



Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Investec Bank present

ZEBRA!

By Ross Mueller



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



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

Zebra!

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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Lee Lewis

Set Designer – David McKay

Costume Designer – Julie Lynch

Lighting Designer – Damien Cooper

Sound Designer – Paul Charlier

A/V Designer – Shane Johnson

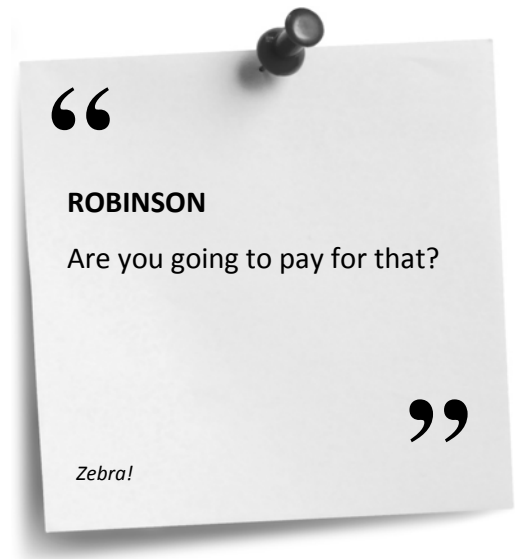
Fight Director – Scott Witt

CAST

Jimmy – Bryan Brown

Larry – Colin Friels

Robinson – Nadine Garner



THEMES

GFC (Global Financial Crisis)

Mid-life Crisis

Americanism

Zebra!

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Midtown New York City, mid January 2009. Sunday morning and it is snowing. Preparations are underway for the inauguration of the first African-American president Barack Obama amidst a failing economy due to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The bar is empty of people, but the television screens are on and the jukebox still playing.

Businessman Larry has agreed to a blind date to meet his daughters' fiancée at an Irish Bar "The Big House" before they go onto a baseball game. Jill Robinson, the proprietor is trying to close up and initially refuses to serve him. He claims to know the former owner, Marty (later revealed to be her deceased husband). She softens and agrees to sell him one drink. Larry says he's a millionaire having made his fortune from the Dot Com boom of the 1990's. He attempts to bargain with Jill into selling the bar's prize collection of sporting memorabilia. Although unconvinced of his wealth she joins in the haggling game. The bargaining soon moves onto an age guessing competition, debates about their respective music tastes and generational differences between them.

They are interrupted by the entrance of bleeding ex-pat Australian Jimmy (who has been in the bathroom prior to Larry's arrival). The blood is the result of Jimmy having come from the scene of a car accident that appears on one of the television sets. Larry is impressed by Jimmy's daring rescue of three beautiful women from a burning limousine. Jimmy introduces himself, as Larry's to be son-in-law. Larry is obviously uncomfortable that Jimmy and he are of a similar age. Jimmy a former volleyball champion and real estate entrepreneur reveals that he has lost all his money in the GFC. Like "two old men having a pissing competition" they become increasingly competitive and testy with each other resulting in a 'Zebra like' physical brawl. Jill tries to intervene but ends up worse off than they do. She disappears to the bathroom.

Larry goes behind the bar looking for a pen and paper so they can make a list of Jimmy's assets to write up a draft of a pre-nuptial agreement he is insisting on to protect his daughter's interests. Instead he finds a bankruptcy statement. Jill returns and asks them to leave. Larry offers to buy the bar. Jill angrily replies it is not for sale. He continues to try to barter items

from her until she breaks down. Reciting Edgar Allen Poes' *The Raven* she likens her situation to the hopelessness expressed in the famous Baltimore poem. Finally she accepts a cheque from Larry and the two men leave for the game. She turns the sign on the door from "closed" to "open".

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

Zebra! draws on the events of the global financial crisis (GFC) to explore the male mid-life crisis, the legacy of the baby boomer generation and Australia’s relationship with all things American. The economic, military and cultural influence of America is far reaching around the world. While many of us may have never travelled to the United States most of us have grown up with American films and television shows in our living rooms. The success of many Australian actors and film industry professionals in America is testimony to the on-going cultural links between the two countries.

Zebra! is set in New York City the heartbeat of the western world’s financial institutions during the GFC of 2007 - 2010. The GFC was triggered by a collapse in the United States banking system, which resulted in the closure of financial institutions, government bailouts of banks, and massive losses in global stock markets. Much of the problem stemmed from the over investment in real estate with the majority of Americans living an unsustainable lifestyle. The housing market was hit hardest. People were given loans by unscrupulous financial lenders to buy houses that they couldn’t afford to pay back. As interest rates increased many people were forced to default on their loan payments. The downturn of the real estate market contributed to the failure of key businesses, financial institutions and declines in consumer wealth, confidence and economic activity. The loss is estimated to be in the trillions of U.S. dollars.

Renowned American economist and winner of the 2001 Noble Prize in Economics, Professor Joseph E Stiglitz outlines the events that led to the GFC : “House prices were soaring while the income of most Americans was going down. Almost all the growth was going to very few people at the top. We were consuming beyond our means.” Professor Stiglitz believes the situation was made worse by the American Government’s rescuing of failing investment institutions: “The banks that were being bailed out by government had failed in their basic job of assessing creditworthiness. They loaned to people who couldn’t pay. Government bailed them out and that led them to engage in more and more of these bad lending practices.” He describes Americans as living in a “bubble” about to burst, the economy doomed to becoming a “slow train wreck”.

Zebra! narratively situates the GFC in the foreground and the historic inauguration of the first

African – American President Barack Obama in the background of the drama. With the new administration came great hopes for both social and economic change and although the play ends with a gesture of giving and hope the United States continues to make slow recovery as well as many countries such as Greece and Ireland who are still suffering the economic fall out effects from the crisis.

Reference:

Professor Joseph Stiglitz *Freefall :Free markets and the sinking of the global economy* 2010
public address at Murdoch University

<http://media.murdoch.edu.au/causes-of-the-global-financial-crisis-unveiled>

Additional Resources

On the Global Financial Crisis

An Overview with reference to Australia’s response.

<http://www.canstar.com.au/global-financial-crisis/>

Historical representations of other Economic Crises:

Irish Potato Famine 1845-1852

1930’s Great World Depression

- The photos of the 1930s depression by Dorothea Lange

<http://history1900s.about.com/od/photographs/tp/greatdepressionpictures.htm>

- *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck 1939 (and the film version of the same name);

The Wall Street Crash of 1987

Wall Street film directed by Oliver Stone 1987

Americanism in Australia, September 3, 2010

http://www.ehow.com/facts_6891353_americanism-australia.html

On Mid-Life Crisis

<http://divorcesupport.about.com/od/isdivorcethesolution/f/midlifecrisis.htm>

Edgar Allen Poe’s poem *The Raven*

Christopher Walken’s rendition of Poe’s *Raven*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFy7XidbnKw>

Zebra!

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 **AIM:** To introduce the theme of the GFC and its dramatization in *Zebra!* through social satire.

Prior to the GFC the US was living in an unsustainable “bubble”...
Somewhere between two-thirds and three quarters of our growth was related to real estate. House prices were soaring while the income of most Americans was going down. Almost all the growth was going to very few people at the top. We were consuming beyond our means.

Professor Joseph Stiglitz



Discuss

Have you ever wished for something you couldn't afford to pay for?
Did you buy it anyway? If so, how - credit?

Our past behaviour is a good indicator of how we will behave in the future.
Do you have a financial plan?
How do you pay for the things you need and want?
What does it mean to be living 'beyond your means'?



Research the GFC and its affect on the world economy, including Australia.

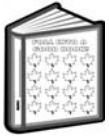
Do you know anyone who was affected by the crisis?
Describe their circumstances.



Watch 'Sponser An Executive' a satire on the plight of 57 year old Company Executive 'Wayne'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDC0qcf0kzE>

Who does 'Wayne' represent?
What do the makers of this video want their audience to think about?



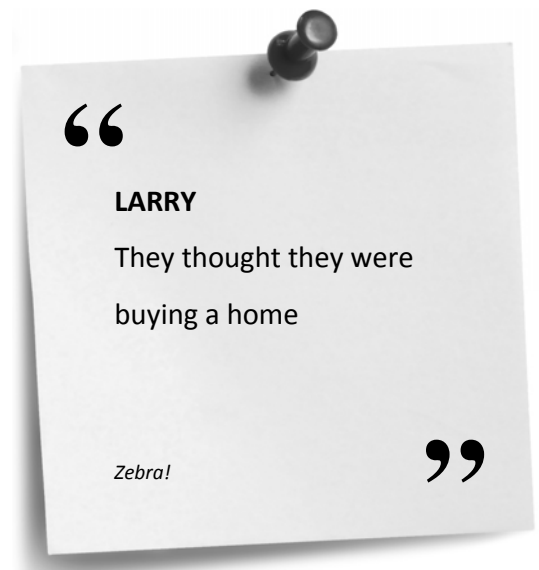
Write & Present an alternative ad that shows a sympathetic view of some-one who has suffered a financial loss through the GFC.



Write & Present a scene where one of the characters is experiencing financial hardship.

How did they get into this situation?

How will they solve their problem?





AIM: To compose and analyse comparative satirical texts .



Research real –life cases in Australia of economic hardship during the GFC.

Discuss your research with the class.

What do the stories have in common? How do they differ?

The GFC promoted a satirical response from the media especially when a lot of the people responsible for the crisis were people at the top of the financial industry – such as wealthy banking and financial executives.

Here are some examples of typical jokes posted on financial websites:

What's the difference between Investment Bankers and Pigeons ?
Pigeons are still leaving deposits on brand new BMW's

What's the capital of Iceland ?
About \$5.50

What is an optimistic outlook?
Investment broker ironing 5 shirts on Sunday.

I bought a toaster yesterday. They gave me a bank with it.

I tried to get cash from the ATM today but it said "insufficient funds". I don't know if that meant them or me.

Henry Paulson was out jogging without his guards. All of a sudden a man with a ski mask jumped out from behind some bushes with a gun. The masked man said "Give me all your money!" Unwilling to do so, Paulson said, "You can't do this, I'm the US Federal treasury secretary!" The man then replied,... "Oh, never mind then. Give me MY money!"

Reference::

<http://www.aussiestockforums.com/forums/showthread.php?t=17035&page=1>



Draw a cartoon using one of the joke captions listed

Devise and tell a joke based on your real-life case study
OR **Draw** a cartoon OR **Stage** a satirical photograph

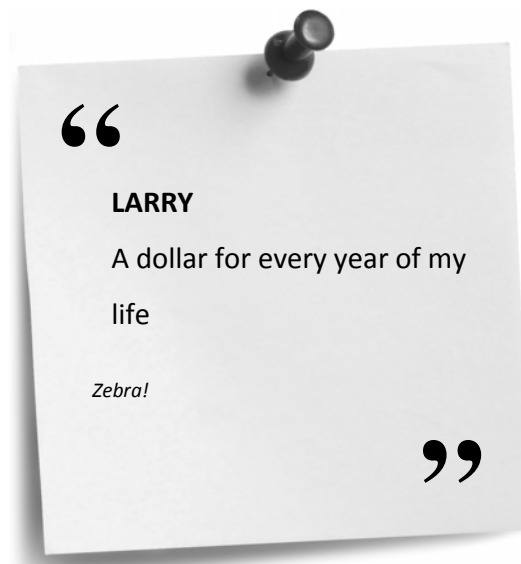
Zebra!

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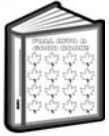
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WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?



AIM: To examine the affect of the GFC on a diverse range of individuals and communities.



Research how Australia has been affected by the GFC.

List ways you or your family have been affected (or not) by the GFC.

Ref: Journalist Paul Colgan lists 50 ways the GFC has changed Australia.

<http://www.thepunch.com.au/articles/50-ways-the-gfc-has-changed-australia/>

Research successful businesspeople and entrepreneurs.

How were they affected by the GFC?

For example:

Australian Suzi Danfis General Manager of the Australian Businesswomen's Network
<http://www.dynamicbusiness.com.au/articles/articles-entrepreneur-profile/suzi-dafnis-the-pitfalls-of-starting-and-growing-a-business.html>

American Mark Zuckerberg Founder of Facebook



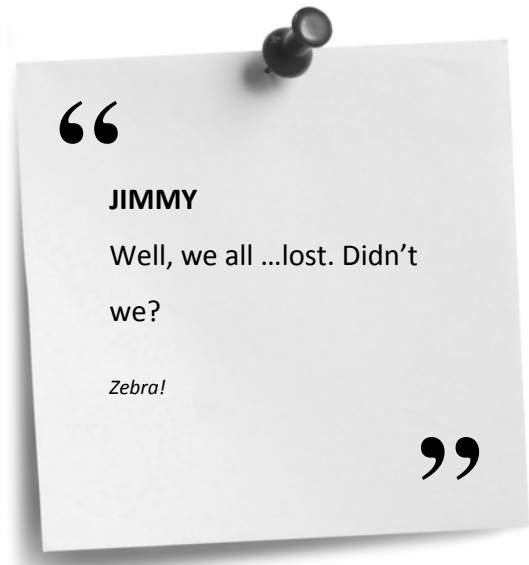
Discuss the headline 'They don't encourage you to be an entrepreneur at school' in light of Australia's response to the GFC and what you are taught at school about financial investment, business management and fiscal responsibility.

'They don't encourage you to be an entrepreneur at school' by Andrew Carswell

Daily Telegraph September 18, 2010

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/clever-aussies-are-the-real-gfc-heroes/story-e6frezz0-1225925548938>

DEBATE For Vs Against





AIM: To introduce and explore the theme of Americanism.

“We are all American now”

Brendon O'Connor
Associate Professor
University of Sydney's U.S. Studies Center

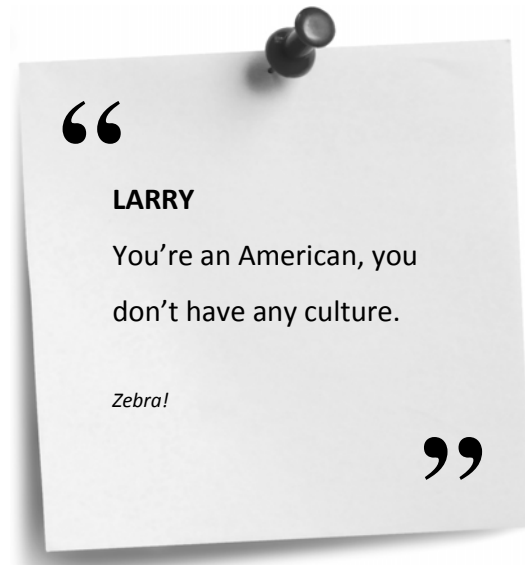


Define the term ‘Americanism’.

Conduct a Survey in your class, school, community on what television shows and films people watched/will watch this week;

Present your findings to the class.

Discuss the survey results with reference to the question ‘How American are we?’





AIM: To explore animal study as a basis for characterization and as a vehicle to understand human behaviour.

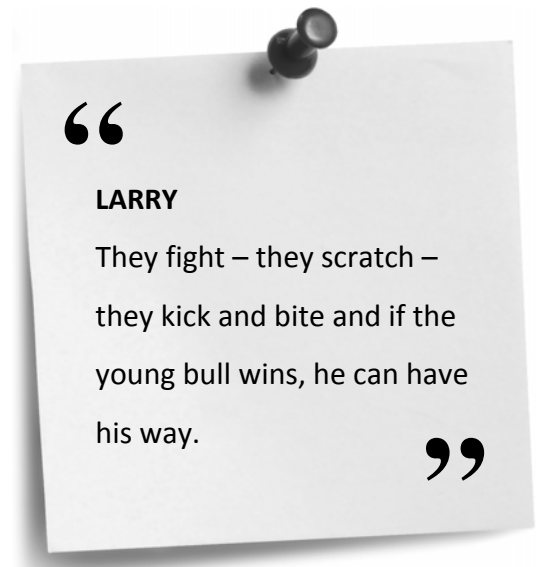


Why does Larry describe himself as a Zebra?
What is the significance of the play's title?

What animal could Jill Robinson be?

Discuss your responses in relation to Robinson's character and behaviour.

Why does she quote from Edgar Allen Poes' poem 'The Raven'?



Animals

Give each student a specific animal or give one from a random list. There are two of each animal – two males, male and female, or two female combinations. Make the selection diverse – big birds, little insects, felines, reptiles, fish etc.

Consider

Habitat

Diet

Physical Characteristics

Behaviours

Explore ways of moving - walking, sitting, hanging etc

Explore sound and vocalizations – sniffing, grunting, roaring etc

Be attentive to detail!

ZEBRA!

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Imagine & Enact

The animal is hungry.

You must show how your animal eats. Greedily? Slowly?

Secretly? In a stationary position? On the move? Timorously? Aggressively?

The animal is thirsty.

How do they drink? In gulps of little sips? With their minds on other things or with total concentration?

The animals fight among themselves.

How does each animal manifest its rage and its aggression?

The animals are tired and go to sleep.

How? Standing, sitting, lying down? On a branch? In a burrow?

The animals wake up and go in search of their partner, male or female.

When two animals have found each other they must perform a greeting and a parting scene, remaining faithful to their animal's way of behaving.

Discuss the behaviour of your animal under different conditions (sleeping, drinking, fighting etc) and observations of your partner animal. How were you different, how were you similar?

Reference: Augusto Boal *Games For Actors and Non-Actors* 2002



Extension:

Enact the sample dialogue scene focusing on playing Larry and Jimmy as male Zebras.

Larry is the father Zebra and Jimmy is the potential suitor to his daughter, Monica.

100% Zebra

75% Zebra 25% Human

25% Zebra 75 % Human

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Jimmy What do you do?

Larry To prove that I'm still breathing? Yes, yes! How do I fill the lonely hours of my day?

Jimmy I'm not suggesting anything like that. Okay golf.

Larry CNN and Documentaries and golf Jimmy. I play a lot of golf. That's my schedule really.

Jimmy Great.

Larry I think it's a little boring.

Jimmy Surprise me.

Larry What'd you say?

Jimmy I said – that's surprising.

Larry You're a liar.

Jimmy I'm sorry – I'm a little nervous.

Larry What have you got to be nervous about?

Jimmy I want to make a good impression.

Larry How do you think that's going?

Jimmy I'm a little nervous.

Larry What do men get?

Jimmy What's coming to them. I'm going to fight you.

Discuss the scene variations as the performers shifted from animal to human and visa versa.

+ **Continue** enacting the sample scene extended to include the character of Robinson.

Repeat the animal/human percentages based on your discussions on what kind of animal you think Jill is.

Larry What's coming to them. I'm going to fight you.

Robinson No. Not in this bar, not today.

Larry I will pay you for any breakages. You know I'm good for it.

Robinson He's been in a car accident!

Jimmy I'm not going to fight a one armed man.

Robinson Larry, I understand your anger.

Larry No you don't.

Jimmy Physical violence is no way to broker a family relationship.

Larry Right, whatever. But – we are animals.

Jimmy Come on, Larry.



AIM: To understand the function of memorabilia nostalgia in *Zebra's* representation of the character's eroding values and beliefs in an ever-changing and unpredictable global world.

Memorabilia refers to the collection of objects that represent the past.

Do you collect memorabilia for a beloved sports team, club, hobby, music group, entertainer or celebrity?

Do you know someone who does? Describe their collection.

What other mementoes of significance do you keep to remember the past?

Why do we keep reminders of the past?

The walls of 'The Big House' are covered with Irish cultural mementoes and American sporting Baltimore Ravens, Baltimore Bullets, Baltimore Clippers and Boston Celtics memorabilia.

The characters of *Zebra!* collect and bargain for prized items as a way of preserving the past and maintaining their cultural identity. They compare songs and discuss generational differences as a way of trying to understand their changing circumstances.

Discuss the significance of Simon & Garfunkel's *Mrs Robinson* as the play's closing song.

Now & Then



Research some of Sydney and Australia's well known memorabilia landmarks – Luna Park, Hard Rock Café, the Rocks and Wharf area.

Research the history of the Wharf area and re-development of the Pier 4 site to house the Sydney Theatre Company.

Collect images of the Rocks and Wharf area then and now.

Interview someone who has lived and/or worked in the area over a long period of time - a staff member of the STC, a restaurant or shop owner, or a long term resident.

How has the area changed? How have the people who live and/or work in the area changed?

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Find a location in your school, home or in your local area where memorabilia is displayed.

Describe the range of objects.

Take photos of the location and of particular objects that interested you.



Devise a 2 minute scene where two people reminisce about a past event in a location you have researched.

Consider

Restaurant/Shop in the Rocks area

The Wharf Restaurant, Sydney Theatre Company

Sports Club House - football, yachting, golf, fishing etc.

Retirement Home

What will the images and/or cherished objects be that trigger memories for the characters?



Extension

Compare & Contrast *Zebra!* with Ray Lawlers' 1959 play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* where themes of memory, memorabilia nostalgia and loss are also explored.

“

ROBINSON

You changed the music and
you hurt me.

Zebra!

”



AIM: To understand how place and location create inspiration for production design and narrative.

Zebra's "The Big House" set design is based on one of New York's oldest pubs, McSorley's Old Ale House.



Research McSorley's Old Ale House.

<http://www.mcsorleysnewyork.com/home.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyG-NfqgV9Q>

Compare & Contrast the source location and the set design of *Zebra*.

Consider

Sound

How did the sound design create a sense of time and place in *Zebra*?

Costume

How did the costume design define the character's different social status?

Set

How did the set design serve the themes of the play?

How did the layout of the set assist the actors in their use of the stage? Consider the small intimate scenes contrasted with the larger actions such as the fight scene.

Lighting

How did the lighting design contribute to mood and atmosphere?

ZEBRA!

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Big & Small

'The Big House' is a meeting place of past and present, old and new, big and small business.

Discuss the statement with reference to the character journeys and the values and beliefs represented in *Zebra!*

Outside & Inside

In *Zebra!* there are many references to the Big House as a safe haven from the outside world – accidents, muggings, bankruptcy, snow.



Read EE Cummings's 1923 poem 'I was sitting in mcsorley's. outside it was New York and beautifully snowing.'

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-isittingmcsorleys/poem.html>

Read Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven* 1845

<http://www.heise.de/ix/raven/Literature/Lore/TheRaven.html>

Compare & Contrast these texts with *Zebra!*'s representation of inside and outside as metaphors for safety and fear of the unknown.



Write & Present a 2 minute scene where two characters take shelter from an external threat – bad weather, ghost, a debt collector.



Write & Present a 2 minute scene entitled 'Closing Time'

Character A wants to close up business for the day/night.

Character B must try to persuade A to stay open.

Consider

Hairdressing Salon

Restaurant

Bank

Airport Check-In

Dentist Surgery



“

LARRY

“Welcome to the Big House”

– from sea to shining sea!

Zebra!

”