

STC Ed presents a Staged Reading of

David Williamson's

The Removalists

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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

DAVID WILLIAMSON'S THE REMOVALISTS – STAGED READING

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2012

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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

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ABOUT STC ED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about/us

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Jemma Gurney

CAST

Sergeant Simmonds – tba

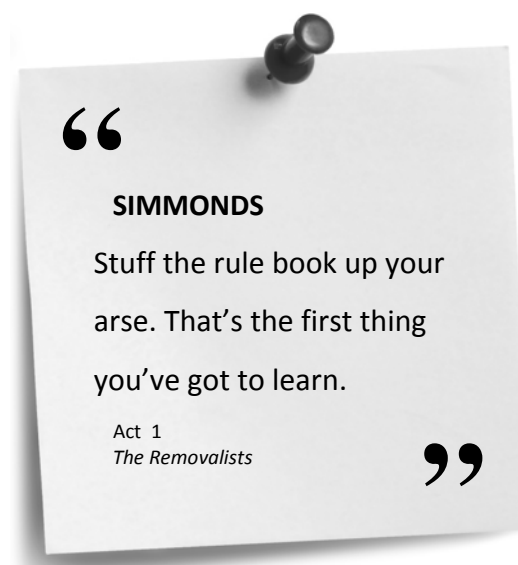
Constable Ross – tba

Fiona Carter – tba

Kate Carter – tba

Kenny Carter – tba

Removalist – tba



THEMES

Australian Drama

Australian Culture & Society

Satire

Power & Corruption

Domestic Violence

ACT ONE Police Station

Sergeant Simmonds is inducting new police recruit Constable Ross on his first day at the station. Simmonds insists on knowing everything about Ross if he is to be on his team. They are interrupted by two women who have come to the station to report an offense. Fiona Carter, accompanied by her older sister Kate, says she has been beaten by her husband, Kenny.

Simmonds instructs Ross to take notes and photographs of Fiona's injuries. Fiona is reluctant, as she has already been assessed by a doctor who has supplied her with a medical report. Kate complies with Simmonds request, telling Fiona to show them her bruises and seemingly appears to enjoy the policeman's game of having Fiona undress in front of them.

Simmonds offers to organize a removalist to pick up Fiona's furniture and take it to the new apartment Kate has organized for her. He also proposes to drop in on her and Kate to make sure Kenny "isn't making a nuisance of himself". When Simmonds asks Ross if he's available to assist, he says he has a previous date with his girlfriend. After Kate and Fiona leave, Simmonds chastises Ross for nearly having blown their chance of having sex with the sisters.

ACT TWO Carter House

Fiona is ironing and doing her last minute packing, surrounded by boxes when Kenny unexpectedly comes home. Kate arrives and both try to get him to leave suggesting he go to the pub for a meal with his mates. When the removalist turns up Fiona and Kate play dumb. Kenny says he didn't call a removalist. The removalist accuses Kenny of trying to get out of paying him. Kenny threatens violence slamming the door on him.



There is a knocking at the front door. Kenny assumes it's the removalist. Simmonds and Ross crash through the door and proceed to handcuff Kenny to the door. Kenny hurls abuse at them. Simmonds retaliates by punching him in the stomach. When Fiona goes to protest, Simmonds says he won't tolerate that sort of language from Kenny.

When the removalist begins moving the furniture Kenny realizes Fiona is trying to leave him and protests the furniture is his. Simmonds continues to punch Kenny in the stomach, which in turn provokes him to taunt his sister-in-law. Simmonds and the removalist begin to argue over which item of furniture is to be moved. Kenny tells Fiona he won't take her back if she leaves. He and Kate launch into a tirade of insults. But when Kenny reveals Fiona has been reporting to him on Kate's sex life she turns on her sister. Kate says she must get home but refuses Simmonds offer to take her, preferring to catch a taxi. Kenny pleads with Fiona he be allowed see their daughter, Sophie. When Kenny makes a lewd comment about Fiona to Simmonds, he goes berserk and begins beating him uncontrollably. The women come from the kitchen but are too shocked to intervene.

Simmonds reveals he wasn't able to have sex with his own wife for five years after the birth of their son. Everyone is silenced by his outburst. Kate shows some empathy for his situation and things calm down. Kate makes a move to leave when Simmonds begins quizzing her about her relationship with a car salesman. Kate reaches her tolerance level when he accuses her of being an adulterer and decides to wait outside for the taxi.

Kenny tries to coerce the removalist to call Russell Street Police Headquarters but he refuses to get involved. Kenny and Fiona continue to argue until Kate's taxi arrives. Kenny pleads for her to stay as he fears being beaten up by the police. Her sister drags out a bewildered Fiona to the awaiting taxi. Ross uncuffs Kenny to take him to the station when a scuffle breaks out. Ross beats Kenny unconscious. Ross panics thinking he has killed him when Kenny crawls battered



and bleeding into the room. Simmonds refuses to call him a doctor and tries to bribe Kenny into not reporting the incident by offering to hire prostitutes. They all share a beer and a joke until Kenny suffers a massive cerebral hemorrhage and dies.

Ross becomes distressed and panics wanting to make it look like Kenny committed suicide. He hits Simmonds wanting to make it look like the officers have been assaulted. Simmonds fights back and the play ends with both men attacking each other viciously.

Consider

The Removalists balances humour with horror.

Kenny dies twice.

Fiona and Kate are stereotypes.

Williamson wrote for a middle-class audience.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

'New Wave' 1967 – 1970

I got the idea for La Mama when we went to New York in the sixties. We were poor. It was impossible to go to the theatre – even to see a film was expensive – but there were these places where you paid fifty cents for a cup of coffee and you saw a performance, and if you felt like it you put some money in a hat for the actors. I saw some awful stuff and some good stuff. It was very immediate and exciting, and when I came back to Melbourne I wanted to keep going, but there didn't exist such a place. So I talked around a bit, to a few actors and writers and directors, sounding them out about doing their own stuff, Australian stuff, but for nothing. The actors were the least interested: they were getting some sort of work and were used to being paid. The directors were interested, because there was so little opportunity for them to work; and of course the writers were the most interested of all.

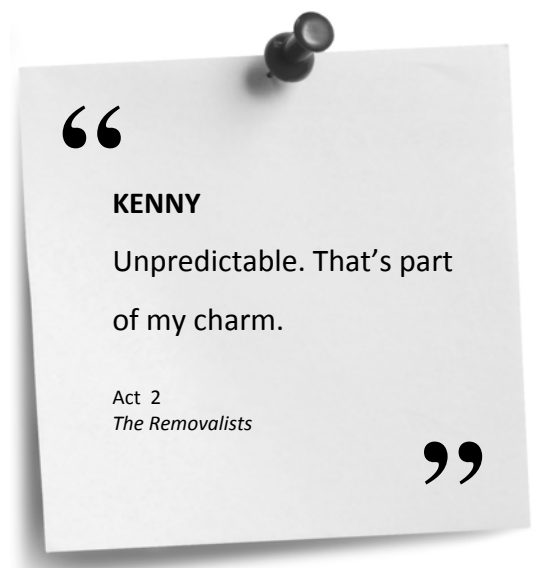
Betty Burstall

An old lingerie factory was transformed into a theatre and renamed 'La Mama' theatre by Betty Burstall to become a venue for the staging of new Australian drama works. A playground for writers, actors and directors exploring new forms of theatre production, La Mama became synonymous with the new voice of Australian Theatre. Key players in the Australian 'new wave' were Jack Hibberd, Alex Buzo, John Romeril, Graeme Blundell, Max Gillies, Bruce Spence, and David Williamson.

In Melbourne and Sydney's fringe theatres a rebellion against British colonialism was unleashed. The new post-colonial drama was 'rough and popular', nationalistic, culturally assertive, and dominated by a decidedly educated middle class with leanings to the political Left. There was a commitment to innovation, the outrageous and controversial. One of the key features that distinguished the new drama was the use of the Australian language – well-known phrases, colloquialisms, accents and speech rhythms were adopted to reflect recognizable characteristics of the Australian idiom.

The dictionary definition of 'ocker' is 'a boorish or aggressive man, esp. an Australian man'. The ocker was abrasive, loud, a drinker and a larrikin and an 'accomplished sexual performer'. Peter Fitzpatrick writes of the arrival of the stage ocker: 'for the first time the theatre had found a stereotype which represented cultural distinctiveness in a form that urban audiences could recognize as corresponding to aspects of their own experience'. Audiences might not always want to be identified with the ocker, but 'he came from the suburbs as they did, and everyone knew somebody a bit like him'. Australian audiences were able to locate their sense of identity in the language spoken on stage. Williamson's Kenny Carter represents the quintessential ocker in his buffoon-like crudity. Kenny can be both grotesque and childlike. These contradictory qualities are reflected in his wives' conflicting behaviour toward him – one moment defending her self against his violent outbursts and then in another protests against his savage treatment by the police officers. The brutality is passed around and between the male characters. The inherent complexity of Williamson's ocker lies in his crafting of him as a dramatic device to satirize and challenge the social morays of British culture and etiquette that had previously dominated the Australian stage.

The Removalists has been described as a 'savage microcosm' of Australian culture. The plays depiction of violence in the suburbs captured the audiences of the 1970's with its dark comedy and heightened form of realism. Williamson says the play is 'not an attack on the police forces as such', claiming it is really 'about authoritative behaviour and the processes whereby ordinary individuals are drawn into it'. The connection between violence and authoritarianism was and still continues to be one of the more controversial aspects of the play.



References:

La Mama: The Story Of A Theatre, Liz Jones, Betty Burstall, Helen Garner

After 'The Doll' : Australian Drama since 1955 , Peter Fitzpatrick

Developments in Recent Australian Drama, Peter Fitzpatrick, Helen Thomson,
World Literature Today, Vol 67, Number 3, Summer, 1993

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David Williamson Quotes

I went to see Betty Burstall after reading an article in *The Australian* that La Mama was thriving but looking for new scripts. I arrived full of excitement and trepidation.

A play needs an ongoing social interaction for two hours. It is an attempt to study a social situation.

I was the removalist in the La Mama production of *The Removalists* and I wasn't good in it.

Social interaction is my primary interest.

My grandfather, my uncle and my cousin were all policemen, so a lot of police lore filtered through to my consciousness as well.

The audience wants to see reflections of themselves.

I couldn't wait to write *The Removalists* either. If something grabs your imagination and you run with it, it's the best sign that something interesting will emerge. If you sit down with a blank sheet and say, 'What will I write?', you can be in trouble. Not always, but often.

Sure, universality is good, but write of your own society first.

Stereotypes have a dramatic function. They are *meant* to be stereotypes, or at least recognizable types. The two sisters, Kate and Fiona, in *The Removalists* are types—the hard bitten, upwardly mobile Australian suburban shrew and the feckless, dominated, naive younger sister. They are written that way to serve the dramatic structure of the play, not to serve as perfect role models for progressive womanhood.

The Removalists, was a story told to me by a removal man.

I remember reading *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* at the age of seven or so.

The source of conflict has always been an interest.

I don't think my plays are simplistic, but a bad production or a partisan reviewer can reduce them to simplicity.

References:

Yacker: Australian Writers Talk about Their Work, by Candida Baker, 1986
Interview with David Williamson

What I Wrote: David Williamson, 2009

David Williamson: Playwright - A Profile, Meryl Tobin
Westerly Imprint: 1975, Volume 20, No. 2, June, 1975, Pages 39 – 41



Additional Resources

Film Adaptation



The Removalists 1975

<http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/the-removalists/>

Screen Australia website. Teacher's Notes available on line.

On David Williamson

What I Wrote DVD 2009

Teachers Notes available on-line

Yacker: Australian Writers Talk about Their Work, by Candida Baker, 1986

Interview

David Williamson: Playwright - A Profile, Meryl Tobin

Westerly Imprint: 1975, Volume 20, No. 2, June, 1975, Pages 39 - 41



Tall Tales but True – David Williamson, playwright, 1994

Documentary Film by Don Featherstone

Teacher's Notes Available On line

<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/tall-tales-true/notes/>

David Williamson at Thirty-One Plays, Penny Gay, Contemporary Theatre Review, Vol 14, Issue 3, 2004

Australian Biography Series: David Williamson DVD

Film Australia, Teachers Notes On Line, 2007

David Williamson: A Writer's Career, Brian Kiernan, 1996

La Mama Theatre



La Mama: The Story of a Theatre Liz Jones, Betty Burstall & Helen Garner, 1988

Talking Heads: Graeme Blundell ABC Interview on origins of La Mama, 2009

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/talkingheads/txt/s2605233.htm>

Australian Drama

Our Australian Theatre in the 1990's, Veronica Kelly, 1998

Playing Australia: Australian theatre and the international Stage, E Schafer, 2003

Make it Australian: The APG, the Pram Factory and New Wave Theatre

Gabrielle Woolf, 2008

Developments in Recent Australian Drama, Peter Fitzpatrick, Helen Thomson, World Literature Today, Vol 67, Number 3, Summer, 1993

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