

THEATRE WORKS PRESENTS

# BEYOND THE NECK

BY TOM HOLLOWAY

EDUCATION NOTES

THEATRE WORKS  
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# BEYOND THE NECK

## EDUCATION NOTES

**Written By** Tom Holloway

**Produced by** Theatre Works

**Directed by** Suzanne Chaundy

**Cast:** Francis Greenslade, Emmaline Carroll Southwell, Freddy Collier,  
Cassidy Dunn

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### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

**Beyond the Neck** is a poetic verbatim-inspired play that explores the enduring trauma, grief, and resilience following one of Australia's darkest events — the 1996 Port Arthur Massacre in Tasmania.

On 28 April 1996, 28-year-old Martin Bryant killed 35 people and wounded 23 others at the Port Arthur Historic Site, a former convict settlement and tourist attraction. This tragedy sent shockwaves through Australia and the world, fundamentally reshaping the nation's gun control laws and public consciousness.

Tom Holloway's play does not re-enact the massacre. Instead, it meditates on the aftermath — the decades-long reverberations of trauma and the fragile ways in which people continue living, remembering, and searching for meaning.

The play's title, *Beyond the Neck*, references both geography (the narrow isthmus linking Port Arthur to the Tasman Peninsula) and metaphor — what lies "beyond" the surface of trauma, memory, and human resilience.

# STYLE AND STRUCTURE

## FORM

- Verbatim-inspired theatre, using real voices and testimonies as its basis.
- Non-linear, interwoven monologues and dialogues.
- Fragmented storytelling that mirrors the fractured nature of memory and trauma.

## STYLE AND CONVENTIONS

- **Direct address:** Characters often speak directly to the audience, blurring the line between performer and witness.
- **Chorus and overlap:** The four voices sometimes merge or interrupt, representing collective grief.
- **Minimalism:** Sparse staging focuses attention on text, rhythm, and emotion.
- **Repetition and rhythm:** Holloway structures dialogue like musical composition ("A Quartet on Loss and Violence").
- **Symbolism:** Simple gestures, sounds, and images evoke emotional landscapes rather than literal settings.

## GENRE

- Contemporary Australian drama
- Poetic realism / documentary-style verbatim theatre

# THEMATIC ANALYSIS

## 1. TRAUMA AND MEMORY

Verbatim-inspired theatre, using real voices and testimonies as its basis. Non-linear, interwoven monologues and dialogues. Fragmented storytelling that mirrors the fractured nature of memory and trauma.

## 2. ISOLATION AND CONNECTION

Each character is isolated in grief, yet their stories intertwine. The ensemble form reflects the human need for empathy and collective healing, suggesting that connection is possible even amidst suffering.

## 3. THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

By giving voice to survivors and the bereaved, *Beyond the Neck* transforms private pain into shared reflection. Theatre becomes a vessel for remembrance and community reconciliation.

## 4. REALITY AND IMAGINATION

The boy's imaginary friend, the woman's imagined family, and the teen's distorted memories reveal how grief distorts perception — showing how the mind constructs "safe versions" of trauma.

## 5. HEALING AND RESILIENCE

Ultimately, the play suggests that healing lies not in forgetting but in facing memory with compassion. Holloway's work invites collective empathy — an essential part of post-traumatic recovery.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS

CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION	FUNCTION & THEMES
<b>The 7-Year-Old Boy</b>	Lonely and imaginative, invents an imaginary friend "Michael" who encourages dark thoughts.	Represents innocence corrupted by exposure to violence and disconnection. Highlights intergenerational echoes of trauma.
<b>The 17-Year-Old Girl</b>	Lost her father in the massacre; struggles with identity, grief, and her mother's new relationship	Embodies unresolved grief and the search for truth. Her visit to Port Arthur forces confrontation with loss.
<b>The 28-Year-Old Woman</b>	Appears to travel with her husband and daughter but they are revealed to be memories — both died in a car accident.	Explores denial and the inability to let go; a haunting portrayal of love, loss, and the mind's defence mechanisms
<b>The 75-Year-Old Man</b>	A café worker and survivor of the massacre. Suffers from severe PTSD and recurring flashbacks.	The emotional heart of the play; his trauma embodies the play's ethical and emotional weight.
<b>The Visitor</b>	Appears in the "Coda" as a reflective voice.	Offers closure, reminding the audience of collective healing and remembrance.

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The role of the 7-year-old boy in *Beyond the Neck* will be performed by an adult male actor. Due to the psychological intensity of the material and the thematic content of the work — including grief, trauma, dissociation and references to violence — Theatre Works has made the decision not to cast a child in this role. This approach is consistent with our duty of care and wellbeing standards for young people, and it also aligns with the performance style of the play, in which all performers embody memory, perspective and lived experience rather than literal realism.

# DRAMATIC ELEMENTS AND CONVENTIONS

## ELEMENT

## APPLICATION IN BEYOND THE NECK

### Sound

Subtle underscoring by live musician (Philip McLeod) enhances atmosphere; sound evokes memories and emotional shifts.

### Lighting

(By Richard Vabre) Minimal yet expressive — uses shadow, contrast, and focus to signal flashbacks and emotional tone.

### Set & Costume

(By Jacob Battista) Simple, symbolic design — portable objects, neutral palette; allows multiple spaces to coexist.

### Space

Open and fluid — no fixed setting, allowing time and memory to overlap.

### Movement

Stylised and rhythmic, choreographed transitions between characters' internal and external worlds.

### Voice

Shifts between naturalism and heightened tone; overlapping dialogue creates a musical structure.

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## CREATIVE TEAM INSIGHTS

### SUZANNE CHAUNDY – DIRECTOR

Renowned for her precise rhythmical direction, Chaundy treats *Beyond the Neck* like a piece of music. Her approach draws out the text's "quartet" form — weaving emotional restraint with moments of catharsis. She ensures the production avoids sentimentality, instead evoking truth, empathy, and quiet humanity.

### DIANNE TOULSON – PRODUCER

As Executive Director of Theatre Works, Toulson ensures the production maintains integrity and accessibility. Her focus on education, wellbeing, and artistic excellence positions *Beyond the Neck* as both a profound piece of theatre and a vital tool for collective reflection.

# DRAMATIC ANALYSIS BY SCENE

## SCENE 1 – SETTING OFF

- **Summary:** Introduces all four characters and their private worlds of grief.
- **Themes:** Grief, loss, denial, emotional isolation.
- **Impact:** Establishes tone and fragmented rhythm; audience begins to piece together connections between characters.

## SCENE 2 – THE TRIP DOWN

- **Summary:** The characters' narratives begin to intertwine during a symbolic journey toward Port Arthur.
- **Themes:** Family, trauma, memory, blurred reality.
- **Impact:** Builds empathy and dramatic tension; audience senses convergence toward a shared site of trauma.

## SCENE 3 – ARRIVAL

- **Summary:** At the memorial site, memories collide. The old man's flashback and the boy's "joke" trigger emotional climax.
- **Themes:** Confrontation with trauma, collective memory, moral awakening.
- **Impact:** The audience experiences catharsis and discomfort, witnessing the deep cost of unhealed pain.

## CODA – THE VISITOR

- **Summary:** A quiet reflection; voices merge, offering stillness after turmoil.
- **Impact:** Serves as collective exhale — a reminder of remembrance and resilience.

## PERFORMANCE STYLE AND ACTOR CHALLENGES

Actors must navigate a balance between restraint and emotional authenticity. Holloway's rhythmic structure demands:

- **Precision of timing and listening**
- **Subtle emotional control**
- **Sensitivity to trauma-informed storytelling**

Performers serve as vessels rather than "characters," channeling collective experiences instead of individual psychology.

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## THE POWER OF VERBATIM THEATRE

Verbatim and documentary-style theatre transforms lived experience into shared narrative. In *Beyond the Neck*, Holloway reframes real voices to:

- **Humanise history beyond media coverage.**
- **Provide catharsis for both performers and community.**
- **Encourage empathy and awareness in audiences.**

The play becomes a form of cultural healing, acknowledging pain while reaffirming humanity. By allowing stories to be heard without sensationalism, Holloway invites reflection rather than judgement.

## DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1. How does *Beyond the Neck* use theatrical form to reflect the fragmentation of trauma and memory?
  2. In what ways does the play challenge audiences to consider empathy and responsibility?
  3. How does the absence of a traditional narrative shape the audience's understanding of grief?
  4. What role does sound and silence play in communicating emotional truth?
  5. How does the play demonstrate the potential of theatre to process national tragedy?
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## IMPACT ON AUDIENCES

*Beyond the Neck* invites its audience into an act of collective witnessing. Rather than presenting violence, it holds space for reflection and compassion. The impact lies in:

- Fostering empathy for survivors.
- Encouraging national remembrance without sensationalism.
- Demonstrating how art can process trauma and restore humanity.

Audiences leave not comforted, but changed — carrying the quiet weight of understanding.

# EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE

## CURRICULUM LINKS

- **VCE Theatre Studies** – Unit 3 & 4 (Interpretation, Dramatic Analysis, Performance Styles, Realisation of a Script).
- **VCE Drama** – Unit 4 (Documentary/Verbatim Theatre, Australian Identity, Devising from real events).

## KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Analyse the use of verbatim and non-linear narrative in exploring trauma.
  - Examine ensemble performance and actor-audience relationships.
  - Reflect on theatre's role in memorialisation and healing.
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# CONCLUSION

Beyond the Neck stands as one of the most significant Australian plays of the 21st century — a sensitive, lyrical exploration of how we carry and confront collective grief. In Theatre Works' production, the combination of Holloway's writing, Chaundy's direction, and the ensemble's authenticity transforms tragedy into profound theatre.

This is not a play about death.

It is a play about survival, memory, and the human capacity to heal — together.

# FURTHER INFORMATION

## ABOUT THE WRITER | TOM HOLLOWAY - PLAYWRIGHT

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Tom Holloway is a **multi-award-winning playwright and librettist** whose work has been staged across **Australia and internationally**. A **four-time AWGIE Award winner**, his notable plays include *Museum of Modern Love* (2024 AWGIE winner), *Storm Boy* (Sydney Theatre Company, AWGIE & Helpmann nominations), *And No More Shall We Part* (Hampstead Theatre, AWGIE & Victorian Premier's Award winner), and *Beyond the Neck* (2008 AWGIE winner). His works have been produced in the **UK, USA, Germany, France, Denmark, Jordan, and New Zealand**.

Tom has collaborated on four operas with Czech composer **Miroslav Srnka**, with a new work premiering at **Theater an der Wien (Vienna) in 2025**. He is currently under commission with **Sydney Theatre Company, Flying Penguin, and Theater an der Wien**, while also leading **storytelling and creative process workshops for young people**.

Tom Holloway's **Beyond the Neck** composes the long shadow of the Port Arthur massacre into a beautifully graduated piece of chamber theatre.

*"In writing a play inspired by the Port Arthur killings Holloway set himself an enormous challenge. How do you write about a massacre? He succeeded both in avoiding sensationalism and in honouring the experiences of the many people affected by the violence. The authenticity of the play largely lies in the fact that it is a piece of verbatim theatre and that it is styled as a set of interwoven monologues in which each character narrates their experience in their own voice. The boy, old man, young mum and teenage girl are the four lenses through which we see events, each speaking directly to us in a seemingly unmediated way."*

## SHORT MARKETING BLURB

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### BEYOND THE NECK – A POWERFUL EXPLORATION OF TRAUMA AND HEALING

In the wake of tragedy, four strangers find themselves connected by an unspoken grief. **Beyond the Neck**, by award-winning playwright Tom Holloway, is a deeply affecting and poetic meditation on trauma, resilience, and the human need for connection.

Set against the backdrop of the Port Arthur massacre, this gripping ensemble work weaves together fragmented voices to reveal the ways in which personal and collective grief shape our lives. With striking theatricality and emotional depth, *Beyond the Neck* does not re-tell history—it explores its echoes, the silent spaces between survivors, and the profound impact of loss on those left behind.

Presented by Theatre Works, this compelling production will tour in 2026 following its critically acclaimed Melbourne season. Directed by Suzanne, who helmed the acclaimed 2012 *Red Stitch* production, this revival is both urgent and intimate—a theatrical experience that lingers long after the final moment.

**A hauntingly beautiful work that confronts, compels, and ultimately finds hope in the resilience of the human spirit.**

## LONG MARKETING BLURB

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**“Deeply moving, powerfully poetic, and utterly essential theatre.”**

**Beyond the Neck** is an unflinching yet delicate exploration of trauma, memory, and human resilience. Written by Tom Holloway, one of Australia’s most compelling contemporary playwrights, this ensemble-driven work takes audiences on an emotional journey through the lasting impact of national tragedy.

Four characters, seemingly strangers, share their stories—sometimes hesitantly, sometimes explosively—as they navigate their own ways of processing grief. Through fragmented memories, confessions, and unspoken moments, *Beyond the Neck* paints a vivid and affecting portrait of survival, guilt, and the fragile threads that connect us all.

Set in the long shadow of the Port Arthur massacre, this is not a play about history—it is about its echoes. It is about the silent weight carried by those who were there, those who arrived after, and those who were forever changed by an event that reshaped a nation.

Following a highly successful Melbourne season, *Beyond the Neck* embarks on a national tour in 2026, offering audiences across Australia the chance to experience this hauntingly beautiful work. Directed by Suzanne, who led the acclaimed 2012 *Red Stitch* production, this revival captures the play’s raw intensity while delivering a fresh, urgent interpretation.

With arresting performances, evocative staging, and a deeply humane core, *Beyond the Neck* is a must-see theatrical event that confronts, compels, and ultimately reminds us of the power of connection in the face of unimaginable loss.

# TEAM

## SUZANNE CHAUNDY

*Director*

A NIDA-trained director, Suzanne Chaundy is one of Australia's leading directors, with a distinguished career spanning opera, theatre, special events, and large-scale outdoor spectacle. She is renowned for her acclaimed productions of Richard Wagner's works, most recently completing The Ring Cycle for Melbourne Opera to critical and audience acclaim.

Her directing credits include Melbourne Opera, Opera Australia, Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, Red Stitch, La Mama, and Anthill Theatre, with productions staged across Australia, Europe, the UK, Asia, Latin America, and the USA. Suzanne has also led signature works for Strange Fruit, presented at over 400 international festivals.

As the founder of the Richard Divall Emerging Opera Artists Program, she is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of performers. For *Beyond the Neck*, Suzanne brings her visionary direction and deep understanding of text-based theatre, ensuring a production of profound emotional and artistic depth.

**In 2012 Suzanne Directed the Red Stitch production of *Beyond The Neck* to critical acclaim**

*"Subtitled A Quartet on Loss and Violence, the play possesses a musicality and Suzanne Chaundy's rhythmical direction draws it out. She crafts an effect redolent of the purity and sadness of plainsong."*

*"Director Suzanne Chaundy conducts like a maestro. It's a challenging text that could collapse into sentiment in the wrong hands, but by guiding the cast to hold their emotions close, Chaundy lets the grace notes of humour offer light and understanding without the easy comfort hope or the overwhelming fear of hopelessness"*

## **DIANNE TOULSON**

### *Producer*

Dianne Toulson is a highly experienced arts leader and producer, with over 25 years in theatre management, production, and strategic development. As Executive Director of Theatre Works, she has been instrumental in shaping the company's artistic vision, championing ambitious, socially resonant productions, and fostering new pathways for independent artists.

A specialist in producing theatre that challenges and engages audiences, Dianne has a deep understanding of the logistical, creative, and audience engagement strategies required to bring complex works to the stage. Her expertise spans touring, production management, audience development, and strategic planning, with a career that has included leadership roles at Red Stitch, Women's Circus, Rollercoaster Theatre, and ACAPTA.

Dianne is passionate about storytelling that pushes creative boundaries and amplifies diverse voices. Producing *Beyond the Neck*—a powerful meditation on trauma, resilience, and memory—aligns with her long-standing commitment to theatre that sparks conversation and creates lasting impact. Her leadership ensures the production is delivered with artistic integrity, accessibility, and a strong connection to audiences, particularly through its alignment with the VCE Theatre Studies Playlist (pending approval).

Through Theatre Works, Dianne continues to drive bold, artist-first productions that engage and challenge Australian audiences.

## **JACOB BATTISTA**

### *Set & Costume*

Jacob Battista is a Melbourne-based theatre designer with a strong background in creating evocative and immersive stage environments. A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Production, Jacob has worked extensively across Australia's independent and mainstage theatre sectors.

His design credits include *The Almighty Sometimes*, *Admissions* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Flake*, *Grace*, *Iphigenia in Splott*, *Love, Love, Love* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *Driftwood*, the Musical (Umbrella Productions); *Hand to God*, *Bad Jews* (Vass Theatre Group); and *Rust and Bone* (La Mama Theatre), among many others.

Jacob's work is known for its nuanced spatial storytelling, a quality that makes him an ideal designer for *Beyond the Neck*. His approach to design will help shape the production's shifting emotional landscapes, supporting the text's exploration of trauma, memory, and healing.

Jacob was awarded the 2016 Besen Family Scholarship at Malthouse Theatre, where he worked with Marg Horwell on *Edward II*, and is a recipient of an Australia Council ArtStart Grant.

## **RICHARD VABRE**

### *Lighting Designer*

Richard Vabre is an award-winning Melbourne-based lighting designer with over two decades of experience across theatre, opera, dance, circus, and immersive installations. His work is distinguished by its atmospheric precision and ability to shape the emotional tone of a production.

A five-time Green Room Award winner, including the prestigious John Truscott Prize for Excellence in Design, Richard has been nominated for an additional ten Green Room Awards. His expertise in crafting evocative lighting environments will be integral to *Beyond the Neck*, enhancing the play's shifting perspectives and deeply affecting narrative.

## **PHILIP MCLEOD**

### *Musician, Composer & Sound Design*

Philip McLeod is a versatile musician, composer, and founding member of Blue Grassy Knoll, renowned for their original soundtracks to Buster Keaton films. Over a career spanning 19 years, he has toured extensively across Australia, Europe, North America, Asia, and South Africa, including performances at New York's Broadway, the Edinburgh Festival, and regional tours of Ireland, Holland, and Canada.

As a member of The Spaghetti Western Orchestra, Philip performed at the Montreal Jazz Festival and toured the USA and Europe. His compositions have been commissioned by the State Orchestra of Victoria, string quartets, theatre and dance productions, television, and radio plays.

Holding a degree in composition from La Trobe University, Philip brings his expertise in live performance and cinematic scoring to *Beyond the Neck*, crafting a haunting and atmospheric soundscape that enhances the play's poetic storytelling.

## **ELEANOR HOWLETT**

### *Arts Producer & PR Specialist*

With over 20 years of experience in the arts industry, [Name] has worked across Brisbane, Perth, and Melbourne as an actor, producer, publicist, and arts consultant. Their extensive background spans producing, PR, marketing, and event management, supporting independent artists and companies in bringing productions to life.

For the past decade, Eleanor has provided strategic PR and marketing solutions, helping artists navigate the challenges of promoting their work. As an independent artist and small business owner, they bring a deep understanding of industry trends, ensuring tailored, media-savvy campaigns. Committed to delivering professional yet personal service, Eleanor is dedicated to supporting artists with innovative and effective promotional strategies.

## **BELLE HANSEN**

### *Tour Coordinator*

Belle Hansen is a theatre maker, director, and performer with extensive experience in devising and delivering new work across Australia. She has collaborated with companies including Queensland Theatre, Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre, The New Work Company, and Rawcus, and is currently an Associate Artist at Theatre Works.

A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Theatre), Belle is also the Artistic Director of Frenzy Theatre Co. She is passionate about fostering emerging artists and championing new voices in Australian theatre.

As Tour Coordinator for *Beyond the Neck*, Belle brings her deep understanding of theatre-making and logistics to the production, ensuring a seamless journey for the cast and crew as the work reaches new audiences.

## **ADAM GARDNER**

### *Marketing & Promotion*

Adam Gardner is the creative force behind Theatre Works' marketing and design, shaping the visual identity of the company across print, digital, and social media. As Theatre Works' Marketing and Design Guru, Adam is responsible for the striking brochures, dynamic website, and engaging social media presence that connect audiences with the theatre's bold programming.

With an exceptional eye for detail and a deep understanding of storytelling through design, Adam crafts campaigns that not only promote productions but also capture their essence. His innovative approach ensures Theatre Works' productions reach the widest possible audience, making theatre accessible, compelling, and visually impactful.

For *Beyond the Neck*, Adam's expertise in branding and audience engagement will play a vital role in amplifying the production's reach, ensuring that its powerful themes resonate beyond the stage. Eleanor is dedicated to supporting artists with innovative and effective promotional strategies.