

**MALTHOUSE**

**EDUCATION**



# **THE RETURN**

**RISING :**

**VCE THEATRE STUDIES—PART A**

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

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REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHY / Pia Johnson and Tamarah Scott  
DESIGN / Hours After

Prompt Pack written and compiled by Lyall Brooks,  
Malthouse's Education Coordinator

## ICON KEY



LINKS



ACTIVITY



VIDEO

# WELCOME

## WELCOME TO MALTHOUSE THEATRE'S *THE RETURN*.

This Prompt Pack A is a collection of resources, provocations and activities intended to support you and your students' exploration and study of this epic new Australian Indigenous theatre work prior to attending the show.

As *The Return* 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 settings, timeframes, language and style, as well as information and an activity designed to engage students' critical thinking around the challenges of staging contemporary Australian Indigenous theatre.

The *Themes* chapter elaborates on some of the issues informing this work—theft of Indigenous artefacts and human remains, and the repatriation process involved in returning these to Country.

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 are short guides 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

*The Return*'s playwright John Harvey, as well as a comprehensive list of further reference material—some of which is 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, simple links provided for those holding a paper version.

You will also notice I have separated the Pack into DARK pages like this one to address teachers, 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 mid-May.

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

I'm confident *The Return* 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

Education Coordinator,  
Malthouse

# WARNINGS & SUPPORT

Extra care must always be taken when working with First Nations content in the classroom. Even when the focus is on the analysis and evaluation of the theatre piece itself, not the content, students must still engage with historical and contemporary Indigenous issues as the inextricable themes and contexts of the work.

We thoroughly recommend the free resource *Teaching First Nations Content and Concepts in the Drama Classroom* by Kamarra Bell-Wykes, Rachel Forgasz and Danielle Hradsky. Click [here](#) for a copy, or head to the Resources chapter for a link.

We also encourage you to book into the teacher workshop (free for *The Return* school ticket holders) based on the above resource and tailored to your classroom teaching of *The Return*. The workshop will be held at The Malthouse on Monday 9 May 2022, and available online shortly thereafter.

Finally, we urge you to take special care with any First Nations students in your classroom—especially if discussions arise around the 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 and damaging as talking insensitively about specifics.

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

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**LIFELINE**  
13 11 14  
[lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

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**KIDS HELPLINE**  
1800 55 1800  
[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

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**YARNING SAFE'N'STRONG**  
1800 95 95 63  
[facebook.com/YarningSafenStrong](https://facebook.com/YarningSafenStrong)

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**VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY**  
[VACCA.org](http://VACCA.org)

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**HEADSPACE**  
[headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

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**REACHOUT**  
[au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com)

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**DJIRRA**  
1800 105 303  
[djirra.org.au](http://djirra.org.au)

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**SUICIDE CALLBACK SERVICE**  
1300 659 467  
[suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

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**BEYOND BLUE**  
1300 224 636  
[beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

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**BACKGROUND**

# PLOT

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## PROLOGUE

Jackson and his wife Hilda sit on the banks of the river, calming their baby with a small rattle. As he leaves to check his fishing line, figures in white coats and gloves enter and take Hilda, the baby, his spear, and their possum skin cloaks.

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## SCENE 1: ON DISPLAY

Jackson finds himself in the 'Museum of Origins'—as a display—joining the existing 'Museum Natives' Eddie, Mary, Scarlet and Thomas, who are arguing and preparing their plinths and costumes for the day. The Curator enters, briefs Jackson, and begins welcoming visitors as the Natives strike poses on their plinths with a surreal theatricality.

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## SCENE 2: BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Three museum directors reveal to The Curator their plans for a worldwide tour of their new exhibit, Native Encounters, featuring an (unseen) artefact—that, to The Curator's discomfort, she had already promised to return to its traditional custodians—as the centrepiece.

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## SCENE 3: THE CURATOR SHARES THE NEWS

Scarlet and Thomas teach Jackson how to exhibit himself properly. The Curator enters and tells them of the upcoming world tour, and reveals Jackson must sit for a marketing photo shoot.

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## SCENE 4: PHONE CALL—NOTIFICATION

Repatriation Officer Carla receives a call from someone (The Man) who believes he has an Aboriginal skull that was dug up by his grandfather (The Pop) and kept in the family for many years, and now wants to talk about returning it.

---

## SCENE 5: NATIVE ENCOUNTERS—PHOTOSHOOT

The Photographer—a celebrity fashion shoot—type figure—and The Assistant set up to for Jackson's session. The set is dressed with a fake humpy, bushes, a log, boomerangs, a spear and a kangaroo carcass. Then Hilda is brought out with her baby in a coolamon and posed next to Jackson and the props. The scene disintegrates into violent discord and a horrific freneticism of lighting and sound, as the camera flashes change to gunshots and The Photographer uses a boomerang as a rifle to 'shoot' Hilda, the baby and, finally, Jackson—who is left reliving the nightmare scene.

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## SCENE 6: MUSEUM STORAGE

The Curator is revealing artefacts to the Natives—'just a fraction' of what the Museum has in storage—and asking them to help curate the touring exhibition. Thomas finds and puts on an old pearl diving helmet, and is immediately overwhelmed by a sense of drowning as if he is connected to the artefact in a personal, visceral and—perhaps—historical way.

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## SCENE 7: OUTSIDE OF COUNTRY PUB—JACKSON MEETS THE COLLECTOR

It is New Years Eve, 1915. Jackson is ejected from a pub and is immediately struck up in conversation by The Collector, who offers Jackson a swig from his flask and elicits details of the recent burial of Jackson's grandfather by the banks of the river.

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## SCENE 8: THE COLLECTOR—GRAVE ROBBING

The Collector, revelling in the great value of a 'fresh, uncontaminated full-blood corpse', leads a group of Grave Robbers in digging up graves on the banks of the river—including that of Jackson's grandfather. After they leave, Jackson arrives. He sees the plundered graves, and notices on a the ground a bottle of the same spirits he shared with The Collector the night before—and realises what has happened.

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## SCENE 9: REPAT OFFICER VISITS PERSON TO COLLECT ANCESTRAL REMAINS

Carla and her assistant Mitch have arrived at The Man's house to discuss repatriating the skull. The Man and his partner, The Wife, reveal how the skull had been found by The Pop, named 'Doris' and displayed on his mantle for years—and sometimes used to drink from on special occasions. All the while, Jackson is present and unseen by the others. He sits shaking and in pain as the skull is talked about and handled. After careful diplomacy by Carla and Mitch, 'Doris' is handed over. Jackson sees a Dancer Spirit emerge as the repatriation officers leave with the skull.

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## SCENE 10: MUSEUM—ALL THESE BOOKS ABOUT NATIVES

The Natives are pulling out historical books about Indigenous people from boxes and reading excerpts. The language is simplistic, patronising, and frequently wrong. Jackson is present, but slips into a trance-like state as he watches the Dancer Spirit.

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**SCENE 11:  
DELIVERY OF ITEMS TO ANATOMIST—  
MELBOURNE DOCKS**

The Collector is delivering all the stolen items to The Anatomist, who is preparing to transport them to collections all over the world. They discuss provenance of the Indigenous artefacts, tangentially and unironically argue that The Ashes should never leave the 'hallowed turf' of Lord's Cricket Ground in England, and The Anatomist reveals his passion for pseudosciences in which bodily measurements and proportions predict mental traits and intelligence.

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**SCENE 12:  
JACKSON & MARY VENTURE FURTHER  
INTO THE BELLY OF THE MUSEUM**

Jackson and Mary continue to unpack boxes deep in the Museum's storage area. Jackson presses Mary about her past, and she reveals repressed, violent memories of being taken as a young girl. Jackson unboxes a baby rattle—the same one as in the Prologue—and we hear the baby's cries as he frantically keeps searching through boxes.

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**SCENE 13:  
ANATOMIST SPEAKS AT EUGENICS  
SOCIETY OF VICTORIA**

The Anatomist, on the quest for more funding, is delivering a speech about the benefits to Australian society of eugenics—the theory of racial improvement and planned breeding popular in the early 20th Century. He proceeds to demonstrate the dissection of an Indigenous corpse, played by The Dancer Spirit. Stopped by The Host, The Anatomist nevertheless espouses to his audience the importance of gathering further 'specimens' and recommends they fund 'hundreds, maybe thousands' more collectors across the country.

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**SCENE 14:  
JACKSON DISCOVERS THE REMAINS  
IN THE MUSEUM**

The Natives, following a deep murmuring 'dark energy' through the Museum, arrive deep in the storage area to find Jackson still rummaging through boxes—this time he has found boxes and boxes of human remains. Convinced there are secrets being kept from them, the Natives fetch The Curator as Jackson destroys empty boxes. The Curator arrives and they argue about the scientific value of the artefacts versus the injustice of keeping ancestral remains from Country. Jackson claims the Museum owns The Curator just as much as they own the artefacts before storming out.

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**SCENE 15:  
THE CURATOR & THE MUSEUM  
DIRECTOR—STORAGE ROOM**

The Director arrives to find The Curator cleaning up the mess Jackson made—and having second thoughts about where the ancestral remains belong. The Director dismisses The Curator's concerns by saying the exhibition has already been marketed, the stakes of its success are too high to pull out, and argues the income from it will raise funds that will eventually aid the repatriation process. He finally threatens The Curator with termination of she doesn't toe the line.

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**SCENE 16:  
REPATRIATION OFFICER  
VISITS THE MUSEUM**

Carla is at the Museum with The Curator, who we now know as Sarah, as well as two community representatives, Robert and Nancy. Jackson is watching. Sarah is showing Carla the remains and belongings of Hilda and her baby, and Carla has brought the Doris skull that she believes is 'the father'—Jackson. Carla explains to Robert and Nancy that there is great scientific value in keeping the remains and performing scientific tests on them—but that parts of the remains would necessarily be destroyed in the process. Robert and Nancy say they will have to consult with their community. After they exit and leave Jackson alone, Eddie enters. While heartbroken that his own story isn't known, yet, Eddie helps Jackson into his possum skin cloak—allowing Jackson to step back into his story.

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**SCENE 17:  
BURIAL CEREMONY**

The Museum disappears and is replaced by rain and open holes in the ground. While the Cultural Dancer and Yidaki Player perform, Robert and Sarah bid Jackson farewell. As the remains are lowered back into Country, Jackson and Hilda hold hands and walk off into the distance holding their baby as a hymn of healing is heard and the rain stops, leaving land, body and spirit aligned.

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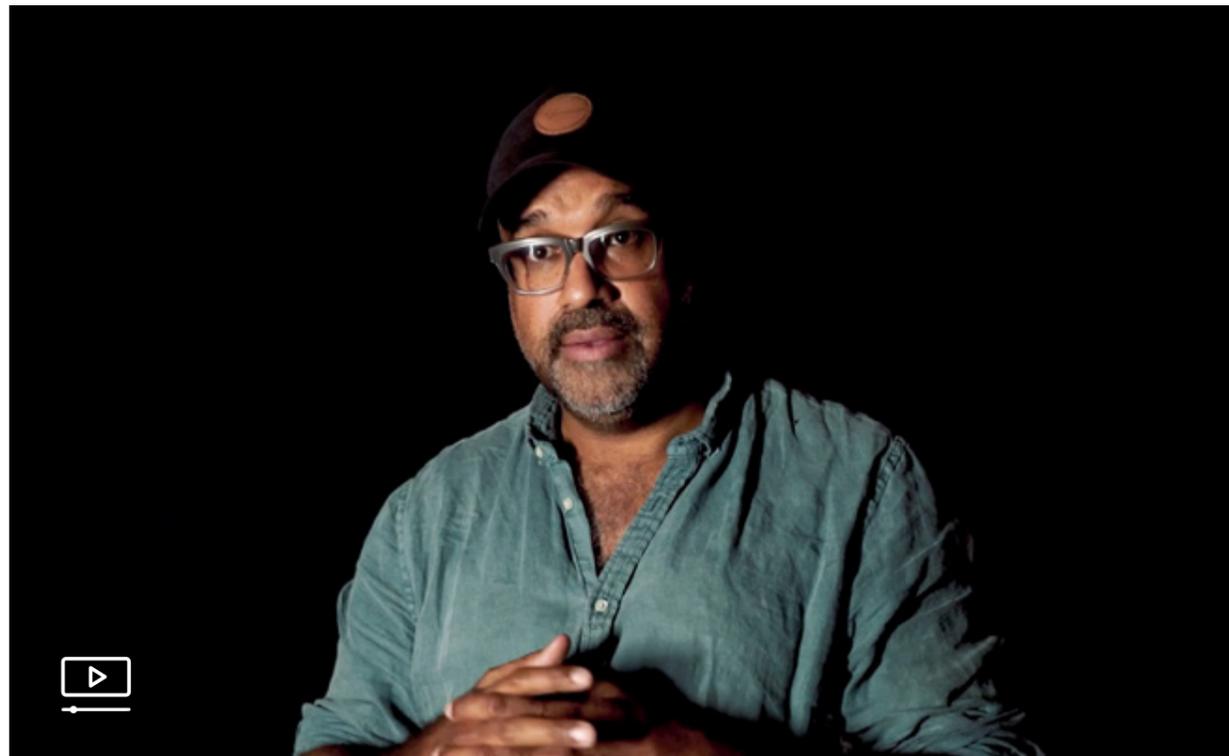
# GENESIS & HISTORY

*The Return* is a radical reframing of Australian history through the experiences of First Nations people attempting to reclaim the remains of their Ancestors out of the archives and return them to sacred ground. The story brings us face to face with the historical violence against Indigenous people, the gap between colonial and Indigenous relationships to death and ancestry, and Australia's relationship to First Nations' sovereignty.

Yorta Yorta traditional owner Jason Tamiru first started discussions about the potential to create a theatrical event focussed on repatriation while working at Malthouse several years ago. He himself has been involved in the repatriation and reburial of hundreds of sets of bones, and was interested in a work that would draw on both his own lived experience and the stories of many others working in this field, faced with the challenge of restoring respect and dignity to these individuals.

Watch playwright John Harvey talk about his involvement in the creation of *The Return* [here](#).

The purpose of the project was always to reframe audience's understanding of death, history, ancestry, and reconciliation through an Indigenous lens—confronting audiences with the cultural, political and spiritual significance of repatriation. Originally planned as an epic, immersive experience involving storytelling and audience interaction that was part documentary and part ceremony, Jason and John—together with Malthouse Theatre Artistic Director Matthew Lutton and Dramaturg Mark Pritchard—eventually settled on a more Western-traditional dramatic theatre structure, removing any links to specific stories and people and creating instead a story of 'fictional truth-telling'.



# CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

## CAST



**JIMI BANI**

Thomas, The Photographer,  
The Collector, Robert, Mitch,  
The Director 3



**GUY SIMON**

Jackson



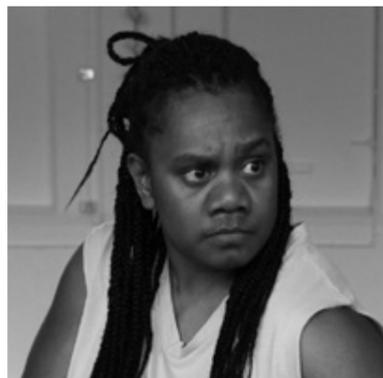
**DAMION HUNTER**

Eddie, The Director, The Man,  
The Anatomist, Grave Robber 3



**LAILA THAKER**

The Curator / Sarah, The Host,  
Grave Robber 1



**GHENOA GELA**

Scarlet, Hilda, The Wife, Nancy,  
Grave Robber 4



**ANGELICA LOCKYER**

Carla, Mary, The Assistant,  
Grave Robber 2, The Director 2



**CULTURE EVOLVES**

Cultural Dancer & Ceremony



**SEAN PATRICK RYAN**

Yiki Yiki (Didgeridoo)

## CREATIVE



**JOHN HARVEY**

Writer



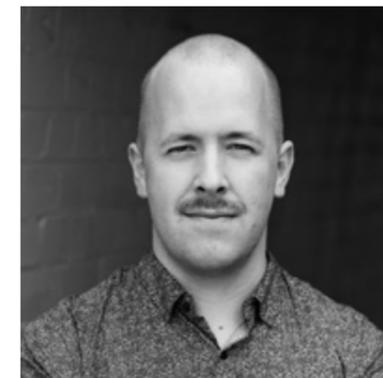
**JASON TAMIRU**

Co-Director &  
Cultural Custodian



**MATTHEW LUTTON**

Co-Director



**MARK PRITCHARD**

Dramaturg



**ZOË ATKINSON**

Set Designer



**CHLOE OLGILVE**

Design Consultant (Set)



**PAUL JACKSON**

Lighting Designer



**ZOË ROUSE**

Costume Designer



**JETHRO WOODWARD**

Sound Designer & Composer

## PRODUCTION



**LYNDIE LI WAN PO**  
Stage Manager



**COINTA WALKEDEN**  
Assistant Stage Manager

## ADDITIONAL CREATIVES

**JASON TAMIRU** / Traditional Vocals, Yidaki, Clapsticks

**LAURA HALE** / Producer & Company Manager

# 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, plus our bespoke workshop.

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



# CONTEXTS

# PLACE & SETTING

## DHUNGALA

Though there are many First Nations names for the rivers, flows and bodies of water that make up what European settler-colonisers would eventually call the Murray-Darling system, Dhungala is a well-known Yorta Yorta name for the Murray River—the North-Central stretch of which winds its way through Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba and Barapa Barapa Traditional Lands.

It is rich in plant and animal diversity and its ecology is closely linked to the flooding regime of the river and its associated wetlands creating a favoured natural habitat for water-birds and freshwater fish, important food sources for the Traditional Owners.

Home to the Yorta Yorta for over 40,000 years ago, Dhungala is one of Australia's oldest living cultural landscapes, and reminders of the ancient and ongoing First Nations relationship with this land are still with us today. Artefacts and evidence of Aboriginal habitation include scarred trees, shell middens, cooking mounds, burial grounds, marker trees and sacred sites.

While there are many Dreaming stories related to the river and its environs (including the **Bangerang story** and the story of **Ponde, the River Creator**) it is important to note that Dreaming stories are more than simple 'fables'—they are complex, multi-layered systems for communicating knowledge and law, they connect people with place, identity, ancestry and community, and they hold a significant and enduring holistic place within First Nations spiritual practices. You are encouraged to conduct your own research into Indigenous connection to Country, as it forms an integral underlying theme of *The Return*.

### EXPLORE

- Consider the concept of 'place' in all its complexities. What does 'home' mean to you? What about 'Country'? Or 'community'?
- Interrogate your own definitions and connections to family, tradition and culture.
- Research and/or imagine First Nations perspectives on the above. How does the living history of tens of thousands of years change your concept of 'place' and 'Country' and 'culture'? How does the (comparatively recent) history of colonialism, displacement and oppression recontextualise your findings?

# TIME

## NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE

Time in *The Return* is complex: shifting, ethereal, and often non-linear. On the surface, we switch between various moments in the past (ostensibly the 1800s or early 1900s), contemporary scenes of repatriation activities in homes and museums, and several instances in which time is both warped and irrelevant—often involving characters from different (or even unknown) time periods interacting.

Arguably underlying and anchoring all these is a sense of a vast history—that these moments are occurring within, and deeply rooted to, a many-thousand-year-old continuum of culture and connection.

One of the themes of this show is 'how does history impact us today?'

*We're caught in this idea that time is linear, whereas it's actually not a linear thing. We are products of our past. We're all spiritual creatures here on this earth having this physical experience, and so the way we all sit in this place, the way we move through it, isn't affected by the time that have on our watch or our phone. They're just kind of arbitrary things that are made up.*

*And from an Indigenous perspective: people have a process, from this world to the next, and we have a responsibility and obligation to guide people thorough that—as family and as community—and I think this story speaks to that obligation. And it's a broader story as well; this happens in many different cultures and many different societies.*

— **John Harvey, playwright**

# LANGUAGE

A reminder that *The Return* contains language that some people may find offensive. Please use care when exploring the text, and remember to contextualise any problematic language as that deliberately chosen by the (First Nations) playwright to indicate character and intent.

## CHARACTER

The spoken language of *The Return* is written in contemporary Australian English. While each character may exhibit subtle idiosyncrasies to indicate status, ethnicity, education and/or attitude, they never tip into caricature.

### INVESTIGATE

Search for clues in the script that suggest each character's background, standing, or world view. Look for what is there—swearing, slang, a dropped 'g', articulation, broad vocabulary—as much as what isn't. See if these things change according to the character's emotional state or where they are on their journey.

### DISCOVER

Scene 9, set in the house of The Man and The Wife, is an excellent example of distinguishing character through language—as well as a finely crafted exploration of the entrenched prejudice language can contain.

THE MAN	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Office. What does that mean?
CARLA	We support communities to understand, protect and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage sites across Victoria.
THE MAN	I didn't think there were any Abos in Victoria.
THE WIFE	Man!
THE MAN	Oh sorry, I mean, Aborigines.
THE WIFE	I met some out at Ayres Rock once.
CARLA	Uluru.
THE WIFE	What?
THE MAN	Bloody shame they closed the climb hey.

Read through the scene, identifying the words and phrases that reveal the biases The Man and The Wife have against Indigenous Australians. Think of how you might classify them—overt; microaggression; defensiveness; reverse victimisation (DARVO); possessive language; racism; misgendering etc. You may find crossovers depending on your categories. Perhaps highlight each instance in a different colour(s) or write them into columns or a Venn diagram.

Now take note of how the characters of Carla and Mitch respond to each. What does this reveal about their characters' status, experience, or emotional state?

Consider your own experiences. Have you thought or used any of these biases before? Have you been the recipient of them? Make space to discuss and share with the class or a partner. Listen with empathy and understanding, and reflect on how you might be alert to others' and your own attitudes and behaviour moving forward.

## NAMES

Character names in plays are often overlooked by an audience (or reader), but can provide further clues to their status, background, relationships with others—even their fate. In *The Return*, playwright John Harvey landed on a very specific idea about how these characters should be named, based on the idea of rewriting the dominant white history (and Indigenous Australians' place in it).

Listen to John talk about the creation of the characters [here](#).



# STYLE

## CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS THEATRE

*'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drama holds an important place in Australian literature. As a body of work, these texts express unique and specific cultural heritages. [...] Contemporary Indigenous theatre is produced for multiple and various audiences; sometimes for specific or general Indigenous communities, and sometimes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.'*

**Maryrose Casey and Cathy Craigie**

*A Brief History of Indigenous Australian Contemporary Theatre*

*'There is no generic entity labelled Contemporary Indigenous Arts Practice. The word 'contemporary' has been called into question; 'arts' is regarded as a term defiled through association; 'practice' is a sticky point; and 'Indigenous' defies classic Anglo definition. Half-caste, migaloo, yellow skinned, douggai, mixed breed, invisible trouble-maker. 'You've done something with your life. You don't have to be Aboriginal anymore,' politically correct, fair skinned, pale one, up-market Murri, Myall.'*

**Wesley Enoch**

*RealTime #4, December-January 1994*

*'When we require people to speak—and therefore to think—about themselves in particular ways, language itself can become a form of colonisation. [...] In The Arts, we differentiate between music, dance, and drama; we categorise expressive skills as distinct from dramatic elements and other theatrical conventions. Expecting all artists to speak about their work in terms of its performance style and theatrical conventions imposes Western ideas about art and artmaking which may be incompatible with their own ways of knowing, being, and art-making.'*

**Kamarra Bell-Wykes, Rachel Forgasz and Danielle Hradsky**

*Teaching First Nations Content and Concepts in the Drama Classroom*

### EXPLORE

Reflect on the three quotes above (and you are highly encouraged to read the full version of Casey & Craigie's article—a short and informative ten-minute read!). Consider:

- What does it mean for language or art to be 'colonised'?
- What are the many challenges in categorising contemporary Australian Indigenous theatre? Think about history, language, cultural ownership, Western vs Indigenous structures, etc.
- If someone were to try to coin the term, what would 'Contemporary European Theatre' look like? What language would it be in? What would be its structure? What stories would it tell, and from whose perspectives? What about '(Universal) English-Language Theatre'—what would that look and sound like? What connections can you make between the problems with these hypothetical concepts and those of the existing label of 'Contemporary Indigenous Theatre'?
- What challenges do you imagine Malthouse Theatre and the creative team behind *The Return* came up against throughout the theatre production processes?



## STRUCTURE

Watch (or rewatch) the interview with playwright John Harvey, especially his thoughts on the **structure**, the **writing process** and the **themes**.

He highlights the effects of writing about such harrowing and sensitive subjects personally, and the challenge of writing about them for a theatre audience. He mentions *The Return* ultimately being a 'story of healing'—for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Despite Wesley Enoch's belief in the problematic nature of trying to categorise or label Indigenous art (in **CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS THEATRE**, previous), he recently spoke about a structural similarity he considers many Indigenous theatre works share:

*'How do you—in the Greek sense of 'catharsis'—take the souls of those in the audience on a journey, through things that can be incredibly harrowing and confronting and powerful, and return those souls back to their bodies, stretched and invigorated and exercised around an idea?'*

*'Whereas I find a lot of non-Indigenous writers love the sense of 'keeping in the wallow' of it—you know?—I think that a lot of Indigenous writers find a way of having some kind of 'uplift' in their work—a greater responsibility for an Indigenous theatremaker to go 'how do I LIFT people up at the end, so that they can go out, into life, with a sense of feeling empowered?'*

*'Because you feel a sense of responsibility for every single Aboriginal person who's in the audience—to feel like their story had been told, and told with care, and that they had been given something that was a gift to take home with them. Then, regardless if there were Aboriginal people in the audience at all, it would give everyone that sense of lift.'*

### **Wesley Enoch**

Drama Victoria Jumpstart Conference, 2019

Recorded by The Aside podcast

### INVESTIGATE

Go back to the script. What does this 'uplift' at the end of *The Return* look like? Also identify any earlier moments that may plant the seeds of this eventual hopeful ending—that ultimately makes this a 'story of healing.'



# CHALLENGES

## CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS THEATRE

See **CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS THEATRE** in the previous **STYLE** section for the challenges associated with defining or labelling this style of theatre.

## CUSTODIANSHIP OF STORIES

While the later **THEMES** section of this Prompt Pack, identifying the very real history and some specific stories that inspired the play, helps broadly contextualise the problematic or insensitive nature of retelling certain stories, there are many resources online and in libraries that speak to this subject in a more detailed and targeted way, for those keen to learn more.

Watch the section of John Harvey's interview where he talks about approaching using **real stories** as inspiration for writing *The Return*, the cultural sensitivities and protocols the creative team have to be aware of, and how they overcame these challenges—by creating a completely new work of fiction.

### **ACTIVITY: DISRUPTED STORIES**

Your teacher will guide you through this activity.

### **ACTIVITY**

## DISRUPTED STORIES

This activity, borrowed gratefully from the 2020 Drama Victoria Theatre Festival, is a simple and fun way for students to start thinking critically and empathically about the impact of cultural appropriation, by first making it personal, then forming connections from there to colonisation and cultural theft. It is written out here for you to lead the class in the activity.

Think of a story that belongs to your family—a story that has become 'family legend' (like the time Uncle Frank rode his bike into the tree at the Christmas barbecue, or when you went to the footy when you were little and almost caught the ball after it went through the posts, etc) Take a few minutes, walking around the room, thinking of the details of the story that you are you going to regale someone with in just a moment.

Find a partner and exchange stories. Keep them short: who, when, where, what, why, how.

Now tell your story again, but this time your partner is going to interrupt the story with 'corrections'. You, as the storyteller, must accept each new piece of information and incorporate it as truth into your existing story.

### **FOR EXAMPLE:**

**A:** When I was ten, we had-

**B:** No, you were fifteen.

**A:** You're right... When I was fifteen we had a Christmas barbecue at-

**B:** No, it wasn't Christmas, it was a birthday.

**A:** Yes, sorry, it was. So we were having this birthday party...

Swap roles and repeat the storytelling. As an extension, you can also try repeating the activity again with the same stories, but only using non-verbal language.

### **SHAKE IT OUT! AS A GROUP, DISCUSS:**

- What did you notice?
- How did you feel—as both the storyteller and the disrupter?
- What was the effect of being corrected while telling your own story?
- Would you allow someone else to tell your story—and why or why not? If so, what conditions would you put in place?
- Think about this activity on a larger scale: how are others' cultural stories or histories disrupted or corrected (or colonised)?
- What connections can you make between your personal/family story being told by someone else, and the sensitivities inherent in telling First Nations stories?
- What connections can you make to this activity and the background of *The Return*? What might the term 'Cultural Custodian' mean? (The play is inspired by Jason Tamiru's experience as a repatriation officer and he has worked closely with playwright John Harvey to dramatise his stories.)

# THEMES

# REPATRIATION

*Lay me down in the sacred ground  
Keep me from the cold  
Wrap me in the deep warm earth  
Where the stars can see my soul*

**Kev Carmody**  
*Eulogy for a Black Man*

*The Return* is a work of fiction inspired by the experiences of Jason Tamiru, the play's Cultural Custodian and Co-Director, who has been involved in the reacquisition and reburial of hundreds of Indigenous ancestral remains. The work also draws upon documented historical incidents of the theft of sacred remains (and the parties responsible), and the contemporary stories of many others working in this field.

Repatriation is the practice of recovering, reclaiming and reburying the remains of Indigenous Ancestors on their traditional lands.

Throughout Australia, the bones of Indigenous people have been stolen or displaced by collectors, anthropologists, farmers and developers since colonisation through to at least the 1970s. For First Nations people, the dead are as present in their lives and on this landscape as the living, and the defilement of sacred burial sites and theft of remains has a profound impact on the health of the land and its people. Traditional owners across Australia have in recent decades been struggling with museums, universities and private individuals in Australia and the UK to regain possession of these remains, and return their Ancestors to the ground.

*'Our cultural duty and obligations to our Ancestors through our traditions and customs remains unbroken and connects us absolutely to Country and to each other. We will continue to recover our Ancestors whether they be in museums or in private collections. [...] Human Remains of our Ancestors are sacrosanct, and the trade in and collection of Human Remains and grave goods where there was no informed consent was repugnant to all Aboriginal Peoples and the civilized world. [...] We all have a spiritual, moral, cultural and politico-legal obligation to respect the Dead and everyone in the Community should support us in respecting our Ancestors as we do the non-Indigenous community.'*

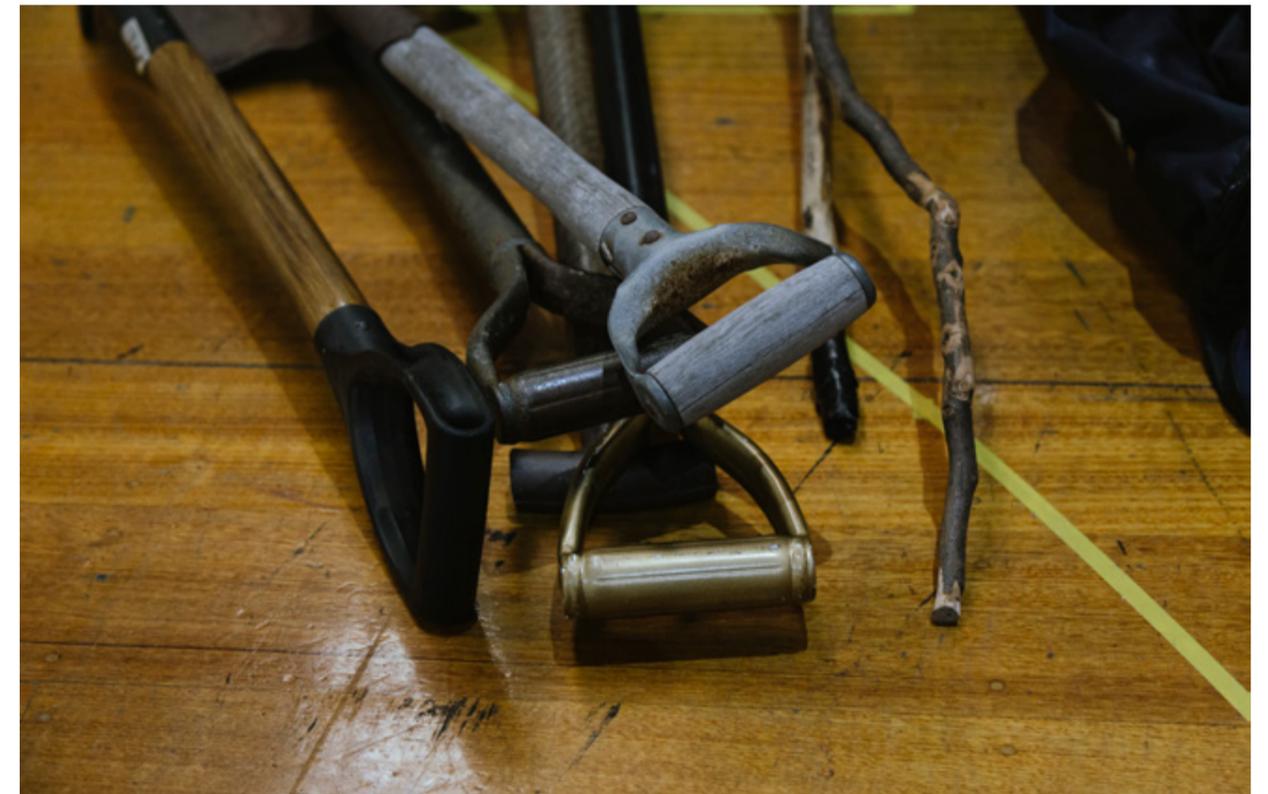
**Gary Murray**  
Wamba Wamba Elder and Wiran Aboriginal Corporation chairperson

## EXPLORE

Choose one of the following stories to research, either on your own or using the links in the Resources section as a starting point. Summarise them and present them to the rest of the group or class.

- The origins of Jaara Baby, and its return to Dja Dja Wurrung Country
- Swedish scientist Dr Eric Mjöberg and his expeditions in Australia
- The stories of Mungo Man and Mungo Lady, and their significance to scientists and to their community
- The Aboriginal Funeral Service, and the Hearse that was used to take Mungo Man home to Country
- The battle with the British Museum over the Dja Dja Wurrung barks

Remember that while these incidents served as the very real inspiration for *The Return*, John Harvey's play is not based on any one historical event. Instead, the play is a fictionalised truth-telling of the past and present, and reflection upon future possibilities. (See *Contexts: Challenges* in this Prompt Pack for more information.)



# 'MUSEUM-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX'

We often think about museums as fairly neutral places, where history is gathered and arranged for the benefit of humanity. But like any institution they come with politics, history, values, economic interests, and blindspots. The term 'Museum-Industrial Complex' asks us to reframe the idea of museums as an industry—with a historical complicity between them the cultural artefact 'collectors' who made careers (and lots of money) out of providing stolen relics, art and human remains. (Compare this with the more common contemporary term 'Military-Industrial Complex'.)

*'How do you respect the living if you don't respect the dead?'*

**Gary Murray**

Wamba Wamba Elder and Wiran Aboriginal Corporation chairperson

*'The living decide, and it's in our interest to decide what goes in a museum.'*

**Tiffany Jenkins**

Author of *Keeping Their Marbles: How Treasures of the Past Ended Up in Museums and Why They Should Stay There*



## ACTIVITY: THE NOT-SO-GREAT DEBATE

Consider the proposition:

**'Cultural artefacts deserve to be in museums, no matter how they got there.'**

This will now be the subject of a class debate—with one team taking on the 'Affirmative' position and the other the 'Negative' position.

Traditional debate format calls for two teams of three debaters each, but this activity can be carried out with any structure and rules the class decides. You could also use less participants, or add a team of researchers to each team, or even form a third group of judges or live fact-checkers.

There are countless articles, essays, videos and podcasts that explore both sides of this debate for your research—many of which are in the Resources section of this Prompt Pack—and *The Return* script itself interrogates some of these different points of view. Below is some material and thoughts to get you started (don't forget to research both sides so you know what you may be arguing against!):

### AFFIRMATIVE:

Podcast episode: **'Objections to Repatriation'** from The Open University's Repatriation and Returning Remains.

Power of science and knowledge as a greater good

This is how respect is shown in Western institutions

Culpability and statute of limitations

### NEGATIVE:

Article: **'Museums are returning Indigenous human remains but progress on repatriating objects is slow'** from The Conversation.

Deference should be given to cultural integrity

'Respect' is defined differently by different groups and one should be considered more valid than another

Cultural custodianship (ownership) belongs to the descendants of those wronged, not those of the aggressors

Once the activity is complete, take time to debrief as a group. List things you learned from the other side's arguments, perhaps acknowledge that sometimes these arguments are not necessarily yours to engage in, and accept the subject is complex and often fraught. Finally, clear your mind, open your heart, and engage your empathy before seeing the production on stage; while *The Return* explores both sides of the same debate, it presents a distinct and convincing—and inclusive—point of view on repatriation.

# **PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES & INFORMATION**

# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

*The Return* 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 AND 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 AND 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 labelled clearly as being suitable to Unit 3, Unit 4, or both. Finally, there is some information to prepare students for attending the performance, readying them to analyse and evaluate Malthouse Theatre's production.

## ACTIVITY ONE

# SCRIPT ANALYSIS (UNIT 3)

This activity is all about familiarising yourself with the script, which you are required to read prior to attending the production.

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 inferred? 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 (UNIT 3)

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.

Feel free to use any material from this Prompt Pack, but remember these are neither definitive answers nor a substitute for analysing the text. You are encouraged to conduct your own dramaturgy by researching the play's contexts and themes further, and always ensure you reference the written script when imagining your interpretations.

## CONSIDER THE INFLUENCE OF TIME AND PLACE ON DESIGN

Research the history and landscape of the natural settings in the script. Looking at images of these areas should provide you with some ideas about how these places look. Consider the world of the play's created spaces—the Museum of Origins, the house of *The Man and The Wife*, etc. Collate sample images of existing similar spaces. Research the timeframes you've identified in Activity One. Consider how the eras, and history and/or appearance of the locations might influence the various designers working on the production of *The Return*.

## 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 eight actors have to play 27 characters between them. How might this be solved this? 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 time, place or ethnicity to the last?

## 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. A constant sound bed and repeated music motifs from the sound designer; liberal use of uplighting and/or empty space from the lighting designer; an abstract platform that can be endowed with any location from the set designer; theatre technologies that include video walls and a rain drop. 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

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.



# SCRIPT ANALYSIS (UNIT 4)

This activity is all about familiarising yourself with the script, which you are encouraged to read prior to attending the production to support your understanding of the characters and intended meaning of the play.

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 the production on stage (Activity Four).

## TAKE NOTE OF THE TIMEFRAMES

When is the play set? How many different timeframes are indicated or inferred? 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 NOTES ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Start broad. 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? Now identify two or three central characters. List everything you can find about them: name; age; gender; physical and vocal attributes; occupation; key relationships with other characters; relationship to the setting (time and place); comparative status; key purpose in the plot; primary motivations; and their connection to or objectives within the play's key moments.

## 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

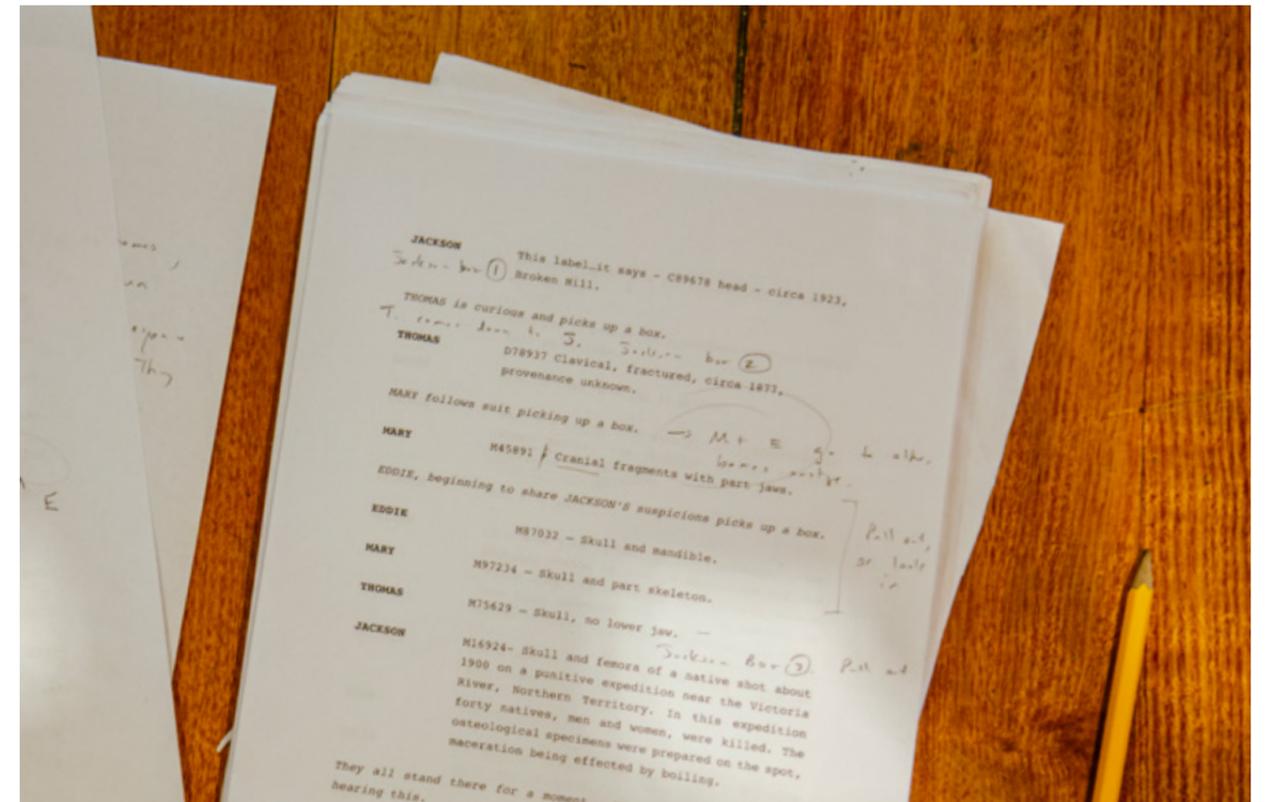
Create a chart that visually depicts where you think the most important plot points or highest points of dramatic tension in the script occur. (Keep this chart to refer to after you have seen the play in performance; following your viewing of the play, you can make an analysis and evaluation of the how 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 THE PRODUCTION (UNIT 4)

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 this Prompt Pack 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 AND PLACE ON DESIGN

Research the history and landscape of the natural settings in the script. Looking at images of these areas should provide you with some ideas about how these places look. Consider the world of the play’s created spaces—the Museum of Origins, the house of *The Man and The Wife*, etc. Collate sample images of existing similar spaces. Research the timeframes you’ve identified in Activity One. Consider how the eras, and history and/or appearance of the locations might influence the various designers working on the production of *The Return*.

## 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 production? 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 eight actors have to play 27 characters between them. How might this be solved this? 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 time, place or 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. How might a director lead the theatrical realisation of these moments and convey them 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. A constant sound bed and repeated music motifs from the sound designer; liberal use of uplighting and/or empty space from the lighting designer; an abstract platform that can be endowed with any location from the set designer; theatre technologies that include video walls and a rain drop. Keep checking in with the rest of the group to ensure a unified and harmonic vision (perhaps assign a director role to oversee this), 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

Brainstorm and identify as many challenges that the production team may face in staging the play 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 INTERPRETATION (UNIT 3)

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 The Malthouse foyer, note things like:

- Does the poster or billboard 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 production to begin, see if you can observe any evidence of pre-show directorial or design decisions, such as:

- The lighting preset, including any haze.
- Pre-show sound or music.
- Any set that is visible—or 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

Quietly take notice of things like:

- 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.
- Keep your questions focussed on the interpretation or production processes. Asking personal cultural questions is insensitive and inappropriate, so think about how you could reframe the question to relate to how contexts and culture have been interpreted.

- Conversely, 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 in this Unit, 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. Acting Smart *Theatre Studies* (version 8, p196) recommends categorising your notes under the following headings:

- 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 *The Return* as an audience member.



# WATCHING THE STAGE PRODUCTION (UNIT 4)

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 The Malthouse foyer, note things like:

- Does the poster or billboard 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 production to begin, see if you can observe any evidence of pre-show directorial or design decisions, such as:

- The lighting preset, including any haze.
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- 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 *The Return* as an audience member.



# RESOURCES

# INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT



Malthouse Theatre sat down with the playwright of *The Return*, John Harvey, just as rehearsals began. 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/trplaywrightinterview](https://vimeo.com/malthouse/trplaywrightinterview).

- Introduction
- What was the inspiration for *The Return*?
- How did you go about deciding on the play's style and structure?
- What did the dramaturgy and writing process look like?
- What are the key themes of *The Return*?
- How did you address any cultural considerations that arose when creating this work?
- Why is this work important to stage today?
- Where—and when—is the play set?
- Tell us about your approach to naming the characters?
- As the season approaches, what are you most excited—or hopeful—about?

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# CONTENT WARNINGS

## ASPHYXIATION / CLAUSTROPHOBIA

A character puts on a pearl diving helmet, and has a panic attack, believing he can't breathe. It's an intense emotional response, but he receives care and it passes quickly.

## BODY MUTILATION

One scene depicts the dissection of a human body. It is described in graphic detail, as if an autopsy was being performed on a live body. There are violent sound effects accompanying this moment, though no actual violence is being performed on the body.

## COARSE LANGUAGE

The play words 'shit' and 'fuck' are used sparingly.

## DISPOSSESSION

The play explores the historic theft of Aboriginal ancestral remains from burial sites. One scene dramatises this moment explicitly, pulling buried replica remains out of the ground.

## GUN VIOLENCE

A character uses a boomerang as a rifle, and shoots two fleeing characters, who fall down dead. The scene simulates an act of brutal colonial violence.

## GUNSHOT SOUND EFFECTS

Loud gunshot sounds are used in the production. There are no real or replica firearms used in the production.

## STOLEN GENERATION

One scene depicts a family being separated and taken away by authority figures. The scene is played simply, as if the characters were mannequins in a museum display, without any emotional reaction.

## REPLICA HUMAN BONES

The production includes replica human bones, introduced as being the bones of First Nations people. These replicas are quite lifelike. No real bones are used in the production.

## RACIST LANGUAGE

This production makes selective use of racist language and attitudes towards First Nations people. The play is written and performed by First Nations artists, deploying this vocabulary for the purposes of satire and critique.

# FURTHER RESOURCES

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

Note that all resources are hyperlinked for those clicking on an interactive PDF version of this Prompt Pack but, for those holding a paper version, simple bitly links have been provided.

## CONTEXTS: PLACE AND SETTING

- **Bangerang Story**  
bit.ly/TRContexts1A
- **Ponde, the River Creator**  
bit.ly/TRContexts1B
- **Yorta Yorta Country**  
Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation | bit.ly/TRContexts1C
- **Caring for River Country**  
Murray Darling Basin Authority | bit.ly/TRContexts1D

## CONTEXTS: TIME

- **Nonlinear narrative**  
Wikipedia entry | bit.ly/TRContexts2A

## CONTEXTS: LANGUAGE

- **What exactly is a microaggression?**  
Vox article, 2015 | bit.ly/TRContexts3A
- **DARVO**  
Wikipedia entry | bit.ly/TRContexts3B

## CONTEXTS: STYLE

- **A Brief History of Indigenous Australian Contemporary Theatre**  
Maryrose Casey and Cathy Craigie | Article, 2011 | bit.ly/TRContexts4E
- **Wesley Enoch on Contemporary Indigenous Arts Practice**  
RealTime | Article, 1994 | bit.ly/TRContexts4B
- **Teaching First Nations Content and Concepts in the Drama Classroom**  
Kamarra Bell-Wykes, Rachel Forgasz and Danielle Hradsky | Education Resource, 2020 | bit.ly/TRContexts4C
- **The Challenges of Benevolence: the role of Indigenous actors**  
Maryrose Casey and Liza-Mare Syron | Journal article, 2005 | bit.ly/TRContexts4D

## CONTEXTS: CHALLENGES

- **Indigenous Perspective in Drama with Wesley Enoch**  
Drama Victoria | Podcast miniseries, 2019 | bit.ly/TRContexts5A

## THEMES: REPATRIATION

- **Eulogy for a Black Man**  
Kev Carmody | Song | bit.ly/TRThemes1A
- **Jaara Baby**  
Melbourne Museum Archive, 2003 | bit.ly/TRThemes1B
- **Jaara Baby**  
Wikipedia entry | http://bit.ly/TRThemes1C
- **Wamba Wamba Reburials**  
Wiran Aboriginal Corporation Media Release, 2005 | bit.ly/TRThemes1D
- **Dr Eric Mjöberg**  
Video, 2010 | bit.ly/TRThemes1T
- **Dr Eric Mjöberg**  
Wikipedia entry | bit.ly/TRThemes1E
- **Mungo Man**  
The Guardian article, 2017 | bit.ly/TRThemes1U
- **Dja Dja Wurrung Barks**  
The Conversation article, 2016 | bit.ly/TRThemes1G
- **The Hearse**  
The Age article, 2017 | bit.ly/TRThemes1H
- **Repatriation of Cultural Material**  
Collections Law article | bit.ly/TRThemes1J
- **Bringing our Ancestors Home: We will not be well until this is done**  
Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council | bit.ly/TRThemes1K
- **Paul Keating's Redfern Speech**  
Creative Spirits | http://bit.ly/TRThemes1M
- **Scientific Theft of Remains in Colonial Australia**  
Paul Turnbull | Australian Indigenous Law Review journal article | bit.ly/TRThemes1N
- **Repatriation and Returning Remains**  
Open University | Podcast, 2012 | bit.ly/TRThemes1P
- **Power and the Passion**  
Shannon Faulkhead and Jim Berg | Book, 2010 | bit.ly/TRThemes1Q
- **The Hanged Man and the Body Thief**  
Alexandra Roginski | Book, 2015 | bit.ly/TRThemes1R
- **Riding the Black Cockatoo**  
John Danalis | Book, 2009 | bit.ly/TRThemes1S

## THEMES: THE 'MUSEUM-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX'

- **Museums are returning Indigenous human remains but progress on repatriating objects is slow**  
The Conversation article, 2016 | [bit.ly/TRThemes2A](http://bit.ly/TRThemes2A)
- **Objections to Repatriation**  
Repatriation and Returning Remains | Open University | Podcast Transcript, 2012 | [bit.ly/TRThemes2B](http://bit.ly/TRThemes2B)
- **Stuff the British Stole**  
ABC podcast series | [bit.ly/TRThemes2C](http://bit.ly/TRThemes2C)

## OTHER RESOURCES

- **Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies**  
[bit.ly/TROther1A](http://bit.ly/TROther1A)
- **Victorian Aboriginal Education Association**  
[bit.ly/TROther1B](http://bit.ly/TROther1B)
- **Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation**  
[bit.ly/TROther1C](http://bit.ly/TROther1C)
- **Common Ground**  
Advocacy and education resources | [bit.ly/TROther1D](http://bit.ly/TROther1D)
- **Map of Indigenous Australia**  
[bit.ly/TROther1E](http://bit.ly/TROther1E)
- **Uluru Statement from the Heart**  
[bit.ly/TROther1F](http://bit.ly/TROther1F)
- **Drama Victoria: First Nations Resources**  
[bit.ly/TROther1G](http://bit.ly/TROther1G)
- **Koorie Education Resources**  
VAEAI | [bit.ly/TROther1H](http://bit.ly/TROther1H)
- **Protocols for Koorie Education in Victorian Primary and Secondary Schools**  
VAEAI | [bit.ly/TROther1J](http://bit.ly/TROther1J)
- **30 Aboriginal apps you probably didn't know about**  
Creative Spirits | [bit.ly/TROther1K](http://bit.ly/TROther1K)

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