



life at 9

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

© ATOM 2014

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA



AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA

<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>

ISBN: 978-1-74295-479-0

<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>

Overview > This is the fifth instalment of The Life Series. *Life at 9* provides a window on Australian childhood in an effort to uncover just what it is that gives a child the best chance at life.

Curriculum Guidelines

Life at 9 will have interest and relevance for middle to senior secondary and tertiary students in the following curriculum areas:

- Health and Human Development
- Biology
- General Science
- Values Education
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Exploring early Childhood (Secondary)
- Studies of Society and Environment/HSIE (Secondary)
- Child and Family Services (Tertiary)
- Child Development Studies (Tertiary)
- Community and Family Studies (Tertiary)

Apart from its direct relevance to these learning areas, *Life at 9* presents an engaging picture of Australian children growing up in the 21st century. The program will have great interest for many people—parents, teachers and anyone who has been a child! Adults may identify with some of the different styles of parenting shown in the series and students are almost sure to recognise themselves in at least one of these children. The programs are as fundamental to understanding the nature of human life and development as *Planet Earth* is to our understanding of the natural world. This is documentary viewing of an altogether different order to much of what is broadcast on television. The joys and struggles of these very different families are shown with sensitivity and warmth. Comparisons with Michael Apted's *Seven Up* films may be inevitable, although this series looks at children every two years from age 1 and employs a more deliberately scientific approach to understanding childhood development.



While ideally, it would be worthwhile for students to have watched the previous Life programs beginning in 2006 with *Life at 1*, *Life at 3* in 2008, *Life at 5* in 2010 and *Life at 7* in 2012, *Life at 9* can be viewed and appreciated independently. There is sufficient recapitulation of key moments from the earlier programs in the series for *Life at 9* to stand alone. If there is time, it would be very worthwhile to show students one of the earlier programs in the series so they can observe the changes in the children as they grow up and become more independent.

There are portraits of the children and other information about the earlier episodes of the Life series at this ABC website:

http://www.abc.net.au/tv/life/about_the_series/

Teachers could select from the activities in this guide which best suit their students. Given that there are eight children and their families featured in these two episodes of *Life at 9*, it may assist with later discussion if close viewing tasks are divided between groups or individuals, i.e. allocating different children to individuals or groups. Similarities and differences in how the children respond to the challenges set can then be discussed after students have watched both episodes. Each student could be allocated two children to focus on as they watch the program — one from each episode. See Table 2 on page 11 of this guide for a list of the 4 children who are featured in each episode.

Each episode runs for one hour



Synopsis

The Life Series returns with two compelling new episodes as eight Australian children negotiate life in the rapidly changing world of late childhood, in the crucial few years before adolescence begins. They've been filmed since their first year of life, as part of a unique scientific and social experiment. Now nine, they are the public face of a pioneering longitudinal study of Australian children.

The study reveals sweeping changes to childhood, particularly in how children are spending their time. So in a Life Series first, we follow all our children from wakeup to bedtime to uncover what life is really like at nine.

In *Life at 9*, the kids respond to the world with new sophistication and complexity. But at the same time,

their development is at a precipice. The latest scientific research tells us their levels of independence and creativity could set them up for success in later life. Yet evidence suggests that both are declining rapidly in the life of the modern child.

Through the prism of our Life Lab the kids undergo developmental and behavioural experiments with child psychologist, Dr Marc de Rosnay, and creativity expert, Dr

David Cropley. How independently do they think? What kind of praise equips children to cope with failure? And can kids improve their creativity levels in just one day? Their parents are put under the microscope too. How much freedom are they giving their kids to make their own decisions? And are

today's kids more creative than their parents?

The Life Series has exclusive access to a wealth of scientific findings from Australia's unique federally-funded longitudinal study, *Growing up in Australia*, where 10,000 children and their families are interviewed over 15 years to unveil never before captured sociological and scientific data. *Life at 9* runs in concert with this study and provides real life illustrations of the scientific findings, bringing a human face to the statistics.

As the nation watches the lives of our children unfold, we ask what it is that makes us all independent, creative and thriving human beings. This is *Life at 9*.

Background to the series

The fifth instalment of the landmark Life documentary series, *Life at 9* follows a group of nine year-olds carefully selected to represent those participating in the largest ever scientific study of Australian children.

Conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and the Australian Bureau of

Statistics, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) was initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

It explores family, social, health, and neighbourhoods as well as questions about the development and wellbeing of children. Its longitudinal and multidisciplinary structure will enable researchers to determine critical periods for the provision of services and welfare support and identify the long-term consequences of policy.

KEY CREDITS

Director	Jennifer Peedom
Narrator	Colin Friels
Producer	Naomi Just
Executive Producer	Jennifer Cummins
Editors	Mark Middis & Philippa Rowlands
Creative Director	Marcelle Lunam
Composer	Nerida Tyson-Chew
Co-Writer, Post Producer	Ili Baré
Directors Of Photography	Justin Brickle, Simeon Bryan & Mick Angus
Sound Recording	Leo Sullivan, Daren Clark & Gary Hamden

Websites:

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/life-at-9>
www.abc.net.au/life

***Life at 9* is an Heiress Films Production, Screen Australia National Documentary Program, developed and produced in association with the ABC**



PREVIOUS PROGRAMS

THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF THE LIFE SERIES, *LIFE AT 1*, SCREENED TO WIDESPREAD ACCLAIM ON THE ABC IN 2006. *LIFE AT 1* WAS A WINNER AT THE GOLDEN DRAGON 2006 BEIJING INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FILM FESTIVAL AND WAS A FINALIST IN THE 2007 LOGIE AWARDS. *LIFE AT 3* WAS SELECTED TO SCREEN AT THE NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL IN 2009. FILMMAKER JENNIFER PEEDOM WON BEST DIRECTOR OF A DOCUMENTARY SERIES AT THE 2007 AUSTRALIAN DIRECTOR'S GUILD AWARDS.



During 2004, 10,000 children and their families were recruited to the study from a sample selected from the Health Insurance Commissioner's Medicare database. About 300 postcodes were selected at random across the country and then a number of children were selected from these. Around 18,800 families were invited to participate. Teams of experts are researching the areas of health, education, childcare, family functioning, child functioning and socio-demographics in the lives of the 10,000 children and their families. They include sociologists, educationalists, paediatricians, psychologists, statisticians, epidemiologists and experts in early childhood, temperament and mental health of populations.

The Life Series examines how children grow and develop in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, including the impact of family relationships, finances, work, health and education. It considers the dynamic interplay of nature and nurture, conducts experiments and speaks to experts about how the findings of the longitudinal study may be playing out in the families' and children's lives.

PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

SHARING EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS

- 1 What information do you have in the form of photos, videos and family stories about you when you were nine?
- 2 Have you and/or your parents kept records of your early years at school in the form of drawings, class photos, school reports, sports and arts awards and workbooks?
- 3 What do you remember about being in Grade 4? Share any vivid memories.
- 4 How many brothers and sisters do you have, and what number are you in the family order?
- 5 Have you thought about becoming a parent at some time in the future or do you think this is not something you would want to do?
- 6 If you were to become a parent, what do you think would be your preferred age to do this?
- 7 What would you like to do before you think about being a parent?
- 8 How important do you think it is to establish a stable emotional and financial environment in which to bring up a child? What are some of the factors that might make it challenging to maintain this stability?
- 9 These two episodes of *Life at 9* are interested in exploring two important aspects of growing up — Independence and Creativity. As a class, brainstorm these two ideas and make a collective list of what you think these words mean.
- 10 At what age do you think children should be allowed to walk to school without adult supervision? When did you first take yourself to school, whether on foot or on public transport?
- 11 Do you think that primary school-children today spend too much time indoors, watching television or using screen devices such as computers, tablets and smart phones? What is 'too much time' and why might it matter?



The families featured in *Life at 9*

Ben and the quintuplets, Kylie and Paul

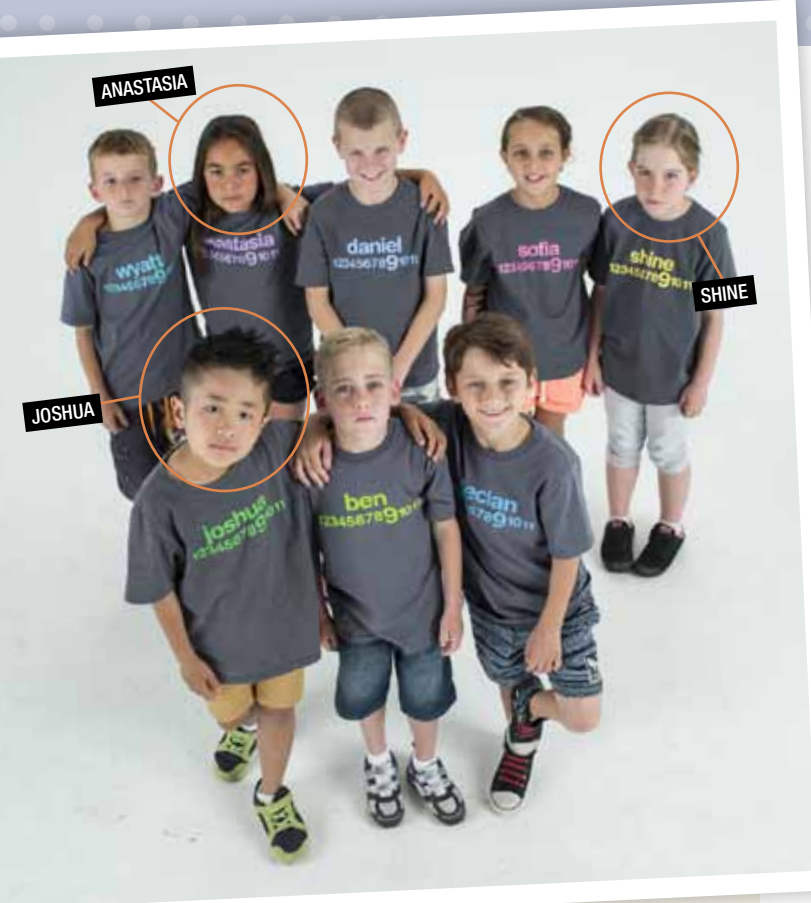
Ben was born the smallest of his quintuplet siblings. His premature birth predisposed him to a range of developmental problems including language development. But with five siblings under one roof, Ben has had no choice but to embrace independence and responsibility. As mum Kylie says, 'I can't be there to do every little thing for them.' Out of all our kids, Ben was the only one to get himself ready for school in the morning without adult supervision.

Ben's streak of independence is already setting him in good stead, despite needing help with his speech and some areas of his learning. In the last year, Ben has had to draw on this independence more than ever before, as his parents have separated. In spite of the challenges he faces, mum Kylie is confident his independent nature will see him through, 'He's his own little world, his own little man.'

Daniel, Kath and Rodney

At nine, Daniel has already done it tough. Not long after he turned one, his older brother Jamie suffered irreversible brain damage following a near-drowning accident and later died. Unable to escape the pain of losing a child, Daniel's parents' marriage came to an end.

When we last saw Daniel at 7, it had been more than a year since he had seen his father Rodney. Complicating issues further was mum Kath's diminishing eyesight,



which has deteriorated further. She has been legally blind and living on a pension for some time.

In *Life at 9*, perhaps unsurprisingly, child psychologist Marc de Rosnay comments that Daniel 'seems like an older kid somehow.' But at the same time, Daniel expresses the most fear about stepping out on his own out of all our kids - he thinks he will have to be eighteen before he will be able to go down to the shops unaccompanied. It's this conflict between his growing maturity and his fear of being alone that one teacher calls 'Daniel's dichotomy.'

In a *Life* experiment, Daniel manages to overcome this internal conflict. He is one of the only kids to make it to the shops and back without adults, and the ice block he brings home with him seems extra sweet. Mum Kath is acutely aware of how important steps like these are to build Daniel's confidence. What's more, Daniel is gradually spending more time with his dad Rodney. So although Daniel is sometimes fearful now, his development towards independence looks to be on track.

Shine, Michelle and Alain

Quietly self-confident Shine has already witnessed an extraordinary transformation in her family unit in her short life. In *Life at 1* & *Life at 3*, her family was caught in a desperate cycle of poverty, and by *Life at 5*, parents Alain and Michelle had had enough. They decided to go to University and in *Life at 7*, both parents graduated. And today, the family of seven have just returned from a holiday around Europe to visit Alain's family.

Even though so much has fallen into place, mum Michelle is still haunted by her own past and in *Life at 9*,

we see her visiting the mother she never knew. 'When I was three months old, Mum gave me away to Dad,' explains Michelle. Until now, Michelle has been reluctant to give Shine too much independence, but something about putting her past to rest leads her to re-evaluate her parenting: 'I guess I just started thinking about whether I was keeping them safe or whether I was actually stopping them from learning. It's a fairly recent shift and it's been hard, you know, to let go of that protective cotton wool sort of stuff.'

Whilst Shine's parents have been wary of giving her too much physical freedom, they have encouraged her to have an enquiring, independent mind. Shine's independent spirit reveals itself in the *Life Lab*. In a test to observe conformity, Shine is the only child to defy the rules, and add a tiny splash of colour to her painting when only black and brown were 'permitted'.

Anastasia, Kathy and Darren

A look back at Anastasia since *Life at 1* is both entertaining and revealing. From her christening to various tussles at pre-school and beyond, we see a strong willed, determined little girl.

In *Life at 9*, Anastasia continues to march to the beat of her own drum. When she participates in a triathlon, she shows little desire to follow the crowd. In fact she sees the race as a relaxing bike ride rather than a competition.

It's a display of independence that sets her apart from the other competitors. From the sidelines, we see Anastasia's parents wrestle with one of parenting's challenges as they accept that letting Anastasia follow her own impulses, even if they run counter to their own, is key to developing her independence.

Joshua, Steffi and Garry

Joshua has always wanted to get things right first go. Even in *Life at 1*, he seemed to wait until he knew he could do it before even attempting to crawl. In fact, at 17 months, he bypassed crawling altogether and went straight to walking.

In *Life at 9*, Josh is increasingly self-assured, but his desire to get things right is still alive and well. So much so, he tells us that if he were to get a bad mark, he would 'smash his head against a wall ... or a pillow.' Lucky he's getting good marks at school: 'if you don't get good marks, you won't get into university.'

Could Josh's budding perfectionism be something that could stand in his way? It stops Josh from trying new things, something he will need to do to develop his creativity. But when Josh attends a storytelling workshop, the idea that there doesn't have to be a right or wrong answer strikes a chord with him. Alongside the other kids, he creates his own book, proudly describing it as

a 'new chapter in his life'. And he soon starts valuing his own ideas, not just high marks. It's a change mum Steffi is happy to see. 'He's a very special boy', she says.

Sofia, Bernadette and Anthony

Compared to the rest of the 'Life' kids, Sofia has a highly structured environment. Her weekly schedule includes choir rehearsals, piano practice, swimming training, cheer leading and circus training. Like her mother, she is empathetic and sensitive. And like her father, she's competitive and driven.

Shortly before Sofia was born, dad Anthony was diagnosed with terminal cancer, an illness he attributes today to his own relentless schedule. Anthony has been in remission since treatment, but had another health scare in *Life* at 5. In *Life* at 9, Anthony admits he still struggles to find the work-life balance.

However Sofia may be inadvertently showing him the secret. Sofia's parents are the first to say her busy schedule is her choice. Her commitments reflect a growing trend in Australian childhood – an increase in adult-led pastimes, rather than child-led free play. Scientists now know that this kind of free play is key to developing creativity. It turns out that between all of her activities, Sofia actually squeezes in time to play. In fact, she spent some of the most time playing out of all our kids. At the same time, she had some of the least amount of screen time.

An experiment in our Life Lab reveals Sofia's creativity is flourishing, in spite of her hectic lifestyle. It seems no matter how busy she is, Sofia still finds time to have fun. And Dad Anthony knows it's an attribute that will set her up well in life. 'Wherever Sofia ends up, I know she'll be fine,' he says.

Wyatt, Tamara and Robert

Fun-loving, considerate Wyatt has faced many challenges in life. Born to teenage parents, Wyatt was just two years old when Tamara broke up with Glenn, and he now hasn't seen his father for over two years.

Tamara is recently engaged to new partner Robert, who has become a father figure to Wyatt. Tamara & Robert's son Juwan, now four, was born with epilepsy, cerebral palsy, severe brain damage and severe global development delay. The impact for Wyatt is that his younger brother requires a lot of his mother's time and energy. Wyatt's greatest wishes are for his brother's well-being, proclaiming that if he could change one thing in the world, it would be for Juwan to walk.

Since *Life at 7* was broadcast, a benefactor has come forward and offered financial support to the family. Tamara is now studying fulltime at TAFE to fulfil her dream of becoming a chef.



Wyatt has continued to struggle in many areas of learning, although he has shifted to a new school since *Life at 7*. With some extra one-on-one attention and encouragement, Wyatt has discovered a love of science. For Wyatt, the future is one of many possibilities. He plans to be a scientist, and an artist, and join the Army, 'so I can help save people.'

Despite struggling at school, Wyatt blew everyone away with his creativity in the Life Lab. Although he has trouble expressing some of his ideas, it's clear he's full of them. In fact, in one experiment, Wyatt's creativity scored in the 98th percentile of the wider population.

Declan, Kim and Patrick

Declan has always been headstrong. He was a highly irritable baby and toddler with extreme tantrums. Since then, his temperament seems to have stabilised, and he has become a highly social and popular schoolboy. But at home, his parents still struggle at times with his strong will.

Out of all our kids, Declan has some of the most screen time. It's something his parents are not happy about, though they have difficulty enforcing rules around it. Scientists around the world have concerns about the effects of excessive screen time on growing brains and creative development. Although active interaction with screen based learning tools has shown benefits, the jury is still out on the effects of passive consumption of television and games on childhood creativity.

But Declan hopes to indulge a new passion – playing the drums. His parents' reaction is not positive and initially Kim says there is no way she is having drums in her house. Even so, Declan managed to get around his parents' restrictions with a sneaky strategy which paints a telling picture of his blossoming creativity.

The experts featured in *Life at 9*

Several of the experts in this series have appeared in previous programs, while others bring different kinds of expertise to interpreting the children's responses to the different Independence and Creativity activities.

1. Winthrop Professor Stephen Zubrick: University of Western Australia Centre for Child Health Research

Stephen Zubrick is a Winthrop Professor in the Centre for Child Health Research at the University of Western Australia. His research interests include the study of the social determinants of health and mental health in children, longitudinal studies of language development, and large-scale psychosocial survey work in non-Indigenous and Indigenous populations. He is particularly interested in the translation of psychological and social research findings into relevant and timely policies and actions on the part of governments and private agencies. As chair of the scientific advisory group of the Longitudinal Study, Professor Zubrick is the spokesperson for the study findings in *Life at 9*.

2. Dr Marc de Rosnay: Senior Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Sydney

Dr de Rosnay's key research interest is the development of children's emotional competence and their emotional understanding, examining as well the long-term influence of early relationships and parenting practices on children's emotional development. He completed his doctorate at the Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford in 2003 and has worked at the Winnicott Research Unit (University of Reading), and the Centre for Family Research (University of Cambridge). He has published widely, and recently co-authored 'Emotions in Research and Practice' (University of Aalborg Press, 2010).

3. Dr David Cropley: Associate Professor of Engineering Innovation, University of South Australia

Dr Cropley's interests span creativity as an enabler of complex problem solving; measurement of product creativity; assessment of organisational innovation, and creativity in crime and terrorism. Dr Cropley is author of many books, chapters and papers on creativity and innovation, including 'Creativity and Crime: A

Psychological Analysis' (Cambridge University Press, 2013) and 'Fostering Creativity: A Diagnostic Approach for Higher Education and Organisations' (Hampton Press, 2009). His latest book, 'Creativity in Engineering', will be published by Cambridge University Press in late 2014. Dr Cropley is also a keen rower and has set two world records in indoor rowing endurance events (in 2010 and 2012).

4. Professor Robyn Ewing: Teacher Education and the Arts, Acting Pro Dean, The University of Sydney

Robyn is Professor of Teacher Education and the Arts. She teaches in the areas of curriculum, English and Drama, working with both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Robyn is passionate about the arts and education and the role quality arts experiences and processes can and should play in pedagogy across the curriculum. In the areas of English, literacy and the arts, Robyn's research has particularly focused on the use of educational or process drama with authentic literary texts to develop students' critical literacies. She has been published widely in this area. Her current research interests also include teacher education, especially the experiences of early-career teachers and the role of mentoring; sustaining curriculum innovation; and evaluation, inquiry and case-based learning. She is particularly interested in innovative qualitative research methodologies including the role of the Arts in educational research.

5. Tim Gill: Childhood Consultant to United Kingdom Government

Tim Gill is one of the UK's leading thinkers on childhood, and an effective advocate for positive change in children's everyday lives. For over 15 years his writing, research, consultancy projects and other work has focused on the changing nature of childhood, children's play and free time, and their evolving relationships with the people and places around them. Tim has advised political parties and think tanks across the political spectrum. In 2008 he shared the platform with David Cameron and David Willetts at

the launch of the Conservative Party's Childhood Review. His consultancy clients include the National Trust, London Legacy Development Company, Forestry Commission, Mayor of London, Argent plc and Play England. Tim's book 'No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Averse Society' was published in 2007.

6. Carl Honore: Author of *Under Pressure: Rescuing our children from the culture of hyper-parenting*

Carl Honoré is an award-winning journalist, author and TED speaker. He is also a globetrotting ambassador for the Slow Movement. The Wall Street Journal called him 'an in-demand spokesman on slowness.' His first book, 'In Praise of Slow', examines our compulsion to hurry and chronicles a global trend toward putting on the brakes. His second book, 'Under Pressure', was hailed by Time as the 'gospel of the Slow Parenting movement.' Translated into more than 30 languages, his books have landed on bestseller lists in many countries. 'In Praise of Slow' was a BBC Radio 4 Book of the Week and the inaugural choice for the new Huffington Post Book Club. 'Under Pressure' was a finalist for the Writers' Trust Award, the top prize for non-fiction in Canada.

7. Lee Trew: Tracker and Outdoor Educator, Bluegum Bushcraft

Lee has been using Jon Young's coyote mentoring approach for over a decade, and began learning and teaching bushcraft as a teenager at the Forest School Camps in the UK. He studied indigenous survival skills at Tom Brown Jr's Tracker School, and Practical Primitive, both in the US, and spent a year living in the bush, finding shelter, water and food on the landscape; putting it into practice. Now he brings psychology and bushcraft together for rewilding; helping people of all ages to reawaken their wildness and deepen their connection with the natural world. Lee presented a seminar on rewilding at the Ultimate Health Event in Sydney, and was the 'bushcraft and trapping consultant' for a recent Australian film, *The Hunter*.



EPISODE 1: INDEPENDENCE

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

Becoming an independent adult is the ultimate goal of childhood. But increasingly children's horizons are shrinking, either due to risk-aversion, fear or lack of community support. So as the Life kids reach the age of nine, how much independence do they want and how much do they get?

By the age of nine, developmentally children are more like adults than they are like children. So how much independence can nine year-olds really handle? For parents, the challenge is juggling the delicate balance of safety and support on the one hand, with freedom and experience on the other. We reveal that despite all of our parents enjoying huge freedoms when they were 9, none of them feel comfortable passing that on to their kids. It appears the fear of strangers is one of the key shifts that is holding today's kids back from experiencing the autonomy their parents had as children.

In an increasingly fear-driven world, are parents overprotecting children and in turn, robbing them of the vital practice they need to become independent adolescents in later life? This episode explores the dynamic interplay of parenting and a child's increasing push for independence.

In a Life Series first, we compare what all of our children are doing at pivotal times of day via fixed-cameras and examine how they are going about everyday activities and taking steps towards independence.

How is country-boy and quintuplet Ben's independence developing as he continues to struggle with a speech impediment and as he learns of his parents' separation?

Even though Daniel shows clear signs of wanting to be independent, will his responsibility to his virtually blind mother be holding him back?

How does Shine's mother's own rocky past affect her parenting and Shine's experience of independence?

Are our neighbourhoods providing environments where our children are safe to practise their independence? We will see if any of the Life kids can successfully complete a mission to walk to their local shop and buy an ice block on their own.

And are parents doing the right thing by praising their child, in an effort to build their self-esteem? We test how our Life kids respond to different types of praise to determine whether there is a right kind of praise to help kids become independent adults.

TABLE 2 - LIFE AT 9

CHILD	PARENTS
Episode 1: Independence	
Ben:	Kylie and Paul
Daniel	Kath and Rodney
Shine	Michelle and Alain
Anastasia	Kathy and Darren
Episode 2: Creativity	
Wyatt	Tamara and Robert
Joshua	Steffi and Garry
Sofia	Bernadette and Anthony
Declan	Kim and Patrick

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN AND PARENTS FEATURED IN LIFE AT 9?

While we see all eight children who were filmed for *Life at 9* in each of the two episodes exploring issues of independence and creativity, the focus is more closely on four of the children in Episode 1 and on the other four children in Episode 2. See **Table 3** to see how this works. All 8 children take part in and appear in the Life Lab tests and in the group bushwalking activity.





STUDENT ACTIVITY

SUGGESTED WAYS TO WATCH THE PROGRAM

Divide your class into four groups, with each group concentrating on one of the children and their family in each of the two episodes, e.g. Ben in Episode 1 and Sofia in Episode 2.

For each child, you or your group could consider the areas listed in **Table 3** and make notes on what you see as their importance in the child's development.

For those of you who have watched earlier episodes of the Life series, consider how the children have changed and developed over the 2 years since they were last observed, and filmed. If you have not seen the previous programs, you will need to collect this information from what you see in these episodes, from the recapitulations in the narration and what the child's parents and the experts who are monitoring the children have to say. There are also quotes scattered throughout the guide that should help with this activity.

Use Table 3 (*overleaf*) for note taking as you watch each episode. You will need two copies of this chart — one for the child you are focussing on in Episode 1 and the other for the child you have selected to observe closely in Episode 2.

INDEPENDENCE

Here are some of the questions posed by the experts and tested in the Life Lab and through observing the children:

- In an increasingly risk-averse society, what are the dangers of overprotection?
- What is the impact of a loss of freedom and a fear-driven society?
- What does building independence at nine mean for later life?
- How much are kids allowed to practice making their own decisions?

Learning to do things on your own provides a terrific avenue towards mastery and a sense of accomplishment.

At some point you have to grow up, it doesn't just arrive in a box on your birthday.

PROFESSOR
STEPHEN ZUBRICK



- How much responsibility can nine year-olds really have?
- What is the right amount of risk at nine?
- Is too much praise a bad thing?
- In what ways does developing independence depend as much on the approach of parents as it does on their children?
- Which of the children demonstrate a capacity to get themselves up and organised for the school day? What are some of the factors that have encouraged this child to act independently?
- What does the larger longitudinal study show about the percentage of 9 year-olds who get ready for school independently? Why do Marc de Rosnay and Professor Zubrick think it is important for children to be regularly involved in household chores?



TABLE 3

NAME OF CHILD	
Present family structure — siblings, mum, dad and extended family.	
Economic circumstances of the parents.	
Parental approach to learning, work and their own education.	
How the child responds to different aspects of their schooling.	
Extra-curricular activities undertaken by the child on a regular basis.	
The parental perceptions of the child.	
Any particular events that may have affected the child's capacity to become more or less independent and creative in adapting to challenging situations.	
To what extent is gender shown to be a factor in the child's upbringing and approach to activities?	
In a few words, indicate your sense of the key characteristics of the child you have been observing.	



DANIEL

'I think he's just trying to learn who he is and how far he can push his boundaries' — Daniel's mum

BEN

'They don't tend to want you as much as you'd want them to'

'I allow the kids to make their own mistakes. It's the only way they are going to learn' — Kylie, Ben's mum

- How might Ben's premature birth have influenced his speech development?
- What change in his living arrangements does he now have to deal with as a 9 year old?
- What are some of the risks inherent in Ben's mini motor bike riding?
- Do you think country kids like Ben and his siblings have more opportunities for risk taking and looking after themselves, partly because they do spend more time outdoors than city kids?
- How does the composition of this family unit make it especially important that all the children take an active part in the household chores?

Children have this enormous appetite for experience, and it's through their own efforts, through play, through exploration that children practice the art of being human beings.

TIM GILL

- What are some of the events in Daniel's life that have resulted in him behaving, in some ways, as 'the man of the house'?
- How does Daniel show his practical responses to his mother's vision problems? How have the challenges Daniel has had to deal with in his life, allied with his mother's strengths, helped Daniel to mature into a child 'who sometimes seems older than his years'?
- What are some of the difficulties Daniel experiences in being part of two families — his daily life with his mother and sister and that of his dad with his new family? How are Kath and Rodney managing this relatively common problem?
- How does Daniel demonstrate resilience at this time in his life?

The challenge for parents of 9 year-olds is to navigate tricky waters of safety and vigilance on the one hand...while at the same time appreciating that freedom is important to allow the child to flourish — Professor Zubrick

INDEPENDENCE EXPERIMENTS

KING / QUEEN OF THE CASTLE

- What does the collaborative building activity where child and parent have to work together demonstrate to the researchers?
- When the children have the opportunity to work on this task independently of their parent, how does their approach to the activity change?

'This one is better...'cause I made it — Wyatt

Just let me do it — Daniel

- How can these different approaches be accounted for, given the age of these children?



SHINE

'She's still my little girl but not as much my little girl' — Alain, Shine's father

- Why are Shine's parents especially concerned to provide a very stable environment for her and protect her from their own childhood experiences?
- What do Shine's parents believe have been the most important factors in their own journey together in providing stability for their children?
- How do the scenes of Shine's mother re-connecting with her mother provide insights into why family support is so highly valued by Michelle and Alain in their parenting?
- In what ways does Michelle believe that some of her difficulties growing up were the result of having 'too much freedom and independence'? How do Shine's parents feel they need to work on giving their children more independence without putting them at risk of harm?
- How do Alain and Michelle try to build independence in Shine to make her own decisions?
- What style of schooling have they chosen for Shine?

I wish I could swim in the pool by myself...walk to the shop by myself...they just say no... they don't want me to drown in the pool. And they don't want me to get stolen when I walk to the shop — Shine

- How does the cautiously protective approach to their own children contrast with the freedoms some of the parents remember from their own childhoods?
- What are some of their reasons for being afraid to let their 9 year-olds have similar freedom to play



outside and do some activities independently? Do you think these adult fears about the dangers outside the world of the home are warranted? Why do you think many parents today are more actively protective of their children?

- What reasons did the children give for not feeling confident about walking to school on their own or going to the shop alone?
- What are some of the 'real' dangers inherent in driving children to school as opposed to walking?

We're inclined to treat nine year olds like they're little kids when really, when we give them independence, what we see is they're more like little adults in many ways.

MARC DE ROSNAY

ANASTASIA

'She is a screaming teenager hanging to explode out. She definitely wants more independence at the moment' — Darren, Anastasia's father

- What are some of the advantages for children attending a school close to home?
I really wish I could have more independence... so you don't have to be told where to go and what to do — Anastasia
- What does Darren, Anastasia's father, think about the rather common tendency of constantly praising children in an effort to build their self esteem?
- How does Anastasia affirm this approach to being realistic about her strengths and weaknesses in the way she participates in the community triathlon?
- What is her expressed reason for not always wanting to come first and be the best?
- At what age in the future do the children think they might be able to go to the shops on their own?

ICE BLOCK TEST OR GOING UNACCOMPANIED TO THE LOCAL SHOP

- What are some of the factors to be considered during this experiment?
- How are the parents persuaded to let their kids take part?

- How is the task monitored and recorded?
- Outline the genuine difficulties some of the children experience in negotiating this activity? How common are local corner shops today?
- Which of the children are able to complete this challenge successfully?

PAINTING CHALLENGE

- What are the instructions to the children taking part in this experiment?
- How does Shine's response to the limitations of the painting task differ to those of the boys — Joshua and Declan?
- What does the way the other children react to Shine's decision suggest to the Life Lab experts about conformity and acceptance of rules at this stage in the kids' lives?

THE INVERSE POWER OF PRAISE TEST

Should we over-emphasize a child's natural ability? What can be 'the wrong type of praise'? In this test half the kids are praised for their intelligence and natural ability for getting tasks right and half are praised for trying hard. Some tasks are easy while others are more difficult.

- Do the different kinds of feedback have an effect on the children's approach to problem solving?
- What do the observed responses of the kids suggest about the need to be careful in the way you affirm children's skills?
- What is the best way to encourage children to develop their skills?
- How does Anastasia's response to her results in the various tests suggest that she is learning from her parents about what matters to her?

OUTDOOR LIFE LAB — BUSHWALKING

- Had any of these children previously spent time in the bush?
- In what ways is a supervised bush environment an ideal place to test resilience, ingenuity and risk-taking?
- What kind of unexpected things can happen in outdoor environments like the Australian bush? How can this be challenging for anyone unused to being in an open, unfamiliar space where the sights, sounds and distances are often quite new?
- What are some of the things the children learn to master outdoors that may have been unknown to them until now?
- What do we see the kids experiencing outdoors away from the watchful eye of parents?
- How do they appear to respond to this unaccustomed freedom to just be kids together trying out new things?



We need to provide those experiences [for children] where they can have a bit of risk and have a bit of feedback from reality in a way that the learning curve is not going to be too hard. ... They won't be crippled, they'll just be singed.

LEE TREW

EPISODE 2: CREATIVITY

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

The ability to think creatively and flexibly is key to preparing our children for a future world we cannot predict. However, there are grave concerns that creativity is declining, with the finger of blame pointing to how children are spending their time both in and out of school.

In this episode we will test how creative our Life children are as they approach a known tipping point in creativity levels around the world. Scientists around the world nominate the 'fourth grade slump' as an age when creativity declines: children become less spontaneous, more fearful of risk and desire more conformity.





Creativity may seem to be abstract, but it has in fact been measured for decades. Dr David Cropley, a leader in the field of innovation and creativity, takes our children through a series of creative exercises in the Life Lab and the results are astounding. For the first time we will also test their parents as we examine what happens to our creativity as we grow up.

Creativity encompasses much more than artistic ability. It enables people to approach problems and solutions in inventive ways. This episode tests whether creativity is more than just innate talent. Can it be taught? And are we as parents doing all we can to recognise it and to allow it to develop? The children of today will need to be creative to solve the problems of tomorrow.

Here are some of the questions posed by the experts and tested in the Life Lab and in the children's lives as they observe creativity in the children:

- How will Declan fulfil his strong desire to be musical in the face of parental opposition?
- Does Sofia's highly-scheduled life mean she has less time to develop her creativity?
- Why does Joshua not see himself as creative and can the Life Lab provide a window to his creativity?
- How important is old fashioned play to creative thinking?
- What is creativity and how creative are our children?
- What inhibits creativity and what helps it to flourish?

As we saw in Episode 1, apart from observing the children in their day-to-day activities, experts in child development lead these



It's important to remember with creativity that it isn't necessarily something that you're born with. It's something that can be taught and developed.

DR DAVID CROPLEY

children through a number of exercises designed to measure various aspects of creativity. Most of these tests are based on what is known as the 'Torrance' test which has been the gold standard in creativity assessment for over fifty years.

ACTIVITY 2

WATCHING EPISODE 2

Refer to the suggestions in the introduction to Activity 1 as you watch your group's chosen child in this episode, whether that is Wyatt, Joshua, Sofia or Declan. Select a different child to focus on in this episode to the one you followed in Episode 1.

WYATT

Wyatt has had to adapt more in his life than most of our other kids...and it's this that could be the key to his creativity — Narrator

- What level of ingenuity does Wyatt demonstrate when he is asked to create different uses for the paper plate?
- What do you understand by the term 'divergent thinking' used here to describe creativity?
- In what ways is trying as many possible





solutions part of being creative?

- What are Wyatt's strengths and weaknesses at this stage in his education?
- How might the necessity of having to adapt to several different households in his early years have developed resilience in Wyatt?
- How is his essential nature shown in the way he talks about his hopes for his brother Juwan?
- What are some of the positive developments in the family's life over the past two years?
- How does Wyatt show that he is curious, creative, flexible and persistent in many of the challenges presented in the Life Lab experiments

THE MARSHMALLOW CHALLENGE

- What are the essential differences in the ways in which the adults and the children approach the spaghetti/marshmallow tower building task?
- How does the way the children approach this challenge enable them to successfully complete the task?
- What are some of the perhaps unintended consequences of learning to conform, particularly in relation to being creative?

JOSHUA

He won't risk himself to do something that he is not 100%. He was born with a personality like that — Joshua's mum

- Why does Joshua say that he is not creative?
- How might his 'perfectionism' have some

inhibiting influence on his ability to take risks and try out new approaches?

- Describe his response to getting good or not so good marks for his schoolwork?
- What reason does Joshua give for striving for good marks?

PREPARING FOR NAPLAN

On the one hand there is a need and a want to know about how well children broadly and collectively are doing...on the other hand there is a great anxiety about measuring children and pigeonholing and stereotyping them. And as a result of that, limiting their opportunities in one area or another — Professor Zubrick

Creativity is something that occurs in absolutely every domain of life. We're not just talking about artistic enterprise, we're talking about the ability to step into life's problems and find creative ways of dealing with them.

STEVE ZUBRICK

- What are the Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 NAPLAN tests used for in Australian schools? What are they designed to test? How are the results used by schools, parents and governments?
- What evidence is there in this program that the NAPLAN testing process may put pressure on schools and teachers, families and children?
- How is Joshua's mother trying to ensure that Joshua will do well in the upcoming NAPLAN tests?
- What do experts such as Professor Zubrick, David Cropley and Carl Honoré suggest are the limitations of this national testing process? What style of thinking do they believe it encourages?
- What evidence is there from teachers, parents and students that in some schools a great deal of time is spent on NAPLAN preparation?

FREE PLAY

- What do you understand by 'free play'?
- What are the benefits of free play for children?
- How is 'free play' different to other forms of activities? Are 'mucking around', 'kicking a footy' and 'hanging out' free play?

SOFIA

Sofia is ambitious, she's motivated, absolutely. She just gets everything done and dusted straight away
— Bernadette, Sofia's mother

- What distinguishes Sofia from the other children in terms of her weekly activities?
- What extra-curricular fitness and learning classes does she take each week?
- To what extent do her activities seem to be self-generated and how far might they also reflect her parents' approach to life — i.e. being busy and engaged in activities most of the waking day?
- What pressures does the need for children to attend outside activities place on parents?
- What percentage of Australian children at age 9 have an extra-curricular schedule that is as activity-packed as Sofia's week?
- How active and self-directed is Sofia in terms of her time spent on outdoor play with neighbourhood kids?

DECLAN

He can't put the TV or the computer on in the morning until he is ready for school — Kim, Declan's mum

- How do Declan's parents try to control the amount of screen time he has each day?
- Did the figure of 20 hours a week of screen time as an average for 9 year-olds in Australia surprise you in any way?



One of the casualties of this fast forward, hurry up childhood is creativity.

CARL HONORÉ

'Technology is not an evil in and of itself, the key is how we use it but too much screen time can begin to rewire children's brains' — Carl Honoré.

How can parents know what is 'too much screen time' and is it possible to limit television watching, and online time with computers, tablets, mobile devices and other technologies with all children? At what age should restrictions (if any) be placed on children in relation to their use of technology?

- What is emphasised and valued at the school Declan attends?
- How does Declan get the music lessons he wants in this situation when mum and dad are reluctant for the house to become a practice studio for drumming?

STORYTELLING WORKSHOP

With creativity there are no wrong answers... anything they put down on the page is good and interesting and can be built upon — Matt Roden, facilitator

This is a new chapter of my life...doing a new thing I've never done before — Joshua

- What is the activity taught and encouraged at the Sydney Story Factory? Why is this activity thought to take place on a less regular basis in classrooms today? Has acquiring 'knowledge' diminished imaginative storytelling or is it not seen to have any intrinsic value?
- How does Joshua respond in a situation where there are no right or wrong answers?

SLIME TEST

- What is this test designed to discover about the



children?

- Why do the researchers in this program believe it is vitally important for children to learn to be flexible and prepared to challenge propositions and directives, to demonstrate ingenuity and be confident about their creative abilities?
- What does the slime test demonstrate about the different levels of patience, perseverance and lateral thinking shown by the children? How would you have gone with this challenge?

PLAY, PLAY, PLAY

- Why are opportunities for free play in an informal way often limited for many children today?
- What is the essential difference between adult-directed activities, like formal sport and free play time where children initiate and manage their own activities?
- Do most of the children express a preference for playing inside or outdoors? What might their choices suggest?
- Is being bored the worst thing that can happen to you?
Why do you think many people today want to be constantly connected to others and feel unable to cope with solitude or the loss of a mobile phone? Do you expect to be educated, stimulated and entertained during your waking time by external factors?

BUSH WALKING

Children need to daydream...they need to explore the outer limits of their imagination without gadgets — Carl Honoré

- When the children go out for a day in the bush what is one of the things they are asked to do? What varied responses do the children have to this task?
- Is it ever possible to predict accurately how people will respond to being outside their comfort zone in unfamiliar surroundings?
- What were some of the perhaps surprising responses of the children to being separate and quiet in the bush for 30 minutes?

TESTS OF CREATIVE THINKING

At the beginning of the 21st century we need people who are going to think outside the box because if we keep our minds focussed inside the box we are heading for real trouble — Carl Honoré

- Do you think it is possible to improve your creative abilities with practice, much as you would improve your physical strength through targeted exercises?
- What was the challenge involved in 'finishing the unfinished picture'?
- Why do you think the kids were not particularly



We actually subvert our creativity as we get older because we learn that we have to conform, we learn that we have to be like everybody else.

ROBYN EWING



inspired by this task?

- What are they asked to do in the following exercise?
- How does this task appeal to them?
- When they return to the earlier 'unfinished picture task', do they do it with any more enthusiasm and imagination? Who performs especially well on this creativity challenge?
- How is this child, with fewer structured opportunities for activities, shown to have a really curious and lively mind?
- How does the science teacher foster Wyatt's interest in how things work?
- How important do you think it is for schools, teachers and parents to encourage all children to be creative problem solvers and increasingly independent as they grow up and confront challenges in their lives?

FINAL STUDENT ACTIVITY

Select one or more of the following overview activities for discussion and /or writing:

- Share your observations about the children you followed with other students who have been observing different children in this group of 8.

Identify what you thought was the most interesting aspect of the personality and temperament of the children you followed.

- Compile a set of questions you would like to ask a member of the research group — Professor Zubrick, Dr David Cropley, Carl Honoré, Lee Trew or any of the other people appearing in this program — about their experiences, findings and possible recommendations they might make about what they believe it takes to give a child the best chance at life in the 21st century.
- What do you think are the most interesting aspects of the way this program is made? (Not just the very real appeal of the children themselves!) How do the varied segments of scientific testing, play, interaction, recapitulation, group and individual activities, music and humour all come together to paint a vivid picture of Life at 9? Comment on the production values of this program. How would you account for the mostly natural and unselfconscious behaviour of these 8 nine year-olds when being filmed and recorded? What particular skills would these filmmakers need to have?
- Several members of the expert panel express concerns about the pace of life today and how it may be affecting how children learn to think and behave. There is a growing body of research that technology can be both beneficial and harmful to different ways in which children think. Carl Honoré, who appears in this program, has written a book titled 'In Praise of Slow'. Discuss the challenges for children, their families and schools to 'slow down' and take life at a more leisurely pace. What are some of the factors that work against people choosing the slow lane?
- Although these 8 children are a small sample of children growing up in the 21st century in Australia, did you think that the children appearing in this fifth series of the Life programs represented a reasonable cross-section of Australian children in terms of ethnic diversity and socio-economic circumstances? How demanding would making these programs be for the children and their families? What benefits might there be for the children and their families in having a visual record of their life taken every two years?

References and Resources

The Life Series

Read about the making of the series and the people behind it
<http://www.abc.net.au/life>

Growing Up In Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of

THE QUICK LIFE QUIZ

- 1 Which of these children has several brothers and sisters?
- 2 Whose mum has recently retrained to work as a teacher?
- 3 Which child attends a Montessori school?
- 4 How many of these children are one of two children in their family?
- 5 Which two children were able to successfully navigate the trip to the local shop alone?
- 6 Who is learning the drums?
- 7 Who can do the splits in gymnastics?
- 8 Which of these children live mostly with their mum?
- 9 Who hopes their younger brother will walk soon?
- 10 Who is very keen to get good test results?
- 11 Who really likes using the computer?
- 12 Who rides a mini motor bike?
- 13 Which child takes part in triathlons?
- 14 Whose mum attends martial art class?
- 15 Which child really enjoys science classes?

Australian Children (LSAC) is a major study following the development of 10,000 children and families from all parts of Australia. The study commenced in 2004 with two cohorts -families with 4-5 year old children and families with 0-1 year old infants.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/>

BOOKS:

Tim Gill, *No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk Averse Society*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (October 24, 2007)

Carl Honoré, *Under Pressure: Rescuing our Children from the Culture of Hyper-parenting*, Harper One (April 7 2009)

Marguerite O'Hara
 9/07/2014



This study guide was produced by **ATOM**. (© ATOM 2014)
ISBN: 978-1-74295-479-0 **editor@atom.org.au**

For information on **SCREEN EDUCATION** magazine,
or to download other study guides for assessment,
visit <**<http://www.screeneducation.com.au>**>.

Join ATOM's email broadcast list for invitations to
free screenings, conferences, seminars, etc.
Sign up now at <**http://www.metromagazine.com.au/email_list/**>.

For hundreds of articles on Film as Text,
Screen Literacy, Multiliteracy and Media Studies,
visit <**<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>**>.