



AUSTRALIAN
PLAYS
TRANSFORM



YIBIYUNG

BY DALLAS WINMAR

EDUCATION RESOURCE

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INTRODUCTION

This resource has been developed by Australian Plays Transform to illustrate some approaches to teaching a drama text to English students in Years 7-10. However, the resource can be adapted for use in other subject areas and year levels.

These teachers' notes are accompanied by classroom activities designed to support the development of students' understanding of core textual concepts of context, character, and representation in relation to the close study of a single text.

AUSTRALIAN PLAYS TRANSFORM

Australian Plays Transform (APT) is Australia's national play development and publication organisation. It hosts the world's largest online showcase and searchable database of the best Australian playwriting. APT seeks new voices for new times, develops plays that change the national story, links them to production, publishes them and promotes them here and around the world.

<https://apt.org.au/for-educators/>

This resource was developed by Zoe Hogan and was reviewed by Dallas Winmar.

TEACHING DRAMA TEXTS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

In Years 7-10, English students in NSW are required to engage meaningfully with at least two drama texts in each Stage. Engaging with Australian plays provides a wonderful opportunity for students to experience texts by Australian authors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors, and texts that explore a range of intercultural and diverse experiences, and a range of cultural, social and gender perspectives.

Drama refers to a piece of literature intended to be performed in front of an audience. Drama texts differ from many other written texts studied in English because a drama script is intended to be fully realised in performance. To understand how drama texts work, it is useful for students to become familiar with the *elements of drama*, which are combined to create *dramatic meaning*. The elements of drama are atmosphere, audience engagement, focus, language, moment, movement, place, rhythm, role & character, situation, sound, space, structure, symbol, tension, and time. A visual reference for the *elements of drama* is located [here](#).

While Australian plays can be studied and analysed as written texts, we encourage students to consider how drama texts could be performed in front of an audience. This resource includes a range of written, creative, and embodied activities for students in the English classroom.

YIBIYUNG BY DALLAS WINMAR

Yibiyung is a story of hope and change, telling the coming-of-age story of playwright Dallas Winmar's grandmother Yibiyung. She was one of hundreds of girls swept up in the forced removals of the 1920s and trained to become domestic servants.

The play encompasses Yibiyung's life story, starting with her removal from her family to a mission, then to a settlement, then a series of domestic work placements. Eventually Yibiyung escapes and makes her way home to reconnect with her family and Country. Through it all, Yibiyung's sense of identity and refusal to submit to the controls placed on her life shines through.

This resource includes a detailed synopsis, recommended resources for teaching First Nations content and concepts, and a series of pre- and post-reading activities centred on the core textual concepts of context, character, and representation.

ABOUT THE WRITER – DALLAS WINMAR (YETTUNG)

Dallas Winmar (Yettung – Dallas' Noongar name) is proud of her heritage and connections to Balladong/Menang/Koreng country. Dallas is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. Her plays include *Yibiyung*, *Aliwa* and *Skin Deep*. She has twice been awarded the Kate Challis RAKA Award for *Yibiyung* and *Aliwa* and was shortlisted for the Western Australian Premier's Book Awards – Script for *Aliwa. My Place* (Series 2), for which Dallas was a writer, won Most Outstanding Children's Program at the Logies. *Bulmurn*, a play for radio, was produced by ABC Radio. Her stage plays have been produced by Belvoir St Theatre, Malthouse Theatre, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, and Kooemba Jdarra Theatre.

ABOUT THE PLAY

The first performance of *Yibiyung* was produced by Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney in September 2008, directed by Wesley Enoch and starring Miranda Tapsell as Yibiyung. The production toured to Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne in October 2008.

SYNOPSIS

Act One: The Child

The play opens with Yibiyung standing underneath a tree, holding a file. She is an older version of herself, looking back at the past. She speaks in English and talks of how she was born with no rights and her place in society was decided for her.

The next four scenes are performed in the Noongar language of south-west Western Australia. We see Yibiyung's mother Yirribin give birth to Yibiyung's baby brother. Yirribin tells her daughter a story of how a particular constellation came to be; a story of women who travelled a long way from their home and ended up far away from each other and always on their own. A few days later, Yibiyung's uncle visits and teaches her how to care for the land. On their return to the campsite, Yibiyung's baby brother is crying. Yibiyung tries to wake her mother, but she is dead.

The next scene is at Yirribin's funeral. A local policeman attends and is informed that Yirribin died of influenza, like so many others in her community. He expresses concern about who will look after Yirribin's children, and Uncle informs him that another family will nurse the baby, and he will raise Yibiyung. In the next scene, Uncle tells Yibiyung that she belongs to this land and that he'll always look after her.

A voiceover reads a letter from the Deputy Chief Protector of Aborigines, stating there is a 'half-caste' girl who should be removed from her family and sent to a mission.

Yibiyung gives the letter to her Uncle, who tries to read it then puts it in his pocket. Yibiyung visits her mother's grave. Uncle takes the letter to the Policeman, who reads it aloud to him. Uncle is distraught that Yibiyung is going to be taken away, and the Policeman explains that legally, he is not Yibiyung's guardian. The Policeman says that Yibiyung will be cared for and educated at the mission.

Uncle tells Yibiyung that she is going to the mission and that she must learn for herself and for him. He promises that if she doesn't like the mission, he will come and get her.

At the mission, Yibiyung makes a new friend who came to the mission as a baby and does not know her family. Yibiyung gives her a name, Djindi. Yibiyung finds that life at the mission is filled with chores and English lessons. She meets a boy who she calls Smiley. Uncle visits the mission and promises Yibiyung that next time he visits, he'll take her home. He leaves reluctantly.

As Yibiyung teaches Djindi and Smiley some Noongar language, we hear a voiceover – another letter from the Deputy Chief Protector stating that the people at the mission will shortly be moved to Moore River Native Settlement.

Uncle returns to the mission but has just missed Yibiyung. As Yibiyung, Djindi and Smiley travel on the train, we hear Yibiyung describe the harrowing experience of being removed from her Country.

At Moore River, Yibiyung encounters the Tracker, the Superintendent, and the Matron, who all impose strict rules. Matron says they can only speak English. Yibiyung says to Djindi that she will never follow the rules. Locked inside the dorm, Yibiyung shares a poem about the silent suffering of Moore River.

Uncle writes a letter asking when the people will return to the mission, and saying that he will fight to get his family back. Life at Moore River is hard for Yibiyung and Djindi, and they take an opportunity to escape and go swimming in the river, where they find Smiley. As they swim and laugh, we hear a voiceover from the Superintendent, informing Uncle that Yibiyung will soon be sent out as a domestic servant.

After talking about the future, Yibiyung and Djindi fall asleep at the river and wake up at night time. Yibiyung tells Djindi the story of the stars that her mum shared at the start of the play. The Tracker finds them and tells them that Matron is angry, believing they have run away. He is kind and cooks them food before taking them back to the settlement.

The Matron is furious, and Yibiyung is put in the 'boob' (jail) for the night and told she will be sent out for domestic service the next day. Smiley brings her something warm to wear and promises Yibiyung he'll look for her. He tells her that her Uncle tried to see her last week but he wasn't allowed into the settlement, and Yibiyung vows that one day she will beat them.

Act Two: The Girl

Yibiyung, now called Lily, arrives in a new place. She meets the Doctor, who examines her and forces her to have cough mixture – if she's healthy, she'll be able to work harder. Lily is introduced to the Cook, who tells her she will need to learn fast or she will be punished. She also tells Lily that it is forbidden to enter the Doctor's garden without permission.

At night, Lily writes a letter to Djindi. A Lady appears in a nightgown, holding a doll, which she gives to Lily. She says she wants Lily to become part of the family. Lily says she already has a family. We hear Lady's letter to the authorities, in which she says that she will treat Lily as though she were her own child.

Lily has received no letters and is told that the Doctor monitors the mail. The Doctor tries to keep his wife (the Lady) separate from the Cook and Lily, saying that she should be resting. The Lady gives Lily a new dress and tells her to forget about missing her own mother. She teaches Lily to waltz and says that she lost her own baby and cannot have another, but she has Lily now.

Uncle writes to the Chief Protector, requesting that Yibiyung be allowed to visit her family for Christmas. The request is denied as she has been adopted.

The Doctor checks the figs in his garden; each one is carefully wrapped in a cloth bag. He goes through the mail to be posted and removes one (we assume it is Lily's letter).

The Lady explains to Lily that the Doctor is very protective of his figs. She invites Lily to join her for tea in the garden, but the Doctor objects to his wife serving their servant. The Lady is upset and leaves the table, followed by the Doctor. Cook tells Lily her story, of being left with the Doctor's father when she was four years old. She tells Lily she should leave while she can.

Alone in the garden, Lily opens one of the cloth bags and eats a fig. The Doctor discovers her and smashes several figs into Lily's face. The Lady appears and pulls the figs from the tree, throwing them on the ground and yelling at her husband. The Doctor demands to be left alone with Lily. He kisses and gropes Lily and she screams.

We hear a voiceover that Girl 454 (Yibiyung/Lily) has left the family to return to Moore River, and will be sent to another family in three months. The girl has a white baby. Lily enters holding a baby, which Matron forcibly takes from her, saying that it's for the best.

Act Three: The Woman

Act Three begins at a travelling boxing troupe at a country show, where challengers compete to knock down 'Kid Kangaroo'. Lily is at the show with the farmer couple who she now works for. 'Kid Kangaroo' is Smiley – Lily calls out his name and he is knocked out. Smiley and Lily talk again, and Smiley suggests that they could marry, they just need permission from his Aunty. He says that when they are married, Lily will be free and left alone by the authorities. She will be able to go home. Lily agrees, but Smiley's Aunty asks about her family. Aunty says they cannot be married, as they are the same skin. Smiley and Lily are sad but promise to always look out for each other.

Living at the farm with the couple, we see that Lily is able to write to Djindi, although it is also clear that she does not have control over her meagre earnings. Lily visits Smiley's Aunty at the camp, bringing a bag of flour she has taken from the farmers. Lily confesses she is tired and feels trapped, and is sick of asking permission to do everything. When Lily returns, her employers threaten to send her to another farm.

Lily hears an owl calling and Djindi appears. Lily knows that Djindi has passed away. Aunty tells Lily that she should go home, for herself, but also for all the others who have never made it home.

A montage sequence shows Lily on the run, as various voiceovers indicate that the authorities are on alert and attempting to track her down. As Lily travels through country, she draws kangaroo tracks into the ground, eats berries, and begins to speak once again in Noongar language.

Finally, Lily arrives home and is greeted by her Uncle. They greet each other in English then begin to talk of the story of the stars. They retell the story in language, speaking of the young women who were scattered far away from each other.

In the final scene, *Yibiyung* stands on stage, alone. She says that years later, she went back to Moore River Settlement with her daughter and grandchildren. She is now free. She says her heritage, her identity, and her name can never be taken away.

ACTIVITY: GETTING TO KNOW THE PLAY

This activity is designed to introduce students to the narrative of the play through presenting six scenes that depict key moments in Yibiyung's life. Suggested scenes for this activity are:

- Visit to the Policeman (p.17-19) – Uncle is informed that Yibiyung will be removed
- In the Dorms (p.37-39) – Yibiyung learns about the rules of life at the Mission
- In the Boob (p.51-53) – Yibiyung is punished and decides that she will fight back
- Letters Arriving (p.62-64) – Yibiyung is in domestic service
- At Camp (p.87-89) – Yibiyung decides to escape and return home
- Gathering of the File (p.93) – Yibiyung reflects on her life.

Divide students into six groups – each group receives one of the scenes above. The group researches the context of the scene (see 'Context', p.11). Students prepare a presentation of their scene for the class. To prepare their scene, students can take on the roles of actors, production designer, and director. The role of the 'production designer' is to identify/include any key props or costume elements that will help convey the story (encourage students to consider symbolism). The role of the 'director' is to provide guidance during rehearsal/preparation of the scene, and to consider how the scene as a whole conveys dramatic meaning.

After watching each scene, the class discusses the following questions:

- What happened in the scene?
- What did we learn about Yibiyung in the scene?
- What challenges is Yibiyung facing?
- If you could give Yibiyung advice, what would it be?

TEACHING FIRST NATIONS CONTENT & CONCEPTS

The NSW English curriculum asks teachers to make decisions that support meaningful inclusion of the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors, and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences, histories, and voices. *Yibiyung* depicts the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through the story of Yibiyung, a tenacious and irrepressible young woman.

In the Australian Curriculum: English, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is a cross-curriculum priority. Students develop an awareness and appreciation of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. Students learn to develop respectful, critical understandings of the social, historical, and cultural contexts associated with different uses of language features and text structures.

Guided by the advice of the First Nations performing artists in ILBIJERRI Theatre's Advisory Group, this resource begins with the core textual concept of context, so that students can understand and appreciate the story of *Yibiyung* in the context of the history of Stolen Generations in Australia.

“The expectation is just as with any other play: That they research the play, they research the background. You know, you do it with Shakespeare, you do it with Greek Tragedies, you do it with everything else. Why can't you do it with our work as well? Plays are all about context. If you're not exploring the context you shouldn't be exploring the play.”

ILBIJERRI Theatre Advisory Group

ILBIJERRI Theatre also advise to develop a local perspective on the text you are studying. This might include incorporating texts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors who are local to the land on which your school is located, and researching the history of the Stolen Generations in your area. We strongly recommend engaging with ILBIJERRI Theatre's *Teaching First Nations Culture and Concepts in the Drama Class Room* to consider issues such as sensitive and appropriate portrayals of First Nations characters in the classroom, and considering the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in your classroom.

Further resources

- ILBIJERRI Theatre's *Teaching First Nations Culture and Concepts in the Drama Class Room* resource
- APT's collection of recommended resources for the teaching of First Nations content and concepts
- Narragunnawali subject guides for English and Drama
- *Yibiyung* education resource for teachers from original Belvoir St Theatre production
- *For their own good: Aborigines and government in the south west of Western Australia, 1900-1940* by Anna Haebich – this text is a comprehensive and moving history of Aboriginal people in the south west of Western Australia in the early 20th century, and was referred to extensively by Dallas Winmar while she was writing *Yibiyung*.
- Hradsky, D. & Forgasz, R. (2023). Possibilities and problems of using drama to engage with First Nations content and concepts in education: A systematic review. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 50, 965–989. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00536-1>

Related texts

Excerpts from *Yibiyung* can also be used in a multiple text study. The following texts are suitable for Years 7-10 students and include thematic and historical links to *Yibiyung*:

- *Dirrarn* by Carl Merrison and Hakea Hustler – a short novel for young adults that follows the character of Mia as she finds herself at a boarding school on Noongar Country in Boorlo/Perth, thousands of kilometres from her home on Jaru Country in the Kimberley. Mia's story provides a contemporary counterpoint to the story of *Yibiyung*, another young Indigenous woman who finds herself separated from home.
- *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris (Nugi Garimara) Pilkington is the true story of Nugi Garimara's mother, Molly. The story was made into a film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, directed by Philip Noyce. Both are set in 1931 in Western Australia, similarly to *Yibiyung*. Three Indigenous girls are forcibly removed from their mothers and transported to the Moore River Settlement, where *Yibiyung* is also taken. In the film, the character of A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of the Aborigines, is played by Kenneth Branagh. While he is not a character in *Yibiyung*, there are several letters to and from the Deputy Chief Protector. In the film, the character of Mavis (played by Deborah Mailman) was taken to Moore River Native Settlement as a child, and then sent out to domestic service with an abusive white employer. This mirrors parts of *Yibiyung*'s own story, as well as the character of Cook in *Yibiyung*. The visual representation of Moore River Settlement and the surrounding landscapes in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* also provide powerful visual context for the story of *Yibiyung*'s escape.

CONTEXT

Context refers to factors acting upon composers and responders that impinge on meaning. Context and text are in a symbiotic relationship in the production of meaning. To understand context we need to look beyond the text and consider the world in which it was produced and the worlds of its reception. This goes beyond historical and cultural background to a consideration of how the personal, situational, social, literary, cultural, and historical environments of the responder and composer as well as the mode of production pervade a text. Different contexts of the acts of composition and response can have an effect on the meanings and values of similar content.

However, even when all of these factors are taken into consideration, complete understanding of the effect of context on a text is impossible as we cannot tell where context ends and text begins. Our own knowledge and representation of the world is filtered through our own context, colouring all we see and all we say and do, impossible to escape. All we can do is recognise that it is there.

STAGE 5

Students understand how the complexity of their own and of other contexts shapes composition and response to texts.

They learn that

- *their perceptions of the world are filtered through their own context*
- *context shapes language, forms and features of texts*
- *language, forms and features of texts inscribe values and attitudes in their representations of people, information and ideas*
- *texts may be responded to and composed differently in different contexts.*

From English Textual Concepts, ETA & NSW Department of Education (2016)

THE PLAYWRIGHT'S CONTEXT

Yibiyung is an example of a text that is set in a specific historical and cultural context, yet also speaks to the personal and cultural environment of Dallas Winmar, as composer of the text, who was inspired to write a story that honoured her grandmother. Dallas' grandmother was sent into domestic service at the age of 14, and then ran away. To write the play, Dallas had to undertake detailed research, including obtaining official documents, reading historical texts (including *For their own good: Aborigines and government in the south west of Western Australia, 1900-1940* by Anna Haebich) and speaking to family members.

ACTIVITY: THE PLAYWRIGHT'S CONTEXT

Think-pair-share: Dallas Winmar describes her research process in this [video interview](#). After watching the interview and taking notes, in pairs students discuss the following questions:

- What steps did Dallas take to research the play and get permission from her family? Why was each step important?
- Imagine you saw the play *Yibiyung* – what do you think you would feel/think at the end of the play?
- Dallas says that her intention was to celebrate and honour her grandmother and her love for country, home, and family. How do you think this intention is reflected in the play?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Yibiyung is set in south-western Western Australia (WA) and features scenes at Carrolup Mission, Moore River Native Settlement, Fremantle, and Dangin. Noongar people have been the traditional owners of south-western WA for over 45,000 years. The play begins in the year 1914 and follows Yibiyung's life through to the late 1920s and beyond.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY: NOONGAR CULTURE

Connection to culture and Country is an important theme in *Yibiyung*. Before studying the play, students learn about Noongar culture and country. This could include reading '[Connection to Country](#)' on the Noongar Culture website and locating the 14 Noongar language groups on the [AIATSIS map](#) of Indigenous Australia. *Yibiyung* includes several scenes in Noongar language, such as the character of Yibiyung teaching her friends 'heads, shoulders, knees, and toes' in Noongar language. Students can watch a video of this song in language [here](#).

To study *Yibiyung*, students need to have an understanding of the real historical context of the Stolen Generations in WA in the early 20th century. Over one and a half centuries, Noongar and other Aboriginal children in WA were taken away from their families and placed in institutions and missions. It was usually lighter-skinned children who were taken to be 'assimilated' into white society.

While the establishment of Christian missions brought about the first systemic removals of Noongar children, this practice became enshrined in law from 1874 onward. The Industrial Schools Act of 1874 stated that: “any Indigenous child ‘surrendered’ to an institution could be detained there without parental consent, or contracted to employment after the age of 12 until the child reached 21 years”. In Western Australia, the Chief Protector of Aborigines was an official role first held in 1898, and became an increasingly powerful through subsequent legislation. The Chief Protector was the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child in Western Australia up to the age of 16.

Missions

Carrolup Mission was established in 1915 during World War 1 as a government settlement for Aboriginal people. Meticulous records were kept at Carrolup, detailing corporal punishment against children. In 1918, a missionary described how children at the Mission broke down with homesickness, and Noongar adults were camped outside the fence of the mission. In 1922 the Mission was closed and all residents were sent to Moore River Native Settlement. However, Carrolup was reopened between 1939 and 1951 where hundreds of children were again kept in government ‘care’.

ACTIVITY: LIFE ON THE MISSION

Think-pair-share: Students read the scenes ‘School Lesson at Carrolup’ (p.22-23) and ‘Uncle Visits Carrolup’ (p.27-29). In pairs, students discuss the following questions:

- How does Yibiyung describe life at Carrolup to her uncle?
- What kind of education is Yibiyung receiving at Carrolup?
- Do you think she likes life at Carrolup? Why/why not?

Creative writing: Students write a letter to a relative about their own first memories and experiences of school.

Research and writing: Students create a page for a textbook for other students about Missions in Australia in the early 20th century.

Settlements

Moore River Native Settlement was established in 1918, 135km north of Perth/Boorloo. All over WA, Aboriginal people and children were forcibly removed from their families and sent to Moore River. The settlement became notorious for overcrowding, harsh punishment, and deaths due to treatable respiratory and infectious diseases.

After a series of attempted escapes, a punishment shed made of corrugated iron was built – referred to by residents as ‘the boob’. The Chief Protector of Aborigines in WA at the time, AO Neville, regarded the settlement as a way to integrate children of mixed descent into non-Indigenous society. Children were trained to work as domestic servants or farm and station workers. Below are descriptions of life at Moore River:

“It’s a wonder we all survived with the food we got. For breakfast we got a bit of porridge with saccharine in it and a cup of tea. The porridge was always dry as a bone. Lunch was a plate of soup made out of bones, sheeps’ heads and things like that, no vegetables. For dinner we had a slice of bread with jam and a cup of tea. After our dinner we were locked up in a dormitory for the night.” WA woman who lived at Moore River Settlement from 1918 until 1939 (from Haebich, 1982, p.59).

“Young men and women constantly ran away (this was in breach of the Aborigines Act). Not only were they separated from their families and relatives, but they were regimented and locked up like caged animals, locked in their dormitory after supper for the night. They were given severe punishments, including solitary confinements for minor misdeeds” (from Choo, 1989, p.46).

ACTIVITY: TIMELINE

Make a timeline of events in Yibiyung’s life that take place at Moore River Settlement. Annotate with quotes from the play. To do this, students will need to read the following scenes:

- Welcome to Moore River (p.36-37)
- In the Dorms (p.37-39)
- A Poem (p.39-40)
- In the Boob (p.51-53)
- Back to Moore River (p.71)
- Gathering of The File (p.93)

Discuss: How do these events in Yibiyung’s life reflect government policies concerning Aboriginal people at this time?

ACTIVITY: CREATIVE WRITING

Students write a poem about Moore River. Students can refer to 'A Poem' (p.39-40) for inspiration.

Extension activity: Ask students to choose a piece of music that reflects the mood or atmosphere of the scene 'A Poem', and the new poem they have written. Students read/perform 'A Poem' and their own poem as their chosen music is played. Students reflect on how the language and music combine to create dramatic meaning.

Domestic work

Lily (*Yibiyung*) is sent out for domestic service work firstly to a doctor and his wife in Fremantle, then to a farming couple in Dangin. As the ultimate purpose of removal was to control the reproduction of Indigenous people to 'absorb' them into the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous girls were targeted for removal from their families and sent to work as domestic servants. There was also an economic basis to this system, as the girls became menial workers within government or mission communities or cheap labour in the wider community. Many girls were sexually assaulted and became pregnant while in domestic service, only to have their own children removed from them and institutionalised.

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CHARACTER

Character is traditionally viewed as a description of a fictional person. As a construct, it is made up of verbal or visual statements about what that fictional person does, says and thinks and what other fictional characters and the author of the text say about him or her. The reader, listener or viewer fleshes out these statements to imagine a person-like character, sufficiently individualised and coherent to establish the sense of an identity. In this way, representation of a 'real' person invites personal identification and judgements about the character's morality and value to their society. This kind of analysis can contribute to shaping one's own sense of a moral and ethical self and so becoming a way of enculturation.

Characters may also be created and/or read as representations of ideas, of groups of people or of types that serve a function in a narrative genre. Questions of characterisation then focus on the ways a character is constructed both by the responder and the composer and its function in the text.

STAGE 5

Students understand that characters can represent types of people, ideas and values.

They learn that

- *characters may be a medium through which ideas and societal attitudes and values are conveyed*
- *characters may operate as foils for each other*
- *representation and interpretation of character depends on personal and cultural values.*

From English Textual Concepts, ETA & NSW Department of Education (2016)

YIBIYUNG'S STORY

Plays are often structured in three acts – a beginning, middle, and end. This may also sometimes be referred to as the set up, the confrontation, and the resolution. Generally, Act One establishes the world of the story, including characters, setting, and the goals of the character. In Act Two, the main character usually encounters conflict or increasingly difficult challenges and setbacks in achieving their goals. In Act Three, the main character may achieve their goal, or fail to do so. Visual representations of the three-act narrative arc can be found online.

As the name of the play suggests, *Yibiyung* focuses on one character: Yibiyung, also called Lily, and her journey through adolescence into adulthood.

ACTIVITY: COMING-OF-AGE STORIES

Look at the list of scenes (p.ii-iii of the script), organised in three acts:

- Act One: The Child
- Act Two: The Girl
- Act Three: The Woman

Discuss: What does the structure of The Child, The Girl, and The Woman tell us about what type of story this is?

Think-pair-share: Students read the last scene of each act:

- Act One: In the Boob (p.51-53)
- Act Two: Back to Moore River (p.71)
- Act Three: Gathering of the File (p.93)

Students identify the key events in each of these three scenes. Students then describe the character of Yibiyung in each of these three scenes – how does she change? How does she stay the same? You may ask students to structure their reflections as in the table below.

Students reflect on how the key events of the three scenes are connected to the titles of each act (The Child, The Girl, and The Woman). How do they relate to each other?

Act	Final scene	Key events (what action happens in the scene?)	Character notes (how does Yibiyung change? How does she stay the same?)
Act One: The Child	<i>In the Boob</i>		
Act Two: The Girl	<i>Back to Moore River</i>		
Act Three: The Woman	<i>Gathering of the File</i>		

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

In Drama, a monologue is a speech by a single character. Monologues can serve a range of purposes, including providing insight into a character's motivations or backstory, driving the story forward, or delivering exposition.

ACTIVITY: MONOLOGUES

Read the first and final scenes of the play, which are both monologues delivered by Yibiyung – 'Prologue' (p.3) and 'Gathering of the Fire' (p.93).

- Students read the scenes aloud
- Students experiment with different vocal qualities (loud/soft, shy/confident, sad/happy).
- Students select which vocal qualities they feel suits Yibiyung at the start and the end of the play. Why have they made this choice?

CHARACTER FOCUS: THE MATRON

There are 17 characters in *Yibiyung*, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters. Many of the characters are introduced with constructs of events and settings to create narrative. One such character is the Matron at Moore River Native Settlement.

ACTIVITY: SCENE READING

In groups of 3 or 4, students read the scene 'In the Dorms' (p.37-39). There are three characters (Yibiyung, Djindi and Matron) in the scene. If students are working in a group of 4, the fourth student can read the stage directions aloud and/or take on a directorial role. Students prepare and present their scene to the class. Encourage students to think about how body language, vocal tone, and gesture can convey the power/status of the characters.

Extension Activity: As a class, discuss how the characters of Yibiyung, Djindi and Matron are represented in this scene.

- Students highlight any dialogue in 'In the Dorms' that relates to names. What is the significance of names in this scene? How does Dallas Winmar use the issue of 'white names' to convey the values of the characters and setting?
- How do Yibiyung and Matron operate as foils (characters who contrast) for each other? How does their dialogue reflect this? (Matron does not hear most of what Yibiyung says).
- Students reflect how characters (such as Matron) can be a medium through which societal attitudes and values are conveyed.

REPRESENTATION

Representation is the depiction of a thing, person or idea in written, visual, performed or spoken language. In representing we make choices from the language offered by these modes. Representation may aim to reflect the natural world as realistically as possible or may aim to convey the essence of people, objects, experiences and ideas in a more abstract way. There are many different ways of seeing the world as our view is framed by context and culture. This means that representation cannot mirror actual reality but each representation offers a different construction of the world and of experience in it.

STAGE 5

Students understand that representation embeds attitudes, beliefs and values.

They learn that

- *representation may be intentionally or unintentionally biased*
- *representation is influenced by and in turn influences its context*
- *representation favours or privileges a position by omitting or silencing the views or perspectives of particular groups.*

From English Textual Concepts, ETA & NSW Department of Education (2016)

REPRESENTATION AND TEXT TYPES

Ideas and people can be represented in different written, visual, and performed text types for different purposes. Playwright Dallas Winmar intentionally uses different text types to tell the story of *Yibiyung* and make the audience/responder aware of the historical context of the story and the different perspectives of characters.

There are several different text types in *Yibiyung*:

- Monologue (e.g. Prologue)
- Naturalistic dialogue in English (e.g. Mother's Grave) and Noongar (e.g. Birth of Brother, Story of the Stars, Yirribin's Camp, Mother's Death)
- Poetry (e.g. The Train, A Poem)
- Official letters (e.g. Letter to Inspector, Moving People to Moore River, Memo to Uncle, Letter Regarding Domestic Service, Adoption Letter, Back to Moore River)
- Personal letters (e.g. Uncle's Letter, Letter (From Uncle to Chief Protector))
- Singing (hymns and in language) (e.g. Going to the River)

ACTIVITY: TEXT TYPES

Students review examples of each of the text types listed above, reflecting on the representation of the idea and its impact. You may ask students to structure their reflections as in the table below.

Text type	Example scene	Does this representation favour or silence a particular group?	How does this representation impact the audience?
Monologue	<i>Prologue</i>		
Naturalistic dialogue	<i>Mother's Grave</i>		
Poetry	<i>The Train</i>		
Official letter	<i>Letter to Inspector</i>		
Personal letter	<i>Uncle's Letter</i>		
Song	<i>Going to the River</i>		

ACTIVITY: READERS' THEATRE

This is a collaborative activity to introduce students to how elements of drama combine to create dramatic meaning. This activity may take several sessions, and the descriptions below are adapted from *Beyond the Script* and *The School Drama Book*.

In Readers' Theatre, the focus is on voice and using a script with very limited movement. Students will annotate their script with how they will read their part, what sound effects they will add and how their facial expressions and hand and body movements will add to the communication of feelings.

In groups of 4 or 5, students receive one of the following two scenes:

- Uncle's Letter (p.41) – personal letter – subjective tone
- Memo to Uncle (p.45) – official letter – objective tone

Each group prepares a 'Reader's Theatre' for their letter, paying attention to how they can represent the scene objectively, subjectively, or with ambiguity.

Step 1. As a group, practise reading the script together.

Step 2. As the group continues to practise, think about the following aspects and, as a group, decide on your verbal expression:

- How will you speak your part? Consider your tone (happy or sad); volume (loud or soft) and pace (quickly or slowly) as well as the facial expressions that will indicate your mood.
- Limited hand and body movements should also be explored, although in Readers' Theatre you do not move very much and you face the audience.
- As a group, decide where you will arrange your readers and where you will stand or sit.
- Your group can also explore the kind of sound effects you will include and whether you'll use body percussion to create these.

Step 3 As a group, go through and allocate reading parts, highlighting these. Readers then annotate the copy of the script using the above instructions, focusing on voice and sound. When you divide the script up, you may wish to all say parts of the script together, or to break it down so that pairs of students speak together.

Step 4 Rehearse your Readers' Theatre script.

Step 5 Perform your Readers' Theatre piece.

Readers' Theatre can help students explore the text as a script without resorting to stereotypes. Encourage students to think about how they can symbolically represent characters. For example, educators have used white half masks to indicate non-Indigenous characters, and pieces of fabric for First Nations characters (Davis, 2007), or coloured sweaters as metaphors (Dupuis & Ferguson, 2016).

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