

MALTHOUSE

EDUCATION

LOOKING ^{FOR} ALIBRANDI

9 – 31 JUL



VCE THEATRE STUDIES—PART A

BELVOIR 

MALTHOUSE ACKNOWLEDGES THE LAND AND SONGLINES OF THE BOON WURRUNG AND WURUNDJERI PEOPLES OF THE KULIN NATION.

*Malthouse Theatre and Belvoir present Looking for Alibrandi.
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ICON KEY



LINKS



ACTIVITY



VIDEO

WELCOME

WELCOME TO MALTHOUSE THEATRE'S LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI.

Prompt Pack A is a collection of pre-show resources, provocations and activities intended to support you and your students' exploration and analysis of this brand new adaptation of one of Australia's most loved stories.

As *Looking for Alibrandi* is on VCAA's combined 2022 Theatre Studies playlist, the pack's contents relate to both Unit 3, Outcome 3: *Analysing and evaluating theatre* and Unit 4, Outcome 3: *Analysing and evaluating a performance*.

The Pack is structured around five main chapters: **Background, Contexts, Themes, Pre-Show Activities & Information, and Resources.**

The **Background** chapter includes the plot, genesis and history of the playtext, as well as information on the company and team involved.

Contexts provides selected material to get students started in their research of the play's source material, time, language and style, as well as the challenges in interpreting the script to the stage.

The **Themes** chapter starts with an exercise to activate the play's overarching theme of identity, before 'exploding it out' to provide information and provocations relating to the work's interrogations of family, religion, socioeconomic status, peer pressure, and the immigrant experience.

The **Pre-Show Activities & Information** chapter guides students through the script analysis and imagining an interpretation required by Theatre Studies, and provides activities targeted towards either Unit 3 or Unit 4. Also included is a short guide for students when attending the theatre – what to look for, how to be a respectful audience, when to take notes, etc.

Finally, **Resources** is where you will find an enlightening video interview with Malthouse's New Work Manager, Mark Pritchard, as well

as a comprehensive list of further reference material—some of which are referenced in the other chapters of this Prompt Pack, and some that are simply extra resources for teachers or students to use at their discretion, including books, articles, documents and podcasts. Note that all resources are hyperlinked for those clicking on an interactive PDF version of this Prompt Pack, as well having short, easily-transposed links for those holding a paper version.

Once again, this pack is separated into **COLOURED** pages for teachers like this one, and **WHITE** pages (that are easier to print or photocopy) directed at students, so you can easily identify and choose what information you disseminate to the class.

Remember that the purpose of the Prompt Packs are to provide inroads and information about the production, not provide definitive answers. Students will need to engage in their own broader study and discussion.

I hope this Prompt Pack A will excite curiosity, prompt discussion and ignite imagination in your classroom, preparing you and the students for both the performance and the deeper post-show study and learning contained in Prompt Pack B, available early July.

If you have any other questions regarding this material, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at lbrooks@malthousetheatre.com.au.

I'm confident *Looking for Alibrandi* will be an extraordinary experience for you and your students, and one you will all remember for a very long time.

See you at the theatre!

Lyall Brooks

Malthouse Education Coordinator

WARNINGS & SUPPORT

We urge you to consider the cultural diversity of your classroom when studying this play. Take special care with any students with Italian or Mediterranean backgrounds in your classroom—especially when discussions arise around the language and themes of the play. Be aware that the danger of talking about one's lived experience or culture 'in the abstract' can be just as confronting as talking insensitively about specifics.

You are encouraged to read the short list of content warnings below, explore this Prompt Pack in advance, use your best judgement when disseminating or discussing information, and make yourself and your students aware of the support offered by the organisations on the right.

COARSE LANGUAGE

This production contains occasional coarse language, in English and Italian.

STAGE VIOLENCE

There is only mild violence in the production. One character is hit in the face with a bottle of tomato passata, and passata is occasionally used as stylised blood effect during the show.

SUICIDE

One of the younger characters dies by suicide offstage. This is relayed to other characters verbally, and has an emotional impact on the characters, but the death itself is not seen or described.

BEYOND BLUE

1300 224 636

beyondblue.org.au

HEADSPACE

headspace.org.au

REACHOUT

au.reachout.com

HEALTH EQUAL YOUTH (HEY) PROJECT

www.yacvic.org.au

LIFELINE

13 11 14

www.lifeline.org.au

KIDS HELPLINE

1800 55 1800

BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

1800 105 303

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/

SUICIDE CALLBACK SERVICE

1300 659 467

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

BACKGROUND

PLOT

BEFORE EVERYTHING

In dream-like semi-darkness, a female figure dances—perhaps on the deck of a ship. She loses her balance and steps on a tomato, and this long-ago memory is interrupted by reality as the figure—Nonna—is dragged into the present.

THE YEAR BEGINS

It is early 1996, and Josie is at her Nonna's house with her mother, Christina, to make the year's supply of passata. Josie, a second-generation Italian Australian, doesn't feel a strong connection to her Nonna and her heritage—nor does she want to. She is about to sit her HSC year, but has to spend every weekend and Wednesday night at Nonna's while Christina works extra shifts. Nonna speaks of the 'curse' that befalls the women of the family.

RADIO NATIONAL (FANTASY)

Josie has a fantasy of herself in the future—successful barrister, wife and mother, and Order of Australia recipient—being interviewed by ABC's Margaret Throsby. Josie reveals Christina became a single mother at a young age and was thrown out of home by her father (Josie's Nonno) as a result. Josie says she has never tried to find her own father, and that she has a scholarship to attend St Martha's, an exclusive Catholic girls' school.

SCHOOL BEGINS

Josie sits in study period with her best friend (and only other Italian student at St Martha's), Sera, and bossy school captain, Ivy. Sera is applying a dubious homemade growth cream to her breasts and, even though Josie is deputy school captain, Ivy makes racist remarks to both of them.

WOG ASIO

As Josie and Sera go to the beach, a heightened physical sequence depicts what is, through Josie's eyes, the invasive surveillance and information network within the Italian-Australian community ('Wog ASIO').

AFTERNOON AT NONNA'S

Nonna is sharing photos from her childhood in Italy. She reveals she knows Josie has been to the beach and warns her of the social risks of appearing promiscuous. Michael Andretti, a handsome lawyer who has just moved back to Sydney, arrives and is promptly fawned over by Nonna. Josie seems to know more about him than is revealed, and there is tension between them before Josie swiftly walks out.

BACK HOME

Later, Christina reveals to Josie she has also run into Michael earlier in the day, but both women confirm they 'didn't give anything away.'

HAVE A SAY DAY!

At the traditional youth speech day, Josie bumps into John Barton: captain of the local private boys' school, politician's son—and her secret crush. They are interrupted by the charming 'total shithead' Jacob Coote from Cook High, and John promises to meet up with Josie at the upcoming inter-school dance before leaving. Jacob delivers a rebellious speech to an ecstatic crowd of students.

DRESSING UP

A month later, and Nonna and Christina are adjusting Josie's dress for the dance, which she hates. Neither Christina nor Josie have visited Michael since he moved back. Nonna laments being 'the only one to keep this family's reputation.'

DANCE!

At the dance, Josie tried to find John but fails. With typical malice, Ivy informs her John has already left. Josie talks with Jacob and, after Sera leaves with her new boyfriend and Josie is left without a ride home, accepts Jacob's offer to walk her. We also glimpse Nonna, at home, looking through her photos.

WALK HOME

Josie connects with Jacob on the walk home. She tells him about her disconnection from both her Italian and the upper-class Australian cultures. When they arrive at Josie's house, Michael is there arguing with Christina. She sends Jacob away and listens.

CONFRONTATION

In an exchange loaded with both volatility and magnetism, Christina has told Michael that Josie is his daughter and he is offering to help out. Josie bursts in angrily, and Christina sends Michael away so she can talk to her.

ENOUGH!

The scene moves fluidly between an abstract vision of Nonna in pain, Christina telling Josie she invited Michael because Nonna had worked out the secret of Josie's paternity, and Nonna chastising Christina about her past and bringing on 'the curse.'

CAREERS DAY

John apologises to Josie for not meeting her at the dance and explains he 'wasn't feeling well.' After encouraging an excited Sera to consider studying medicine at university, he promises to show Josie around the USYD campus and leaves. Ivy enters and accuses Josie of being a bad influence on John, and racially provokes her until Josie attacks her. The girls are hauled into Sister Bernadette's office and Josie, threatened with expulsion (and possibly litigation), begs her to call Michael instead of Christina.

ENTER ANDRETTI

Josie and Michael sit alone in Sister Bernadette's office. They reconnect slowly as they share their inter-generational experiences of racism, and Michael encourages her the best revenge is 'doing well in life.' He offers her an after-school job at his law firm, and Josie notices there is possibly still an attraction between her parents.

FAMILY ROUND TWO

Christina learns about both Josie's school fight and the internship offer and is angry at Michael's sudden involvement in his daughter's life. Recounting the abuse and neglect she suffered at the hands of her own father, Christina tells Josie she should reconnect with Michael if she wants.

JACOB COOTE PLEASE

Josie meets Jacob in his dad's garage. She apologises for sending him away the night of the dance, he congratulates her for punching Ivy, and they kiss.

MORE JACOB

Josie and Jacob run excitedly through the streets and—pursued by Wog ASIO—eventually end up at her house. Their previous flirtatiousness subsides as Josie realises they have vastly different goals for their individual futures.

COURTHOUSE FANTASY AND LIFE

A montage scene switching between Josie working in Michael's office, Josie fantasising about an older, successful lawyer version of herself, and conversations between Josie and Christina in which Josie relays Michael's nostalgic attraction to Christina, they reveal they have both been avoiding Nonna for months now, and Christina entertains the idea of going back to study.

JOHN BARTON

John is showing Josie around USYD. They talk about education and class, their fathers, and how they used to have crushes on each other but are happy just being friends now. John gives Josie a letter—to read after the upcoming exams—about his future 'emancipation.'

NEW SERA

Josie tries to engage Sera in boy gossip, but Sera has committed to pursuing medicine and distracted with studying for her exams. Josie wonders if they've somehow 'swapped brains'—but they find common ground in identifying how much harder they have to work to break free from their Italian immigrant upbringings.

BACK AT NONNA'S

Josie is visiting Nonna after a long time, looking through an old photo album. Nonna recounts her experience coming to Australia as an immigrant, her arranged marriage, and working on a remote farm in Queensland. She balks at discussing an old photo of a handsome Australian man, Marcus Sanford. Josie invites Nonna to her house to celebrate Christina's upcoming birthday.

SURPRISE!

Josie and Nonna are waiting for Christina on her birthday but she arrives home late, and a man's voice is heard being hurriedly sent away. After first joyously assuming it was Michael getting back together with her mother, Josie is furious when she learns Christina is actually dating other men, and she runs away to go to Jacob's.

LIQUID COURAGE

Sera provides the requested alcohol and advice before Josie goes to Jacob's to potentially have sex for the first time.

JACOB & JOSIE

Josie and Jacob attempt awkwardly to have sex but everything 'gets weird' and it goes nowhere. Jacob has dropped out of school and Josie, although she cares for him, realises they are on very different paths in life.

FIRST EXAM

Josie arrives at school feeling positive about taking her first practice exam, until Sister Bernadette stops her to inform her that John Barton has committed suicide.

THE FUNERAL; THE LETTER

A dialogue-less scene depicting John's funeral, Josie tearing open the letter he left her, and then emptiness.

THE AFTERMATH

Some weeks later, Christina and Michael talk about Josie's grief, their past and, despite Christina's forgiveness, how they will never be together. Josie emerges from her room and Christina leaves to continue her new TAFE studies. After talking to Michael briefly about Christina's relationship with her own father, Josie abruptly stands and leaves.

THE CONFESSION

Josie confronts Nonna about the way she treated Christina as a pregnant teen. Nonna confesses that 'the curse' started with her—she had an affair with Marcus, the mysterious man in the photograph, and he is Christina's real father. She believes she has been trying to protect Christina and Josie ever since. Josie tells the audience she threw John's letter away; she hoped he had found peace, and let him go. She's now realised her behaviour—and that of the Alibrandi women before her—has always been in the pursuit of some sort of freedom.

PASSATA FOREVER

The three Alibrandi women are back making passata like we first found them, but there is a new, lighter energy in their relationship—a reconciliation has occurred. They reveal Sera is going to be a doctor—she even got a higher HSC score than Josie—and they laugh as Nonna swears.

GENESIS & HISTORY

'The story has always compelled me because it spoke so directly to the conflict I experienced, socially and internally. I was scared to embrace my identity for fear of not being able to access an Anglo-centric world. Josie was the first character I had ever read or seen on screen that understood what it was like. She made me proud to be a wog and I will thank Melina for creating her every single day.'

Stephen Nicolazzo
Director



Watch the full video of Malthouse New Work Manager, Mark Pritchard, talking about his role, the dramaturgy process, and the genesis of *Looking for Alibrandi* [here](#). In it, he reveals the background of the work as a new theatrical adaptation.

Well-known Melbourne theatremaker—and Malthouse directing alumnus—Stephen Nicolazzo brought the idea of adapting *Looking for Alibrandi* to the Malthouse artistic team in 2019. Malthouse already had a relationship with stage and screen writer Vidya Rajan as a recent Playwright in Residence, and suggested the two work together to create the script—predicting Vidya's experience growing up as an Australian of South Asian descent would bring an interesting perspective on the themes of cultural identity in the story.

'Approaching this adaptation, I was struck by the echoes in my own life in the mid-2000s. The parallels were easy to access: the conservatism in the family space, the feeling of alienation from whiteness and the wanting to get approval from it, and looking at university as a way of gaining legitimacy. I recognised the patterns in the way the women talk, and lean on each other, and form their own world. It's their strength, but the dynamics are constantly going around in a circle. Love is shown through correction and conflict. Getting that right in the adaptation was about finding the connection to my own migrant history and the domestic spaces that me and my Aunts and Mum occupied.'

Vidya Rajan
Playwright



CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

CAST



CHANELLA MACRI
Josie



LUCIA MASTRANTONE
Christina, Sera



JENNIFER VULETIC
Nonna, Margaret Throsby,
Sister Bernadette



DANIEL NIXON
Composer & Sound Designer



KATIE SFETKIDIS
Lighting Designer



ROSA VOTO
Choreographer



HANNAH MONSON
Ivy, John Barton



JOHN MARC DESENGANO
Jacob Coote



ASHLEY LYONS
Michael



CECILY RABEY
Stage Manager



HARRY DOWLING
Assistant Stage Manager

CREATIVE



STEPHEN NICOLAZZO
Director



VIDYA RAJAN
Writer



KATE DAVIS
Set & Costume Designer

ADDITIONAL CREATIVES

MUSICIANS

Rosa Voto
Renato Vacirca

VOCAL COACH

Matt Furlani

DIALECT COACH

Paulo Bongiovanni

BESEN FAMILY ARTIST PROGRAM RECIPIENTS

Aiv Puglielli (Sound Design & Composition)
Karine Larché (Set & Costume Design)

TRANSLATION

Moreno Giovannoni

DESIGN INTERN

Casey Harper-Wood

DIRECTOR INTERNS

Tansy Gorman
Steph Lee

MALTHOUSE THEATRE

Malthouse Theatre collaborates with local and international artists to create inventive performances that cut to the core of the human experience. Their work explores the world—personally, socially and politically—to provoke a dialogue with and within audiences. Malthouse consistently and proudly serves as a counterpoint to the mainstream and, to this day, its distinctive style resonates locally, nationally and globally.

The company champions artistic and cultural diversity and seeks out alternative points of view. They invite collaboration without bias, actively address inequities in representation, and believe fiercely in gender equality. They champion positive change and passionately influence its enactment.

For over 40 years, Malthouse Theatre has fanned the flames of Melbourne's radical culture, exerting significant influence on the city's artistic community. In 1976, Carrillo Gantner, Graeme Blundell and Garrie Hutchinson formed the Hoopla Theatre Foundation, which transitioned into the Playbox Theatre Company in 1980.

In 2004, Michael Kantor reimagined Playbox as Malthouse Theatre, named after the iconic venue that has been the company's home since 1990. A historic beer-making malthouse built in 1892, the building at 113 Sturt Street, Southbank was gifted by Carlton & United Breweries to Playbox Theatre in 1988.

Converted into an agile and contemporary theatre complex, The Malthouse comprises a world-renowned 500-seat Merlyn theatre, the recently refurbished 180-seat Beckett Theatre, the flexible Tower theatre space, rehearsal rooms and meeting spaces, and a new bespoke workshop.

It is Malthouse Theatre's dedicated venue—a home for innovation and live experiences that provoke and entertain.



CONTEXTS

THE SOURCE TEXT

MELINA MARCHETTA

Melina Marchetta was born into a family of Australian immigrants, like the character Josie in *Looking for Alibrandi*; the story of Marchetta's grandmother immigrating to Australia from Italy in the 1930s loosely inspired the novel. Unsure of her academic abilities, Marchetta left school at age 15, but later earned a teaching degree. She taught at a Catholic boys' school in Sydney for 10 years. *Looking for Alibrandi*, her first novel, was published in 1992 and became an instant hit, selling out its first print run in only two months. It earned a number of prestigious awards, both in Australia and worldwide, and Marchetta went on to also write the screenplay for the award-winning 2000 film adaptation.

'When this book came out, it was ground-breaking. It was a book that made it possible for a generation of young adults to identify as Italian-Australians. It showed them that they did not have to choose between one or the other. And it became popular and loved largely because librarians and English teachers all over Australia believed students should not shy away from stories about themselves, dealing with issues they faced day-to-day. They decided not to focus on how 'exotic' Josie was, but how pertinent her story was to our national narrative. To read and teach this book focusing solely on 'ethnicity' would do the work a great disservice. Her Italian heritage is only one of many parts of Josephine Alibrandi's character. And her character is strung together by the stories her mother Christina and Nonna Katia tell her about strong, stoic women who do not conform to stereotypes.'

Alice Pung
Reading Australia

'For the very first time in my own life, there was a book that didn't fetishise a migrant upbringing. Josie wasn't somebody to pity or consider 'exotic'. I identified with her world, the pressures and challenges of straddling what I considered at that age to be identities in competition with each other. I loved Josie's gutsiness, her insistence on making up her own mind about sex and not giving in to peer pressure. I loved her loud, vibrant, complicated family, and the fact that her experiences with racism vindicated my own.'

Randah Abdel-Fattah
The Book That Made Me

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOVEL

EXPLORE

Read Melbourne writer Alice Pung's [full essay on *Looking for Alibrandi*](#), part of Copyright Agency's *Reading Australia* series.

What are the Italian-Australian cultural aspects of the novel that Pung, an Asian-Australian, identified with?

- Despite growing up in a different city, what were the geographical and/or moral familiarities she recognised from when she was a teenager?
- How does Pung describe the timeline and scope of Anglo-Australia's attitude towards and acceptance of non-Anglo writing, language and culture. How does she posit *Looking for Alibrandi* might have played a part in this?

'There's a legacy of teenage girl's literature, from Anne of Green Gables to Bend It Like Beckham, of these girls being highly intelligent and precocious and restless to remake the world in their own image. And I think that's very true to life. Teenage girls are often the canary in the coal mine of social change... Their coming of age is often loaded with interesting social and historical stuff.'

Vidya Rajan
Playwright

For playwright Vidya Rajan, *Looking for Alibrandi* sits in a fascinating tradition of young girls' stories heralding major cultural shifts. Rajan's approach to the adaptation drew on her own South Asian heritage, and the resonances the story has with more recent waves of migration.

- What might these resonances be? Brainstorm as many things—themes, events, language, culture—that Rajan may have connected with in the process of adapting the novel into a play.
- Consider and research the two examples of teenage girls' literature Rajan mentions above: *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). What cultural shifts might these works have reflected or foreshadowed?
- What about *Looking for Alibrandi* itself? What social changes might this story have echoed or influenced?
- Can you think of any other Young Adult or teenage girl-focussed works—books, films, music—that similarly spoke to the zeitgeist?

THE HOWARD ERA

A notable change in this stage adaptation of *Looking for Alibrandi* is to set the story in 1996 instead of 1992, which recontextualises the action under the new Prime Ministership of John Howard.

The March 1996 Australian Federal Election was the most important Australian election for more than a decade, decisively returning the Liberal-National coalition to office after thirteen years in opposition. Howard swept into power with talk of sovereignty and strong borders, and pledged to create an Australia that was 'comfortable and relaxed' about its past, its present and its future.

Race and immigration emerged as a major election issue for the first time in many years. The campaign was full of racially charged rhetoric, notably from the then-emerging political personalities Pauline Hanson, Graeme Campbell and Bob Katter. Hanson was dis-endorsed by the Liberals for her comments about Aboriginal people, but still won a seat as an independent, leading to an increasingly toxic focus on immigration policy in the ensuing years.

John Howard himself had become embroiled in the immigration debate in 1987, when he stated that levels of Asian immigration were too high. He subsequently modified his position and prior to the 1996 campaign, publicly apologised to the Asian community for his earlier remarks.

The second major issue of the campaign was the discussing of Australia becoming a republic, which Howard—a staunch monarchist—pushed back against.

It was the Howard government that soon invented the cruel form of bureaucratic torture that is the Temporary Protection Visa, and began the policy of offshore detention for asylum seekers via prison camps on Christmas Island, Manus Island and Nauru, with Howard's ringing declaration that 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.'



THE MID-90s

ACTIVITY: TIME CAPSULE

Research the mid-90s and gather as much information and material as you can to create a virtual 'time capsule' of 1996.

Arrange all the material into a digital or real dramaturgical booklet—one you could give a *Looking for Alibrandi* cast or creative team on the first day of rehearsals or at the beginning of the design process. Consider sections like:

- **MUSIC:** What was in the charts? What radio stations were there? In what format was music consumed? What made the Triple J Hottest 100 that year? Perhaps highlight the Australian artists.
- **TV:** What shows were popular at the time? What was new, and what was older but enduring? Are there any mentioned in the script to help you?
- **POP CULTURE:** How did people access pop culture, celebrity gossip and trends? What magazines were there? Consider the demographics they were aimed at.
- **FASHION:** Find images of what people were wearing. Consider pictures of celebrities or the front covers of magazines, but also find photos of regular people to get a balanced picture.
- **POLITICS:** The Howard Era section gives one overview of the federal Australian scene, but we are also affected by world politics. Who was in power, where? What were their political views, and did they have an impact here? What about local government? What was the political scene in Sydney at the time, and did that have an effect on local people?
- **NEWS:** What was happening—or what had happened recently—that might have an impact on people's lives or thinking? Again, think both local and global (ie Sydney had just been named in 1994 as the 2000 Olympics host city).
- **OTHER:** Housing, school, wealth, work, race, culture, the arts, weather, books, technology... Cast a wide net—time capsules usually are made up of the most overt, popular and/or meaningful relics of their time (like the early Internet!).

'The egalitarian myth was stripped of its collectivist spirit to become a glossy fantasy. In the same sweep, unionists became self-employed tradies, private and religious schools created one of the world's most segregated education systems, union membership plummeted, fragile institutions of First Nation self-determination were dismantled, cities bristled with McMansions in ever-growing suburbs and the bush was transformed by industrial mining.'

Julianne Schultz

The idea of Australia: forgotten history, power for power's sake and the collapse of the egalitarian myth



LANGUAGE

RACISM & THE TERM 'WOG'

The term 'wog' is a racial slur. In the UK it refers to a dark-skinned person from North Africa, the Middle East or South Asia, possibly from the term 'golliwog'. In Australia it was used to refer to people from Southern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

'When I came here people were telling me that I had to give up being Italian and I felt the pressure to give up. They wouldn't play with you. They wouldn't MIX with you. They'd tease you. I remember getting on the bus and putting my school bag down in the line and the kids would come and kick it away, because you're a wog. So you had to wait at the back of the line and you were scared, you were intimidated. It was like they made you feel like you were dumb because you didn't speak English. Era bruttissimo a quei tempi, madonna! And in those days, you didn't want to be Italian, you wanted to be Australian. You wanted to fit in.'

Clementina, a Calabrian grandmother

Italian Language Maintenance in Sydney: New Perspectives for the Fourth Generation

In the 1980s, the term started to be reclaimed by some artists from those communities, including Nick Giannopoulos and Simon Palomares, George Kapiniaris and Mary Coustas, through shows like *Wogs Out of Work*, *Acropolis Now*, and *Wog Boy*. This came hand-in-hand with a lot of racial caricaturing, and there's a tension in some of these stereotypes in having both positive and negative impacts for those communities.

'The term 'New Australian' was used—un-ironically—to refer to recently arrived migrants, usually by people whose own 'Australian' ancestry dated back less than two hundred years. Like Asians, Mediterraneans appeared on commercial television only if they made fun of themselves. So we had Con the Fruiterer, Effie, and later, the multicultural cast of Fat Pizza... and we called this our self-deprecating, larrikin sense of humour. You were accepted if you realised your 'woggy' or 'chinky' ways, and could make fun of your 'ethnicity.'... People were still laughing at us, and not with us. So making fun of ourselves was often tinged with some degree of self-loathing.'

Alice Pung

Reading Australia

'This word, coming out of a white person's mouth, is a reminder of all that happened, of the racism endured and the art that was born from it.'

Koraly Dimitriades

Hey White People: Please Don't Call Me A 'Wog'



STYLE

'All of the action takes place in the Alibrandi kitchen, with the elements of the kitchen fluidly turning into all the other spaces. Passata stations may be set up around the space.'

'The ensemble rotates around the space constantly creating new spaces and images.'

'All scenes are through the lens of Josephine Alibrandi, shifting between reality and adolescent fantasies/nightmares.'

From the script

THE TEXT/AESTHETIC PACKAGE

Josie Alibrandi sits at the centre of this play, as our narrator and guide. Around Josie is a rotating ensemble, with all other cast members playing multiple characters, and Josie witnessing and leading the construction of events.

The play also uses fantasy sequences that live in an expressionistic space. These are memories or imaginings of Josie Alibrandi, more often than not related to Josie's place within the context of 1990s Australia and its politics, as well as the looming cyclical nature of 'the Alibrandi curse'.

Watch Malthouse New Work Manager Mark Pritchard [discuss the history of the script creation](#).

Mark talks about director Stephen Nicolazzo's unusual and appealing 'aesthetic' being a major reason for commissioning the work, and Stephen then worked with playwright Vidya Rajan to develop the script over a few years. This makes studying the implied theatre styles in Vidya's playtext *as well as* the previous stylistic work of Stephen's—perhaps, here, a somewhat inseparable context—a valuable exercise in imagining what styles the final production may exhibit.

INVESTIGATE

What styles are implied in the script? What examples can you find to support your analysis? Consider:

- the actor-audience relationship and direct address
- visible character transformation and costume changes
- expressionistic set descriptions and *mise en scene*
- realistic acting styles suggested by language and dialogue
- satirical characters and heightened physical sequences (ie Wog ASIO)
- symbolism (ie use of passata as blood)

(Remember to avoid using the term 'Eclectic' in isolation. By definition eclecticism is a mix of styles—so what styles, specifically, contribute to your assessment of 'Eclectic?')

'The style exists between heightened realism and expressionism—a world of high stakes drama and the melodramatic that is peppered with biblical imagery, gothic shadows, and elements of the divine. It is a world of overwhelming beauty, drenched in memory, in trauma, in history. The whole piece should unravel like a fast train, emulating the internal workings of Josie's inner life.'

Stephen Nicolazzo
Director

EXPLORE

Now research director Stephen Nicolazzo's body of work (stephennicolazzo.com is a good place to start, as is his theatre company, littleonestheatre.com.au). How would you describe or define Stephen's aesthetic? What theatre styles can you glean from the information and images?

Your research may certainly change or add to how you imagine Malthouse's stage interpretation, but it can also provide extra context to your script analysis. As Stephen also worked closely with Vidya in the development of the text, does it also help you identify further indicative style elements within the script?



PASSATA

Throughout the production, the Passata Day ritual of tomato sauce making is present. It's an ongoing visual element that underpins the action, bringing a constant sensory element of the tradition that links Josie, Christina and Katia to their Italian roots—and to each other.

Passata Day is an annual Italian tradition that's celebrated around Australia, often in January when tomatoes are at their ripest. It involves families coming together, chopping and boiling tomatoes, and then bottling the mixture for cooking throughout the year. Melina Marchetta's original novel of *Looking for Alibrandi* is said to have introduced the iconic Passata Day tradition to many non-Italian Australians.

The use of tomatoes for sauces and preserves did not emerge until the late 1800s. When they were brought to Europe in the 16th century, tomatoes were considered poisonous, and the tomato plant was grown exclusively for ornamental purposes. It took about two centuries for the initial distrust to fade and for tomatoes to be considered edible, by which time the tomato plant had adapted to the climate of Southern Europe. San Marzano is considered the best type of tomato for making sauce, because it's pulpy, compact, sweet, not very watery, with few seeds, and the right amount of acid.

Every region and every family has its own recipe for passata—perhaps adding a basil leaf, or sometimes a touch of salt or olive oil to the bottle. Some families boil and purée the tomatoes first before bottling the mixture, others first peel and quarter the tomatoes, then push them through a machine to make a purée—the messiest job!—before being poured into bottles, sealed, and then boiled in a vat of water for one or two hours. The bottles used are usually recycled and may have been in rotation for decades.

'The children place a few basil leaves in each prepared passata bottle. The women chop the tomatoes; the men operate the machinery; and one of the most experienced women in the group, a passata veteran, pours the passata, as wastage of any of the purée is not tolerated. Of course, at the end of a hard day's work, it also calls for a classic Italian lunch, with homemade wine and lots of laughter.'

Nigella Lawson

CHALLENGES

ACTIVITY: DEPARTMENT HEADS

Grab your *Looking for Alibrandi* script and divide the class up into five groups. Put yourself in the shoes of either the actors, the director, the designers, stage management, or the audience.

Using the script, your task is to annotate and brainstorm as many challenges as you can—difficulties, potential issues, health and safety concerns, and/or simply questions like 'how will this work?'—then report your findings back to the class. As a whole class, come up with one or two potential mitigations.

Remember to only use what's evident in the script. There will likely be quite a few overlapping challenges identified by more than one department/group.

Here are a few to get you started:

ACTORS	→ Costume quick-changes
	→ Emotional wellbeing working with difficult topics (ie suicide)
DIRECTOR	→ Staging intimate scenes
	→ Working naturistically within an expressionistic set
DESIGNERS	→ Supporting rapid scene/character changes
	→ Real passata stations – can they really be boiling hot?
STAGE MANAGEMENT	→ Onstage safety working with hot/wet/slippery food products
	→ Cleaning up messes and protection of set and costume
AUDIENCE	→ Being presented with difficult topics (ie suicide)
	→ Offensive language
	→ Allergies/nausea if real food is cooked onstage (smells etc)

THEMES

IDENTITY

JACOB. So you're really really Italian then hey?

JOSIE. No. I'm not... Italian or... Australian or anything. I don't know.

Scene 11

Identity is the overarching theme of *Looking for Alibrandi*; it is intrinsically linked to almost every other topic or idea present in the play (as well as the source text and film adaptation). 'Who is Josie Alibrandi?' is a question whose answer Josie herself is in search of, and the many and varied things she loves or loathes, runs from or to, embraces or discards—as well as the prism through which she sees them—make up the building blocks of her ever-establishing identity.

Some—but not all—of these building blocks are explored a little more in this chapter.

ACTIVITY: KNOWING YOURSELF

First, to empathise with the complexity of Josie's (or anyone's!) journey towards self discovery and articulating her identity, let's focus on **you**.

Your teacher will lead you through this activity. You do not need to share your drawing/diagram/discoveries with anyone, or discuss anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

DISCOVER

After you have looked at the many building blocks that make your own identity, repeat the exercise for Josie Alibrandi—as a class or in groups, on butcher's paper or on the whiteboard. Ensure every offer is supported by the playtext (you may even write down a page or scene number/s relevant to each suggestion).

ACTIVITY: KNOWING YOURSELF

Get students to find a quiet space for themselves, with a few blank pieces of paper (or a large sheet butchers' paper) and pens/markers. (This mind-map format can easily be adapted as a daisy model, list, chart or table, or even a Venn diagram.)

Remind them that they do not need to share their finished work with anyone, then guide them through the activity.

Draw a circle in the middle of the page and write **your own name** inside.

Now draw a line from this circle to another, smaller, circle, and write **AGE** inside. Write your age outside of this new circle, and connect them both with a line.

Now draw another line from the centre 'name' circle to another smaller circle, this time writing **GENDER** inside. Again, write your answer next to this new circle with a small line connecting them.

As you can see, we are beginning to create a mind map-style diagram. Some circles will have more than one answer or piece of information to write next to it. Continue with any of the following aspects of your 'identity' (teachers: use your discretion, and/or feel free to change or add):

- ethnicity/culture
- favourite food
- favourite clothing
- favourite music
- family members
- friends
- subjects I'm studying
- subject I want to study
- what do I want to be?
- sexuality
- spirituality/religion
- superstitions or rituals
- what inspires me
- what makes me angry
- people who influence(d) me
- how I relax
- what role I take in a group
- how I respond to conflict

Take a look at the vast, complex matrix that makes you... *you*. With a highlighter or a different coloured pen or marker, underline or highlight the things that you think are the most important, clear or influential in making up who you are. With another colour, you may wish to highlight the things that are currently developing or settling, in a state of change, or were otherwise difficult to answer.

Put your work away. Share any observations or discoveries with the class—only if you are comfortable doing so.



RELIGION

CATHOLICISM

The play features both Irish and Italian traditions of Catholicism, in the elite private school environment St Martha's and in the Italian migrant community.

Until about 1950, the Catholic Church in Australia was overwhelmingly Irish in its ethos (think *Brides of Christ*). Most Catholics were descendants of Irish immigrants and the church was mostly led by Irish-born priests and bishops. Post-war immigration saw the congregation's demographic change dramatically, with Italians becoming the largest national group, but being held as outsiders, and in some cases a pastoral problem to the Australian Church due to differences in their approach to Catholic tradition.

The Italian migrants were largely from Southern Italy, where Catholic traditions involve Saints' days, statues, icons and other habits of devotion that crossover with pagan traditions and harvest cycles. In the 1950s the Australian Catholic Church subscribed to the government policy of 'assimilation' of migrants. Sacred images of Saints were often rejected by the Churches, and feast day celebrations had to take place outside the church.

Italian homes in Australia often display Catholic symbols, icons and images of saints proudly, linking them to specific villages back home. Crucifixes are hung on walls or displayed in small shrines, and they're also commonly worn on a necklace or rosary.

'You don't often see the same paraphernalia in Irish Catholic homes as you do in an Italian house, where it's very prominent.'

Stephen Nicolazzo
Director

Italian religious orders such as the Scalabriniani, Cappuccini, and Francescani would often act as mediators between the local clergy and a group of Italian migrants, but overall the Church's quest for uniformity in religious practices implied that migrants had to renounce secular traditions of expressing the same Catholic faith in a different way. These tensions began to dissipate through the Whitlam era and the push around multiculturalism, but the distinctions between the two traditions are interesting to consider.

THE CURSE / IL MALOCCHIO

JOSIE. (to us) *Nonna thinks Alibrandi women are cursed. Because bad things happen to us. Except the only bad thing she ever talks about is Mama giving birth to me, so...yeah. Also the devil is involved somehow.*

Scene 2

Even before her father comes back into the picture, Josie, her mother and grandmother are forced to reckon with the narrative of shame that surrounds their family.

Italians have a long and deep-rooted tradition of beliefs about luck and things that give either good or bad luck. In Italy there are colloquial names for bad luck—*sfiga*, *iella*—but the most notorious is *Il Malocchio* (*mal* = evil; *occhio* = eye).

Malthouse New Work Manager Mark Pritchard investigates this idea of *Malocchio* further in his Dramatugy Pack for the play. He explains:

'Malocchio is the Italian version of the widespread belief that others can cast a curse of jealousy, envy, or malice on a person or a personal object, bringing them harm or misfortune. *Malocchio* is rooted in a person's envy, and its symptoms can include headache, excessive yawning, and a general malaise. It is usually cast by one person on another, but Nonna believes that the Alibrandis have put such a curse on themselves.

'You can receive or give *Malocchio* through excessive praise, so compliments are often followed by 'God bless you' to avoid giving any accidental *Malocchio*.

'A spell to rid someone of *Malocchio* involves making the sign of the cross with olive oil in a dish of water while saying a prayer, and drawing meaning from the patterning of the oil. Another method involves a *strega* (witch) using scissors to 'cut the air' over the dish, make the sign of the cross three times and recite a prayer.

'A *cornicello* or *corno portafortuna* is a gently twisted red horn-shaped amulet, similar to the color and shape of a chili pepper. The *cornicello* can be seen hanging in people's houses, outside windows, inside cars, or worn as jewellery.'

FAMILY

JOSIE. You know if it's so much trouble why don't we just go down to Woolies and get some Leggo's? It tastes the same.

Josie grins at us. Christina and Nonna freeze.

NONNA. Leggos...

CHRISTINA. Okay, Josie. [Italian] Have some respect. [English] You're not too old to be slapped.

NONNA. [Italian, rapidly] See? See, Christina. Leggos. You don't listen to me and look at her, [English] no understanding of tradition, [Italian] sits there laughing like a gypsy. Leggos. [English] Close your legs.

Scene 2

PARENTS

INVESTIGATE

As a group, explore the script and discuss the relationship each character has with their parent(s). Consider:

- Josie and her Christina
- Christina and Nonna
- Christina and Nonno
- Josie and Michael—both in his absence and when he returns
- John and his father
- Sera and her parents
- Jacob and his father
- Ivy and her parents
- Nonna and her parents back in Italy

What are the similarities and differences between these relationships? Are there any **thematic links**—whether due to the similarities or differences? What have been the **effects** of the characters' relationships to the mothers or fathers—how has it shaped their personality and identity?



THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

NONNA. *Is very far, Josie. But we must go! We get down from the boat and I meet man I am engaged to for first time—your Nonno. But then we not stop, he immediately take me train and bus to Ingham. Is not city, just farm. Full of Italians working in field—I was shock, but Nonno say you don't know how lucky you are—he was in camp in world war before I come—the Australians lock all Italian in camp Josie, what they think our men do? Kill them with tomatoes? So then I understand what Nonno say and I quiet.*

Scene 22

ITALIAN MIGRATION IN AUSTRALIA & THE INGHAM CAMPS

The Italian presence in Australia can be traced back to the First Fleet. The gold rushes lured many hundreds of Italians to Victoria, who then stayed on establishing small, mainly farming communities, or moving across the country. While northern Italians arrived sporadically from agricultural regions like Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany and the Veneto, it was southern Italians who started to increase from 1901—mostly Sicilians, but also Calabrians, Abbruzzesi and Campanians. In Queensland, tropical sugarcane towns like Ingham witnessed dramatic rises in the Italian population from the 1920s, with almost half of the sugarcane farms in the Herbert River district owned by Italians.

There was a notable gender imbalance among the Italian community, with three or four men for every woman. Many consequently married Indigenous, South Sea Islander, and foreign Queensland women, forging early multicultural ties.

Life for Italians after 1933 deteriorated in an intense climate of suspicion and fear, reducing their arrivals. The Italian became fragmented into fascist, anti-fascist and politically disengaged affinities.

When Italy entered the war in June 1940, this highly visible minority group soon felt the deep-seated hostility of Australian locals, and were declared 'enemy aliens'. Queensland locked up almost 3,000 Italian-Australians, with Italian community leaders in the cane growing districts being among the first to be interned. Men were arrested regardless of whether their loyalty was proven or not, in camps such as the Ingham camp referenced in the play.

Most were liberated after Italy surrendered in 1943, but so pervasive was the paranoia in North Queensland that the authorities refused to allow all to return home. Some were not released until late 1944.

'We early immigrants of 'enemy' origin had been treated by the government and the legally constituted Australian authorities during the course of the war... It was a treatment we did not deserve and was in sharp contrast with Australia's avowed policy of fighting for the rights and liberties of the oppressed peoples of the world, for the protection of minority groups and for the prevention of racial discrimination.'

Oswaldo Bonutto
ABC article, 2020

After World War II, Italians migrated to find better employment prospects and a better lifestyle, but conditions were not always what they had been led to expect. Until the 1960s, there were no national, ethno-specific welfare services for arriving migrants. Support was provided on a local level by volunteers from within the Italian community, often with the help of political organisations or the Catholic Church.

The massive influx of Italian migrants in the 1950s contributed to the expansion of what came to be known as 'Little Italy's' in the major cities. By the 1960s, whole precincts were devoted to Italian businesses, shops, entertainments, coffee bars and restaurants, and Italian social clubs sprang up across the country. By the 1970s, Italian names were found in the strata of business, politics and society, and Italian words—*spaghetti, pasta, zucchini, pizza, gelato, cappuccino, vino*—were integrated into the everyday experience of Australians.



PROXY BRIDES

Marriage-by-proxy is the celebration of the union of two people in which one of the two spouses is absent at the time of the ceremony and is symbolically replaced—by ‘proxy’. It was authorised by the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century and was a widespread practice among many Italians who emigrated to Australia up until the 1970s. It’s estimated there are approximately 12,000 Italian women who married men in Australia by proxy between 1945 and 1976.

Sometimes the future groom and bride were acquainted, at least by sight, as they often came from the same village. On other occasions, they knew each other well and were in love before the man left for Australia, but there were also several cases where the two had never seen each other before and were from different villages or regions of the Italian peninsula.

In these cases they met for the first time via images: they exchanged a photograph and if the two liked each other a paper correspondence started to get familiar. It could last for months, even years, until they decided to marry.

‘You don’t see a person, you dream. You dream what you do not see. You fall in love of that letter that you receive, and you anxiously wait for the next because there is nothing else.’

Carmela, a proxy bride
SBS article, 2019

The ceremony was still strictly religious, and had to take place in the church of the bride village. On the day of marriage the woman was accompanied to the altar by her father where she was awaited by a stand-in for her true husband-to-be: often the brother or a friend.

Following the wedding celebrations, the long bureaucratic procedures that were required to allow the new wife to emigrate to Australia to be with her husband began. Once everything was ready, the proxy bride would travel to Australia, in most of the cases by ship, a journey that lasted about a month.

NONNA. *You not know how your Nonno was Josie. When they tell me there is man for me in Australia, I all smiles. He so nice in his letter. On boat here, I laugh and dance, excited. I dream my new life. But when I come here. On first night, he slap me. In front of everyone. I think maybe is because of camp, maybe not happen again. But he always the same. When in farm, all Italian wife sad their husband have to work so much, and I say I was sad also, but I not sad he away. My body... [Italian] For fifty years he treated me like an animal [English] like an animal in his house Josie only there to feed him food and for... even when I don’t want. Then Marcus come to Ingham and it different.*

Scene 29



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

IVY. *Josie, I don't know how they do things in the old country or whatever mud hut you're from, but you're in Australia now, okay?*

JOSIE. *I know where I am, Ivy.*

IVY. *And in Australia, and I know you're probably trying, but we have a way of behaving that isn't quite so...*

JOSIE. *What?*

IVY. *(takes a breath) No... my mother has always expected me to take a charitable stance with those less fortunate. Never mind, Josie.*

JOSIE. *Oh yeah charity... is that what your dad will call it when he buys you your own tv show? Where you can talk about Country Road and how important it is to match your bag with your xenophobia?*

IVY. *What did you say?*

JOSIE. *Oh, do you not know that word?*

IVY. *No I just... sometimes I can't... understand with your voice? But I guess it's to be expected. English is hard.*

JOSIE. *I'm so tired of you Ivy. I was born here and you know it.*

IVY. *Mmmm but once a dirty wog, always a dirty bastard wog.*

Scene 14

CLASS

Josie may be focused on an 'upward' path through most of the play, but ultimately Jacob forces her to question whether class—and the aspiration to transcend hers—is so important. By the end of the play, Jacob goes from school captain to dropping out to become a mechanic; meanwhile Sera finds renewed academic focus on a medical degree and even gets better marks than Josie. And Josie winds up reassessing her own 'inevitable' path—prestigious high school scholarship, university, professional career in law—and understanding there are many valuable paths, and perhaps none as preordained as she first thought.

INVESTIGATE

Look at the script and see if you can identify the implied class, aspirations and belief in inevitability of all the school-aged characters (Josie, Sera, John, Jacob, Ivy)—and whether their views change over the course of the play. You can do the same (perhaps with some retrospection, perhaps not) for the adult characters.

PRIVATE SCHOOL CULTURE & THE BORN-TO-RULE MENTALITY

The status and privilege—and scandals—associated with private schools in Australia has been the subject of much discussion in the media in recent years, especially independent all-boys schools.

'In Australia, we're so adamant about telling the story of meritocracy and this being 'the land of the fair go'—but this hides the truth... It can take four generations for someone with a low socio-economic background to reach the average income. Our divided education system exacerbates the social strata...

'You've got schools where they've identified kids are turning up hungry and they want to be able to run a breakfast program and they can only afford to do that three days a week. You've also got schools in Australia who have firing ranges and orchestra pits and two-storey swimming tanks so that kids can learn to scuba dive.'

Bri Lee
Who Gets to Be Smart

The Howard era put a focus on consumer choice around education, encouraging competition between schools around success rates, while also injecting public funds disproportionately towards the elite private schools. This two-tiered public/private system can entrench educational inequality from a young age, lead to a widening divide in education outcomes from Australian students and, ultimately, shape the corridors of power; the composition of many recent governments hugely favour graduates from this same set of elite schools.

This theatrical adaptation of *Looking for Alibrandi* leans into these resonances, and the significance of these schools for migrant families as high-pressure opportunities for their kids to access what Vidya Rajan calls 'white belonging'. While there are academic benefits that come with attending these elite schools, the major long-term impact comes from the networking and access these schools enable.

'I was drawing on my own experience of going to law school at a 'group of eight' university. I went to public school in the suburbs, so I did not encounter any of these people who I did when I went to law school—the John Barton world. It was really interesting how even the aspiration to study law became this breeding ground for the nation's politicians.'

Vidya Rajan
Playwright



PEER PRESSURE

HSC & MENTAL HEALTH

In 2003 a report found pressure to perform in the HSC contributed to one in 11 adolescent suicides in NSW. The former Commissioner for Children and Young People and an author of the report, Gillian Calvert, called for an urgent investigation of how to support young people during this stressful period, and how to work with parents and the community to provide realistic guidance to students.

'As a group these were successful students, with records indicating they set high standards for themselves and worked extremely hard... the period leading up to their deaths was typically characterised by feelings of overwhelming pressure to succeed, coupled with an intense fear of failure.'

Gillian Calvert
Sydney Morning Herald article, 2003

The study examined 111 adolescent suicides together with another 76 deaths that resulted from deliberately risky behaviour such as drug use or reckless driving. The group accounted for almost a quarter of all deaths in the age group, and 70 per cent of those suicides were men. Two-thirds had experienced long-term difficulties with mental health, family or school problems, but many deaths were also precipitated by a bereavement, relationship breakdown or argument with parents.

There are now many support services and programs in Australia attempting to tackle this issue, and foster conversations in high schools about the pressures facing young people. These include **Headspace**, offering free assistance (both online and in person) to young people facing various issues or questions from physical and mental health to sexual help, and **Beyond Blue**, providing information about where you can seek assistance and support, who to contact, and what to expect.

Students may also wish to refer to the more comprehensive list of support services at the start of this Prompt Pack.

'EMANCIPATION'

JOSIE. (to us) *I'm not sure how much of this I can take, honestly. It's always the same old bloody thing. 'Tradition'. And I'm just here in the middle of it. (to Nonna and Christina) I wonder what it's like to be free, to be emancipated.*

NONNA. *What is emancipey?*

Scene 2

Although more overt in the original novel, this playtext of *Looking for Alibrandi* also frames the events of the story as Josie's pursuit of her eventual 'emancipation'—liberation from the trappings and outward signs of her cultural (non-white) roots, breaking free from traditional working class aspirations to become a successful barrister, and finally proving the fallacy of the Alibrandi 'curse'—all based on the perceived access and opportunities (and expectations) of the white, rich kids.

JOSIE. *Ooh. 'The Emancipation of John Barton'. I like that.*

JOHN. *I don't think I'm quite there yet, but soon.*

JOSIE. *And then what? What will the emancipated John Barton do with his life, hey?*

Scene 20

The antithesis in the story of Josie's more upward-facing emancipation is the eventual tragic release achieved by John Barton. John, the son of a wealthy politician, has had his life set out for him from a young age: like his grandfather and father before him, he's expected to study law, go into politics, and possibly even become the Premier. Feeling stuck and saddled by parents' high expectations is a burden both he and Josie share, but John feels so trapped by these expectations that he commits suicide.

Josie eventually conceptualises this as John's own 'emancipation', and recognises just how important it is for young people to be able to make choices for themselves and feel good about their place in the world—the alternative, as John demonstrates, can be fatal.

SEX

He takes out a condom wrapper.

JOSIE. *Oh good. (she peers at it) Large. Like a tampon. Hey do you ever wonder what it would be like to have a period? Like as a guy?*

JACOB. *Josie, we're going weird again.*

She kisses him hard. It escalates. She bites his lip.

JACOB. *Ow! What? Why?*

JOSIE. *Sorry!*

JACOB. *I think I'm bleeding.*

JOSIE. *Quick, put some alcohol on it to disinfect it.*

JACOB. *What the fuck-*

Before he can speak, she's dabbed some whisky on his lip—it burns.

JACOB. *Ow. Josie, what the hell—what's going on?*

JOSIE. *What do you mean? We're having sex!*

JACOB. *Are we??*

Scene 25

Despite her best friend Sera's active sexual confidence, and Jacob's overt solicitations, Josie initially resists any pressure to explore her own sexuality as she instead focuses on her studies (and 'emancipation'). It takes a fight with her mother and Nonna for her to change her mind—contextualising it for herself as not so much as giving in to peer pressure, but giving in to the Alibrandi 'curse': making a rebellious, potentially calamitous decision and letting her morals be judged by the community as retribution for her family's perceived hypocrisy.

Ultimately (and in a slight tonal departure from the novel and film), both Josie and Jacob realise they are attempting to have sex for the wrong reasons—and that they have the power to break their or their families' cycles of habitual behaviour—and they agree to break up and remain friends.



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES & INFORMATION

Looking for Alibrandi is on the combined 2022 Theatre Studies Playlist for both Unit 3 and Unit 4, meaning it may be studied for Outcome 3 in either (but not both) Units. To recap the requirements of these two tasks:

UNIT 3, OUTCOME 3

ANALYSING & EVALUATING THEATRE

Students must analyse and evaluate an interpretation of a script in a production. They are required to:

- Analyse and evaluate the relationship between the written script and its interpretation on stage.
- Study ways the interpretation on stage draws on and interprets the contexts in the script, examining what decisions have been made about acting, direction, design, the use of theatre technologies and elements of theatre composition.
- Evaluate the ways theatre practitioners, such as the director, actors, designers, or a dramaturg, have contributed to the interpretation on stage.
- Study how the theatre styles and contexts implied in the script are interpreted on stage.
- Develop skills in using theatre terminology and expressions to describe how the script has been interpreted creatively and imaginatively.

UNIT 4, OUTCOME 3

ANALYSING & EVALUATING A PERFORMANCE

Informed by the techniques they used to interpret their Unit 4, Area of Study 1 monologue, students will further develop their understanding of the techniques used by actors, directors and designers when interpreting a script for performance. They are required to:

- Study the performance's theatrical styles, and analyse and evaluate how the actors, directors and designers interpreted the script for the stage.
- Consider the interrelationships between acting, direction and design in the performance, by reflecting on the characters, how the actors interpreted them, and the contribution of the directors to this process.
- Study acting skills used by the actors to portray their characters, including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement and stillness and silence.
- Develop an understanding of other aspects of acting, direction and design, including artistic vision, focus, the use of elements of theatre composition, the use of verbal and non-verbal language, and the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship.
- Refine their understanding of the terminology and expressions associated with analysing theatre productions.

The following activities are designed to facilitate students' pre-show analysis of the text, and activate their imaginations for all the different ways in which the script might be interpreted. They are suitable for both Units 3 and 4. Finally, there is some information to prepare students for attending the performance, readying them to analyse and evaluate the Malthouse Theatre's production.



SCRIPT ANALYSIS

This activity is all about familiarising yourself with the script prior to attending the performance, which you are either required (Unit 3) or encouraged (Unit 4) to read.

Remember to read the whole text: not just the dialogue, but also the character descriptions, the scene settings and the stage directions.

You may like to make your own notes before completing this guided activity, or use this as an initial springboard for your own research. This activity will support your next step of imagining an interpretation (Activity Two).

TAKE NOTE OF THE TIMEFRAMES

When is the play set? How many different timeframes are indicated or implied? Do characters appear exclusively in only one timeframe? Do different time frames exist concurrently in any moments of the play? How explicitly are these described—if they are at all?

TAKE NOTE OF THE SETTINGS

Where is the play set? How many settings are there? Is there a central location or one that ties the action of the play together? Do we see these settings at different times? Do different settings appear simultaneously, or overlap in transitions? How comprehensively—or otherwise—are these settings described in the playtext? Are there specific details or objects mentioned, or simply a broad label of the location?

MAKE BRIEF NOTES ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Who are they? What are their relationships to each other? Are there any unique characteristics amongst the characters? What does their use of language tell you about them? What do their names reveal about them? Who are the central characters? List two or three characteristics for each of these central characters.

IDENTIFY LANGUAGE OR REFERENCES THAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

Take note of any words or phrases you are unfamiliar with or unsure about. See if you can work out what they mean by examining the circumstances or surrounding contexts in the script, then look them up—see how close you were! How does the spoken dialogue and references help the audience understand the meaning of potentially unfamiliar content?

ISOLATE KEY SCENES OR MOMENTS THAT EVOKE THEMES OR STRONG REACTIONS

Which scenes do you consider significant and why? What are the themes of the play? What moments in the text explore each particular theme or issue the deepest? Can you isolate sections of the script where you feel any strong emotions for the characters?

NOTE IMPORTANT PLOT POINTS

Create a chart that visually depicts where you think the most important plot points or highest points of dramatic tension in the script occur. (Keep this chart to refer to after you have seen the play in performance; following your viewing of the play, you can make an analysis and evaluation of the how the elements of theatre composition supported these moments during the production.)

IDENTIFY STYLES

What theatre styles are implied in the script? Are there any conventions associated with these theatre styles present within the script? What style of acting is implied in the script?

NOTE ANY DESIGN ELEMENTS

List (or highlight in different colours) any explicit mention of suggested sounds, music, lighting states, costuming, makeup, set or props. What other design elements are implied in the playtext? What other types of theatre technologies are implied in the script?



IMAGINING AN INTERPRETATION

This activity can be done individually or in groups—perhaps with each person taking on the responsibility of (or looking through the eyes of) a separate production role. You may choose to address the entire play, or focus on one or two of the key moments you identified in Activity One. Prepare a presentation to the rest of the class, then discuss and compare all your ideas.

This Prompt Pack has deliberately avoided spoilers and sneak peeks—so you are encouraged to use your imagination and skills (and terminology) you've learned in Theatre Studies so far! While the contextual materials in here are free to use, you are urged to conduct your own additional dramaturgy by researching the play's contexts and themes further.

CONSIDER THE INFLUENCE OF TIME & PLACE ON DESIGN

Consider the world of the play's created spaces. Research the history and landscape of the settings—collate sample images of existing similar spaces. Research the timeframes you've identified in Activity One. Consider how the history, the cultural influence and/or appearance of the locations might influence the various designers working on the production of *Looking for Alibrandi*.

IDENTIFY WHICH THEATRE STYLES MIGHT BE USED IN THE PLAY

How might the contexts of the play—that you've unearthed in your research—be conveyed in the interpretation? What theatre styles might be best utilised? What style of acting would best serve both the contexts and written dialogue?

BRAINSTORM HOW THE CHARACTERS MIGHT BE REALISED ON STAGE

Build on your work from Activity One. Can you find any specific script references to any of the characters that might inform design decisions? The ensemble of six actors have to play at least ten distinct (and many other ancillary) characters between them. How might this be solved? How might the directors and actors manipulate elements of theatre composition to create distinct character(s)? How might a costume designer realise the actors' task of quickly changing between individual characters—each of which may be of a distinctly different age, gender, time, place or even ethnicity to the last?

PUT YOUR BRAINSTORMING INTO PRACTICE

Acting Smart Theatre Studies (version 8, page 202) offers a terrific activity for exploring the motivations and relationships of the characters through workshopping.

1. Play a scene from the script, with each role played by two actors—one to deliver the dialogue as written and the other to improvise the character's inner thoughts straight after.
2. Using the same scene, use a series of frozen tableaux and physical levels to symbolically represent the characters' statuses and shifts in objectives.
3. Combine the two exercises in a presentation to the class.

IMAGINE THE REALISATION OF KEY SCENES OR MOMENTS

Relook at the key scenes or moments that evoked themes or strong reactions you identified in Activity One. In what ways might these moments be theatrically realised and conveyed to an audience?

EXPLORE YOUR OWN IDEAS ON ASPECTS OF DIFFERENT DESIGN AREAS

Consider any elements of design explicitly mentioned in the playtext (identified in Activity One), as well as any that are implied, and start to create an overarching design or artistic vision. You may wish to agree on a broad artistic vision with the group first—use adjectives, inspiration images or sounds, or any other shared language—before focusing on and fleshing out one production role for the sake of the exercise. Consider: a constant sound bed or traditional music motifs from the sound designer; bright Sydney/summer lighting and/or empty space from the lighting designer; an abstract sculptural platform that can be endowed with any location from the set designer; theatre technologies that include video walls or operating onstage passata stations. Keep checking in with the rest of the group to ensure a unified and harmonic vision, and even if in your interpretation you decide to override explicit directions by the playwright, ensure you anchor your imaginative choices to clues provided in the written script.

IDENTIFY ANY CHALLENGES

Complete the *Heads of Department* activity in the **Challenges** chapter if you haven't already. Brainstorm and identify as many challenges that the production team may face in interpreting the play on to stage as you can. Speculate as to how they might be overcome, and how the play's complex ideas, atmospheres and staging might be presented to an audience.



WATCHING THE PRODUCTION

This run-down of things to do and take note of when you watch the interpretation on stage—from arriving at the theatre to after the curtain falls—is inspired by the excellent and comprehensive guide in *Acting Smart Theatre Studies* (version 8, page 104).

BEFORE THE SHOW

As you enter Malthouse Theatre foyer (or look up the @malthousetheatre Instagram or TikTok), note things like:

- Does the poster or billboard (or images and videos on social media) capture the themes or story of the play? Does it give any clues about the interpretation you're about to see?
- Does the size and aesthetic of the theatre building and foyer match what you imagine the show to be? Does it hint at the style of the production, or how the show has been interpreted?
- Who is in the audience, and are they the demographics you expected the play to be written for?

As you are seated in the auditorium waiting for the show to begin, take note of how the style of theatre or interpretation of the written script might be hinted at by:

- Pre-show sound or music.
- The lighting preset, including any haze.
- Any set that is visible—and perhaps any spaces that are dark?

Turn your phone OFF (not just on silent), and put your notes away. Sit back and get ready to enjoy the show as a (keen-eyed!) observer.

DURING THE SHOW

For **Unit 3**, quietly take notice of things like:

- How the production interprets and presents the contexts of the written script.
- How the theatre styles implied in the script are realised on stage.
- How the playtext has been interpreted creatively and imaginatively.
- How the application of the production roles relates to those implied in the written script.

For **Unit 4**, note:

- How the actors portray the characters through gesture, voice, movement, focus etc, and how the actor-audience relationship is established or manipulated.
- What the characters' traits, status, central function and objectives are, and how the direction impacts on how these are portrayed.
- How all the elements of design were used, and how they impacted on the acting and direction.
- How theatre style(s) were used by the director and actors, and how the elements of theatre composition were used to convey meaning.

AFTER THE SHOW

If there is a Q&A immediately after the show:

- Please respect the actors—they have just spent over an hour exploring some deeply affecting topics in order to perform for you, and are delaying their usual decompression and de-roling to now offer their insights, openness and honesty.
- Remember the cast and creatives aren't VCE Theatre Studies students—and definitely aren't there to write your school assessment for you! Think about what you'd like to know and what will help you in your own work, and phrase your questions accordingly.

As soon as you can after the play, write down as many notes as you can! This could be in the foyer afterwards, in a quiet spot and the class might find outside (the Malthouse courtyard is an excellent spot), or in the car, bus, tram or train on the way home. For **Unit 3**, p105 of *Acting Smart Theatre Studies* (version 8) recommends categorising your notes under the following headings:

- Contexts portrayed in the production
- Theatre style of the production
- Variations to the written script
- Similarities to the written script
- Application of production roles
- Use of theatre technologies
- Use of elements of theatre composition

For **Unit 4**, page 196 of the same textbook recommends the following categorisation:

- Characters
- Acting
- Actor-audience relationship
- Use of focus and language (verbal or non-verbal)
- Direction
- Use of theatre styles
- Elements of design
- Elements of theatre composition

Once back in the classroom, Prompt Pack B will support you in your deeper study and learning following your experience of *Looking for Alibrandi* as an audience member.

RESOURCES

INTERVIEW WITH MALTHOUSE'S NEW WORK MANAGER



Malthouse Education sat down with its resident New Work Manager, Mark Pritchard, to discuss his role in the company, the dramaturgy process, and how *Looking for Alibrandi* went from concept to script. Click on the above image to watch the whole interview, or use the links to specific questions below. The whole video can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/LFADramaturg.

- Introduction
- What does your role entail?
- What was the genesis of *Looking for Alibrandi* as a play?
- What did the writing process look like?
- What's your advice to students conducting their own dramaturgy?
- What part of the script are you most excited about seeing realised on stage?



CONTENT WARNINGS

COARSE LANGUAGE

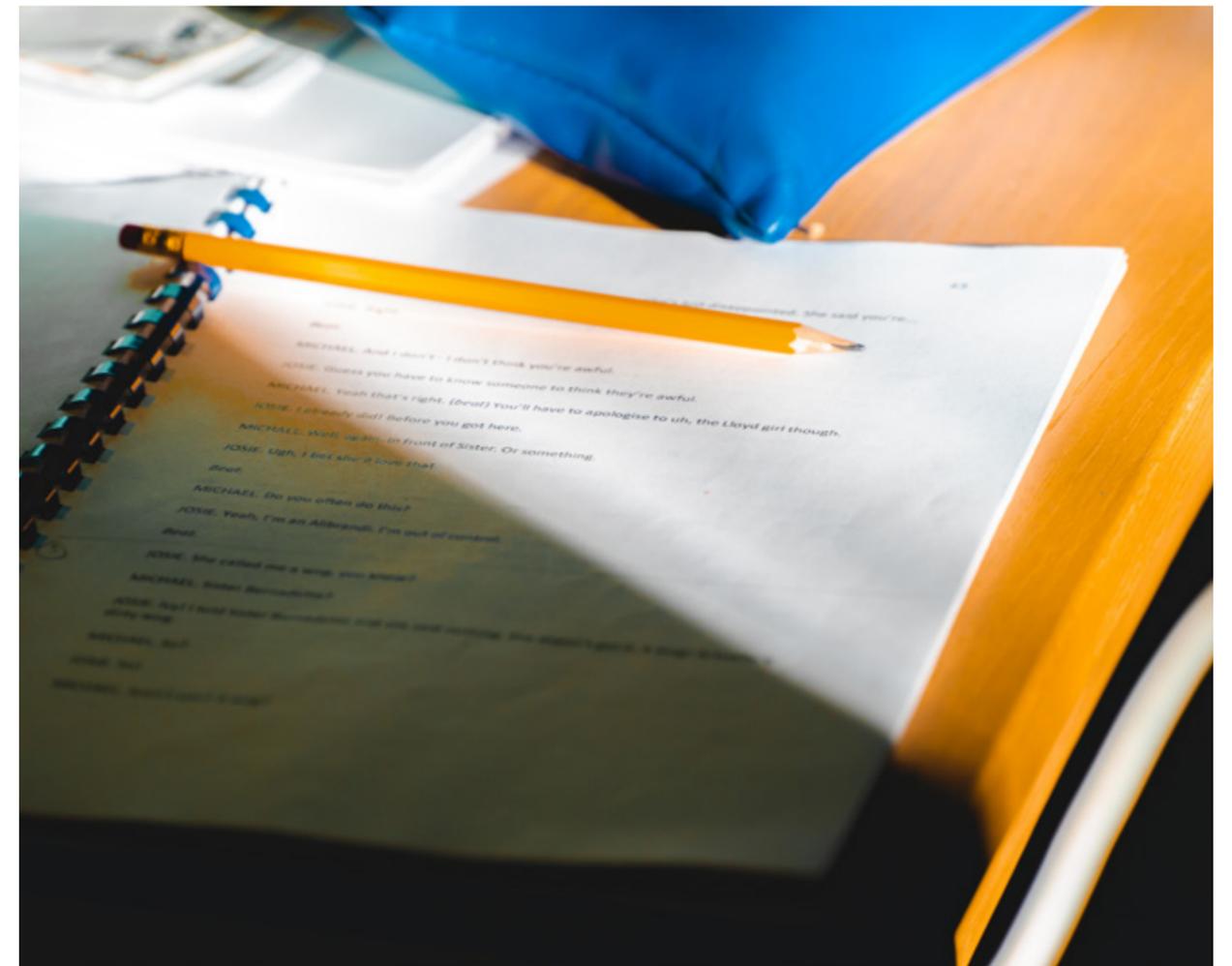
This production contains occasional coarse language, in English and Italian.

STAGE VIOLENCE

There is only mild violence in the production. One character is hit in the face with a bottle of tomato passata, and passata is occasionally used as stylised blood effect during the show.

SUICIDE

One of the younger characters dies by suicide offstage. This is relayed to other characters verbally, and has an emotional impact on the characters, but the death itself is not seen or described.



FURTHER RESOURCES

These resources are divided up into the chapters and sections for which they were used as references, but you will also find several resources here that inform and provide rich source material across several topics.

Note that all resources are hyperlinked to their source below for those clicking on an interactive version of this Prompt Pack but, for those holding a paper version, shorter bitly links have been provided to copy into your browser.

CONTEXTS: THE SOURCE TEXT

- **Reading Australia: Looking for Alibrandi**
Alice Pung | Copyright Agency | Essay | bit.ly/LFAContexts1A
- **Still Looking for Alibrandi: Migrant Teens Deserve Their Own Young Adult Fiction**
Sarah Ayoub | The Guardian | Article, 2014 | bit.ly/LFAContexts1B
- **Looking for Alibrandi**
Melina Marchetta | Book, 1992 | bit.ly/LFAContexts1C
- **Melina Marchetta**
Writer Website | bit.ly/LFAContexts1D
- **Anne of Green Gables**
L. M. Montgomery | Book, 1908 | bit.ly/LFAContexts1E
- **Bend It Like Beckham**
Film, 2002 | bit.ly/LFAContexts1F

CONTEXTS: TIME

- **The Idea of Australia: Forgotten History, Power for Power's Sake and the Collapse of Egalitarian Myth**
Julianne Schultz | The Guardian | Article, 2022 | bit.ly/LFAContexts2A

CONTEXTS: LANGUAGE

- **Italian Language Maintenance in Sydney: New Perspectives for the Fourth Generation**
Manuela Di Giovanni | University of Technology Sydney | Thesis, 2020 | bit.ly/LFAContexts3A
- **Hey White People: Please Don't Call Me A 'Wog'**
Koraly Dimitriadis | SBS Voices | Article, 2016 | bit.ly/LFAContexts3B
- **Goodes Gutted by Racial Slur**
SBS News | Article, 2013 | bit.ly/LFAContexts3C

CONTEXTS: STYLE

- **Stephen Nicolazzo**
Director Website | bit.ly/LFAContexts4A
- **Little Ones Theatre**
Theatre Company Website | bit.ly/LFAContexts4B
- **Vidya Rajan**
Writer Website | bit.ly/LFAContexts4C
- **Celebrate Passata Day**
Lisa Portolan | SBS Feast | Article, 2013 | bit.ly/LFAContexts4D

THEMES: IDENTITY

- **What Does It Mean To Be Italo-Australian Today?**
Laura Egan | Il Globo, 2018 | bit.ly/LFAThemes1A

THEMES: FAMILY

- **Our Australian Girl: Meet Lina**
Sally Rippin | Book, 2013 | bit.ly/LFAThemes2A

THEMES: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

- **WWII internment of Italians in Australia remembered on 75th anniversary of war's end**
Tom Major | ABC News | Video and article, 2020 | ab.co/3OpjHxT
- **Italian proxy brides: Australia's forgotten generation of female migrants**
SBS Italian | Video and article, 2019 | bit.ly/LFAThemes4B

THEMES: SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

- **Who Gets To Be Smart**
Bri Lee | Book, 2021 | bit.ly/LFAThemes5A
- **Privilege Still Protects the Violent from the Consequences of their Behaviour**
Julia Baird | Sydney Morning Herald | Article, 2021 | bit.ly/LFAThemes5B
- **Why Public Schoolboys Like Me and Boris Johnson Aren't Fit to Run Our Country**
Richard Beard | The Observer | Article, 2021 | bit.ly/LFAThemes5C

THEMES: PEER PRESSURE

- **Suicide Linked to Pressure of HSC**
Sydney Morning Herald | Article, 2003 | bit.ly/LFAThemes6A
- **More Action Needed on Body Image and Stress**
Victoria School Guides | Article, 2015 | bit.ly/LFAThemes6B

OTHER RESOURCES

- **Looking for Alibrandi**
Malthouse Theatre | bit.ly/LFAOther1A



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