



MAGPIE

by Elise Greig

EDUCATION NOTES

Magpie Education Notes

by Stephanie Tudor

About the Show

Mordecai, a novelist dealing with a bad review and a long-standing quarrel with her daughter, returns to her family's Brisbane home for the first time in decades following the death of her father. The home conjures echoes from her distant past: the muggy summers, the smell of rotten mangoes, and the perpetual arguments between her Romani Mother and Father.

When she discovers her old journal; an innocent tapestry of ideas, drawings, and imaginings; Mordecai is drawn back to 1961 and a long-abandoned investigation into her parents' unhappiness. Pushed along by her childhood friend Splinter, Mordecai sets out to uncover the long-dormant secrets that cursed her family and led to her leaving home at fifteen.

Spanning from young love to aging cynicism, *Magpie* is a coming-of-age story that will thrill and delight like lemonade ice-blocks and a swim on a hot day.

Estimated Running Time

1 hour 30 Minutes

Suitability Grades

11 and 12

Warnings

Severe coarse language, adult themes: murder, physical assault, sexual assault, threats of physical violence.

Themes

Culture	Belief systems and faith
Secrets	Outsider / Belonging
Friendship	Growing up
Secrets	Love
Family relationships	

Curriculum Links

Dramatic Form and Style

Magical Realism
Contemporary Australian Drama

Dramatic Conventions

Narration / Breaking 4th Wall
Non-linear narrative
Direct address
Fluidity of space, time and characterisation
Breaking out of realist action



Playlab Theatre

Playlab exists to build theatre that matters. Playlab seeks to identify, nurture and support playwrights by offering; development initiatives that provide structure, critical feedback and investment to create high quality work; programs to build skills; and a pathway to the stage in the form of professional productions. Playlab is also dedicated to the promotion of playwrights through the publication of their work and advocacy to local and national presenters and producers.

Metro Arts

Metro Arts has been a non-profit, cultural community hub for 40 years. We are Brisbane's only multi-arts centre developing and co-presenting contemporary art in all its forms. We are a vital incubator, where independent and emerging artists across all disciplines are supported to create, experiment and present their work. Work created at Metro Arts often goes on to national and international platforms, connecting with audiences from across the globe. Art starts here with Metro Arts.

e.g.

e.g. is the production company of award-winning actor Elise Greig who created the company in order to share works that focus on *good stories told well*. The inaugural production of e.g. was the realisation of a gripping contemporary new play from the UK, *Swallow* by Stef Smith. *Swallow* was presented as part of Metro's Local season in 2017 and as well as producing, Elise also performed in the work. Her work as Anna was recognised through a Matilda Award in 2018. The second production of e.g. was the Australian premiere of the award-winning Euro hit two-hander, *Poison* by Lot Vekemans. *Poison* was presented as part of Metro's Local season in 2018 and saw the leading male actor honoured with a Matilda Award in 2019.

An Interview with Playwright, Elise Greig

How do you begin the playwriting process?

This playwriting process was different because I was part of the Alpha Processing program at Playlab. *Magpie* is a work that is part of my PhD so I was very conscious of the process I was undertaking. I'm utilising yoga as a framework for creative writing, so what I did privately throughout the process was to utilise yoga principles and philosophy to ground myself before each writing session. The Alpha Processing process meant I worked with Ian as dramaturge, investigating the text as it developed. It was an excellent process and more structured than previous writing projects. I also drew inspiration from Natalie Goldberg's writing techniques.

What inspired you to write this play?

Magpie is a story that sheds light on a unique time in Brisbane's history, focusing on a lesser-known ethnic minority group, which I feel I'm uniquely placed to explore. I have Romani heritage on my father's side and it's a part of my family lineage I've always been fascinated by. There were intriguing elements — the snippets of language, the secret code of messages left in the landscape (patrin), burning everything with the body when someone dies. I started researching beyond family folklore and connect with a researcher from Sydney. She was an older woman and quite unique, requesting that I pay her in stamps. She had Romani heritage too and, interestingly, warned me of the shame of having a Romani past. It was something she hadn't told many of her friends and she was one of the experts on the subject! She confirmed the significance of my family lineage — Boswell, Appleby Fair, a huge public funeral for our great-grandmother, but she never stopped warning me about the judgments and assumptions people made about Romani. After this research, I wrote my first work, *The Romany Project*. It was a one-woman show and on the strength of that work, Sean Mee commissioned me to write my first full-length play, *Crèche and Burn*. Since then I haven't stopped writing, but I'm fascinated by Romani culture and believe it is a culture that has much to teach us about the assumptions and judgements we make about other. It keeps tapping me on the shoulder.

Mordecai is transported back to 1961 but she isn't transformed into 14 year old girl she was in 1961 she is of the contemporary world and will quite often use direct address to express her feelings. How do you think this impacts Mordecai's journey?

I think it's really important that Mordecai is engaging with the past from the perspective of the present. She doesn't 'become' the girl because the purpose of her going back to the past is to shed light on the present. Although there's a magical realism element to her stepping into the past, she isn't transported to that world. Instead, she can replay key elements of the events that have contributed to her ongoing trauma, in the hope that she will finally make peace with them. The audience is her witness. They represent a part of herself, the part that is backing her to investigate and heal. They are therefore very important to the storytelling. The direct audience address was there from the beginning. It was an essential part of her voice. She's nutting the whole thing out.



Do you see the play as uniquely Australian or does it have universal resonance?

Its setting is uniquely Australian because it's the height of a Queensland summer, but it definitely has universal resonances. We watch a woman dealing with an emotional wound and as she deals with it, so do we deal with our own. It's a coming-of-age story and that is definitely universal. She was coming-of-age in the summer of '61 and in a way she's coming-of-age now as an older woman because she's having a milestone moment in her life by understanding a turning point in her past.

With the play set in 1961, why do you think this is an important play for contemporary audience to see?

Australian audiences need to see this show on our stages.

Romani is a metaphor for difference, other, misunderstood minority, the overlooked untouchables, the pariah. So too are magpies, hence the title. Vaclav Havel said the treatment of the Roma is a litmus test for democracy.

Just as contemporary Australia continues to wrestle with this key issue of identity, so too does the central character in *Magpie*. As an ex-pat whose family heritage is part of a pariah group, Mordecai McAlister is an outsider and is therefore in a unique position to question, analyse and reflect on the Australia she is returning to after 50 years. As we watch Mordecai debate, investigate and grapple with the assumptions she has made about this place, her culture and her relationship to it, we grapple with these issues too. Mordecai, the central character, has internalised many assumptions about her family, her culture and herself.

I'm also exploring the idea of transgenerational emotional inheritance, that if trauma and/or grief are not dealt with they are passed to the next generation. In this instance, the emotional inheritance that is passed from parent to child across three generations. What if Mordecai shakes these assumptions, traumas and emotional inheritances out of the family tree? What if she doesn't?

An Interview with Director, Ian Lawson

When you first read *Magpie*, what drew you to the work and why did you invest in it? Why did you think it was important that Playlab produce this script?

The work first came to me as an early draft in an application to our Alpha Processing program. What immediately drew me to it was the character of Mordecai and her complexity, plus the premise of her long avoided return to her family home — the home she fled as a teenager some 50 years before. Add in the unusual cultural focus and the dramatic potential in the investigation into the parents and I was sold. The resulting development saw the work move through numerous drafts and a reading with Elise responding to feedback in an excellent fashion. The quality of the work in Alpha Processing led to the decision to invest further through the Beta Testing program, which is a more detailed workshop process. The draft from this was long listed for the Queensland Premier's Drama Award.

Playlab has recently evolved into a new-writing theatre and we have a focus on producing work that speaks to the diversity and socio-political of Australia. This is reflected in the first two Playlab productions *Blue Bones* and *The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek*, and *Magpie* is an accessible yet idiosyncratic work, which has a unique perspective into another area of our national character and the quality was present, so committing to produce it was an easy decision.

What was your overall vision for the production?

Limitations are quite often the key to innovation and creativity. In the case of *Magpie*, if you had the budget you could take a realistic approach to design and have a house and yard filled with details of life in the 60's. This would be a very valid line of attack, however, given the organisation's resources, this was a totally impractical path. But more importantly, there is greater possibility and theatricality in embracing Mordecai's subjective version of the truth, which like the criticism of her writing, is disconnected, incomplete and lacking in detail. This will be reflected mostly in the sensory aspects of the production (lighting and sound) to capture the heat and atmosphere, with physical emphasis placed on Brisbane tropes like weatherboards, house stumps and the front yard. By giving the impression of reality and removing obligation to physical comparisons with real life, the focus falls on the emotionally complex relationships between characters, which ultimately forces Mordecai to dig deeper and forgive.

What do you see is at the heart of *Magpie*?

The heart of the work is the transformation of Mordecai and the breaking of a cycle of intergenerational trauma, which is threatening its third, even fourth generation if you count Fortuna's pregnancy. Her parents bottled up and denied their grief, refusing to process the death of a child (even moving to the other side of the world), which took its toll through poisoning the family environment and hardening Mordecai into a divisive,



judgemental and defensively independent woman. Mordecai abandoned her home, her culture and her family to escape the toxicity and so the work needs to break her resistance to vulnerability down, by reintroducing her to each of these components of her true identity.

Could you discuss the use of Magical Realism in the production. How did you approach this?

The Magical Realism is a major dramatic part of the style of the writing and inseparable from the story. In *Magpie* the Magical Realism is based in memory, rather than anything super-natural. When connecting with the home she fled fifty years before Mordecai's memory is triggered and the story splits into two lines — the present and 1961. The memory line provokes Mordecai and enables change in the present through teaching her perspective and opening the path to truth and forgiveness. In terms of realisation, the Magical Realism thread needs to be framed technically to heighten and focus the senses into the Mordecai's POV and separate it from the present time frame.

Memory is so important to this production. How did you create a world where the audience has that sense?

The first place to start was through dramaturgical development of the text to make sure that use of memory was a consistent tool to create drama for Mordecai and would separate her from her current circumstances. There is a conceit at the heart of the work that relates to memory, which is that Mordecai has forgotten (repressed) the specific circumstances of her last year at her home. This can only ring true if the trauma she went through was sufficiently strong enough to damage her and shift her outlook on the world. This informs the given circumstances of work and consequently the choice of actions, focus and atmosphere. The importance of memory will be demonstrably clear by a combination of these things and carried/embodied by Mordecai. The first 5 to 10 minutes is where you set up the form of the work for an audience (how to read what is going on) and this is no different.

Mordecai is transported back to 1961 but she isn't transformed into the 14-year-old girl she was in 1961 — she is of the contemporary world and will quite often use direct address to express her feelings. How did this impact your approach to these moments?

One of the fundamentals of storytelling is challenging the protagonist to change and so keeping Mordecai in the present and in connection to us, the audience, is a way for her change to be expressed and marked in real time. Like us, she is engaging with it freshly. It is a more complex and nuanced path that results in a real catharsis for Mordecai. It was during the dramaturgical process that this decision was discussed and then executed. When working on these moments (which is a significant part of the play), you are having the characters that inhabit 1961, act with the fourth wall down and to the truth of the moment. While for the actor playing Mordecai, the fourth wall is up and she is operating in and around the other characters, while still serving the scene in 1961. This is a delicate dance.

What is your directing process? How do you prepare before you get into the room? Does this differ from show to show?

Understand the story from a character, structural and plotting point of view before setting foot in the room. Having worked dramaturgically on it for a long period of time, I am familiar with all turning points, the phases of the characters inner lives, their objectives and with the development work on the set and lighting design, this allows me to have a dramatic and physical shape to scenes, yet be open to how an actor can bring a different perspective/energy to it and provide ideas of their own. Harnessing the creativity of individual artists is vitally important and in combination with a strong vision and dramatic framework, a process can be controlled (filtered) yet adventurous. One thing I do on every work is to look at what is happening to the protagonist at the climax and work backwards to the beginning of the play to understand the turning points and plot the pitch of the beginning to create as dynamic arc as is plausible.

Because this is an original work the directing process must be very different than just picking up a finished script. Can you talk to this?

I must admit that I haven't directed a production of an existing work for over a decade. I have however directed readings of existing scripts and can assure you that the job requires far less effort as you are predominantly working in an interpretive mode, rather than a ground up dramaturgical testing and realising mode. With new work you have to look at possibilities in a more complex way, as you are defining all of the elements of drama for the first time. Regardless of how many creative developments the work has undergone, there are always small tweaks that can be made that make difference. This means you are always operating on multiple levels.



Context

Historical Context

Brisbane 1961 — Clem Jones

In 1961 Clem Jones was elected as the Lord Mayor of Brisbane. He served as Lord Mayor until 1975 and during this time, Brisbane transformed from a rather dull town to a vibrant subtropical city. Under Jones' leadership, the first town plan was adopted; roads, drainage and sewerage systems were improved; and parklands and public swimming pools were created. Also, new transportation systems were planned for the city. In a move towards diesel buses, Jones closed the trams and trolley-bus systems.

For further reading on Clem Jones visit:

<http://leaders.slq.qld.gov.au/inductees/dr-clem-jones-ao-1918-2007/>

Romani Culture

The Romani, also known as Roma, Romany and Rom, are a major ethnic group. The Romani do not exclusively identify with any specific country. Currently, there are an estimated 12 million Romani people worldwide, and the majority (70%) live in Southern and Eastern Europe, from Spain through to the Balkans. Evidence suggests that the Romani ethnic group developed in the state of Punjab in India and migrated across Europe about 1,500 years ago. The Romani frequently moved around and were considered outsiders. Often viewed with prejudice, discrimination and suspicion, the Romani people were labelled 'Gypsies', which was considered a pejorative term.

Itinerant Lifestyle

The Romani people, particularly in Eastern Europe, were continuously moving around because of discrimination, persecution and extreme hardship, especially during wars. Traditionally, the Romani travelled in caravans, carts or wagons and remained in a place for some time. The nomadic Romani tended to migrate seasonally through paths that crossed national boundaries. Initially the Europeans were cordial to the Romani, but later they become suspicious of the Romani stealing before travelling on to the next town. Some countries passed laws to prohibit the Romani from staying. In World War II, the Romani were targeted alongside the Jewish and other groups, and were sent to concentration camps, tortured and killed in gas chambers. Also, in some countries, including Spain and Portugal, the Romani became slaves and were banned from speaking their language and following their traditions and culture.

Romani Culture

For centuries the Romani culture has been tarnished with stereotypes and prejudices. Since the Romani people lived amongst other cultures, without complete integration into society, or any stability that comes with territorial strength, their ethnic culture varies by location. Even though many host countries have attempted to settle the Romani people or assimilate them, there are some unique customs and qualities to Romani culture.

Spiritual beliefs

Although it is believed that the Romani originally practiced Hindu religion, there is no single faith among the Romani population. The traditional Romani practices and customs are often mixed with the predominant religion of the host country. The Romani population in Europe are largely Catholic, while the Romani people in Middle Eastern are mostly Muslims. Religious practices are infused with traditional Romani beliefs and rituals that bear a resemblance to Hinduism.

Complex and customary rules and values govern Romani culture. These rules guide relationships and provide boundaries for behaviour, justice and other aspects of life.

Language

For most of its history the Romani language was an oral language with no written form in common use. The origins of Romani language are thought to be in the Sanskrit languages of Northern India, such as Punjabi. There are numerous different dialects in the Romani language. Some Romani words have been adopted by the English language, such as “pal” (brother) and “lollipop” (from lolo-phabai-cosh, red apple on a stick).

Family structure

The Romani typically live with close kin. Resources, workload and food are shared with extended family. The archetypal Romani family includes husband and wife, their unmarried children and at least one married son, his wife, and their children.

To read stories about Australia's Romani culture, visit:

<https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/feature/romani-road-australias-gypsy-culture>



Classroom Links

Belonging and Culture

- How has your own personal identity has been shaped by the people and places in your life?
- How do our own experiences contribute to how we see ourselves and form our own set of values?
- What references to the Romani culture where in the play?
- What references were there to Australian culture within the play?
- Consider where Mordecai's fits between these two. Where does she see herself belonging?
- How do individual characters identify themselves as belonging to a specific group through their appearance, use of language, cultural background and social rituals?
- Why do you think Mordecai's mother doesn't want her using the Romani language anymore?
- Elise Greig said "[Mordecai] is a character who is an insider, behaving like an outsider regarding her culture. An expat returning to her family home, forced to deal with the culture of her origin." Consider how this is portrayed throughout the production. Is there a moment where she 'belongs' in her culture?
- "As we watch Mordecai debate, investigate and grapple with the assumptions she has made about this place, her culture and her relationship to it, we grapple with these issues too." Elise Greig. Consider assumptions we make about different cultures and people. Why is this damaging? What can we do, moving forward, to repair this?

10 Pound Poms

In 1945, the Australian Government initiated an Assisted Passage Migration Scheme, colloquially known as the "Ten Pound Pom" scheme. This colloquial term derives from the £10 payment required to migrate under the scheme to Australia. The scheme was developed under the "Populate or Perish" policy with the aim to increase Australis's population.

Initially the scheme was applicable to the United Kingdom and Northern European countries that would more easily assimilate in the 'White Australia' policy. Eventually the scheme opened to other countries, including Italy, Greece and Turkey. The scheme peaked in 1969 with over 80,000 people migrating under the scheme to Australia. In 1973, the cost of the assisted migration increased to £75 and the number of assisted migrants significantly reduced. The assisted passage migration schemes were phased out in the 1980s.

For further reading on the Ten Pound Poms visit: <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/13640>

Classroom Links

Context and Intertextuality

- What references to other work exist in this play? Why do you think that is the case?
- What references did you find difficult to connect with? What references did you connect with? Why?
- What context does the audience bring to this play? How does your own understanding of the background change the way you watch and respond to it?



Curriculum Connections

The curriculum connections are provided based on the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) Drama Senior Syllabus (2013) for Year 12 students and General Drama Senior Syllabus Drama (2019 v1.1).

General Senior Syllabus

Taken from QCAA Drama 2019 v1.1 — General Senior Syllabus

Unit 1 — Share

Students explore the importance of drama as a means to tell stories and share understandings of the human experience in a range of cultures, including those of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and/or those from the Asia-Pacific region. Students study this unit with the purposes of celebrating, documenting, empowering and informing audiences through storytelling as a dramatic form. They manipulate and shape the dramatic languages to explore a range of linear dramatic forms and non-linear dramatic forms through scripted and non-scripted texts. They explore hybridity of conventions and forms in storytelling practices.

Inquiry questions

- How can we use drama to celebrate, document, empower and share understandings of the human experience?
- How can we recreate people's stories in linear and non-linear dramatic forms?
- How can people's stories be shared through making and responding to drama as ensemble and audience?

Unit 2 — Reflect

Students explore the power of drama to reflect lived experience. The unit engages with the purposes of informing and challenging audiences, understanding and empathising with the truth of others' experiences, and chronicling/documenting and celebrating what it is to be human.

Inquiry questions

- How can we use representational dramatic traditions to inform, empathise, chronicle and document lived experiences?
- How can we manage dramatic languages to reflect the human condition?
- How can we reflect contemporary and inherited styles of Realism through making and responding?

Style and Form

Magic Realism

Magical realism is a genre where magic elements are a natural part in an otherwise mundane, realistic environment. The 'real' world is interrupted by the supernatural or magical which alters the central characters' story or journey. It is a realistic narrative, and naturalistic acting techniques are combined with elements of dream or fantasy.

Magical Realism Conventions

- An “irreducible” magic which cannot be explained by typical notions of natural law.
- A realist description that stresses normal, common, every-day phenomena, which is then revised or “refelt” by the marvellous. Extreme or amplified states of mind or setting are often used to accomplish this.
- It causes the audience to be drawn between the two views of reality.
- These two visions or realms nearly merge or intersect.
- Time is both history and the timeless; space is often challenged; identity is broken down at times.
- The work is often metafictional or self-referential.
- The text may employ a “verbal magic” where metaphors are treated as reality.
- Phenomenological states may include the primitive or childless that seem to dislocate our initial perceptions/understandings.
- Repetition, as well as mirror reversals, are employed.
- Metamorphoses take place.
- Magic often is used against the established order.
- Collective symbols and myths rather than individual ones haunt the work.
- The fiction in form and language often embraces the carnivalesque.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris. Ed. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995



Classroom Links

Magical Realism

- Identify examples of Magical Realism used in *Magpie*.
- How does the 'magic' alter Mordecai's journey?
- What are the two worlds in *Magpie* and how do they co-exist?
- How do the various storylines work together?

Structure

- What was the importance of Mordecai's memories throughout the play? What were they of? Who did they involve? How did they impact her in the present?
- Consider the difference between what Mordecai experiences and a flashback. Why are these different and how was this communicated to the audience? Give an example of a moment that reinforces your idea.
- What effect does the play's structure have on the creation of Dramatic Meaning?
- How does the use of direct address impact your understanding of the characters and of Mordecai's journey?

Design Elements

Josh McIntosh speaks about the design of the set and the feel he wanted to create for both the character and the audience.

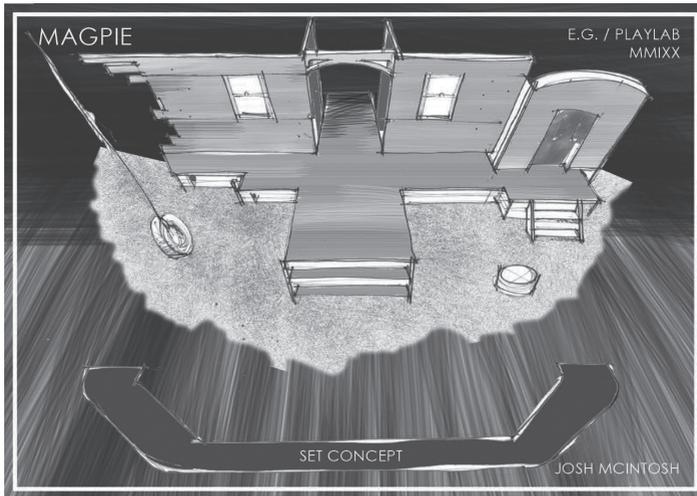
Our set for *Magpie* is intended to provide a sketch of familiar places for Mordecai's story to unfold. Being set and played in Brisbane, we're assuming something of a shared knowledge — even shared memories — of Mordecai and our audience. We know what a worker's cottage from the inner suburbs looks like. We know front yards covered by mango tree detritus, rusty front gates, paths overgrown by fishbone ferns and weathered front steps leading up to a central portal on a front veranda. So that ground work is done for us. It's our intention that as Mordecai describes her home (then and now) in lyrical detail, our audience is given the visual space and imaginative freedom to fill in details for themselves. There literally are blanks in the set to "fill in". I've always found that when an audience is permitted to invest their own experience, memory and imagination into a story, their connection with the arc of the story becomes stronger, and quite plainly, this creates a richer theatrical experience.

In a real world setting like this, textures and colours that illicit familiar sensations can be useful and for *Magpie*, I'm hanging much of the "look" on external weatherboard walls of a typical Queensland cottage. But I've broken them apart, allowing the black space upstage of the set to have its own presence. This may help us to illuminate characters behind the set to show extra-narrative information, create a convention for memory sequences or provide a soft method of portraying multiple characters' stories occurring simultaneously. When the set is built and the scenic arting is realised, the intention is to move from rawer, weathered timbers on stage left, thru to denser treatments of a pale aqua-green tone that we still see left on structures of the same vintage. It's a beautiful palette that inherently feels of another era. Greens and blues also feel, to me, like the colours of water, nature, memory, melancholy, thought and a gentleness. However, there are moments in this story of great heat and passion and anger. And Mordecai's father works in an abattoir — and the possibilities of seeing this character caked in blood in the orange pink glow of a summer sunset is a direct contrast with the tones of the set! There is the potential of a real visual strength and beauty when the design elements work together with the lighting design of David Walters.

Base elements will also play into the aesthetic of this set design. Mentioned within the storytelling is the elemental nature of Mordecai's father. The storytelling traditions and nomadic lifestyle of the Romani link directly with a dependence on fire, earth and water, and as the story plays out in front of our audience. A dense layer of gravel is indicated on this concept picture just downstage of the verandah and reading over to stage left where a quarry will be described — a place of refuge for Mordecai and her childhood friend, Splinter.



Overall, this set is designed to be flexible and fluid. Our story moves in and out of the present, Mordecai's past and to past beyond her memory. We move in and around her childhood home and surrounds, to settings of stories told outside her world — those of Splinter and her parents. There is heightened emotion explored and articulated



Classroom Links

Design

- What materials have been used to make the set? How does this contribute to the creation of place?
- What elements of the set do you believe are uniquely 'Australian'?
- Is the set realistic or symbolic? How is it used?
- What words would you use to describe the place where *Magpie* is set? How are different production elements such as lighting, sound and music used in the creation of place?
- Consider the themes of *Magpie*. Devise a Dramatic Meaning from these themes and share them with your class. What directorial and design choices have been made to portray this Dramatic Meaning? Think about the materials of the set.
- “But more importantly, there is greater possibility and theatricality in embracing Mordecai's subjective version of the truth, which like the criticism of her writing, is disconnected, incomplete and lacking in detail.” Ian Lawson. Considering the quote above, how was this realised through the set design?

Activities and Resources

Initial Questions

- What do you know about the play?
- What does the title make you think the play is going to be about?
- Why is it important to share Australian stories and experiences through new theatre?
- What experiences of Australian theatre have you had?
- Define what makes all these examples “Australian”. You may want to consider characters, plot, themes and issues, symbols and metaphors, language, setting and landscape, cultural and political context, comedy and irony, atmosphere, element of biography and Australian identity.
- Why is culture and history important?
- What do you know about Romani culture?

Spectrum Of Difference

Students are asked to stand in the centre of the room. The teacher makes a variety of statements that the students can agree, disagree or stay undecided on. They are to position themselves across the room on the invisible line between completely agree and completely disagree depending on their conviction. Students will be asked to justify their answer. If need be the teacher can place numbers along the line to help students decide and further illustrate the degree in which they agree or disagree.

- If no one knows about it, it doesn't count.
- Telling a lie is okay if you are protecting someone.
- Withholding the truth is the same thing as telling a lie.
- There are times in your life when you should lie.
- Our history makes us who we are.
- If you are accused of a crime you are innocent until proven guilty.
- Memories can always be trusted.
- Family comes first.
- Everyone is flawed and it's wrong to think that anyone is perfect.
- Everyone is a product of their upbringing.
- We fear what we don't understand.
- You should always stand by your beliefs, no matter the consequences.



Memories

Memories are the basis for Mordecai's journey in *Magpie*. Discuss the impact memories have on our lives. Discuss how good or bad memories can still have a large impact on people's presents.

Have students select a memory that they can remember vividly but encourage them to pick something that has occurred at least five years ago. They might choose something from a holiday, a special occasion with their family or primary school. Have the students write down as many details of this memory as possible. Prompt them with ideas about the five senses as they write.

Chose students to share their memory with the class. Using these memories as stimulus have students in small groups of 3-4 recreate the memory. Show these scenes. Add in direct address, only of the person whose memory it is. How does this change the audience's understanding of the event? What has changed in the three viewings of the memory?

Students select one of these moments to present.

Extension

Take one of the memories and have students workshop the telling of this moment as if they are 60 years old, reflecting back on their life. They could be telling their grandchildren, be using it as a warning tale, delivering it to an audience, or in a moment of personal reflection as a soliloquy. How does this change the scene?

Non-Linear Storytelling

In groups, one student tells the others a real-life story. (You may wish to prompt students to help them think of one, e.g. something funny that happened this week; a time when you were scared as a little child.)

The groups workshop this story, focussing on clear storytelling and using a linear structure.

Each group is to then rearrange the story parts into a non-linear structure. Workshop this, and then consider the use of additional storytelling devices e.g. direct address, projection, physical sequences.

Rehearse and present. Reflect and discuss the use of non-linear narrative and the impact on audience engagement and understanding.

After seeing the play you can link this activity back to the students' understanding of the production through its non-linear storyline.

Language

The play uses two languages throughout — Romani and English. Consider the impact on the audience of using the Romani language. How does this change the way we feel during these scenes? What do we focus on when we cannot understand the dialogue?

Using this a starting point have students complete the following activity. Afterwards you could run a discussion about how being unable to use extended dialogue meant you had to rely more on tone and body language to interpret meaning.

Yes / No

Divide the class into pairs.

The goal of each pair is to create a 30 second scene using only the words ‘Yes’ and ‘No’

Encourage students to try to tell a story, including a range of emotions in the scene, and if possible, to have a beginning, middle and end, not just go back and forth.

You can make it more challenging by giving them two random words, i.e ‘apple’ and ‘banana’ or simply have them say the word blah. They can repeat the words as many times as they like to create a ‘sentence.’

Show some of these to the class. Ask students to consider what they focused on to try and understand the narrative, what did the actors use to understand each other.



After You See/Read the Play

Connect Extend Challenge

Employing the Connect, Extend, Challenge framework from Visible Thinking by Project Zero, ask students to reflect on the play. Students can examine ideas that have been confusing them or that they would still like to explore. TStudents complete the set of questions individually, and then in small groups compare and discuss their answers.

Connect, Extend, Challenge. Visible Thinking by Project Zero.

http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03d_UnderstandingRoutines/ConnectExtendChallenge/ConnectExtend_Routine.html

As a class discuss the ideas that emerged out of the Connect, Extend, Challenge.

Initial Questions

- What do you believe was the key message of the play?
- How did the actors communicate changes in character, scene and action?
- Try to recall the plot. What stages led to the eventual climax?
- Recall the moments of strong emotional connection. What led to these moments? Consider acting techniques as well as plot and design elements.
- What do you believe is the best aspect of Magpie?
- How does the staging contribute to the production? Discuss the use of props and scenery.
- Consider the fact that this is a new work developed by Playlab, and produced with Playlab, e.g. and Metro Arts. Why do you think this is the case? Why is this an important story to tell?

Spectrum of Difference

Repeat the spectrum of difference now that students have read the play. As them to consider the production when they answer this time. Discuss if their answers have changed and why.

- If no one knows about it, it doesn't count.
- Telling a lie is okay if you are protecting someone.
- Withholding the truth is the same thing as telling a lie.
- There are times in your life when you should lie.
- Our history makes us who we are.
- If you are accused of a crime you are innocent until proven guilty.

- Memories can always be trusted.
- Family comes first.
- Everyone is flawed and it's wrong to think that anyone is perfect.
- Everyone is a product of their upbringing.
- We fear what we don't understand.
- You should always stand by your beliefs, no matter the consequences.

Character Map

Create a “map” of the main characters and with the matrix below. This is useful to do directly after viewing the performance, so students understand the narrative and nature of the work. This can also help later when constructing a response or critique.

Forming Exercises

After viewing *Magpie*, take a key scene that impacted you and use it as inspiration for a new performance exploring the issue evident in that scene.

Start by recalling the moment and write down what you remember about

- Acting techniques
- Design elements
- Plot
- Issues / themes within the moment
- Dramatic conventions
- Dramatic meaning
- Why this moment has stayed with you

Consider how you may explore this issue in a new context.

- An outline of the theme / issue to explore
- Brainstorm dramatic conventions you could use
- The dramatic meaning you want to convey to your audience.

Use this information to create a series of storyboard that convey your concept.

Workshop these with students.



Key Moments

As a class, identify 5 key moments from the production. Break students up into smaller groups as assign them each a key moment.

1. Have students recreate this moment as series of freeze frames with no dialogue. The movements should be strong and your emotions evident to effectively convey this to the audience.
2. Students are then to add two words per freeze frame. These can be spoken to the other characters or direct address to the audience.
3. Add additional dialogue so the scene is complete.
4. Have students workshop the scene showing only one character's perspective. Ask them to consider how this changes the way the audience views the scene.

Ritual

Ritual is a large part of any culture. A ritual is an action or event that is repeated regularly or at a certain time as a ceremony. Various ritualistic moments are interspersed throughout the narrative. Ask students to consider rituals they have in their own culture, family or other groups.

- Why are rituals important to individuals and society?
- How do rituals create a bond and sense of community?
- Ask students to consider the rituals within *Magpie*. How do these provide insight into the characters?

Elements of Drama Discussion

<p>Role Relationship Character</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a specific moment of dramatic action that exemplifies one of the characters. How? Why? What dramatic meaning did this communicate to the audience? • How would you describe each character? How are their characters portrayed through the voice and movement of the actors? • What is Mordecai’s motivation in solving a 50-year-old mystery? • What are Aggy and Meshack’s motivations in keeping secrets from Mordecai? • The idea of belonging is important to all to all of the characters. Describe moments when a character felt that they were excluded or belonged to a particular culture or group. • Mordecai plays multiple roles, she is the narrator to the audience as well as her 60 year old self and 14 year old self. How were these shifts in roles managed?
<p>Tension</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were some of the key examples of tension during the production? • Choose a specific moment of dramatic action that exemplifies one of the characters. How? Why? What dramatic meaning did this communicate to the audience? • How did the tension engage you? • What were you invested in? • How does the mystery impact the creation of tension? • Consider the tension of relationship between Mordecai and Meshack and Mordecai and her daughter. How was this communicated to the audience? Was this tension ever resolved?
<p>Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were some of the key examples of tension during the production? • Choose a specific moment of dramatic action that exemplifies one of the characters. How? Why? What dramatic meaning did this communicate to the audience? • Consider the use of focus throughout the play. How did the actors focus shift between characters? • How did Lowing’s focus shift during the moments of direct address and playing Mordecai within a scene?



Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When was it written?• When is the play set?• How would changing the time impact the plays dramatic meaning?
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The play is set in a variety of places in Mordecai's past. How was this communicated on stage?• List the various places the play was taking place?• How would changing the setting impact the play's dramatic meaning?• It is only through going back to Mordecai's family home that she is 'transported' to the past. Why do you think this is?
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyse the different ways that the stage was used throughout the production.• How did the use of the space help to convey the different settings and locations?• How did the lighting enhance the different use of the space?
Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider how relationships in the play are communicated through body language and movement. Consider how you can show a relationship without "explaining" it.• How effective were the moments of stillness as a contrast to the moments of hectic movement by the actors onstage?• Was the movement symbolic in anyway? Consider the rituals throughout the performance.• How was movement contrasted by stillness? What effect did this have?
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How were words used to create power?• What was the subtext behind some of the memorable lines?• How was language used to shape character? Consider not only the Romani language but the use of slang.• How do individual characters identify themselves as belonging to a specific group through their use of language?• Consider the impact of using of the Romani language. How did this change the way the audience engaged with the performance or how they felt in these moments?

Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe two contrasting moments in Magpie. How were these moments created through sound, lighting, voice and movement?• How did the contrast of language shape the production? How did you feel when you couldn't understand what was being said?• What were the contrasts between the present and 1961? How was this communicated to the audience through the design elements as well as through the actors.• Analyse the ways in which contrast is used throughout the play in relation to the range of moods; between humour and tragedy.
Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the impact of the sound design and music used to create specific moods. Use specific moments of dramatic action from the show and discuss how they made the audience feel.• Consider how they would've been different if different artistic choices were made, such as alternative lighting or sound.• How would you describe the mood when Splinter and Mortdecai break into the Vardo? How was this atmosphere created?• How did you feel when Mortdecai uncovers the truth? What performance techniques and skills of the actors were utilised to make you feel this way?
Symbol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the impact of the symbolic nature of the set. How did this impact your understanding of the production and the narrative?• There are strong symbolic references to the four elements, fire, earth, wind and water. Why do you think this is the case? How did it impact your understanding of the characters?• Consider the title of the play. How is this not only symbolic of Mordecai but the Romani people as well?



Classroom Links

Forming

- Read Scene 1 and consider how you might design a space that reflects this.
- How might you transform a space to reflect these details? Think about production design (set, costumes, lighting and sound design). Ensure that you are considering how this space can be used to introduce magic into the narrative.
- Sketch a design.

Classroom Links

Presenting

- Read Scene 2 aloud.
- Try out extreme possibilities as actors might do during rehearsals.
- Go through the scene twice, trying out two contrasting sets of desires/ movement/intentions and share their work.
- Think about replaying the scene in a range of different scenarios and locations/contexts, for example; as a hurried mobile phone conversation, in a really noisy assembly, passing notes between each other in class.
- How do the circumstances and surrounding affect what is being said? Does the audience pick up on different agendas or attitudes when the surroundings change?

Directing

Imagine you are directing *Magpie* and use the script excerpt to create a vision for the production. Consider:

- Magical Realism conventions
- What message / idea you want to convey to the audience and how you will achieve this.
- Block your scene with other students, however, experiment with objectives, motivations and subtext for the characters. Which one more closely matches your initial vision and interpretation, and why?

Assessment Ideas

Year 11

Concept Document

Context

In this unit, you have explored how drama can be used to celebrate, document, empower and share understandings of the human experience. You have been exposed to the potential of drama to share people's stories. As an artist, it is crucial to share your unique voice and develop storytelling skills across both linear and non-linear forms.

You will create an original work that empowers and informs an audience about the shared human experience.

Task

After viewing *Magpie*, you will use this production as stimulus for your own piece of theatre. You must identify a key convention used in this nonlinear hybrid production and devise an original dramatic concept that focuses on sharing and telling stories.

Your dramatic concept must organise information under the following headings:

Analysis and evaluation (400 words)

How was the convention manipulated to contribute to the communication of the shared human experience?

My concept (600 words, 10–12 images)

Identify a chosen purpose and context.



Year 12

Forming

Context

In this unit, you have explored how drama can be used to celebrate, document, empower and share understandings of the human experience. You have been exposed to the potential of drama to share people's stories. As an artist, it is crucial to share your unique voice and develop storytelling skills across both linear and non-linear forms.

As an emerging artist, you have been asked to submit a proposal for a new Magical Realism production to be included in Queensland Emerging Artists' Program 2018 season. You will need to research appropriate forms and styles of performance.

Task

You are to prepare an original dramatic concept utilising conventions of Magical Realism.

Prepare a written original dramatic concept to submit to the Queensland Emerging Artists' Program.

Outline your vision for your original production using Magical Realism conventions to shape dramatic action. Explain how you will combine the dramatic languages to convey your intended meaning to engage a contemporary audience.

Considerations should be made regarding how you will manipulate the dramatic languages including Elements of Drama, and conventions of style.

You are to submit:

Copy of original stimulus

Writer's statement, clarifying the themes your show explores and your sources of inspiration

Extended Response

Task 1

Mordecai is transported to her past to uncover long buried secrets.

After viewing *Magpie*, evaluate the effectiveness of the production by analysing the **on-stage dramatic action** and how the use of the dramatic languages created **dramatic meaning**. In your response consider how the play uses Magical Realism conventions to facilitate the character's journey. Support your statements with perceptive and thorough evaluation and supporting evidence from key moments in the production. Use appropriate drama terminology throughout your essay.

Task 2

You are to write an analytical essay evaluating a key dramatic meaning from the production of *Magpie*. You are to evaluate the success of the production and how it created dramatic meaning through the manipulation of the elements of time, place, tension and mood.

Task 3

“The audience is [Mordecai’s] witness. They represent a part of herself, the part that is backing her to investigate and heal. They are therefore very important to the storytelling.” Elise Greig.

In response to the above quote you are to write an analytical essay evaluating how the audience has been positioned to be involved in Mordecai’s journey. You are to evaluate the success of the production and how it created dramatic meaning through the manipulation of the elements of time, place, tension and mood. You may want to consider the use of Magical Realism and direct address in your response.

Task 4

“There is heightened emotion explored and articulated by the heat of a summer waiting for a storm to break and there is the pain and confusion of mixed memories and family secrets.” Josh McIntosh

In response to the above quote you are to write an analytical essay evaluating a key dramatic meaning from the production of *Magpie*. You are to evaluate the success of the production and how it created dramatic meaning through the manipulation of the elements of time, place and mood. You may want to consider the use of design elements in your response.

Task 5

Playlab continues to be a developer of new work, building theatre that speaks to contemporary Australian society to challenge, inform and entertain audiences.

In response to the above quote you are to write an analytical essay evaluating a key dramatic meaning from the production of *Magpie*. You are to evaluate the success of the production and how it created dramatic meaning through the manipulation of the elements of time, place and mood. You may want to consider the manipulation of time and place in your response.



Online Resources

Romani Culture

Who Are The 'Gypsies'? - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z70wX8wLRtI>

10 Pound Pom Scheme

Commercial https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoY29Y6Y_IQ

Documentary – BBC Timewatch – Ten Pound Pom - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1Fy4ZFozrQ>

Brisbane in 1961

Life in Australia: Brisbane (1964). Directed by Robert Parker. Produced by the Commonwealth Film Unit.

A picture of life in the Queensland capital of Brisbane in the mid 1960s. - <https://youtu.be/vIJ94j8I65g>

Viewpoint on Brisbane – (1975) The city of Brisbane, Queensland as seen through the eyes of European migrants. <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/southern-queensland-time-capsule>

Clem Jones — Hall of Fame <http://leaders.slq.qld.gov.au/inductees/dr-clem-jones-ao-1918-2007/>