

EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDENTS IN THE ONLINE WORLD APRIL 2020

These resources have been created for the online learning world. You may know some of the selected plays and some may be new. It's always great to make discoveries. Whichever is the case, Australian Plays recommends that teachers access and read a script before selecting it for their students.

Each script and the accompanying activities are designed as a *mini unit* of work or *series of lessons* for students to do solo, in pairs and in collaboration and take place over several days or spread across two or more weeks. It all depends on your students and the learning context.

For each selected play there are activities that include:

- Suggested ways to jump into the script - individually, in pairs, in breakout groups, as a class, 'live' in the online space OR to prepare and bring back
- Monologues, Duologues and Scenes to read, learn, present and 'perform' and that can be assessed 'live' or recorded by students and then submitted for assessment
- Ways for students to consider the design elements of theatre; set, properties, costume, sound, make-up. From reading the script they can make some creative decisions – what would this play look like and sound like? (Without sneaking looks at the productions shots first!)
- Suggestions for analysing and evaluating the script by reading professional reviews of previous productions and comparing
- Listening to interviews with playwrights about their play, why they wrote it, and the stories they want to tell
- See production trailers or highlights that offer glimpses into the world of the play
- Access Education/Teachers notes prepared especially for the show that contain a whole stack of other activities for teachers to use with students!

Links to the curriculum: at the end of this resource there are two tables that offer ideas about how the resources and the study of the plays link to the Australian Curriculum in the Arts, Drama and to aspects of each of the senior curriculum in Drama/Theatre. They are suggestions only but may offer educators way to consider why and how these scripts can address learning.

If you aren't able to have a school production this term, consider how one of these plays can be your 'production' in the online space.

So, consider your students, what are they into? Which script might offer them some new learning about plays and theatre? Over to you...and them.

Meg Upton
Education Curator
Australian Plays

EXPLORE THE AUSTRALIAN PLAYS WEBSITE:

Australian Plays YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AustralianPlays>

Here you and your students will find an incredible series of digital offerings all from living, contemporary Australian playwrights, talking about their plays, why they write for the stage, what prompts them to write, the stories they choose to write. The channel also offers insights into major arts festivals, networks and theatre companies who champion playwriting and playwrights.

- **RED DOOR** - <https://australianplays.org/reddoor>
- **BLAKSTAGE** - <https://australianplays.org/blakstage/media-gallery>
- **OF THE ISLAND** - <https://australianplays.org/oftheisland>
- **IN CONVERSATION** - https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKMLRd6FZNkBDUtmVhrztsl5oZC__4wro
- **AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FORUM** - <https://australianplays.org/atf>
- **NATIONAL PLAY FESTIVAL** - <https://australianplays.org/npf/video>
- **PLAYBOX** - <https://australianplays.org/playbox>
- **SYDNEY FESTIVAL** - <https://australianplays.org/sydney-festival-2020>

On the Australian Plays website <https://australianplays.org/> you will find links to:

- **MALTHOUSE EDUCATION** - <https://australianplays.org/malthouse-education>
- **STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF SA EDUCATION RESOURCES** - <https://australianplays.org/statetheatresaeducation>
- **STATE OF PLAY COLLECTED ESSAYS** - <https://australianplays.org/state-of-play>
- **WOMEN IN THEATRE DATABASE** - <https://australianplays.org/wits>



A COMMERCIAL FARCE BY PETER HOUGHTON

INCLUDED IN THE RED DOOR COLLECTION - <https://australianplays.org/reddoor>

It's the night before opening of *Living Today* by Dylan Crackbourn. Bill is a clapped out, middle aged theatre director hoping to save his finances and his marriage by scoring a hit with his production - but in the lead he's cast Jules, TV star and narcissist who can't seem to achieve the simplest of tasks. Director and actor walk through the moves to try and nail it before the big night. But the farce of Bill's life and the farce they're rehearsing get horribly entangled... with murderous results.

"Like Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*, *A Commercial Farce* shamelessly plunders the genre of English farce for its backstage humour and accidental anarchy. The similarities are obvious and both spring from the ghost of Ben Travers - but toward a different end. *A Commercial Farce* uses the confused identities and situations standard to the form to unravel the central identities of its (hopefully) three dimensional dual protagonists" – Peter Houghton, Playwright.

Drawing on traditional farce and elements of slapstick, the play involves verbal repartee, physical tricks, the single ends of telephone conversations, misunderstandings and rapid-fire dialogue.

SUITABLE FOR STUDENTS IN YEARS 10-12 (SOME LANGUAGE, SOME SEXUAL REFERENCES)

STYLE: COMEDY, FARCE, SLAPSTICK

Writer John Mortimer once pointed out, 'Farce is tragedy played at a thousand revolutions per minute'.

CHARACTERS:

Bill - 45-50, a director/producer, disillusioned and with personal issues

Jules - 20-25 a young screen actor looking for the stage

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING THE SCRIPT

- Read the entire play in your own time or as directed by your teacher
- Allocate the two characters across a series of pairs within your online group
- Do a 'live' reading of the script in scenes/episodes across a couple of online learning sessions where each pair picks up at the end of one scene and continues the play – a bit like tag reading – continuing until the play is finished
- Allocate specific scenes for pairs to prepare and present back to the group

DUOLOGUE EXAMPLES: Pages 13 and 17

- There are some quick-fire duologues between Bill and Jules in this play
- Use the suggested scenes as examples (page 13 and then on page 17)
- Pair up in your online classroom, or in a zoom/team breakout group
- Set the same scene for different pairs so you can compare and contrast interpretations
- Prepare your selected/given scene for presentation back to the whole group
- If you have time, go off and search for a simple prop or piece of costume to bring to your shared reading – draw on the stage directions and some of the images offered online to assist
- Discuss and analyse - what interpretative decisions did each pair make?
- Which responses did you enjoy the most and why?

MONOLOGUES – PREPARE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MONOLOGUES AND PRESENT AS

- A rehearsed reading - with the script but giving as much expression as you can! OR
- A fully rehearsed monologue – all the lines learnt and you fully in character

MONOLOGUE 1: BILL (ACT 1, SCENE 1) – ON PHONE

Begins: I'm not saying you don't have a right to express yourself...

Ends: Well, if you had a memory instead of a hair trigger we wouldn't!

MONOLOGUE 2: JULES (ACT 2, P 61) – STANDING ALONE ON THE STAGE

Begins: I know I'm not a good actor Bill

Ends: Trust me

'STAGING' THE PRODUCTION:

While not being able to see a production of the show at this point in time, you can put your imagination to work.

Note in the script how the set is designed, what the action suggests and how the stage directions inform what might be required.

- How do you imagine this play would be staged?
- Create a Pinterest or other digital scrapbook page with images of set pieces and properties – upload to a group share drive – take it in turns to discuss your choices
- Sketch a piece of the set you think is important to the play – colours, textures, palette, size
- Do any aspects of the script resonate as being symbolic – action, word, gesture, sound?
- Draw a costume for either Bill or Jules – their everyday clothes, their performance clothes

- After you have imagined how it would be staged, on the Australian Plays website click on the Gallery link underneath the play description to find number of images from the production – compare these to your reading of the script
- The designer for the original production of *A Commercial Farce* was Anna Cordingley and you can find further images from the set design at this link: <http://www.annacordingley.com.au/a-commercial-farce/z0iup1n4f6uxizmb4o3gaz7r0zqkbb>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THE RED DOOR COLLECTION – AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT, PETER HOUGHTON.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiCXT9aY984&list=PLKMLRd6FZNkDNo0jmfK_Q7EwMIPqMPIEu&index=4&t=0s

- What further insights does this interview offer you about the play, the style, the characters?

REVIEWS: WHAT DO THE CRITICS SAY?

Critical reviews are one person's perspective of a theatre performance. They inform but they are not the 'definitive' analysis of a production. What further information about the play, the style, the direction, the acting and design do these reviews offer you? Are they favourable?

1. <http://theatrenotes.blogspot.com/2009/06/review-oh-humanity-commercial-farce.html>
Scroll down a bit to find Alison Croggan's take on *A Commercial Farce*. She critiques the writer, performers, director and the style of the piece.
2. This is another review from the Arts Critic in The Age Newspaper
<https://www.australianstage.com.au/200906172638/reviews/melbourne/a-commercial-farce-%7C-malthouse-theatre.html>

The following two tables offer links to the Australian Curriculum – the Arts and general capabilities – and to aspects of each of the State and Territory senior curriculum in Drama/Theatre Studies.

CURRICULUM LINKS: THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

LEARNING AREA	DESCRIPTION / EXAMPLES OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
THE ARTS - DRAMA	<p>In Drama students across all bands/year levels, explore the following Elements of drama including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principles of narrative (story) Viewpoints – multiple/different Forms – structures, devised, scripted Skills, techniques and processes – making and responding including: Role, character and relationships, voice and movement, language, ideas and dramatic action, Audience (particularly how to ‘perform online’) Materials – voice, body, props, costumes, lighting, sound, space
CAPABILITIES	
LITERACY	<p>LITERACY IN THE ARTS</p> <p>In the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, students use literacy to develop, apply and communicate their knowledge and skills as artists and as audiences.</p> <p>Through making and responding, students enhance and extend their literacy skills as they create, compose, design, analyse, comprehend, discuss, interpret and evaluate their own and others’ artworks.</p> <p>Each Arts subject requires students to learn and use specific terminology of increasing complexity as they move through the curriculum. Students understand that the terminologies of The Arts vary according to context and they develop their ability to use language dynamically and flexibly.</p>
NUMERACY	<p>NUMERACY IN THE ARTS</p> <p>In the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, students select and use relevant numeracy knowledge and skills to plan, design, make, interpret, analyse and evaluate artworks.</p> <p>Across The Arts subjects, students recognise and use: number to calculate and estimate; spatial reasoning to solve problems involving space, patterns, symmetry, 2D shapes and 3D objects; scale and proportion to show and describe positions, pathways and movements; and measurement to explore length, area, volume, capacity, time, mass and angles.</p>

	Students work with a range of numerical concepts to organise, analyse and create representations of data relevant to their own or others' artworks, such as diagrams, charts, tables, graphs and motion capture.
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING	<p>CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING</p> <p>Responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century – with its complex environmental, social and economic pressures – requires young people to be creative, innovative, enterprising and adaptable, with the motivation, confidence and skills to use critical and creative thinking purposefully.</p> <p>This capability combines two types of thinking: critical thinking and creative thinking. Though the two are not interchangeable, they are strongly linked, bringing complementary dimensions to thinking and learning.</p> <p>CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING IN THE ARTS</p> <p>In the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, critical and creative thinking is integral to making and responding to artworks.</p> <p>In creating artworks, students draw on their curiosity, imagination and thinking skills to pose questions and explore ideas, spaces, materials and technologies.</p> <p>They consider possibilities and make choices that assist them to take risks and express their ideas, concepts, thoughts and feelings creatively.</p> <p>They consider and analyse the motivations, intentions and possible influencing factors and biases that may be evident in artworks they make to which they respond.</p> <p>They offer and receive effective feedback about past and present artworks and performances, and communicate and share their thinking, visualisation and innovations to a variety of audiences.</p>
PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY	<p>PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY</p> <p>Personal and social capability involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, establishing and building positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills.</p>

	<p>PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY IN THE ARTS</p> <p>In the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, students identify and assess personal strengths, interests and challenges. As art makers, performers and audience, students develop and apply personal skills and dispositions such as self-discipline, goal setting and working independently, and show initiative, confidence, resilience and adaptability.</p> <p>They also learn to empathise with the emotions, needs and situations of others, to appreciate diverse perspectives, and to understand and negotiate different types of relationships.</p> <p>When working with others, students develop and practise social skills that assist them to communicate effectively, work collaboratively, make considered group decisions and show leadership.</p> <p>The study of English as a system helps students to understand how language functions as a key component of social interactions across all social situations.</p>
<p>INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING</p>	<p>INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING</p> <p>Intercultural understanding is an essential part of living with others in the diverse world of the twenty-first century. It assists young people to become responsible local and global citizens, equipped through their education for living and working together in an interconnected world. Intercultural understanding combines personal, interpersonal and social knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Intercultural understanding stimulates students' interest in the lives of others. It cultivates values and dispositions such as curiosity, care, empathy, reciprocity, respect and responsibility, open-mindedness and critical awareness, and supports new and positive intercultural behaviours.</p> <p>Though all are significant in learning to live together, three dispositions – expressing empathy, demonstrating respect and taking responsibility – have been identified as critical to the development of Intercultural Understanding in the Australian Curriculum.</p> <p>Drama and the study of others' stories greatly contributes to these dispositions</p>

STATE SENIOR SYSTEM	LINKS/CONNECTIONS – some or all of the following in an online world
HSC Drama (New South Wales)	Australian Drama and Theatre Dramatic Traditions in Australia Contemporary Australian Theatre Practice The Voice of Women in Theatre Approaches to Acting Significant plays of the 20 th Century
VCE Drama & Theatre Studies (Victoria)	Drama Unit 2 – Australian Identity Area of Study 1: Using Australia as inspiration Area of Study 2: Presenting a ‘devised’ performance – in an online space Area of Study 3: Analysing a devised performance Theatre Studies Unit 2 – Modern Theatre Styles and Conventions Area of Study 1 – exploring modern theatre styles and conventions Area of Study 2 – Interpreting scripts
QCAA Drama & Drama in Practice (QLD)	Drama - Units 1-4: Share, Reflect, Challenge, Transform including: Cultural inheritances of storytelling A range of linear and non-linear forms Realism, including Magical Realism Associated conventions of styles and texts Theatre of Social Comment Contemporary performance Associated conventions of styles and texts Inherited texts as stimulus (for making own)
Tasmanian Department of Education	Drama Foundations 2 Learning about different drama texts About storytelling How to review theatre (not necessarily live!) Vocal and movement skills How to turn a script into an ‘online performance’ Drama Foundations 3 How to create characters from scripts Vocal techniques for characterisation How to review and evaluate theatre About theatrical genres How to interpret drama texts

SACE - South Australia NTCET – Northern Territory	<p>Drama – Stage 1</p> <p>Responding to drama – analysing and evaluation – written mode</p> <p>Dramatic synthesis – present a dramatic produce in ‘online presentation mode’ (at present) or a written response</p> <p>Drama – Stage 2</p> <p>Students analyse texts and other materials, (online) performance, and their own learning</p> <p>Students experience diverse perspectives and challenge their imaginations</p>
WACE – Western Australia	<p>ATAR syllabus</p> <p>Outcome 1 – Drama ideas</p> <p>Outcome 2 – Drama skills and processes</p> <p>Outcome 3 – Drama responses</p> <p>Outcome 4 – Drama in society</p>
BSSS – Australian Capital Territory	<p>The resource and scripts included addresses a range of units including:</p> <p>Comedy</p> <p>Design for the Stage</p> <p>Lighting and sound design</p> <p>Realism</p> <p>Theatre for young people</p>

PREPARED BY MEG UPTON
EDUCATION CURATOR
AUSTRALIAN PLAYS
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[australian*plays*.org]