WHITE CHINA

BY THERESE COLLIE

EDUCATION AND SUPPORT MATERIALS
WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY STEPHANIE TUDOR

White China

by Therese Collie

Education Notes

by Stephanie Tudor

A Playlab Theatre Publication

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These materials have been compiled by Playlab Theatre in conjunction with the premier production of *White China* by Therese Collie.

The activities have been included to be used in your classroom both before and after the show. They are practical and written activities that you can use and adapt for your students. If you have any questions about the notes, please feel free to email Stephanie Tudor: steff.tudor@gmail.com

About the Show

***White China* by Therese Collie**

January 1974 and South-East Queensland is flooding ...

As the Brisbane River breaks its banks, Daisy, a devout do-gooder sets out in a dinghy to find her mother Lily, who has disappeared from her nursing home. Jasmine, a Feminist Activist and Daisy's daughter, insists on accompanying her much to Daisy's chagrin.

Far from lost, Lily has rediscovered her half sister's Joy and Ava, who are desperate to uncover the resting place of their mother, Mary Wong. It is approaching Bi San, Ancestors' Day, when Chinese traditionally worship the dead, but without knowing where her grave is Joy is fearful that she will be cursed for shirking her duty. So, they begin their search by unpacking family lore and retracing historical steps.

Spanning the reaches of the Brisbane River, *White China* is an epic adventure that follows three generations of woman as they rewrite their relationships in the wake of unacknowledged truths about their family history.

Estimated Running Time 90 minutes

Suitability Grades 10 – 12

Warnings Contains low-level coarse language, adult themes including sexual references and mentions of abortions.

Themes

Culture, Loss, Powerlessness, Minority, Discrimination, Racism, Immigrant experience, Family, Mother and daughter relationship, Feminism

Curriculum Links

Dramatic Form and Style
Contemporary Theatre
Realism

Dramatic Conventions
3-dimensional and believable characters
Minimalist set
Multiple role
Fluidity of place and time
Projection / multimedia

Cast and Creatives

PLAYWRIGHT	Therese Collie
DIRECTOR/DRAMATURG	Ian Lawson
COSTUME DESIGNER	Frances Foo
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Geoff Squires
SOUND DESIGNER/CO-COMPOSER	Guy Webster
VIDEO DESIGNER	Nevin Howell
CO-COMPOSER	Anna Kho
PRE-PRODUCTION MANAGER	Madeline Römcke
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Tammy Weller
STAGE MANAGER	Bridget O'Brien
CAST	Tegan Braithwaite Deborah Faye Lee Elise Greig Emily Liu Tracey Tainsh (aka Isheeni)

Curriculum Connections

The curriculum connections are provided based on the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) General Drama Senior Syllabus 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. In this unit, students develop the knowledge, understanding and skills required to make and respond to dramatic works that use a wide range of dramatic conventions to tell stories in linear and non-linear forms. (Australia. Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2019, p.26)

Inquiry questions
Unit 1:

- How does drama promote shared understandings of the human experience?
- How can we use drama to celebrate, document, empower and share understandings of the human experience?
- How can we recreate people's stories in dramatic linear and non-linear forms?
- How can people's stories be shared through making and responding to drama as ensemble and audience? (Australia. Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2019, p.27)

Unit 2 — Reflect
Students explore the power of drama to reflect lived experience. The unit introduces students to the dominant paradigm of drama that embraces notions of truth and authenticity in performance. Students explore the representational dramatic traditions of Realism, then investigate more contemporary dramatic styles associated with the realist style. 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. (Australia. Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2019, p.30)

Inquiry questions

Unit 2: How is drama shaped to reflect lived experience?

- 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? (Australia. Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2019, p.31)

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

ACARA

Year 9 and 10 Band Descriptors

- **Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles (ACADRM048).**
    - Considering viewpoints – contexts: For example – How does the drama relate to its social context in which it was created? What culturally symbolic movements are evident in this drama? What historical influences have impacted on this drama? How are global trends in drama influencing Australian drama?
- **Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect (ACADRR052).**
    - Considering viewpoints — philosophies and ideologies: For example — How has drama theory been used in creating and performing this text?
    - Considering viewpoints — evaluations: For example — How successful were the actors and director in conveying the playwright's stated intent? How successfully have the design elements been incorporated into the drama?
- **Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making (ACADRR053).**

Style and Form

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

Realism

A style of drama crafted to create believable representations of life; roles and characters in Realism drama draw on real-life or life-like motivations (Australia. Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2019, p.74). This style of theatre aims to 'replicate life' onstage. This means that not only is there a focus on shaping three-dimensional character portrayals but also authentic costumes, sets and props.

Classroom Links

Style and Form

- Identify examples of conventions used in *White China*.
- How does the use of these conventions better convey the production's dramatic meaning?
- Consider the use of time and place. What are their impacts on the production?
- Consider a convention that you thought has an unexpected use in the production. How was it used effectively? What impact did it have on your understanding of the meaning?
- What conventions stood out to you as an audience member?
- What effect does the production's inclusion of these conventions have on the creation of dramatic meaning?
- Why was the use of a fragmented narrative structure so important?
- How did the designer and director change time and place?
- What other conventions could be included? How would this contribute to the dramatic meaning?

Fluidity of Place and Time

Telling a story in multiple times and places requires fluid transitions between each time and place. This can be done through a character transformation, costume changes, or even through design elements such as changes in sets, lighting or mediatised elements. Fluidity of place and time is not only used in multinarrative pieces but also in non-linear productions. This serves to allow multiple perspectives to be told but can also be used to distance the audience.

Multi narrative / Fragmented narrative structure

Multi narrative is when a play contains multiple character or storylines that are each running simultaneously. Each story is linked by a place, central character or event. Although this storytelling device is more commonly found in film it can be used in theatre to show different perspectives, how similar events occur in different places or times or how people are connected. The production will jump between each narrative, sometimes picking up right where we left the character or at other times travelling forward in time.

Fragmented Mood

Fragmented mood is often used to distance the audience from the emotion of one character and have them instead focus on the issue or social comment being conveyed. This convention is often used by switching between scenes, time periods or events when there is a turning point or moment of heightened mood.

Pre-Show Activities

Initial Questions

- What does the title of the play make you think of?
- What excites you about seeing this production?
- Why do you think it's important for theatre to reflect and share stories based on real life events?
- Are you defined by how people perceive you?
- Are we destined to become a particular person based on our situation or environment?
- Can you successfully reinvent your identity or get away from your past?
- Why and how is culture important to our identity?
- What happens when you are removed from your culture?

Background

White China is set in Brisbane in 1974. Engage students in a conversation about their knowledge of Brisbane during this time.

- What was Brisbane like in the 1970s?
- What was growing up in the 70s like? What would be some key differences about childhood in the 70s compared to now?
- What key events happened in the 1970s in Brisbane?
- What do you know about the Brisbane floods in 1974?

Using the images from Flashback to 50 Years ago https://www.couriermail.com.au/questnews/flashback-to-50-years-ago/image-gallery/f1ab43d495c902c175cd90d9f1ca6fd3, have students complete a See/Think/Wonder to further understand what the 1970s were like in Brisbane.

Ask students

- What do you see?
- What do you think about that?
- What does it make you wonder?

This routine encourages students to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations. It helps stimulate curiosity and sets the stage for inquiry. Encourage students to back up their interpretation with reasons. Adapted from https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/See%20Think%20Wonder_2.pdf

Read the information about Brisbane and the floods below and ask students what new information they now have. Have students create a mind map of 1974 in Brisbane.

Brisbane Floods

- Brisbane 1974 Floods - News Footage (Queensland State Archives) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYbfS4ns08o
- Queensland Floods 1974 and the Extensive Damage to Brisbane (No Audio) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_o0pdZ-2Djo - from 17 minutes there is aerial footage
- FLASHBACK - Uncovered 1974 flood footage https://fb.watch/dZ1kw0t0Xe/
- Gallery: Brisbane's 1974 floods, 40 years on https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-27/brisbane-1974-floods-40-year-anniversary/5197952
- How the 1974 Brisbane flood compares to today https://www.9news.com.au/national/how-bad-was-1974-queensland-flood-compared-to-2022-rainfall/3b94bee9-174a-439c-847e-dbe442b30a9e

Brisbane 1970s

- Why the 1970s was the decade of living dangerously https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/why-the-1970s-was-the-decade-of-living-dangerously-20210916-p58s6r
- Brisbane's radical movements in the 1960s & 1970s http://www.epochfuture.com/index.php/issues/brisbane-s-radical-movements-in-the-1960s-1970s
- Remembering Bjelke-Petersen's abject reign https://independentaustralia.net/life/art-display/remembering-bjelke-petersens-abject-reign,13081
- Joh Bjelke-Petersen https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joh_Bjelke-Petersen

Read and Research

- Ancestor Worship in Taoism https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/Chinese_Customs/taoism_ancestor_worship.htm
- Bai San https://www.karliewu.co.uk/Bai-San
- Grace Darling https://rnli.org/about-us/our-history/timeline/1838-grace-darling
- Grace Darling https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/grace-darling
- Toowong Cemetery https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/community-and-safety/community-support/cemeteries/toowong-cemetery
- Holy Triad Temple https://www.mustdobrisbane.com/visitor-info-arts-culture-history/holy-triad-temple-albion
- Women's liberation movement in Oceania https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_liberation_movement_in_Oceania#:~:text=and%20employment%20discrimination.-,Sydney,1960s%20and%20throughout%20the%201970s
- The Sydney Women's Liberation Movement 1970 – 1975 https://whnsw.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The_Sydney_Womens_Liberation_Movement_1970-1975.pdf
- Sex, Power And Anger: A History Of Feminist Protests In Australia https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-27/sex-power-and-anger-a-history-of-feminist-protests-in-australia/100030592
- A History of International Women's Day in words and images http://www.isis.aust.com/iwd/stevens/70s80s.htm

Sharing Stories

White China is inspired by Therese Collie's family. When sharing stories it is important to consider how to use these as inspiration and how we can use and reshape them to create engaging works.

- Have students think about a story from their childhood. Ask them to consider their family, places they lived, important people, friends, injuries, funny habits, what they used to believe, favourite hobbies or activities, travels. It must be a story or memory they are willing to share with the class.
- Ask them to record their responses, audio only. These recording should be spontaneous and only done once, not a polished performance or the memory.
- In small groups or individually, swap recordings.
- Ask students to reflect on this experience. What was it like recording your memory? What was it like listening to each other's recordings? Whose recording did you find the most interesting and could be explored by way of performance?

OR

- Ask students to bring in a photo that has a story behind it that involves them or someone they know. It could be funny, serious, an event, a time when you wanted to mark an important occasion, a photo featuring other people that signifies their relationship to them.
- They are to write about their photograph. The moment that is portrayed and why they chose this specific moment. The account is to be in first person and add as much detail, description about the emotions and experiences as possible.
- Swap these around the class, they can be anonymous if you like. Have students read other's stories.
- Ask students to reflect on this experience.

Using either of the above activities, ask students to then retell someone else's story. Remind them that they are taking someone's story, but they are now making it their own. Aim for the truth, but make it an interesting story for your audience. Perform some of these for the class.

- What emotions did you have as you were performing someone else's story?
- Did you feel obligated in any way?
- Evaluate how successful you were in sharing the story? Were there any issues? Discuss.
- What emotions did you have as you watched someone else perform your story? why?
- What were your expectations of the performer, as you watched them?
- Did they interpret your story the way you wanted them to? Why or why not?

Use this activity as a springboard to discuss the importance of sharing, chronically and documenting other's and our own stories.

Reflect on this activity after seeing *White China*.

Extension: Take a key moment from one of the stories or memories, that impacted you and use it as inspiration for a new performance.

Use the key ideas to begin to consider a new piece of theatre that:

- Creates a shared understanding of the human experience
- Shares, celebrates, documents, empowers or informs audiences

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.

Workshop these.

You may then want to:

- Write key dialogue that represents your idea.
- Create a storyboard with moments of key action.
- Continue to workshop these in the class to create a short scene

Script Work

Read the two script excerpts. Read this twice. In pairs, have students perform one of the scenes.

Encourage them to extend the stage directions adding their own take on the scene. Ask them to consider what the text tells them about the characters, their motivation, obstacles, beliefs, and relationships.

Show some to the class. What similarities or differences were present? What did some pairs focus on or bring to life?

Afterwards have students write down answers to the following

- What does the set look like?
- What do each of the characters look like?
- What do you notice about the dialogue used by each character? What does this convey to you about each character?
- Write down 5 words that you associate with each character.
- What do you think the play will be about?
- How do you think the two scenes fit together?

Directing

Directing is an important role that is about bringing a script to life. It involves creating a vision for the production as well as guiding the actors in their performances.

- Ask students to brainstorm: "What do I think / What do I know / What do I need to know about directing?"
- Discuss student responses. What are some of the similarities that appeared? What are the differences?

Have students explore how well they communicate as a director.

- Have two students sit back to back. One is given a blank piece of paper and pen, the other a sheet of simple shapes and symbols.
- The second student gives clear verbal directions on how to draw the identical layout of shapes and symbols as appears on their sheet. They cannot see each other's sheet of paper.
- Compare the two pieces of paper at the end. How close were they to the original? What contributed to the success or challenges of the activity?

Ask students to read the two script excerpts from *White China* as well as looking at the styles and forms included in the production. Have them start by brainstorm ways this could be shown onstage. Ensure they unpack what they think the text is about first. Ask them to then brainstorm the conventions that would best work to convey their chosen meaning.

- Ask them to view What is theatre capable of? Simon Stone at TEDxSydney https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6VFfGvAVZI
- Students create a mind map of the tools a director can use to create dramatic meaning, e.g. lighting, blocking, and sound.
- Discuss what they learnt.

Have students use this to create a directorial vision for *White China* using one of the script excerpts.

Ask students to include:

- The conventions they would manipulate.
- 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?
- Consider the conventions and styles you would use to convey this piece. What are the differences in having a different actor play each role, rather than switching between them? Experiment with a range of conventions.
- Have students pitch their directorial visions to the class.
- Then in groups have them realise one of these moments onstage.

Present these to the class.

- What similarities or differences did you notice?
- How did each group create time, place and mood?
- What conventions did they manipulate to achieve their intended purpose?

Post-Show Activities

Discussion Questions

- What do you think about the name of the production now? Do you think it has two meanings?
- What do you believe was the key message of the play?
- How did the actors communicate changes in 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 *White China*?
- How does the staging contribute to the production? Discuss the use of props, set and costumes.
- Why is this an important story to tell?
- How does *White China* inform, empathise, chronicle and document lived experiences?
- When did you realise the connection between the two narratives?
- Describe three moments in the performance where you felt strongly about one of the characters. What made you feel this way?
- Why is it important to tell Brisbane stories?
- What did you learn about Brisbane that you didn't know before?

Key Moments

As a class identify 5 key moments from the production. Break students up into smaller groups and 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.

OR

4. 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.

5. Have them consider this a gallery walk through a museum. Have them add a title to each of these freeze frames to direct dramatic focus.
6. When presenting these, one actor must step out of the freeze frame and explain the title and the image, as if they were a tour guide explaining a painting.
7. Have students extend on this by turning each freeze frame into an abstract representation of that moment, focusing on the mood or character emotions portrayed, rather than the plot. Students can bring these moments to life in a movement sequence.

Gallery Walk of Questions

Using a Gallery Walk to explore the questions that students have after seeing a production is a great way to build an understanding of what the students are thinking in a safe space. It allows them to ask questions anonymously but also provides an opportunity to contribute by working together to answer other's questions.

- After using the post-show discussion questions and talking to the students about the production, what they connected with, what they enjoyed etc. Have students write down the questions they still have on post-it notes and put these up around the classroom.
- Students are to walk around the class in a gallery walk and choose two questions, that aren't their own. 1 that they think they can answer and one that they want to know the answer to.
- Using these post-it notes, work through the questions and use these to form a larger class discussion.

Timeline

Have students create a timeline of the key events and time periods from the play. Have students consider the events before the play occurs as well as the events of the play. Discuss the impact of the play happening over such a short time period but it traveling to multiple locations and discussing a lot of the character's journey and history that isn't shown onstage. How does this change our understanding of the characters and their journey?

Family Tree

Create a family tree, documenting the main characters and their relationships with each other. This will be especially helpful to help students understand the connections between the characters in the two narratives. 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. Consider the experiences within the play that define the characters' journey, the status shifts through the production and how their actions demonstrate their belief systems.

Extension: Throughout the production, characters grow and reveal more about themselves. On your family tree add your initial impression of each character, as well as the initial impression conveyed by other characters in the production. Does this shift during the production? If so, what causes this and is this for better or worse?.

Key Themes

Engage students in a discussion about the key themes and concepts explored throughout the production. Ask students which themes were most obvious and what their interpretation of them was. Link this to the manipulation of the dramatic elements and the dramatic meaning.

Theme Focus – Culture and Identity

Culture

Culture is often defined as customs, social behaviours and ideas held by a certain group of people. This can include the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits held by individuals in these groups. Culture is often originated from or attributed to a specific region or location. Culture is often defined in terms of race, or ethnicity, however, it can also refer to smaller groups within society, this may be the culture of the town you live in, school you go to or even your family culture.

Often our identity is wrapped up in or shaped by our culture.

Consider:

- What is Australia's cultural identity?
- What is your cultural identity?
- What cultures do you belong to?

- How have / do these cultures help shape your identity?
- What does it mean to belong?

Identity

Throughout the production, Jasmine (JAZ), Lily, and Daisy are trying to navigate their personal identity, who they are and what they stand for.

- Define the term identity and discuss the different aspects that contribute to one's sense of identity.
- What are the things that make us who we are? Beliefs, experiences, morals, likes, dislikes, politics, etc.
- *White China* deals with not only self-identity but about belonging or not belonging to a culture or community.

Ask students to consider who they are, and how their individual identity has been shaped. Ask them to create a mind map that unpacks their identity. Encourage them to consider how they would describe themselves and put any key information on the mind map. You could also do this activity practically and have students talk to another student about "who they are."

After this ask students to examine what they have written down or what they said and ask them to consider:

- What factors shaped your identity?
- What parts of your identity have been shaped by your family, friends, culture or community?
- What parts of your identity are at odds with those of your family, friends, culture or community?
- What happens when others view us differently than we view ourselves?
- What parts of your identity do you choose for yourself?
- What parts of your identity do you think are determined by others, by society, or by chance?
- Whose opinions and beliefs have the greatest effect on how you think about your own identity?
- What aspects of your identity do you keep private in order to be accepted?
- What aspects of your identity are you willing to change to fit into our identities influence our choices?

Ask students to then consider these questions from the point of view of *White China*.

Examine this short excerpt from *White China*.

DAISY Your grandmother has Chinese blood, Jaz.

JAZ What! No! we can't be Chinese.

DAISY We might not look it but it is our heritage.

JAZ What! How long have you known that?

DAISY She told me her mother was Chinese, the night before I got married. She was worried my children might look Chinese.

JAZ Why didn't you tell me?

DAISY Mum didn't want anyone to know.

JAZ But I'm not anyone!

DAISY Mum swore me to secrecy, Jaz.

JAZ But it's my heritage too! Wait till I tell my friends!

DAISY Don't you dare!

JAZ Why not? You're a bigot like all the rest of them! You're worried about how your Catholic friends will take it! Those whiter than white parishioners with their whiter than white souls! The Yellow Peril is taking over our country, raping our women and children and corrupting our society with gambling and drugs!

- What does this say about identity and culture?
- What is Daisy worried about?
- Why do you think Daisy and Jaz's views are so different?
- Use this to add further information to your family tree.

Theme Focus – Discrimination

One of the overarching themes of the play explores the different experiences of discrimination encountered by key characters. This is shown through the relationships between characters in the play, but also through the discussion of what they fear from the larger community as well. Consider how each character is discriminated against and how they react to this.

Read the information about the 'yellow peril' and fears around Chinese immigration in Australi

- What cultural stereotypes of Chinese people are presented in the play?
- Consider moments where the characters either accept or reject their culture. What occurs in these moments? What does it communicate to the audience about the time period and people's attitudes?
- Where there moments of 'casual' discrimination or racism? Where there moments of overt discrimination or racism?
- Revisit the information about Brisbane. What was happening during the 1970s in terms of race and gender discrimination?

Read about the Yellow Peril:

- Yellow Peril Revisited https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-the-yellow-peril-revisited-134115
- Yellow Peril https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_Peril
- Australia's Yellow Peril Problem https://intpolicydigest.org/elbowed-and-hustled-australia-s-yellow-peril-problem/

Consider the rhyme recited in the opening:

Mary Mack, dressed in black,

Silver buttons down her back.

She likes coffee. I like tea.

She likes sitting on a Chinaman's knee!

Got to a river, couldn't get across,

Saddled up a Chinaman and used him as a horse!

- Have you ever heard this rhyme before?
- What does it make you think about?
- What other rhymes do you know, or have you heard that contain racist language or ideas?
- Why do you think the playwright had Joy singing this? What impact did this have?

Gaps and Silences

When constructing a play, the playwright makes certain decisions about what to include and exclude. One of the ways this is done is through certain gaps and silences. These gaps and silences invite us to infer meaning. Often when reading or watching a production, we tend not to pay too much attention to what has been omitted, but rather we focus on the content of the text presented to us. However, when we consider a gap or silence we may gain a new perspective, be able to delve deeper into a character or explore a moment further.

Choose a character from the play and locate a gap within their character journey to construct a monologue. This activity could also be done with the insight they gained from the relationship or identity activities. Revisit the family tree, the key moments and the timeline activities to help you identify key gaps or silences to explore.

- Brainstorm a list of possible events.
- What is each characters' motivation, obstacle, and objective in that event?
- Think about the play. What do we already know about their lives?
- Consider the characters relationship in the play. What is implied about their past relationship

A monologue is simply a character speaking their thoughts aloud for the benefit of the audience. The character can be speaking directly to the audience; however, they may just be speaking to themselves, another character, or even to an object. The setting for the speech can be implied or hinted at during the speech itself. The character should move around a little and also gesture to help convey emotions and create mood. When writing a monologue it is important that you:

- Establish and maintain a clear character voice.
- Create perspectives and representations of concepts, identities, times and places from the play.
- Use dramatic languages and scriptwriting conventions.
- Include new information. Don't just recount what we already know from the play.
- Only include one complication. It is one moment in time, do not try to include too much.
- Think about why the character is revealing what they are revealing. This will help you to build tension.
- Think about what happened right before this moment and what will happen right after.

EXTENSION: Ask students to present their monologues as a polished performance.

Consider:

- Movement and gesture
- Pace and pause
- Characterisation
- Use of stage space

Classroom Links
Performance

- In groups, read the scene aloud.
- Try out extreme possibilities as actors might do during rehearsals such as one actor not moving and one continually moving, using extremes of volumes or emotions, etc.
- Go through the scene twice, trying out two contrasting sets of desires/movement/intentions and share their work.
- How do the circumstances and surroundings affect what is being said? Does the audience pick up on different agendas or attitudes when the surroundings change?
- This scene sets up the relationships for the rest of the play. Consider how to best convey these through movement and dialogue.
- Layer in the identified conventions. How does this change the meaning of the scene?
- Play the scene using a heightened or vaudeville style vs Realism conventions. How does this change the meaning?

Scene Excerpt 1

JAZ	It didn't stop Grand!
DAISY	How do you know about that?
JAZ	She told me over porridge, on one of my overnighters at her Shorncliffe house.
DAISY	What did she tell you?
JAZ	Oh you know, how she married the first man that came along and promised her the world when she was 18. She got sick of him spending all their money on drinking and playing around when the Depression hit. So she finally divorced him, just before the war.
DAISY	She had no right telling an impressionable young girl, things like that!
JAZ	I liked it. She was teaching me stuff.
DAISY	She had plenty of experience, that's for sure!
JAZ	What, with men?
DAISY	Anyone who could help her get what she wanted.
JAZ	She did that all right! Built up her real estate business, bought old houses, did them up, sold them at a profit /
DAISY	/ But heaven help anyone who–
JAZ	At a time when women didn't do things like that! Grand's the man! I wish you were more like her.
DAISY	I never want to be like her!
JAZ	Why not?
DAISY	It's better for you I'm not.

JAZ What do you mean?

DAISY Nothing.

JAZ No, come on. ***[Beat]*** We never talk. ***[Beat]*** Oh well, be Our Lady of Perpetual Martyrdom then!

DAISY Your grandmother would've beaten the living daylights out of me if I got up to all the antics you do, Jaz. And heaven forbid, if I'd gotten into trouble!

JAZ Not Grand! She wouldn't hurt a fly. Grand is a kind old lady who smells of Lily of the Valley.

DAISY And urine.

JAZ Mum! ***[Beat]*** Would you help me if I got into trouble Mum?

DAISY Yes. I promised myself I'd never do to my kids what your grandmother did to me.

JAZ What did she do to you?

DAISY There's Shorncliffe pier!

JAZ I can see it. What did Grand–

DAISY Watch out Jaz! You'll run into the–

JAZ Stop telling me what to do!

Scene Excerpt 2

JOY You did well for yourself Lily.

LILY Yes, well, maybe…

JOY And you had all those men helping you. You loved the men, Lily.

LILY They loved me.

JOY Remember all those Johnny Spivs? In Sydney, during the war, after we found each other again?

LILY pulls out her photos and looks through them.

LILY Ah yes, I've got a photo of you and me taken in the street in 1943.

JOY Oh yes that photographer snapped us in Circular Quay when we were getting off the Manly ferry to make our tram connection.

LILY You beat him down on the price when we went to pick up the photo. No flies on you Joy!

JOY I had me head screwed on from all those years in the haberdashery. We look so young!

LILY That's because we used that whitening cream those Johnnys got us on the black market.

JOY I didn't think it was right, but you said: "If a man gets pleasure in giving things to you, you take them!"

LILY And silk stockings and underwear sets and nice handkerchiefs.

JOY They got us some good quality dress materials too.

LILY You are always so prim and proper Joy.

JOY Remember I made you that suit? Two-piece pinstripe all wool gabardine jacket and skirt with a single-breasted, knitted waistcoat. You looked so smart!

LILY Oh the parties we used to have with our Sugar Daddies!

JOY Remember one of them always bought mud crabs and we'd drop them in a pot—

LILY — and they would jump out and run around everywhere!

JOY The poker games that would go all night!

LILY One of my guys always had the latest jazz records from America.

JOY You had that one that was a really good dancer too. Used to dance with you in my kitchen, remember?

LILY If he was in the mood.

They start to scat sing* 'In the Mood' *together.

JOY/LILY Da da da da da da da da da da da da da dum.

LILY And then he'd grab you and swing you around!

LILY grabs JOY in a dance pose and swings her around.

JOY Whacko the diddlio!

LILY And call you Doll, a China Doll!

JOY He tried it on me once, you know, but I said, "You're trying up the wrong tree, Mate! Lily's the one who loves you."

LILY I don't know about love, Joy.

JOY Yes, the men always loved you but you never loved them?

LILY It's easy to make men want you, Joy. But I didn't need them to want me. I didn't need all that jive.

JOY stops the dancing.

JOY — You know, I was hurt that you always introduced me to him as your friend, not your sister.

Pause.

LILY — I'm sorry. I did tell Daisy you were my sister. She knew.

JOY — When did you tell her? She never called me Aunty!

LILY — I told her much later, the night before she got married.

JOY — You waited that long?

LILY — I couldn't trust her not to tell anyone else.

JOY — I made her that beautiful, red cheong sam dress. It took me hours. I used the best silk too and hand-embroidered it with pearls. But you wouldn't let her wear it.

LILY — She told you?

JOY — She told me you tore it off her. How could you do that Lily?

LILY — I didn't want her to go through what I did. I didn't want people knowing she had Chinese blood. When my foster families found out they didn't want me anymore. One woman made me scrub the floor and then chucked dirty water all over it and said: "Clean it up again, Chow!" I know you know what's it like.

JOY — Yeah, but I always shut my ears to that rubbish. You're my sister! We share that blood.

LILY — Yes, but I'm not like you. I knew I wasn't completely white but I didn't have to tell everyone. I didn't have a mother… or a father, to say who I was. I was on my own, so I kept Daisy in the dark for as long as I could and I brought her up tough like me, so if anyone looked down on her, she would survive. I'm sorry Joy, but I had to do what I thought was right for Daisy.

You never had a child.

JOY I had Ava. Let's go!

JOY grabs LILY and they leave.

Classroom Links
Directing
Imagine you are directing *White China* and use the script excerpt to create a vision for the production. Consider:

- The conventions used in the production
- What message / idea you want to convey to the audience and how you will achieve this.
- The conventions and styles you would use to convey this piece. What are the differences in having actors play multiple characters? How would the scene be different if using realism conventions versus Epic Theatre or movement conventions? Experiment with a range of conventions and styles.
- 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?

Meet the Writer

Interview with Therese Collie

How do you begin the playwriting process?

Brisbane born, in the late 70s I toured extensively as an actor before studying at the Lecoq School of Theatre, Mime and Movement in Paris in the early 1980s. On returning home, I joined Street Arts Community Theatre Company where I began to develop my skills as a director and writer; working with many diverse communities (e.g. Indigenous, Greek, Women in Prison) to help tell their stories.

So my playwriting began with me working as a Writer-in-Community, listening to a community's concerns and finding the story they wanted to tell. Sometimes I worked with groups, other times with an emerging writer from the

community. Together, we would develop characters and settings and a story that could hold the main themes.

I have also devised shows with a team of actors, often being director as well as writer. This requires a process of trying ideas on the floor with the actors, recording the material and gleaning the best bits to develop further.

I have also started by being intrigued by a story, then researching, interviewing and letting my imagination take hold.

You have said this play is inspired by your mother's family. Can you talk about how you used that as inspiration?

When I became a mother, my mother told me her mother's mother, my great-grandmother, was Chinese. Turns out my grandmother was ashamed of her Chinese mother and spent her whole life denying her half-sisters, taking her fear of being found out on my mother.

On meeting my Chinese great aunts, I was fascinated by their stories of growing up in White Australia and inspired by their determination to survive well, despite all the obstacles they faced of birth, gender, class, race, the Depression and World Wars.

Why did you want to tell this story?

I have written *White China* to contribute to the too long suppressed history of Chinese in Australia and to tell an eternal story: the quest for the mother, the source of the river.

I wanted to celebrate the character of these women — their humour, charm, larrikin nature and their toughness; that they were funny, resilient and very hard working too.

I also wanted to tell a story of my generation, to explore the clash between mothers and daughters during a time of enormous change in women's lives with the second wave of feminism and the personal becoming political.

What is it like telling your family's story?

First of all, *White China* is not my family's story. It is a fiction based on the stories told to me by my mother and great aunts.

It was fun to get to know my mother better through the process of hearing her

stories and travelling with her to meet and eat Yum Cha with our extended Chinese family. I loved seeing my mother's pride in her heritage increase and her understanding and forgiveness of her mother's actions deepen. As a result I understood myself better too.

Having said that, it was sometimes very hard for my family to tell their personal stories of the repercussions of racism through the generations. But I know they found it cathartic and they were keen to contribute to the development of the fictional story that is eventually told in *White China*.

How much research did you have to do?

From 1992 to 1997, I conducted many interviews with my mother and made trips to Sydney to interview my Chinese great-aunts. I also interviewed my mother's Chinese friend, who surprisingly turned out to have been looked after by my Chinese great-aunts when she was a young girl!

I visited and researched Chinese graves in cemeteries in Toowong, Brisbane, and Drayton, Toowoomba in Queensland, and Rookwood, Sydney.

I also researched the 1974 Brisbane flood, the history of Chinese in Brisbane, feminism and political protests in Queensland in the 1970s.

Why did you want to use the backdrop of the floods to tell this story?

In *White China*, five women are swept up in a quest to find their mother and confront some long unacknowledged truths about their family. I felt that a flood was an apt metaphor for the surfacing of secrets.

The story is played out against the backdrop of a flood in 1974.

The 1970s were a time when cultural assimilation, symbolised by the White Australia Policy, was giving way to multiculturalism. This timing allows the play's themes of place and displacement and draconian immigration policies to be explored.

And, having a mother and daughter stuck in a boat travelling upstream against a flooded river, provided an opportunity to highlight the generational conflict between mothers and daughters during the 1970s second wave of feminism.

Can you explain the importance of the title?

White China suggests genteel cups of tea and polite conversation with nothing unpleasant being broached – in other words, secrets being suppressed.

It also carries the potential of the china being smashed and the breaking down of barriers. An actual white china teacup is used in the play as a plot device.

White China is also a name that can be given to those who have Chinese ancestry but pass as white.

What do you see is at the heart of *White China*?

White China shares a woman's story of cultural identity, racism, familial conflict, compassion and reconciliation. It not only acknowledges the history of the Chinese community in Australia, but also enables audiences to recognise the price paid personally by those who were forced to deny, or be shamed by, their difference. Sadly, the play's themes of place and displacement remain all too pertinent in the prevailing Australian and global political climate.

What do you see as the role of playwrights in our society?

To entertain, challenge and break stereotypes. To help audiences understand how the past impacts on the present and how we can learn from it to shape our tomorrow.

For young people wanting to create theatre or start writing scripts, what advice would you give them?

Be realistic about what you can do, but be open to opportunities and take a chance. Find the people you want to work with, the colleagues you can trust with your idea and work.

Have a good work ethic. Be on time, turn up, be observant, curious and open. Take feedback on board, but don't feel like every idea is relevant.

Be persistent. Production of your work can take years.

White China started out as Upsadaisy with a Reading, commissioned by Street Arts Theatre Company in Chinatown in 1996. *White China* resurfaced in 2015 when I began developing it through the Lotus Asian-Australian Playwriting Project. In 2017 I worked with Dramaturge/Director Ian Lawson and actors on a Creative Development to produce a stronger, clearer and more engaging

script. Playlab Theatre supported a Reading of *White China* with five actors in December 2017. In January 2018 a Design Development gathered visual materials and created a remote controlled boat.

Get it written, don't get it right! Get that first draft out, so you can see what the work is. Then you can start distilling and incorporating new ideas or plot points.

Create core plot documents, lists of ideas for characters and settings, relevant articles for socio-political background, and information about any languages and cultures used. Check the latter with trusted sources.

What are your 'go to' methods or techniques for creating a believable, three-dimensional character?

Create detailed character histories. Include extra information that could be useful, even though you don't know how yet.

If you are going to interview people to develop characters, oral history techniques are valuable to learn. Always be respectful of people who give you their stories and be clear about how they will be used. Be upfront that you are creating a work of fiction and that characters are often a combination of people, stories, and ideas to serve the central theme of the play.

Surprise your audience with characters who embody contradiction and complexity.

In terms of writing habits, I like to start work each morning without looking at anything else, coming straight out of sleep to harness that imaginative dream state.

Therese Collie Playwright White China 19th July 2022

Elements of Drama Discuss

ROLE **RELATIONSHIP** **CHARACTER**	• 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? • How does the sister's relationship change over the course of the play? • How does Jaz view her grandmother differently at the end of the play vs the start? • Do you think Jaz and Daisy's relationship changes over the course of the play? How and why? • How did the use of two stories impact your understanding of the characters and their relationships? • What are the characters key motivations for the secrets that they kept? • Who has the higher status throughout the production? When does this power balance shift? • Think about the start of the play, how did this set up the relationships between each of the characters? • How were the relationships shown through body language and movement?

TENSION	• What were some of the key examples of tension during the production? • How did the tension engage you? • What were you invested in? • How did the changes in time and place impact the development of tension? • Consider the use of heightened emotions and performance. How did this create or break the tension? • Tension of relationship is present throughout the play. What are the most obvious examples of this? Why does the tension develop?
FOCUS	• Think about the moments onstage where dramatic focus shifted. What happened onstage to facilitate this change? • How were the design elements used to shift the dramatic focus?
TIME	• When is the play set? • Consider the intertextual references, how is time relevant in relation to these? • The play discusses a lot of important events to the characters that occurred before the play. How does the impact your understanding of the characters and their relationships? • Consider a moment of extreme tempo or duration? What did they convey to you?

PLACE	• The play is set in multiple locations. How was this communicated onstage? • How were the different places differentiated onstage? • How were design elements manipulated to communicate the different places? • How was the setting of Brisbane significant? How did this impact your viewing of the production? • When was projection uses to create place? How did this assist in your understanding of the dramatic meaning?
SPACE	• 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? • Consider that a lot of the production occurred within a boat. How did this change the actors use of space? • Consider how this idea of being trapped is communicated through the manipulation of space.
MOVEMENT	• Consider how relationships in the play are communicated through body language and movement. Consider how you can show a relationship without "explaining" it. • Was the movement symbolic in anyway? • How was movement contrasted by stillness? What effect did this have?

LANGUAGE	• 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 the different ways each character speaks / uses language. • How did the use of Chinese impact you as an audience member?
CONTRAST	• Describe two contrasting moments in *White China*. How were these moments created through sound, lighting, voice and movement? • Analyse the ways in which contrast is used throughout the play in relation to the range of moods. • Jaz and Daisy have very different views on life – opportunity and religion. Examine how this is communicated and how it impacts their relationship. • What other elements of contrast did you see throughout the production? • Contrast the characters at the start of the play to end. How have their lives and relationships changed?

MOOD	• 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. • Consider the mood at the start of the play. How does this contrast with the end of the play? • How did the use of the projection shape mood? • Consider a moment of intense mood. What performance techniques and skills of the actors were utilised to make you feel this way? • How did you feel when both Jaz and Ava reveals their secrets? What performance techniques and skills of the actors were utilised to make you feel this way?
SYMBOL	• Discuss the impact of the symbolic nature of the set. How did this impact your understanding of the production and the narrative? • Consider the items that each character unpacks and takes with them when they evacuate. How are these symbolic? What do they say about each of the characters? • Consider the title of the play. What do you think it means and how does it change your understanding of the play? • How were the projections use symbolically?

Assessment Ideas

Extended Response

Task 1

"I have written *White China* to contribute to the too long suppressed history of Chinese in Australia and to tell an eternal story: the quest for the mother, the source of the river." Therese Collie

After viewing *White China*, evaluate the effectiveness of the production by analysing the onstage dramatic action and how the use of the dramatic languages created dramatic meaning. In your response consider how the play uses parallel narratives to demonstrate the ideas conveyed in the quote above. 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

"[A playwright's role is] to entertain, challenge and break stereotypes. To help audiences understand how the past impacts on the present and how we can learn from it to shape our tomorrow." Therese Collie

In response to the above quote, you are to write an analytical essay evaluating how the production works to 'entertain, challenge and break stereotypes'. You are to evaluate the success of the production to share understandings of the human experience and how it created dramatic meaning through the manipulation of relationship and mood and one key convention.

Task 3

In response to the above image, you are to write an analytical essay arguing a position about the manipulation of two key elements of drama and one key convention. How do key moments from *White China* reflect the concepts depicted in the image above.