to incidental music recorded “live” during the filming process.)

• Discuss the choice of representative participants throughout the series, their personal stories, and the on-screen image they convey to viewers as members of the Islamic faith in Australia. You might wish to compare or contrast this with on-camera representatives of Australian, non-Islamic background, heritage and culture.

• Comment on whether there is a difference between the way in which “moderate” Islam is presented on-screen throughout the series, and the way in which images of radical Islam are presented. How relevant and/or helpful are these terms? One sequence that is worth examining in detail is where Imam Uzair and others view a video, in Episode 3, at the Bald Hill Mosque, in Brisbane (approx. at the 14-minute mark).
• Plan and create a promotional advertisement poster display, or a 30 or 60-second radio or video promotion, about the series. For the poster, consider carefully your thematic approach, and use of image, colour and text. For the radio promotion, you may prefer to work in pairs or small groups to plan a radio script, in which you must consider the use, extent and variation of voice-over, music and sound effects, and any suitable sound “grabs” taken from the series itself. You will need to rehearse, record and edit the audio track. For a video promotion you will also require the necessary equipment, tools and software, and a drafted script which will need to be carefully edited.

• Draft, edit and proofread a review of the series in 250-300 words for a weekly TV magazine. Take into account the style and approach you will take in the review for your assumed reading audience.
The Mosque Next Door: An Overview

Carry out the following activities (see also activities on the full series from a Media Studies perspective, above):

• Discuss what you believe to be the overall purpose and the achievements of the series.

• Write a commentary on what you learnt, discovered and/or appreciated from the series. Explain which sequence, or series of events, stood out for you as being of most interest, or insightful, or challenging for you. Did anything in the series alter your perception of what a mosque is, or what life within the mosque is like, or what the people who work in, and practise their faith in the mosque, are like?

• The series press kit contains Statements by the producers and researchers about their personal experiences and thoughts on the making of the series. Here, you will be able to see a perspective on the program and its participants, by the filmmakers, that doesn’t actually appear in the program. Or does it? Access the press kit online, read the Statements, then discuss what you think the filmmakers themselves gained from their experiences of working with, researching and filming, the participants. Comment on your own reaction to the observations made in the press kit, and whether they add to your understanding and appreciation of the series. (See “Press kit” in website references.)

• The entire series is about the “normalcy”, rather than about the abnormality and the strangeness of everyday Australian citizens and those seeking to become Australian citizens. Comment.

• Comment on whether the series, for you, satisfactorily answers or responds to any questions or perceptions you may have held about Islam and/or Muslims in Australia, or whether there are still unanswered questions that required more detail and explanation.

• How relevant are key terms and Islamic practice to the lives of Australian Muslims in this series?
References and Further Resources

**BOOKS**


**Film**


*Last Chance* (director, Kamal Saleh), OnePath Network, 2016.

WEBSITES

Afghan cameleers:

Australian citizenship test:

Crescent moon:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunar_phase
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_and_crescent

Five daily prayers of Islam:
http://aaiil.org/text/books/mali/muslimprayerbook/fivedailyprayers.shtml

Five pillars of Islam:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/fivepillars.shtml

Hijab:

Holland Park:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holland_Park,_Queensland

Holland Park Mosque:
https://www.facebook.com/Holland-Park-Mosque-1612102112350457/
WEBSITES

Islam in Australia:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Australia
http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/07/11/4043888.htm

Islamic Women’s Association Queensland:
http://iwaq.org.au/

Jihad:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/jihad_1.shtml

National Security Hotline:

Pan-Islamism:
http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/1819
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-Islamism
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid_Qutb
http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/11/07/4570251.htm

Press kit:

Ramadan:
https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/australia/ramadan-begins
Southern Pictures is a dynamic production company with a strong commitment to storytelling that creates high-quality, high-impact original programming for broadcast, the web and new media.

The company, formerly known as Australian Documentaries, was established in Sydney in 2009 by Laurie Critchley to produce the 7-part primetime series, Family Confidential. Since then, Southern Pictures has gone on to produce factual programs for networks including Channel 9, ABC, and SBS that demonstrate its commitment to producing original formats and revelatory, character-driven content.