

6

PLAYWRITING: CREATING AND WRITING PLAY SCRIPTS

WHY LEARN ABOUT PLAYWRITING?

This chapter explores the role of the Australian playwright in creating scripted drama. By exploring and discussing the work of the playwright, you will appreciate and understand the ways in which this theatre practitioner uses skills of written communication to create drama that examines and reflects our society. As well, you will practise exercises and activities to help you write your own Australian script.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 6.1 Playwriting
- 6.2 Approaches to playwriting
- 6.3 Contemporary Indigenous Australian drama
- 6.4 Writing your own Australian scripted drama
- 6.5 Playwriting task: Australian drama

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- recognise how theatre and drama reflect and explore aspects of Australian society and human experience
- apply a process to create, write, edit and publish a script that explores aspects of Australian society, politics and history
- identify and explain how the playwright incorporates dramatic form, dramatic techniques and dramatic conventions for a specific purpose.





iStockphoto/ferrantraite

6.1 Playwriting

A play script is the written record of a theatre performance. This is the playwright's way of communicating their creativity and ideas with directors, actors, designers and audience. Some plays that were written a long time ago have been performed many times over many hundreds of years. Each time a script is performed, the director, actors and designers approach rehearsals and staging with a new approach or interpretation. This is called a directorial concept. Play scripts do not have to be written by only one playwright—they can be written in collaboration with other writers. Some theatre companies work with a playwright to record and develop the stage action that they see in rehearsal.



Playwriting Australia
Wikihow – How to Write
a Play

THE PLAYWRITER'S VIEWPOINT – THEATRE AS A MIRROR

Theatre and drama are integral parts of society. They not only provide entertainment, but also encourage us to reflect on life experiences that are familiar and not so familiar. The playwright hopes that the shared experience of theatre provides us with a valuable opportunity to examine ourselves, so theatre can lead to powerful changes both for individuals and for the community.

Theatre and drama reflect the significant changes occurring in society, politics and history. Through their work, playwrights can explore one or more of the following viewpoints:

Social concerns – The play may invite the audience to examine and explore individuals, communities, groups, the way we interact, social classes, racial tension, youth, the elderly, interpersonal relationships or living conditions.

Political concerns – The play may invite the audience to examine and explore the ways in which power in society is exercised. For instance, the play may comment upon the politics of gender, issues of equality, human rights, our laws, economics or our interaction with other countries of the world.

Historical concerns – The play may invite the audience to examine and explore the ways in which our past has shaped us. For instance, the play may focus upon significant historical events, or consider what we can learn from our history and how it might help us shape our future.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What are some important social or political issues that concern you at the present time? Write these down and explain your concern. Share your work with a partner.
- 2 Recall one Australian play or performance you have seen or studied recently. Consider the social, historical and political concerns listed above. Identify which of these was the most dominant concern of the performance.
- 3 Visit the Australian Bureau of Statistics website. Gather information about population distribution, racial groupings, family structures, and so on. Choose one piece of information you find particularly interesting or that you feel challenges people's preconceptions about Australia. Share this information with the class.



Australian Bureau of
Statistics

THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND THE BENEFITS OF WRITING SCRIPTS

If you refer back to the stages of the creative process in chapter 4, you will recall that at some point the creator needs to let ideas incubate before they generate, select and combine ideas in fresh and innovative ways. Through a more focused approach to writing play scripts, you will think more deeply about your choices of language to communicate how you are framing the action, character, character relationships, stage design, staging, rhythm, tempo, symbol and mood in more effective ways. This can be very useful, especially when you are working on collaborative projects in Drama classes where you only have short periods of time to work with your group. By writing scripts individually, you can provide more developed and refined scenes for your group to rehearse.

The three interrelated areas of skill for the playwright are:

- 1 **Concept** – If you refer back to focus: framing the action (chapter 3, p. 60), you will recall that this element of drama is tied to your intention as a playwright and is often framed by the question you are asking the audience to consider. The concept for your play must have a clear focus in terms of the ideas and viewpoints you are exploring.
- 2 **Dramatic action** – This is where the playwright uses their skills of imagination and creativity combined with their knowledge of the elements of drama, theatrical techniques, elements of production and performance style to visualise the play in action on the stage. They make choices about how the play is structured, and what the audience will see, feel, hear and experience. In many ways, when the playwright is writing their play, they are simultaneously working as a director—staging their ideas for dramatic action using their imagination.
- 3 **Dramatic language** – In this skill area, the playwright uses the power of language to communicate. Through language choices, playwrights create character voices, convey ideas in the play, build tension through subtext, create and describe metaphor and imagery, and build mood and atmosphere.

Areas of skill for the playwright

| CONCEPT | TO WHAT EXTENT ... |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Originality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created a fresh or authentic 'take' on the subject matter, style or form? • What is the 'focus' that frames the dramatic action? • What is the particular perspective or point of view? |
| Clarity of purpose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I clearly communicated what I am expecting the audience to experience? • Will the audience be taken on a clear and satisfying journey, appropriate to subject matter, style and form? |
| Sustained theatrical concept | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created and sustained a clear 'vision' or 'world' on and for the stage? • Can the world be visualised/realised on the stage? • Have I achieved/met/realised my dramatic intention and articulated theatrical concept? |
| Stylistic and thematic coherence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the choice of 'style' of the play serve the purpose? • Am I making choices that reflect a sophisticated understanding of theatre? • Is there a clear connection/relationship between thematic concerns and chosen performance style? • Are the ideas realised by the choice of performance style? |





| CONCEPT | TO WHAT EXTENT ... |
|---|---|
| Structural cohesion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I used the structure of the play (sequence of dramatic action/manipulation of time/space) to give the theatrical world form and dramatic meaning? • Does the development of thematic concerns of the play form a coherent whole/theatrical experience? |
| Effective choice and shaping of elements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I effectively manipulated all of the elements of drama to shape and create a convincing 'world' and a coherent journey? |
| Development of clear and purposeful dramatic action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I written for the stage and not for film or television? Is the action able to be staged? Is the action theatrical? • Is the temporal frame (how time is shaped and manipulated) developed and clear? Is it immediate and forward-looking, or does it allow for moments of reflection to flesh out ideas and action? • Have I manipulated the dramatic action effectively and with a definite purpose? • Have I made effective structural choices to take the audience on a particular dramatic journey (linear/non-linear narrative, montage, emotional, etc.) that fulfils my intention? |
| Effectiveness in engaging the audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I considered the actor/audience relationship and shown an effective use of theatrical devices and techniques such as dramatic irony, direct address and proxemics? |
| Create characters and relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created convincing and engaging characters/roles appropriate to the chosen style? • Do the characters have distinct/individual/clear/original 'voices' appropriate to the style? • Are the characters/roles created and their relationships consistent with the chosen style and the demands of the dramatic action? • Do the characters and their relationships have depth/complexity/belief? |
| Describe visual and/or aural imagery and effects appropriate to style | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I effectively communicated the staging and stage directions? • Have I clearly communicated any action based on non-dialogue? • Have I created effective visual and/or aural imagery, within both the dialogue and the stage business, consistent with style and the demands of the chosen dramatic action? |
| Create subtextual, symbolic and thematic meaning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created motifs, symbols and metaphors to develop subtextual/thematic meaning? • Have I written rich and layered dialogue, appropriate to style, that develops subtextual/thematic meaning? • Have I used dialogue to communicate action and style to enhance the realisation of the vision? |

6.2 Approaches to playwriting

[Some playwrights] talk as if the power of one's own personal experience and imaginings is enough. It rarely is.

Hannie Rayson – Australian playwright

AUSTRALIAN PLAYWRIGHTS

Australia has many successful playwrights whose work has been produced both nationally and internationally. Australian playwrights have written plays in a variety of dramatic forms. One example is to use realism as the core dramatic form but to

incorporate dramatic techniques that are not conventions of traditional realism, such as direct address, symbolism and moments of fantasy, absurdity or the supernatural. These plays are sometimes defined as ‘magical realism’.

Looking closely at some Australian playwrights in this unit will provide you with an opportunity to examine contemporary Australian theatre in more depth. You will read about some different approaches to scriptwriting, the use of dramatic form, and the incorporation of dramatic conventions and techniques. Script extracts have been provided to help illustrate the playwrights’ intentions. You can also read, discuss and perform these extracts.

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

SUZIE MILLER

Playwright

Suzie Miller is a multi-award winning Australian/international playwright. She is a NIDA graduate, has an MA from UNSW in Theatre, an Honours degree in Science and a Masters of Law.

Suzie has had over 30 productions of her works in theatres and festivals around the world in Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth), UK, Ireland, Canada and New York. Very recent shows include *Dust*, Black Swan Theatre Company, Perth (2014); *Driving into Walls*, PIAF, Sydney Opera House (2013); *Caress/Ache*, Griffin Theatre, Sydney, (2015); *The Sacrifice Zone* (text and physical theatre), Theatre Gargantua, Toronto (2013); *Overexposed* (dance/theatre work), WA State Theatre (2014); *Medea*, La Boite Theatre, Brisbane (2015).



Courtesy Suzie Miller

Suzie Miller



Barking Gecko Theatre Company – *Driving into Walls* by Suzie Miller (Highlights)

ONEFIVEZEROSEVEN BY SUZIE MILLER

Researching a play

Working in conjunction with Barking Gecko Theatre Company in Perth, Suzie was commissioned to write a play that answered questions about Western Australian young people. The Artistic Director of Barking Gecko wanted to know: Who are they? What do they think? What are their aspirations? Where will this lead the country? This led to the production of a play *Driving into Walls*. The success of this play led to the writing of *onefivezeroseven*, a broader look at the youth of Australia. *onefivezeroseven* is an excellent example of a contemporary dramatic form that integrates chorus, dance, physical theatre, projected imagery, movement and direct address in a powerful way to capture what it is like to live as a young person in Australia. The play takes actual interviews and responses to questions from young people and presents a series of ‘events’ or episodes that capture thoughts and feelings about growing up, sexuality, divorce, education, fame, parental stress, housing issues, terrorism, religion, politics, cyberspace, globalism, community, culture, subculture and cyberspace.

Dramatic structure and dramatic form

In *onefivezeroseven* there are six main characters:

- Matilda/Tilly (an Anglo-Australian) from Altona, Melbourne
- Hayden (an Indigenous Australian) from Parramatta, Sydney and the Northern Territory
- Grace (an Asian-Australian) from Adelaide
- Jesse (an Anglo-Australian) from Queensland
- Jordan (an Anglo-Australian) from Tasmania
- Mo (an Arabic-Australian) from Western Australia.

This play is a strong example of the ways in which contemporary theatre fuses many art forms to create multi-layered, metaphoric expressions of human experience. A multi-discipline theatre performance, *onefivezeroseven* combines physical movement, dance, acting, projected imagery and recorded sound to convey the preoccupations and concerns of Australian youth. Rather than a more conventional linear narrative, *onefivezeroseven* is a montage of discrete scenes that explore themes about life as a teenager.

Extract from *onefivezeroseven*

The following scene is a monologue. As a playwright, this is often a good place to begin your practice of writing dialogue, as you are able to develop your knowledge and understanding of one character more fully. Even though only one character is speaking, Suzie Miller wanted the cast of the play to use physical movement to illustrate and add to the performance of each event.

The playwright intended for Mo to perform this monologue in Arabic with Jordan standing beside him interpreting into English. For our purposes, only the translated version is given below. Work in groups to rehearse and perform the following extract and then complete the tasks that follow.

ONEFIVEZEROSEVEN (EXTRACT)

EVENT 9

MO – A STORY

Mo speaks in Arabic. JORDAN stands beside him and interprets all of this into English—line by line.

My name is Mohammad and this is my story

I was 12 when I finally came to live in Western Australia

Before then I had no idea where Australia was, but my father kept saying we would be safe there, so I always thought of it as a special place, with people who were very very kind.

I remember Lebanon before the bombs came. But most of my memories were about toys I had and the street in Beirut where I lived.

Playing at school. Things like that.
At first me and my friends thought the war was really exciting
And then the bombs started to fall.
The day before we left, my mother was crying and crying.
The area at the end of our street was flattened by bombs.
I remember Dad packing lots of things and getting Mum,
my brother and me in the car.
We had to drive towards the border.
But we hadn't gone far when I saw it.
That I saw him.
Driving past an area of just bricks and rocks, the left over part
from a bomb, Mum telling us not to look out.
But of course I did.
I saw him lying there
It was our neighbour Mr Abdul
With his wife and his boy rocking over him
Weeping
Mr Abdul's face was covered in blood, but his eyes were open
His leg was separated from his body and one arm was twisted in a
weird position
His wife was trying to grab parts of him
And his son looked afraid.
I just stared at Mr Abdul's face.
It's so strange how I just knew he was dead
Even though I had never seen a body before
We didn't stop, we just drove past
But it felt like I was there just looking at him
For ages
He was from my neighbourhood
I had known him all my life
And in that moment I promised myself
Made a promise in my heart and to Mr Abdul
That I would always be kind to people
No matter who they were
I would always find the good
That was my promise
And we just drove onwards and left the land I was born in.
My first year in Australia was really lonely, no one else at my school spoke
Arabic, and it took me a long time to understand English.
By the time I got to High school, I had lots of friends—Anglo kids,

My brother and I have been in Australia all these years, and
we're still called:

'Terrorists'

'Osama Bin Laden spawn'

'9/11 murderers'

People tell us to 'go home'

But Australia is my home. My place is here

At the train station I've been told I'm a "terrorist"

"A refugee who doesn't belong here".

I've had food thrown at me, and—

Been spat on.

Beat.

I think of my neighbour's dead face

I think of the promise I made that day

I might have only been 9 when I made it, but—

It was the biggest thing that has ever happened to me

Beat.

And I need you to hear this

Beat.

I belong here now

Beat.

(Slowly and in English) I AM a young Australian

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

HANNIE RAYSON

Playwright

Hannie Rayson has established a reputation for topical, complex dramas written with wit and humour. A graduate of Melbourne University and the Victorian College of the Arts, she has an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from La Trobe University and is a Fellow of the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne. Her plays have been extensively performed around Australia and internationally. They include *Please Return to Sender*, *Mary*, *Leave It Till Monday*, *Room to Move*, *Hotel Sorrento*, *Falling From Grace*, *Competitive Tenderness*, *Life After George*, *Inheritance* and *Two Brothers*. She has been awarded two Australian Writers' Guild Awards, four Helpmann Awards, two NSW Premier's Literary Awards and a





Victorian Premier's Literary Award as well as *The Age* Performing Arts Award. She also wrote *Scenes from a Separation* with Andrew Bovell.

For television she has written *Sloth* (ABC, *Seven Deadly Sins*) and co-written two episodes of *SeaChange* (ABC/Artists Services). A feature film of *Hotel Sorrento*, produced in 1995, was nominated for 10 Australian Film Institute Awards. In 1999 she received the Magazine Publishers' Society of Australia's Columnist of the Year Award for her regular contributions to HQ magazine.



NewsPix/Pat Scala

Hannie Rayson

Hannie made playwriting history when *Life After George* was the first play to be nominated for the Miles Franklin Award. In 2006 she was nominated for the Melbourne Prize for Literature, a prize for a Victoria-based writer whose body of published or produced work has made an outstanding contribution to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.

INHERITANCE BY HANNIE RAYSON

Researching a play

As a playwright, Hannie Rayson believes that research is essential. As preparation for writing the play *Inheritance*, Hannie travelled to the Mallee region of Victoria 15 times to meet the people who lived there and to listen to their stories. She wanted to get to the heart of the discontent that was a feature of life at this time for many people living in regional Australia. The director and cast of *Inheritance* also travelled to the Mallee region with Hannie to help develop their understanding of the characters and the issues of the play.

Here are some statements from Hannie about what she discovered during her research in the Mallee:

- 'I went into these country towns and talked to these people in pubs, libraries, everywhere, and asked: "What's on your mind? What are the key things?" And they usually said, "Inheritance. Who gets the farm?"'
- 'Such tensions become worse as society changes. The recognition of women and minority groups disrupts the traditional lines of succession. For some time now wives and daughters have demanded their fare share.'
- 'Other challenges confront the owners of farms. Farming methods are changing; there are still the threats of drought, flood, fire, disease and pests, not to mention the decline of small towns and their essential services.'

Plot and story

Inheritance was first performed by the Melbourne Theatre Company at the Playhouse theatre in the Victorian Arts Centre on 1 March 2003. The play is set in the Mallee region of Victoria. In the play, the Myrtle twins, Dibs Hamilton and Girlie Delaney, are

turning 80. As the family gathers to celebrate, speculation grows as to who will inherit the family property Allandale when the ageing Farley Hamilton, Dibs's husband, is gone. Lyle Delaney and his wife Maureen live and work on the Hamilton farm. Although they are related to the Hamiltons, they do not have ownership of the land. William Hamilton, his sister Julia and her son Felix, who have arrived from the city, provide an opportunity for the divide between bush and city to be explored.

After Farley Hamilton dies, there are rumours that he has left the farm to his adopted son, Nugget, who is an Indigenous Australian. Although a loved member of the Hamilton family, Nugget is viewed as an outsider. The tension in the play increases as various family members vie for their share of the farm.

Characters

The characters in *Inheritance* are:

The Hamiltons

- Dibs Hamilton, aged 80
- Farley Hamilton, aged 83
- William Hamilton, aged 52 (Dibs and Farley's eldest son)
- Julia Hamilton, aged 44 (William's sister)
- Felix, aged 19 (Julia's son)
- Nugget Hamilton, aged 38 (Dibs and Farley's adopted Indigenous Australian son)

The Delaneys

- Girlie Delaney, aged 80 (Dibs's twin sister)
- Lyle Delaney, aged 48 (Girlie's son)
- Maureen Delaney (Lyle's wife)
- Ashleigh Delaney, aged 16 (Lyle and Maureen's daughter)
- Brianna Delaney, aged 15 (Ashleigh's sister)

Themes and issues

Inheritance comments upon many topical issues. It is structured and written to encourage us to consider not only the actions of individual characters, but also the concerns, fears, problems and joys of our Australian society. Some of the themes and issues in the play are family loyalty, land ownership, reconciliation, the Stolen Generation, the divide between the city and country, greed, suicide and intolerance.

Dramatic form and dramatic techniques

Although *Inheritance* is realistic in style, certain dramatic techniques are used to create memories of the past. The use of direct narration to the audience and the appearance of characters from the past help the audience understand the family history of the Myrtle twins and how ownership of the farm came to be in Dibs's hands. In one significant scene, the character of Nugget interacts with the spirit of his deceased adoptive father, Farley. Nugget reveals how as a youth he was torn between being with his white adoptive family and his own people. In this scene, breaking the style of realism allows the audience to learn more about the characters, particularly as we are able to hear their private thoughts.

Elements of production

The Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *Inheritance* was performed on a proscenium stage. The set was suggestive of the farmhouses belonging to the two families, the Hamiltons and the Delaneys. Upright wooden beams, floorboards and rustic furniture were used to represent the interiors of the two houses. A floodlit cyclorama was used to create a distant, changing skyline. Moments of flashback were created with the use of lighting and sound. At certain moments in the play, a wooden wall with two central doors was moved from the wings to centre stage. These doors helped to add an element of surprise to certain moments, such as when the hanging of Norm Delaney (who was the father of Girlie and Dibs) is revealed. A moving track in the upstage and downstage floor allowed large set items such as cars and trucks to be moved onstage and offstage.

Costumes were designed to represent the characters in a realistic style. Differences in costume design were made to establish the past and present, the city and the bush, and the different generations. Recorded music was incorporated to establish atmosphere.

Extracts from *Inheritance*

The following scenes are from the play *Inheritance*. Work in groups to prepare a rehearsed performance of one or more script extracts.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Read through the following script extracts. Identify the social, political and/or historical concerns in each extract.
- 2 Identify the objective and motivation of the character you will play.
- 3 Identify the tension and climactic moment of each scene by dividing the script into units of action (see chapter 5, p. 119).
- 4 Highlight three or four words, phrases or actions used by the character you will play. Explain why these are important to your understanding of your character.
- 5 Prepare a character biography for the character you will play.



HINT

When rehearsing a script, it is important to identify the subtext behind the words of the character. By doing this you will more easily identify character motivation and objective. This understanding will add dimension to your character.

***INHERITANCE* (EXTRACTS)**

INHERITANCE

ACT ONE, SCENE 19

Characters: Lyle, Maureen, Brianna, Ashleigh and William

In this scene, Lyle and his wife Maureen discover that their cousins, the Hamiltons, intend to sell the farm that Lyle has spent his life working on but does not own. The scene begins with Lyle talking to his two daughters, Ashleigh and Brianna. They have heard rumours that the farm they live on is to be sold.

(LYLE enters the kitchen. ASHLEIGH is doing her homework.)

ASHLEIGH Dad. My friend Anne Cogsley told me that the Hamiltons are going to sell their farm.

(BRIANNA enters.)

LYLE Isn't she a sticky-beak.

ASHLEIGH Her Dad's their financial counsellor.

LYLE Cougar Cogsley. Jesus Christ.

ASHLEIGH She told me not to tell.

LYLE That's crook. Spreading your private business all over the district. Bloody hell.

BRIANNA Would we be able to buy it off them?

LYLE You wouldn't get me within a hundred mile of one of them, financial counsellors.

BRIANNA Would we?

(He laughs sourly.)

LYLE Got three million dollars, have you? No. If they sell Allandale we're up the creek.

BRIANNA But it's our farm.

LYLE Our farm, Bri. But their land.

BRIANNA What about Cromies'? That's ours, isn't it?

LYLE It's only fifteen hundred acres. You can't feed a family on fifteen hundred acres.

(MAUREEN enters.)

MAUREEN Get a wriggle on, girls. You'll be late for choir.

ASHLEIGH It's at St Mary's tonight.

MAUREEN Can you take them? I've got a Progress meeting, then I've got to get down to the CFA to get signatures for the petition.

LYLE The Hamiltons are puttin' Allandale on the market.

(Beat.)

MAUREEN I knew this'd bloody happen. I'm going to the solicitor.

LYLE I said no.

MAUREEN They're walking all over you, Lyle. It's not fair.

LYLE Who says life is fair? Life is not fair.

WILLIAM *(offstage)* Yoo-hoo.

MAUREEN Oh, Christ. It's the Pansy Boy.

LYLE He's come for the trestle tables.

WILLIAM *(offstage)* Hello?

LYLE We're in here.

WILLIAM *(entering)* G'day, Maureen. Lyle.

(LYLE goes to the fridge and gets out two tinnies. He pulls the tops off and hands one to WILLIAM.)

LYLE Hear you're selling the farm.

MAUREEN I just wrote you people a cheque for six thousand dollars—to run our sheep on land which should be ours.

WILLIAM What land is that, Maureen?

MAUREEN You know damn well.

LYLE Maur—when Nanna Myrtle gave the farm to Auntie Dibs, she gave Mum and Dad ten thousand quid to set them up in the pub.

MAUREEN Big deal.

LYLE That was a lot of money sixty years ago.

MAUREEN The farm is worth two million dollars.

LYLE And the rest. What with the two houses and the machinery ...

MAUREEN Three million, then.

WILLIAM Maureen, what has this got to do with you—?

MAUREEN Lyle has put in more tractor hours than all of youse put together. Every school holiday, every Christmas, every weekend. And you walk back here after thirty years expecting just to clean up.

WILLIAM Maureen. It's my family's farm.

MAUREEN Mate, the land belongs to the people who work it. Not to the banks. Not to the multinationals. And certainly not to a pampered city boy who turned tail because he couldn't hack it.

ACT ONE, SCENE 26

Characters: Girlie and Maureen Delaney, Julia, William and Felix

In this scene, William Hamilton and his sister Julia and her son Felix, who are visiting from the city, bump into Girlie and Maureen Delaney in town. Maureen and Girlie are seeking signatures for a petition to open a rural transaction centre in the local milk bar as the bank and post office have been closed down. They are suspicious of Julia, her brother William and her teenage son Felix, because they believe the three are trying to persuade Dibs Hamilton, Girlie's sister, to sell the farm.

JULIA Hey, is that Maureen up there?

WILLIAM Quick. Nip down here.

JULIA No! We can't. She's seen us.

WILLIAM Shit!

JULIA *(waving)* Hi, Maureen!

MAUREEN Hi! *(To GIRLIE)* It's whining Julia and the Pansy Boy.

GIRLIE Is that Felix? He's a weedy-looking bloke, isn't he? I see what you mean. He does look like a fairy.

JULIA Hi, Auntie Girl. How are you? Felix, you remember Auntie Girl, don't you?

FELIX Hey.

MAUREEN Hello, youse. Come to sign our petition, have you?

JULIA What is it?

MAUREEN We're trying to get a rural transaction centre in the milk bar.

GIRLIE Since we've lost the bank and the post office. How are you, Will?

WILLIAM Well, thanks, Aunty Girlie.

MAUREEN They reckon we're too small, but we'll see about that.

GIRLIE They all go into Swan Hill o' course. Do their business in there.

MAUREEN *(pointing)* Poor ol' Archie here.

GIRLIE Everyone shops at Safeway in Swan Hill.

MAUREEN And on the way home, with two hundred bucks worth of groceries in the boot, they realise they've forgotten bread or milk or something—so they stop at Archie's and put it on the tab. It's not right.

GIRLIE He can't keep going.

FELIX That's globalisation for you.

GIRLIE She's going into politics, you know.

JULIA Mum said.

GIRLIE Can't be any more stupid than Roly Pigget.

FELIX Who's he? Your local member?

GIRLIE There was a time when you could've put a chook in the National Party and people round here woulda voted for it. But not anymore.

MAUREEN So what's happening about Allandale? Any more news?

JULIA What about?

MAUREEN Doesn't she know?

GIRLIE What?

MAUREEN William?

WILLIAM I don't know any more than you do, Maureen.

JULIA What's this?

MAUREEN It's all over town.

JULIA What?

MAUREEN Your mother's putting Allandale on the market.

GIRLIE Over my dead body she is.

JULIA I think you might have got the wrong end of the stick.

MAUREEN I hope so. I really hope so. Otherwise things might get very nasty around here.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

Characters: Maureen Delaney

Maureen Delaney gathers support for her political campaign. In this scene, she arrives on the back of a ute at an agricultural show to give a speech.

(The Rushton Agricultural and Pastoral Show [A & P Society Show]. There are all the sound effects of fairground music, children squealing on the ferris wheel and a muffled loudspeaker announcing missing children, the results of the sheepdog trials and the preserves display in the pavilion. The Grand Parade will be at 3 p.m.)

PUBLIC ADDRESS *(voice-over)* Could someone please bring the results of the showjumping to the stewards' stand in the middle of the arena. Thank you. And now, ladies and gentlemen, here's a little lady with a lot to say for herself. They're calling her the 'Mouth of the Mallee'. Please welcome the Independent candidate for Murray—Maureen Delaney.

(The back doors roll open. Accompanied by triumphant music, her campaign song, MAUREEN DELANEY rides in on the back of a ute which rolls down the stage towards the audience. She is waving to the crowd of enthusiastic supporters who clap and whistle and stamp their feet [on the sound track]. A large banner reads: 'Vote One Maureen Delaney Putting the Mallee First'.)

(MAUREEN addresses the assembled crowd.)

MAUREEN Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen. I was born in the Mallee. I went to school here. I got my first job at Dobsons' in Swan Hill. This is where I've raised my family. And I know what it means to work my guts out. I know Mallee people and I'm telling you right now, we've got a problem.

Do you know why some of us can't get the phone to work? Why we drive every day on roads that are not safe? Why our children are being educated in second-rate schools? Do you? I'll tell you why. We're too bloody nice. That's why. We're too decent. Let's get one thing straight. You deserve—your kids deserve—the same basic facilities as city people take for granted. But have you got a problem sticking up for yourself, or what?

Let me tell you a true story. One night, a gang of bikies come hooning into Rushton. Stirring up trouble, making a helluva racket. I had this young fella working with me in the pub and he says to me, 'Maureen,' he says, 'they're gonna trash this place.' And I thought, 'Bugger that. I am not going to be intimidated by a band of thugs.' So I march over to this big hairy bloke in a leather vest with tatts all over him and I say 'Out!' I say, 'You heard me. On yer bike.

Now!’ He stares at me long and hard, this creep, and then he says, ‘Yes, ma’am.’ And he gives me a little bow and they get on their bikes and ride out of town. True story.

My friends, we made this country. And we’re not about to be bullied by foreign interests who are no different to those bikies. I’m talking about the multinationals. I’m talking about the foreign-owned banks. And I’m talking about every Asian, Moslem and Hottentot who come here and refuse to sign up to the Australian Way of Life. There are women who come to this country who are not prepared to show their faces. Well I say, ‘Don’t show your face around here.’ My friends, this is Australia, where people say g’day to each other in the street and lend a hand when they see a mate in trouble.

You know me. I’m Maureen Delaney. On Election Day—put the Mallee first. Put a ‘1’ beside Maureen Delaney.

ACT TWO, SCENE 6

Characters: Dibs, William and Nugget

In this scene, William and his mother are in the bedroom of her deceased husband. They discuss the will he has left behind and who will inherit the farm. They are interrupted unexpectedly by the arrival of Nugget, who is also looking for the will. He believes that his adoptive father has left the farm to him.

(The Hamiltons’ bedroom.)

(DIBS enters to find WILLIAM rifling through his father’s writing desk.)

DIBS What are you doing?

WILLIAM I’m looking for the will.

DIBS It’s with the solicitor.

WILLIAM Uh-huh.

DIBS We made one about ten years ago.

WILLIAM Mm-hmm.

DIBS I can tell you what’s in it.

(WILLIAM seizes upon an envelope. He opens it deftly with a letter opener.)

DIBS William! Please!

(WILLIAM examines the contents carefully.)

WILLIAM *(reading)* ‘I hereby revoke all former wills and testamentary dispositions *(made by me)* and declare this to be my last Will and Testament.’

(He turns the pages to note the date and the witnesses.)

(Reading) ‘Dated this day Monday 26th April 1999.

Witnessed by Frederick Barnard and Frank Scott.’ *(Pause.)*

Who are they? Mum?

DIBS *(quietly)* Airforce chums. Bunty Barnard and Wing-Commander Scott.

WILLIAM He must have gone down to Melbourne. Did you know about this?

DIBS Must have been Anzac Day.

WILLIAM *(reading)* 'After payment of my just debts, testamentary and funeral expenses, and any taxes or duties payable as a result of my death, I give my entire remaining estate to my son Neville Hamilton, known as Nugget.'

DIBS Let me look at that.

WILLIAM *(reading)* 'I do hereby devise and bequeath the old house block ... matrimonial home and garden ... motor vehicle ... money held in my name, Commonwealth Bank, Swan Hill, to my spouse Elizabeth Hamilton, known as Dibs.'

DIBS Give me that.

WILLIAM My son, Neville Hamilton. Known as Nugget.
(Silence.)
What are we to understand from this?

DIBS He didn't have anywhere else to go. So we adopted him.

WILLIAM But who's his father? Who is Nugget's father?

DIBS Unknown. It was 'Unknown' on his birth certificate. Give me that.
(WILLIAM hands her the will. DIBS rips it up.)
This is not Farley's farm. This is my farm. And I will decide how it's to be operated from now on. No-one gets anything until I say so.
(NUGGET enters.)

WILLIAM Haven't you heard of knocking?

NUGGET Get real.

DIBS What is it, Nugget?

WILLIAM Did you want something?
(Pause.)

NUGGET Farley reckoned there was something in his desk.

WILLIAM What sort of something?

NUGGET None of your business.

WILLIAM If my father said there was something in his desk for you, then I'd like to know what it is.

NUGGET It wasn't for you, mate. It was for me.

WILLIAM What is it?
(Pause.)

NUGGET His will.

WILLIAM His will is with the solicitors in Swan Hill.

NUGGET It's in the third drawer.

WILLIAM Take a look.
(WILLIAM and NUGGET stare at each other.)

NUGGET Farley left me the farm.
DIBS We've done everything we can for you, Nugget.
NUGGET He left it to me.
DIBS You don't seem very grateful for what we've done.
NUGGET Grateful?
WILLIAM Yes.
NUGGET Grateful.
WILLIAM Frankly, this fantasy you've dreamt up—I find it quite an affront. I mean, who do you think you are?
NUGGET Farley's son.
WILLIAM That's a lie. Your father was a rabbito.
NUGGET That's bull, mate.
WILLIAM You conniving little cheat.
NUGGET I'm not taking the farm off you.
WILLIAM You're dead right, you're not.
NUGGET I'm keeping it in the family.
DIBS You're not family. I'm sorry. But you're not.
(WILLIAM pulls the drawer out to show NUGGET.)
WILLIAM There's nothing in here for you.
(NUGGET exits, slamming the door behind him.)
DIBS He's not family. He's not.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Break into small groups and choose two elements of drama (other than tension). Analyse and explain how these elements of drama contribute to dramatic meaning in one or more of the scene extracts. Share your thinking with the class.
- 2 Discuss the reasons why you think the playwright has chosen dramatic form for their play. In your answer, consider how realism might impact on the actor–audience relationship.
- 3 Evaluate one group's performance of their script extract. Comment on their interpretation of the extract including use of space, control of tension, and the effectiveness of character interpretation through the use of movement and vocal dynamics.
- 4 Identify two key moments from the script extracts and explain how the playwright has used dramatic action and language to create tension.
- 5 Write your own character monologue. Plan your monologue first by creating a character biography. When you have written a draft, work with a partner and ask them to perform your draft monologue. What did you see? What did you think about what you saw? What questions do you have? What changes will you make because of this new information?

6.3 Contemporary Indigenous Australian drama

These experiences (intercultural drama) can help develop cultural sensitivity and bring into sharp relief the cultural and social attitudes and beliefs of the participants.

Kate Donelan and Anne Marshall – Drama educators

Indigenous Australian performance and ritual began many thousands of years ago. Indigenous Australians use dance, singing, chanting and storytelling as a means of sharing and passing on experiences, knowledge and culture. Over the last 30 years, a new form of Australian theatre has evolved that combines aspects of traditional Indigenous Australian culture with Western dramatic forms.

During the 1960s and 1970s, many Western societies experienced a significant change in attitudes to issues of equality and human rights. In Australia, the influence of this social change encouraged Indigenous Australians to express their concerns about how their own people lived in a post-colonial era. Jack Davis is a famous Indigenous Australian playwright from this period. Jack was born in Perth in 1917 and is a descendant of the Nyoongarah people of south-west Western Australia. He became an activist on behalf of his people, and from 1967 to 1971 he was director of the Aboriginal Centre in Perth. Jack's plays include *The Dreamers* (1983), *No Sugar* (1985) and *The Honey Spot* (1986). The plays are largely set in the past and are written to show the world from an Aboriginal perspective. Although they deal with oppression and conflict between 'whites' and 'blacks', they also encourage Indigenous people to be self-empowered.

Some current Indigenous Australian playwrights include Leah Purcell (*Black Chicks Talking*, 2002); Wesley Enoch (*The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table*, 2004); Kylie Coolwell (*Battle of Waterloo*, 2015); and Jada Alberts—whose work we will explore in greater detail later in this unit.

The following table outlines some of the features of contemporary Indigenous Australian theatre.

Contemporary Indigenous Australian theatre

| DRAMATIC FORM | THEMATIC CONCERNS | DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES AND CONVENTIONS |
|--|--|---|
| Non-linear narrative Eclectic and fragmented A combination of the styles and traditions of Western performance with aspects of Indigenous language and culture | Grief Kinship/family Relationships Identity The Stolen Generation Assimilation Racism Reconciliation Connection with the land Interactions with the law Effects of the past on the present | Direct audience address Symbolism Visual metaphor Storytelling Dance and music Multimedia Indigenous language Political oratory Presentational acting Stand-up comedy Realism |

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

JADA ALBERTS

Writer, Director and Actor

Jada Alberts was born and raised on her grandfather's country (Larrakia) and has family ties to the Yanyuwa, Bardi and Wardaman peoples. She studied and practised performing arts from a young age and, in 2006, graduated from the Adelaide Centre of the Arts. She is currently an Associate Artist at Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney and has many stage credits to her name. Jada's film credits include feature film *Red Hill* and on television in *Rush*, *Redfern Now*, and *Wentworth*. Jada plays the role of Nerida in ABC's drama, *Cleverman*, set to screen in 2016.

Jada is also a director, dramaturge and playwright. Her debut work, *Brothers Wreck*, received critical acclaim and a nomination at the 2014 Sydney Theatre Awards (for Best New Australian Work). *Brothers Wreck* also received a nomination for the Nick Enright Prize for Playwriting at the 2015 NSW Premier's Literary Awards.



Courtesy Jada Alberts

Jada Alberts

ISSUES OF REPRESENTATION AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Questions about representation in acting

It is the ethical responsibility of directors, playwrights and actors to represent people and groups in ways that are authentic, respectful and culturally sensitive. In comedies, satire and parody are sometimes used. This can seem disrespectful, but clever comedy writers often are making important points about power structures and attitudes in society that need to be challenged.

Indigenous Australian theatre practitioners encourage young Australians to engage with the works of Indigenous Australian playwrights. The intention of the student in performing these works is important. According to Bain Attwood, a leading scholar of Australian cross-cultural history, some key questions to consider before engaging in performing work by Indigenous Australians are:

- Who produces this knowledge?
- When and where?
- About and for whom is this knowledge?
- For what purpose?
- How and in what form is it produced?
- What are the effects?

Avoiding generalisations

One of the most important understandings to have when working with Indigenous Australian plays is that the play is the playwright's expression of their individual understanding and experiences. As actors, playwrights, directors and designers of theatre, it is important to avoid generalising the events and experiences of characters in a play as a representation of Aboriginality. For further guidelines about working with Indigenous Australian plays, refer to the Drama Australia guidelines.



Drama Australia

The power of knowing yourself

To alleviate some of the problems of representation, it is important that you have thought deeply about your own cultural background, your history, your family's history in this country, and the circumstances and conditions that have created the social and political contexts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians today. If possible, direct contact with Indigenous Australians is especially important as you can ask questions, be asked questions, and develop an understanding based on experience rather than information from the media or school lessons. This can be challenging, but your school and your teacher may be able to help with this.

BROTHERS WRECK BY JADA ALBERTS

Plot and story

Brothers Wreck follows the inner struggles of Ruben as he tries to deal with the tragic suicide of his cousin Joe. During the play Ruben visits a counsellor, David, a requirement of the courts due to Ruben's recent violent behaviour. Ruben's cousin and sister Adele and her boyfriend Jarrod try to help Ruben avoid trouble but struggle to help him effectively. Adele is also worried about her mother, who is unwell in hospital. Later in the play, Ruben and Adele's aunty, Petra, arrives to help. From her we learn that when Ruben was a very young boy, he suffered another tragedy when his mother's car lost control and crashed during a heavy storm. The play begins six months prior to the present day with the shocking discovery of Joe's body.

Characters

- **Ruben**, early-20s, seemingly untouchable. Ruben is impulsive, quick-witted and sometimes aggressive. He thinks he has figured out the world and his place in it. Ruben's mum died when he was young so he was raised by one of his aunts, Adele's mum.
- **Adele**, mid-20s, Ruben's cousin and sister. Adele is dedicated, sure of herself, mostly calm and always loyal. She has a tendency to worry.
- **Jarrod**, mid-20s, Adele's boyfriend. He's cheeky, thoughtful and quietly confident. Good with his hands, Jarrod loves to make or fix things, mostly engines.
- **David**, late-30s, Ruben's counsellor. David is a former teacher who has worked in the Darwin area most of his life.
- **Petra**, 40s, the youngest of three sisters. She is Adele and Ruben's aunty.

Themes and issues

In the notes for the 2015 Belvoir production of *Brothers Wreck*, Jada Alberts talks about how her personal experiences informed her writing. She refers to the inherent responsibility for each other that Indigenous people feel—‘our skin-ship system’. *Brothers Wreck* aims to give strong messages about the importance of family and supportive familial relationships, particularly during times of crisis. The play also addresses the troubling issue of youth suicide, a national problem that can have devastating consequences for many people.

Dramatic form and elements of production

Brothers Wreck uses realism to effectively create a powerful relationship between the performers and the audience. The use of the ‘fourth wall’ gives the audience a window into the lives of Ruben and his family, and creates an intimacy that builds our empathy for the characters. In the Belvoir production, set, lighting and sound meticulously created a realistic representation of an indoor/outdoor space of a home in Darwin.

Brothers Wreck script extracts

The following scenes show how, despite Reuben’s anger and grief, his family are able to reach out to him and help him to find his way to a form of acceptance.

BROTHERS WRECK (EXTRACTS)

BROTHERS WRECK

SCENE SEVEN

- RUBEN** Hey Aunty.
He gives PETRA a hug, trying to act as sober as possible.
- PETRA** Ruben Thomas Kelly, you’ve lost weight, ya bag of bones. Where’ve you been?
- RUBEN** Just at Beach Front.
- PETRA** You stink of grog, boy. You gonna go visit your mother like this?
- RUBEN** My mother’s dead.
Beat.
- PETRA** What did you say? [*Beat.*] Don’t tell me you just said what I think you said. You wanna watch your mouth, boy, you hear me? Who do you think you’re talkin to? [*Beat.*] You’d be dead too if it wasn’t for my sister layin up there in that hospital. Now you have some respect and think about what you’re sayin before you say it, you hear me? Don’t think I’m gonna put up with your bull, boy. [*Beat.*] Get in

the shower and wash yourself off. I don't care who you are, you're not goin to see my sister like that.

RUBEN *starts to exit.*

Wait there.

RUBEN *stops.*

Del, we'll go, ay. Jarrod, can you drive? You mob jump in the car.

ADELE Grab that bag there. Jarrod.

JARROD *grabs the bag of supplies.*

ADELE and **JARROD** *exit. PETRA* *sits.*

PETRA You think it's right to mess your sister round like this, you know she's been waitin for you. Not too important for you to get to the hospital, is it? Wanna mess around down the pub instead? Is that even where you were? These mob aren't stupid, you know, don't think you can pull the rug. *[Pause.]* You need to take a good hard look at yourself, boy.

Who took your sorry arse in after we lost your mum. When your father took off, who took care of you then? Treated you no different then, Del, worked her arse off to put food on the table, a roof over your head, sounds like a friggin cliché, don't it, boy?—but that's what she gave you. Free a' charge.

And here we are, one time in your 21 years of livin when she needs you and you can't even stand up straight.

She waits for RUBEN to respond. He doesn't.

Suit yourself then, boy. You can stand there lookin at your belly button all night ... better that I suppose, then come to the hospital and get on my friggin nerves. *[Beat.]* You hear what I said?

RUBEN Yeah.

PETRA You know why? You wanna take a guess? *[Beat.]* Izzy'd take one look at you and it'd break her heart. *[Pause.]* You know that, don't you? *[Beat.]* We'll be back in the morning. Have a shower, sleep it off.

She grabs her bag and heads for the door.

RUBEN Aunty?

He unzips his backpack. He pulls out a bunch of frangipani stems, pulled off a tree—they're inside a plastic bag. He hasn't done it quite right but he's tried. It's beautiful.

Mum's favourite.

PETRA *takes them. She feels a little as though she's been too harsh on him. She takes the stems from the bag and wraps them in an old newspaper that's on the table.*

PETRA Flowers, and a crossword.

She nods and smiles at her nephew.

I love you, Rue. I wouldn't say nuthin if I didn't. I'll see you tomorrow.

She exits.

As she leaves, RUBEN notices a letter on the table. He takes it, shoves it in his backpack.

SCENE EIGHT

DAVID is in his office, writing at his desk. There's a knock at the door.

DAVID Come in.

ADELE enters. *She stands at the door.*

ADELE Hi, Mr Wills?

Beat.

DAVID Hi. Sorry, you surprised me, no-one's called me that in a while.

ADELE Sorry.

DAVID No no, it's fine.

ADELE You never taught me, we never met, I just, know of you. I was in Year Eight when you left. I'm a Kelly. Adele. I'm Ruben's sister.

DAVID Oh, hi. Of course, please, take a seat.

ADELE Ah nah, it's okay, I'll stand.

DAVID You sure?

ADELE Yeah.

DAVID Okay. *[Beat.]* So, Ruben.

ADELE Yeah.

DAVID He's okay, isn't he?

ADELE Yeah, well. Yeah, just the usual. It's funny, I came here to ask you the same thing, but, um ... *[Beat.]* So you work here now?

DAVID Yeah. Been here for the last couple years.

ADELE Didn't wanna teach anymore? *[Beat.]* Sorry ... sorry, too personal. *[Beat.]* Guess we all have that in common, hey.

DAVID What's that?

Beat.

ADELE Never mind. *[Beat.]* Sorry ... I don't really know why I'm even here, I just thought you might ... *[Beat.]* Maybe, help me.

DAVID Sure, whatever I can.

ADELE Does it ever go away?

DAVID I'm sorry?

ADELE Does it ever go away, the picture in your head? *[Beat.]* I don't mean to be rude but, I know what happened, the whole school was talking about it. I mean, when you found him in the bathroom. The picture of him in your head,

is it ... is he always there? I'm prying, I know, I'm sorry, I know you're s'pose to talk about other people's problems, not your own. I know the last thing you probably need is some random askin you personal stuff, but I just thought it might, help ... is all. 'Cause that picture, for me, it plays over and over in this sick kind of slow motion and it's quiet but screaming all at once and I can't ... I just can't get it to go. *[Beat.]* It's always with me, everywhere I go.

DAVID *steps closer to ADELE. She objects.*

No, it's okay, it's okay. I'm okay.

Pause.

DAVID Maybe it never does. Go, I mean. I think it changes, I think. Somehow it becomes, bearable. *[Beat.]* He was a student of mine. For a long time I felt like I should have somehow known. I guess I've found a way to live with that, that helplessness, to live with what he left.

Beat.

ADELE There's this spot the boys used to fish at. Jarrod, Joe and Rue. Couple of years back they rescued this tinny from the dump. It sat on the front lawn busted and full of holes so long, they nicknamed it the *Front Yard Challenge*. Eventually they patched the holes. Joey found an old motor. They'd fish all the time, the three of them. All night and all day if they could. They found this spot on the harbour with three sunken ships all in a clump. Brothers Wreck they named it, best spot on the harbour. Place is teeming with fish, get the salmon schools coming in on a high, couple of barra if you're lucky. *[Beat.]* Since Joey's gone it's like ... I can't help but think we'll all end up down there, sunk. At the bottom of the ocean, clumped together. *[Pause.]* Maybe you can't talk about it, patient confidentiality or whatever, that's okay, I just ... I just want to know if he's moving, not sinking, you know, I'm his big sister, it's weird for me to talk to him about this stuff. I mean I try but ... I just want to know ... if he's going to be okay, I guess.

DAVID I'm sorry, Adele, I ... *[Beat.]* Ruben's missed his last two appointments. I've called and called, I've sent letters to the house, I haven't been able to get in touch with him for weeks.

ADELE What?

DAVID He's breached bail conditions. I'm sorry, I didn't realise you didn't know.

ADELE Why didn't you ... *[Beat.]* I gotta go.

ADELE *wipes her face, grabs her bag and starts to leave.*

DAVID Adele, wait.

ADELE *exits.*

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Evaluate one group's performance of a selection of script extracts. Focus your discussion on the use of effective scene transitions. Include consideration of how the transitions added to the atmosphere of the performance.
- 2 Evaluate one group's performance of their script extract. Comment on the ways in which the group effectively incorporated dramatic techniques in the performance.
- 3 Evaluate one performer who portrayed a character both in the past and present, or a performer who played more than one character. Discuss the ways in which the performer manipulated vocal dynamics, body language, energy and focus to effectively present two or more different characters.

6.4 Writing your own Australian scripted drama

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PLAYWRIGHT?

When we go to the theatre and see a scripted drama performed, it is important to remind ourselves that what we see is the end product of a long and rewarding process. A playwright is unlikely to be happy with the first draft of a script. It is a process of refining ideas, exploring them in rehearsal and re-drafting the script that creates the best work.

So, where do you start? When writing a script it can be helpful to follow certain important steps. It may be helpful to also refer back to the steps in the creative process provided in chapter 4 on playbuilding.

Step 1 Define your idea

Defining your idea is the most important step in creating a script. It is the creation of your concept and is the first stage of the creative process, known as 'problem finding'. You need to be clear about the intention of your script. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my intention?
- How will I frame the action through the questions I am exploring in my script about aspects of life, philosophy, love, spirituality, history, art, relationships, society, politics or power?
- What is the most effective style to communicate my ideas? Will I use a dramatic, comedic, realistic or non-realistic style?
- How long do I want the performance to be?
- What type of performance space will the script be performed in?



National Theatre
Discover – David Hare on
Playwriting
National Theatre
Discover – How to Create
Characters

Step 2 Research your idea

It is crucial to research the ideas for your play. In the creative process, these stages are gathering knowledge and being open to a broad range of information. Without substantial research, your situations and characters can become clichéd or stereotyped. Often interviewing people or finding true stories can help give your writing a freshness and originality. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I need to know about my topic?
- Where can I access information?
- How do I record the information so it is useful to me when I write?
- How do I interpret the information?
- How open am I to finding information and ideas from unexpected places?

Step 3 Decide on your characters and roles

Each character needs to have a crucial part in the telling of the story. Remember that both roles and characters are important. A good place to start creating character is through character biographies (see chapter 4, p. 86). Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the roles and characters in my play?
- Why is each role or character important?
- Who is/are the protagonist/s and antagonist/s?
- What is it about each role or character that gives it dimension and complexity?
- What message do the actions of the roles or characters give to the audience?
- What are the character's objectives and motivations?

Each character or role needs to have a unique voice. The language they use will reflect their social class, personality and status. Finding character voice requires consideration of not only how the characters sound, but also how the characters move. Their physical appearance and use of body language will influence the use of vocal dynamics by the performer.

Step 4 Plot the journey

Once you have researched your idea, you can begin to establish your dramatic structure and the dramatic action of your script. In the creative process, this is where you are generating ideas for the dramatic action. At this stage you can record your dramatic structure and dramatic action as a brief written description, or synopsis. You may also choose to prepare your synopsis as a storyboard with some explanatory notes rather than full descriptions. Be prepared to take some risks. Today, many contemporary plays are breaking away from traditional linear narratives and are using staging, performance spaces, dramatic structure, technology and language in more poetic, symbolic and unexpected ways. Initially, you will need to decide on your dramatic form and the focus of your play, as this will determine how you shape the dramatic action. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What form or style will my play be performed in? Will it be realistic or melodramatic, or will it perhaps be realistic but with influences from other forms?
- What impact will the choice of form and style have on the actor–audience relationship?



HINT

Visualise your play as you write. See the characters, costume, lighting, and setting. Hear the sounds. Sketch any strong images or record them on your script draft as stage directions. This helps establish the world of the play and defines the atmosphere you wish to create.



CHALLENGE

Create three characters of your own imagining. Make each character distinctly different from the others. The differences might be in background, status, confidence, education, country of birth or personality. Imagine each character must give the first three minutes of a speech, for example at a 21st birthday, a funeral or a wedding. As you write the speech, try to adopt the character's voice. Present your speeches to the class.



HINT

In the creative process of playwriting, allow yourself time away from working on your play to let the ideas for your play 'incubate'. This is when your mind continues to pull ideas together, link your playwriting to other projects you may be working on, and problem solve.

- What are the ideas I want to explore in my play and how might the dramatic action communicate these ideas to an audience? For example, 'I want to explore an idea about how love can be healing. I will show this through a short, non-realistic scene where many different characters give their perspectives before exploring one aspect of this idea more deeply in a longer, more realistic dialogue.'
- Is the dramatic structure that of a linear narrative or a non-linear narrative, or is it a montage structure? What is the best way to tell the story and present the ideas?
- Who is/are the protagonist/s? Who is/are the antagonist/s?
- How will the tension of the piece be established and built? What is the climactic moment of the piece? Will there be one or more climactic moments? When will they occur?
- What locations will be used? How will the locations be established using performers and the elements of production?



HINT

Dramatic structure is the term used to describe the order and placement of scenes and acts.

Step 5 Develop the scenes

In step 4 you completed your dramatic structure and synopsis. Your scenes then spring from this overview. In this stage of the creative process, you are not only generating ideas but also combining and selecting them based on your understanding of what will be effective in performance. Each scene explores a new development of plot or idea, like paragraphs in an essay. Each scene has its own particular point. All the scenes are linked together in a particular order to help establish the intention of the play. As the play has a climactic moment, so will each scene. Make sure you are clear about the significant moment or line in each scene, and how each scene contributes to the whole script. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are all the scenes necessary?
- What is the climactic moment in each scene and is this moment clear?
- What is each scene's relationship to other scenes?



HINT

Once you have developed your dramatic structure and have a synopsis of the dramatic action, it is possible to use performers to help develop scenes through improvisation. This approach may assist you in refining both plot and characters.

Step 6 Workshop the script

After a period of writing, it is a good idea to have your script workshopped. Having actors read and perform your script will help you discover new ideas. In the creative process, this is externalising your ideas, which then helps you to continue generating, selecting and combining new ideas based on what you see when the script draft is performed. The actors do not need to rehearse for the workshop. A reading of the script will help you work out the overall running time, develop the build of tension, improve scene transitions and fine-tune characters. It is also a good idea to invite a few people to see your script performed for the first time. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What were the strengths of my script?
- What did the performers enjoy?
- What improvements can I make?
- What did the performers find difficult to follow or understand?



HINT

Make sure you bring a copy of your script and a pencil to your script workshop. Make annotations and notes as your script is read or performed by the performers.

Step 7 Edit the script

Using the material you have gathered throughout the workshopping process, edit your script. Make adjustments, delete lines, add lines, and so on.

Step 8 Perform a reading of the script

It is now time to revisit the rehearsal room. This time you will give your performers time to read the script and prepare their characters before a rehearsal. You may also give the performers some specific directions in terms of character interpretation, movement, entrances and exits. You might ask a friend who likes directing to rehearse with the performers. Invite a small audience to your performance. Sometimes it is helpful to invite some of the same audience members from your workshop reading, as they will have comments about the changes you have made. Once again, you are looking not only for flaws but also for ways to improve your script.

Step 9 Produce a final script

Once your play has been written up as a final draft, it is ready to be performed. A director will create his or her interpretation of your play and bring a directorial concept to the work. This is often an interesting time for the playwright as they are seeing their work interpreted by others.

EXERCISE

EXPLORING AUSTRALIAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY

The following exercises are preparation for the end-of-chapter playwriting task, and allow you to collaborate with others to explore your own perceptions of Australian society, politics, history and culture. This will help you to define your concept and point of view before writing your script. It is important to remember that all opinions and ideas are useful. Our society is diverse so there will be many different points of view. Keep logbook entries of your work in these exercises, as they will provide a useful resource for the performance task.

True blue?

Work in groups of three. List as many things you can think of that are distinctly Australian. These might be particular examples of people, places, events, objects, animals or expressions. There is no need to edit or alter your list. Include everything you can think of. Try to group your words and ideas into categories. Share your ideas with the class.

Map of Australia

As a class, use the entire area of the classroom to create a map of Australia incorporating movement, vocal dynamics and levels. On your map, include cities, natural landmarks and other features you feel are important. As you become a city, landmark or feature, consider how you might use your physical shape and vocal dynamics to express the idea or object you are representing.

Tableaux of Australian society

Divide into groups of six. Prepare two or three tableaux that represent an issue of concern you have about Australian society or politics. Present your tableaux to the class. Make sure each tableau represents as many aspects of the issue as possible.





HINT

Refer to p. 80 for an explanation of a montage performance.



Australia and the world

In this exercise you will create a brief performance that comments on how Australia is shaped by global ideas, movements and events. Use the following perspectives as a starting point for your play:

- how Australians think they are seen by others
- how Australians would like to be seen by others
- how Australians really are.

Divide into groups of five. Brainstorm ideas about the three different perspectives and then prepare a montage presentation that shows the three viewpoints. Incorporate an inventive use of movement, vocal dynamics, repetition and space. Also consider how you can control movement and timing to transform from one scene to another so there are no breaks in your performance.

Mateship

The concept of mateship is a significant aspect of Australian culture. Mateship embodies certain values, including equality, loyalty and determination. Divide into groups of four and prepare a short performance that examines the strengths and weaknesses of this code of loyalty. Spend some time in your group discussing the positive and negative aspects of mateship. Your performance may be linear or montage in structure, and include the use of narration, tableaux, symbols or freeze frames. Present your performance to the class.

The Australian natural environment

The Australian landscape has a powerful influence on our perception of our country and what it means to be Australian. Our relationship with the environment has been explored in many Australian plays and films.

- In large groups, prepare a movement-and-sound-scape that shows two contrasting landscapes or seasons we experience in Australia.
- Prepare a role-play in which the natural environment is a central feature. Two or three people should play characters who respond to the environment; the others should create the environment. Some suggested environments to present are an ocean beach, the bush, the desert, a rainforest, the mountains or the underwater world.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Write a logbook entry that discusses your perception of what it means to be an Australian in the 21st century. In your entry, refer to the performance work you have seen in class.
- 2 Research and create a list of four Australian plays or films in which the Australian landscape has been a dominant feature. Discuss the ways in which the environment is symbolic in the play or film.
- 3 Choose one of the exercises you participated in. Evaluate the ways in which you and your group used body language, movement, vocal dynamics and the elements of drama to achieve an effective performance.

PERFORMANCE TASK



6.5 Playwriting task: Australian drama

The task

You are to write a five-minute scripted drama for two to four characters that explores an aspect of Australian society, politics or history. You are encouraged to experiment with a range of dramatic forms, techniques and conventions in the writing of your piece.

You will present a final published version as a typed script that incorporates the following script conventions:

- title and title page
- cast list, with brief role and character descriptions
- scene descriptions, including information about set, lighting and sound where appropriate
- role or character names in the left-hand margin of the page
- indented dialogue lines
- stage directions where appropriate
- double-spacing of the print.

You will also include a statement of 300 words that explains your intentions as a playwright, the themes and issues you wish to explore, and the reasons for your choice of dramatic form, techniques and conventions.

You and your teacher will decide on whether or not to rehearse and perform the final script.

You may choose one of the following suggestions as a starting point for your script.

- The Lucky Country
- Island
- ‘The strength of a nation lies with its people.’

You may also choose to set the action of your play against the background of a significant Australian day, or event, such as one of the following. This can add symbolic meaning to your script.

- Australia Day
- Sorry Day
- A protest march
- Anzac Day
- New Year’s Eve
- Christmas Day
- The Melbourne Cup

Creating and making Australian drama

- Research aspects of Australian society, politics and history that are of interest to you.
- Decide on a central focus and intention for your scripted drama.
- Choose a narrative structure to frame your scripted drama.
- Devise characters or roles.
- Consider how dramatic techniques such as narration, projected images or mime can be incorporated into your scripted drama.
- Consider integral and efficient ways of creating scene transitions.
- Use improvisation in rehearsal to workshop your script with other members of the class.
- Make notes of your observations of your scripted drama in performance. Adjust the draft of your script accordingly.

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- establish an effective, original and clear intention as a playwright
- devise an effective and engaging setting and situation
- create interesting and appropriate characters or roles
- establish tension
- establish an appropriate atmosphere
- incorporate dramatic techniques appropriate to the style and purpose of the scripted drama
- publish a final script that incorporates formatting conventions
- explore an aspect of Australian society, politics or history.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Recount the process of developing your scripted drama. What problems did you encounter and how did you overcome them?
- 2 Evaluate the reading of your scripted drama. In your evaluation, comment on the ways in which the weaker aspects of your script could be strengthened.
- 3 Evaluate one other class member's script. In your evaluation, discuss the playwright's intention. Consider how effectively they chose dramatic form to suit their intention.
- 4 Research one of the key periods in Australian theatre history. Present a short talk that outlines the features of the chosen period. In your presentation, include the performance of a script extract from a play written during the period.
- 5 Imagine you are running a course in writing Australian drama. Explain the important steps you would take in the process of writing an Australian play.



Playwriting task: Australian drama

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- recognise how theatre and drama reflect and explore aspects of Australian society and of human experience
- create, write, edit and publish a scripted drama that explores aspects of Australian society, politics or history.

| Key learning areas | Level of achievement | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Beginning | Consolidating | Mastering | Excelling |
| <p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you prepared your scripted drama by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • researching an aspect of Australian society, politics or history of interest to you? • establishing an effective, original and clear intention? • preparing written drafts of your scripted drama? <p>Have you incorporated dramatic form, techniques and conventions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choosing the most appropriate dramatic form(s) for the intention of your piece? • selecting dramatic techniques and conventions for a specific purpose? • manipulating the elements of drama to establish tension and atmosphere? • incorporating improvisation to explore and develop role or character, and dramatic action? • presenting an appropriately formatted and published copy of your scripted drama? • creating an appropriate actor–audience relationship? | | | | |
| <p>Responding</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • question and interrogate the choices you have made in terms of concept, dramatic action and dramatic language? • reflect on the process of structuring moments of your scripted drama into a coherent and polished performance incorporating effective scene transitions? • reflect on the feedback of your teacher and others to make changes and build your creativity? | | | | |

Comments
