

B L U E
B O N E S



BY MERLYNN TONG

EDUCATION SUPPORT MATERIALS

Written and compiled by Annette Box, BA/BEd (Hons)

Blue Bones

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A Playlab Publication

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1. Synopsis of the Play

What is *Blue Bones*?

When a woman finds scars left by her ex-boyfriend of many years ago etched into her bones, she begins a turbulent journey to unpack her past in order to discover how he got under her skin.

Based on the true story of teenage romance blossoming then warping in the heat of bustling Singapore, *Blue Bones* is a one-woman show told with incredible honesty by Merlynn Tong. Combining multiple characters, song and arcade dance games, *Blue Bones* is a whirlwind of love and loss, violence and courage, with the wreckage continuing to be felt across the years.

This is a work of startling truth and vivacity superbly executed by one of Queensland's most talented young female playwright/performers. A multi-lingual, multi-media production that examines the effects of domestic violence, *Blue Bones* is important new work that embodies excellence, diversity and artistic innovation.

Suitable for in class application with students in Years 11 and 12 (ages 16 and over).

2. The Creative Process ... with Merlynn Tong, playwright and performer

AS PLAYWRIGHT:

Below, Merlynn discusses her creative process in response to a series of questions aimed to help illuminate how one turns personal stories into a dramatic work. The questions included; how did you realise the story you wanted to tell? How did you go about selecting which parts of the story to include? How did you determine which aspects of the narrative would work best on stage? How did you decide how to dramatised these in the script (e.g. flashbacks, use of symbols such as the x-ray, multi-role-ing)? How did the various aspects of the editing process (including working with a dramaturg, creative development, editing and rehearsed public sharing) work? What were the final stages required to publish the script and premiere the work?

This story had been lingering in my mind for some time. In fact, in my first play, Ma Ma Ma Mad, which is also a one-woman-show, Tom makes a brief appearance. I decided to expand on this monologue for a poetry event at which I was performing. At that time, I had just visited my doctor about some back pain I was experiencing and she pointed out on my X-ray a part of my spine that looked like it had been broken and rebuilt over the last 10 years. I did not have an answer for her at the time when she asked if I had any fall or impact. However once home, it dawned on me. It was from my teenage boyfriend's beating one night on a bridge. From there, my new expanded monologue about a girl searching for her ex-boyfriend in her bones was born.

I was then fortunate enough to be a part of Playwriting Australia and Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP)'s program Lotus. I had many amazing mentors from the program who helped me to piece this story into a full-length play. Another stroke of luck came when Ian Lawson, Artistic Director of Playlab, came to a reading of my draft of Blue Bones. He approached me about developing the work and we have become a formidable force in our drive to develop this work into what it is today.

Ian filled in the role of dramaturg, director and friend during my writing process. First, we detonated the old script and worked on a structure that was dramatic and appropriate for the stage. With his guidance, I allowed myself to steer away from autobiographical storytelling (as was the case with my first play) and into semi-autobiography. This liberated my writing and the injection of fiction allowed me freedom to integrate even more heart into my writing and performing. Ian

also challenged me about how to ignite the story even further, through the use of projections, flashbacks and other dramatic tools. It felt incredible to have those new ideas injected into the process and the work. My creativity was at an all-time high and I have never written faster than I did in that stage.

This was a fairly challenging topic to write about, and I needed about 10 years to pass before I could properly digest, process and ultimately find a creative outlet for what happened all those years ago. I also went through about 10 years of researching to understand domestic violence, its cycles, grieving and reclaiming self-worth. As I was creating the piece, I found that the atmosphere of the time and the flavour of Singapore were essential to the retelling. Or, as one of my mentors, playwright Stephen Carleton, said to me, “it sounds like Singapore is a character in the play”. That was revolutionary for me. The heat, the speed and the vibrancy of the country were all such a vital part of my life at the time, and to my memories of those events, that it had to be included in the retelling of the story. Dance was also a huge part of my life at the time; dancing in arcades, in school and everywhere I could. It made sense to run the storyline of dancing in conjunction with the story of meeting Tom. I also grew up around a ‘gangster’ culture of sorts, so it was great to have the character of Atlantis to showcase that aspect of my teenage memory space.

We had two public readings which both went very well. They reaffirmed the direction we were taking with the work. Then, as a team, Ian Lawson, Nathan Sibthorpe (Visual Designer) and Guy Webster (Sound Designer) and I travelled to Singapore to collect the images and sound necessary for the authentic reproduction of the work. It was euphoric, surreal and extraordinary for me to get to share my version of Singapore with the team, while also collecting visceral experiences while on the ground. This was a crucial step to fully forming the work.

Right up until the final publication of this script we were still tightening it more and more each week. Once it hits the floor with our team, it will have the chance for theatrical components to bring even greater life and breath into the script. I cannot wait to see where it goes next.

AS PERFORMER:

For your role in *Blue Bones* you play not only yourself, but also a number of key people in your life who you knew personally and often very intimately. For young performers, what would you say are the challenges and benefits of playing yourself on stage, as well as creating dramatized versions of people often very close to you?

The benefit of playing yourself and people who are or have been close to you on stage is that you know yourself and them very well. However, make sure you still pay close attention to the fictionalised versions of all the characters. I do the same investigative homework as I would if it were a new character; exploring their given circumstances, history, dreams, beliefs and so forth. When you play yourself on stage, make sure you take care of yourself and your psyche too. Reliving trauma each night can be very hard on your heart. I make sure to remind myself that this is a show, not real life. Warming up and down helps, as does taking extra care of myself with lots of great food and down time. I also have a fabulous psychologist who is there to support me.

When a character is NOT based on a real life human, what are your 'go to' methods or techniques for creating a believable, three dimensional character?

Doing homework on the character is essential. I analyse the script and list as much detail and information about the character as I can. I read the script at least three times, quietly and out loud. I go through my scenes very carefully, trying to uncover the objectives, obstacles and tactics of my character. What are the stakes? Are they high enough? Then I read the script again and I imagine the key lived experiences of my character. I make sure to engage all senses. I repeat this as many times as needed and hopefully when I reach the rehearsal room, I am prepared with a great sense of the character and a strong enough foundation from which I can play and create.

How do you ensure that you achieve a healthy balance of sharing yourself onstage and allowing for some privacy and discretion as an individual?

I take a lot of down time for myself during rehearsals and production. I require quite a lot of alone time to rejuvenate. It helps that I have an extraordinary partner who understands me and takes wonderful care of me when I am doing a work as demanding as this. I make sure that I eat regularly and very well (lots of vegetables and protein). I also meditate daily which helps me relax and feel grounded.

For this production you had to physically challenge yourself in order to depict the dance and attack components of the piece. What are the appealing and intimidating aspects of this for an actor? Do you have any advice for young actors as to how to prepare for highly physical performances to ensure that the delivery is both believable and safe?

I love physical performance, be it to watch or perform. I love expressing via the body. Sometimes words are just not enough and the power of movement can be empowering and incredible to witness. To prepare for performances like this it's great to do training that helps you build awareness of every part of your body. Physical theatre training like Butoh, or even yoga and some kinds of meditation really helps with this. Be honest with your team if you ever feel unsafe. It is not worth pushing yourself too hard and injuring yourself if it results in not being able to perform.

Storytelling is crucial in this style of play as the actor needs to ensure that their story is authentically and accurately captured. What would you say are the most important acting techniques to employ to ensure the performance is sincere, while still being theatrical and engaging?

There are so many acting techniques that I have not learnt yet. I think the most important thing is to be continuously learning new techniques to expand beyond your existing capacity. Reading acting texts, attending workshops, making films with friends ... these things all help you to become a better storyteller, performer and, ultimately, artist.

3. New Writer's Theatre ... with Ian Lawson, Director and Dramaturg

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT & DIRECTION:

You have been heavily involved in the creative process for *Blue Bones*. Can you briefly outline the process undertaken by you and Playlab as part of bringing this new work to the stage and to publication?

I first encountered the work in concept form when Playlab supported Brisbane's first Lotus Program for Asian Australian Playwrights in 2015. It was immediately apparent that there was an idea at play that had currency and a unique voice, so Playlab welcomed Merlynn and Blue Bones into the Lab Rats program. Merlynn excelled in the development process where we moved from a synopsis, through a beat sheet and into draft form. Due to the impressive draft that resulted from Lab Rats, we invested in a workshop through our Beta Testing Program and spent the better part of a week refining the text further on the floor. At the conclusion of both programs we held a public reading that confirmed for us that we were on the right track.

What was it that originally drew you to this piece?

The currency and potency of the story, Merlynn's charisma and heart, and the ease with which she could make me laugh, then in a moment, turn, and make me cry.

Did you ever consider using a performer other than Merlynn (playwright) in the production? Why, why not?

No. It is her story. The integrity and authenticity of the work would be greatly reduced if we didn't use Merlynn as it is her experience of not only a relationship, but the city of her birth, Singapore. Singapore is a very idiosyncratic place, a collision of cultures on every level; language, cuisine, education, and so on. If we were ever to use another actor, then they would probably have to be Singaporean.

How much changing or altering of the text occurs once rehearsals commence? Does this differ when the playwright is present and also the performer?

*The degree of altering that occurs in rehearsal is usually dependent on the development process a work has been through. If you have had the opportunity for the playwright to work extensively on the floor with the actor, you are likely to have prepared the text for rehearsal far better than through just conceptual dramaturgical development. It is testing the work in three dimensions; action, language and subtext, in particular. As mentioned above, *Blue Bones* has been*

through two readings, which have given us such a great understanding of the work and built a trusting relationship between me and Merlynn. In rehearsal it is much easier when the playwright is also the performer as you are streamlining the process and not having to direct actors, and then have dramaturgical conversations — rehearsals are in theory, about realisation rather than development. In professional processes, playwrights are rarely present all the time at rehearsals due to the fact they are not being paid, so major dramaturgical changes can be problematic, hence often or best avoided.

How important is it, when the playwright is also the sole performer, for there to be an external creative involved, in this case you as the Director?

Critical. It is always important to have external eyes on your work, no matter your role in a process. Blue Bones is story with a high degree of difficulty. Theatre is generally considered an actor's and/or a writer's medium, and film more a director's. This theatre work is the closest to a director's piece that I have engaged with in nearly a decade. As such, working with Merlynn to shape the work is something that is vitally important to meet the needs and demands of this script, which requires the character and world to turn in a single, brief moment. This is a memory play that needs to work in real time to challenge and change the character; dramaturgically and performance-wise this is difficult and requires a very nuanced realisation. For me, I have the other creatives (Lighting Designer, Sound Designer and Visual Designer) involved to keep me honest.

As a director, what is the most exciting aspect of working with a new play for its professional debut? What are the challenges?

Going where no one has been before. Creating something from the ground up is much more fulfilling than just interpretation, because you are aiming to communicate a new idea, and in this instance, an idea of real currency, to your community to affect change. The most exciting time is generally when you have your first audience; watching them engage with a story and sensing how it is working is very special. There are plenty of challenges as referred to in the other questions, but there is no reward without risk.

In your role as director, how much input did you have regarding the exploration of dramatic conventions such as flashbacks, symbolic use of songs, projections, multiple role-ing and so on? Were these scripted into the play initially, or did they emerge during the creative development period and public showings?

For most of the process I have acted as Dramaturg / Mentor to Merlynn, and so I have had a strong hand in finding and shaping the form of her story. This is because the process began in the Lab Rats program and a large component of it is the

development of the playwright's craft. Consequently, we went back to basics starting with articulating the controlling idea and trying to find the most appropriate form through which to express it. Merlynn's initial idea included multiple roles, a song and various symbols, but the memory or flashback form was developed through the process, as was the dramatic structure. The projections were built in from the beginning of this development so as to fully integrate them into the story.

How did you approach the sensitive and personal content of this script in such a way so that the artistic integrity of the piece remained at the core? Was this a challenging task or one that required a mutually determined approach?

Merlynn's first play Ma Ma Ma Mad was a biographical story about the suicide of her mother, so I knew she had the ability to go to dark and truthful places. But with Blue Bones I wanted to develop her craft and so I challenged her not to be confined by the real events to free her from obligation and encourage dramatic thinking to best express the idea she wanted to convey. Merlynn agreed and rose to this challenge as she usually does with rigour and integrity. So, you could call Blue Bones semi-autobiographical. The additional motive for doing this was to create distance between the dramatic world and the real event to help protect Merlynn.

Cinematic projections, lighting and other production elements featured in this work to indicate time, place, relationships, situation and to establish mood. What would be your advice to students (who may not have access to such production or design elements) for directing extracts of the play in class — what do you think are the most important directorial considerations for this particular text?

Having done two readings without the screen, I am confident that it will stand on its dramatic legs by itself. There is very little (if any) direct acknowledgement of the screen by the characters. The screen mostly acts as framing device (along with other functions) establishing the landscape for the audience. So, I'd recommend that the director and actor establish shared images for the environments (and other references or characters) that bring texture and ownership to the performance (if you see it and believe it, the audience will too). Additionally, I would concentrate on the punctuation of moments in a scene and how the "Merlynn" character is connected to what is happening. Within her relationship with Tom in particular you will notice that she starts out in denial of what happened to her and then progresses through stages, consequently revealing what it is doing to her internally. As mentioned, this is a memory play that works in changing the character in real time.

Based on your career experience as a director, what are your best tips for new and emerging young directors, playwrights and performers?

Learn about story first and foremost. All of those disciplines require you to be a storyteller, and so an understanding of the elements and nuances of story will absolutely improve the individual craft of each. Actors will be able to work on their character in relation to the broader narrative if they can pull apart and understand the purpose of their character in relation to others, major and minor turning points, structure and so on. A director has to shape and emphasise meaning and use a style that supports the vision for the story, so clearly a complex reading of a script is necessary. They also have to understand the craft of acting, as they have to work continually with actors to deliver the story; doing this will get better results and make for more efficient progress. In addition to story, playwrights too should also understand the craft of acting, particularly the analysis that various methods use to articulate objectives and actions as this can inform how scenes can work, as it is a powerful reflective tool.

4. Curriculum Connections

In the Drama Classroom

The curriculum connections provided are based on the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) Drama Senior Syllabus (2013) for Queensland Year 11 and 12 students (see here for more information — qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior/subjects/arts/drama-2013) and the Australian Curriculum: The Arts / Drama (see here for more information — australiancurriculum.edu.au/the-arts/drama). Where possible, definitions have been provided for state specific terminology to assist with application across senior courses of study in other Australian states.

The Australian Curriculum refers to ‘Making’ Drama which includes Forming and Presenting (QCAA dramatic dimensions), along with creating, devising, directing, designing, scripting, improvising and performing. ‘Responding’ (terminology used in both the Australian Curriculum and QCAA syllabus) includes analysing, reflecting, critiquing, researching.

In *Blue Bones*, the ‘Blue’ is representative of the bruises, the pain, the sadness and the depression which can be crippling when faced with abuse — both physical and emotional. The ‘Bones’ is representative of the adolescent experience and particularly, the highly physical nature of this as our bodies become slaves to chemical forces beyond our control. This includes the growing pains, changing bodies, changing momentum and movement and the rites of passage which mark this time in our lives. The final key influencing factor on the construct of the script is the role that Singapore plays as a very character itself, with its own idiosyncrasies, rhythms, habits and characteristics. Merlynn mentions the Singaporean flag in the very first scene. Due to the nature of the design of the flag, the role of Singapore as a character throughout will be referred to as the ‘Moon’. To guide you through the text and towards relevant script extracts based on the themes or narrative components you wish to explore, the teacher’s notes have been organised into three categories; ‘Blue’, ‘Bones’ and ‘Moon’.

Key theatrical styles, forms and their associated conventions which are evident throughout the play:

Realism:

Snapshots of real life seen in real time, use of the fourth wall, authentic, believable and emotionally driven narrative with a central protagonist. The script also features aspects of Heightened Realism, including the use of dream sequences, flashbacks, non-linear narrative, highly stylised moments and symbolic choices.

Physical Theatre:

Use of physical storytelling and movement to portray the narrative, which may be symbolic and stylised, use of a physical activity such as dance as part of the drama or stage action. The Asian theatre styles of Butoh and Suzuki Theatre in particular informed the performance and the devising of movement sequences.

One-Person Show:

Multiple role-ing, storytelling and memory/story drama, fragmented structure, use of song, music and movement to depict values of culture and character.

Verbatim Theatre:

Use of real life stories and events to create the narrative. While the stories may not be delivered in a strictly verbatim sense and may have been dramatised for this script, the notion of utilising stories drawn from real life experiences is present.

Epic Theatre:

Breaking the fourth wall, short and episodic scenes, use of cinematic projections, generic role portrayal, gestus, contrasting and fragmented mood between scenes, multiple role-ing.

Contemporary Political Theatre:

Unpacking of modern issues of social, ethical, political concern in a dramatic fashion, communication of a political agenda or standpoint including a call to action.

BLUE

Realism

Script sample:

Projection of Singaporean Hospital.

ATLANTIS

Eh please don't ask me to calm down ok. YOU calm the fuck down. I want to find out what happen to my sister and WHO THE FUCK DID THIS.

INDIAN DOCTOR

Please Sir, I've told you all we know already. Your sister was found unconscious, on a bridge at 4am yesterday. A kind gentleman who found her and brought her in and we have found that she has substantial bruising and a broken back.

MERLYNN

My brother finally realises I've woken up.

ATLANTIS

Shut up. Get the fuck out.

Girl, don't try to move ok, yes yes, pain I know. Don't cry.
Stop it. Tell me, who did this?

MERLYNN

I told him I fell down a set of stairs.

ATLANTIS

BU YAO PIAN WO AH, GIRL. [*Subtitle <Mandarin>:
DON'T LIE TO ME, GIRL.*]

You think I'm born yesterday? How can you fall DOWN the
stairs and end up on TOP of a bridge? SOMEBODY DID THIS
TO YOU! NI KEN WO JIANG SHUI! [*Subtitle <Mandarin>:
SOMEBODY DID THIS TO YOU! TELL ME WHO!*]

MERLYNN

I ask about the NDP.

ATLANTIS

No girl, today is Monday, you have been unconscious for two
days now. NDP finish. Your back is broken.

MERLYNN

I haven't danced since then ...

Through my tears I say that I was just going to meet Tom for
a last time, just to talk. And it just got so, so wrong. I let slip
his name from my lips ...

I look up, and Atlantis is gone. Like an ancient myth, what
happens next has been whispered and passed through a
thousand lips.

Six of my brother's closest friends, all from the same gang,
gather in a clan house ...

Projection of Singaporean Chinese Clan House.

ATLANTIS

So my brothers, what I know is, this Lam Pa Bin, ei si pa wa
eh xio beh pa jin gu liao. Tong Kim e is pa ka, pa ke e buey
ki lai. Brothers, wa ai kwa e a lam pa qiu. Kwa eh ho gao gan,
kwa e pua kang! [*Subtitle <Hokkien>: So my brothers, what
I know is, this Penis Face, he has been hitting my sister for*

a long time now. Now he has hit her, hit her to the point she cannot get up. Brothers, lets watch his balls shrink. Watch him be fucked by a dog, watch his anus spilt open.]

MERLYNN Silent Benny hits the marble table. Everyone is taken aback — the gentle giant has been awakened.

2pm, the bell rings, Tom is yanked out of school by two young gang members. He is dragged to a void deck.

The passage above indicates the highly passionate and believable approach that a brother or loved one would take when first being able to communicate with a family member who is waking after having been physically abused. Atlantis is highly protective of his sister and enraged that this injustice has been allowed to occur and seeks the truth to pursue revenge.

Physical Theatre

Script sample:

MERLYNN I slap him. And I run, as fast as I can. He chases me.

Projections of locations flick by.

He catches me.

Projection of bridge over highway.

He punches my chest. Then my stomach, again and again, until I vomit. He pulls me up by the hair and gets me in the face. I drop to the ground. He slams my head against the metal railing.

MERLYNN's head gets hit 3 times.

Ah! And I look down.

I see big bright car lights flashing by. Zoom Zoom Zoom. My concoction of saliva and tears leak to the ground. I feel his arms on my back. No, no, why is he using his hands? He picks me up.

No don't! No don't!

I push my body into the ground. I cling onto the railing; I want to merge into concrete. He drops me.

He kicks my back. His shoe, my bones, his shoe, my spine. His shoe, my bones, his shoe, my spine. His shoe, my bones, his shoe, my spine.

I black out.

This captures the most physically aggressive of the attacks on Merlynn and is executed with choreographed and stylised movements to enable the audience to capture the harrowing physical impact without actually having to re-enact the crimes. The fusion of the athleticism of the chase teamed with the use of protracted duration and tempos ensures that this moment achieves its full impact through physical theatre techniques.

One-Person Show

Script sample:

Lighting shift. MERLYNN back in the hospital and cannot move her body again. She is still for awhile.

MERLYNN

What am I doing? Siao ah. [*Subtitle <Hokkien>: Am I crazy?*]
Everything was fine. No problem.

She tries to move out of bed, she's in pain.

KAN! [*Subtitle <Hokkien/ Mandarin>: FUCK!*] I don't want to think about ... I want, I want, I want ...

A surreal space.

MOTHER

Ah girl, don't worry, mummy's here beside you.

You in pain my girl. Don't think so much, just rest ok, just push it all away, just go to sleep. Let your pain slip from your body, drop by drop until you are empty and free. Let yourself float higher and higher, away from everything. Then you will arrive in the beautiful purple river and the lake will lick your skin. It will keep you from thinking about the past.

[Sings] Wang bu liao wang bu liao

Wang bu liao ni de cuo

Wang bu liao ni de hao [Subtitle <Mandarin>: I cannot forget, I cannot forget.]

I cannot forget your mistake.

But still, I cannot forget your wonders.

MERLYNN No, no, don't. No draining, no floating, no purple fucking river. I don't want. Mummy, I don't ... I have to remember, I have to, I have to, I have to ...

In the Hospital. We see the introduction of the mother figure as an other-worldly, protective influence, being portrayed by Merlynn, however the reality of Merlynn's injuries and situation remains obvious through the projection of multiple x-ray images onto her body. The use of surreal lighting indicates that she is in a hyper-real, flashback moment, as is often used in one person shows to reveal additional characters.

Verbatim Theatre

Script sample:

X-rays flash. MERLYNN is back in the Hospital.

MERLYNN How could I forget all this? How come I don't remember he used to do be like that. Maybe because he is more of a good guy than a bad guy. Right? I mean, he has been through so much, he had such a difficult childhood. I remember he once told me.

A memory space.

TOM I am in my room. I hear the door open and he immediately starts to scream and shout because my mother has not finished cooking yet. Then I hear her scream. Scream so loud. I hear whoosh whoosh. I know that he is using his belt on her. Like he uses on me sometimes. I hear our chair fly across the room. One day I want to have a lot of money so I can buy those plastic chair from IKEA and throw away our stupid wooden chair!

Mummy yi zi han yi zi han. Then I hear the sound of her flesh and bones banging against my wall. Mummy ah, mummy ah. Bu yao da wo de Mummy, Bu yao da ta. HONG GAN AH!
[Subtitle <Mandarin/ Hokkein>: Don't hit my mummy, don't hit her. GET FUCKED!]

X-rays flash. MERLYNN is back in the Hospital.

MERLYNN

I can't fathom what it's like to grow up like that. To be always hanging on the edge of security, uncertain if the day would gift you protection or mayhem. Perhaps because of witnessing this, the wires in his brain tangled. Messages gets missed, meanings confounded and actions explode out of his limbs in a wild misguided fury. So it's not really him that is hitting me. My love is the Tom that kisses me, dances with me in the rain and spends hours to win a Giant Piglet for me.

Subtle sound of water. Projection of Underwater World Shark Tank.

TOM

How much did you borrow from Nolleen to come here?/ How is that enough for both of us to eat? I want McDonalds/ I thought you in Express Stream you should be smarter. I think the dirt in my fingernail is smarter than you.

MERLYNN feels TOM twisting her wrist and whispering in her ear.

MERLYNN

Don't Tom, not here. There is so many people here./ Please/ Tom, our friends are just near by. Please stop./ I'll do anything you want later ok?

AH!

TOM is choking MERLYNN.

I can't breathe/ Tom, stop/ Please/ People are watching us, Tom/ Tom/ Don't lift me, Don't lift me!/
MERLYNN is standing on tiptoes.

I can't breathe!

Please help me/ Please help me/ I beg you, please, please help me.

The largest man in the crowd had big green eyes. He looked at me, lifted a chip and “crunch”.

Suddenly Tom's grip softens. I break free and run ...

Projections of Underwater Water World flash.

Right into — Nolleen Lee.

Noelleen, I ran away because Tom, he, he, he hits me.

NOELLEEN

I know Merlynn, I saw. Shh, Shh, Shh. I'm sure Tom is very sorry. You finish your crying? You remind me of my mother. She also always cry lidat when my father beats her. It is all part of adult relationship. You need to learn how to cope better. Ok? Stop being childish. Come, let's go join everybody.

MERLYNN is back in the hospital. Xrays flash. She weeps.

We hear Tom recount his memories of how he was first exposed to physical abuse. He describes in detail the sounds, the smells and what he witnessed in a very innocent and raw manner. The use of an actual story belonging to the person on whom a character is based makes the language and its impact more authentic and powerful and enables the influence of the issues to be felt in a way that fiction cannot.

Epic Theatre

Script sample:

Basia Balut's "Little Waltz" plays. Projection of moving through a Singaporean flat from bedroom to bathroom.

MERLYNN

This song. I love it. I used to play this every morning as part of my routine.

MERLYNN sings along.

Tom rarely hits my face, but I do dance and PE almost everyday, so I play it safe and often cover up all the bruises. I bought 3 tubes of liquid foundation. Green, Purple and Yellow based.

MERLYNN continues singing.

Projection of a colour wheel spinning. MERLYNN rubs a spot on her chest.

When a bruise is fresh, it is red and still painful. I gently apply my green foundation which is opposite of red on the colour wheel.

MERLYNN rubs a spot on her tummy.

At the second stage, a bruise is purple or blue. Not as painful now but it looks nasty. I use the yellow foundation, yellow is the opposite of purple on the colour wheel.

MERLYNN rubs a spot on her butt.

MERLYNN continues singing.

At its last stage a bruise turns yellow. I use the purple foundation that is the opposite of yellow.

MERLYNN sings along and rubs each spot, one by one in an almost dance routine.

This is in an almost infomercial style, as Merlynn demonstrates how to select the correct colour of make-up and concealer to hide the bruises and marks left when you have been physically abused. The inclusion of song and dance in this moment serve to alienate the audience from the greater emotional significance of the very act, as Merlynn stands before the audience in nothing but her underwear, baring all of herself to the audience as she makes light of the act of disguising her wounds.

Contemporary Political Theatre

Script sample:

Projection of HDB Staircase.

MERLYNN When we finish, I light a cigarette and ask
So what going to happen to that Ling Ling?

TOM Oh Merlynn, I love you! But I, I cannot deny my feelings
for her too. I mean have you seen her? I guess not but
fuck, she's gorgeous. But but, I wanted to be honest and
I told her about how I felt for you too. And that's why we
are meeting today! She suggested it actually. She should be
downstairs now, let's go.

MERLYNN How could I have been so dumb.

Projection of Blk 3 Void Deck.

We go to the Void Deck, the empty ground floor of a HDB
building. I sit on a cold marble chair, Ling Ling is beside
me, beaming, damn, she even smells good. I hate her so
much. Then Tom ...

TOM The reason why we are meeting today is so we can resolve
this situation. The situation being that we are all in love.
You [*pointing to MERLYNN*] for me. You [*pointing to Ling
Ling*] for me. Me for you ladies. So we got to come up with a
solution that would work. This is a very stressful time for all
parties involved so I do seek your kind cooperation.

TOM's phone rings.

MERLYNN He takes the phone call. It's just me and Ling Ling now.

LING LING Sorry I haven't formally introduced myself, my name is
Ling Ling, pleased to meet you [*pause*]. You know Tom
really loves you, a lot.

I didn't know about you when we, you know, got together.

I thought you would punch me, thank you for not punching me.

Hey we have the same backpack!

MERLYNN

Tom was gone for more than an hour and in that surreal space of time. I learnt that not only do Ling Ling and I have the same backpack, we wore the same shoe and dress size, we could both ice skate but not roller blade, we had the same magazine and book in our backpack and we both loved the same boy.

TOM

I knew you ladies would get along! So have you come up with a solution yet?

She raises her hand.

LING LING

If you don't mind, I actually have a proposition. Since Merlynn and I get along so well, and I even work on the days that she's at dance, why don't we just go out with you when we are free?

So Merlynn can meet you on pai er, pai si, pai liu ...

[Subtitle <Mandarin>: So Merlynn can meet you on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday ...]

I can do the other days, and on li bai tian we can all

[sings] lian ai I-N-G

HAPPY I-N-G

xin qing jiu xiang shi

zuo shang yi tai pen shi ji

[Subtitle <Mandarin>: I can do the other days, and on Sunday we can all

[sings] Loving,

Being happy,

My spirit is just like

A jet taking off from the platform]

MERLYNN

I didn't realise this jia kan tang *[Subtitle <Hokkien>: Girl who eats potato]* Ling Ling can even speak mandarin.

I don't remember if I said yes to her grand plan but I remember moving to the playground ...

Projection of playground with a bridge.

We sit on the tiny bridge. Tom in the middle, Ling Ling and I on either side, leaning into him. He plants a kiss on her cheek and then on mine.

I couldn't ... I said I had to go.

Tom kisses me on the lips. Ling Ling leans towards me ... and pats me on the shoulder. I run off, hide behind a pillar, watch them make out and bloody cry again.

The contrast in expectations of the roles men and women fulfil in society today and who is entitled to what is revealed through a seemingly natural scene, in which Tom invites Merlynn and his other girlfriend Ling Ling to a meeting to discuss his proposal to date them both simultaneously. When he leaves the two girls alone together, we observe the innocence of the girls, their battle against how they should feel about one another, but how they really do feel, and the unsettling normality with which Tom approaches the situation.

BONES

Realism

Script sample:

Projection of Playground at night.

MERLYNN

I always met Tom at playgrounds.

Tom Tom! Guess what the Discipline Master told me? He said I'm embodying the National Day Spirit of Singapore!

Ok ok, I show you my dance ok? Huh? McDonalds? But I want to show you my dance/ Ni ke yi den 5 minutes mah? *[Subtitle <Mandarin>: Can you wait five minutes?]* What about two minutes? I just show you half! Well ya actually you're right. I guess I also hungry. Just the usual ya?

I went to McDonalds and when I returned lots of people are gathered in the playground.

Tom was standing in the middle of a heart made out of candles holding a single rose. He presses play on the radio.

Projection of a heart made out of candles. "Hallelujah" by Jeff Buckley plays.

TOM sings.

TOM Happy six months anniversary Baby.

TOM gives MERLYNN the rose.

MERLYNN People start "wooo-ing" around us. He keeps singing.

TOM continues singing.

He invites me into the heart. The crowd helps me in, over the flames, their heat on my skin. He holds me and now we dance. Couples around us, hold each other and sway. I can feel his heat against my chest.

This is pretty sweet of him.

Then suddenly, the heavens open and the Singaporean rain pours down on us. I try to grab our McDonalds and run, but Tom pulls me back into him. All his clothes cling onto him, his black hair a paste on his face, his spectacles a waterfall. People scream, dart and run around us. We dance. The rain comes down harder. We raise our hands in the air. His hand traces my vertebrae, one at a time; I love feeling the heat of his palm. I miss his smell.

MERLYNN is dancing with her eyes closed.

Tom kisses my forehead and whispers in my ears,

TOM I love you so much Merlynn. I never want anyone else. I have never been with anyone but you. I'm so glad that we

both saved ourselves for each other./ I mean we were both virgins when we met, right?/ Oh my god, you were not a virgin?/ Was all this a joke to you?/ How can you lie to me like that? Don't even try and talk yourself out of this! Just because you are in Express Stream does not mean you are smarter! You are nothing! Nothing but a bloody liar! Why would you LIE TO ME LIKE THAT!

A slap. X-rays flash. MERLYNN is back in the Hospital.

The conversation between Tom and Merlynn when he confronts her about her virginity is a perfect example of a believable exchange between a boyfriend and girlfriend. The time (evening, on their six-month anniversary), the place (in an outdoor playground near a McDonald's) and the situation (Jeff Buckley's ballad Hallelujah plays as he stands amid a heart shaped formation of candles) creates a highly detailed and believable context within which this moment of realism can take place.

Physical Theatre

Script samples:

MERLYNN

I turn around, I see Tom. He is leaning against the claw machine, hand poised over joystick.

Projection of a metallic claw.

The machine's fluorescent light makes beads of sweat on his forehead shimmer. Someone whispers in my ear that the machine is unbeatable, no one ever wins. And that Tom has been playing for more than 3 hours now. I can tell ... the claw has become a part of his body, an extended limb.

A crowd surrounds him.

MERLYNN mimics TOM's actions as she speaks.

He moves the joystick.

As TOM moves the joystick, the movements are mirrored on the projection accompanied with a squeaking sound. He

moves the joystick forward, forwards, left, left, forward, left, back, a touch to the right.

Once, satisfied, he pushes the big red button and the claw yawns and begins to drop.

*Projection shows the claw coming towards the audience.
Squeaking sound of the claw machine.*

Yelps of excitement bubble from the crowd, the claw flicks at something from the bottom ... And no! He misses.

Tom takes a deep breath. Another silver token is dropped into the machine. And he is off again! This time faster, sharper,

A bang on the red button!

And the claw catches nothing.

The crowd releases their breath. More people join the crowd now. Tom retrieves yet another token and sends it into the belly of the machine.

TOM wipes the sweat off his forehead, cleans the lenses of his spectacles, take another deep breath.

And he is off again!

TOM moves the joystick.

The now massive crowd leans forward, lungs all full, eyes stretched wide. A low chant grows from the crowd. “Jia You”, “Jia You”, “Jia You”. *[Subtitle <Mandarin>: Add oil, add oil, add oil.]*

They push past me, I can't see the front anymore.

And Bang!

Then silence.

Pause

Sound of crowd exhaling.

The crowd exhales in unison and like the red sea, they part. And in front of me, stands Tom.

I suddenly realise how beautiful he is. He is one of the most handsome boys in the arcade, in Bencoolen Secondary School! I mean he has eyes bigger than golf balls, his hair is centre parting and each side rises so high that it's taller than our CBD buildings. And when he smiles, like he is now, he creates dimples so big that if you put in some water, Mummy's Koi fish would quite happily live inside for the rest of their lives. Our eyes lock. Tom walks towards me.

TOM Merlynn Tong, will you accept this

Projection of Giant Piglet.

GIANT PIGLET as token of my love and be my girlfriend?

MERLYNN What could I say but ... "YES! Yes I will!"

Sunset City Arcade depicts the exaggerated execution of the arcade game of the 'Claw' by the character of Tom, mimicked by Merlynn. The heightening of this moment to represent the great physical sacrifices and conquests taken in order to win Merlynn's heart require agility and drawing on a strong core to allow for the fractured, jerky movements described. The delivery of these in a highly athletic and choreographed manner is crucial to the depiction of the first encounter with Tom, Merlynn's first true, teenage 'love'.

MERLYNN Tom and I had so much in common. We liked smoking, eating and playing arcade games. We even like the same game you know — Dance Dance Revolution! two mats, one stage, a chance to dance in perfect unison!

MERLYNN plays Dance Dance Revolution with Tom. The song 'Butterfly' by Smile plays. Projection of game screen.

GAME

VOICEOVER READY, SET? STEP!

Music begins. MERLYNN sings along as she dances.

// Tom was so cool when he played.

MERLYNN dances and sings as TOM

GAME

VOICE OVER Results ... Super S COMBO! YOU ARE A PERFECT MATCH.

This passage explores the ritual of their first dates, spent singing and dancing on the Arcade machines. The exuberant nature of the dance movements and singing required for this capture the euphoria of true love while establishing a jubilant mood in crushing contrast for the darker moments to come.

One-Person Show

Script sample:

MERLYNN I cut Tom off after that. I did, I asked him to get out of my life. And I focused on my NDP dance. But he kept on texting me.

MERLYNN dances. Sound of Nokia text messages. Multiple messages are projected on the screen. The texts seems to beat MERLYNN down as she dances: “Yo! Whatsssuppp?? :)”, “Call me back leh ...”, “Eh, are you there????!” “Please, Merlynn, baby, please. I miss you. So much until it hurts. We need to meet please (please, I beg you!) come to Blk 3 Void Deck at 4pm ok? I don’t know how to live without you ...”

MERLYNN collapses on the ground.

And I, I went. A week before MY big NDP dance ... Yes I was broken, yes I was lost, yes I was humiliated by this Ling Ling. But I still went.

This passage features the presence of ‘another character’ (in this case, Tom) through the text messages he is sending her. These are portrayed via projections as Merlynn tries to throw herself into her dance but we see her distracted from this task as well as the impact of her being incessantly pursued by a love who has ‘wronged’ her. Through the use of projections, the language choices and Merlynn’s movements we engage in a narrative bigger than the one person onstage, while not losing sight of her adolescent struggle to overcome heartbreak.

Verbatim Theatre

Script sample:

Projection of HDB.

MERLYNN

Ok it's tall buildings, more than twenty stories high sometimes, and on each level there are many homes. eighty percent of Singaporeans live in a HDB building.

So we were at our favourite HDB staircase at Blk three, level sixteen.

Projection of HDB staircase.

The four households who lived on this level don't seem to leave the house very much. We've never been caught when we make out here. So we thought it's the perfect spot for our first time. The grey concrete staircase, the dark blue handrail, the buzz of the fluorescent light. How could it get any more romantic?

I lay myself on the stairs. My bum rests on one stair and I slowly [*spread legs*]. He kneels, leans in and kisses me — no one had ever kissed me like that. His tender lips, my eager tongue. He unbuttons my uniform and he slides his warm hand around my waist, I feel safe. I feel his breath on my neck. He holds me tight. He moves lower, I smell his hair. I feel his lips on my chest, his skin against mine, his sweat caressing my body. I am a river. He took it out ... Oh my goodness, it is bigger than cucumber! How is it going to? Ok wait, baby, I move, ya, maybe here, ahh no no slow slow, ya ya, wait, there maybe, ok yup yup, lidat? Ahhh. Ok oh oh, okok quiet quiet. OHHHKAAAYYY.

Sex finishes.

We have takeaway McDonald's after. So romantic.

I felt so much closer to him. I also knew then that I had special expansion powers down there, I felt like I had a huge gap, like I could hold the whole Universe in me.

Merlynn recounts her ‘first time.’ This is one of the ultimate rites of passage from adolescence into adulthood. The storytelling approach is required in this moment to connect with audience directly and remind them that this is a real story, her story, and one belonging to a young girl on her way to womanhood, which makes the truth of it more heartbreaking.

Epic Theatre

The script sample from page 18 shows the shift from Merlynn’s body covered in projections of x-ray images directly back to the school grounds preparing for the dance competition is an example of fragmented mood, alienating the audience and readers from connecting to the emotional narrative too closely. The contrast in the mood and the experiences of a young Merlynn are characteristic of the emotional rollercoaster ride and priorities juggling act that is adolescence.

Contemporary Political Theatre

The passage on page 19 takes the audience and readers into Tom’s back story and paints a picture of a history or pattern of abuse. In no way does this dream sequence and flashback moment permit the way he treats Merlynn, however it allows us to examine the bigger picture and the greater impact for society, rather than getting lost in just one character’s story. Merlynn’s desire to make excuses for why he acted the way he did also opens up conversations about victim behaviour and profiles. The confirmation of similar behaviour in Noelleen’s family endorses how entrenched domestic violence, namely against women, can be in a society or culture.

MOON

Realism

Script sample:

MERLYNN And they were all right, Tom was great! He and I were the ideal couple in school. No one knew me like Tom did.

Projection of a Hawker Centre. TOM slides his arms across the space in front of him to flick to different stores.

TOM Uncle, gei ta qi fan, bu yao xiong rou hor. Ah, bu yao la ye shi ah. Xie Xie. [*Subtitle <Mandarin>: Uncle, she’ll have Chicken Rice, no breast meat please, no chilli too, thank you./*]

TOM flicks to the projection of another store.

My poor boy. Then we headed to some shade beside the Pirate Ship to sit and share our red bean ice cream. It was all velvety and sweet, little jewels of delightful bean-iness always calling you back for another suck and another and another ...

TOM

How come you didn't buy me one also?/ Didn't you think that I may want one at this sad time of my life?/ Baby, can you return me the money for the ice-cream? You are committing fraud on me.

How can you do this to me after what happen to my mother? Don't you care for me? All you know how to do is sit there and suck and suck on your ice cream, you slut./ Why are you such a dirty slut? Sometime I just CAN'T FUCKING STAND YOUR ...

A slap. Projection of Little India.

You enjoy the food?/ Good. Don't think I didn't notice that other thing./ Don't act dumb. You like the attention right? Wear all this skimpy clothes and all the Indian man stare at you. WHY ARE YOU SUCH A WHORE? YOU ARE MINE YOU UNDERSTAND.

A punch.

Snap Projection of Kampung Glam.

WHY DIDN'T YOU HAVE ENOUGH MONEY FOR AN EXTRA EGG FOR ME?

A kick.

Projection to Niko's "Night of Fire" on the 'Para Para Paradise' Game. Projection of the game screen. The objective is to hit the arrows as they pass, this creates a dance.

GAME

VOICE OVER

The Stage is ready for your dance!

SONG: Night of Fire, Night of Fire

MERLYNN /I began to hit him back. And then I run and I run and I feel so powerful!

As the song continues MERLYNN gains strength.

/I run and run but most of the time he catches me. And then ...

Song ends.

I wish I didn't run.

X-rays flash. MERLYNN is back in the Hospital.

We see Tom and Merlynn traipsing across Singapore from theme parks to Little India and Kampong Glam to a Games Arcade. As the setting changes, the physical activity and engagement to the surroundings of these iconic Singaporean locations also shift, as the highly stylised physicalisation of the physical abuse starts to appear. The contrast of the act of running and the heightened hysteria of the conflict between the two is then symbolically portrayed through a dance routine at the arcade. Merlynn is able to utilise dance and the frenzy of the arcade game to portray the mania incited by Tom's attack and her desire to defend herself. This physical choice means that abuse does not need to be actually presented onstage, the impact created by the contrast between being attacked and dancing has a greater effect and the ever present role of the 'moon', of Singapore herself, remains present throughout.

One-Person Show

Script sample:

Projection of Canteen.

MERLYNN I love Malay food but I'm Chinese so I couldn't get the Malay discount at the canteen. My best friend, Siti on the other hand loved Chinese food, not pork of course, the other stuff, but she was not allowed to buy it because she's Muslim. So I got her delicious Chinese forbidden delights. While Siti, with her big eyes and Malay heritage, got me my Malay food and I also got the discount. I saved seventy-five cents a day. A fortune.

SITI is eating.

SITI This is so sedap [*Subtitle <Malay>: delicious!*] You sure you don't want some? Sedikit? [*Subtitle <Malay>: A little bit?*] No? Good.

Merlynn! I just heard, you and Jerry — habes [*Subtitle <Malay>: finished!*]

Number one, why you never tell me STRAIGHT away? Uh-uh, we will discuss that later. Number two, why you break up with him? He's so cute and like one whole year older than us you know! Is it because your brother Atlantis ask you to break up? Your big, bad, bossy, big brother. Mmmm.

MERLYNN Siti was always making these really weird references to my brother. I didn't know how to respond.

SITI slurps.

SITI Anyway! You say Jerry got like really, really big ... hands right? How does it feel ah? The boy hand on your waist? Nice ah? What about when you had ... sex? Alamak, [*Subtitle <Singlish>: Gosh!*] is it like magic?

Why you break up with him? He's a boy who likes you and he wants to put his thing in you. You know how rare that is? Show me again, what is the size of his thing?

Like that, like that?

Like that? You just tell me when to stop.

MERLYNN Urgh, I didn't care about that Jerry at all. He was nothing like Tom. Tom understood me, he could read my mind, he adored me like no one ever has.

In the canteen as Merlynn becomes Siti in the canteen. The projections on the screen, the inclusion of Malay (Siti's native tongue), the act of eating the noodles and the listing of the many types of noodles is a nod to the role that food plays in the Singaporean culture. The inclusion of a language not native to Merlynn and the very act of eating itself provides opportunities to more easily step into

This documents in Merlynn and Tom's exact words the interaction at the water park which escalates to another physical attack on her. The very real nature of this exchange demonstrates the way in which perpetrators manage to convince themselves of the victims being 'deserving' of the attack. It also captures the fear Merlynn faced when confronted in these moments as she begs him to stop.

Epic Theatre

Script sample:

MERLYNN tries to touch the middle of her back and is seized by pain. She is in a memory space. She can move her body in this reality. The beginning of Singapore's National Anthem plays. The projection of an empty outdoor assembly with the Singapore flag flying on the flagpole.

Oh my goodness! Bencoolen Secondary School.

There, that was my spot in the assembly every single morning, concrete grainy marks on my bum, a greeting by the morning sun. Oh, all the books that I read here during silent time everyday. I visited so many amazing worlds in those pages.

There's where that Tammy Tay would raise the flag at assembly. How I wanted to lift the Singapore flag, one inch at a time as everyone sang around me. I would have been so good — better than that Tammy Tay!

This is where I met Tom ... when I was 15.

The anthem crescendos. MERLYNN tries to catch up and joins everyone.

Semua kita berseru, Majullah Singapura, Majullah Singapura.

Subtitle <Malay>: Together we proclaim, Onwards Singapore, Onwards Singapore

I don't think I've sung the National Anthem since I left Singapore.

Beat. Song fades out. THE DISCIPLINE MASTER's is a Voice Over (VO) here. His voice sounds like it is projected over a scratchy microphone.

DISCIPLINE
MASTER

[microphone squeaking] Students, let us now recite the pledge together “We the ... / *[underscoring the following]*

MERLYNN places her fist over her heart and joins in.

MERLYNN

“We the /citizens of Singapore pledge ourselves as one United People. Regardless of Race, Language or Religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality, so as to achieve, happiness, prosperity and progress for our Nation.”

This showcases the highly episodic nature of the text and the way in which it moves from iconic places in Singapore to featuring the many native languages, the rituals, customs and traditions of the country and of their schools through oaths, National Day preparations and juggles these many layers through the integration of voice overs, projections, music, narration and movement. The fragmentation contributes to the alienation effect as we learn objectively about not only the character of Merlynn, but of the country, Singapore.

Contemporary Political Theatre

Script sample:

DISCIPLINE
MASTER

Quiet, quiet. Students listen up. Eh eh, Darren Lim, quiet please. Ok boys, just a reminder that boys your hair CANNOT touch your collar. And girls, your skirt can only be one finger width above the knee. If you do ANY of these things ... You know what will happen!

Ok, exciting news. Girls, listen up. EH, Darren Lim, shut up. *[clears throat]*

For the upcoming National Day, we are not only going to have a new song, but a set dance to perform as well.

MERLYNN

Zhen de ma? [*Subtitle: <Mandarin> Are you for real?*]

This was incredible news because we never had a National Day DANCE before.

DISCIPLINE

MASTER

I have pulled some strings and for the next NDP, one of our students here at Bencoolen Secondary School will be dancing the set dance AT the actual National Day Parade, with thousands of people watching you live, ok, and millions more on TV.

MERLYNN

We were sent back to class straightaway so we could listen to the song for the first time.

“We will get there” by Stephanie Sun plays.

It became my life, my love, my cocaine. That’s just an expression — don’t bring cocaine or anything like that into Singapore, if not you’ll get hung — ok?

Here’s the chorus!

She sings.

Oh my goodness, I love this!

Song fades off. A squeaking sound through the speakers.

National Day Parade. Merlynn references the 2002 song written for this event as well as the National Anthem, full lyrics can be found by following the links provided below. Both songs are a form of pride and protest in a number of ways and are used to convey the identity of the country and the historical, political and social context against which the story takes place.

We Will Get There (Singapore National Day Parade Theme Song in 2002, by Stefanie Sun)

gugalyrics.com/lyrics-326280/stephanie-sun-we-will-get-there.html

The National Anthem of Singapore

nhb.gov.sg/resources/national-symbols/national-anthem

Potential Learning and Assessment Activities ...

Realism:

Students are to select what they perceive to be the most powerful scenes or a scene of emotional impact to them. Working in small groups (or individually), they are to select one scene and allocate roles among group members. They are then to explore the scene from an actor's perspective (as discussed by Tong in the Q&A responses) to determine the given circumstances of each character — who are they, where have they come from prior to this scene, what has just happened to them as well as exploring the relationships and status of each character, their objectives in the scene and tactics or characteristics they may employ throughout. Utilising all provided information in the playscript and supporting documentation to help create a sense of their character, they are also to connect the character's experience with an experience of their own which they are to document in written form (letter, journal entry, stream of consciousness) or verbal form (recording on a tablet or similar device in either audio only or audio visual form) purely for their own purpose and preparation. Throughout their rehearsal or exploration of the scene they are to revisit their experience to enrich their connection with the character. These are eventually to be presented as memorised, polished scenes for an audience of peers. Students are to document the process in a journal form and to observe and analyse another group's performance in order to identify how authentic the scene was, the connection between actor and character and character and audience, the successful application of dramatic elements (such as relationship, creation of tension, mood, use of focus) and other drama skills (including use of voice, movement and technical or production aspects) to create dramatic meaning.

Physical Theatre:

Students are to take one of the memories or moments from the one person show activity which they feel could be told primarily through physical theatre and to associate this moment with a physical activity which they enjoy or participate in (as Merlynn does with her escaping her attacker to dancing). Students are to select key movements or qualities of this physical activity (for example archery, netball, rowing, gymnastics) and to select two to three core movements or actions which must be acquired to succeed in this skill. Students are to teach this to a small group of their peers, paying specific attention to the technical execution required for accuracy. Students will then work in small groups to dramatise their selected memory moments integrating this physical activity to enhance the tension created in the moment and to establish the desired mood. Consider aspects of physical theatre relating to movement such as tempo, duration, size, shape, repetition, motif, floor patterns, proximity and more. Students are to observe the impact that confidence and an authoritative

delivery of the physical skill have on the overall performance. They are to record observations as both audience and participant throughout the process. They may like to further explore principles of Butoh or Suzuki Theatre to inform their work in this physical approach.

One Person Show:

In the period of time of the playwright's life documented in this play, significant events occurred for her which would change the course of her future. Students are to map a particularly significant year in their life thus far, recalling moments of impact or that generated change for them and may have altered the course of their personal journey. They are to create a succinct timeline featuring no more than 5 moments of interest or intrigue to share with a partner. Working in pairs, each pair is then to reduce this to 3 key events or moments to be dramatically realised using a range of dramatic conventions in the style of the one person show (storytelling, movement, song, multiple roles, flashbacks, and more). Each student will present their memories, with their partner assisting them to shape and deliver the narrative and concepts in a clear but engaging way.

Verbatim:

Students are to use one (or more) of the websites or films listed in the resources provided as a primary or direct source of content. They are to select extracts and copy these verbatim (word for word) for use in a scene exploring similar issues and themes explored in the play (the adolescent experience, first love, Singaporean culture, gender issues, abusive relationships). They are to draw on additional sources (songs, poems, cinematic projections, movement) to add to the verbatim text to create a short scene or 'episode' onstage. Students can work individually or as a small group to research, prepare, document or script and present these for peers.

Epic and Contemporary Political Theatre:

Students are to identify the scenes from the play which refer to the actual events which unfolded for Merlynn (as opposed to dream sequences). In small groups, they are to research and investigate relating events, people, places and issues further and to determine an overarching issue of concern and currency to them which is worthy of exposition. Utilising statistics and images sourced through research, along with other alienation techniques (song and dance, gestus, juxtaposition, breaking the fourth wall), they are to select one or more moments in the scripted scene to puncture with segues to communicate the chosen issue. Students may play with the structure of the scene, incorporate the stage directions and utilise repetition, with the original scene the foundation for a scene drawing on aspects of epic theatre and contemporary political theatre.

Student as Director:

Following reading the script, students are to select a scene that they feel could have been shaped differently or realised in another manner, as per the styles, forms and conventions explored throughout the play. They are to create a design and/or director's brief for how they would like to see this scene (or scenes) explored, provided alternative text, stage directions, production elements (sound, lighting, cinematic) as appropriate. This is to be shared with peers for feedback before the student takes on the role of director to apply their concepts in the space. Students will experience the role of the director, the directed and observers of the process throughout. At the end of the process once students have fulfilled all three roles they are to reflect on the successes, challenges and discoveries they made in both written and verbal forms.

BEYOND THE DRAMA CLASSROOM

Although primarily a text of value for study in the Drama classroom, it may be worth considering application of this text in pastoral care classes or through relevant areas of the school who examine domestic violence, suicide, the family unit, mental health and sexuality.

5. A list of other sources of information to extend learning and discovery

Where Else, What Else?

<https://www.whiteribbon.org.au>

Dedicated to providing information on and access to help for domestic violence concerns

<http://au.reachout.com>

Identifying the situation you are in and strategies to act

<https://www.amnesty.org.au/stop-violence-women>

Amnesty International's global campaign to stop violence against women provides international insights on this issue

<http://www.loveisrespect.org>

Exploring what a loving relationship should and can mean

<http://www.unwomen-nc.org.sg>

The UN's Singaporean chapter for women

<http://www.aware.org.sg/2010/12/domestic-violence>

AWARE – the Association of Women for Action and Research look into violence against women

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/13-amazing-coming-of-age-traditions-from-around-the-world>

A look at different approaches to 'coming of age' in various cultures and countries

<http://cultureand youth.org/adolescence/research/rites-of-passage-in-adolescence>

Exploring the importance of rites of passage to assist with the transition from youth to young adult

<https://www.ndp.org.sg>

The website dedicated to Singapore's National Day Parade

<http://www.yoursingapore.com>

Find out facts and details about Singapore, including the diverse range of languages spoken, the food and the landmarks as explored in the play

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BSCUxvkKwA>

Watch an example of someone playing the Dance Evolution game in an arcade in Singapore to get a real sense of this activity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=De4NbsUibmM>

Film clip (with lyrics) for the 2002 National Day Parade theme song 'We Will Get There'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHQ8GsscYVI>

The 2002 National Day Parade performance Merlynn was selected for but did not perform in

<http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/how-to-speak-like-a-singaporean-audio>

Hear audio samples of the various dialects and languages spoken in Singapore and featured in the play

Ilo Ilo is a 2013 Cannes award-winning film which gives an insight into the everyday life of a Singaporean family and the balance of power and gender in their household.

Sandcastle is another award-winning Singaporean feature film which provides greater insights into the adolescent struggles and first romance.

12 Storeys provides an insight into various troubled families living in an apartment building, highlighting a range of family and gender dynamics existing in Singapore in the late 1990s.