

# STUDY NOTES



## Synopsis

From the Director of *Patriot Games* and *Clear and Present Danger* comes *Catch A Fire*, a story of sabotage, corruption, alienation and murder. Academy Award®-winner Tim Robbins (*Mystic River*, *The Shawshank Redemption*) and Derek Luke (*Glory Road*, *Friday Night Lights*) star in this suspense thriller based on a true story. Set against a country in flames and two cultures at war, *Catch A Fire* is the gripping account of the spark that ignited a man, inspired a revolution and united a country.

## Introduction

Useful for GCSE, AS/A2 and Highers Politics, Citizenship, History, Film and Media Studies.

This resource works in connection with the official website for the film [www.catchafiremovie.com](http://www.catchafiremovie.com) and provides students with an opportunity to explore the issues presented in the film. Please be aware that Film Education is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is essential to understand the historical context of the film in terms of the social and political changes in South Africa at the time. Visit the website [www.catchafiremovie.com](http://www.catchafiremovie.com)

Read through the notes in the Story section then the Brief History section. Answer the following questions:

## Apartheid & South Africa

- What were Pass Laws?
- What political effects did the Sharpeville massacre have?
- South Africa is due to host the 2010 football World Cup. Would this have been possible during the Apartheid era? Why, or why not?
- In your own words explain who Afrikaners are.

## The ANC & The ANC Military Wing (MK)

- Who was the MK? When and why were they formed?
- Why was the oil refinery at Secunda targeted?

## Patrick Chamusso

- Why was Patrick Chamusso suspected of helping bomb the oil refinery on 31st May 1980?
- What was ANC policy concerning the attack on the oil refinery and other targets?
- Patrick Chamusso was later charged with contravening the Terrorism Act. Having watched the film, would you describe him as a terrorist?
- What are the connotations of the term 'terrorism'?

# SCENE ANALYSIS

Using clips from the website, answer the following questions (go to Video and then click on the following sequences).

## I'm A Foreman Boss

- What makes the police suspicious?
- Listen carefully to Patrick Chamusso's tone of voice. How would you describe it?
- Is there anything about his behaviour that you could describe as provocative?
- How do the police respond?
- What was your reaction to this behaviour?
- What does Chamusso's use of the word 'boss' tell us about the relationship between black and white people in South Africa at the time?

## I Want To Go On

- How easy do the MK representatives make it for Chamusso to join?
- What are the personal costs of choosing this course of action?
- Can you understand his motivations?

## Ask Yourself

- What sort of pressures does Vos bring to bare on Precious (Chamusso's wife)? In what ways do you think she is vulnerable?
- Listen to the sequence again, what does the information he uses tell us about his position?

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- Do you think that this is a political film?
- How would you describe its message?
- Is the message also conveyed in the trailer?
- How is it communicated to the audience?
- How are particular groups represented? Is this ideologically based?
- Does the film encourage a particular understanding of events?
- Does it help to position the audience?
- How would you describe the policies of the South African state in terms of its treatment of Chamusso? Think about his having to conform to Pass Laws, and his imprisonment without trial.
- Do you think such policies can be justified? Do you know of other countries that have similar laws in place? Develop a 'for and against' debate on this topic.