



EDUCATION PACK - PART A

HEARTH

by Fleur Murphy

18 MAY - 17 JUNE 2022

LA MAMA COURTHOUSE / RIVERLINKS WESTSIDE / GASWORKS THEATRE / KINGSTON ARTS CENTRE / BURRINJA CULTURAL CENTRE

WWW.FLEURMURPHY.COM

20
SCENES

SEASON 2022

- **La Mama Courthouse, Carlton - www.lamama.com.au**
- **Riverlinks Westside Mooroopna/Shepparton - www.riverlinksvenues.com.au**
- **Gasworks Arts Park, Albert Park - www.gasworks.org.au**
- **Kingston Arts Centre Black Box, Moorabbin - www.kingstonarts.com.au**
- **Burrinja Cultural Centre, Upwey - www.burrinja.org.au**

Note: The duration of performance is 85 minutes followed by 15 minute Q&A.

Information for teachers and schools:

Script: The script will be published as a high-quality softcover script by Lab Kelpie Press and will be available to purchase from February 2022 for \$15 through the website of playwright [Fleur Murphy](#). Free Educational Resources will be available to download from the same [website](#). Scripts will also be available to purchase at the box office at each performance.

The play is appropriate for older teenagers e.g. VCE as it reflects realistic aspects of Australian life and deals with complex issues in an honest yet sensitive manner. Set in the recent past (2009) it addresses themes that are current, familiar and engaging such as family relationships and adoption and the impact of bushfires.

Issues are addressed in a way that will promote interest, further discussion and debate. The play has the potential to open up conversations about families including topics such as adoption and keeping secrets. A particularly strong theme that reflects community standards is family loyalty and duty shown through a number of relationships and situation that occur in the play. There will be opportunities for students to consider the circumstances of others and to observe a set of family dynamics that may be unfamiliar to them.

Other themes in the play include living in a bushfire area and the differences between city and country life may foster further discussion and even motivate students to think about their own lives, culturally, socially and politically.

Warning: There is limited swearing, a scene that describes explicit sexual ideas and brief general discussion about drugs and alcohol.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping, support is available:

Lifeline Bushfire Recovery line on 13HELP – 13 43 57 or visit www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au

Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or visit www.kidshelpline.com.au

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Kurt Pimblett & Martin Blum
Image by Chris Tomkins

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Notes prepared by Michele McNamara
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1. Preparing to see *Hearth*

To the student:

The information and activities in this pre-show pack will help you engage with the performance from an analytical point of view. It will help you understand the play on a deeper level and promote meaningful discussions as you and your peers pull apart the layers of meaning contained in the script. You will be able to explore how the play came to be and consider the relevance of the play to the present day.

Your ability to analyse a play will help you understand how the performance of *Hearth* moves beyond mere entertainment and demonstrates a sincere and heartfelt interpretation of a script for performance.

The information you discover will directly inform your responses to the Theatre Studies SACs in Units 3 and 4 as well as the end of year examination.

Part A of this Education Pack is designed to prepare you to see the performance of *Hearth* as part of VCE Theatre Studies Unit 3, Outcome 3 or Unit 4, Outcome 3.

Part B of the Education Pack is designed to be used after you have seen the performance. It contains further information, insights and discussion points about the elements of theatre composition, the impact of different production roles and the evidence of theatre styles. Part B will help you prepare for the SACs associated with the Theatre Studies Outcomes.

At the end of the pack we have prepared revision questions that will assist you with the end of year examination.

To the teacher:

The activities in this Education Pack are designed to help students prepare for VCE Theatre Studies Unit 3, Outcome 3 or Unit 4, Outcome 3.

Part A could form the class and individual work in the two weeks leading up to the performance. It is suggested that students read the script by themselves to facilitate an individual response which will assist with class discussions. Part B is designed for students to analyse and evaluate what they witnessed during the performance. Therefore these notes represent approximately four weeks of work.

Initially the questions are designed to simply draw out information about the play but they become more complex and are written in the style that one would expect from a VCE examination question.

As a bonus we have prepared revision questions at the end of Part B which are designed to assist students to prepare for the end of year examination.



2. Synopsis

It's the 7th of February 2009 - forever known in Australia's history as 'Black Saturday' - and John and Barb Robinson prepare to celebrate their youngest son Tom's 18th Birthday.

The arrival of Matthew, their eldest from the city, along with his girlfriend Abbey, kicks off the celebrations, but the simmering tension between the two brothers starts to build as the morning progresses.

Tom, due to start Uni in Melbourne, hopes that he can move in with Matthew. John and Barb are against Tom moving in with local 'troublemaker' Danny Miller, but Matthew believes it's best for Tom to be free from the stifling safety net of family so that he can start to find his own place in the world.

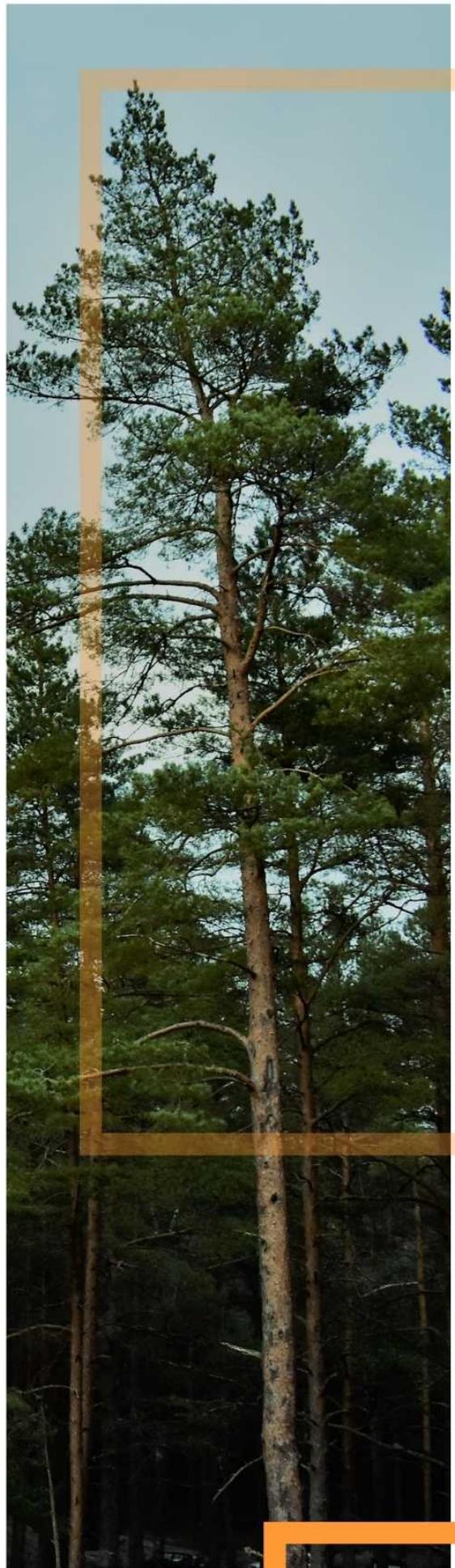
As the temperature rises outside, so do tensions within the home. During the celebrations it's revealed that Tom, along with Danny and his other mates have been in trouble with the police for lighting fires. In an outburst of anger and frustration Tom reveals a deep family secret - that he knows that his brother Matthew is adopted. Tom storms off, out into the heat. Unable to comprehend the shaky foundations of his past and the betrayal of his parents, a broken Matthew leaves the house too.

John, Barb and Abbey wonder about the boy's safety when they learn the wind has changed and the family home is now in the line of the approaching bushfire. Matthew returns and urges that they all have to evacuate now - that there's a fire already on the property. With little time to spare, John, Barb, Matthew and Abbey leave.

Tom's whereabouts are unknown until a few days later when he's arrested for suspicion of lighting the fire on his parent's property. The police enquiry starts to reveal that it was in fact Matthew who lit the fire, which started at the base of an old pine tree (a tree that Matthew had planted with John when he was little) in an impulsive moment full of pain and confusion following the reveal of his adoption.

Matthew is then faced with the ultimate decision when one of the police officers, a friend from his past, offers to make sure that the evidence they have against Tom is all that's put forward. Matthew is left to decide between letting his brother take the fall or confessing to his own actions.

Almost a year later we discover that Matthew is now in prison for his crime. He and Tom begin to rebuild their relationship while John and Barb try to rebuild their home.



Source: Canva



3. About the play

Hearth, written by Fleur Murphy, is a compelling new Australian drama about family and belonging, forged in the exploration of an environmental threat that Australians know all too well – an approaching bushfire. Brilliantly striking the balance between pathos and humour, *Hearth* immediately draws in audiences with its witty and lyrical dialogue, relatable characters and timely themes. It investigates how good intentions can slowly erode away and reveal the cracks in the foundations of a family and poses the question: What makes a family? Is it love, blood, or law? And, what can break it?

In a searing 80 minutes, audiences traverse themes as rich and complex as white Australia's settler-colonial relationship to this land; the escalating threat of natural disaster fuelled by the climate crisis; family, duty and the impact of family secrets, and the consequences of toxic masculinity.

Hearth primarily reflects the cultural diversity between country and city. This promotes a whole state focus rather than an urban-centric attitude. The Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 affected the whole state as people in the city were confronted by the realities faced by those who lived outside the capital city through constant newscasts, on location reporting and accounts given by those involved in the tragic events that unfolded.

The diversity of perspective, attitude and outlook between country and city dwellers is an important aspect of 'Aussie culture' and one that bears examination and analysis which is possible through the study of this play.

The dynamics within the family unit also reflect the complex and fragile relationships that exist and change throughout the life of a family. Each person must navigate their own personal journey and this can often bring tension to others. While *Hearth* invites us into the heart of a family, as observers we also have space to ponder, to question and to imagine what is, and what might have been.



Source: Canva



4. The Playwright

Hearth was developed as part of Fleur Murphy's major project whilst studying her Masters in Writing for Performance at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2019. The script has been presented to the public through staged readings both in Melbourne and in regional Victoria to test the work for an audience and to gather feedback. Hearth has been inspired by the playwright Fleur Murphy's upbringing in a small country town, by family secrets, and the heartbreaking accounts of those that were involved in the Black Saturday Bushfires in 2009.



Playwright, Fleur Murphy
Image by Andrew Morley

Murphy writes...

Part of my research involved spending a day driving to Kinglake and the surrounding area and spending some time on my own, exploring the town and the nearby bushland.

It felt important to me to experience that particular landscape. I wanted to let the colours, smells, images and language of that particular place seep into my conscious and unconscious. One of the main things that came from that visit was the inclusion of the Pine Tree in the script.

At one stage I remember pulling over at the side of a dirt road, somewhere in the Kinglake hills, and looking up at massive, towering trees. Some were native gums; others were stoic pine trees with large trunks and deep green foliage. They looked immovable. Like nothing could destroy them – they were colossal.



5. Audience

Hearth is an opportunity for city audiences to engage with a work that presents stories and experiences that often sit on 'the fringe' - both geographically, and in regard to our consciousness of the world beyond the metropolitan.

City dwellers are protected from the harsh, unforgiving and unpredictable forces of nature that regional populations face throughout the seasons. From bushfires to floods, the escalating threat of natural disaster fuelled by the climate crisis is undeniable. These experiences often exist behind the safety of our screens but Hearth brings them front and centre making it powerfully moving and memorable.



Kinglake, 2000
Image by John Young
Source: victorianplaces.com.au



6. Setting

Hearth is set in the height of the Australian summer; 'bushfire season'. We are in the small Victorian town of Kinglake which is around 60km north east of Melbourne CBD. On this 46 degree day in January 2009 we are introduced to the Robinson family, John and Barb on the occasion of their son Tom's 18th birthday. They are joined at the party by Tom's older brother Matthew and his girlfriend Abbey.

There are two main settings for Hearth:

- The Robinson family home', represented by a minimalistic kitchen scene
- The Clearing, a bare, open space, save some blackened tree trunks and branches scattered around. A slight haze in the air, grey-white flecks gently fall from the sky, like snow.



Retro Kitchens of Yesteryear
Source: loveproperty.com

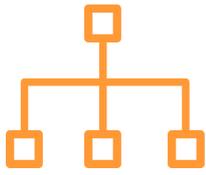


Source: unknown

From Murphy...

For me, these two settings are a nod to the extreme weather conditions we experience in Australia in general, as well as in the face of climate change. I remember a Christmas in 2006 when there were reports of snow falling in parts of Victoria, while my family sweated it up in 36-degree heat in Mooroopna. Now, more than ever, our country is experiencing extreme bouts of weather – snow and drought, hail and fires.

Although it's not my aim to present a piece that comments on climate change, it's important to mention that it played a part in creating a setting for Hearth. Even though the audience are entering the piece with the potential frame and expectation that it's about a bushfire, I wanted to create an opening scene that would challenge that. Ideally, I imagine that 'the clearing' almost looks like a winter wonderland. That the 'grey-white' flecks of ash look like falling snow.



7. Structure + Activity: Allegory

Plays can often use acts and scenes to help define particular moments in time with new scenes showing audiences that the action is taking place in a different location. The structure of *Hearth* is different. It is a non-linear work containing thirty-six scenes. Being non-linear the action of the play often moves forwards and back in time. This type of structure not only highlights points of contrast throughout the play but it keeps the audience guessing about what they are seeing on stage.

The structure of the text, although naturalistic, has a particular rhythm for the different scenes and interactions between characters. There is a musicality of dialogue; with lines overlapping, characters being cut off, lost in thought, repeating words and silences. Scenes between Matthew and Tom exist in other times, mostly in the past. These clipped scenes feature ephemeral dialogue requiring the audience to use their imaginations, glean clues from the text as to the particular time and place. Monologues, duologues and scenes depicting an interview are viewed curiously as the audience determines how they fit into the bigger picture. The experience and trajectory of the bushfire plays a role in the overall composition and structure of the piece gradually building the tension between members of the family as they get closer and closer to the secret being revealed.

A dramatic device used in *Hearth* is foreshadowing, which is giving the audience small clues that might indicate a future event; something we can look for in the relationship between Tom and Matthew and through the allegory of the pine tree.

The presence of the pine tree in *Hearth* serves as an allegory or visual representation. Allegories have been used throughout history in all forms of art to convey complex ideas and concepts in ways that can be understood by readers, listeners or in the case of a play, an audience. The allegory of the pine tree expands the audience's reality and encourages them to think about what else they are seeing.

Hearth can be seen as an eclectic tapestry with many threads intersecting, overlapping, coming together and falling apart. The audience is meticulously led on a journey of discovery through these different threads of time, place, and memory.



ACTIVITY: Allegory

Murphy uses a literary device known as allegory which is 'a symbolic fictional narrative that conveys a meaning not explicitly [but through] the narrative.' (Britannica, 2021).

The allegory in *Hearth* is the pine tree as its presence expresses abstract ideas. Read Scenes 25 and 26 of the play and discuss:

- What ideas are expressed through the presence and action of the pine tree?
- What is the pine-tree telling/showing us about the narrative?



Kurt Pimblett & Martin Blum
Image by Chris Tomkins



8. Contextual Information: Australia 2009

Labour was in power and Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister. While Queensland was enduring torrential rainfall and flooding, south eastern Australia was sweltering through the worst heatwave in a hundred years.

In February everyone was talking about the bushfires in Victoria. Towns such as Kinglake, Marysville, Narbethong, Flowerdale and Strathewen were devastated by fire and 173 people lost their lives. Fires also blazed in Beechworth, Bendigo, Bunyip, Churchill, Horsham, Narre Warren, Redesdale, Upper Ferntree Gully and surrounding areas; the state was well and truly alight. More than 19,000 members of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) fought to save lives and property and to contain the fires.



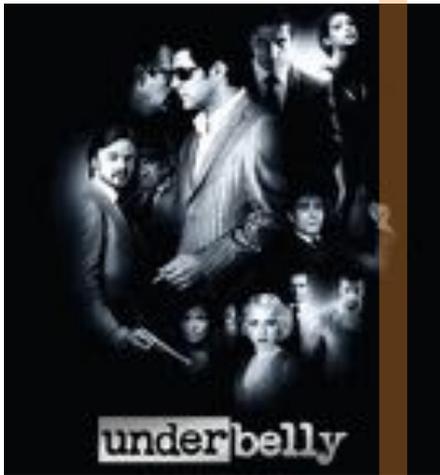
Source: cleanpng.com / Reuters News
Red Cross / Canva

It may be a generalisation but in the case of the family depicted in *Hearth* it is true - country people often lead a frugal life. While family life is important to them so too is community life. This community spirit is what brings them together and helps them get through the hard times.

During the Black Saturday bushfires Australian Red Cross were supported by locals wanting to do what they could to help:

'The community rallied and took on the leadership roles required to get things going. These were people who chaired local committees, energised the working bees, organised community gatherings, or simply took time to share a meal with a neighbour in need' – The Red Cross

On February 7 Australia observes a National Day of Mourning for those who have lost their lives in the bushfires.



Source:
imdb.com / theTVDB.com / imdb.com /
ABC news

With Victoria reeling from bushfires Queensland once again was battered by the elements, this time by Cyclone Hamish causing extensive damage to the Great Barrier Reef. And as if that wasn't enough, these floods, fires and cyclones were followed by an economic slump and the first negative growth for eight years.

Socially, in 2009 we were watching Underbelly, MasterChef and Australian idol on TV.

Samson and Delilah, Avatar and Mao's Last Dancer dominated at the cinema Box Office and we listened to Empire of the Sun, an electronic duo who cleaned up at the Arias that year.

According to the Alcohol and Drug Foundation alcohol played a big part of the social scene in both city and regional and rural areas however it was country kids who were more likely to drink to excess on a regular basis. One of the reasons for this was the social acceptability of alcohol and its role in social and community events. Cannabis was the most available drug and again country kids used and abused for many reasons. Some of the factors contributing to overuse include peer pressure, limited employment opportunities, and violence in the home, mental health issues, socioeconomic status and plain boredom. While these concerns are not limited to regional and rural areas, the opportunities to seek help and overcome these behaviours were limited by geographic isolation (adf.org.au).

Parents aspire to provide opportunities for their children and in the case of country kids that meant supporting them to leave home and attend university. This is often a difficult and expensive undertaking and perhaps it goes some way to explaining the reasoning behind the frugal country lifestyle.

Country kids who leave home at 18 often leave behind friends. They may go from living in a family home to a tiny bedroom in a share house populated by strangers. For some it can be a very lonely time. Budgeting becomes really important as they are now responsible for paying bills, groceries, travel and especially, their phone.

At first, many may find themselves going 'home' almost every weekend but as they make new friends the visits get further apart. They might bring some of their new friend's home with a promise of a roast dinner. Mum would send them back with clean laundry, bags of food, cakes and biscuits if they were lucky. Dad would give their car a 'once over' checking oil, water and tyres and maybe even fill up their tank. Eventually the kids would settle into city life and spend more time calling 'home' on the phone than actually visiting. Matthew had gone through this rite of passage and made a life for himself in Brighton. Tom was on the verge of this life-changing event. John and Barb had gone through this once and with Tom leaving, the house would soon feel quite empty.



9. Characters

The characters in the play are complex and delve deeply into the motivation, personality and character traits of a contemporary Australian family unit and contemplate the strength of their loyalty towards each other.

CHARACTER LIST:

JOHN – Aged early 60's. He's a builder by trade and recently retired. He had lived in the Kinglake area all his life.

BARB – Aged 60. Originally grew up in Seymour. She studied as a nurse but focused on being a stay-at-home mum once she had children. She is in the very early stages of undiagnosed dementia.

MATTHEW – Around 35 years old. The adopted son of John and Barb. He lives in Brighton with his girlfriend Abbey. He has acquired a PHD in Biotechnology and although his job isn't specified in the script, I imagine he might work as a cellular biologist.

TOM – Turning 18. The biological son of John and Barb. Wants to be a photographer. Is about to leave home to go to University in Melbourne.

ABBEY – Around 35 years old. Not from Australia. She came to Australia to attend University. She is a gallery assistant and lives with her boyfriend Matthew in Brighton.

THE VOICE – Around 35 years old. Police Officer, Senior Sergeant Lauren Reid. She has lived in Kinglake all her life.

The characters in *Hearth* provide an opportunity to examine familial relationships and generation gaps between siblings and parents.

- A mother and father that live together
- A large age gap between siblings Matthew and Tom, of at least 20 years
- A large age gap between the parents and youngest son Tom
- Biological and non-biological children



Photo from an early development at VCA in 2019
Image by Andrew Morley



10.

Themes

+ Activities: Masculinity, Understanding the brothers, Life or death decisions, Fire

FAMILY LOYALTY & DUTY

Loyalty is having a strong feeling of faithfulness to your family. Duty to your family is one step further; a commitment, an obligation, and a responsibility to ensure they are safe and well. As family is a strong theme in *Hearth* we can look for signs in the script of both loyalty and duty in the actions of each of the family members. The characters in the play are complex and although they belong to one family the individuals each have their own personalities and motivations.

John feels a strong duty to support the family unit and this responsibility continues to be demonstrated as his 'boys' leave home and his wife, Barb, goes into mental decline. He is a strong husband, father and an active member of his community. Barb just wants to look after everyone but is finding things increasingly distressing as the family face more complex issues and circumstances; all of a sudden she realises that a sundae won't suffice! At the party everyone welcomes Abbey into the family as a sign of loyalty to their son, Matthew and Abbey becomes the new voice, gently challenging the way the family has always operated.

In *Hearth* we see how each member of the family deal with the news of Matthew's adoption. While adoption can have lifelong consequences for all involved it has greater impact when it has been hidden; as in the play. When considering this situation it is important to remember that we are viewing the past and are judging it by the today's standards. Twenty years ago adoptive parents were encouraged to raise the child as if they were their own. That decision required members of the family, and possibly friends, keeping a secret from the child. For the child there is a feeling of grief associated with not knowing ones birth parents whenever they discover that they are adopted.

MASCULINITY

The term 'toxic masculinity' has become a way of explaining male violence and sexism in our society. 'Toxic masculinity' describes the negative aspects of masculinity, distinguishing the behaviour from the healthy aspects of masculinity. The term, however, can be problematic as it is often used sweepingly and incorrectly by some to include all male behaviour.



ACTIVITY: Masculinity

Discuss with your peers the positive and negative aspects of masculinity demonstrated in *Hearth*.

MASCULINITY - cont

To understand the brothers, Tom and Matthew, it is important to find evidence in the script that points to their family loyalty and duty.

From Murphy...

Although I didn't want to make the character of Matthew a deliberate arsonist, I was intrigued by the idea of a fire being lit, impulsively. That the action added a twist to the plot and allowed space for more drama to unfold post bushfire. It was no longer just about Matthew discovering he was adopted and the family finding a way to recover from that – it was also about the moral dilemma and guilt he had for lighting a fire that destroys his family's home. As Matthew's world is shattered by the news of his adoption, he destroys his family's world in a single impulsive act.



Kurt Pimblett & Martin Blum
Image by Chris Tomkins



ACTIVITY: Understanding the brothers

- How might the age difference between Matthew and Tom affect their relationship?
- Who do you think might have had knowledge of the adoption?
- From reading the script why do you think Matthew left the house?
- Does anything change for Matthew during the play? Make notes in your script to support your answers.

COMMUNICATION

There are two important elements in this theme: communication as technology and communication as interaction.

The play portrays a world where smart phones are not yet a universally essential personal item. Matthew and Abbey have phones as they live and work in the city but John, Barb and Tom rely on the home phone. This situation lends itself to discussions about other ways of surviving/communicating, especially in the country. What do you do when the phones aren't working? How do you know about the bushfires? Wi-Fi was also problematic in the country as there were many dead spots where there was no signal at all. This lack of reliable communication was an important factor for the family, especially during bushfires.

Families in bushfire prone areas had to make a fire plan as it is a social responsibility that demonstrates community consciousness. Everyone in the family had to understand the implications of that plan and agree to carry it out, no matter what!

Life and death decisions are made; do we stay and fight the fire to try and save our home or leave and seek shelter and let the fire burn through everything we own? What if the family agreed to stay and the fire became too much – would they die?

The Royal Commission held after the bushfires also investigated communication breakdowns in the community and the implications they had for emergency services, householders and fire-fighters. The CFA warn against people trying to defend their own homes, instead encouraging them make a plan.



ACTIVITY: Life or death decisions

Read this excerpt from Scene 25 aloud:

BARB: Are we in trouble?

JOHN: I'm... I think....

BARB: There's been no warnings -

ABBEY: What about Matthew?

JOHN: We know our plan.

ABBEY: Are we, what? Staying or leaving?

JOHN: We'll leave -

BARB: No. The boys.

JOHN: Yes, it's ok. We've got time.

BARB: But the boys?

JOHN: They're smart.

BARB: But if we go and they come back... And...

JOHN: They know the plan too -

ABBEY: What's the plan? What's happening?

Read the document that the CFA have prepared and imagine if you and your family had to make these decisions.

[LINK to the document HERE](#)

COMMUNICATION - cont

Communication within any family can be challenging and is different for each family member. You will examine this theme in more detail in Part B but while watching the performance take some time to consider the following:

- Do all the members of the family have a voice?
- What impact does peer-pressure have on Tom?
- What happens in the family that drives Tom to divulge the family secret?
- What is the reaction from each member of the family?

The communication, or lack thereof, between the family members is also a strong theme. It can be seen through verbal and non-verbal language. You may need to analyse what is said and what is shown to discover more about each character.

Finally, the play depicts communication between people of different socio-economic and ethnic groups, recognising the cultural differences between life in the country and life in the city; living in an affluent bayside suburb. While watching the performance notice how characters portray a variety of perspectives and expectations and how the dialogue moves from relaxed colloquial 'round the BBQ' conversation to, at times, awkward, slightly uncomfortable exchanges.

THE ENVIRONMENT: BUSH FIRES & CLIMATE CHANGE

The 2009 bushfires were the catalyst for the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission, examining the nature and circumstances surrounding the bushfires and the policy and procedures for emergency warnings. While the findings were very clear: 'Bushfire is an intrinsic part of Victoria's landscape...[w]e need to learn from the experiences of Black Saturday and improve the way we prepare for and respond to bushfires,' government involvement around bushfire awareness and response/support is still being debated as it relates to climate change.

According to the Climate Council of Australia 'catastrophic bushfire conditions...have been aggravated by climate change... [And] the nature of bushfires in Australia has changed... [as they] are now more dangerous than in the past, and the risk to people and property has increased.'



ACTIVITY: Fire

Watch this short video that explains the relationship between bush fires and climate change.

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/how-does-climate-change-affect-bushfires/>

Now watch and discuss the interview with Greg Mullins on The Project:

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/not-normal-climate-change-bushfire-web/>





11. Cast & Creatives



Playwright
Fleur Murphy



Director
Tom Royce-Hampton



Producer
Fiona Stafford



Set & Costume
Chantal Marks



Lighting
Clare Springett



Sound
Max Royce-Hampton



'John'
Geoff Paine



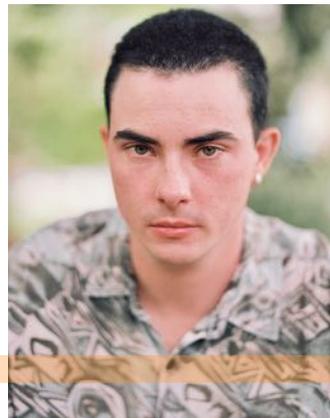
'Barb'
Carole Patullo



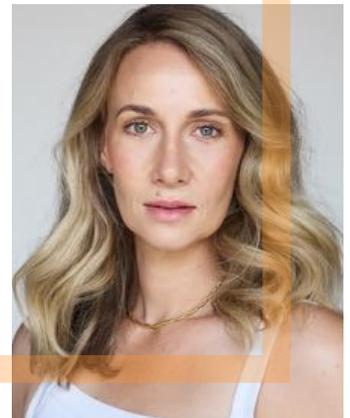
'Matthew'
Martin Blum



'Abbey'
Sonya Soares



'Tom'
Kurt Pimblett



'Voice'
Eleanor Webster

[Click here to read the team's bios](#)



12.

Director's vision for the production



Director, Tom Royce-Hampton
Image by Andrew Morley



Royce-Hampton writes...

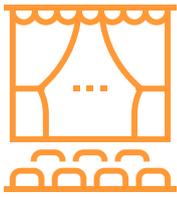
My directorial focus is that the production carries the audience along through scenes of disparate pace and rhythm while finding cohesiveness that allows for each dream-like episode to build on and support the central narrative and the play's themes.

Hearth is at once an intimate character-centric family drama, an examination of the intricacies of relationships both born into and created, and a study of the resonances of deeply held secrets. It is a work that dares to draw on elements of realism, allegory, metaphor and dream-like memory, which playwright Fleur Murphy has superbly woven together to create a heartfelt and captivating modern-Australian fairy tale.

The impending threat of bushfire is a central theme of the narrative and a metaphor for the death and rebirth of the family unit. Ensuring that its ongoing presence is felt is a directive for the design team and given circumstances of the actors.

The audience will meet the characters in multiple and contrasting worlds, real and imagined, and past, present, and future as they grapple with this bombshell and the associated fallout. Such is the scope of the work, it is paramount - and will be a core aim of our production - that the audience can intuit the difference between dreamscape, memory, and reality as these shifts occur. We will employ carefully choreographed staging in concert with paired back and evocative lighting and immersive sound design to guide the audience's experience of time and space as we fold from one world to the next.

*Staging moved readings prior to the beginning of rehearsal revealed just how detailed and specific the text of *Hearth* is - the world of the play is truly present in her writing and revealed by studying the rhythm of the text. A key concern in staging this work will be for the actors and I to discover a compelling staging while adhering to the intricacies and nuance of the text.*



13.

Theatre styles

+ Activity: Understanding key terms

The theatrical style of *Hearth* is eclectic. It features an Australian family drama demonstrated through realism with aspects of non-naturalism shown through lyrical monologue, theatrical metaphor, symbolism and allegory. The set design takes on both realistic and symbolic features underpinning the changes in time and place in the different scenes. However the general aesthetic is one of minimalism giving a strong sense of being in a rural location.

The shifting of time and place continually challenges the audience. The fourth wall is intact at times and at other times, during moments of memory or reflection, the characters address the audience directly through lyrical monologue. There is a bold theatrical metaphor in the continual threat of the bushfire and allegory seen through the ever-growing pine tree.



ACTIVITY: Understanding key terms

Review your understanding of the following:

Eclectic Theatre

Symbolism

Realism

Metaphor

Non-naturalism

Allegory



14. Language / Script Excerpts + Activities: Connecting the dots, Directing and acting challenge

EXCERPT #1

From MURPHY:

When I wrote Matthew's first monologue, the image of the pine tree was fresh in my mind. It was rich with all sorts of meaning and subtext – that of having a family tree, familial roots, of a tree species that wasn't native to the area, just the dark colours and steadfastness of the image of a pine – all fed into what I thought about Matthew as a character and his situation.

Scene 3 (excerpt):

MATTHEW:

We place it gently in a hole and push the earth around its base.

Pat pat pat - stomp stomp stomp.

Ha, that broad grin across his face.

The breeze, it whisper-rustles through towering gums.

What they say? I don't know.

Secure though.

Here it will grow, among the other trees.

We stand - A father's hand on shoulder.

A son, eager to please.

Every Christmas we decorate the pine - I decorate it.

It's mine.

As the play progresses, the pine grows. It's unforgiving in its nature, pushing up floorboards with its roots and extending branches into the house. Eventually it grows to a distorting height, becomes a blackened skeleton of a tree and somehow consumes, or becomes one with the house, before it is finally gut down with a chainsaw.



ACTIVITY: Connecting the dots

Discuss: How might the pine tree act as an allegory for Matthew's personal journey?

EXCERPT #2

From MURPHY:

*For *Hearth*, I wanted to create dialogue that was naturalistic, that could effectively represent the natural patterns of thought and speech. This meant that the dialogue contained a lot punctuation that was there to 'score' the dialogue, like you might score a piece of music. Usual punctuation was applied (. , ...) but I also attempted to further suggest the rhythm of dialogue through the use of “-“ and “/”.*

*At the beginning of *Hearth* I make a note on dialogue:*

/ indicates where the next line should begin in order for dialogue to overlap.

- at the end of text; indicates a line interrupted.

- on its own; indicates a look/moment/pause not conveyed by words.



ACTIVITY: Directing and acting challenge

For this activity you will need 5 students to take the roles of Tom, John, Matthew, Barb and Abbey and someone to act as director.

Read the scene 19 excerpt (below) and try to find the rhythm, with lines overlapping and people talking to different people in a large group – just like a big family gathering.

Scene 19 (excerpt):

TOM: Does he know? -

JOHN: I won't be spoon feeding you anymore.

TOM: While he's in the room - does he know? Matthew, do you know?

MATTHEW: What? I picked you up -

TOM: No - that Mum and Dad are hypocrites?

MATTHEW: In what way?

JOHN: (To Tom) Ungrateful. / This is about you, not us -

TOM: Fuckin secrets -

MATTHEW: You told me what happened -

TOM: Do you know about you though? (To Barb and John). Does he know?

JOHN: What?

TOM: Talk about sheltering me, spoon feeding me. I thought that's why you hated me.

MATTHEW: Hated you, what?...

TOM: Why you don't want me to live with you -

MATTHEW: No - I don't understand.

TOM: The shit they've kept from you. The perfect son -

MATTHEW: What are you talking about?

JOHN: I think maybe we need to just stop Tom.

TOM: You don't fuckin know, do you?

BARB: Tom, please...



15. Design

- **15.1. Set Design**
+ Activity: Delving into Symbolism
- **15.2. Costume Design**
- **15.3. Lighting Design**
- **15.4. Sound Design & Theatre Technologies**
+ Activity: Using sound & technology to create a world



PERSPECTIVE VIEW 1

VENUE: LA MAMA COURTHOUSE

The concept for the set is for the audience to immediately sense that "something is not quite right" as soon as they enter the venue. While the house furniture will look warm, cosy and charming, the placement of the set pieces will signify the chaos that is to unfold.

Set design image and statement by Chantal Marks



15.1. Set Design + Activity: Delving into Symbolism

Set Design by Chantal Marks

From MARKS...

"One of the exciting challenges of *Hearth* is the realisation of the multiple worlds that butt up against each other. Murphy has created an almost cinematic story where we experience frequent movement of time and space. Where we leave the family drama and follow characters into memories, the future, and dreams."

Mood & Precedent Images Board

CLEARING



A hyper real, liminal space where the past, present and future exist simultaneously.

Projections onto a scrim or surfaces: Graphics to be of highly saturated, colour footage or still images of forest edge scenes.

ROBINSON FAMILY HOME



Built by John in 1968: "Rustic-Gothic minimalist craftsman vibe"

The rough sawn timber posts and mix of dark and warm wood speak to a rustic, crafty style.

Second-hand, darker timber furniture could be sourced to reuse as the chairs and table in the family home? Perhaps lighter timber could have a charcoal wash applied?

PINE TREE



Surreal symbolism of the "otherness" of Tom/ the dangers of the family secret and indicates the threat of fire.

The vivid stage directions for the 'Pine Trees' scenes could be realised through projections of stop motion mixed media art. Collages could depict the pine tree incrementally pushing through the timber floorboards and growing through the house, busting the walls and wrecking havoc. Using photographs to create the stop motion collages would link back to the photography interest of Tom & Abbey.

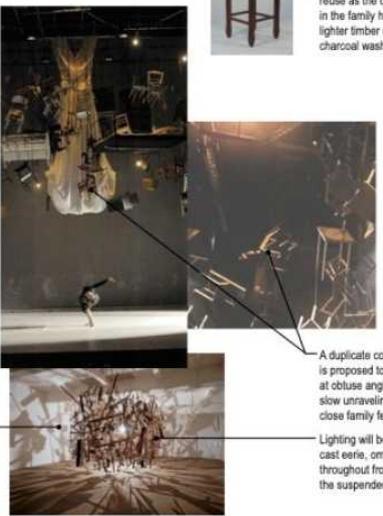
MONOLOGUES



Moments where we hear character's inner thoughts.

Projections onto scrim or surfaces: Similar graphic language to the 'CLEARING' but slightly closer up/ zoomed in views that are only in greyscale.

Subtle lighting casting shadows of duplicated, suspended furniture will add to the reflective moments in the monologues.



A duplicate copy of all furniture is proposed to be suspended at oblique angles to signify the slow unraveling of the initially close family feet.

Lighting will be explored to cast eerie, ominous shadows throughout from the shapes of the suspended furniture.



"The initial set design concept is to create a minimalist, hyper-real, yet liminal space where past, present, and future can exist simultaneously. The core set of the family home will evoke homeliness; warm, cosy, and charming. Furniture and props will be truthfully reminiscent; handmade, collected and repaired, and certainly well-loved. This central environment will be raised slightly from the floor, giving the sense that this world is a floating island which exists in the real world but also at one particular time and in one particular space. A bleeding of set and lighting over the fourth wall - between stage and audience - will ensure the audience feel as if they occupy this floating world with the characters.

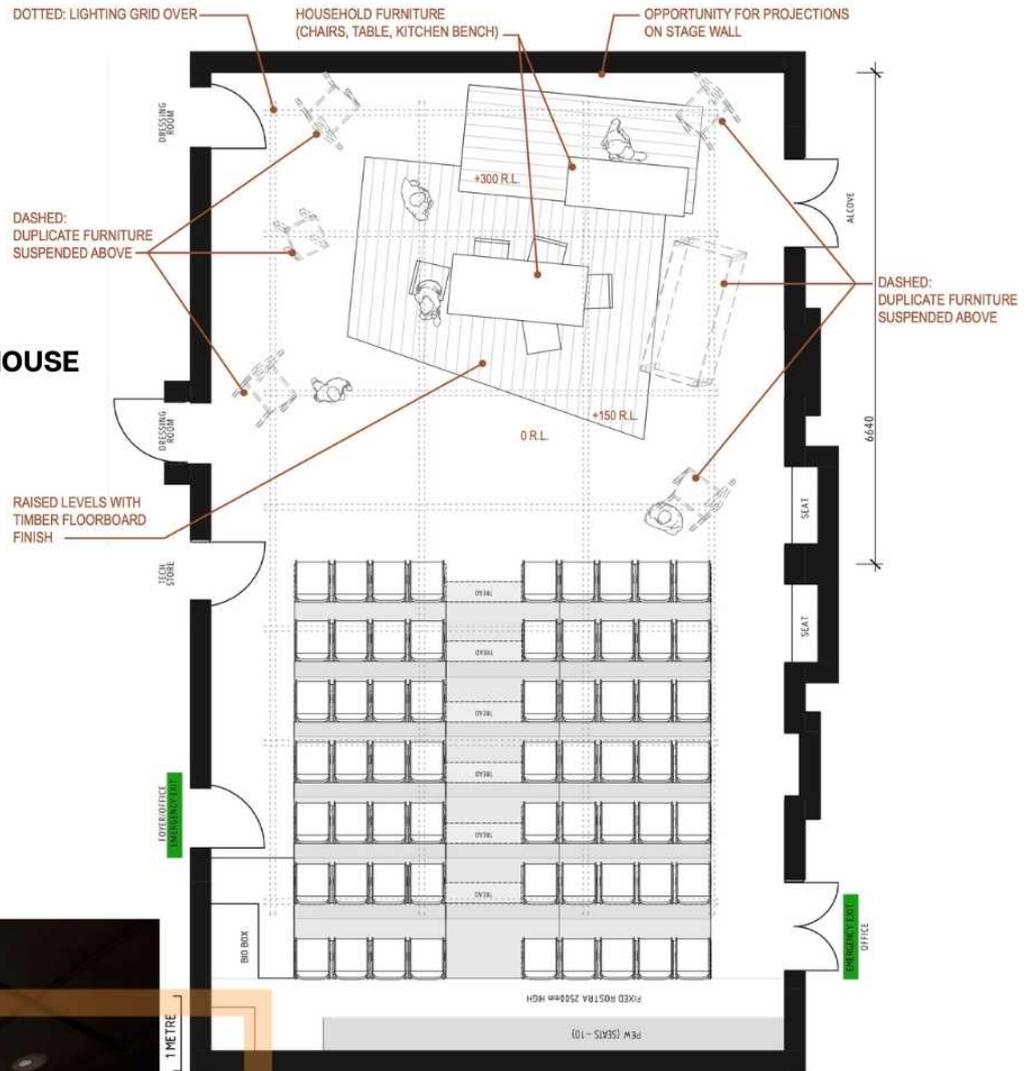
From the top of the play, the furniture of the home will be duplicated and suspended around the outside of the playing space, This will frame the 'real world' and give expression to the dream-like world; a place where anything might happen and where there are always more questions than answers. It will also serve to foreshadow the events that will take place later in the play."

MARKS cont...

"The pine tree exists both as a poetic illustration of Matthew's otherness in the family landscape, and – through its growth throughout the play – presents us with an allegory representing the growing tension of the imminent revelation of the family secret and the impending danger of bushfire."

To minimise environmental impact, the furniture props and materials for the construction of the set will be sourced second-hand, made from recycled materials or reused/ hired where possible. Other elements will be designed to have an end reuse plan (i.e. steel framing to suspend the duplicate set of furniture)."

**PLAN - SET LAYOUT
VENUE: LA MAMA COURTHOUSE**



R.L. = RELATIVE LEVEL IN RELATION TO THE EXISTING STAGE FLOOR LEVEL



PERSPECTIVE VIEW 2
VENUE: LA MAMA COURTHOUSE

By having duplicated furniture suspended on angles and seeming exploded out from the centre of the house, the unraveling of the family is symbolised. Atmospheric lighting, haze and projections will further enhance the unsettling affect.

Set design plan and image by Chantal Marks



ACTIVITY: Delving into symbolism

Search for an example of a symbolic set design and discuss with peers what the messages of each design might be trying to communicate to the audience.

Examine Marks initial set design and share your thoughts with the class on why each element of the set design might have been included. What might the set design tell you about the characters, the themes, the setting etc.?



15.2. Costume Design

Costume Design by Chantal Marks

Costumes form part of the visual language for theatre. They provide an opportunity to help build the characters and enable audiences to quickly enter the world of the play to connect with the themes explored.

TOM	MATTHEW	ABBEY	BARB	JOHN
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Old looking, stretched, wrinkled t-shirt with sweat stains under armpitsGrubby, worn shorts, perhaps with some non-fashion conscious rips/ holesLoose socks poking out of boots - socks have lost their elasticity at the top	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Light-weight linen shirt with sleeve rolled up, spotless, ironedSouth-side chino trousers, artfully rolled up at base to show off shoes, cleanClarks Desert Boot style shoes, clean, no socks visible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Statement earrings in bold colour to match dressShort-sleeved, two layered dress with breezy sheer top layer over solid, bright colour base layer.Clean, new R.M. Williams style boots with a slight heel, but enough of a touch of 'country vibe'. No socks visible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Old, stretched tee - then change into a colourful jarring patterned "fancy" tee with a similar cutOver-the-knee light linen shorts with a few small stains showingElastic slip on casual around-the-house shoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Short sleeved, baggy checked shirt.Typical farmer work shorts with utility pocketsMud caked farm boots with socks pulled up.

Costume design images provided by Chantal Marks

From MARKS...

"Although the playwright indicates the approximate ages of the characters, it is through a script analysis of the dialogue between the characters and the stage notes that their complexities emerge. For these costume designs, we feel it is appropriate that the costumes are accurate to the time period to help drop the audience into the moments of intense realism that sit between the more surreal scenes such as those in 'the clearing'.

We are using the costumes to identify different socio-economic backgrounds of characters, their priorities and some of their quirks, as well as establish the country environment, the weather and the time of day for each scene. For instance, let's consider shoes alone: while the characters of Matthew and Abbey will have fashionable boots (for 2009) with a touch of 'country chic' (i.e. very clean, new looking R.M Williams or Clarks 'Desert' Boots), the characters John and Tom will all have grubbier boots that are worn down, scuffed and a bit muddy. This will help communicate that Matthew and Abbey are from the city, they focus on how they appear and how they present themselves to others. In comparison, it will be clear that John and Tom do not prioritise fashion or cleanliness and are not concerned about how they appear to others.

Staging a realistic play requires both cast and creative to undertake thorough research. For the characters of Barb, John and Tom, we researched photos and video footage from Black Saturday to see what locals in that specific part of country Victoria were wearing in the summer of 2009. We also looked through country fashion brochures from the 2000's to get ideas for specific moments in the script. For example Barb has a comedic costume moment that is described in the stage notes:

Barb re-enters in a different 'fancy' top and shorts. The top is on back to front and the tag is sitting up against her neck...

This inspired us to source a top that will be a very similar shape and fabric as Barb's original t-shirt, but will have a loud, floral pattern that makes it seemingly more extravagant."



Source: Canva

MARK'S APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE THEATRE MAKING...

Our focus on sustainable theatre making means that, wherever possible, set and costume elements for Hearth will be sourced from thrift shops or borrowed for this production.

Second-hand furniture will help place the world in the 2000's, as well as signifying the family's financial position and values for making do and mending. For example - the furniture will look dated and have scratches, nicks, paint splotches and visible repairs. This wear and tear will provide visual indications of the rumblings of life throughout the previous three decades.

Pre-loved garments are already worn down, stretched or faded and this can potentially save the costume team having to 'distress' or 'weather' garments.

Altering existing garments is a great way to save money and avoid contributing to the detrimental impact the fashion industry has on the environment.





15.3. Lighting Design

Lighting Design by Clare Springett

From SPRINGETT

"The world of Hearth will be discovered through contrast and shadows which are created by the narrative and the set design. Transitioning from the family scenes to the dream-like scenes, the lighting design will utilise the curiosity of the furniture suspended from the ceiling which will instantly transport the audience into the realm of memory and dream.

Inspiration comes from many sources including the text, the context of the narrative, the vision of the director and from the set design. As vision boards can assist with the collaborative process these collected images (below) tapped into the ideas I had for Hearth and allowed discussions to occur with other creatives to uncover the manner in which we wanted to tell the story.

My design brief for Hearth was to create a world that is both naturalistic and surreal, that sits in multiple places and spaces in time, and that is held together, pulled apart and almost smothered by love, memories, secrets, and the ongoing presence of the impending bushfire. I also needed to be able to shift clearly between these spaces whilst allowing them to co-exist.

My inspiration came firstly from Fleur Murphy's writing and the imagery it evoked, then from my own family history and how it influenced who I am, first-hand experience of seeing the aftermath of brutal bushfires and the rebirth and recover of nature after natural disasters.

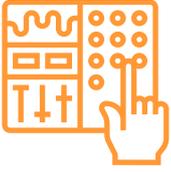
Together with our Director – Tom Royce-Hampton and Set/Costume Designer Chantal Marks, we worked to uncover the intricate world of the text. We began by gathering visual references and Chantal had created a scene break down, so that we could map out the spaces the characters were inhabiting. Throughout the preproduction period we discussed and tested different ways of bringing all our ideas together.

This deep dive into each scene allows me to navigate not only the path of the characters but the trajectory of the story as a whole and how the set moved within it.

As the family secrets become unravelled, the home is being uprooted and pulled apart. By using very specific angles of light and embracing the shadows cast by the set pieces, I will be able to move from a warm welcoming family home to the burnt and blackened clearing. By balancing light levels with the output of the projection I will be able to hide specific areas of the set, whilst guiding the audiences' eyes to others. By utilizing colour, light level and haze I will be able to give a sense of the ever-present danger of the fire closing in around the home."

VISION BOARD





15.4.

Sound Design & Theatre Technology

+ Activity: Using sound and technology to create a world

Sound Design by Max Royce-Hampton & Tom Royce-Hampton

At the time of writing this resource we were still experimenting with combinations of sound, lighting and theatre technology within the production.

After you attend the performance take notes on how sound and theatre technology contributed to your experience.



ACTIVITY: Using sound and technology to create a world

Read the script and notate where sound or theatre technology could be used effectively, for example:

- Does this scene call for soundscapes, song or sound effect (SFX)?
- If you were composing a soundscape for the scenes located in The Clearing can you describe what it might sound like? For example, what instruments, sounds or effects might be included? What is the tempo? What kind of atmosphere are you trying to create?
- How could this soundscape communicate the themes of the work?
- How might theatre technology help create the world of the play, particularly in relation to the growing pine tree?



16.

Attendance Checklist

- Read the whole script and ensure you are familiar with the text, the characters, the plotline.
- From the moment you enter the theatre, look at the whole theatre and stage area with an enquiring mind. Even before the play begins; what do you see, hear and feel?
- Consider the questions that have been raised in the activities as you will need to respond to them in future
- Most of all, enjoy the performance!



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PART B
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