



THE VISITORS

BY JANE HARRISON

DIRECTED BY WESLEY ENOCH

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Cover: Beau Dean Riley Smith and Dalara Williams (2023 cast).

Photo: Rob Hookey.

Compiled by Kelly Young, Education Manager for the Sydney Theatre Company. Additional curriculum links compiled by Sarah Clarke.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Moogahlin Performing Arts acknowledges the Gadigal and Ngemba Peoples who are the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all First Peoples with whom we work and with whom we share stories.



The 2023 cast of *The Visitors*. Photo by Daniel Boud.

ABOUT THE COMPANIES

ABOUT MOOGAHLIN PERFORMING ARTS INC.

Moogahlin Performing Arts was formed on Gadigal country in Redfern N.S.W in November 2007, by a group of First Peoples performance artists, educators and community workers. Bunuba man Frederick Copperwaite, Murrawarri woman Lily Shearer, and Biripai woman Liza-Mare Syron established the company at the request of the late Kevin Smith who wished to bring performing arts back to the community of Redfern, in honour of the founding members of the National Black Theatre.

Moogahlin Performing Arts was incorporated in 2009, with Redfern Community Centre, Performing Lines and Gadigal Information Service hosting us until we became a resident company of Carriageworks in 2014. In 2015, the Co-Founders stepped down from the Board to become Co-Artistic Directors and joined by Yorta Yorta theatre maker Andrea James from 2015 – 2016 to form a peer-based Artistic Directorship model utilising cultural principles to provide a supportive, yet critical and interrogative framework for the discussion and development of new work.

Moogahlin's first production was the third instalment of the PACT led project Gathering Ground in 2010 at the Block in Redfern Sydney, a community development performance project. Since that time our program has grown to include three key festivals, the Yellamundie National First Peoples Development Festival, Baiame's Nggunnhu Festival in Brewarrina, and Koori Gras with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, as well as several new work developments and artist and sector development initiatives.

moogahlin.org

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun".

Just over 40 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as a resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre-makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

STC has toured work internationally to great acclaim and has worked with many of Australia's internationally renowned artists including Benedict Andrews, Cate Blanchett, Wayne Blair, Rose Byrne, Toni Collette, Judy Davis, Elizabeth Debicki, Joel Edgerton, Barrie Kosky, Ewen Leslie, Deborah Mailman, Tony McNamara, Suzie Miller, Joanna Murray-Smith, Tim Minchin, Richard Roxburgh, Sarah Snook, Andrew Upton, Mia Wasikowska, Jackie Weaver and Hugo Weaving.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the Company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment, development and advisory body; and by the New South Wales Government through Create NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS



Dalara Williams in the 2023 production. Photo by Daniel Boud.

SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 7 – 12

NSW CURRICULUM LINKS

Drama Stage 4, 5 and 6

- Dramatic Forms and Performance Styles: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre

History Stage 4

- The Ancient to the Modern World, Depth Study 6, Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, Colonisation and Contact History

English Stage 4 and 5

- Stage 4 and 5: Outcome 8

VIC CURRICULUM LINKS

English

- VCE English + EAL
- Unit 3, Area of Study 2: A possible supplementary Mentor Text for the Writing about Country Framework

Drama

- Unit 2, Area of Study 1- Outcome 1
- Australian Identity – using Australia as inspiration

History

- VCE History
- Units 3 and 4 – Australian History
- Area of Study 1 and 2, Outcome 1 and 2

TAS CURRICULUM LINKS

Arts

- Arts Level 1: ART115123
- Module 1: Focus area - Drama

Drama

- Drama Level 3: SDD315120

Drama Foundations

- Drama Foundations Level 2: SDS215117
- Unit 1

English

- English Level 3: ENG315117
- Section B: Perspectives, Module 4

First Nations Studies

- First Nations Studies Level 3: TAS315119

History

- History Level 2: HIS215124
- Module 3: Movements for change in the 20th century

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

QLD CURRICULUM LINKS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

- Unit 3, Responses and Contributions, Topic 1

Arts in Practise

- Unit 3.1 and Unit 3.2

English

- General Senior Syllabus
- Unit 1: Perspectives and texts
- Unit 2: Texts and Culture

Modern History

- Unit 2 - Movements in the Modern World
 - Australian Indigenous rights movement since 1967 (referendum)

Social & Community Studies

- Unit 3.5 and Unit 3.6
- Assessment E2, Assessment F1, Assessment F2

NT CURRICULUM LINKS

Aboriginal Studies

- Aboriginal Studies Stage 1 and 2

Creative Arts

- Creative Arts

English

- English Literary Studies: Stage 2
 - *Stolen* by Jane Harrison on the suggested text list. *The Visitors* could be used as a supplementary text
- English: Stage 1
 - Responding to texts
- Essential English: Stage 1
 - Responding to texts

Drama

- Drama Stage 1
- Assessment Type 2: Responding to Drama

Modern History

- Modern History Stage 1: Indigenous Peoples

WA CURRICULUM LINKS

Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies

- Year 11 Syllabus
 - Unit 1 and Unit 2

English

- Year 11 Syllabus
 - Unit 1 and Unit 2
- Year 12 Syllabus
 - Unit 3 and Unit 4

Drama

- Year 12 Syllabus
 - Unit 4 (Monologue - candidate's choice)

Modern History

- Year 11 Syllabus
 - Unit 2, Elective 2: recognition and rights of First Nations Peoples
 - Unit 2, Elective 3: decolonisation
- Year 12 Syllabus
 - Unit 3, Elective 1: Australia 1918 - 1955



CAST & CREATIVES

THE VISITORS BY JANE HARRISON

PLAYWRIGHT

JANE HARRISON

DIRECTOR

WESLEY ENOCH

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

LIZA-MARE SYRON

CULTURAL LIAISON

AUNTY YVONNE SIMMS

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

ELIZABETH GADSBY

ASSOCIATE DESIGNER

SHANA O'BRIEN

LIGHTING DESIGNER

KAREN NORRIS

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

BRENDON BONEY

ASSOCIATE SOUND DESIGNER

AMY FLANNERY

SENIOR DHARUG & DHARAWAL

LANGUAGE TEACHER

CORINA NORMAN

DHARUG & DHARAWAL LANGUAGE

TEACHER

JORDAN RYAN-HENNESSEY

VOICE COACH

CHARMIAN GRADWELL

FIGHT & MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

NIGEL POULTON

2024 CAST - TO BE CONFIRMED

1 HOUR 15 MINS, NO INTERVAL

THIS PLAY PREMIERED AT CARRIAGEWORKS, GADIGAL ON 22 JAN 2020

A NEW PRODUCTION CO-PRODUCED WITH SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY OPENED AT DRAMA THEATRE, SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE IN 2023 WITH A SHORT EAST AUSTRALIAN TOUR.

CO-PRODUCER

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO**

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: WESLEY ENOCH

We are surrounded by the need for discussion and debate, we have friendly disagreements all the time, we argue and oppose sometimes for very personal reasons as we clash over values and ideology but as a society the key is finding some way forward rather than being paralysed by division.

The Visitors simultaneously leads us to a past and a preferred future. It takes us back to the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove and asks: 'what if' that moment was different? What if there was a way for the visitors to hear the generous message of welcome? What if they understood the power of connection to Land for the First Peoples? Sure, there is disagreement and debate about what is the best course of action and these people – like all people – find it hard to stick to the process but through calm investigation and evidence they find a consensus that is right for them and consistent with their values and cultural obligations.

This play asks an audience to reimagine a seminal moment in time and take a divergent path from the timeline we have lived. We have been interested in the Indigenous Futurism movement which changes the perspectives of our history and projects us into a world where technologies merge with our heritage to create new societies. Like an MCU multiverse platform this play imagines a world different to ours.

A play is only a set of ideas performed for an audience but this play is asking us as Australians to imagine a different world to the one we currently occupy, and make a difference to change the world in the future. This play is an argument laid out by actors, that asks- "shall we take a different path to the one we currently walk? Should we find new ways to walk together in the future?"

Open, honest and thoughtful debate and discussion is the only way through. We must all hold on to the need for respectful and passionate debate to arrive at the best outcome for the country. If last year's referendum debate taught us anything it is the need for calm investigation and to interrogate evidence in search of misinformation, misdirection and short term political advantage.

The Visitors is an investigation into the power of storytelling and speculative fiction to explore our present world and shape our future.



NOTES ON THE PRODUCTION: MOOGAHLIN PERFORMING ARTS



Liza-Mare Syron.

The Visitors by Murrawarri playwright Jane Harrison first came to the attention of the Moogahlin Performing Arts company in 2013, after being submitted for the inaugural Yellamundie National First Peoples Playwriting Festival. After a two-week development with a First Peoples dramaturg, director, and seven actors, the play went on to a further development workshop at Playwriting Australia and Melbourne Theatre Company in 2013. Then in 2014, as part of the Cybec Electric play reading series, it was presented and directed by Wiradjuri theatremaker Leah Purcell with Melbourne Theatre Company and Melbourne Indigenous Arts Festival. The play had a second workshop at Melbourne Theatre Company in 2016, and a Next Stage development in 2019 with Moogahlin Performing Arts. Moogahlin then premiered the work at Sydney Festival in 2020, directed by Bunaba man and Moogahlin co-founder, Frederick Copperwaite, with an all-male cast, including John Blair, Damion Hunter, Colin Kinchela, Nathan Leslie, Leroy Parsons, Glenn Shea, and Kerri Simpson. We were preparing to tour the work in 2021, but these plans were delayed for some years due to COVID-19.

In 2023, Moogahlin Performing Arts, Sydney Theatre Company and Sydney Opera House restaged the work in a production directed by Quandamooka man Wesley Enoch,

followed by a short east Australian tour. Building from this in 2024, a nationwide Australian tour brings this story to audiences across the continent, with plans for an international tour to follow. In restaging *The Visitors*, Moogahlin spent many months considering our role as the lead First Peoples partner in this production, and the cultural processes that would inform the artistic development of this First Peoples' story.

Moogahlin's uniqueness as a company lies in our philosophy and approach to making work, in which we uphold interconnected First Peoples' values of respect for the diversity of First Peoples' experiences, languages, land, water, air, practices, and lore; responsibility in a leadership role and responsibilities to create opportunities and contribute to culturally-safe work spaces; relationships to build sustainable relationships through our strategic partnership model; reciprocity in creating cultural arts exchange opportunities with community and artists locally, nationally, and internationally; relevance by engaging in critical discourse from a First Peoples world view, seeking community feedback on our work and seeking community engagement in all levels of creation.

In recognising that *The Visitors* is a work of speculative historical fiction, Moogahlin acknowledges that it is a story based on our history and heritage as First Peoples of Australia. In working through a culturally informed process, Moogahlin engaged Aunty Yvonne Simms, a Bidjigal and Gweagal woman from the La Perouse community as our Cultural Liaison to guide and connect us with the appropriate knowledge sharers and to immerse our creative team into the process of creating the world of the play, first created by Harrison. Through Aunty Yvonne's guidance and connections, we have been supported by Aunty Barbara Simms, Uncles Greg and Vic Simms, Corina Norman and Jordan Ryan-Hennessey, who have all worked closely with lead creatives on the history of their people, the set, costume, and prop design, and the use of language terms in the play.

In consideration of creating the weapons referred to in the script, a dialogue was created around whether the weapons would be made in a culturally-informed way, as weapons usually are, or if they would be imagined as props created by

NOTES ON THE PRODUCTION: MOOGAHLIN PERFORMING ARTS

Sydney Theatre Company makers. It was decided that in consultation with the Elders that the actors would be working with objects designed from historical cultural designs found in the Sydney Harbour and river areas. Regarding the use of language in the text, Moogahlin have collaborated with Corina Norman and Jordan Ryan-Hennessey, allowing for a deep investigation into which language groups would be appropriate to translate some of the text into. Originally Jane drew from The Sydney Language Dictionary by Jakelin Troy (1993). For this production language has been drawn from the Bidjigal dialect, recognising that this clan sits within the Eora Nation and Dharug language group. It's also important to note, however, that Bidjigal also aligns with the Dharawal language group to the south.

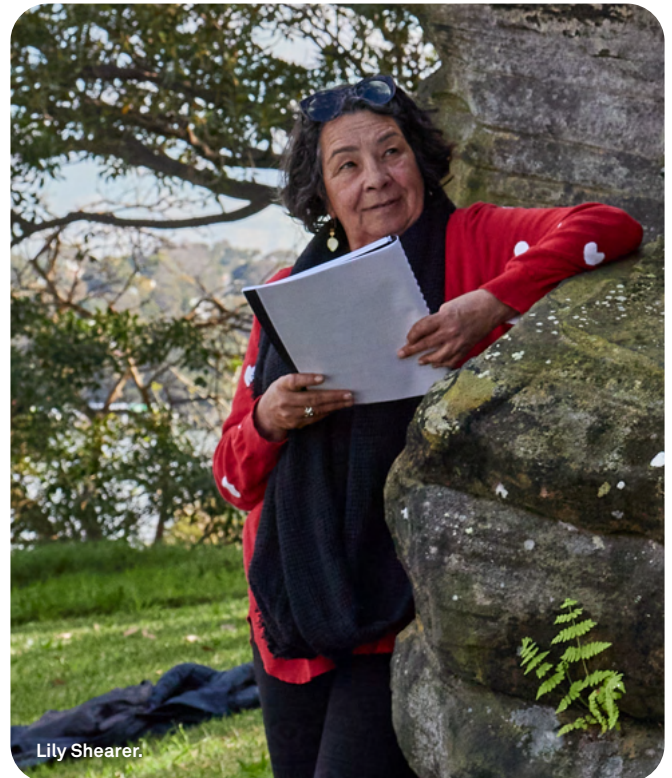
In keeping with Moogahlin's values we employed First Peoples associate artists to work closely alongside lead artists in production. Shana O'Brien is the Associate Artist working with Lead Designer Elizabeth Gadsby, Amy Flannery is composing with Brendon Boney on sound design, and Moogahlin's Senior Associate Artist Liza-Mare Syron is working with Wesley Enoch as the Associate Director.

In outlining these cultural arts approaches to making First Peoples' stories for the stage, we at Moogahlin aim to honour our practices and 'ways of being' that have existed for thousands of years. We honour our ancestors, whose experiences and knowledge of these practices have been handed down from generation to generation. We also pay attention to our languages, that are closely related to each country and place from which they derive, and finally we value place, where the story is situated, by fully immersing ourselves, cast, crew and partners, hosting site visits to areas of significance in the script. We are grateful to Tribal Warrior Association for our Sydney Harbour cruise and visit to Me-Mel (Goat Island), and to Uncle Vic Simms for our walking tour of La Perouse. In aligning cultural values to artistic processes in all our work through collective collaboration, we acknowledge that as individuals we also hold knowledge and gifts that have been provided to us by our Ancestors.

Finally, the company would like to pay our respects to the descendants from the countries mentioned in the play, who

continue to live on their traditional homelands in this present time.

Lily Shearer and Liza-Mare Syron
Moogahlin Co-founders



SYNOPSIS

Seven leaders from across Eora gather on a rocky escarpment at Warrane for a meeting. It's the middle of summer, temperatures are soaring, and the sky is full of rare spectacular cloud formations.

Each member of the gathering has come to represent their clan; Gary of the Northern Parramatta River mob, Lawrence of the Botany Bay mob, Gordon of the Sydney-Cove-harbour-dwelling Clan, Albert of the South Shore Clan, Jaky of the Manly Cove-North Shore clan, Wallace of the River mob, and Joseph of the Headlands of the Bay Clan.

Once the welcoming procedures are complete, the group gets down to business: what to do about the fleet of giant nawi that have appeared on the horizon and are drawing closer to shore?

Who are these strangers? What are their intentions once they arrive? And, more importantly, do they plan to stay?



Luke Carroll, Kyle Morrison, Dalara Williams, Guy Simon, Elaine Crombie, Beau Dean Riley Smith and Joseph Wunujaka Althouse in rehearsals for the 2023 production. Photo by Daniel Boud.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS



The 2023 cast of *The Visitors*: Guy Simon, Elaine Crombie, Luke Carroll, Joseph Wunujaka Althouse, Dalara Williams, Beau Dean Riley Smith and Kyle Morrison. Photo by Daniel Boud.

The Visitors relies on the creation of archetypes to decolonise accepted narratives. The character of Gordon, Cadigal man of the harbour dwelling clan, is an archetype that represents the structure of the post-invasion Australian history. Gordon's story arc functions as a metaphor for truth telling. Landing on Gordon's country both in 1788 and in the decades prior, Harrison gives the audience a character who has experienced the worst of British behaviour in his contact with them, and who finally speaks to the ugly truth of what the invaders have brought with them. The power of speaking this truth is the ultimate connection to Land, ancestors, and power.

GARY

Northern Parramatta River mob.
The 'Bureaucrat/Numbers Man'.

LAWRENCE

Botany Bay mob, Fire Clan.
Youngest. 'Almost initiated'.

GORDON

Sydney Cove – harbour-dwelling clan.
The 'General'.

ALBERT

South Shore Clan.
The 'Engineer/Mr Logic'.

JAKY

Manly Cove – North Shore Clan.
The 'Joker'. The 'Tradie'.

WALLACE

River mob. Eel Place Clan.
The 'Anthropologist/Philosopher'.

JOSEPH

Headlands of the Bay, Spear Clan, La Perouse area.
The 'Doctor/Healer'.

FORM, STYLE & CONVENTION

FORM

Indigenous Futurism

A way of imagining a decolonised narrative, Indigenous Futurism allows for radical truth-telling about the past through an imagined future. As a form, Indigenous Futurism sits across all types of storytelling including theatre, novels, and digital media. In the case of *The Visitors*, Harrison relies on the technique of dramatic irony to heighten the audience's sense of looming tragedy.

Realism

Realistic narrative throughout the play. The narrative flows continually from the beginning to the end, challenging the form of a Realistic narrative. This choice positions Harrison as an "active agent" in the telling of the story (Syron, 2020) and pays homage to First Peoples construction of the circularity of time. This choice by Harrison, including the power of the ancestors at the end, is a reclamation of First Peoples stories and a placing of the revisiting of the historical event from a First Peoples perspective.

STYLE & CONVENTION

Realism

Realism aims to recreate the experience of real life on the stage using all the available theatrical elements, including acting, the elements of production and the construction of the narrative. The aim of Realism is to create an empathetic or emotional response in the audience.

Dr. Liza-Mare Syron, Indigenous Scientia Senior Lecturer at the University of NSW, co-founder of Moogahlin Performing Arts and Associate Director of the 2023 and 2024 productions has written;

"Each of the seven roles in *The Visitors* are given a clan/family affiliation based on actual groups living in the greater Sydney area at that time. In the play, these clans are reframed by their environmental correlations and each member is assigned an archetypal role... The suggestion that there was, or is, a lack of senior Aboriginal women knowledge holders is not based on reality... It is also believed that local fisherwoman Barangaroo was present at the first meeting between settlers and her cameragal people at Manly in 1788, and that she also participated in warfare with settlers at North Harbour in November of the same year."

Comedy

The Visitors relies on comic dialogue throughout the play to build a connection between the characters and the audience. This comedy is primarily in the form of the repurposing of traditional English clichés (e.g., red sky in the morning, sailor take warning pg. 1), or "Curiosity killed the echidna" (pg. 32) or Sydney based 'in-jokes' (e.g., Everyone loves a water view pg. 3). Playwright Jane Harrison uses these moments to break down the binary between colonised and coloniser.

CREATING CULTURAL SAFETY

It is important to remember when teaching students about the experience of First Peoples that the exploration of content must be done in a culturally sensitive manner. Teachers should consider the protocols of their local community, listen to Elders, and engage respectfully. Most importantly, in the process of exploring a text, students should not be encouraged to take on roles that are sensitive, enact trauma or cruelty.

When establishing student understanding of First Peoples and western history, teachers and students may wish to explore the ways knowledge and history inform each other.

Acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and knowledges are not able to be easily contained and summarised within one tradition is an important part of creating cultural safety in the classroom. There are attributes that are common among various Peoples and language groups but the complexity within each is of vital importance to acknowledge. For example, the transmission of history, culture and story occurs using an oral tradition in First Peoples culture, whereas in some non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions, history is written down.

If this activity is completed with the class, work with your local Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group (AECG) to explore traditional knowledge in your local area. The following link is from the NSW Department of Education and can be used by all schools in the state.

aecg.nsw.edu.au/aecg-regions/

PRE-TEACHING: *THE VISITORS*

IMPERIALISM, INVASION AND COLONISATION

For the full impact of *The Visitors* to be felt by an audience, they must have a clear understanding of the aims of imperialism, the violent history of invasion and the process of colonisation on First Peoples.

Imperialism is the way in which one country extends its power and control over another. There were four imperial strategies actioned by the British during this period of history. The first was the invasion and subjection of the original owners of the land. The second was to establish power and control through economic expansion which in the case of the British, involved land stealing and extraction of natural resources for their emergent industrial economy. The third is a form of ideological control built on the ideas of the Enlightenment, of the modern state, science, and the ideology of the individual, designed to allow Europeans to define themselves against the 'other'. The result is to establish a global hierarchy of humans which we now call racism. Less commonly identified as an imperial strategy is the control of knowledge and ideas in which the human mind is controlled by the ideas of the hegemonic power (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

Colonisation should be understood as but one of several strategic choices that can be made by an imperial power to extend its influence over another group of people. In the case of Australia, the landing of the First Fleet on 26 January 1788 marks the official date of the commencement of colonisation. *The Visitors*, set on that morning, asks the audience to place themselves imaginatively in that moment, as the world of the Eora changed forever. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith defines colonisation as:

“Colonisation is an imperialist strategy and is based on the theft of land and its material wealth. Colonisation begins with the invading power overtaking the land of the invaded country. They establish ports and basic infrastructure to access and extract resources and capture developing markets. The colony that develops around the newly developed economic infrastructure becomes the site for disseminating the invading country’s culture.” (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012)

It is important to note that the forces of imperialism and colonisation have been, and continue to be, actively resisted by First Peoples across the world, including Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012)



Luke Carroll and Elaine Crombie in the 2023 production of *The Visitors*. Photo by Daniel Boud.

PRE-TEACHING: *THE VISITORS* (cont.)

DECOLONISATION AND POSTCOLONIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

The analysis of the process of colonisation, called Postcolonial Studies, unpacks the ways in which colonisation occurred and its devastating effects. Many First Peoples argue that the process of colonisation is not over and, in fact, is an ongoing and continuous process, which mutates and changes in response to the challenges of the colonised. Academics such as Ramon Grosfoguel write that the process of globalisation is an extended process of colonisation throughout the world, particularly through the perpetuation of western hegemonic ideas. We are, he argues, living in a state of perpetual coloniality maintained by the dissemination of western learning and ideas throughout the world by the global tertiary education system. (Grosfoguel 2006).

Decolonisation is the process by which the hegemonic power of imperialism – the power of imperial ideas in the minds of humans – is challenged. This process of understanding the ways in which imperialism reaches into the minds of First Peoples forms the basis of a cultural critique of which *The Visitors* is part. This critique relies on two major strands;

“One draws upon a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonisation in which we were intact as indigenous peoples. We had absolute authority over our lives... We did not ask, need, or want to be ‘discovered’ by Europe. The second strand... demands that we have an analysis of how we were colonised, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and our future...Decolonisation encapsulates both sets of ideas.” (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012)

The Visitors is a work that seeks to decolonise Australian history – particularly notions of the arrival of the First Fleet. The play draws, as Tuhiwai-Smith notes, on a time before colonisation, where First Peoples were undisturbed by invaders whilst relying on the audiences’ understanding of the atrocities of colonisation and what it has meant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the past 200 years.

Classroom Activities

Use the links to the digital resources list below to begin a conversation about imperialism and colonisation. These videos are chosen to provide a First Peoples perspective to the arrival of the First Fleet.

Questions to be considered include:

1. How do Australia’s First Peoples describe their lives before invasion?
2. How does listening to the story of Captain Cook’s first disembarkation and the arrival of the First Fleet from a First Peoples’ perspective change your understanding of the event? Can you draw a conclusion about why the British might have a vested interest in emphasising their side of the narrative?
3. Imperialism is the process by which one country exerts control and power over another. How do these digital documents show that the British had imperial motives when they arrived?
4. How did the process of colonisation work as an imperialist strategy in Australia?

Digital Resources

The National Museum has links that explore pre-invasion life in Australia.

- digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/evidence-first-peoples

The clips below are about the landing of the First Fleet.

- [Indigenous Perspectives of Cook’s Visit - Endeavour 250th Anniversary](#)
- [Cook’s arrival at Kamay: a Dharawal perspective](#)
- [Arrival of First Fleet](#)
- [Episode 4 - First Encounters - Strangers](#)
- [Governor Arthur Phillip and the Eora \[HD\] Saturday Extra, ABC RN](#)

THEMES & IDEAS

DECOLONISING HISTORY AND MEMORY

Imperial power relies on the validity of carefully constructed historical narratives that lay the foundations for its ownership and control of the land; narratives that deliberately exclude the original owners. *The Visitors* asks the audience to consider the importance of history and the way that it might be rewritten as a radical decolonising act designed to challenge the foundations of the colony and its claim to legitimacy.

Colonial understandings of history are key to preventing challenges to the legitimacy of white settlement. Colonial myths, laid down at invasion and include terra nullius, the peaceful intent of the British on arrival and the absence of genocidal activities, work to legitimise the ugliness of the process as that of a benevolent invader who acted with the best interests of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at heart. All imperial myths serve to obscure other narratives – the narratives that claim sovereignty, language, knowledge, culture, and the deep connection to the land and that destabilise and delegitimise colonial power.

The notion of history as a narrative is an important one in both First Peoples and western constructions of themselves because it determines what is understood about a society and what it chooses to remember. *The Visitors* challenge some of the assumptions that are embedded in national narratives of invasion.

Western narratives of history have been traced from the work of Ancient Greeks, Thucydides, and Herodotus, who are said to have established Western understandings of investigating the past. These understandings have relied on written evidence, application of 'rational' and 'unbiased' examination of historical sources and notions of linearity – that history is moving from one point to another without digression, circularity, or repetition.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of history are diametrically opposed (Behrendt 2019). Emerging from *The Dreaming*, First Peoples' histories are built into a deep connection with the ancestors, the land, law, culture, and language. Passed down via the oral history tradition, First Peoples histories are grounded in their context. That is, an understanding that where a human being

is placed in history and geography will influence the way that a human will see the world. It is this understanding that acts as a potent challenge to western constructions of history. Emerging from the land, storytelling is a fundamentally radical act because it asserts connection to and ownership of country. Additionally, the histories experienced since 1788 challenge the colonial myths of white settlement because they offer a counter narrative that delegitimises the colony (Behrendt 2019).

The Visitors, whilst written within a western theatrical form and utilising western theatrical styles, acts as a challenge to colonial versions of invasion which construct images of an uninhabited land, and uncivilised, unintelligent people, requiring the help of the invader to use the land for commercial interests. Instead, the playwright renegotiates constructions of history by firstly, insisting on the presence of a rich and developed civilisation, whilst secondly, inverting the stereotypes traditionally applied to Australia's First Peoples.



Elaine Crombie in rehearsals for the 2023 production.
Photo by Daniel Boud.

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

Classroom Activities

Playwright Jane Harrison, using the written historical sources that remain from the invading forces, reimagines the invasion of Australia in *The Visitors*. One of the ways that Harrison's script does this is through the personalisation of the experiences of colonial history that white invaders have chosen to forget. Harrison's seven characters are both individuals and archetypes and one of their theatrical purposes in the story is to personalise the reimagined experience of the First Peoples who were present in the Greater Sydney Area on 26 January 1788.

The script extracts below are examples of the truth of the story that has been suppressed and forgotten, providing a perspective on the historical events that were not recorded by the British and have been lost to time. The 2024 production of *The Visitors* begins in language. The use of language is one that immediately locates the history of invasion as one that is not British – challenging the idea of terra nullius and the right to take ownership.

Jane Harrison's meticulous research into the period has allowed her to provide a decolonised perspective of the events of 26 January 1788. Before moving into the main activities exploring the power relations revealed in constructions of history, read the two extracts below.

The first quote is from William Dampier and reflects his first experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“... setting aside their human shape, they differ but little from brutes. They are tall, straight bodied, and thin, with small, long limbs. They have great heads, round foreheads, and great brows... They are of a very unpleasing aspect, having no one graceful feature in their faces. Their hair is black, short, and curled, like that of the negroes; and not long and lank.... the colour of their skins, both of their faces and the rest of their body, is coal black, like that of the negroes of Guinea.” (Moreton-Robinson 2015)

The following quote is from *The Visitors*. Harrison has written it for the character of Lawrence.

Lawrence: Setting aside their human shape they differ little from brutes. They have stocky bodies, short limbs, narrow heads, thin lips and wide-open protruding eyes that have a fish-like likeness. They are of a very unpleasant aspect, having not one graceful feature in their faces. They have no facial hair, their faces as smooth as a young girl, I could barely tell which sex is which. (Harrison, 2021)

A. As a class, discuss the following questions;

- What do you notice about the two texts when they are written side by side?
- Have you read or heard descriptions like Dampier's before?
- If you have read or heard these descriptions before, where might you have heard them?
- Why might playwright Jane Harrison have used an historical source that was written down by a white man recording his thoughts about seeing a First Peoples person for the first time, to use as dialogue?
- What is the impact on the audience of inverting racist descriptions of Australia's First Peoples and giving them to a First Peoples character?

B. Harrison's challenge to the historically accepted, colonial version of first encounters between First Peoples and British people is explored in the activities below.

Working in groups of 4 – 5 students, explore the different extracts of the script below. Each group of extracts has been selected to support students in their exploration of the ways in which colonial power shapes historical narratives to serve its own purposes. The following extracts follow the journey of Lawrence, who sneaks up to a group of the visitors to examine them.

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

Lawrence: Respect to your country, Uncle.
Lawrence nods then sneezes.
Lawrence wipes his mucousy nose on his arm; the others wrinkle their noses in disgust.
 (pg. 7)

Lawrence: They left my country. They stayed three days and then they left.
They ignore him – until he sneezes three times.
 Joseph: You are unwell. Your eyes glow, as does your nose.
 Lawrence: My head aches.
 Joseph: Green slides from your nose. Like slime at the edge of a water hole
 (pg. 31 – 32)

Lawrence: My nawi slid beside theirs. It was like a cliff face. As tall as a fig tree... One of them (was) leaning over the nawi. And then he...
He sneezes. And sneezes.
 Lawrence: I felt a small spray, like mist from a waterfall.
 Gary: Curious, but irrelevant.
 Lawrence: Hey, I'm just explaining
He is unsettled. Feverish.
 (pg. 33 - 34)

Gordon: I'm not welcoming them. I'm not.
Now Albert sneezes violently.
 (pg. 47)

The extracts below reimagine the historical moment in which First Peoples may have experienced their first view of western people.

Joseph: [To Albert] Albert, did you ever expect to see them back again? Those shiny ones?
 Albert: They come. They go.
 Jaky: Shiny ones?
 Joseph: Under their cloaks they are. Shiny and pink.
 Like the inside of a shell.
 (pg. 3)

The final set of extracts gives voice to the way in which First Peoples might have felt as they watched the First Fleet arrive and begin to disembark.

Gordon: You want that to happen to us? We let them on shore, they might do that to us? Look how that man swings lifeless. Look. Look. Look! Its barbaric! (pg. 38)

Gordon: I'm signalling my mob right now. We will take up arms against them. There's no point talking anymore.
 Albert: Wait! [To Gordon] What bad consequences? What do you mean?
 Gordon: What if they stay? Forever?
Gary is exasperated.
 Gary: Visitors don't stay. That's why they're visitors.
 Walter?

Wallace: Of course, they'll leave. Folks have been coming here on their nawi before. Coming, going, sometimes trading, but always leaving eventually. We have long memories, eh? We know their visits are a passing event, a fleeting encounter. We are still here and will be forever. Do you really think because they come ashore this one time that we might fade into nothingness, like smoke in the sky?
 (pg. 42)

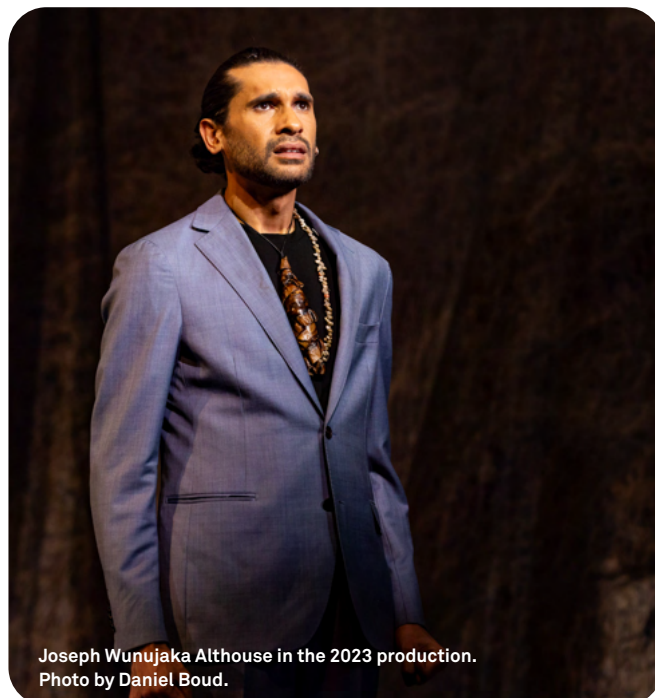
Gordon: They're no good. There's not one of 'em whose any good. They will hurt us. They will trample our land. They will poison us with their liquid. They will cut down our trees, muddy our water, and take too many fish. They will hurt our beloved country. (pg. 48)

1. Allocate the extracts to different groups in the class and rehearse them through to performance. Watch each performance.
2. Once the extracts have been performed, discuss the following questions;
 - Brainstorm colonial understandings of the history of invasion that are addressed in Harrison's script extracts above.
 - Brainstorm how Harrison's script has given a First Peoples perspective on the history British invasion. As this discussion unfolds, fill in a table like the below;

First Peoples Perspectives	British Perspectives

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

3. Ask the class to draw conclusions about the reasons why colonial history has focused on British understandings of the historical events of invasion. As the conclusions are generated by the discussion, note them on the whiteboard.
4. Ask the class to move back into groups of four.
 - In groups, brainstorm adjectives that try to describe the motives of the British.
 - Contribute each of the words generated in the group to an adjective bank on the board.
 - As a class, discuss the ideas generated by the class.
 - Moving back into groups, create a performance about the importance of rethinking the way that history is discussed in Australia using what you have learned. This performance could be directed at an imagined audience of the media, government officials or the history department at your school.



Joseph Wunujaka Althouse in the 2023 production.
Photo by Daniel Boud.

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE AND 'AUSTRALIA DAY'

Imperial power relies on the legitimacy of carefully constructed narratives. These narratives are the foundations upon which the colony understands itself. Constructed by the hegemonic power to justify its continued ownership of stolen land, the power of these narratives lies in the imagination, cognition and cultural understandings of all Australians and is the final bastion of coloniality and its grip on power. (Tuhiwai-Smith pg. 24)

Australian cultural narratives are rooted in European concepts of capitalist ownership and possession. These ideas of ownership, brought to fruition in The Enlightenment, allowed Europeans to see themselves as autonomous, male, rational owners of private property – a concept unimaginatively extended to the peoples and lands that they encountered as they travelled the globe. This deeply flawed and subjective narrative of what it meant to be an individual (I own therefore I am) allowed colonisers to take land at will, justifying its theft as part of a racist project designed to bring white supremacy to invaded lands and keep it there.

Generated by the British Government of King George III, Captain James Cook was provided with a set of instructions that were based on a western understanding, or narrative, of ownership. Australian First Peoples academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes;

“Cook’s... secret instructions were, if Cook found the great southern continent and encountered ‘natives’ (he was) to ‘endeavour by all proper means to cultivate a friendship and alliance with them... You are also with the consent of the natives to take possession of convenient situations in the county in the name of the King of Great Britain, or, if you find the county uninhabited take possession for his majesty’...” (Moreton-Robinson 2015)

Captain Cook was unable to adapt his contextual understanding of private ownership and capitalist ideas of possession with other constructions of ownership when arriving on the shores of various countries in the South Pacific, including Australia. Possessions, as defined by

western thought, are things that can be sold, exchanged, or traded – usually made by people or extracted from the environment. This understanding of ownership and possession relies on placing humans outside of nature, so that resources, including land, can be extracted, and exploited for human use. Western perceptions of First Peoples living in and within nature meant that Cook was able to place First Peoples as being inseparable from nature and therefore, by western logic, unable to possess it. As a result, Cook was able to declare Australia ‘uninhabited’ and the property of the King.

‘Australia Day’ and its focus on the landing of the First Fleet marks the anniversary of formal British settlement in Australia. It is a narrative that relies on colonial understandings of the foundation of Australia, based in western ideas of ownership and possession of a land stolen under the pretence of “terra nullius.” The leap between claiming possession in the name of the King and the dispatch of Governor Phillip to begin a British colony was simple one for the invaders once the story of uninhabited land was established and perpetuated.

Narratives constructed by the invader during early settlement and into the 20th and 21st centuries are designed to maintain cultural hegemony, with the goal of the continued justification and hence control of stolen land. The image of Australia’s beaches, used as a cultural motif by white Australia, and presented in a decolonised manner in *The Visitors*, are key in these stories. They are used to inscribe and reiterate ideas of white male ownership of the land. Australia’s beaches are a reminder of Australia’s geographical borders – Australia is an island and is surrounded by water. Both Captain Cook and Governor Phillip arrived in Australia and landed on its beaches, transgressing and crossing borders as part of the illegal act of invasion, a serious and provocative act, the repercussions of which they as naval officers, would have completely understood. Further, the act of planting flags (Cook on Possession Island in Far North Queensland and Philip in Sydney Cove) on the beaches of Australia was a performance designed to reinforce the story of ownership by the British.

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

In the years since, Australia's yearly re-enactment of the story of the arrival of the First Fleet remains one in which imperial celebration of a story of theft, genocide and loss is retold with the aim of consolidating a sense of solidarity amongst those who benefit from it. To challenge the validity of this narrative is to challenge white stories of ownership and notions of civilisation and open the story to the process of truth-telling.

It is January, the weather is stifling, the rare and unusual mammatus clouds spectacular. The sound of cicadas, birds, and seas. (pg. 1)

Jane Harrison's opening of *The Visitors* invites the audience to see the arrival of the First Fleet onto the beaches through a different lens. This means that our understanding of Australia's founding story is reimagined allowing the audience a completely new perspective, reinscribing our cultural texts with new and more complex meaning. Harrison's characters, with their considered and wise conversation and connection to their land, ancestors and lore sits in direct opposition to the imperial narrative that has held Australia in its vice-like grip for the past 220 years. It is the process of seeing the event in a new way in the theatre that allows the audience to reimagine the event in the world outside of their own hegemonic perceptions of history, challenging notions of cultural memory.

Classroom Activities

1. Museum of Images: Working in groups of four, ask students to find between four and six iconic and contemporary images of a colonial Australia Day. Ask each group to present their images to the class so that each group contributes to a larger group of pictures. Ask the students to look at the complete collection of images and draw conclusions about the following questions;
 - What groups of Australians occur most often in these images?
 - What activities are people doing in the images?
 - What does the Museum of Images suggest about Australia's narrative about itself?
2. Ask each group to imagine that they know nothing about the history of the country whose national day they are looking at. Create a thirty second performance that explains to the audience what they know about this country from what they have been able to deduce from the images. After the performances, the class could brainstorm what discoveries they made about the identity of this group.
 - Who are they?
 - What do they value?
 - What evidence do you have?
 - What does this tell the audience about their understanding of the ownership of the land they live on?
3. Harrison's script challenges dominant colonial understandings of the narrative about Australia Day
 - a. Working as a class, build an understanding of the ways in which students use language to express that they own something. This could include both words and sentences. The teacher could divide the whiteboard into two and on the left-hand side, student ideas about communicating ownership could be written. This might include examples such as "Welcome home." or, "You're welcome to visit." or, "That's mine."
 - b. Once this has been completed, students move into groups of 4 – 5 people. Ask each group to work through the first nine pages of Harrison's script, making notes about each time the characters communicate ownership of their land. Examples of script extracts include the following;

Joseph: Gordon. Respects to your country.
(pg. 1)
 - c. Move back into the groups that were established in the Museum of Images activity and revise the performance devised based on contemporary understandings of Australia Day. This revision should be in the spirit of Harrison's revision to the narrative of Australia Day, where students creatively challenge the images that they have previously presented and turn them into a clear statement of First Peoples ownership. Once the groups have made their revision having followed the same process as Harrison, ask

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

students to consider the following questions;

- What changes did each group make to their narratives/images/characters. Why did they do this?
- How did these changes change the audience's perspective on Australia Day?
- Speculate reasons as to why power structures in society continue to reinforce national narratives about Australia Day that are clearly one sided?

4. The following activity relies on the analysis of the primary sources of David Collins, the first Judge-Advocate of the NSW colony and secretary to Governor Phillip Collins left behind written documents that have been used to understand the early colony in Account of the English Colony in New South Wales (1789 and 1802).

He wrote of his experience as part of a landing party in which the invaders were looking for a site for permanent settlement.

"Their little fleet attracted the attention of several parties of the natives, who all greeted them in the same words, and in the same tone of vociferation, shouting everywhere 'Warra, warra, warra,' words which, by the gestures that accompanied them, could not be interpreted into invitation to land, or expressions of welcome." (Standfield, 2010)

There have been two references to the words "Wara, wara, wara" in these education resources. The first is in the "Cook's Arrival at Kamay: A Dharawal Perspective" and the second is in Harrison's script.

Gordon: Warra, warra wai. (pg. 6)

Working in groups of 4 – 5 students, devise a performance using your understanding of the meaning and intent of the use of the phrase "Wara, wara, wara" when used by the Dharawal people in response to "the little fleet". Being mindful of the size of the disingenuous phrase "the little fleet," use any theatrical style except Realism to communicate the intentions of First Peoples and the emotions that accompanied their response. Perform this to the audience and discuss;

- What intention was communicated through the performance?
- How were you able to tell?
- As a class, speculate on why the British were so unwilling to see the intention behind the communication of the Dharawal people?



Beau Dean Riley Smith in rehearsals for the 2023 production.
Photo by Daniel Boud.

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

LORE AND LAW: CHALLENGING THE BINARY OF COLONISATION

Harrison's script challenges the racist binaries established during the establishment of the colonial period and perpetuated in contemporary society. Harrison's carefully employed inversion of white racist language by the seven characters shines light on ugly perceptions whilst flipping those stereotypes on their heads.

The Visitors invites the audience to imagine a conversation that is different to the racist conversations that have occurred throughout Australia's colonial history. The play embeds the complex conversations between the seven imagined characters about their approach to the arrival of the First Fleet within the complex, respectful and immense systems of knowledge, lore and culture developed over 65,000 years of First Peoples life in Australia. Provided by the ancestors, these systems are unique to each Nation and have held Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people safe, happy, and thriving for the duration of their history.

Marcia Langton and Aaron Corn, in their book *The Way of the Ancestors* write the following;

"Places where ancestors are sleeping are prominent features in Indigenous law. A relationship between a person and a place is fundamental in Indigenous law because living people share a spiritual substance with these ancestors..." (pg. 44)

Lore, law, culture, language, and knowledge are all intimately connected to the Land and the ancestors. They cannot be separated. They reflect the interrelatedness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life and the importance of respect and responsibility.

Classroom Activities

The following script extracts are from *The Visitors*, and they are moments that speak to a deeper cultural understanding of lore/law including the protocols for welcoming visitors. The extracts thereafter are a contrast between the two world views.

Joseph: What are you seeing, Wallace, that we might have missed?

Wallace: They look desperate

Jaky: How's that our problem?

Wallace: They're in our waters. So, they're our responsibility.

(pg. 11)

Wallace: If we talk it through then I would feel that we made an informed decision.

Joseph: That's reasonable.

Wallace: It's about us. Following through with our protocols. Which might include letting them land.

Gary: Serious? You know what that means. We let them land...

Joseph: And we're obliged to welcome them.

(pg. 12)

Wallace: Who are we, around this circle? Yes, we're the warriors of our mobs. We're the craftsmen. Scientists. Healers. We're cultured. We have language, more than one. We trade. We have ceremonies and songs. We have lore. We have protocols. And we share one particular protocol, and that is we welcome those who pass through our country. (pg. 13)

Wallace: We welcome everyone else. That's our way of doing things since, well, since the beginning of time (pg. 10)

Gary: Can I remind everyone that this is not about what the 'popular' decision is. I am proud to be an Elder on this Council because I value that we have different opinions and that we talk things through in a respectful manner. Gordon. Your tone is not in the spirit of these meetings. (pg. 28)

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

Joseph: Unless they don't have a country?

Jaky: Rubbish! Everyone has a country. We are not born of the sea; we're born of the land. We belong to the earth. That's who we are as human beings.

Albert: They should be at home, caring for it. That's their responsibility. To their country.

(pg. 31)

The following extracts show the experience of the seven Council members as they look at the behaviour of the visitors, heightening the contrast between the two ways of being in the world.

Joseph: I head a group of them heading my way, noisily, banging and crashing through the bush. Naturally, I wanted to avoid them. I fled, my oysters and mussels still sizzling on the fire. I huddled behind a kurrajong tree, watching. Not only did they nick my lunch, cheeky ones, but they happened upon my mob's spears, and took the lot! (pg. 30)

Albert: Had they negotiated to fish in that area? Did they take the appropriate quota?

Joseph: I cannot say.

Jaky: I heard they took loads and loads. Enough for a corroboree.

Gordon: They slaughtered stingrays -

Jaky: I head the bay was like a summer's sunset, red with blood.

Gordon: - stingrays as old as my father's father's father. (pg. 31)

Joseph: What are they doing?

Joseph: A ceremony?

There are sounds of drums and a fife playing. They listen... (The Rogue's March)

Gary: How many are there?

Lawrence: I tried to tell you!

Pause as they stare out towards the sea.

Joseph: What's going on?

Gary: There's a structure like a tree, with a twisted rope. Is it stringy bark?

They watch alarmed. GORDON runs to join them.

Jaky: And a man, struggling.

Lawrence: They're putting the rope around his neck! Oh. Oh...

Joseph: What?

Albert: They're pulling up the rope and...

There is a very faint but bloodcurdling wail.

Joseph: I have never heard such an awful sound! Oh, my spirit!

Gary: The man, he's twitching! Thrashing about!

They stare in horror, mesmerised.

Jaky: Still thrashing.

They watch. For a long time.

Albert: He's dead.

Lawrence: Finally.

Joseph: Dead?

Lawrence: He hangs like a skun animal.

Joseph: In your wildest thoughts, can you ever think of such a thing?

Gary: The horror.

Silence

Gordon: [To Wallace] You want that to happen to us? We let them on shore, they might do that to us? Look how that man swings, lifeless. Look! Look! Look! It's barbaric!

(pg. 38)

And the final extracts, from the last moments of the play, explore the connection and belief in the sanctity of lore, even in the face of such differences.

Wallace: That's what I was talking about. If we have always welcomed visitors, then we should now.

Albert: Whatever the consequence?

Wallace: I don't know what the consequences will be.

Nor do you. But I know our lore. Our protocols.

(pg. 42)

1. Ask the class to work in groups and allocate these extracts to each group. Using the conventions of Realism, find the objective of each moment and character. Perform these to the class and analyse each using the following questions;
 - What adjectives would you use to describe the intentions and experiences of the seven characters in these extracts? Why?
 - How does the world views of the First Peoples characters in these extracts inform the way they respond to the world and people around them?

THEMES & IDEAS (cont.)

- How has foregrounding the lore/protocols/culture of First Peoples changed the way that the audience experiences the behaviour of the British?

2. Use Wallace's speech below to begin a Conscience Alley activity.

Wallace: Of course they'll leave. Folks have come here on their nawi before. Coming, going, sometimes trading, but always leaving eventually. We have long memories, eh. We know their visits are a passing event, a fleeting encounter. We are still here and will be forever. Do you really think that just because they come ashore this one time that we might fade into nothingness, like smoke into the sky? (pg. 42)

Ask a student to take on the role of one of the seven

Councillors. Break the rest of the group into two lines, each to advise the character about whether they should vote to welcome or send away based on what they have learnt from the play. At the end of the Alley, the student is to report back on their decision, providing detailed and thoughtful reasons as to why they would allow the British to disembark.

3. Once Conscience Alley has finished, the class may wish to discuss the issues that arise in more depth. Students may respond to the discussion in a group performance, in a creative writing task or writing a monologue from the point of view of one of the characters in the play.



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