



# Education Resources Pre-Production

STC Ed presents

## RUBY MOON

By Matt Cameron



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Education Resource written by Kerreen Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy

#### KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

#### RUBY MOON

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### ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

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### ABOUT STCED

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### CREATIVE TEAM

**Director** – Sarah Giles

**Set & Costume Designer** – Pip Runciman

**Lighting Designer** – Matt Cox

**Composer and Sound Designer** – Kingsley Reeve

### CAST

**Sylvie** – Eliza Logan

**Ray** – Jo Turner

**Voice of Ruby** – Rose Richards



### THEMES

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Absurdism

Fairytales

Lost Child Narrative

Suburbia

Belonging

### RUBY MOON

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Ruby Moon dressed in a red dress goes to visit her granny at the end of the street and never returns. Every child's fear and every parent's nightmare comes to life in this dark absurdist tale of Australian suburbia.

Sylvie and Ray Moon, a couple from the town of Flaming Tree Grove, are struggling to come to terms with the disappearance of their six year old daughter, Ruby. Hoping to trigger someone's memory of having seen Ruby they keep a child mannequin who is dressed in the same clothes Ruby was last seen in. They are ready to give up hope, until the arm of Ruby's doll turns up in their letterbox. They retrace the events that lead up to her disappearance and set about to conduct their own investigation by interviewing all the neighbors in the street. Their weird and eccentric neighbours include a born again Christian, an ex-soldier, Ruby's former babysitter and a mad scientist. All hint of knowing what happened to Ruby. The strangest and most elusive character is referred to as 'The Wizard'- a former runaway who returned home to find his parents had moved away. He is never seen, but often knocks on the Moons' door.

Haunted by their missing child Ray and Sylvie descend further into a nightmarish world where the boundaries between the real and imaginary become increasingly blurred. When Sylvie reenacts her daughters return as Ruby we are left wondering if they will ever get over not knowing what happened to their missing child.

The story continues ...

What happened to Ruby? Where is she? Will she ever be found? Did she ever exist?

## HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

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*Ruby Moon* combines the elements of absurdism, gothic horror, and fairy tales with the paranoia of suburban myths as well as drawing upon from real-life headlines about missing children.

Matt Cameron describes his work as absurdist. Absurdism has its origins in the European Surrealist movement of the 1920's. Playwrights Alfred Jarry and Eugene Ionesco were exponents of the philosophy of Absurdism. The devastation of the first world war left many people with a profound sense of dissatisfaction with the old world values and beliefs. The Absurdist theatre was fiercely anti-realist and anti-scientific. Devoid of moral decency humans were shown to be as monstrous and irrational as the world they lived in. The European fairytale of industrialization bringing progress and enlightenment had come to an end and the Absurdist's were looking for new ways to understand and represent human behaviour.

Fairy tales are often associated with moral lessons, daydreams and wish-fulfilment fantasies of being rescued, becoming wealthy, finding true love or our way back home. They are often structured as quest narratives where the main character meets both helpers and mentors on their journey that always closes with a happy ending.

Fairytales have their origins in religious stories, cultural myths and legends that have been passed down by generations of storytelling most often from adults to children. European fairytales such as the Grimm Brothers or Hans Christian Anderson collections were reflections of the cultural values and historic times they were written in. Many of the original stories were violent and intended to frighten children into 'good behaviour' by dramatizing the consequences of 'bad behaviour'. Walt Disney Studios revised many of these traditional fairytales to make them more acceptable to middle-class audiences from the 1930's (See 1937 version of *Snow-white and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella* 1950, *Sleeping Beauty* 1959). This shift occurred with the advancement of child psychology and developmental studies in child learning that challenged harsh discipline practices. Critiques of the hidden meanings within fairytales began in earnest in psychoanalytic and literature studies from the late 1950's and peaked with

feminism in the 1970-1980's resulting in numerous adaptations particularly into the popular 'fractured' fairytale as a form of satire and social commentary on the representation of patriarchal family structures, femininity and power.

Matt Cameron chooses not to give his audience a fairytale happy ending with Ruby returning home. While drawing inspiration from real-life missing children cases he has been careful not to have his play read as based on any one story. *Ruby Moon* is concerned for the symbolic 'lost child' that represents not just one particular child but all children (including adults who were children once themselves).

The Australian psyche has a long held fascination with the stories of lost children. The 'lost child' narrative is imbued with a sense of loss generated by the possibility of returning home. Typically, the Australian 'lost child' narrative involves an innocent child wandering into the bush, who becomes disoriented and frightened, and learns a lesson about the limits to their bush survival skills. However, some never return leaving us to contemplate the worst and the mystical.

### **Consider**

The main action of *Ruby Moon* is from the parent's point of view.

Fairytales reflect a society's attitude toward children.

Traditional fairytales end in happiness.

Beneath absurdist drama's grotesque comedy there is a deep concern for the human condition.

Ruby is present through her absence.

## Additional Resources

### *The Writer*

Interview with Matt Cameron 'What I Wrote' series DVD Ronin Films

Trailer gives brief excerpts of definition of Absurdism and his approach to writing.

<http://www.whatiwrote.com.au/cameron.html>

### *Lost Child Narratives in Australian Literature*

- *Billabong* series Mary Grant Bruce
- *Picnic At Hanging Rock* Joan Lindsay (Peter Weir film)
- *Rabbit Proof Fence* Doris Pilkington (Phillip Noyce film)
- *Walkabout* James Marshall (Nicolas Roeg film)
- *Tomorrow Series* John Marsden
- *Dot and the Kangaroo* Ethel C Pedley

*A natural(ised) home for the Lintons: Lost children and indigenising discourse in Mary Grant Bruce's and John Marsden's young adult fiction* 2009

Elsbeth Tilley, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

<http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/australian-studies/article/viewFile/1574/1876>

### *'Missing Children' Films*

*The Golden Child* 1986

*A Cry in The Dark* 1988 (dramatization of Azaria Chamberlain case)

*The City of Lost Children* 1995

*Gone Baby Gone* 2007

*Changeling* 2008

### *Fairytale Critiques*

A.S Byatt Introduction to *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*

Catherine Orenstein *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked* 2002

### *Red Riding Hood Adaptations*

#### Books

*The Little Girl and the Woolf* James Thurber

*Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf* Roald Dahl

*The Book of Fairytales* Angela Carter

## Films

*In the Company of Wolves* directed by Neil Jordan

*Freeway* directed by Matthew Bright

### *Absurdism & related movements - Surrealism & Dadaism*

Plays of Alfred Jarry – *Ubu Roi* series

Plays of Eugene Ionesco – *Rhinoceros, The Chairs, The Lesson, The Bald Prima Donna*

Paintings by Salvador Dali, Jean Miro

Sculpture by Marcel Duchamp

Photographs by Man Ray, Dorothea Tanning

Writings of Andre Breton, Albert Camus, Franz Kafka

Film by Luis Bunel

### *Gothic/Fairytale Hybrids*

Films of Tim Burton – *Corpse Bride, Edward Scissorhands, Beetlejuice, Sleepy Hollow*

*Shrek* series

*Princess and the Frog* directed by Ron Clements 2009 – social-political re-casting of traditionally white princess as African –American (aligned with Obama Presidency)

*Tangled* 2011 Walt Disney re-working of Rapunzel fairytale





**AIM:** To introduce the play's theme of belonging and to increase level of empathy and understanding of the characters experience of loss.

Have you ever had something or some-one precious to you go missing - a favourite toy, a beloved family pet, a special piece of jewellery?

Have you ever had a good friend or family member who you've lost touch with?

How old were you?

What happened?

How did you feel at the time?

Did you ever find your missing item/person?

If so, how were you reunited? If not, how do you feel about the loss now? Have your feelings changed?



**Devise & present** a short scene based on your personal story of loss.

### Consider

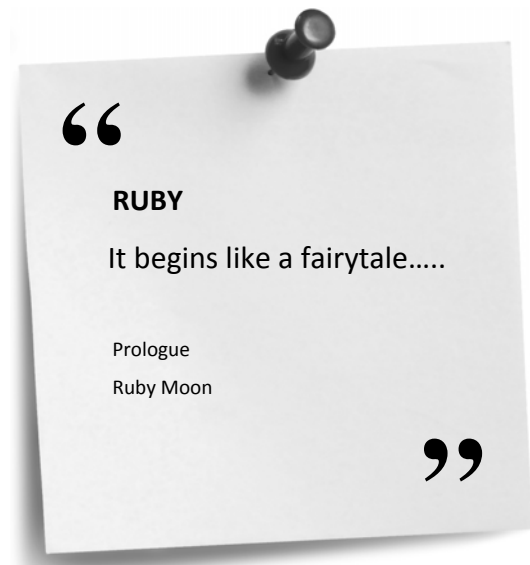
Where?

When?

What?

Who?

Why?



### Extension- Alternative Endings

If your scene ends happily with the character being reunited with their missing person/object repeat the scene with an alternative 'unhappy' ending. And visa versa.

Discuss the different outcomes.

What did you notice about how people deal (or don't) with loss in their lives?

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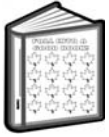
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**AIM:** To identify and understand the function of the fairytale narrative embedded within the play.



### Research Fairytales

Do you have a favourite fairytale?

If so, what is it and why?

If not, do you have a favourite story you liked to be told as a small child?

What was the story and what did you like about the story?

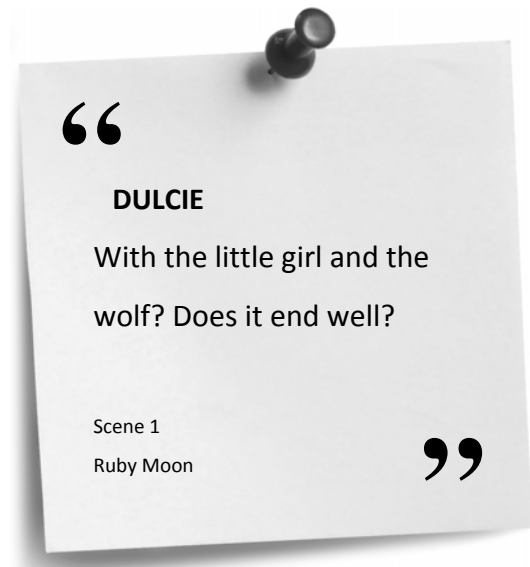
### Discuss

Why do we tell children fairytales?

Who tells children fairytales?

What is the purpose of fairytales?

**List** the typical features of a fairytale.



*Ruby Moon* references the Brothers Grimm's Little Red Riding Hood fairytale.

**Research** the different versions of Little Red Riding Hood.

**Compare** and contrast the versions.

**What** is the purpose of the story?



**Devise & Present** a version of Little Red Riding Hood with a complication.

**Consider** changing the

Setting – urban, rural, marine

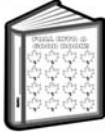
Time – past, present, future

Style – western, sci-fi, musical, soap opera etc

Characters – incorporate characters from other fairytales (as in the films *Shrek*, *Tangled*)



**AIM:** To identify and explore the application of absurdist elements in a dramatic text.



### Research Absurdism

**Make** a list of typical elements in an Absurdist play

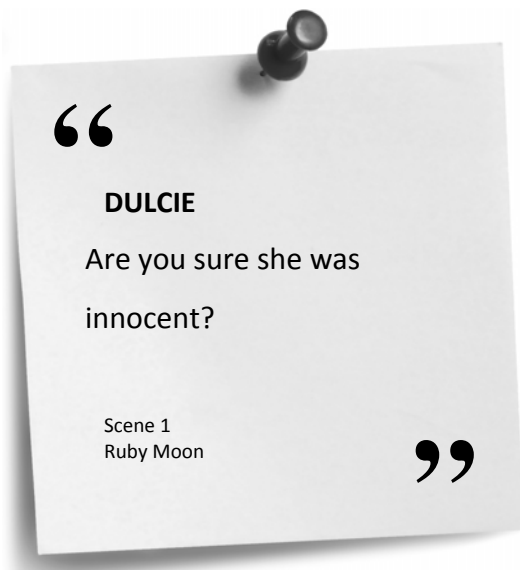


### *What it is not!*

**Walk** around the room.

**Name** everything you see 'what it is not' – a desk is a bed, a door a waterfall, a pen is a phone and so on.

**Devise & Present** an absurdist scene where something changes into something it is not.



For example in *Ruby Moon* the mannequin for Sophie becomes a substitute for the real Ruby.

### Consider

Exaggerated characters and situation

Grotesque behaviour

Anti-realistic

Anti-scientific – where something becomes what it is not in reality (a man becomes a rhinoceros as in Eugene Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*)



**AIM:** To develop and apply skills in devising and performing absurdist drama on theme of suburbia and belonging.



### **Story Word Interruption**

In pairs.

A begins a story.

B interrupts the story with random word/s (one at a time)

A must incorporate the word/s into the story

Repeat and reverse roles.

How did the stories change with each word interruption?



**Write** a list of noun words on separate pieces of paper - objects, places, things, person, quality, action (be bold and surprising in your ideas)

**Put** in a container & mix them up.

**Choose** 5 random words (without looking!)

**Devise & Present** a scene entitled 'In Our Street' incorporating the 5 words.

**Don't forget** your Absurdist checklist – grotesque, anti-realistic, exaggerated!



**Extension:** Repeat prepared scene with audience/facilitator introducing elements from *Ruby Moon* that must be immediately incorporated into the scene.

For example: a knock at the door, sudden darkness, a full moon, a doll's arm ...

**Discuss** the scenes

How did they change – mood, character behaviour, narrative logic?

How did the audience react?

**Performance Viewing Task – While watching Ruby Moon:**

**Look & Identify** the absurdist elements in the production

**Consider**

Stage Design

Costume Design

Music & Sound Design

Acting Style

Mood & Tone of the performance

Audience's responses

How did you feel during the performance – did your mood change?

When and why?





**AIM:** To explore the theme of memories, mourning and secrets in *Ruby Moon*

Memory Stories

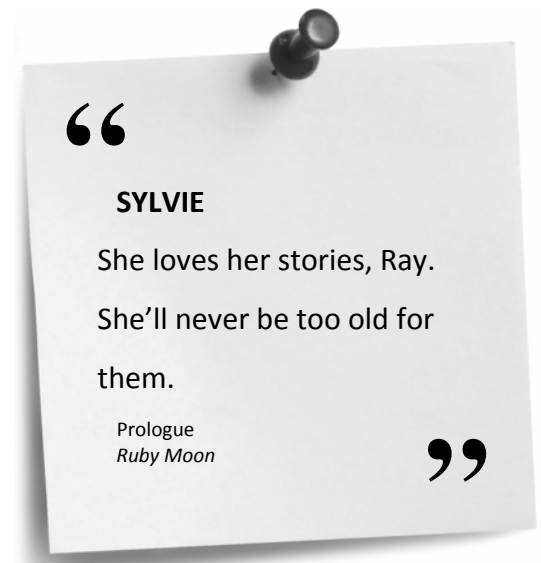
Telling stories is a way of remembering people and events. Sylvie and Ray keep the memory of Ruby alive by telling stories.



**Why** is it important for Sylvie and Ray to not forget Ruby?

**What** are other ways that Sylvie and Ray remember Ruby?

**Why** are there no photos/images of Ruby?



“

**SYLVIE**

She loves her stories, Ray.

She'll never be too old for them.

Prologue  
*Ruby Moon*

”



Extension

**Research** a real life case study of a missing child, such as Madeleine McCann who went missing in 2007.

**What** happened?

**Was** the child ever found?

**How** did the parent/s respond? Relatives and friends, general public, and the media?

**Share** your research findings with the class.

Mourning & Loss: The Nine Stages of Grieving

In 1969, Dr Elizabeth Kübler-Ross developed a five stage grief cycle which outlined the specific ways in which people deal with loss and trauma. Since then, the cycle has been expanded to include nine stages:

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Physical Distress
- Guilt
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Testing
- Acceptance

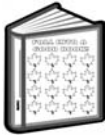
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**Research** the \*Nine Stages of Grieving (or Seven Stages of Grieving if preferred).

**Divide** into groups, allocating a different stage to each group.

**Compare** the Nine Stages of Grieving with the behaviour and actions of Sylvie and Ray and other characters from the play.

**Support** your ideas with specific references from the play (including quotes).

\*NB: Remember the stages function as a guide only to help us understand how people experience loss and trauma.

### Truth, Lies and Secrets



**Explore** the question 'Where is Ruby?'

**Consider**

Ruby was abducted by aliens.

Ruby was taken by the Wizard.

Ruby is behind the curtain.

Ruby's disappearance was staged by her parents.

Ruby never existed.

**Defend** your theory of what has happened to Ruby with evidence from the play.

For example, could Ruby have disappeared into Professor Carl Ogle's 'Portable Black Hole'?

CARL: Strictly I didn't do anything. But I take full responsibility for my invention. My theory is I must have left the lab door unlocked, allowing Penelope to creep in. She was always hungry for mice. She'd already eaten three. Ruby must have followed her in and stumbled upon my first prototype. Much larger diameter. Very powerful. Would have taken them both in an instant.

### Performance Reflection

**What** do you know about Sylvie and Ray by the end of the performance?

**How** does the ending reflect the director's vision of the play?



**AIM:** To examine the use of imagery, language, and narrative voice in *Ruby Moon*

RAY: I could read you the story, baby?

SYLVIE: Yes, tell me the story, Ray. I want to hear the story.

With the voices. Do the different voices.

### Image & Narrative Voice



**Why** does Sylvie ask Ray to read her the story in “different voices”?

**When** reading a dramatic story aloud to an audience how can you bring the text to life?

**How** do adults often read stories to children? And why?



**Read Aloud & Discuss** the selected text:

RAY:[*reading*] ‘It had been one of those scorching summer days

When all the world appears ablaze

Sprinklers swivelled to a hypnotic beat

Cicadas pulsed to the shimmering heat

Concrete was caramel under your feet and

The ice-cream van turned slow motion into the dead-end street.

The setting sun lit the flame trees one by one

Her mother looked down the grove like the barrel of a gun

As the little girl turned like a page to wave farewell

Before skipping away down the path to hell.’

*He snaps the book shut.*

### **Consider**

Key Imagery

Word usage – Alliteration ‘scorching summer’

Assonance ‘slow motion’

Rhyme ‘days’ , ‘ablaze’

Metaphor – the summer heat is like ....?

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Interpretation – of an Australian suburban street in summer

Narrative Structure – how does the story begin, develop and end?



**Brainstorm** ideas for the ‘different voices’ – how they might change and develop?

For example, the first voice might begin softly and be spoken in a reassuring tone.

**Take** a line each

**Speak** each line with a different voice to convey a different intention, a different mood to create a different dramatic effect.

+ Extension

**Create** a moving body sculpture that becomes the story.

**Speak** the text with accompanying movement.

+ Extension

**Compare & Contrast** Ray’s story text with the following character dialogue.

SYLVIE: Don’t stop. Keep going.

RAY: I can’t do the story tonight.

SYLVIE: You have to.

RAY: I can’t bear it.

*He gets up and slams the book down*

SYLVIE: I want to know how it ends.

RAY: It doesn’t end well.

SYLVIE: I don’t want to hear that story.

RAY: Grow up, Sylvie! Grow up!

*He releases her. Silence.*

### Consider

Length of sentences

Emotional tone

Rhythm

Character motivation

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**Perform** the scene from Ray’s story telling through to include the above dialogue.

**Discuss** the shifts in narrative voice with reference to structure, tone and dramatic effect.

Music As Text

RUBY: [singing, voice-over] ‘She’s not in the room

Hide from the world

The curtain girl...

Behind the curtain girl,’



**Discuss** the use of music and song in the production.

**Why** does Ruby communicate only through song?

The music of the sixteenth century song ‘Greensleeves’ (written by Henry VIII) features in the production:

Alas, my love, you do me wrong,<sup>2</sup>

To cast me off discourteously.<sup>2</sup>

For I have loved you well and long,<sup>2</sup>

Delighting in your company.<sup>22</sup>

Chorus:<sup>2</sup>Greensleeves was all my joy<sup>2</sup>

Greensleeves was my delight,<sup>2</sup>

Greensleeves was my heart of gold,<sup>2</sup>

And who but my lady greensleeves.

**Discuss** the significance of the ice-cream van’s music–box playing ‘Greensleeves’.

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### Creative Missing Persons Report



**Write/Perform** Sylvie and Ray giving a 'Missing Persons Report' to Detective Holloway.

Your missing person's report for Ruby Moon will need to provide the following information with specific references (including quotes) from the play text:

- physical description of Ruby including distinguishable features
- a recent photograph (or drawing ) of Ruby
- where and when Ruby was last seen or heard from
- places Ruby may visit
- list of any medical problems or medications Ruby may need
- names and contacts of friends associated with Ruby.



Reference: Australian Federal Police guidelines

<http://www.missingpersons.gov.au/site-help/>



Extension

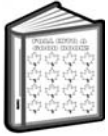
**Design** a 'Missing Person' advertisement for Ruby.

**Research** 'Missing Children' websites.

**Design** a web site to assist in finding Ruby.



**AIM:** To examine the cultural practices and social issues represented in *Ruby Moon*



*My parents are always warning me ...*

**List** warnings parents give to their children.

**Discuss** the responsibilities of being a parent.

**Debate** 'What makes a good parent?'

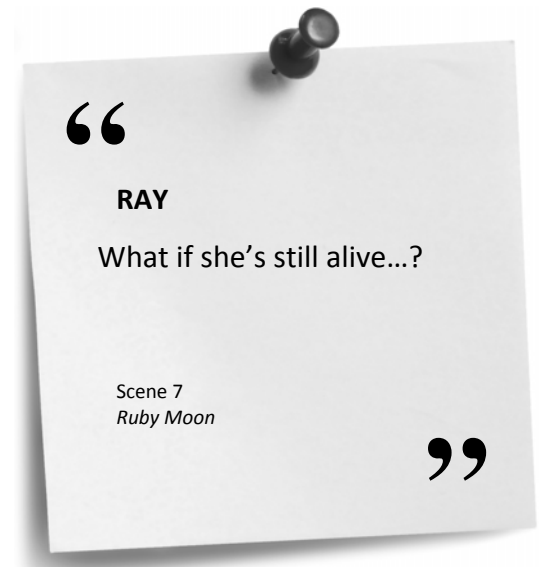
### Consider

Different Cultural Practices, Values & Beliefs

Legal Responsibilities

Social Expectations

Generational Differences



SYLVIE: I want to know how it ends.

RAY: It doesn't end well.

SYLVIE: I don't want to hear that story.

RAY: Grow up, Sylvie! Grow up!



**What** kind of parents are the Moons?

**Why** does Ray call Sylvie "baby"?

**Why** does he tell Sylvie to "grow up"?

**Who** is the real child in *Ruby Moon*?



**Write/Perform** a scene based on your research and discussion of parent warnings to children.

### Consider titles

'Never speak to strangers'

'Be careful not to stray from the path'

'What I put on Facebook'

'Not doing my homework'

*Ten Years Later ....*

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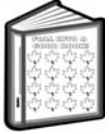


**Write/Perform** two alternative endings.

'Ten years later Ruby returns home ...'

'Ten years later and Ruby has still not returned ...'

### Performance Reflection



**What** does the director want the audience to be feeling and thinking about at the end of the performance?

**List** three things you think are important about this play for adults and young people.

### Absurdism

The playwright, Matt Cameron never reveals where Ruby is but instead offers up varying perspectives on what may have happened to her, who might be responsible and where she might be.



**How** is this approach consistent with Absurdism's emphasis on anti-realism, the grotesque and deep concern for the human condition?

### Adaptation

'*Ruby Moon* takes the typical Australian lost child narrative, replacing the bush with the suburban street.'

'It's that ability to prosper as a cautionary story and benign children's tale, as the basis for a literary work or an improvised bedtime yarn, which makes the fairytale so enduring. More than anything, they're flexible.'

Craig Mathieson

The Sydney Morning Herald, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011



**Discuss** these statements with reference to Matt Cameron's adaptation of the fairytale to a contemporary Australian setting.



**AIM: To increase understanding and appreciation of *Ruby Moon's* design concept and directorial approach.**

'The theatre space I designed is really very plain and bland when you look at it ... it's just a room with curtains!' - Pip Runciman

Space Transformation

In *Ruby Moon* the space essentially stays the same throughout the performance and there are no scene changes. Everything happens in one space. Within this space lie deep-seated memories and secrets and worlds within worlds within worlds.



**Discuss** how designer, Pip Runciman, transforms the ordinary and real world into the strange and unexpected?

**Consider**

- Use of Light
- Sound & Music
- Objects & Furniture



**Does** the design reference a specific time period? If yes, which period/s? If no, why not?

Character & Costume Transformation

The characters in *Ruby Moon* are all archetypes.

Archetype (Greek for 'original pattern') is a basic model from which copies are made. In drama archetype characters represent the most typical and essential characteristics of human behaviour. They are characters who demonstrate universal personality types and roles. For example: the rebel, the hero/heroine, the mother, the witch, the villain, the traitor, the snob, the beggar, the trickster.

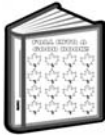
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**Research** the archetypes that commonly appear in fairytales – if the wolf is the villain archetype in *Red Riding Hood*, who does the grandmother represent?

**List** three things about each character in *Ruby Moon* that makes them an archetype.

*Ruby Moon's* costume design is believable and everyday with simple changes.

The actors play multiple roles throughout the performance.

### Performance Reflection

**How** do the actors transform from one character to another?

#### **Consider**

Costume	Posture	Facial Expression
Archetype Characteristics	Physical Gesture	
Voice	Movement	



**How** does the costume design support the actors having to play multiple characters?

**How** do the design choices impact on the directorial approach and acting style of the performers?

### Object Transformation

In *Ruby Moon* the unexpected is explored in the use of everyday objects.



**Select** an every day object that has the potential to represent many things. For example a chair, a pencil, a book.

**Pass** the object round the circle.

**Transform** the object into something unexpected.



Extension

**Devise/Present** a scene when an object must change three times - a book becomes a hat, a pen a gun, a chair a space ship ...

### Performance Reflection

**How** many everyday objects were used in unexpected ways during the performance?

**How** effective was object transformation as a theatrical device?



### Everyday Suburbia Becomes A Nightmare

Pip Runciman was inspired by Tim Burton's film *Beetlejuice* for its depiction of the ordinary urban environment contrasted against the strange world of the characters hidden within the house.

In designing *Ruby Moon* she has aimed to capture the 'otherworldliness' within the ordinariness of Australian suburbia. Where we recognize things we might find in our own world as normal at first glance but then are noticed to be not quite right when we look again.



**Describe** a typical Australian street.

**Consider** key features of your own street, what makes it typically Australian, what makes it unique?

**Make** an Image Board (Poster or Drawing) of the 'Everyday Suburban' street – include photos, drawings, objects.

**Re-Make** the Image Board transforming the 'Everyday Suburban' street into the 'Nightmare' street.

**Drawing** on the contrast between urban everyday 'boring' and the strange bizarre

**Change** the images by adding, subtracting, exaggerating elements, make them strange, creepy, otherworldly, weird.

**Remember** your Absurdist checklist – anti-realistic, anti-scientific, grotesque, exaggerated.

### Performance Reflection

**How** do the designer and director achieve a claustrophobic and otherworldly mood?

**Describe** three moments in the performance when shifts occur from ordinary suburbia to the unexpected and strange.



**Compare & Contrast** the vision and design concept of this production with the vision and design concept of the STC's 2008 production of *Ruby Moon* directed by Andrew Upton - a link to a video of Andrew and the designer, Jo Briscoe discussing their approach:

<http://archive.sydneytheatre.com.au/education/performance.asp?pid=212&typeid=4&secid=1>

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