



CAN ONE TEAM  
REALISE THE DREAM  
OF MILLIONS?

# POWER MERI

MEDIA STOCKADE PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH SCREEN AUSTRALIA A FILM BY JOANNA LESTER "POWER MERI"  
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A STUDY GUIDE BY  
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## SYNOPSIS

Papua New Guinea is Australia's nearest neighbour, a place characterised by stunning but unforgiving landscape, immense cultural diversity – and a national passion for rugby league. According to human rights organisations, it is also one of the worst places in the world to be a woman.

*Power Meri* follows Papua New Guinea's first national women's rugby league team, the PNG Orchids, on their journey to the 2017 World Cup in Australia. Proud, strong and hopeful, the pioneering women in the PNG Orchids team have overcome more challenges than most to play their much-loved national sport. But after years at grassroots level, they have just three months to transform themselves into a competitive national team.

*Power Meri* takes audiences on a journey through rarely-seen corners of PNG and behind the scenes of women's sport. It follows the Orchids through selection trials, arduous training with a fly-in-fly-out Australian coaching mentor, and diverse personal struggles as they face the world champion Australian Jillaroos and compete at the World Cup.

But their mission is greater than winning. In a country with appalling rates of domestic violence, sport is one of the few arenas in which PNG women can show their strength. If they can perform like men on the rugby field, can they change attitudes about the treatment and status of women back home?

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## CURRICULUM LINKS

*Power Meri* offers students an opportunity to:

- critique and challenge assumptions and stereotypes;
- consider the influence of sport on national and personal identity and on gender equality;
- examine the roles, status and representations of women in modern day society;
- weigh up the importance of winning vs participating;
- consider the different ways people can demonstrate resilience;
- evaluate the importance of community support to individuals and groups;
- discuss the relative socioeconomic differences between Australia and Papua New Guinea, and the relationship between the two countries.

This study guide is suitable for secondary students at all year levels. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in Health and Physical Education, English and Media. It may also be used as a supplementary text in the teaching of Civics and Citizenship and the development of Australian Curriculum general capabilities: Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding.



### Links to the Health and Physical Education curriculum

In Health and Physical Education, students explore the importance of sport participation in the community, and the influence of traditions, norms and stereotypes in shaping cultures and identities. In this context, *Power Meri* relates to the following outcome areas:

Strand	Sub-strand
Personal, social and community health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being healthy, safe and active</li> <li>Contributing to healthy and active communities</li> </ul>
Movement and physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding movement</li> </ul>

### Links to the English curriculum

In English, students are encouraged to study texts which explore themes of human experience and cultural significance, interpersonal relationships, and ethical and global dilemmas within real-world and fictional settings and represent a variety of perspectives.

Strand	Sub-strand
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language variation and change</li> <li>Purpose, audience and structures of different types of texts</li> <li>Text cohesion</li> <li>Visual language</li> </ul>
Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature and context</li> <li>Personal responses to ideas, characters and viewpoints in texts</li> </ul>
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Texts and contexts in which they are used</li> <li>Listening and speaking interactions</li> <li>Purpose and audience</li> <li>Analysing and evaluating texts</li> </ul>

### Links to the Arts (Media) curriculum

In Media Arts, students refine and extend their understanding of structure, intent, character, settings, points of view, genre and conventions through opportunities to reflect on, analyse, interpret and evaluate a range of media texts. Specifically, students:

- Analyse how technical and symbolic elements are used in media artworks to create representations influenced by story, genre, values and points of view of particular audiences
- Evaluate how technical and symbolic elements are manipulated in media artworks to create and challenge representations framed by media conventions, social beliefs and values for a range of audiences (ACAMAR078)
- Identify specific features and purposes of media artworks from contemporary and past times to explore viewpoints and enrich their media arts making (ACAMAR072)
- Analyse a range of media artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their media arts making (ACAMAR079)

Teachers are advised to consult the Australian Curriculum online at <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/> and curriculum outlines relevant to their state or territory for further information.



## HISTORY OF WOMEN IN SPORT

Women's participation in organised sport has increased dramatically over the past 50 years, with some variation between different countries. These participation rates reflect the broader movement towards gender equality across the globe over the same time period. However, despite the increase in the number and quality of female athletes, there is still significant disparity between men and women's sport in terms of prize allocation and sponsorship, fan base, media coverage and institutional support.

This inequality hails back to ancient times. For example, at the original Olympic games, a special (unmarried) women's only race was held prior to the men's competitions, but married women were banned from participating in the Olympic events or even attending as spectators.

Prior to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were only occasional instances of women involved in sporting competitions – such as women playing an early form of soccer in China during the Song dynasty (960-1279CE). On the whole, participation and support in women's sport focused on correct posture, beauty, fitness and health. The notion of women's sport was limited to recreational, informally organised and non-competitive activities which didn't follow formal rule sets.

Things began to change in the 1880s, with many schools starting to integrate physical education into girls' classes. Women's-only sporting clubs began to form around the same time. The modern Olympics saw its first female participants at the Paris games in 1900, where 22 women competed in tennis, sailing, croquet, equestrian and golf (compared to 975 men, competing across 95 different events). Some 20 years later, the *Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale* was founded in France, to enable more women to compete with each other, especially at an international level. Among other achievements, the organisation helped to bring about four women's-only Olympiads in the 1920s and 1930s.

Despite this progress, women's sports leagues often struggled, largely due to low spectator support. The prevailing attitudes of the time saw women as belonging to the home, being weak and lacking in stamina, hence many early female sport pioneers faced significant societal disapproval. Participation grew as these community values were overcome – and in turn, societal values changed as women increasingly demonstrated their physical prowess; thus, women's participation in sport was both fuelled by, and contributed to, the women's liberation movement.

Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, a few women gained sufficient recognition for their talent to make a living through sport. Some of these early pioneers in professional sport include Joan Weston, a roller derby star, and tennis players Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova. However, even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women are considerably less likely than men to be professional athletes, and those that are often face a **significant pay gap compared to their male counterparts**.



## WOMEN'S RUGBY LEAGUE

Rugby league football is one of two codes of rugby. It originated in 1895 in Northern England, after a split from Rugby Football Union over disputes relating to payments to players. The sport soon gained particular popularity in Australia and Oceania, and today is played in over 70 nations around the world, which also include Canada, France, USA, Russia and South Africa. The first Rugby League World Cup was held in France in 1954.

Women's rugby league is relatively new by comparison, with the first female teams officially recognised in the UK in 1985, 90 years after the game was codified. The Australian Women's Rugby League was formed in 1993, but even then, it took several attempts before the organisation was able to affiliate with the Australian Rugby League.

Following the success of several international test matches in the 1990s, the first women's Rugby League World Cup took place in 2000. It has since been held in 2005, 2008, 2013 and 2017, and is now scheduled to run every four years.

The 2017 competition set an important benchmark as it was the first time that the women's Rugby League World Cup ran alongside the men's Rugby League World Cup, with all 12 of the women's matches broadcast on free-to-air television (in Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea). The event was also historically and symbolically significant because it was the first time that the men's and women's teams were given the same level of service for travel, accommodation, support staff and referees, and the first time in any world cup, in any sport...not just the Rugby League World Cup, that both the men's and women's world champions were crowned on the same day, at the same venue.

## RUGBY LEAGUE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Rugby league was introduced to Papua New Guinea in the 1930s by Australian miners, and popularised further by Australian soldiers stationed there during World War 2. Since then, it has become so intrinsically intertwined with the PNG culture as to be considered as the country's national sport.

Rugby league is seen as a unifying force in an otherwise often-divided country, and to many it is a source of pride and optimism in the face of many social, economic and political problems. The sport has a huge participation rate, both at senior and junior levels. It figures largely in school-based activities and is sometimes used to deliver key social messages, such as in the case of the *League Bilong Laif* (League for Life) program, supported by National Rugby League Australia and the Australian government.

The PNG men's national rugby league team is *The Kumuls*, who played their first ever international test match in 1974, against Great Britain. The country's professional rugby league team is known as *The PNG Hunters*, and *The Orchids* is PNG's national women's team.

## PRE-VIEWING

## QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever played in, or watched, a game of rugby league? What aspects of it did you enjoy/ not enjoy?
2. Are some sports more 'feminine' or 'masculine'? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Consider some international sport events that Australia took part in. Can you think of any sporting moments that significantly boosted our national morale? Are there any instances in Australian sporting history that had a demoralising effect on the Australian people?
4. On a scale of 1-10, how important is sport to our national identity? Do you think that women's sport and men's sport are equally important? Would you say that Australia is more focused on sport than other nations are?
5. Brainstorm a list of things you know or have heard about Papua New Guinea. Alternatively, working individually, with a partner or in small groups, complete the PNG 'bingo' research questions (**below**). Are your impressions about the country mostly positive, mostly negative, or neutral? Explain.
6. PNG is Australia's nearest neighbour. Do you think people travel there as frequently as they do to our other neighbouring countries? If not, why not?
7. What movies, documentaries or books have you seen or read about sports teams? Are there any similarities in the ways that sports teams or sports people are portrayed in popular culture?
8. Make a list of 5 questions that you hope the documentary might answer about the PNG Orchids.



### PNG BINGO RESEARCH

Example of staple food	Country that PNG borders with	Three biggest cities	Approximate number of cultural groups that make up the population
Two of the official languages	A PNG fact of your choice	A significant event that happened there more than 50 years ago	Three geographic features
Name of a geographic province	Average life expectancy	Species of bird on the PNG flag	Number of TV stations
Population	A significant event that happened there in the last 50 years	Something that PNG exports	GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita

## VIEWING QUESTIONS

1. According to the opening words of the documentary, what three things unite Papua New Guinea?
2. As you are watching the film, create a list of words or phrases which describe:
  - a. Papua New Guinea;
  - b. The experience of the Orchids players participating in the World Cup;
  - c. Your response to the documentary.
3. Who is Amelia Kuk, and what does she say about life in Brisbane compared to life in PNG?
4. Identify the challenges that the Orchids players had to overcome in the lead up to, during and after the World Cup competition.
5. Consider the games that featured in *Power Meri*. Complete

the table to summarise the players' feelings, attitudes or morale before and after each game.

6. How much evidence is there of spectator support at Orchids' games?
7. Describe the nature of social media messages highlighted in the documentary. What impact do you think these messages had on the Orchids players?
8. How are the Orchids players using rugby league to benefit themselves/their communities after the World Cup?



GAME	FEELINGS/ATTITUDES /MORALE BEFORE THE GAME	FINAL SCORE	FEELINGS/ATTITUDES /MORALE AFTER THE GAME
<i>PNG vs Australia exhibition match</i>			





## POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS

### \* Women in Papua New Guinea

Women in Papua New Guinea face significant social disadvantage.

Although the PNG Constitution was founded on many principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), it also places priority on maintaining cultural traditions which overwhelmingly diminish the status of women. In a country where a significant proportion of its population is dependent on subsistence farming, women are particularly prone to being excluded from decision making and the market economy. There are currently no women in parliament and women are overwhelmingly underrepresented in the legal system, making their voice difficult to hear.

Over 80% of PNG's population lives in rural areas, with limited access to education and health services. The country's maternal mortality rate is among the worst in the world and only approximately 50% of women are literate (compared to approximately 63% of men). Women and girls – particularly in the remote areas – can also fall prey to accusations of sorcery.

PNG women live in a culture of entrenched violence that is sometimes described as an 'epidemic' and a 'humanitarian crisis'. While exact figures

vary, it is estimated that at least 65%-75% of women suffer from domestic abuse and over 50% of women have been raped. These figures are much higher for women living in the Highlands, with some studies suggesting sexual abuse rates of over 90%.

Cases of rape, physical assault and harassment are frequently underreported in PNG, given that gender-based violence is often seen as socially acceptable, and is occasionally even perpetrated by the police themselves. For many women, the only access to 'justice' is via male-dominated village courts that do not allow for anonymity or escape from social stigma associated with sexual assault. Throughout the country there is significant lack of services such as shelters or counselling services, and perpetrators of violence are often not prosecuted or punished.

1. What do you think was the overall purpose of *Power Meri*? Explain your answer.
2. 'Meri' means women in Tok Pisin. Do you think *Power Meri* is a good title for the film? Can you suggest any alternatives?
3. You can hear some Tok Pisin spoken in the documentary. Tok Pisin is an example of a 'creole language'. Find out what this means, and how Tok Pisin evolved. Can you think of examples of non-English words which have mixed in with the English spoken in Australia today?
4. In the pre-viewing activities, you were asked to make a list of five questions that the documentary might answer about PNG Orchids. Which of your questions were answered? Were you surprised by any of the answers? Did the documentary raise any new questions?



	No. of stories	MAIN TOPIC/IDEAS CONTAINED IN THE STORIES
Stories which are mostly about female players or a women's team		
Stories which are mostly about male players or a men's team		
Stories which are equally about/relate to both male and female players		

5. A lot of films that feature sport teams follow an 'underdog makes it good' storyline. To what extent was your response to *Power Meri* affected by the fact that the PNG Orchids didn't win any World Cup matches?
6. Research the history of your favourite sport, from both the men's and women's perspectives. Create a timeline to show significant milestones.
7. One of the promotional taglines associated with *Power Meri* is the question 'Can one team realise the dream of millions?' What do you think?
8. What advice would you give to sports people who:
  - a. are discouraged (eg. by their friends or family) from participating in a particular sport;
  - b. are given a hard time about their performance (eg. on the field or through social media);
  - c. are disappointed by their own performance.
9. 'In sport, is it more important to win or to have a go?' Consider this question in the context of:
  - a. playing sport at school;
  - b. taking part in sport as a cross-curricular activity;
  - c. playing sport as an elite athlete.
 Is your response the same in each case above? If not, why not?
10. Look through your newspaper or an on-line news source and complete the following table:
11. Carry out an audit of any/all of the following Facebook pages: [PNG Orchids](#), [Australian Jillaroos](#), [PNG Kumuls](#) and [Australian Kangaroos](#). What conclusions can you draw about:
  - a. the frequency and type of posts;
  - b. the number of followers and extent of post engagement;
  - c. the relative incidence of positive vs negative comments.
12. Write three arguments for and three arguments against the following statement: Community support is critical to ensuring personal success (in sport and beyond). Which arguments are stronger?
13. What strategies do you think would be most effective to raise the profile of women's sport?
14. Create a print, video or radio advertisement to

encourage one of the following:

- a. girls and women to take up a male-dominated sport;
  - b. boys and men to take up a female-dominated sport;
  - c. more people to support women's sporting events.
15. Write an essay response to the question: Can sport lead to positive social change in the community?
  16. Papua New Guinea is our nearest neighbour and its population experiences a significantly lower standard of living than most Australians. To what extent do you think Australia should offer support for:
    - a. women's services in PNG;
    - b. sport and recreation in PNG.
  17. Joanna Lester was inspired to make *Power Meri* because she was a fan of rugby league and was touched by what she had witnessed while living in PNG and the relationships she made with the people there. If you were to create a documentary that was inspired by your own passions and experiences, what would that documentary be about? What message(s) would you like to communicate?
  18. Film website – [www.powermerifilm.com](http://www.powermerifilm.com)



DIRECTOR

JOANNA LESTER

Joanna Lester is a journalist and documentary film-maker whose work focuses on the bigger picture impact of sport. She has reported for global media organisations including the BBC and Associated Press and has worked at Olympic and Commonwealth Games, world cups, and other major sporting events across four continents. She has covered rugby league throughout the world, from its birthplace in England to its pinnacle of popularity in Papua New Guinea, via countries where most people don't even realise the sport is played. Her current work focuses on how sport can change lives and improve societies, and how women's involvement in sport contributes to gender equality, particularly in the Pacific. *Power Meri* marks her entry into long-form documentary storytelling, building on her unparalleled and intimate access to the film's characters and her longstanding relationships in rugby league and Papua New Guinea.

PRODUCTION COMPANY MEDIA STOCKADE

[www.mediastockade.com](http://www.mediastockade.com)

[www.powermerifilm.com](http://www.powermerifilm.com)

Photos courtesy of Benard Poma (Power Meri), Dave Buller (NRL PNG) and NRL Photos



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AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA

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