



AUSTRALIAN  
PLAYS  
TRANSFORM

# THE PRIDE COLLECTION

EDUCATION RESOURCE

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## INTRODUCTION

This resource has been developed by Australian Plays Transform (APT) to support teachers in approaching LGBTQIA+ topics and texts with young people. It sits within APT's [Pride Collection](#), which includes publications by LGBTQIA+ playwrights and a curated collection of plays from the LGBTQIA+ Australian theatrical canon.

Students in the secondary classroom are likely to have diverse experiences of gender and sexuality; studying plays that resonate with these experiences offers a way to explore and discuss these themes in the classroom with respect and sensitivity. Exploring the plays in APT's Pride Collection is an ideal opportunity to situate understanding of LGBTQIA+ topics and experiences in language and context, forming a respectful foundation for nuanced classroom discussion and learning.

## 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/>

## EXPLORING LGBTQIA+ EXPERIENCES THROUGH AUSTRALIAN PLAYS

This resource has been designed as a versatile support to educators as they explore themes surrounding LGBTQIA+ identity and cultures with students. Throughout the activities, students are encouraged to think critically about the issues raised in the plays, while also developing their skills in analysis, interpretation, and reflection. Activities are designed to be engaging and interactive, focusing on creating a supportive learning environment for all students. Many of the activities in this resource can be adapted to explore other LGBTQIA+ playscripts or texts (check out APT's [Pride Collection](#) for other plays).

The plays and suggested activities in this resource are suggestions only—as teachers, you know your students and your teaching context best. While these activities are aimed at secondary and tertiary-level students in the Drama or English classroom, we encourage you to adapt them to be appropriate for your students and/or subject area.

## THE EDUCATION CONTEXT

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration states that the Australian education system must “provide all young Australians with access to high-quality education that is inclusive and free from any form of discrimination” (Australian Government, 2020, p.5). The United Nations recommends that school curricula, learning materials, and teaching methods are LGBTQIA+ inclusive, free from stereotypes, and promote respect and non-discrimination (United Nations Free & Equal, 2024).

In a recent Australian study, over 50% of young people across Australia identify with diverse genders and/or sexualities, encompassing 5% of young people who self-identified as transgender and 7% who self-identified as gender diverse (Higginson & Morgan, 2020). LGBTQIA+ issues are, therefore, an important part of all classroom contexts.

However, the invisibility and exclusion of queer representation in a widely hetero- and cisnormative curriculum contributes to the disproportionate number of LGBTQIA+ young people who experience poorer mental health outcomes (Wilson & Cariola, 2020). Globally, 45% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans youth report being bullied at school (United Nations Free & Equal, 2024). In Australia, a recent survey of secondary school students found that almost 30% had personally experienced or witnessed physical harassment directed at LGBTQ+ students, while 93% of students had heard homophobic language at school (Ullman, 2021).

As Drama Australia’s Guidelines for Drama and Gender and Drama and Sexualities (2015) make clear, the Drama classroom is a unique opportunity to:

- Foster and provide a safe and supportive environment for LGBTI students and staff
- Encourage and model the use of inclusive discourse in relation to sexualities and gender identities that is not based on traditional, hegemonic, or power-related normative stereotypes.
- Use and encourage students to use non-sexist, gender inclusive language
- Challenge restrictive representations, views or behaviours that are inequitable, sexist, homophobic or transphobic.

The complete Drama Australia guidelines for Gender and Sexualities can be accessed here: <https://dramaaustralia.org.au/guidelines/>

## TEXT CHOICE AND REPRESENTATION

Studying texts representing the diverse and authentic experiences of LGBTQIA+ people, such as the plays featured in APT's Pride Collection, can foster learning environments characterised by a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Various studies of state-based English curricula in Australia have confirmed that prescribed text lists overwhelmingly feature male-authored texts with heterosexual and cis-gender protagonists (Bliss & Bacalja, 2021; McGraw & van Leent, 2018, 2024).

This lack of representation sends curriculum-codified messages to young people that their identities and relationships are of marginal interest, problematic, or are still too taboo to foreground in a literary study (McGraw & van Leent, 2024). Young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ should be represented in the texts they have to engage with for learning and assessment in schools for their wellbeing and for their academic benefit (Blackburn et al., 2016; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005).

## CURRICULUM LINKS (NSW)

Diversity and difference is one of six priorities in the NSW Curriculum, defined as:

The diversity and difference priority promotes inclusion and respectful relationships. The priority refers to ability, ethnicity, cultural background, socioeconomic status, nationality, language, gender, sexual orientation and beliefs. (NESA, 2024)

Diversity is defined as:

Differences that exist within a group, for example, age, sex, gender, gender expression, sexuality, ethnicity, ability/disability, body shape and composition, culture, religion/spirituality, learning differences, socioeconomic background, values and experiences. (NESA, 2024).

### *NSW English*

In Years 7-10, English students in NSW are required to engage meaningfully with texts that give students experiences of a range of cultural, social and gender perspectives.

### *NSW Drama*

The NSW Drama syllabus notes that students will demonstrate respect for diverse perspectives, including consideration of cultures, beliefs, gender, identity or diverse abilities.

## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

In this section of the resource, we provide some definitions of key terms, with links to resources for further information. At the beginning of a unit exploring LGBTQIA+ topics and texts, it may be useful to introduce definitions for key terms. It can also be helpful to acknowledge that language used to talk about gender and sexuality is continuously evolving and particular terms may mean different things to the people who use them.

Gender is a term that describes a socio-cultural construct that ascribes certain roles, behaviours, forms of expression, activities and attributes associated with biological sex characteristics (United Nations Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity [UN IESOGI], 2021).

Gender identity refers to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth (UN IESOGI, 2021).

Gender expression refers to the external appearance of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behaviour, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviours and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine (Human Rights Campaign, 2024).

Sex refers to how a person’s body is classified based on characteristics such as genitals, hormones, chromosomes, and gonads. People often conflate sex and gender, or wrongly assume that a person’s sex always determines their gender (InsideOUT, 2021).

Sexual orientation refers to a person’s sexual identity, behaviour, and attraction in relation to the gender or genders they are attracted to (InsideOUT, 2021). Sexuality can be understood as a spectrum because some people are attracted to multiple genders, could be attracted to different genders in different ways, or to one gender more than another (ReachOut, 2024).

Below are a selection of terms as defined by Aotearoa New Zealand organisation InsideOUT Kōaro (for a full glossary, we recommend checking out their resources [here](#)).

#### Gender

Agender - a term describing someone who has an internal sense of being neither a man nor a woman, nor another particular gender; meaning 'without gender'.

Bigender - A term describing someone who can be any two genders at the same time, or switch between the two. Some bigender people use different names and/or pronouns for each gender.

Cisgender, Cis - A framework of understanding gender that positions cisgender people and bodies as the 'norm', while marginalising people who aren't cisgender. This includes inferring that those who are trans, non-binary or gender diverse are not as normal or 'natural' as cisgender people.

Non-binary - An umbrella term and identity used to describe people whose gender does not fit into a binary of man or woman. A non-binary person may or may not identify with the term transgender.

Pronouns - Words referring to someone in the third person. Common pronouns include she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs. In some languages, such as te reo Māori, pronouns are gender-neutral (e.g. ia). Some people use their name instead of pronouns, or neopronouns that are less commonly known such as ze/hir/hirs.

Trans man, trans boy - A transgender person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a boy or man.

Trans woman, trans girl - A transgender person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as a girl or woman.

Transgender, Trans - A term used to describe someone whose gender does not align with the sex or gender they were assigned at birth. The term transgender can apply both to those with a binary gender (man/woman) and those whose gender falls outside of the gender binary. However, not all non-binary or gender diverse people describe themselves as transgender.

## Sexuality

Aromantic, Aro - A term describing someone who experiences little or no romantic attraction and/or a lack of interest in forming romantic relationships. Aromantic people may experience other forms of attraction such as platonic, spiritual, sexual, aesthetic or mental attraction. This identity exists on a spectrum, with people experiencing different degrees of aromanticism.

Asexual, Ace - A term describing someone who experiences little to no sexual attraction and/or lacks interest or desire for sexual relationships or activity. Asexual people may experience other forms of attraction, such as platonic, spiritual, romantic, aesthetic or mental attraction. This identity exists on a spectrum, with people experiencing different degrees of asexuality.

Biphobia - Discrimination against bisexual people or bisexuality. This may include negative stereotyping or denying the existence of bisexual people. Biphobia can be perpetuated by people who identify either within or outside of rainbow communities.

Bisexual - Commonly understood to mean 'attracted to men and women'. A more accurate and inclusive definition is a person who is sexually attracted to people of more than one gender, or their own and other genders. Bisexual people can have differing levels of attraction for different genders.

Demisexual - A term describing someone who does not experience sexual or physical attraction to another person until they have formed an emotional or romantic connection with that person.

Queer – A reclaimed word that is often used as an umbrella term encompassing diverse sexualities and genders. It can also be used as an individual identity for someone who is either not cisgender or not heterosexual, and is often preferred by people who describe their gender or sexuality more fluidly.

Important note: *Queer has been used as a slur to refer to someone who isn't straight and/or cisgender. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, and how it is still used as a slur in many communities, it is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQIA+ community (IWU, 2024).*



Gay - A term describing someone who is attracted to people of the same gender as themselves. Gay is also commonly being used by young people as an umbrella term that encompasses diverse sexualities.

Homosexual - A term describing someone who is exclusively attracted to people of the same gender. The term can refer to someone who is gay or lesbian. While some people do self-identify with this term, others do not due to its history of being used in a clinical or negative way.

Lesbian - A woman or gender diverse person who is exclusively attracted to women and self-identifies as such. This term was often used as a political identifier and its definition has expanded over time.

Pansexual - A term describing someone who is attracted to people regardless of sex characteristics, gender identity or gender expression; someone who is attracted to all genders.

Questioning – verb, adj.: an individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

Straight – adj.: a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to some people who are not their same sex/gender. A more colloquial term for the word heterosexual.

# PLAY IN FOCUS: *LADY TABOULI* BY JAMES ELAZZI

Recommended for: Years 11+

About the play:

It's the day of his nephew's baptism and Danny is godfather. Preparations are frantic and emotions are high as Danny's sister Josephine is focused on maintaining the reputation of the family, especially since Danny recently called off his engagement. During the morning, the mother of Danny's jilted fiancé calls the family to tell them that Danny is gay. Danny admits that this is the truth, although his sister, mother, and uncle all ignore him. Later, Danny's uncle Mark counsels him to deny his homosexuality and focus on his family and his faith, maintaining that gay men live 'horrible lives' of fear, disease, and loneliness. Danny's sister Josephine says that after the Christening, she doesn't want Danny anywhere near her son. Danny's mother Dana says that she will never accept him, and he will never step a foot inside the house again if he continues to choose this life. At the end of the play, in a surreal conversation with iconic Lebanese singer Sabah, Danny resolves to leave home in order to live his life without guilt.

Scene context

In the following excerpt, Danny is talking to his uncle Mark. Danny has been drinking at home alone while the rest of his family attends the Christening. Mark has returned to speak to his nephew. He advises Danny to be with whomever he wants in secret, but to maintain a straight marriage and family in public. He urges Danny to keep the family's reputation intact.

Note: Immediately after Danny's response (below), Mark admits that despite his marriage to a woman, he is also gay. Danny refers to his sexuality as a 'disease'.

Scene excerpt (p.65-66)

Danny: A year ago, I was driving past our church where I'd been a thousand times. They were having this parade, some sort of fundraiser. I went down, looked around and I realised they were having a festival, telling people to vote against me.

They called it the *'festival of the family'*.

Families, little kids holding red flags, eating fairy floss, running around. They were being taught that I was wrong. All of a sudden I'd become a threat. My church hated me.

What if one of those kids was like me? Whose mum made him hold that red flag? While the other kids are playing on go-carts and trying to win prizes, this little kid is learning new ways on how to hate himself.

If that's what you call being Lebanese, then I'm not... But you continue to love your family because that's all you know.

Despite one day knowing, perhaps, the same sister that you grew up with, that you shared everything with, will one day spit in your face and take your nephew away. That one day, your mother stares you in the face and makes you choose.

But I'm still the same. I've never changed. It's everyone else that's changed.

That's the whole point.

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#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: MONOLOGUE ANALYSIS

As a class, read the monologue above and discuss the following questions.

- How would you describe Danny's feeling or sense of self in this monologue? Highlight one or two lines from the monologue that illustrates this effectively.
- Leading up to this moment in the play, what emotions do you think Danny has been hiding? What impact do you think repressing his true self has had on Danny?

Ask students to highlight the following line:

*"Despite one day knowing, perhaps, the same sister that you grew up with, that you shared everything with, will one day spit in your face and take your nephew away."*

In pairs, students read this line to each other. Ask students to take turns to express the following emotions as they read the line (encourage students to experiment with vocal tone, emphasis, and facial expression):

- Neutral
- Worried
- Blissful
- Concerned
- Scared
- Excited

As a class, discuss how you felt expressing these different emotions. Which emotion felt most appropriate, or truthful, for the character of Danny? Why? Could you suggest any other emotions?

## PLAY IN FOCUS: *DUMB KIDS* BY JACOB PARKER

Recommended for: Tertiary

About the play:

*Dumb Kids* by Jacob Parker is a play that presents a fresh and queer take on Wedekind's play *Spring Awakening*. Originally published in 1891, *Spring Awakening* has often been banned or censored for its frank exploration of adolescent sexuality. Over a century later, *Dumb Kids* follows the journey of a group of Year 11 students as they navigate their way through questions of identity and sexuality. The story takes place in a modern Australian schoolyard where the students gather to plan the Year Eleven Social (Y.E.S). Despite coming from different backgrounds, they all share the common desire to find love, passion, and lifelong friends. However, in a world where everyone seems to know what they're doing, they struggle to find answers and the courage to embrace their true selves.

Scene context

In this scene, the playwright uses humour and satire to challenge established societal expectations of sexuality, specifically that lesbians are expected to emulate famous figures such as Ellen DeGeneres in their dress, hairstyles, and expression.

Maria is grappling with her sexual orientation becoming common knowledge at her school, after she was seen kissing a fellow student at a party on the weekend (note: Lammie is the student who Maria kissed). The ethereal tone of the scene, achieved through the multi-vocal quality of the Chorus, the use of Ellen masks, and the final image of a carabiner being handed to Maria as if from God, suggests that 'coming out' can bring with it its own set of rules and expectations.

Scene excerpt (p.32-34)

*MARIA leans back and we enter the ethereal.*

PODCAST

This is the real world.

You are a strong, powerful woman. You are not a girl, you are a woman.

You have the power.

Your ambition is a wild-fire and it's your duty to burn through all the koalas of bad energy to attain your inner goddess.

To seize what you want sometimes... you have to change.

*It begins to distort.*

*TRISH, SCARLETT and TANYA emerge wearing ELLEN masks.*

TRISH                      You are a better

SCARLETT                Stronger

TANYA                    Sexier version of

CHORUS                 Ellen DeGeneres

*The CHORUS emerges from the shadows wearing masks of Ellen. It's a seductive dance.*

MARIA                    Oh what the fuck.

TRISH                    You need to be like us.

TANYA                    Be like Lammeir.

MARIA                    Why the fuck are there so many of you? Jesus.

SCARLETT                This is what you are now.

CHORUS                 A Lesbian.

TRISH                    This is who you will be.

CHORUS                 A Lesbian.

TANYA                    You can't run from it, you have to accept it.

SCARLETT                Pantsuits -

TRISH                    Short hair -

TANYA                    Carabiners -

MARIA                    Fuck off!

SCARLETT                Good. Let the anger course through you.

TANYA                    We only grow stronger.

CHORUS                 LESBIAN.

MARIA                    I'm not fucking Ellen-

TRISH                    Well are you sure you're gay then?

SCARLETT                Are you sure Maria?

TANYA                    We're all gay. We're Ellen.

CHORUS                 *(Whispers)* Ellen DeGeneres

*The whispering becomes a chant. The names of famous butch lesbians.*

*And MARIA slowly starts nodding along.*

*Chanting along.*

*MARIA is lifted. This is a religious ceremony.*

*GABE is revealed, holding out a carabiner.*

*It resembles Michelangelo's Creation of Adam.*

*The Carabiner is passed.*

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**SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: FREEZE FRAMES**

As a class, read the above scene. Then refer to the painting *Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo referenced in the scene.

In small groups, students create a freeze frame of the final moment in the scene, in which a carabiner is handed to Maria, in the style of the Michelangelo painting. Students present their freeze frames to each other.

As a class, discuss:

- In the context of this scene, what does the carabiner symbolise?
- Why has the playwright chosen to invoke the iconic image of *Creation of Adam* here?
- What does this freeze frame suggest about societal ideas of sexuality?

Extension activity: In small groups, students create another satirical freeze frame depicting a different example of how societal expectations and stereotypes of gender and/or sexuality are perpetuated.

Invite students to use a famous artwork as the basis for their freeze frame (such as *The Birth of Venus* by Botticelli, *The Dance* by Matisse, or *American Gothic* by Grant Wood). Encourage students to be specific about the particular expectations or stereotypes of gender and/or sexuality that they are satirising in their freeze frame.

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**SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: CREATIVE WRITING**

In many ways, *Dumb Kids* depicts a utopian world in which young people’s diverse expressions of gender and sexuality are largely accepted by their peers. This may or may not resonate with students’ lived experiences. In a review of the play, theatre critic Suzy Wrong wrote the following:

Bullying and intimidation are no longer a significant driving force, in this narrative about adolescent sociality. Conformity too has subsided, with these teenagers completely at ease with notions of diversity. Angst and confusion however remain essential, for it is wholly natural to see humans never figuring everything out, about our very own existence, even after learning that we can all make different choices in self-determination.

The generosity embodied by the cast, allows for a certain utopic vision to make sense, so that we can begin to be convinced of a brighter future. When all the world turns queer, is when no group is allowed to dominate, and when no one is left outside. (Wrong, 2023)

As a class, discuss how even in the world of the play, where diverse genders and sexualities are welcomed, the experience of adolescence is still challenging.

Ask students to choose a character in the play and write a journal entry from their point of view. From the character's perspective, respond to these questions:

- What problems/issues/hardships are you facing and why?
- How do you feel about other characters in the play?
- What is your view of the world that you inhabit? What is the view of the people around you about the world you inhabit?
- Can you be completely honest about your sexuality with those close to you?
- Can you be completely honest about your gender identity and gender expression with those close to you?
- What is a hope or dream that you want realised?

Note: These journal prompts can also be used with other LGBTQIA+ scripts. Emphasise that students are writing these responses from a character's point of view, not their own.

# PLAY IN FOCUS: *BLESSED UNION* BY MAEVE MARSDEN

Recommended for: Years 10+

About the play:

Ruth and Judith have been together for a long time. Long enough to have seen Australia change, for better and for worse. They have two bright and inquiring kids and a manageable mortgage. With love and hard work, they made the political personal and built a family they're fiercely proud of. Their life together is a progressive success story. Why should breaking up be any different? But even the loftiest ideals can come undone when pesky human emotion gets involved.

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## SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: CHARACTER PROFILE

Read Act 1, Scene 1: Easter Pie (p.2-13). This scene introduces the four members of the family:

- Ruth, Caucasian, mid-50s
- Judith, Caucasian, mid-50s
- Delilah, mixed race Caucasian/Vietnamese, 19 years old
- Asher, mixed race Caucasian/Vietnamese, 16 years old

The scene also introduces the play's central conflict: Ruth and Judith's impending divorce.

Individually or in small groups, students create a profile of the character they found most interesting in the scene. Students can design their character profile in any way they like that they think might be related to the play (colours, shapes, and patterns are recommended).

The following may be helpful prompts:

- Name
- Age
- Gender identity and expression – do we know what gender this character identifies as? How do they express their gender?
- Why have you chosen this character? What makes them interesting to you?
- How would you describe this character's personality?
- What is this character's greatest strength?



- What is this character's greatest weakness?
- What does the character think about themselves?
- How do other characters in the scene relate to this character? What do you think this indicates about their relationship/s?
- Central conflict – what is this character trying to do/what is their main goal? What obstacles do they face in this scene?

Students can present their character profiles to the class, or in small groups.

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### SUGGESTED ACTIVITY: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

After reading the whole play, students pick a character for analysis. It may be useful to focus on the same character they chose for the above character profile. Students write responses to the following questions:

- What is the journey or arc the character goes on from the beginning of the play until the end? Students can begin their answer with the headings 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end'.
- What are the character's feelings or thoughts about sexuality (including other people's sexuality and their own sexuality)? Use three quotes from the play to reinforce your points.
- What are the character's views on gender norms? Use two quotes from the play to support your answer (this could include the character's reflections on their own gender identity and expression). Students may need to refer to InsideOUT Kōaro's glossary [here](#).
- What is your personal view of this character? This could include reflections on their personality, their world view, and the way they relate to their friends, family, and society.

Once complete, students share their character analysis with a partner and discuss each other's reflections.

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