1. Synopsis

*Sperm Donors Anonymous* is a cautionary and inspiring documentary about the effects of anonymous sperm donation on donor-conceived children, their families and on the sperm donors themselves.

Myf, Michael, Jeff and Ross were conceived in the 1970s using anonymous donor sperm. All four grew up thinking their dad was their biological father, only to discover in adulthood they were donor-conceived. Sharing a desire to uncover the truth about their donor father and their genetic heritage, their search for answers is hampered by old promises to donors that they would remain anonymous. Faced with this obstacle, they are inventive in their efforts to find out what they can, and searching yields some very surprising results. They meet the doctors responsible for their conception, follow the trail of missing files, undergo DNA tests and connect with other donor-conceived people – all in the hope of uncovering their genetic heritage and finding out about their sperm donor fathers and donor-conceived siblings.

The 1970s saw major advances in the technology to freeze and store sperm. Men were paid to donate sperm to infertile couples on the understanding their identity would remain secret. These men often don't know how many babies they fathered. And in many cases, their offspring have been kept in the dark about how they were conceived. *Sperm Donors Anonymous* lifts the lid on donor anonymity, looks at the effects on the donor-conceived, their families, and on the sperm donors themselves – and shows what is possible when the truth is told.
2. Curriculum Links

The curriculum areas that Sperm Donors Anonymous can be related to include:

1. the discipline-based learning domain of **English**
2. the discipline-based learning domain of **Science**
3. Senior Legal Studies
4. Senior Health and Human Development

NB. Given the concepts involved in ‘Sperm Donors Anonymous’ it is recommended for study at senior levels Year 10 – 12. Teachers are also asked to note that it is possible that students viewing this documentary may be donor conceived, (and at varying stages of self-awareness regarding this fact). Teachers are encouraged to visit the ‘RUDC’ campaign website at www.areyoudonorconceived.org to access support resources that will assist them in showing the documentary and delivering the content in this Study Guide in a way that best caters for this potentiality.

Specific links to the Australian National Curriculum

1. **The discipline-based learning domain of English:**

   Sperm Donors Anonymous can be used as a supplementary text when studying themes of identity and belonging in English from Years 10–12.

   Level 10 English content descriptions particularly applicable to Sperm Donors Anonymous:

   **Reading & Viewing (Literature):**
   - Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1639)
   - Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (ACELT1812)

2. **The discipline-based learning domain of Science:**

   Level 10 Science content descriptions particularly applicable to Sperm Donors Anonymous:

   **Biological Sciences:**
   - The transmission of heritable characteristics from one generation to the next involves DNA and genes (ACSSU184)

   **Nature and Development of Science:**
   - Scientific understanding, including models and theories, are contestable and are refined over time through a process of review by the scientific community (ACSHE191)
   - Advances in scientific understanding often rely on developments in technology and technological advances are often linked to scientific discoveries (ACSHE192)

   **Use and Influence of Science:**
   - Advances in science and emerging sciences and technologies can significantly affect people’s lives, including generating new career opportunities (ACSHE195)
   - The values and needs of contemporary society can influence the focus of scientific research (ACSHE230)

3. **Senior Legal Studies**

   Sperm Donors Anonymous can be used as a supplementary text when studying Senior Legal Studies. The study design for this subject will vary across Australia; however, broad topic areas that the documentary can be related to include:

   - the principles of civil law in Australia
   - the rights of individuals with conflicting interests
   - the institutions that determine our laws, their law-making powers and processes
   - the need for law-making bodies to keep up to date with changes in society

4. **Senior Health and Human Development**

   Sperm Donors Anonymous can be used as a supplementary text when studying Senior Health and Human Development. The study design for this subject will vary across Australia; however, broad topic areas that the documentary can be related to include:

   - fertility and infertility rates in Australia
   - development of fertility treatment in Australia
   - ethical and medical issues associated with fertility treatment in Australia
3. Pre-viewing Activities

It is recommended that class discussion be had prior to viewing *Sperm Donors Anonymous* to establish students’ existing knowledge of this area and provide a base level of information to all students.

1. Brainstorm the following terms as a class:
   - Sperm donation
   - IVF
   - Donor conceived

2. Discuss the various terminology used. What do donor conceived children call their sperm donor and the father that raised them? Donor conceived children prefer to use the term “Dad” for the man who raised them, and biological father or donor/sperm donor for their sperm donor. What does a sperm donor call children who resulted from his donation? Children, biological children or offspring?

3. Present and discuss the following background information:

   Australia was one of the first countries in the world to recognise that people conceived from donor sperm and eggs are entitled to know their genetic origins. However, the ability to access information differs across the country, and there is no national DNA database to assist in matching children and donors. Worldwide, a small number of countries have moved to recognise the right to information for donor-conceived people.

   In the early 1970s, the technology to freeze sperm dramatically improved and the use of sperm donation to achieve conception became more widespread. It is estimated that between 20,000 and 60,000 donor-conceived people live in Australia, yet, according to Louise Johnson of the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA), most do not know that they are donor-conceived. This information was never included on birth certificates, and in the 1970s and 80s, parents were encouraged by their fertility doctors not to tell their children about their origins.

   During this period, Victoria was one of the leading international sites for the development of assisted reproductive technologies such as IVF. It was also the first Australian state, and the first jurisdiction in the world to enact legislation regulating assisted reproductive treatment. This legislation – the Infertility Medical Procedures Act – came into effect in 1988.

   Prior to 1988, donor-conception was unregulated and was entirely in the hands of the medical profession. A culture of secrecy existed. Donors and recipient parents were required to sign anonymity contracts agreeing not to seek each other’s identity.

   Recent changes to legislation in Victoria gives donor-conceived adults greater access to relevant files and services to assist in their search for their donors and potential half siblings. Files that have been locked away for almost forty years will be opened again. This makes the State’s laws on donor conception the most advanced in Australia. In the other states, the law varies. Only Victoria, NSW, and Western Australia have a volunteer register, and in some places, records have been destroyed. In South Australia, clinics such as Repromed and Flinders Fertility report that donor identity records have been destroyed.

   Some clinics including Victorian clinics, have kept records and are able to assist donor-conceived adults to trace and make contact with their donor. However, for other clinics — there is some reluctance to allow identifying information about donors to be released when they were originally promised anonymity. One doctor at a recent NSW Parliamentary Enquiry said some doctors might burn records if they were ordered to release them. But as many sperm donors from the 1970s and 80s have said, they were never given any choice on this issue. Many now say they are happy for identifying information to be given to their offspring.
4. Viewing Activities

Students are directed to take notes whilst viewing *Sperm Donors Anonymous* to assist them in answering the following questions:

1. Why do you think men donated sperm back in the 1970s-80s?
2. Throughout the documentary we meet several people who were conceived via anonymous sperm donation. Take notes in the following table to help you track their journey: [jump to Table 1](#).
3. We join Jeff at the Monash IVF Clinic, where he is given some ‘non-identifying information’ about his donor father. Although they know the donor’s full name, why can’t they hand this over to Jeff? How can Jeff obtain this information?
4. Ross was conceived at Prince Henry’s Hospital, one of the main donation points in Melbourne at the time. Prince Henry’s was closed and demolished in the early 1990s. Where was the donor information moved?
5. Although Ross has his donor code, why are the odds still stacked against him finding his donor father?
6. Ross hits a wall with accessing his files from Prince Henry’s. How does he further his investigations?
7. We meet Ian Smith, who was a sperm donor. He states: ‘Anonymity was a given. You weren’t asked, “Do you want remain anonymous?”’ – it was just there.’ How does he feel about this enforced anonymity now? Do you think all donors would agree with his views?
8. Ian talks about the conflicting rights of donors and donor-conceived children. In his opinion, whose needs should win out and why?
9. Ian Smith was contacted by Monash IVF in 1999 about his sperm donations. How many children had been conceived from his donations and how does he feel about this?
10. Myf Cummerford found her donor father, Michael Linden. How did this unique meeting come about and how does Michael feel about meeting his donor daughter?
11. As we follow Michael Griffiths in his search, we learn the lack of legislation in South Australia makes it difficult for him to find information about his donor. What options are open to Michael in terms of accessing his conception records?
12. Michael continues his own search and obtains his mother’s medical treatment records from the time of his conception. What does he discover?
13. We revisit Jeff, who is contacted by Monash IVF with some exciting news. What is this news and how does Jeff respond?
14. We meet Jeff’s sisters, Kimberly and Kylie, both of whom were donor conceived. What has been Kimberly’s journey with discovering her donor father and how does she feel about her situation?
15. Ross and Michael have been collaborating on a song about their shared experience. Although they share the same experience, how do they differ in their reasons for finding their donor fathers?
16. Ian has called together a group of donors to share their common experiences. What has been Ian’s own experience with being contacted by one of his donor children?
17. We continue to follow Ross, Michael and Jeff on their search. Go back to the table in Question 2 and record their progress.
18. We hear from Myf Cummerford’s father, Simon Walker, who raised her. What have been the repercussions of using anonymous sperm donation for him?
19. Myf’s donor father, Michael, is now part of her and her children’s lives. In what way does he feel this is a ‘second chance’?
20. How did Michael Griffiths’ first meeting with his donor father go? Do you get the sense that there will be future meetings and an ongoing relationship?
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5. Post-viewing Activities

Research tasks

1. Focus on IVF and IUI

In pairs, students are to research and prepare a digital or hard copy pamphlet outlining the process of sperm donation conception in Australia. Areas to include:

- Who can access donated sperm
- Treatment options using donated sperm
- Steps involved in the process
- Frequently asked questions

2. Focus on sperm donation legislation across Australia

As of 2014 the legislation in Victoria changed to allow all donor-conceived people, regardless of when they were conceived, to apply to the Donor Registers for information about their donor. Information will be provided if records can be located and the donor has consented. Parents, donors and relatives can also apply for information about a party that may be related by donor code.

- Divide students into small groups and allocate a state/territory within Australia to each group. Each group must conduct research into the current legislation governing access to sperm donation and donor-conceived children for their allocated state/territory. They are to present their findings to the class in the form of an oral presentation/PowerPoint presentation. As a class, discuss the variations across Australia and the implications of these for donor-conceived children and sperm donors.

An excellent place to conduct initial research for all states/territories is:

http://www.healthlawcentral.com/assistedreproduction/donorconception/access-information-australia/


Specific sites for further research are listed below:

Victoria


3. Focus on donor conception support

We meet various donor-conceived children and sperm donors throughout Sperm Donors Anonymous. It is clear that sharing their stories and accessing support is important to many going through this experience.

• Students are to research this group and prepare a digital or hard copy pamphlet. The pamphlet should outline the aims and services provided by the RUDC Group or the VARTA/VANISH support group

4. Focus on sperm donation

As we learn from Sperm Donors Anonymous, for many couples battling infertility, sperm donation offers them a viable option for conception. It also provides options for single and lesbian women to have children.

• Students are to conduct research into the medical and ethical implications of accessing sperm donation in Australia. They are to research and prepare a 1–2 page report that outlines the following areas:
  – The implications of having a child using donor sperm
  – The rights and responsibilities for sperm donors

• Suggested site to begin research: www.varta.org.au

Writing tasks

• Michael Griffiths states, with reference to his own search for his donor father: ‘It’s about validating your own existence … that there’s order in this chaos.’ After viewing Sperm Donors Anonymous, write a one-page expository piece exploring this question. Include reference to people and events in the documentary.

• At the VARTA/VANISH DC support group, Ross states: ‘I don’t think you can know who you truly are without knowing where you came from.’ After viewing Sperm Donors Anonymous, write a one-page expository piece exploring this question. Include reference to people and events in the documentary.

• Again, with reference to the quote: ‘I don’t think you can know who you truly are without knowing where you came from’...
came from’, have students write an expository piece that reflects on this with direct reference to their own family tree and sense of identity. Encourage students to interview their parents/siblings/older family members, with the focus on familial similarities and differences across generations.

- Select any of the following people from the documentary: Michael, Ross, Jeff, Myf, Ian. Write a series of diary entries from a select time during their journey of discovery. Refer to actual events and people from *Sperm Donors Anonymous*.
- Select any of the following prompts as the basis for an expository piece exploring the theme of ‘Identity and Belonging’. Ensure you refer directly to the people we meet in *Sperm Donors Anonymous*, using events from the documentary to support your points:
  - It is difficult to possess a sense of belonging when we are unsure of our own identity.
  - Our identity determines where we belong.
  - Only upon reflection can we establish our identity.
  - Everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging.
  - Discovering our identity is a challenging journey.

### Class debate

Depending on the age level and subject area, students are directed to conduct research and carry out a class debate on one of the following topics:

- Sperm donors have a responsibility to tell partners about past sperm donations.
- Sperm donor-conceived children have the right to access the identity of their donor father.
- Sperm donors have the right to remain anonymous.
- How does your genetic heritage influence your identity?
- It is better not to know if you are donor conceived

### References

- http://sensiblefilms.com/portfolio/
- sperm-donors-anonymous/
- www.varta.org.au
  require-a-sperm-donor#nsw-sperm-donor-laws
  faq/
  sperm-donation
  legalities-and-requirements/
- http://www.cfc.net.au/site/gamete-donation/
- http://www.healthlawcentral.com/assistedreproduction/
  donorconception/access-information-australia/
  legislation-and-guideline-overview
  need-a-sperm-donor#using-a-sperm-donor-to-help-
  you-conceive

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**ABOVE LEFT:** SIBLINGS JEFF SPRINGFIELD, KIMBERLEY TURNER & KYLIE MAIO DISPLAY THEIR DONOR CODES. **ABOVE RIGHT:** MYF AT HOME WITH HER BABY DAUGHTER **BELOW:** PERFORMER MICHAEL GRIFFITHS AT PIANO.
A GROUP OF MEN FROM A SPERM DONOR SUPPORT GROUP IN MELBOURNE

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