

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**



On Cue

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Compiled by Andrew Byrne.
Designed by Anika Chapman.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Andrew Byrne is the Head of Performing Arts at Prahran High School, and the President of Drama Victoria.

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About On Cue and STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an *On Cue* e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding productions, please visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- Director documentaries
- Design sketchbooks

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."

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 its 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, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. 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.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

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 the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Create NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

Curriculum Connections



SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 7 to 12

SUBJECTS

Drama Stages 5 and 6

Links to HSC Drama Topics:
Contemporary Australian Theatre Practice; Improvisation, Playbuilding and Acting; and Elements of Production in Performance

Links to HSC Drama Individual Project:
Monologues.

Stage 5, Dramatic Forms and Performance Styles:
Aboriginal Performance/ Scripted Drama

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

The 7 Stages of Grieving

BY WESLEY ENOCH & DEBORAH MAILMAN

THE WOMAN

ELAINE CROMBIE

DIRECTOR

SHARI SEBBENS

DESIGNER

ELIZABETH GADSBY

LIGHTING & AV DESIGNER

VERITY HAMPSON

**COMPOSER &
SOUND DESIGNER**

STEVE FRANCIS

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

IAN MICHAEL

PRODUCTION MANAGER

GENEVIEVE JONES

STAGE MANAGER

TODD EICHORN

COSTUME COORDINATOR

SCOTT FISHER

LIGHTING SUPERVISOR

JOSH NEUFELD

LIGHTING OPERATOR

DOUG NIEBLING

SOUND SUPERVISOR

LUKE DAVIS

VIDEO SUPERVISOR

MICHAEL HEDGES

STAGING SUPERVISOR

NATHAN SEYMOUR

STAGING TECHNICIAN

LILY MCHUGH

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER

JOSEPH MAYERS

1 HOUR, NO INTERVAL

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT WHARF 1 THEATRE ON 25 MAY 2021

THIS PLAY FIRST PREMIERED AT METRO ARTS, BRISBANE ON 1 SEP 1995

THE SET OF *THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING* WAS DESIGNED IN CONSULTATION AND COLLABORATION WITH MEGAN COPE AND IS INSPIRED BY HER *RE FORMATION* SERIES OF WORKS.



STC acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with whom we work and with whom we share stories.

Synopsis

One woman reflects on community, dispossession, resistance and pride. Told by a single compelling narrator, this piece weaves together cultural knowledge, memories, and personal experiences to share a powerful story of Aboriginal Australia.

A collection of vignettes that examines the timelessness of the Dreaming, the horrors of invasion, the trials of reconciliation, and police brutality, as well as the importance of kinship, speaking truth to power and the joy of telling your story your way.

The result is an engaging, moving and ultimately empowering recognition of the loss of identity and Country, the will to fight back, and a poem that blends Indigenous and western styles of storytelling.

On its premiere in 1995, this play was a radical act of First Nations theatremaking.

Now, 26 years later, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* continues to ask vital and stirring questions of the way we tell stories and how we remember the past.

The play is a work of 'faction', a combination of fact and fiction,

drawing on personal experiences of both playwrights but also from the experiences of First Nations people from invasion to today. The play explores grief through moments of sadness, melancholic reflection and truth telling that are juxtaposed with punches of satirical comedy.

Pre-Show Activity

After reading the synopsis discuss how you think the play will be presented, considering it is being performed by one actor. Consider set and use of space, acting skills, the use of projection, sound – Think Pair Share.

Thinking about the design of the performance – create a digital mood board that could inform the design of the production: set, costume, lighting, props, projection, sound. Annotate your mood board with your initial ideas and concepts for the design interpretation of *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.



Elaine Crombie in Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. Photo: Joseph Mayers

Playwrights

WESLEY ENOCH

Wesley Enoch is a writer and director. He hails from Stradbroke Island (Minjeribah) and is a Quandamooka man.

Previously Wesley was the Artistic Director at Sydney Festival from 2016 – 2020; Artistic Director of Queensland Theatre 2010 – 2015, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts; Artistic Director at Ilbjerri Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative and the Associate Artistic Director at Belvoir Street Theatre.

Wesley's other residencies include Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company; and the Australia Council Artistic Director for the Australian Delegation to the 2008 Festival of Pacific Arts. He was creative consultant, segment director and Indigenous consultant for the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games and the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

Wesley has written and directed iconic Indigenous theatre productions. *The 7 Stages of Grieving* which Wesley directed and co-wrote with Deborah Mailman was first produced in 1995 and continues to tour both nationally and internationally. Others include *The Sunshine Club* for Queensland Theatre Company and a new adaptation of *Medea* by Euripides; *Black Medea*. His play *The Story of the Miracles* at Cookie's Table won the 2005 Patrick White Playwrights' Award. In 2004 Wesley directed the original stage production of *The Sapphires* which won the 2005 Helpmann Award for Best Play. Other productions include *Appropriate*, *Black Cockatoo*, *Stolen*, *Riverland*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Headful of Love*, *Bombshells*, *Black Diggers*, *Gasp!*, *Happy Days and The Odd Couple*, *I Am Eora*, *One Night the Moon*, *The Man from Mukinupin*, *Yibiyung*, *Parramatta Girls*, *Capricornia*, *The Cherry Pickers* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

DEBORAH MAILMAN

The multi award winning Deborah Mailman AM is one of Australia's most highly respected actors on stage and screen.

Her feature credits include *Radiance*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *Three Summers*, *Bran Nue Dae*, *Oddball* and the internationally acclaimed *The Sapphires*. On television Deborah has created some of Australia's most enduring characters including the award-winning portrayals in *Mystery Road*, *Redfern Now*, *Mabo* and *The Secret Life of Us* as well as voicing 'Big Cuz' in the award-winning animation *Little J and Big Cuz*.

Deborah has also been seen in the muchloved series *Offspring*, *Cleverman* and *Jack Irish*. Deborah plays the lead 'Alex Irving' in *Total Control* and received generous critical appraisal for her performance in the first series.

One of Australia's most celebrated theatre actors, and previously a company member of the Sydney Theatre Company, Deborah's stage performances include Award winning performances in *Radiance* and *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the Helpmann Award Best Supporting Actress role in the STC production of *The Lost Echo* and the Helpmann Award nominated role for Best Actress in the theatre production of *The Sapphires*.

Foreword

BY WESLEY ENOCH AND DEBORAH MAILMAN

Every 7 years the cells in your body are replaced with new cells ostensibly rendering us a new person. Organs, limbs, skin, hair all in a cycle of change. In this constant state of change the only things that remain are memories. It has been over 25 years since *The 7 Stages of Grieving* first leapt to the stage and we are now very different people. We have changed so much, three and half times if we take science at its word, but this play is a constant reminder of the young people we were and the importance of the story we wanted to tell.

In the 25 years of the life of this play there have been multiple productions which have seen a who's who of First Nations talent at the helm – Ursula Yovich, Leah Purcell, Lisa Flanagan, Wayne Blair, LizaMare Syron, Chenoa Deemal, Kaleenah Edwards and many more – and now we add to this list the incredible talents of Elaine Crombie and Shari Sebbens. Shari talks of *7 Stages* as a rite of passage for First Nations women performers and directors and an intergenerational baton that has been passed down the years. In many ways it is not a play that is to be slavishly reproduced but is an invitation to be remade with every passing year. We once entered *7 Stages* into a playwriting award and were rejected as they said it was not a play but more a 'blueprint for a production'. In many ways this was the intention, to create a performance structure and concept that could adapt and change as the times demanded, responding to a changing world and finding new voices to say new things, in new ways, whilst always staying true to the original.

The 7 Stages of Grieving has become a classic in the sense that it is a touchstone and measure of change in the world. As the years roll on, this play reminds us of the idealism of our younger selves, our hopes and dreams, our achievements and our shortcomings, the people we have lost along the way and the new opportunities that have surfaced. We have stories of stage managers coming up to tell us they studied us in high school or Indigenous people telling us that seeing this play was the first time they saw a person like them on stage or that time a student who said they had just finished studying the 10 play and that their parent had also studied it when they were at school. Even now we sell over 1000 copies of the script a year and there have been countless productions. The young people who created this work back in the mid 90s thought they were

passionately capturing a moment in time, not something that will outlast them.

The 7 Stages of Grieving juxtaposes the stages of grief outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (Denial, Anger and isolation, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance) with the 7 phases of Indigenous history (Dreaming, Invasion, Genocide, Protection, Assimilation, Self-determination, Reconciliation). It is incredibly disappointing to see the ongoing relevance of this work and how things have not changed. Talking about deaths in custody and racism in the 1990s was an attempt to support change in our society but the past 18 months shows us so much has not changed. When we rewrote scenes in the early 2000s there was hope with the walks across bridges, the sea of hands and the reconciliation movement that we were on the cusp of a huge step forward but those changes did not manifest. With recent attempts to be constitutionally recognised, the Uluru Statement From the Heart and the treaty movement, we are allowed to hope again but we are guarded against the pain of decades of disappointment.

We think the challenge of this work is that we are entering a new phase of Indigenous history, that of Sovereignty. This eighth stage is the challenge to all who wish to take up this script, the challenge to see this play as a statement of our continued occupation in this Land and our unceded ownership. This play is a demonstration of Indigenous knowledges and technologies, histories and perspectives. *The 7 Stages of Grieving* is not only a 'blueprint for a production' but a plan to change the human heart of our nation. Change is possible. Every cell changes in your body every 7 years giving us hope that we can all be new people.

Director

SHARI SEBBENS

Shari is a Bardi, Jabirr Jabirr person and one of Sydney Theatre Company's Resident Artists. This production of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* marks Shari's directorial debut with STC. In 2020 Shari directed *Superheroes* for Griffin Theatre and this year she directed *Seven Methods for Killing Kylie Jenner* at Darlinghurst Theatre Company.

Her credits as an actor include: Sydney Theatre Company: *A Cheery Soul*, *Black is The New White*, *The Bleeding Tree*, *Battle of Waterloo*. Other Theatre: Belvoir: *Back at the Dojo*, *Radiance*. Griffin Theatre Company: *City of Gold*, *The Bleeding Tree*, *Hoax*. QT: *An Octaroon*. Black Swan Theatre: *Our Town*.

Her film credits include *The Sapphires*, *Top End Wedding*, *Australia Day*, *Teenage Kicks*, *The Darkside*. Her TV credits include *Black Comedy*, *Redfern Now*, *The Gods of Wheat Street*, *The Heights*, *Little J & Big Cuz*.

She is currently Sydney Theatre Company's Resident Director. Her awards include; 2013 Silver Logie for Most Outstanding Newcomer (*Redfern Now*), 2020 Sydney Theatre Award for Best Female Actor in a Supporting Role in a Mainstage Production (*City of Gold*). Shari studied at NIDA and WAAPA.



Shari Sebbens in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.
Photo: Joseph Mayers

Director introduction

BY SHARI SEBBENS

Like a lot of Blakfullas, this play has been floating around me for most of my life, hovering in the air.

When I was 14 years old I was booked in for a school's performance at Darwin High which got cancelled – still sour about that one... gammin!

When I was 19 I read it and it opened my eyes up to what theatre could be. What it could do for my people. It showed me that there was a place for me, as an Aboriginal woman, a Bardi and Jabirr Jabirr woman in the theatre landscape of this country. Which was something that I hadn't really thought about before.

I used 'Nana's Story' to get into NIDA, I did a little showing of 'Home Story' while I was there and then, for my Agent's Day piece which is your exit from NIDA, I performed 'Have You Ever Been Black?' Scenes, fragments of this play literally got me in, through and out of drama school. Thank you, Deb and Wes!

But, funnily enough, I've never seen it performed in full... until now.

Whenever I thought about taking part in this play, and I have been ever since I first read it, I only ever thought about it as an actor. I never in a million years imagined that I'd stage my first production of it from the director's side of things. And with Elaine Crombie performing... What is my life?!

Even more exciting to me is that I have the great privilege of counting the writers of this play amongst my friends. Wesley and Deborah are icons of theatre-making and storytelling and to have Deb on speed dial (humble brag) to ask her permission to modify the script, and to have just been Wesley's Assistant Director on *Appropriate* in the months immediately preceding *7 Stages* – it feels like Blakfulla magic, everything lines up and you're surrounded by the right people at the right time. Thank you, Ancestors!

The process of preparing for and creating this production has been so different to anything I've done before. Like I said, this play has been a part of my life for a very long time and the creative team and I have focused on bringing this play into 2021. We're very aware that this is the fourth time that STC has produced the play, and that it's been on mainstages around the country and abroad many more times over. So the questions became "Why are we putting this on again?" and "What are people expecting on their fourth time round?" And a follow up question: "How do we provide something unexpected?"

One thing we're focusing on is acknowledging the emotional weight that this piece puts on the sole, Blak performer: going deep into that grief every night and handing it over to a

majority non-Blakfulla audience. We're looking at ways to support Elaine and make sure she feels safe, make sure she can go to those big places every night but without needing to sit in them the whole time. In much the same way that we don't sit in grief forever, it ebbs and flows, it comes in and out, and it's not something that you can control. A universality we've all experienced in one way or another. There are lots of moments in the show that I've told Elaine 'will be different every night, and that's okay'.

Working with Elizabeth Gadsby, who has so much creativity, on this incredible design process has allowed us to take a major departure away from most other productions of this play. This direction came from talking about what it means to be a Blak woman in the 21st century. As Blakfullas we live in cities, we live in communities and we travel across Country, whatever we do we are still Indigenous and we're still connected in the ways that we are to our community and our Country. But it doesn't mean we have to be barefoot on stage or paint ourselves up with ochre in order to share that connection. Those are beautiful ceremonies and beautiful ways of being in the world, however, they're not the only part of us and there's a sacredness in Blak practices that must be protected every now and then. The design is also me simply having fun with the resources that we're so lucky to have here at STC. We're one of the leading companies in the world so, let's see what we can do with this piece! Let's see where we can take it. We are consciously exploring what it is to move away from the matriarchal earth mother stereotype that we, as a society, so often put on First Nations women. Not that there's anything wrong with earth mothers or matriarchs, they are the backbone and the front line of our communities. Elaine's a mother of two so she knows all about it. Hi, Andrew and Michael!

I also wanted to play with the traditional setting of a theatre show, the black box, which is so often associated with concepts like voids, emptiness, nothingness and things that are, pardon the pun, dark. So I thought - why not fill it with glitter? A sparkling reflection of Blak joy amongst the grief. We've created this Blak space (like outer space) that's also a nod to our Blak rainbow family, the First Nations LGBTQI+ community. This set allows us to look at the multitudes contained in the Blak experience. From the expanse of a glittering cosmos to the shifting sands layered in time.

In the space we're so lucky to have these beautifully constructed middens, inspired and partially designed by the Quandamooka artist Megan Cope – whose series of sculptures RE FORMATION are in some of the country's most beautiful art galleries. These middens, which represent some of the earliest evidence of the First Peoples of this land, existing in this rainbow coloured space is a wonderful intermingling of the future and the past – a reflection of the non-linear

approach to time that is at this play's heart. Working with Elaine has been absolutely unbelievable. I always knew she was great but watching her in this rehearsal period has been inspiring: you just trust her as a performer. Her stagecraft, her technique, her presence, her improvisational skills and her sense of humour have all continued to blow me and the creative team away but it's her inherent ability to truly play in the highs and lows that makes her perfect for this role and this production.

What I want the audience to know going into this play is that it is a collection of impressions and moments and fragments of grief and much like our culture it is not linear. It's a play that should be afforded, in every production, the space to explore where it sits in the time in which it is performed.

When we first started planning this show back in 2018, before it was delayed by the pandemic, we really wanted to focus on the vibrancy and the brightness of life and humour that lives in the script. But when we came to it this year – when there have been 7 deaths in custody since March and it's the 30th Anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody – our whole process and approach to the play changed. That's the reality of Aboriginal theatre and that's the reality of this play's life. It's something that evolves, almost like it's a little, living theatre organism.

I want to remind people, we are not one single culture, we do not agree on everything. We do not grieve the same way, we do not protest the same way, we contain multitudes and that is why this production of the play is one more exploration in a long line of interpretations specific to its time.

To me this play feels eternal, which makes me so happy.

But also, this play feels eternal and that makes me furious.



Elaine Crombie in Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.
Photo: Joseph Mayers

Style and conventions

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS THEATRE

Is Contemporary Indigenous Theatre a theatrical style?

In the study of Drama, we categorise theatre into style with specific conventions – think Elizabethan Theatre, Epic Theatre, Realism. This allows us as theatre-makers and critics to understand when we are working within a particular style or analysing a particular style. But is this a Western theatre construct? There is a belief in Australian theatre circles that *The Cherry Pickers* by Kevin Gilbert, which was written in 1968, was the first play in the canon of what may be classified as Contemporary Indigenous Theatre.

There has been writing on what constitutes Contemporary Indigenous Theatre, if indeed it exists as a theatrical style (Gilbert, 1998; Rowett, 1993; Syron, 2005). The following are conventions that have been suggested to be elements that may be seen in a play written by a First Nations playwright:

“I knew it was critical for us as black artists to grapple with the largest abstract themes of Indigenous life. I wanted to make sophisticated, world-class theatre, with Aboriginal ideas and Aboriginal people at its heart. And I didn’t want to be shackled by singular truths.”

Wesley Enoch

- Aboriginality according to authorship
- The presence of Aboriginal actors
- The use of dance and/or stylised movement
- Emblematic and symbolic clothing
- Traditional language
- Storytelling
- Soundscapes and traditional instruments
- Symbolic scenography or set designs that highlight the importance of the land
- Song
- Often autobiographical
- A sense of family
- Political
- Traditional cultural material, eg. Ochre, smoke, ceremonial instruments
- Direct address

What has been identified here is a rich, varied and detailed list of what conventions constitute Contemporary Indigenous Theatre. It demonstrates a complexity to what represents the theatrical

style and that it comprises a mix of the traditional with the contemporary. The complexity is further emphasised, with the ‘theatrical style’ being influenced by contemporary Western theatre.

“At the heart of this play’s importance and resonance is its complex structure, which presents concepts of First Nations storytelling to create an embodied history of this country.”

Kip Williams



MONODRAMA

A monodrama is a drama performed by one person. It can be a performance of a single character or in this case, a series of vignettes performed by one actor playing multiple characters. In *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the play is performed by one woman, where she performs a series of monologues/vignettes, transforming into each of the characters/roles.

POLITICAL THEATRE

Political theatre is a term that has been used to refer to different forms, theatrical styles or performances that comments on political/social/cultural issues, political action or protest that has a theatrical quality to it.

VIGNETTE

A vignette is a short scene. A performance that is comprised of vignettes can be presented in two ways:

1. A narrative that may be linear or non-linear, or;
2. No narrative but a series of scenes connected by a theme, concept or idea.

In *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the vignettes are comprised of monologues, movement, song and images.

DIRECT ADDRESS

In naturalistic and realistic plays, a character would never break the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience. Directly addressing the audience has been used in all other styles of theatre throughout time: Greek Theatre, Elizabethan, Commedia dell'Arte, Epic Theatre, Musical Theatre and many more theatrical styles. It has been used to give the audience insight into a character's state of mind or to give the audience information. In a monodrama it is applied differently as the audience are in some ways another character in the scene. The actor can be talking to them as a confidant, they may be implicating them as another character in the scene or they may simply be telling them a story or giving them information. Direct address can also be narration.

TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER

In any play, an actor will manipulate their expressive skills (voice, movement, facial expression, gesture, stillness and silence) to create a character. Traditionally this will be maintained throughout a performance to communicate meaning to an audience. The meaning communicated to an audience can range from contextual information (where and when the character in the play is situated), what the character is feeling and experiencing in specific dramatic moments, status, motivation, characteristics and traits. In a monodrama comprised of a series of vignettes, such as *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the actor will naturally be playing multiple characters. To drive the narrative of each scene the actor will manipulate their expressive skills to embody each character.



Elaine Crombie in Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.
Photo: Joseph Mayers

Themes, Concepts and Issues

THE 7 PHASES OF ABORIGINAL HISTORY AND THE 5 STAGES OF GRIEF

“In the early 1990s, Brisbane playwright Wesley Enoch was teaching at university; Deborah Mailman, his student, became a friend. Like Mailman, Enoch was young, black and savvy, and fast refining the tools of his theatrical trade. One idea floating about the Aboriginal world at this time was the concept of seven stages of Aboriginal history, as identified by Michael Williams, the former director of UQ’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies unit. These stages analyse Australian life from the Dreaming, through several eras of British invasion and on to self-determination and mooted reconciliation. This idea, which riffs off the famous Elizabeth Kübler-Ross model of the predictable stages of grief, chimed with Enoch”. Melissa Lucashenko (Griffith Review, 2021).

THE 7 PHASES OF ABORIGINAL HISTORY	THE 5 STAGES OF GRIEF
1. DREAMING	
	1. DENIAL AND
2. INVASION	
	ISOLATION
3. GENOCIDE	
	2. ANGER
4. PROTECTION	
	3. BARGAINING
5. ASSIMILATION	
	4. DEPRESSION
6. SELF DETERMINATION	
	5. ACCEPTANCE
7. RECONCILIATION	

In 1969, a Swiss-American psychiatrist named Elizabeth Kübler-Ross wrote in her book *On Death and Dying* that grief could be divided into five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Her observations came from years of working with terminally ill individuals.

Her theory of grief became known as the Kübler-Ross model. While it was originally devised for people who were ill, these stages of grief have been adapted for other experiences with loss too (see diagram of [Kübler-Ross model here](#)).

The seven stages of grief are another popular model for explaining the many complicated experiences of loss (Healthline, 2018).

These seven stages are:

- Shock and denial. This is a state of disbelief and numbed feelings.
- Pain and guilt. You may feel that the loss is unbearable and that you're making other people's lives harder because of your feelings and needs.
- Anger and bargaining. You may lash out, telling God or a higher power that you'll do anything they ask if they'll only grant you relief from these feelings.
- Depression. This may be a period of isolation and loneliness during which you process and reflect on the loss.
- The upward turn. At this point, the stages of grief like anger and pain have died down, and you're left in a more calm and relaxed state.
- Reconstruction and working through. You can begin to put pieces of your life back together and carry forward.
- Acceptance and hope. This is a very gradual acceptance of the new way of life and a feeling of possibility in the future.

COLONISATION

Prior to the British invasion, more than 500 Indigenous language groups inhabited the Australian continent; approximately 750,000 people in total. Indigenous Australians are the custodians of the world's most ancient living culture, 60,000 years old. Each group lived in close relationship with the land and had custody over their own Country.

In 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip and 1,500 convicts, crew and civilians arrived in Botany Bay. In the 10 years that followed, it's estimated that the Indigenous population of Australia was reduced by 90% (Harris, 2003). Three main reasons for this dramatic population decline were:

- The introduction of new diseases (smallpox, measles and influenza)
- Settler acquisition of Indigenous lands
- Direct and violent conflict with the colonisers (Australians Together, Colonisation, 2020)

Massacres of First Nations people took the form of mass shootings, driving people off cliffs and there are also accounts of First Nations people being poisoned with food laced with arsenic and other poisons.

RECONCILIATION

"Reconciliation is a journey for all Australians – as individuals, families, communities, organisations and importantly as a nation. At the heart of this journey are relationships between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples". (Reconciliation Australia)

There are 5 dimensions of Reconciliation and they do not live in isolation, for true reconciliation to occur all five dimensions must be applied in unity:

- Race Relations: All Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights and experiences, which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect and that are free of racism.
- Equality and Equity: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participate equally in a range of life opportunities and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.
- Unity: An Australian society that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared identity
- Institutional Integrity: The active support of reconciliation by the nation's political, business and community structures.

- **Historical Acceptance:** All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past and the impact of these wrongs. Australia makes amends for the wrongs of the past and ensures these wrongs are never repeated. (Reconciliation Australia, 2020)

DEATHS IN CUSTODY

In Australia, 3% of the nation's population, our First Nations people, make up 30% of the population of those behind bars. Alarming, in Western Australia 40% of prisoners are First Nations, in the Northern Territory it is more than 80%. Among young people it is even worse. Half of all children in detention nationally are Indigenous. In the NT, more than 90% of all juveniles detained are Indigenous.

There were 3,003 deaths in custody between 1979-80 and 2018-19. Of these, 1,918 were deaths in prison custody, 1,063 were deaths in police custody, 18 were deaths in youth detention and four were in another custody arrangement. Indigenous deaths comprised 18 percent (n=344) of prison custody deaths and 22 percent (n=230) of police custody deaths during this period. In the 28 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody to 2018-19, there were 455 Indigenous deaths in custody – 295 in prison custody, 156 in police custody and four in youth detention (Australian Government, 2020).

FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Aboriginal kinship and family structures are still cohesive forces which bind Aboriginal people together in all parts of Australia. Traditionally the Aboriginal family was a collaboration of clans composed of mothers, fathers, uncles, aunties, sisters, brothers, cousins and so on. In today's terms it is known as an extended family. For Aboriginal people their family provides psychological and emotional support which is important to their wellbeing.

The structure of Aboriginal families reflect cultural values, involve kinship responsibilities, and are not restricted to nuclear families. Aboriginal family obligations can often be seen as nepotism by other Australians. For Aboriginal people kinship and family are especially important. Aboriginal people have family and kinship responsibilities that are not typical of non-Aboriginal families. Aboriginal people get things done through working through their family and kinship structures (Working with Indigenous Australians, 2020).

STOLEN GENERATION

Between 1910 and the 1970s, many First Nations children were forcibly removed from their families as a result of various government policies. The generations of children removed under these policies became known as the Stolen Generations. The policies of child removal left a legacy of trauma and loss that continues to affect Indigenous communities, families and individuals today.

The forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was part of the policy of Assimilation, which was based on the misguided assumption that the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be improved if they became part of white society. It proposed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be allowed to "die out" through a process of natural elimination, or, where possible, assimilated into the white community (Australians Together, The Stolen Generations, 2020).



CULTURE

Essentially, culture refers to a people's way of life – their ideas, values, customs and social behaviour. Culture includes things like the way we do weddings and funerals, the food we like to eat, the way we dress and the music we like. Culture is passed down from generation to generation, and while cultural practices and beliefs change and evolve, many of the basic aspects remain the same.

Many Indigenous people in Australia have a unique view of the world that's distinct from the mainstream. Land, family, law, ceremony and language are five key interconnected elements of Indigenous culture. For example, families are connected to the land through the kinship system, and this connection to land comes with specific roles and responsibilities which are enshrined in the law and observed through ceremony. In this way, the five elements combine to create a way of seeing and being in the world that's distinctly Indigenous. (Australians Together, *Why are culture and identity important?*, 2020).
Read more about Aboriginal culture [here](#).

Links to Drama Stage 6 Syllabus

RATIONALE

Drama is an art form that explores the world through enactment. It is a collaborative art form that involves the creative interaction of individuals using a range of artistic skills. Drama is an important means of understanding, constructing, appreciating and communicating social and cultural values; interpreting, valuing and transmitting the past and traditions; exploring, celebrating and challenging the present and imagining the future.

Drama can be employed as a technique for exploring personal and community issues and developing social skills. It caters for a broad range of students from varying social and cultural backgrounds. It allows for the exploration of attitudes and values of many groups in Australian society as students make, perform and critically study aspects of drama and theatre in Australian and other societies and cultures.

In Stage 6, students explore Theatrical Traditions and Performance Styles including Australian Drama and Theatre. Through Drama, students will develop knowledge and understanding about and skills in:

- recognising the place and function of drama and theatre in communities and societies, past and present
- critically studying a variety of forms and styles used in drama and theatre

The student:

- critically applies understanding of the cultural, historical and political contexts that have influenced specific drama and theatre practitioners, styles and movements
- analyses, synthesises and organises knowledge, information and opinion in coherent, informed oral and written responses
- demonstrates understanding of the actor-audience relationship in various dramatic and theatrical styles and movements

Activity

It is important for students to understand why they are studying what they are studying. Why has your teacher selected the play that you will see? Why is it relevant to you and your studies? Considering the Stage 6 syllabus and the information provided above, how does studying the play *The 7 Stages of Grieving* address parts of the curriculum and are therefore relevant to your studies? Highlight words in the content descriptors that relate to analysing *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.



Elaine Crombie in Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.
Photo: Joseph Mayers

Design

In terms of design, this 2021 STC production is a deliberate departure from all previous productions. The Director Shari Sebbens researched all the past productions and noticed that they all had visual similarities, specifically the costume and set design – the slip the WOMAN wears, the earth on the stage, the ochre painting. With Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s blessing, Shari was given the freedom to take a new direction for this current production.

SET DESIGN

This production has reimagined the set design as described in the script: “A large block of ice is suspended by 7 strong ropes. It is melting, dripping onto a freshly turned grave of red earth. The performance area is covered in a thin layer of black powder framed by a scrape of white. Within the space there are projection surfaces.” The symbolism of the original set design speaks to the culture of First Nations peoples and also allows the actor to engage with the set at various stages of the performance.

“I also wanted to play with the traditional setting of a theatre show - the black box - which is so often associated with concepts like voids, emptiness, nothingness and things that are, pardon the pun, dark. So I thought - why not fill it with glitter? A sparkling reflection of Blak joy amongst the grief”.

Shari Sebbens

In ‘Home Story’ the “WOMAN takes several handfuls of red earth from the grave making a pile on the floor...makes a circle around the pile...makes eight smaller piles around the large pile within the circle...gathers up the smaller piles and relocates them on the white fringing that defines the black performing area...flays her arm through the remaining large pile and circle, destroying it”. In this scene the WOMAN is describing how the mound of earth represents “the land, the source, the spirit, the core of everything” and the circle around the pile of earth represents “culture, family, song and tradition”. The woman explains the complexities of families within Indigenous communities, who can marry who and from what mob. The end of the scene is a stirring representation of the children who were stolen from the family, with the woman destroying the symbolic family tree.



Corner Configuration for *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Design: Elizabeth Gadsby 2021 ©)

“In the space, we’re so lucky to have these beautifully constructed middens, inspired and partially designed by the Quandamooka artist Megan Cope. These middens, which represent some of the earliest evidence of the First Peoples of this land, existing in this rainbow coloured space is a wonderful intermingling of the future and the past”.

Shari Sebbens

In this production, the set design is comprised of a landscape of middens. The space affords the ability and function for the woman to interact with the space, play in the space and with its surfaces. The designer Elizabeth Gadsby worked through the play slowly and carefully, in close collaboration with Shari. There was a decision made to approach the play in a contemporary way that gives it a voice in a contemporary space. The original script described a set that was earthy and dark, whereas this production applies a monochromatic set with glimmers of colour.

The design suggests the story being told has come from the history of the land. The aesthetic of the midden landscape visually looks like layers, suggesting layers of time, and this visual symbolism also relates to the layers of meaning within the script.

The midden shells were cast using concrete, as STC’s prop department had the challenge of creating the middens with a material that was easily transportable and durable, as this is a touring production. The team experimented with sand to build the middens, but found it too harsh and abrasive so decided to work with a rubber foam instead.

Surrounding the stage are glittered walls that have various visual effects, and depending on the lighting can appear iridescent or metallic. This design choice was made to highlight the connections from the cosmos where First Nations Peoples ancestors are, the stars to the sand and the eternal Everywoman in between.

Activity

Research the work of the Artist who created the Midden artwork, Megan Cope. What are middens and how do they connect to Aboriginal Culture?

Resources

[Megan Cope’s RE FORMATION takes oyster shell as its subject](#)
[Fact sheet: Aboriginal freshwater middens](#)

SOUND DESIGN

Composer and Sound Designer Steve Francis has collaborated with Indigenous artists throughout his career. His music and sound design was intended to be “a warm blanket for Elaine to sit in”. He wanted the sound design to keep out of the way of the actor – it is not like a film where the music can tell the audience how to feel. In this play, the story and the actor guide the audience how to feel. The music and the soundscape helps Elaine to play the WOMAN, and includes recordings of her humming.

Post-Show Activity

Describe the sound, music and soundscapes you heard in this production. Identify which scenes applied sound and which didn’t and what were the intended effects. What mood was created in these vignettes? How did it support Elaine as intended? Do you think it would have felt like the ‘warm blanket’ described by Steve Francis?

PROJECTION

This production of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* applies projection quite differently than in the original script. The intention here came from the desire to produce a contemporary interpretation of the script. The designers identified that when the script was originally written, projection was a considerably new technique being applied in productions. Therefore it was used to great effect in the majority of the scenes in the play, almost becoming a second character for the WOMAN to engage with. It was also applied to assist in telling the story, fill in the gaps, and connect the audience emotionally with First Nations culture. In this production, projection is primarily used for words and dates. Bold white letters and numbers flash on the large screen behind the WOMAN.

Post-Show Activity

Make a list of the vignettes, outlining which projections are written in the script and which projections were used in the performance. Analyse the differences. Why do you think this production applied projection in such a different way from the original script?



Elaine Crombie in Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.
Photo: Joseph Mayers

Reflections and Activities for the Classroom

The following is an outline of each of the vignettes presented in The 7 Stages of Grieving. Each vignette includes some suggested activities for students to complete before and after seeing the performance. These may be drama activities, research tasks, discussion questions or simply wonderings.

The following information has been taken from the printed script and the updated scenes used for this production.

(1) PROJECTION

The prologue features a disclaimer: “Ladies and gentleman, we would like to take this opportunity to warn members of the audience that the following performance contains names and visual representations of people recently dead, which may be distressing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. All care has been taken to acquire the appropriate permission and to show all proper respects. Thank you.”

Pre-Show Activity

Why does the play open with this warning? What are the cultural implications of this warning? Research the importance of this warning and the significance it holds for First Nations people. Think about your own culture – what are the traditions in your culture following the passing of someone? Are there similarities and/or differences?

Post-Show Activity

This vignette is presented differently in this production than is represented in the script. How was this moment presented in the performance? Describe this moment and the intended effect on the audience.

(2) SOBBING

The scene begins with the faint sound of someone crying in the dark and the sobbing grows into a wail. We meet the WOMAN for the first time. Words are projected on the screen as the sobbing subsides. The scene ends with the WOMAN saying “I feel nothing”.

Pre-Show Activity

Looking back at the information on Kübler-Ross’ five stages of grief and/or the seven stages of grief, and without looking at the script, brainstorm what words might be projected onto the screen. What words do you associate with grief? The script has a detailed list of words to project on the screen – once you have brainstormed your list, compare it to the list of words written in the script.

Post-Show Activity

Describe how the STC production used AV to project the words in the script. What effect did this have? Where were the words projected? Did the actor engage with the projected words? Describe the use of sound – how did the sound designer reimagine the faint sound of someone crying in the dark?

(3) PURIFICATION

Purification begins with the WOMAN lighting up a wad of eucalypt leaves and watching them burn. As she blows out the flames and watches the embers, she sings a song for the spirits that have gone before her.

The WOMAN’s purification ritual demonstrates her desire to pull herself together and climb up out of her sorrow in order to tell the stories of her family and her people. Storytelling is the only way the WOMAN knows how to make sense of her grief or to do justice to her family.

The lyrics to the song are based on the Kamilaroi language.

GOOD CLEAN SMOKE

Yugila Yugila Munangi	Weep my heavy heart
Bullar Du	Clean Smoke
Marraba Bullar Du	Good Clean Smoke

Wesley Enoch is a proud Noonuccal Nuugi man, Deborah Mailman is a Bidjara and Maori woman, Shari is a Bardi, Jabirr Jabirr person, Elaine Crombie is a Yankunytjatjara, Warrigmal, South Sea and German descended woman.

Pre-Show Activity

“Australia’s First Peoples have been living on the Australian continent for millenia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia is made up of many different and distinct groups, each with their own culture, customs, language and laws. They are the world’s oldest surviving culture; cultures that continue to be expressed in dynamic and contemporary ways.” (AIATSIS)

Use the [AIATSIS map](#) to locate where Kamilaroi country is. Also, locate the Countries of the creative team behind the production: Wesley Enoch, Deborah Mailman, Shari Sebbens and Elaine Crombie. Consider where you were born, can you locate the Country on the AIATSIS map? If you weren’t born in Australia, who are the traditional owners of the land you were born on?

Post-Show Activity

Considering occupational health and safety, having an open flame on a stage in a theatre can be a dangerous venture that must only be used in a controlled environment. How was the Purification scene presented in the production you saw?

(4) NANA’S STORY

This is the first vignette in the play where the WOMAN talks, reminiscing over memories of her family gathering to farewell her Nana. Memories of bright floral dresses, 50 people gathering together for a month of mourning, meals, the sound of country music, the boys painting up and dancing and the girls “showed a thing or two as well”. The strong sense of family and community pour through the WOMAN’s heartfelt retelling of this experience.

Pre-Show Activity

Using the script, create a series of Tableaux to represent Nana’s Story. What images stand out to you from the script? You could play the song “Delta Dawn” by Tanya Tucker to underscore your tableau performance.

Post-Show Activity

In the script it details that floral patterns are projected onto the WOMAN’s dress and that there is a textured soundscape. How was this scene interpreted in the performance you saw? Was it true to the script or did it deviate from it?

(5) PHOTOGRAPH STORY

In this vignette the WOMAN speaks of the tradition of removing photographs of the deceased from view, placed with love in a suitcase. “Everything has its time ... Everything has its time ...”

Pre-Show Activity

The stage directions for this scene describe a chair being scraped across a wooden floor, the sound of footsteps receding and a clock ticking. Why do you think the playwrights included this specific stage direction in the script? What meaning might this communicate to the audience?

Post-Show Activity

The script describes the projected image of an open suitcase filled with photographs, followed by a procession of slides focusing on the details of the photographs. How was this interpreted in the performance you saw? Why do you think this choice was made?

(6) STORY OF A FATHER

In this vignette the WOMAN sits on the edge of a grave lamenting her father's passing and the inevitability of death. The serious nature of this scene – the loss of a parent – is juxtaposed with a satirical ending. The WOMAN says, “The one thing that I find comforting about it (death) is that everyone’s got to do it”. She then lists off some Australian identities, politicians and journalists, “just for being stupid”: Phillip Ruddock, Bruce Ruxton, John Laws, Alan Jones, Stan Zemanek, Pauline Hanson, David Oldfield, Cheryl Kernot.

Pre-Show Activity

Research the Australian identities listed at the end of Story of a Father. Why were they included in this monologue? Why did the playwrights specifically name and shame them?

Post-Show Activity

In this production, a new list of names was added: “John Howard, Andrew Bolt, Derek Chauvin, Andrew Bolt, Pauline Hanson, Jacinta Price... Andrew Bolt, Sam Newman/anyone who has down blackface, Alan Jones, Scotty from Marketing and here’s to my sister girl Kerri-Anne Kennerley”. Why were these people added to the 2021 production? Why would the current creative team decide to name and shame these identities?



Elaine Crombie in Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.
Photo: Joseph Mayers

(7) FRONT AND CENTRE

This vignette speaks to the aftermath of someone being the victim of the Stolen Generation. The WOMAN speaks of an Aunty who attends the funeral of someone who had passed, but the WOMAN knew that the Aunty did not know the deceased, as he had no family. When the WOMAN unexpectedly visits the Aunty she asks her why she attended the funeral, and the Aunty replies “I might be related...I never knew my family”.

Pre-Show Activity

Go to the website [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#) and watch some of the stories of people who were victims of the Stolen Generation.

(8) FAMILY GALLERY

A collection of family photos are projected like portraits in a gallery.

Post-Show Activity

How was this scene presented in the performance? Why do you think this was changed from the original stage directions in the script? Did it have the same impact that the original script described?

(9) BLACK SKIN GIRL

In this vignette the WOMAN dances around while she attempts to evade projected letters of the alphabet while singing a song in language. At the end she gives up, removing her dress, topless, with the letter Z on her chest. This vignette can be interpreted as a conflict of language. Many First Nations languages have been lost since colonisation, with First Nations people being forced to speak only in English, seeing the demise of their native language.

Bului yuli mie

Black Skin Girl

Naia gigi warunguldul

I will be strong always

Post-Show Activity

This vignette has been presented differently than the original script and past productions. In this reimagined interpretation the WOMAN dances around, childlike, singing. As the song progresses the words become stuck in her throat. She implores the audience to remember her language as the translated English takes over.

Comparing the original stage directions and the 2021 interpretation, why do you think this change was made? What impact did this have on the audience?

(10) INVASION POEM

Invasion Poem speaks of the colonial violence inflicted on First Nations people. In the poem the WOMAN recalls white men visiting her home, taking a seat in her father's seat, initially offering gifts. The WOMAN listens to the men, nodding respectfully even though she probably can't understand them. The poem then shifts into violence; the WOMAN is abused. Her children are stolen, not permitted to speak their language, not permitted to dance, their culture gone.

Pre-Show Activity

Using stylised movement, recreate this scene. You might even incorporate tableau into your performance in some of the more intense moments. How can you capture the experience of the WOMAN in this scene? From welcoming, to confusion, to abuse, to loss.

To assist you with the respectful recreation of this scene, there is helpful advice in the teaching resource [Teaching First Nations Content and Concepts in the Drama Classroom: Advice for Teachers](#). The teaching resource was produced by Ilbijerri Theatre Company, Monash University and Drama Victoria.

Post-Show Activity

Reflect on how this scene was represented in the performance you saw. This is an emotional recollection of an experience of the WOMAN. How was this presented in the performance? What expressive skills did Elaine apply to tell this story?

(11) 1788

This vignette is a satirical recreation of what First Nations people may have thought when the colonisers landed in Botany Bay. The WOMAN tells the boats that they are “taking up the whole bloody harbour! Just get in your boat and go. Go on, go on get!”.

Pre-show Activity

Watch the short film *Babakiueria* (1986), a satirical film that explores the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society by looking at an alternate reality whereby Aboriginal people instead play the role of invader and coloniser.

Create a short scene that looks at a satirical response to the landing of the first fleet in Botany Bay, 1788. Consider the First Nations people who saw the boats arriving and think about what they may have been thinking in this moment.

Satirical comedy can be broken down into four specific techniques (Edley, 2018):

1. **Exaggeration:** The first step to crafting a successful satire is figuring out what you want to exaggerate. This can be subtle and on a smaller scale, such as in character depictions or in a character’s inner world, or it can be as full-on as exaggerating settings, even the whole narrative scenario itself.
2. **Incongruity:** The second technique of satire is all about inserting things into out-of-place environments, juxtaposing them if you will, in a way which makes them appear absurd. The desired effect, of course, is to convey a satirical message by giving it an air of absurdity.
3. **Reversal:** The third technique of satire is reversal, in which a situation is subverted to present an inversion of how things really are back to the audience. It usually involves a story which presents the opposite of normalcy (as we understand it) in order to make a satirical point about it. By contrasting the two extremes, reversals can allow satire to be viciously pointed and extremely thought-provoking.
4. **Parody:** The fourth technique of satire is parody, which relies upon the art of imitation to make fun of a situation, especially of someone in a higher power.

Post-Show Activity

In the script for this scene it reads “The date 1788 appears”. In this production, as the audience are seated waiting for the performance to begin, there are three dates projected onto the screen: “26 years”, “30 years” and “233 years”. What is the significance of these three dates in relation to the play? Investigate the importance of these dates to the play. When was the play written? What was one part of Australian history that this play was written in response to? What happened 233 years ago?

(12) MURRI GETS A DRESS

Delivered in the style of stand-up comedy, this vignette shows the institutionalised racism that First Nations people face on a daily basis. From the WOMAN being suspected of shoplifting while looking for a dress in a store, to being blamed for farting in an elevator, to not being helped while her car was broken down. Through comedy, the WOMAN explores racism that is placed upon First Nations people on a daily basis in everyday settings.

Pre-Show Activities

Explore the script of MURRI GETS A DRESS as a comedian. Work with a partner to develop a performance of this monologue, taking note of the specific timing that you would need to elicit laughter from the audience. Where are the punchlines? How can your delivery of the monologue get a laugh from the audience?

Post-Show Activity

This vignette contained the only dramatic set change in the performance. Analyse why the design team chose to make this change.

(13) AUNTY GRACE

In this vignette the WOMAN recalls the time when Aunty Grace returned home from London where she lives with her “Englishman” husband. The monologue explores how the WOMAN’s family had in some way disowned Aunty Grace, placing her photograph in the suitcase even though she is still alive. Was it the emotional abandonment of marrying an Englishman or the physical abandonment of moving to England? This marriage is perhaps even more loaded since the British colonised Australia in the first place, and now the family seems to think that Aunty identifies more with the British than with the Indigenous community she comes from.

Post-Show Activity

In the performance, the WOMAN retrieves a suitcase from amongst the middens and instead of filling the case with red earth as described in the script, she fills the case with grit and shells from a midden. Was this an effective adaptation from the original script? As there is no ‘grave’ in this performance, the final stage direction of placing the case on top of the disturbed grave has been removed. How did this scene end in the performance you saw?

(14) MUG SHOT

In this monologue the WOMAN recalls the real-life story of Daniel Yocke. She speaks in an emotionless, court-report style, to retell this story of racial profiling and police brutality. At moments during the monologue, she breaks from the court-report style showing that she is unable to contain her pain and grief. Only by distancing herself from the material can the WOMAN divorce herself enough from her grief and rage to deliver the facts.

Pre-Show Activity

Research the statistics around Aboriginal deaths in custody and the imbalance of Aboriginal people incarcerated in Australia.

Post-Show Activity

Analyse Elaine’s application of her expressive skills in this monologue. How was she able to communicate to the audience the moments of pain, grief and frustration? How did the use of projection support the delivery of the monologue?

The following text was added to the updated script for the 2021 production. Why do you think they made this change for the 2021 production?

“At the hostel they threw his brotherboy Jojo in the back of the paddy wagon with him and Jojo knew straight away something was wrong with Boonie. He was yelling out to the coppers but the dogs ignored him. Jojo tried to check his pulse, but they had them both in handcuffs, he kept trying to help him but he knew Boonie was gone. When they finally got to the Watch house they looked closer and seen he wasn’t breathing. He had no pulse, he had no heartbeat. Them useless bastards at the Watch house didn’t know what to do so they called the ambulance. Ambulance rocks up and they have to pump needles into him, pounding his chest, giving mouth-to-mouth while them pigs just stood back and watched. They took him to the Royal Brisbane Hospital, pounding and pushing his limp body. Pounding and pushing his limp body. Pounding and pushing his limp 19 year old body”.

(15) MARCH

“Don’t tell me we’re not fighting! Don’t tell me we don’t fight most of our lives”. In this vignette the WOMAN speaks of the peaceful march organised following the death of Daniel Yocke. However, this peaceful, grieving march is reported by the media to be a “defiant Aboriginal march...a traffic stopper”, inferring it is inconvenient and annoying. “6,000 people in rhythm pounding at the road but we’re not yelling, we’re not fighting. We’re grieving”.

Pre-Show Activity

Create a chorus performance of this monologue.

Post-Show Activity

Reflecting on the performance, analyse how Elaine performed this monologue. How did she apply her expressive skills and stillness and silence to create a suitable mood in the performance? How would you describe the mood of this scene?



(16) BARGAINING

“The sound of hammering. The WOMAN slams a nail through two pieces of wood. She stands and carries the wooden cross over to the grave. As she drives it into the red earth, the words FOR SALE are revealed”.

“What is it worth?”

Pre-Show Activity

What is the significance of this scene? Discuss the issue of land ownership in relation to First Nations people (Suggested resource: [Creative Spirits website](#))

Post-Show Activity

Analyse how this vignette was staged. Was it performed differently than in the original script? Why was this choice made?

(17) HOME STORY

In this vignette the WOMAN explains the complexity of the First Nations people’s system of family and relationships, and how these have been impacted through colonisation and the Stolen Generation. Due to genocide, there are fewer First Nations people and even the WOMAN barely understands her own history and traditions.

“Now imagine the children are taken away from all of this. Are you with me?”

Post-Show Activity

As there is no 'red earth' in this production for the WOMAN to make the piles with, a visual metaphor for the lands, culture and tradition, how was this scene interpreted? Analyse the use of the middens in this scene and how Elaine engaged with them to tell this story.

(18) STORY OF A BROTHER

In this vignette the WOMAN tells the story of her brother who was arrested after an altercation with police, where he pushes a police officer after protesting at his friend's arrest, which he felt was an injustice. The shame from being arrested, charged and placed on probation saw her brother quit his job, lose the dole, turn to alcohol to cope, and break his probation. "This is how it starts, the cycle. The cycle". In this monologue, the WOMAN communicates to the audience how insidious cycles of crime, poverty, depression, and substance abuse weave their ways into Indigenous communities.

Pre-Show Activity

Have one person narrate the moment when the arrest is made, with other students playing the brother, his friend and the police. How can the person playing the brother communicate to the audience that he feels an injustice is taking place? How does it feel to play the character of the brother, with his fear of police brutality towards Aboriginal people?

Post-Show Activity

In this performance the scene is titled STORY OF A NEPHEW, not STORY OF A BROTHER. The stage direction "The WOMAN demonstrates" has been cut from this production. How did that change affect the performance of this monologue?

(19) GALLERY OF SORROW

A collection of images appears, depicting the phases of Aboriginal History – Dreaming, Invasion, Genocide, Protection, Assimilation, Self-determination and Reconciliation.

"Nothing. Nothing. Nothing... I feel nothing".

Post-Show Activity

What feeling did this scene evoke in you as an audience member? Reflect on this moment. How were the projections applied and how did this make you feel?

(20) SUITCASE OPENING

The Woman's voice assails the audience with a sense of all encompassing sorrow. She takes the Suitcase, opens it, gently returning the shells and grit to the midden. The Woman grieves. The Woman leaves. Music fills the space. There is a feeling of catharsis and release. (This scene is different from the original script).

Post-Show Activity

Again, reflect on the feeling this scene gave you as an audience member. Describe how the music was used in this scene to evoke a feeling of catharsis and release.

(21) WRECK / CON / SILLY / NATION POEM

The abstract poem the Woman shares in this scene breaks down the word "Reconciliation" –the Australian movement to repair relations between white Australians and First Nations people – and points out the ridiculousness of the concept by mocking the four smaller words that "reconciliation" comprises (wreck, con, silly, nation).

Post-Show Activity

How did the design elements (set, lighting, costume, props) combine to create effect in this vignette? What expressive skills did Elaine employ? How did they contrast to her delivery of other vignettes?

(22) EVERYTHING HAS ITS TIME

Pre-Show Activity.

Go the [Reconciliation Australia website](#) for some excellent resources and ideas on how to truly engage and participate in Reconciliation. What are some actions you or your school could take this year?



(23) PLEA (ORIGINAL SCRIPT) PLEASE (2021 PRODUCTION)

“These are my stories. These are my people’s stories, They need to be told”.

The WOMAN carries the suitcase as she approaches the audience. In this vignette the WOMAN speaks openly about her emotions and her grief. Has she become desensitised to it? Can she still carry the burden of this grief? She places the suitcase down at the feet of the audience – is she inviting the audience to share in her grief, to carry the burden with her and all First Nations people?

Following this vignette, the 2021 creative team have added a joyous surprise to the performance. A lip sync to the song ‘Don’t You Worry’ by First Nations electronic music duo ‘Electric Fields’. The WOMAN dons a colourful cape and performs the song for the audience.

Post-Show Activity

The weight of this scene is heavy on the WOMAN. Analyse this moment in the play. How did this make you feel? With the addition of the lip sync performance, analyse this juxtaposition. Why was the choice made for the WOMAN to change her costume in this moment? Describe and analyse the costume design in the performance.

(24) WALKING ACROSS BRIDGES

This vignette reflects on the Bridge Walk for Reconciliation in Sydney in 2000: “They said over ¼ of a million people walked that day, and then more in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide ... all around the country. Like a song it caught on ... walking across bridges.”

Pre-Show Activity

Research the historical context of the Bridge Walks in 2000 (Suggested resource: [National Museum Australia website](#)). Reflect on what has or hasn't changed since this protest movement.

(24) EPILOGUE (A NEW SCENE ADDED FOR THIS PRODUCTION)

2021 Projected on the screen

Post-Show activity

Dates projected on the screen have been an important part of this production. Analyse the meaning behind this choice. What impact was intended on the audience?

Discuss why this scene was added to the production. What was the intention behind it?

In this scene the WOMAN talks directly to the audience, asking them questions. What were the responses in the performance you saw? Were you compelled to respond?

And finally, will YOU turn up?



References

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Left to right: Ian Michael (Assistant Director), Elizabeth Gadsby (Designer), Elaine Crombie, Todd Eichorn (Stage Manager), Shari Sebbens (Director) in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. Photo: Joseph Mayers