

**Company B**  
presents  
in association  
with **Malthouse Melbourne**



Photograph: Alex Craig

## **YIBIYUNG**

Written by **Dallas Winmar**  
Dramaturgy by **Louise Gough**

Directed by **Wesley Enoch**

**Teacher's Notes**

**Freehills**

EDUCATION PARTNER

## Company B



Company B sprang into being out of the unique action taken to save the Nimrod Theatre building from demolition in 1984. Rather than lose a performance space in inner city Sydney, more than 600 arts, entertainment and media professionals as well as ardent theatre lovers, formed a syndicate to buy the building. The syndicate included nearly every successful person in Australian show business.

Company B is one of Australia's most celebrated theatre companies. Under the artistic leadership of Neil Armfield, the company performs at its home at Belvoir St Theatre in Surry Hills, Sydney and from there tours to major arts centres and festivals both nationally and internationally. Company B engages Australia's most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to present an annual artistic program that is razor-sharp, popular and challenging.

Belvoir St Theatre's greatly loved Upstairs and Downstairs stages have been the artistic watering holes of many of Australia's great performing artists such as Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, Jacqueline McKenzie, Noah Taylor, Richard Roxburgh, Max Cullen, Bille Brown, David Wenham, Deborah Mailman and Catherine McClements.

Sellout productions like *Cloudstreet*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Alchemist*, *Hamlet*, *The Small Poppies*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Underpants*, *Gulpilil*, *The Sapphires* and *Stuff Happens* have consolidated Company B's position as one of Australia's most innovative and acclaimed theatre companies. Company B also supports outstanding independent theatre companies through its annual B Sharp season.

Belvoir St Theatre has recently undergone a major renovation to provide Company B with a state of the art home for the future whilst retaining the charm of the original building.

For more information visit [www.belvoir.com.au](http://www.belvoir.com.au)

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## Malthouse Melbourne



Malthouse Melbourne produces and presents Australian contemporary theatre, a broadly defined program of work conceived and created in collaboration with writers, directors, designers, choreographers, audio artists and performers – a contemporary theatre where the combined possibilities of all the theatre arts are offered centre stage.

Alive to the changing dynamics of a theatre in contest with contemporary life and the contemporary imagination, we determinedly focus ourselves on the creation of new work. By 'new work' we refer not only to 'original' projects but also to re-investigations of classic work and re-appraisals of the Australian and international repertoire, in addition to the presentation of the best new Australian and international theatre making. We undertake this challenge as an offering to the past, a witnessing of the present and as a manifestation of our hopes and fears for the future, as Australia's more adventurous theatre company.

Malthouse Melbourne is the resident company of The CUB Malthouse in Southbank. Originally built in 1892 as a brewery and malting works, The Malthouse was generously donated by Carlton and United Breweries as a home for the creation and presentation of contemporary Australian theatre in 1990. The CUB Malthouse complex houses three theatres (500 seat Merlyn, 200 seat Beckett & the 100 seat Tower Theatre), a vibrant cafe and bar, and Melbourne's most iconically housed scenic workshop.

Malthouse Melbourne's co-productions with Company B include *It Just Stopped* (Stephen Sewell), *Exit the King* (Eugene Ionesco – Translated by Neil Armfield and Geoffrey Rush) and *Yibiyung* (Dallas Winmar).

[www.malthousemelbourne.com](http://www.malthousemelbourne.com)

# **YIBIYUNG**

Written by **DALLAS WINMAR**  
Dramaturgy by **LOUISE GOUGH**  
Directed by **WESLEY ENOCH**

Set Designer **JACOB NASH**  
Costume Designer **BRUCE McKINVEN**  
Lighting Designer **NIKLAS PAJANTI**  
Composer & Sound Designer **STEVE FRANCIS**  
Assistant Sound Designer **MICHAEL TOISUTA**  
Language & Cultural Consultant **ROMA WINMAR**  
Assistant Director **KYLE MORRISON**  
Stage Manager **REBECCA ANDERSON**  
Assistant Stage Manager **JOSHUA SHERRIN**

With

**JADA ALBERTS** Yirribin/Spruiker/Musician  
**JIMI BANI** Smiley  
**SIBYLLA BUDD** Lady  
**ANNIE BYRON** Teacher/Matron/Farmer's Wife  
**RUSSELL DYKSTRA** Policeman/Superintendent/Doctor/Farmer  
**ROXANNE McDONALD** Cook/Aunty  
**DAVID PAGE** Uncle/Tracker  
**MELODIE REYNOLDS** Djindi  
**MIRANDA TAPSELL** Yibiyung

Miranda Tapsell appears in this production courtesy of NIDA

*Yibiyung opened at Belvoir St Theatre on 17 September 2008*

**NB. This synopsis reveals events of the plot intended to be revealed to the audience on stage. We advise not sharing this synopsis with students until after they have seen the production.**

## **Synopsis: YIBIYUNG**

Yibiyung stands in darkness beneath a tree and as her older self; talks about looking back and wondering how she ended up at 'this place'. We don't yet know where she means. She talks about understanding the time she was born into – the implication of the laws of the time on every aspect of her life, against her will. Rights weren't hers, everything was pre-determined before she was even born. To have mixed blood was to fit nowhere.

**In language:** Yirribin, Yibiyung's mother gives birth under the tree, surrounded by women. As the baby is born the women hand Yirribin the baby boy. We hear his first cries as Yirribin calls Yibiyung to her side and puts her brother in Yibiyung's arms. Yibiyung admires how fat and lovely he is. Together they sit and look up into the sky. Yirribin shows Yibiyung a cluster of stars. Once, a long time ago, Yirribin tells her, those stars weren't there.

Once, she says, all the stars looked exactly the same. But those ones are women. As she points up at the stars, Yirribin counts them; one, two, three, four, five – five. Those women, she says, were water people from near the big water who, one dark night, made camp.

The women had to carry water back to their camp in the darkness of the night for the children who couldn't walk far. But they didn't come back quickly enough, so the men from the camp went looking for them. When they found them the men went wild to see the young women still playing around the waterhole. The men took spears and poked the girls in the calves of their legs. The girls ran away, really fast. The men kept chasing them but they couldn't catch them. Then a big wind blew up, took the girls up into the sky. Right up there, in the sky! The men kept throwing those spears and the girls scattered so the spears couldn't reach them. Which is why they're like that now, still caught there. All far away from each other, not like any of the other stars.

Her uncle interjects - White man, he says, call those stars the Southern Cross. Yirribin finishes her story, describing how the young women were too frightened of being speared to come back. Uncle tells his niece not to be like them; play around forgetting when there is a job to do. Those women are now all alone. As he leaves Yirribin thanks her big brother for the wood he's brought.

**Part language, part English:** Yibiyung shows Uncle some tracks she thinks are kangaroo tracks then he shows her what kangaroo tracks really look like. Uncle points out which bush foods are good to eat; which will make her sick and instructs her to take only what she needs (then everything will replenish itself). Be good to the land, he says; then the land will be good to you. He tells Yibiyung she's like one of the cheeky little chitty birds (willy wag-tails) running about here and there. Now she's getting big, she can help around the camp.

Uncle comes to visit again – Yibiyung's baby brother is crying – her mother Yirribin is sleeping. An owl's cry startles both Yibiyung and her uncle. Uncle tells Yibiyung that when an owl cries like that he's wara; bad, a bringer of bad tidings. Yibiyung tries to wake her mother but she won't wake. Uncle realises his sister is dead and takes Yibiyung and her brother away.

**In English (mostly):** Women grieve for Yirribin and a Policeman comes to pay his respects to Uncle. He asks how she died and Uncle tells him she died of influenza, like so many others. The Policeman

enquires after Yirribin's family. Uncle shows him Yibiyung and her baby brother. Their father, Uncle says, has been gone for a while. He looked after his sister though, he said, brought her what she needed. The Policeman gives them a food parcel while expressing concern for the children. The baby, Uncle says, will be nursed by another family, but he'll bring his niece up himself, as he promised he would.

Yibiyung and Uncle are by Yirribin's grave. Yibiyung asks about the owl they heard the night her mother died. Uncle says when an owl cries at night like that it's a warning someone's died. Yibiyung asks Uncle where people go when they die? He tells her their spirits go back to their country – that's why her mother is buried at the top of the hill, near the tree, so that her spirit can look back to her land, to her people from up high and get back to them. She too, he tells her, was born here and belongs here, to this land. When she dies, her spirit will return here. Uncle tells Yibiyung he'll look after her always, as he promised her mother.

A letter (dated 17 Aug, 1914) from the Deputy Chief Protector of Aborigines is spoken by an actor holding a green file of letters under one arm. This letter instructs the Inspector that 'the older half caste girl child' of the recently deceased woman should be apprehended and sent to Carrolup Mission.

Yibiyung takes a letter from a wadjela and hands it to her Uncle. Uncle tries to read it but has to put it back in his pocket. Yibiyung spots the cheeky chitty-chitty bird again and Uncle repeats his warnings about following the bird who flits his tail this way and that to get people to follow him. He tells Yibiyung the *djidi-djidi* means trouble, to keep away. Yibiyung misses her mum and her brother. Uncle says they're with her, putting a hand on his heart to show where.

Yibiyung visits her mother's grave with some (kangaroo paw) flowers she's picked. She talks about her brother, how fat he is now! and how much Kongkan is teaching her, how big she's getting. She tells her mum nothing's the same since she's been gone.

Uncle visits the Policeman to ask him to read the letter. It's from the Department of Aborigines informing him that under the 1905 Act the 'half-caste girl' in his care must be taken to Carrolup Mission. Uncle refuses but the Policeman tells him that if he doesn't take Yibiyung willingly a warrant will be issued and he'll be forced to take her himself. Legally, the Policeman tells him, legally she's no longer his, not by white people's law. Uncle insists she belongs with him. The Policeman tries to persuade him that he can still visit while Yibiyung's at Carrolup; she'll get an education and be looked after while he's away working on contract.

Uncle cooks up a big feed, just for himself and for Yibiyung. When she asks why he says it's going to be a big day tomorrow. Yibiyung eats as Uncle points out her mother's star. He tells her, when she's grown up and far away from home she'll see her mother up there and he'll be looking at the same sky and the same star. Yibiyung is sure she'll never be far from her Kongkan, however big she grows.

Uncle wakes Yibiyung to tell her he's taking her to Carrolup and she has to stay there without him. She says she won't and doesn't want to go. He says he doesn't want to take her but must; the whitefellas won't listen; he has no right to say no. She'll learn to read and write - he wants her to be smart, to learn more than he can teach. Yibiyung doesn't want to learn from *wadjelas*. Uncle insists she learn for him, for herself - then she can teach him. He promises to come get her if she doesn't like it there. Slowly they make their way to Carrolup.

At Carrolup Mission the children play Hide & Seek, counting in language. The teacher comes in with a big blackboard and has them sing the alphabet. She proceeds to teach them what the letters stand for but a girl beside Yibiyung mucks up and makes all the children laugh by mocking the teacher.

Yibiyung and that girl make friends – Yibiyung asks the girl her (*wadjela*) name - the girl confesses that it's Gertrude, which she hates. The girl envies Yibiyung both her pretty names – Yibiyung & Lily. The girl doesn't know where she comes from or who her family is; she was only a baby when she was brought there. Yibiyung says Kongkan might know who she belongs to and that he's coming soon to visit. Yibiyung names the girl Djindi; meaning star.

As Yibiyung & Djindi are doing their chores a boy asks if they want to come catch parrots but they say they've too many chores to do. Yibiyung asks Djindi what his name is and Djindi says he's just called Boy, like she was just called Girl. Yibiyung declares she's going to call him Smiley, as he's always showing his big white teeth. Djindi points out a chitty-chitty to Yibi, who warns her against following the bird, just as Yibiyung's Uncle warned her.

Yibiyung spots Uncle coming to visit and runs to meet him, introducing Djindi and telling her to call him Uncle too, for respect. He brings bush tucker and a red ribbon which he gives to Djindi. Uncle asks her where she's from? Djindi doesn't know so he looks long into her face but he can't tell either, just tells her she's not from down this way. Uncle doesn't stay long but he tells Yibiyung to look after her friends: that she's lucky, she knows her family - family's important. When can I come home, she asks? Her uncle says soon, next time he'll take her home. He wants to take her then but instead walks away, leaving her learning.

Yibiyung gives Djindi a lesson in language as Smiley practises hitting tins with his shanghi. Yibi teaches Djindi to name the parts of the body, in language. They sing to them the tune of "Head, Shoulders, Knee & Toes". As they sing we hear a letter from the Chief Protector to the Superintendent of Carrolup River Native Settlement instructing him that all inmates will be moved to Moore River on June 28. Yibiyung practises writing English on a slate as Djindi chases a *djidi-djidi*.

Uncle goes to visit Yibiyung with a new dress in a brown paper package but bumps into the policeman who tells him to hurry if he wants to see his niece. Uncle arrives at deserted Carrolup and runs to the station, calling for Yibiyung. Meanwhile, Yibiyung, Djindi & Smiley are herded into a train carriage and try to peer through the cracks. Uncle arrives at the station and calls for Yibiyung but it's too late, the Station master says. The train pulls out. As the train carries them away Yibiyung says a poem about the journey – leaving their country for an unfamiliar unknown destination, crowded together like sheep.

At Moore River, the Tracker separates men from women, boys from girls; isolating the old and the sick, mothers and babies. The Superintendent expounds to the people the rules of the place: - children must stay in the compound at all times. He points out the jail, called "The Boob" where anyone who breaks the rules will be put, even children. No one is to disrupt the system. The girls traipse off after Matron to their dormitory.

Matron lines them up and tells them the rules. She doesn't care what their names are, especially not their real names. They can't speak any language – only English. Must get up at dawn, do strange exercises and take medicines, do chores & lessons, never leave the compound, never have visitors, not go near boys, they won't be allowed more than one dress and Matron decides everything for them from now on. Every rule Matron sets out, Yibiyung says to Djindi that she'll defy or avoid following. The girls are locked in and left for the night – they can't even see the stars.

Yibiyung speaks a poem about the girls' predicament in this world of rules without family or comfort.

One night, Smiley comes sneaking up to speak to them through the bars. He wants to know how the girls are doing? Yibiyung says some still weep at night but they all look after them. Smiley tells them they're never returning to Carrolup but gotta stay there, at Moore River. Yibiyung can't believe it or bear to stay there but the other two calm her down. Smiley leaves a damper under the stairs for them to grab first thing, before the ants do.

Uncle says the letter he's written asking if the people at Moore River (dated April 10, 1921) are going to be brought back to Carrolup. He wants his family back and hopes they'll return on the same date as they left. He asks for a letter telling him if this is going to happen; and when they'll be coming back.

The girls are at Church on a hot day, struggling through a hymn (*Shall we Gather at the River*) and Djindi asks Yibi if she believes in God. Yibi is doubtful. If God exists, why are they stuck at Moore River? Djindi tells Yibi Moore River's her home now but Yibiyung says it will never be that. She persuades Djindi to go swimming in the river, without getting Matron's permission. They find Smiley already there, with nothing on. The girls take his clothes while he's in the water; put them where he has to venture further to get them than, naked, he'd really like to. Djindi teases Yibiyung that she likes Smiley in a boyfriend kind of way.

As the girls swim we hear the letter Uncle received in reply from the Superintendent of Moore River, refusing to let Yibiyung return – she is being educated and trained to be sent out soon for Domestic Service.

The girls clamber out of the water and Djindi swings on a rope hanging off a tree near the river. They talk about God - Djindi says he gives her a reason to live. Yibiyung admits she doesn't really believe, not like Djindi does. She believes in the stars, if you follow them they show you the way to go. Soon they'll be leaving, being sent out and having to make their own way. Djindi doesn't want to go – she's seen girls return with babies, heard how badly they've been treated. Djindi's afraid she won't fit in the world outside Moore River. But Yibiyung can't wait to be a bit more free – when Djindi gets upset at the idea of Yibi going, she tells Djindi she'll be her family, wherever she is, always thinking of her, always looking out for her. Yibiyung shoos a *djidi-djidi* bird away. They fall asleep on the riverbank in the hot sun.

When they wake up it's night and there are stars everywhere. Yibiyung comforts Djindi, shows her her mum's star and, to take her mind off things, tells her the story of the stars her mum told her at the start of the play. Djindi marvels at them all being stuck up there on their own, those women. But from Yibi's point of view, at least they're free.

A memo (dated 18 Dec, 1922) from the Superintendent to the Secretary in the Department of Aborigines is read – re a 14 yr old girl No. 454 (Yibiyung) who is suitable to send to the Doctor. We also hear the Secretary's reply, indicating the girl can be sent in the New Year.

The Tracker finds the girls huddled together for warmth in the night. He tells them not to be afraid (of him), Matron is angry enough with them already. He feeds, gets them warm and takes them back. Yibiyung asks him how he catches people and he shows them how to sweep away their tracks with leaves on their feet to brush them away.

Matron is furious – Yibiyung takes the blame while Djindi apologises. But Yibiyung doesn't say sorry, she says it was hot instead. Matron puts her in the jail (the 'Boob') for the night and tells her that the

next day she'll be sent out to service. Djindi is grief-struck that Yibiyung will be leaving. Matron makes her go to bed and Yibiyung is locked in alone.

She hates it there, it's freezing, but Smiley comes to find her as she's shouting for Djindi and gives her something warm to put on. She tells Smiley she's being sent away the next day - he promises that wherever it is, he'll come looking for her. He tells her that her Uncle came to see her last week but they wouldn't let him in. Yibiyung vows that one day she'll beat them, however long it takes her. She asks Smiley what the sky is like outside - he tells her it's full of stars. They'll miss each other, they say, then Smiley has to go. Yibiyung shouts for her Uncle to take her home – she hates being where she can't see the stars, or her mum.

## **End of Act One**

Yibiyung arrives in a new place, carrying her bag. From behind white lace curtains a strange white lady watches her.

A telegram from the Post Master (dated 2 Jan 1923) relays the information that there is a 'half-caste' girl on the train from Mogumber, due in around 5pm.

Yibiyung (now called Lily) sings as she washes herself behind the curtain. A woman (Cook) hustles her to finish up. When Lily is dressed the Doctor examines and is unimpressed with her. She will, he instructs, eventually learn like Cook to know her place here, to clean and serve. He expects she will be slower to learn than a white child and charges her to work hard or face being sent back to Moore River. He forces cough mixture down her throat and tells Cook she must have some daily – if she's healthy she'll work better. Cook asks if she could be brought to see the Lady but the Doctor says Lily must be kept away from his wife.

Once the Doctor has gone Cook warns Lily not to get ideas about replacing her and roughly instructs her in the rules of the place; the kitchen and the Doctor's (forbidden) garden. Cook tells Lily (only once) what chores are to be done every day, warning her that if she doesn't learn fast, the broom will be used across her legs. Cook tells her not to think about running away, that if she does she'll be sent straight back to Moore River or worse, to prison. Are there ghosts here? Lily asks Cook, she thinks she saw one, someone with such a white face, such white skin. But Cook dismisses the subject and makes Yibiyung up a bed in the kitchen. Don't you start crying about where you come from, she warns – tears are of no use.

Yibiyung writes to Djindi saying she's safe, she misses them and to remember her when she looks up at the stars. The Lady comes into the kitchen in her nightgown with a doll in her arms. She couldn't sleep, she says, she wanted to meet Lily so much. The Lady looks at Yibiyung, telling her she's here not to be a domestic, but because she wanted a little girl to become part of their family. But, Yibiyung says, she has her own family. The Lady gives Lily the doll. Lily exclaims at how beautiful it is and asks if it was the Lady's own. The Lady says no, it was for someone else. We understand that it was for her own child and get a sense of the Lady's sadness and longing. The Lady leaves, telling Lily to say her prayers, which she does.

We hear the letter the Lady wrote to the Department (dated 20 May, 1923) asking for Lily to be placed in their care, assuring them she will be cared for as their own child.



Cook and Lily are washing the Lady's white underthings. Lily exclaims that her pants are so big and Cook shows Lily her own exceptionally large pants. They play at imitating the Doctor and the Lady. The Doctor encounters them mucking about and reprimands them both.

Post arrives and Lily asks Cook if there are letters for her? Cook says no, the Doctor vets all the mail in the house. Lily is writing a letter to her friends, though she's heard nothing back since she arrived. She'll write to Cook too, when she leaves. Cook says that's a long time off but Lily says she's not there forever, she's going home. She asks about Cook's family. Cook tells Lily she gave up looking for them long ago. The Lady enters, dismisses Cook and pours Lily a glass of milk. There's so much she'll teach her, she says. What would Lily think if they adopted her and this became her home? Does that mean she'd have to stay forever? Lily asks.

The Doctor comes to tell his wife she should be resting. Cook tells Lily to wipe the milk from her mouth, that she won't be learning anything except to know her place. But Lily remembers that the Lady hugged her.

The Lady opens a box with a brand new dress in it for Lily – all the way from Melbourne. She puts it over Lily's head and tells her how lovely and grown up she looks. When Lily says she misses her Mum, the Lady tells her she should forget those thoughts. She teaches Lily how to dance and they waltz and laugh. The Lady confides that she lost her own baby and the Doctor made it so she can't have another, but she has Lily now. She calls her a blessing from God.

Lily's Uncle sends a letter to Moore River (dated 13 Sept, 1923) asking if Lily might spend Christmas with him – he guarantees to see her back home. This request is refused with the curt information that Lily has been adopted by the Doctor's family and cannot visit him.

The Doctor checks his figs in the garden; they are swathed in cloth bags hanging from the tree. Cook hands the Doctor the letters to be posted. He removes one and hands the batch back to her. Lily, Cook says, writes every day and has not had one reply. The Doctor defends his actions by saying that he can't have the whole camp on his doorstep. The Lady enters the garden and exclaims at its beauty. Lily marvels at the bags covering the figs. The Lady explains the Doctor is very protective of his figs. Lily has never tasted a fig – the Lady describes how sweet and delectable they are – forbidden fruit from the Bible plucked by Eve, some think. She asks Lily if she's happy and Lily says yes, the Lady is good to her. Lily, the Lady says, makes her happy, more than medicines.

Overriding the Doctor; the Lady insists Lily join them for tea in the garden. She pours for Lily and gives her a lesson in etiquette, focusing on her whilst ignoring her husband. The Doctor objects to her serving their servant. He calls Lily a 'native' and the Lady damns him as she leaves the table upset. The Doctor awkwardly follows her inside.

Cook tells Lily her own story – brought to the Doctor's father's house when she was four, not knowing why, told her mother didn't want her anymore. Sometimes, Cook says, an old black man visited her when she was playing in the garden and told her stories. She urges Lily to leave while she can, not like her, regretting now that too much time has passed. Cook gives Lily a handkerchief she's embroidered for her birthday with her initials on it and some stars. Lily loves it and thanks her.

Lily's alone in the garden, a chitty chitty bird is flitting around under the fig tree and she shoos it away. She opens one of the bags and takes out a fig which she bites into, hiding it behind her back when the Doctor surprises her in the act. He forces her arm forward to reveal that it is one of his precious figs. Shouting that if she wants figs she'll get figs; he grabs several and smashes them over Lily's face. The

Lily rushes in to intervene – she pulls his figs from the tree and throws them onto the ground. She shouts at her husband and asks Cook to clean up her girl. The Doctor commands Cook to leave him alone with Lily.

He begins to wipe her face clean but then starts to touch her face and kiss her. He holds her hard and begins to assault her. She screams no - but can't struggle away from his grasp.

A memo from the Chief Protector (dated Jan 1926) is heard saying that Girl 454 has severed communication with this family and is going to Moore River for a holiday. In three months time she'll be sent out again to a farmer couple near Dangin. A telegram (dated 23 Jan, 1925) is to be sent – Young girl, with baby (white) on tomorrow morning's train.

We see Lily enter with a baby in her arms. Matron removes the child from her arms, saying that it's for the best.

## **End of Act Two**

The World Famous Murphy's Boxing Troupe is in town at the country show – the referee calls for challengers to compete for £5 by knocking down Kid Kangaroo, the defender. A cocky Irishman takes up the offer. Lily's at the show with the farmer couple she works for now – they tell her to meet them back for the Dance and to keep away from other 'natives'. The farmer gives her some money and she goes into the boxing tent to watch the fight. Kid Kangaroo is winning - until Lily sees that he's Smiley and shouts his name. At that moment Lightning Jack king hits him and Smiley is out for the count.

The disgruntled ref. leaves Lily by Smiley's side. She asks him why he's fighting and he explains he joined the troupe after working on the farm didn't work out and has been making good money until she made him lose. They tease each other and Smiley fills her in on all that's been happening at the Mission since she went away. Yibiyung explains that the Doctor never posted any of her letters, though she wrote to him and Djindi every day. Enjoying how good it is to see each other again, they begin to realise a strong attraction. Smiley suggests that Yibiyung could come with him and the troupe, leave the farmers, that other men have their women with them. He means they could get married. All they'd need to do, he says, is get permission from his old Aunty. Lily is worried about the Chief Protector but Smiley says that once they're married, they'd be free and left alone. Eventually Lily says yes. They are both overwhelmed, delighted. Smiley swings her round and runs to get his Aunty.

The farmer couple see Lily and go back to the Dance. Smiley comes back to get Lily to take her to his Aunty. Lily's listening to the music and they dance and finally, kiss. Lily's nervous but Smiley reassures her and introduces her to his Aunty. She's a tough old woman who demands to look at Lily and blames her for Smiley losing his fight. She asks Lily where her people are from. Down Jerramungup way and her Uncle lives down Mt Barker way. Her mother's name was Yirribin and her name is Yibiyung. Aunty becomes grave and tells them they can't be married, they both same, same skin. She tells them to part right away. Sadly they say goodbye and part. Lily says to Aunty that they didn't know – she says lots of people don't now, there are too many families broken. Good thing they asked her and did it the right way. The flustered farmer's wife finds Lily and tells her to come back inside the dance.

Lily is writing a letter to Djindi in the kitchen. The farmer comes in to sneak a biscuit from the tin and is startled to see her there. He tells her he'll post her letter for her in town and leaves to check the sheep. The farmer's wife sees that Lily is unwell and tells her to rest for a bit before finishing her work, hoping she's not coming down with anything. She tells Lily to write for new clothes out of the money the Department has banked on her behalf or the neighbours will start to talk.

We hear a letter to the farmer's wife from the Deputy Chief Protector of Aborigines, informing her she must take out a permit to employ the 'half-caste girl', renewable yearly.

We hear a letter from the Deputy Chief of Aborigines instructing the farmer's wife what proportion (2/6 shillings) of Lily's wages should be paid to her directly and what paid to the Department (7/6 shillings) to be banked on her behalf.

Lily goes to see Smiley's Aunty at the camp, bringing her a bag of flour. She asks after Smiley. Aunty spots that she looks low and tells her to just sit by the fire awhile, the smoke from the bush fire will make her feel better. Lily says she's getting tired of everything, feels trapped, that even the stars don't shine as they used to, she's sick of getting permission for everything.

The farmers meet Lily as she returns from the camp; the farmer's wife smells smoke on her clothes and tells her not to go down to the camp again. The farmer's wife threatens her that if she takes anything else or goes down there again she'll be sent away to work for other farmers. Lily says she won't go back, she'll be good. The farmer's wife tells her to do all the chores and that if it wasn't Sunday she'd be getting a flogging.

Lily hears an owl cry in the night and asks the owl who it's for, who's died? We see Djindi, all ghostly and white in the jail space of 'the Boob' from Moore River. Lily sees Djindi and realises the owl cried out for her. Together they sing and do the actions to *Kaat, Koongat, Boornitj, Djen* (Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes). We hear Djindi speak as Lily remembers giving her her name, wondering where she's from and if there's a God. Lily cries herself to sleep as the stars shine bright all around her.

Lily sees a chitty chitty and says to him that if he wants trouble, she'll give him trouble, no one can stop her. She goes to Aunty's camp and Aunty counsels her to run, to use everything she has and to go; not just for herself but for all the others who never made it home, for Djindi. Aunty tells Yibiyung to run, to keep off the main roads, and Yibiyung runs.

Interspersed with this we hear the farmer's wife calling to report Lily missing from the property. As Yibiyung runs we hear memos back and forth attempting to alert districts and to locate her. She's in the bush and she begins to remember, the language she learnt as a child starts to come back and as she searches for her Uncle, she repeats what he taught her about bush food and kangaroo tracks before she was sent away. A policeman is looking for her but no one can find any trace of her at all.

Finally, Yibiyung and her Uncle walk towards each other – she's home and he points to the star, her mother's star. She hasn't forgotten, and he asks if she remembers the story her mum told her? They say it together, **in language**, and Yirribin says it with them with all their people around them, the stars bright in the sky.

Alone Yibiyung walks forward to tell the audience that she did return, years later, to Moore River. She swore she'd never go back but needed to say goodbye. With her daughter and her grandchildren she stood beneath the pine trees and wept for the past, those who never left and for herself. Moore River could never keep her. Not now.

Her name, she says, is Lily Wynne. She was called a Half-caste, referred to as Number 454 but her name; her identity, her spirit could never be taken from her. Her name is Yibiyung.

### End of Act Three

## Scene breakdown: *YIBIYUNG*

### ACT ONE

Prologue

Birth of Brother

Story of the Stars

Yirribin's Camp

Mother's Death

The Funeral

Mother's Grave

Letter to Inspector – 17 August, 1914

Receiving the News

Yibiyung Visits Mother's Grave

Visit to the Police Man

Last Night at Uncle's

Going to Carrolup

School Lessons at Carrolup

Making a New Friend

Washing Day

Uncle Visits Carrolup

Lesson in Language

Yibiyung and Djindi Playing

Uncle Goes to Town

Too Late

The Train

Welcome to Moore River

In the dorms

A poem

Smiley Comes at Night

Uncle's Letter – 10 April, 1921

Going to the River

Memo to Uncle

At the River

Awake to the Stars

Letters regarding domestic service – 18 Dec, 1922

The Tracker

Back at the Compound

In the Boob

### ACT TWO

Telegram – 2 Jan, 1923

The Placement – Winter

Adoption Letter – 20 May, 1923

The Washing Scene

Letters Arriving

Letter from Deputy Chief Protector of Aborigines – 18 Feb, 1923

Dressing Lily Up

Letter to Superintendent Native Settlement, Mogumber – 13 Sept, 1923

Letter from Deputy Chief Protector of Aborigines – 24 Nov, 1924

The Fig Tree

## Back to Moore River – Memo Jan 1925, Telegram 23 Jan, 1925

### ACT THREE

The Show

The Boxing Tent

The Dance

The Meeting Place

Fitting in

Permits

Sneaking off to Camp

Working Permits

Caught Out

The Call in the Night

Morning After

Montage – Visiting Aunty

Montage – On the Run

Returning Home

Gathering of the File

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### The Playwright: Dallas Winmar

**Dallas** is a Western Australian writer who first worked with Company B in 2001 on the staging of her play *Aliwa*. This play was first showcased in Perth by Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre and was developed at the National Playwright's Conference in 1999 and 2000. She was then commissioned by Kooemba Jdarra Theatre Company to write *Skin Deep* for their 2000 program. *Yibiyung* is her third play, with which she attended the Australian National Playwright's Conference in 2006 and the PlayWriting Australia National Script Workshop in 2007. Dallas was jointly awarded the Kate Challis RAKA Award in 2002 for *Aliwa* (alongside Jane Harrison for *Stolen*). *Aliwa* was also short-listed for the script category of the Western Australian Premier's Book Awards, nominated for commendation for The Louis Esson Prize for Drama: Shortlist 2003 and has been published by Currency Press.



**To write *Yibiyung* – the story of her grandmother's early life, Dallas researched her grandmother's real life and obtained many official files and documents, including letters written by and about her. The letters in the play are the real letters she discovered in this process.**

**On the following page a scanned copy of one of the letters Dallas obtained is included. This letter is one sent to the Doctor and his wife to inform them "a suitable girl is now ready to send"**

**Ask your students to consider:** - the official language the letter uses to refer to Yibiyung – compare this language with the way Yibiyung refers to herself at the end of the play

**Yibiyung**      My Name is Lily Wynne.  
I was referred to as a Half-caste  
I was referred to as Number 454  
But my name, my identity, my heritage can never be taken.  
My name is Yibiyung....

324/2

MOORE RIVER NATIVE SETTLEMENT,  
MOGUMBER.

52

18<sup>th</sup> December 1922



The Secty

Replying to your memo of 29<sup>th</sup> inst  
I have now a suitable girl to send to  
Head Office for M. Martell, I remember.  
She is No 454, Lily Wynne, aged 14 years  
Please instruct when she may be sent  
down

*W. Martell*

Mr. Diddie

Please advise Mr. D. that the  
Council be brought down early in January.  
That's all.

*JA*

20. 12. 22

*W. Martell  
but call  
11. 12. 22*

HENRY WILLIAM ATKINSON

621/32

PART OF

## Dramaturg: Louise Gough

**Louise** is a dramaturg for theatre and a script editor for film and television. She has previously worked with Dallas Winmar on the development of *Aliwa* (Company B) and is thrilled to be continuing their relationship on *Yibiyung*. Among her many theatre positions Louise has worked as the Dramaturg in Residence at La Boite Theatre and as the Literary Manager at Playbox Theatre. As a freelance dramaturg and in her company positions, she has developed over forty professionally produced plays, from solo shows to significant mainstage productions. For television Louise worked as the Editorial Manager for Television Drama and Narrative Comedy at the ABC. Whilst in this role she was involved in the development and production of over fifty hours of first-run narrative drama, airing between 2002 and 2005. Louise began her work in film in 2000 as a script editor and has since worked on many projects. Her most recent position was Script Manager at Film Victoria where she oversaw and managed investment in local feature film and television projects. Louise currently works part time as Development Executive for independent film production company Robyn Kershaw Productions and runs her own freelance development business.

### DRAMATURGY IN *Yibiyung*: What does a Dramaturg do?

Regarding my work on YIBIYUNG my main focus was on drawing out the historical story from Dallas (from the files, the books, her grandmother's history) and then working with her to find the best way in which to structure and unfold the story. I certainly did some preliminary reading but only as a point of interest, something to have in my mind, to ensure Dallas was covering as many historical bases as she could with regard to the individual story of her grandmother...

Dramaturgically, whilst of course it was important to be historically accurate, our focus in working together was to be 'emotionally' and 'narratively' accurate, that is, to find a truth to the storytelling that was both particular and universal. Clearly Dallas knows some aspects of the 'truth' of her grandmother's story and would also liaise and consult with her mum about certain things, but generally it was extrapolating from the real into the fictional, so in a way *Yibiyung*'s story became an 'every woman's' story. The sorts of things we had to resolve beyond things like: what letters to include; what were the polices of the time; where did she go; how many placements was she sent to; what was mission life like; were things like geography i.e. how far did she have to travel (on foot); in reality how long was her journey to get back home etc etc ... things that might inform dramatic and storytelling choices.

**Louise Gough**

**After reading the above paragraphs, and after seeing the performance, ask your students to think about & discuss the following questions: -**

- Did you find the historical context of the play easy to understand?
- How do the letters used in the play work to tell the story more successfully?
- What difficulties might a playwright and dramaturg encounter in telling someone's true story?
- What strategies have been used in the play's structure to tell *Yibiyung*'s story more clearly?
- How does the start of the play – immersing the audience in *Yibiyung*'s childhood, told in Noongar language, impact on the audience?
- Does the impact of this beginning (especially the language) develop through the play; causing the audience to identify with *Yibiyung*, her story and her determination to find her way home?
- How did you respond to hearing the story of the stars once again in language at the end of the play when *Yibiyung* had found her Uncle and her home?

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: Policies of the Time:** At the turn of the century the lives of Indigenous people in Western Australia became increasingly defined and controlled by a number of laws and policies. In 1897 the Western Australian Government, significantly, assumed responsibility for the administration of Indigenous affairs. This followed a decade of wrangling with the British Government for control. Under the provisions of the Aborigines Act 1897, the Aborigines Department of Western Australia was formed. It replaced the Aborigines Protection Board and was headed by the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Henry Prinsep. The Department was made responsible for the well being of all Indigenous people in Western Australia, and given control over the provision of relief to the elderly, sick and destitute. The Act also placed a number of restrictions on Indigenous people, including making it an offence for any Indigenous person to enter a public house, simultaneously increasing police powers to enforce these provisions.

The Chief Protector argued that further control was needed. Particularly, he was concerned with the number of children of mixed descent growing up in 'native camps'. He declared that they learned only "laziness and vice" and left to their own devices would grow up "vagrants and outcasts" and "not only a disgrace, but a menace to society." With tighter government control he argued these children could become "useful workers" (quoted by Anna Haebich, *For Their Own Good*, University of Western Australia Press, 1992, 57).

His arguments led to the passing of the Aborigines Act 1905, which made the Chief Protector of Aborigines the legal guardian of all 'aboriginal' and 'half caste' children up to the age of 16 years, enabling him to send any 'aboriginal' and 'half caste' child to an orphanage, mission, or industrial school, with or without the child's parents' permission. The Government held control over the movement of Indigenous people, setting up prohibited areas and native reserves. The 1905 Act also stipulated that Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men could not be married without the Chief Protector's written permission. The Act also ordered the appointment of regional Protectors with powers to grant permits for employment of Aborigines and to manage their earnings.

Throughout this period the Aborigines Department played an increasingly intrusive role in the lives of Indigenous people of Western Australia. Although the 1905 Act had significantly enhanced the level of control the Aborigines Department was able to exercise over Indigenous people, the Chief Protector continued to agitate for stricter legislation, resulting in the Aborigines Act Amendment 1911. This Act further consolidated the Department's powers, particularly with regard to the guardianship of illegitimate 'half caste' children, and continued the trend towards complete Departmental control in the lives of Indigenous people, a trend that would prevail over the coming years.

ABORIGINAL GROUPS OF THE SOUTH WEST OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Norman Tindale map – 1931

### CRUCIAL DATES & LEGISLATION

- 1886 ABORIGINES PROTECTION ACT** – passed by British Govt after atrocities committed against Aboriginal people in WA. Created Aborigines Protection Board with right to take Aboriginal children into custody.
- 1897 ABORIGINES ACT** – British Govt gave up control over Aboriginal people to State Govt of WA. Aborigines Department created instead of Protection Board. Harry Prinsep created 'Chief Protector' of Aboriginal people.
- 1905 ABORIGINES ACT** – Made Chief Protector legal guardian of every Aboriginal & 'half-caste' child under 16. Basis for repressive/coercive State control over every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people in WA.
- 1911 ABORIGINES ACT AMENDMENT ACT** – Expanded powers of Chief Protector to have right over every 'illegitimate half-caste' child to the 'exclusion of rights of mother of an illegitimate half-caste child'
- 1936 NATIVE ADMINISTRATION ACT** – Commissioner of Native Affairs (formerly Chief Protector) made legal guardian of all legitimate & illegitimate 'native' children, notwithstanding if the child has a parent or relative living.
- 1963 NATIVE WELFARE ACT** – Repealed right of Commissioner to be guardian of 'native' minors
- 1967 REFERENDUM** – Changed Federal Constitution, finally entitling Aboriginal people to equal citizen rights
- 1968 CATTLE INDUSTRY PASTORAL LAW** - Entitled Aboriginal pastoral workers to equal pay
- 2008** – Formal unreserved apology from Federal Government to the Stolen Generations and their families



## NOONGAR WORDS in order of appearance in the play

word	say	means	notes
<b>Nidja</b>	(Ni-ja)	Here	
<b>Worl-ak</b>	(Wor-luck)	In the Sky	
<b>Kaya</b>	(Ka-ya)	Yes	
<b>Yoowart</b>	(You-art)	No/Not/Didn't	
<b>Kooralong</b>	(Koor-long)	Long Time Ago	
<b>Djindi</b>	(Gin-di)	Star	Use dj sound at start
<b>Boola</b>	(Bool-a)	Lots/Plenty	
<b>Yokal</b>	(Your-gal)	Women	
<b>Ken<u>y</u></b>	(Kay-nj)	One	Like Ken, or Keny(a) with silent a
<b>Koodjal</b>	(Kood- <u>jal</u> )	Two	
<b>Dambart</b>	(Dum-bart)	Three	
<b>Mo</b>	(Mow)	Four	
<b>Mara</b>	(Ma-ra)	Five / Hand	
<b>Noongar</b>	(Noong-ar)	People	
<b>Koorlin<u>y</u></b>	(Kool-inj)	Travel/Move	Sound nj closest to way ny sound is – almost silent y
<b>Kedala</b>	(Key-da-la)	Night	
<b>Miya</b>	(My-a)	Camp	
<b>Moorn</b>	(M-ore-n)	Dark	The r sound in the middle is rolled
<b>Maamen</b>	(Mar-min)	Men	
<b>Waabin<u>y</u></b>	(War-binj)	Playing	Sound nj closest to way ny sound is – almost silent y
<b>Kitj-ak</b>	(Kidg-uck)	Spearing	
<b>Baamin<u>y</u></b>	(Bar-mi-nj)	Clap/Strike/Hit	Sound nj closest to way ny sound is – almost silent y
<b>Moonboorli</b>	(Moon-boor-lee)	Way up there/ Struggling to look	The r sound in the middle is rolled, as in word boor, boorish
<b>Dat</b>	(Dat)	Stop	
<b>Mokin<u>y</u></b>	(Mock-inj)	Alike/Same	Sound nj closest to way ny sound is – almost silent y
<b>Wadjella</b>	(Wo-ja-la)	White Person	The d is not really pronounced
<b>Kongkan</b>	(Kon-ken)	Uncle	
<b>Djoorap</b>	(Dj-oor-ap)	Happy	
<b>Ngoo<u>nt</u></b>	(Ng-oo-nt)	Oldest Brother	The ng as in end of song - ooont
<b>Kwop</b>	(Quop)	Good	
<b>Aliwa</b>	(Ali-wah)	Beware/Lookout!	
<b>Yongka</b>	(Yong-ga)	Kangaroo	The gg sound is a bit like gk
<b>Ni</b>	(Ni)	Listen!	Very short sound – not like knee.
<b>Merenu</b>	(Mare-in)	Food	First part - mer as in air, rare - ny sound together, near silent y
<b>Boodjera</b>	(Boo-dj-era)	Land/Country	Bood as in good, dj sound aira
<b>Djidi-djidi</b>	(Djidi-djidi)	Willy-wagtail	Like chitty-chitty but with a dj sound at start

<b>Moordang</b>	(More-dung)	Darker	As in Moorn, r sound is rolled
<b>Nyorlam</b>	( <u>Ny</u> -or-lam)	Owl	Ny sound almost like nyuh
<b>Wara</b>	(Worrah)	No good	Warra as in Illawarra
<b>Ngaangk</b>	( <u>Ng</u> -ar- <u>ngk</u> )	Mum	Sound ng as in end of song
<b>Koolinga</b>	(Kool-un-ga)	Children/Child	
<b>Kaat</b>	(Kart)	Head	
<b>Koongat</b>	(Koong-gat)	Shoulders	
<b>Boornitj</b>	(Boor-ni-ch)	Knee	The r sound in the middle is rolled
<b>Djen</b>	(Gen)	Feet	
<b>Miyal</b>	(Me-al)	Eye	
<b>Dwongk</b>	(Dwonk)	Ear	
<b>Djaa</b>	(Jar)	Mouth	
<b>Mooly</b>	(Mool( <u>ya</u> ))	Nose	Almost like mool but faint half-pronounced ya sound at the end
<b>Ngalak</b>	( <u>Ng</u> -ar-luck)	We	Sound ng as in end of song
<b>Maarak</b>	(Ma-rak)	Hands	Beginning as in ma-ra (hand)
<b>Karlark</b>	(Karl-uck)	Fire	
<b>Kep</b>	(K-air-b)	Water	Last sound like p and b at once
<b>Wardong</b>	(Waa <u>ard</u> ong)	Crow	The r sound in middle is rolled
<b>Coolbardi</b>	K-oorl-bar-di	Magpie	Both r sounds are slightly rolled

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Noongar Language pronunciation: Many Noongar words are made up of very different sounds to English – the English pronunciation suggested is an approximation. Some of the sounds in Noongar are faintly pronounced or almost silent while others run into each other. In this list of words some sounds that run together are indicated by underlining.

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Notes on: Noongar Spelling

No u, no c, no h, no q (kw is the q)

Double letters: oo's, aa's , no double r, no double g – gk is similar

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Noongar Dialects: There are many variations within the language and many dialects of which seven survive. People from different areas within the one region often pronounce the same word differently. As the language was an oral language spelling of words in English is even more variable.

**SOURCE:**

Dallas Winmar, unpublished playscript, *Yibiyung*

**CONSULTATION:**

Roma Winmar, Noongar speaker & LOTE teacher; Language & Cultural Consultant, *Yibiyung*  
 Kyle Morrison, Assistant Director, *Yibiyung*

## Story of the Stars –

[begins the play and will be spoken in Noongar, but repeated later in English]

**Yirribin:** Yira djinang. Yira worl-ak djinang.  
***(Look up there. See up there in the Sky!)***

**Yibiyung:** Baal bokadja?  
***(That one.)***

**Yirribin:** Kaya. Baalap nidja mokiny djinang.  
***(Yes. They look like this.)***

Baalap yoowart alidja kooralang. Koorra, koorra djindi baalang boola mokiny.  
***(It wasn't there long time ago. Long time ago stars all looked the same.)***

Djinda baalang yokal.  
***(Those stars are women.)***

***(Yirribin points to the sky and starts to count the stars.)***

Keny, koodjal, dambart, mo, mara.  
***(One. Two. Three. Four. Five.)***

Yokal baalap Kebak Noongar. Baalabiny wardarn-ak yoowal nidja koorliny.  
***(They water people. They come from near the big water.)***

Keny kedala baalap miya warniny.  
***(One night they made camp.)***

Yokal djarbal warn keb-ak-ngat miya baranginy.  
***(The young women had to get bark to cart water in back to camp.)***

Yokal koorlangka kep baranginy. Kedala boola moorn. Koorlangka yoowart barn bokadja koorliny.  
***(Young women had to get water for children. Night too dark. Too far for the children to walk.)***

Baalap yoowart nidja koorl. Yoowart yoowal yey.  
***(They never come back. Not straight away.)***

Maaman baalap karlak koorliny, yokal wardiny.  
***(The men from the camp went to look for them.)***

Yokal yey ngaama, keba-k-ngat wabiny.  
***(They were still playing around the waterhole.)***

Maaman boola karanginy. (ka-rang-iny)  
***(The men got real wild.)***

Maaman kitj-ak woolitj baaminy.  
***(They took spears and poked the girls in the calves of the legs.)***

Baalabiny wortan yaakoorliny. (yaa-koorl-iny)  
**(So the girls ran away.)**

Yokal kert-kert kerdiba koorl. Maaman yaakoorliny, yoka yoowart baranginy.  
**(They run flat out. Men kept chasing but can't catch them.)**

Yeyi maar koomba koorliny. Yokal worl-ak yira koorliny  
**(Then a big wind come blowing. Took them girls up in the sky.)**

Moonboorli djinang.  
**(Right up there.)**

Maaman baalap kitj-ak koordidjiny, koordidjiny.  
**(Men kept on throwing them spears.)**

Yokal baalap wortan koorliny... kaditj yoowart kitj-ak baaminy.  
**(The girls scattered so they wouldn't be speared.)**

Baalang dat nyininy yey, dat nyininy.  
**(That is why they are like that now, still there.)**

Baalang keny bokadja nyin.  
**(All away from each other.)**

Yoowart djinang djindi mokiny.  
**(Don't look like other stars.)**

**(Yibiyung gets up from where she is sitting, and looks towards the bush, and smiles. Yirribin stops her story and looks towards the bush too. Yibiyung sits and Yirribin continues with her story.)**

**Uncle:** Wadjela waangkiny baalap Southern Cross.  
**(White man call it the Southern Cross.)**

**Yirribin:** Yokal kweyiny yoowarl nidja koorliny.  
**(Them young women too frightened to come back.)**

Baalap yoowarl kweyiny kitj-ak baaminy.  
**(They come back, they frightened they get speared.)**

Kaaditj djinang!  
**(You got to learn.) (Points to head.)**

Yoowart kaaditj-boort warniny noonook yoowart wabiny.  
**(Don't play around and forget when you got a job to do)**

Yeyi baalap wara-warniny.  
**(Now they been punished.)**

Baalap keny baalap bo-ka-dja nyininy. Baalap winyaan.  
**(They all away from each other. On their own.)**

© Dallas Winmar

***This script extract is for educational use in the classroom only***

## Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes

(Noongar – Baladong dialect)

[Yibiyung teaches Djindi to sing this in language when they are at Carolup Mission]

Kaat, koongat, boornitj, djen.

Boornitj djen. Boornitj djen

Kaat, koongat, boornitj, djen.

Ngalak maarak baaminy.

***Head and shoulders, knees and toes,***

***Knees and toes, knees and toes,***

***Head and shoulder, knees and toes.***

***We all clap hands together***

Miyal, dwongk, djaa, mooly.

Djaa, mooly. Djaa, mooly.

Miyal, dwongk, Djaa, mooly.

Ngalak maarak baaminy.

***Eyes and ears and mouth and nose,***

***Mouth and nose, mouth and nose,***

***Eyes and ears and mouth and nose.***

***We all clap hands together.***

“Noongar is a word used by Aboriginal people of the south west to describe themselves, their language (both original and contemporary forms) and...as an adjective describing their country, their way of life and other features of their culture. Its meaning is ‘man’ or ‘person’ and it is used across dialect boundaries. The Noongar language groups belong to a region that extends from Moora (to the north of Perth) through to Ravensthorpe and Esperance (on the southern coast)...Dialect differences did and still exist throughout this region. Because of the major disruption to Noongar life caused by wadjela settlement, there has been considerable language change, mostly from the influence of other dialects, other Aboriginal languages and, of course, English, or even for some Noongars, other European languages....Wadjela occupation brought about displacement, disease, massacres, intermarriage, resettlement, separation of children from parents, institutionalisation and bans on speaking Noongar in the presence of wadjelas (at schools, missions and other institutions). For some, Noongar became a covert language used to pass on information. Many others were deprived of learning Noongar because of an enforced separation from speakers of the language.”

From **Robyn McCarron, *Noongar Language and Literature in SPAN, No 36 (1993) Postcolonial Fictions***

## **INTERVIEW on Noongar Language and *Yibiyung***

**Roma Winmar, Language and Cultural Consultant for *Yibiyung* speaks about the Noongar language in the play, written by her daughter Dallas about her mother and Dallas' grandmother.**

**Interview with Christine Bradburn & Cathy Hunt on Friday 8 August, 2008 (edited version)**

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**Okay well if we can just talk about what we were talking about before; about language and how it was taken away and how it's been gifted back, and that resurgence of interest and trying to find it? (CB)**

Mmm, yeah originally, well actually prior to settlement – I mean as a teacher I always talked to the students, prior to settlement there were many language groups within Australia and when you talk about it to people now, they didn't know, they're ...ignorant of the fact that people actually had languages of their own you know, and ah, not only that, that there are so many different languages and so many different language dialects within the languages also and people that can relate to our languages; the indigenous languages better, are the people that come from overseas. Like the Italians and even the Irish, I suppose, how you go from one village to another and not really understand what the next bloke's saying, you see, and to have someone come over and sort of say well 'Now you will learn', ah God's language I suppose, 'now you will learn to speak *our* language', and it's not – oh it's hard to sort of put into words, okay: "You will speak our language." In reality, I suppose - I'm not saying everybody, either. But I'm saying the *Powers That Be*. Because obviously there were lots of people that came out who were trying to find a spot, a place - because a lot of people actually ran away and became part of the community, as such.. Way back; long way back.

And I can also say that a lot of the settlers that were down our area, there were some that learned to speak the Aboriginal Languages as fluently as what the Aboriginal people knew themselves. So on one hand you might have...different ones down around Cape Rich on the South Coast.

You have different kind of people. You get people that want to conquer and you've got people that want to.. ah..

**Discover? (CH)**

Yeah And they have the value of the human being rather than being the conqueror. (Very dramatic, isn't it? I'm just giving background you know.) You can't say well '*They* did this' because it's not *They* at all, it was individuals within the *Powers That Be* that changed; made policies and everything else. Whereas you had other people who were satisfied to be there and learn what they could for their own survival as well as still nurture what everyone else had, you know?...

And the funny thing was, back in our, like in a place called round Gnowangerup and that, these particular property owners could come into town and they would speak the lingo and - it wasn't really a power thing I don't think – they'd speak to the Aboriginal people in their own tongue. And the other townies, or the other white people wouldn't have a clue what they were saying. Yet if you had the Aboriginal person speaking that way themselves, they'd be in trouble.

**Yeah, yep. (CB CH)**

But yet they couldn't stop this other mob. And they probably carried the language better than what the Aboriginal people did because of the way that things were. Like no more language: "You speak English. You're a savage, you speak English."

### **So within that policy, when does that fit into your family timeline? (CB)**

Well right up from when Mum like when was born, right. And within the play itself the 1905 Act was already in place. And there you have this young child who's with her family group and her mother dies and so she's carried on with other family and then, being a half-caste, or a quarter caste or a quadroon or whatever they like to, you know, all these different varying stages of blackness or whiteness – whichever way you like to look at it.

Yeah, you're sort of removed from there, and you take away that culture. You take away the language of anybody you take away the culture.

Language is something that's in your – well I reckon it's in your genes, you're born to it, you hear it and it doesn't matter how long you've been away from something if somebody starts talking, you know, you can feel that sort of growth inside you; the familiarity of something, you don't quite understand it, but the language. I mean, I'd heard it but never, you know, speak it. You know, here you are: "Little brown fella, you're white fella now, you've got to speak like this".

And even in that period of time when they had exemptions and you were exempt from the Act; this is one of the policies – if you became exempt from the Act it gave you an opportunity to go into hotels perhaps or be served in a different way, you know what I mean, to be served in a shop because you're a white fella now. But there were reserves then, and you had the reserve, and you have the town house, the white community and you have the reserves. And your exemption actually exempts you from being a native, right. So what good is it – what's it done?

And, you know, most of them lost their exemption, didn't they because they went back to their family and they were 'fraternising with the natives', you know. So, all this silliness that sort of, went on and the people still carried themselves through all of this, you know.

### **From your mother were you taught any language or had at that stage she..? (CB)**

I heard the language. I was the youngest, always hanging around, and of course you knew, what they were saying but then you were discouraged from speaking it too, well, because of the *Powers that Be*, you know. You're learning your standard Australian English and you're looking to the future and that's where your future's going to be, by being an Australian. You're being an Australian but I mean, you weren't quite an Australian because you weren't counted in the census and that until 1967, right?

### **Yeah.. (CH CB)**

You know you were a native, like flora and fauna and everything else. When you look back at history it's just so silly, it's like giving you things in one hand and squashing something else in the other, you know?

And, by the way, growing up I never thought about anything. I was very whole within my own life, because we were raised as equals.

... And a long time down the track, in fact when I wanted Dallas to start writing, when I thought – I wanted to write myself actually, I wanted to follow the timeline of my mother as to you know, where she went, what was her journey, the key places that she'd been to and how; what effects they'd had on her, as to what made her become the woman she was then.

... all the time, all through the years, she always, when she wanted to speak language she did. And when we actually moved to a place called Narrogin and there were many people coming in from other areas; there were Italians and Dutch people and I don't know, Ukrainians, anyway there were lots of immigrants brought out here to help clear the land and that too. By that time we'd actually been allotted the first *house* and you know, Aboriginal housing, like from the government; inside the town area, you know? It wasn't lined on the outside, but one room was lined. But then that was all new to us – it was like, gosh you could turn the tap on, and there was a tank outside and you know inside there was actually a toilet not far away and there was, inside there was troughs you could wash in, instead of carting a dish or going down the dam and there was a copper inside that little area too, that you made the fire up and half choked while you're having a bath, you know!

And you could let the water out and actually let the next one come in and actually not all – from the cleanest to the dirtiest, you know, wash in that same water. And during that time there was curfew, but we didn't know.

### **Oh, okay (CB)**

We didn't know. Mum would just – “Come on, you kids” and we just followed her instructions. And yet, when in later years you go back and find out that we could have been picked up and taken away, had we not come then. And some people were. I mean, they were just sort of there after hours, they were taken away; their parents were looking for them and they were already gone. They were gone to Carrolup or one of the other mission stations, you know. But during that period it was very interesting, this is the early 50's I'm talking about, around there there were signs 'No Natives Allowed' (because we were natives then), 'No Natives Allowed' in the toilets, public toilets. 'No Natives Allowed' in the public swimming areas, you know. And of course, then there was the language.

Mum had actually been to Moore River, she'd been to those places and them fellas they separated all these people. All these different language groups they all put in the one spot, please, because they were just all Aboriginal.

### **Yeah so there was all different groups that.. (CB)**

All different language groups stuck in the one spot. And I mean; they weren't; they had to adjust to each other, right? - as well as to a new area. And back then, too there were people put in – imagine being taken from the North-West, in the desert, more or less and being put out at Rottneest in this cold cold country, you know, surrounded by ocean, and you weren't an ocean person. Those kind of things sort of happened, you know.

But in here – Yibiyung of course, she learned all these different dialects. She learned all the different dialects from them.

### **Wow. (CB)**



I mean you just can't put everything into this play. She learned everything from them. And as she went out on these placements she learnt all the standard Australian English. She learnt how to do this with the - (*sticks up little finger as if drinking from a teacup*)

### **Yes (CB CH)**

And moulded it all in together, you know; just gleaned everything from here, there and everywhere. And because of particular things that happened, no doubt you put yourself above all that. All the negative things that happened to Mum, never showed on the surface.

She never carried that as baggage, it was always positive. And like, going back to Narrogin - when we were there at Narrogin, and there's the Dutch and the Italians and all these other fellows and Mum, all this mob here speaking their own language because they couldn't speak English and that was a part of them that they'd come over with and they weren't going to let that go, anyway, you know? And there's this Aboriginal lady and they'd be talking and she'd, if people come up she'd start talking language and of course the rest of the family would say: - "Mummy, don't do that, Mummy don't talk like that, you'll get in trouble". And she'd say "This is my country", you know: - "This is my country, that's my language and I will talk my language." Even though she didn't want us to talk the language!

### **So in not wanting you to talk the language – did that mean that she'd just never teach you any of it and you just picked up things from hearing it? (CB)**

We picked up, at that stage, we picked up - listening to them, and their body language; when they'd all get together. But they'd say "Go away" and quite often they'd – I mean I know now all the things that they were saying!...

### **So when did you start actually..? (CB)**

Becoming serious was 1992. This is back at Narrogin, again; this is many years later, back at Narrogin, quite a few of the elders from the different areas and the different dialects within Noongar country, which is a big area. There was talk about reconciliation, all of those kind of things – well language is part of it, you know.

And so they said, well look; we'll all get together, we're having this big language meeting you fellas and we need to have – are we going to have a general dictionary? I mean you're just starting off, so what are we going to do? You can't make dictionaries for all these fellas, you're only just starting off and ah, so I sat there, and it was going to be the Noongar language, you see, and that goes from like ah up ahead of Perth, out east and down to round Esperance; there's a map in over there.

And I listened to the linguist and I listened to the people, and before they ever did anything else, before the dictionary started now they can't work out what name they're going to use for this dictionary – was it a Noongar, a Noongah a Nyungah? – just this one word; there were so many variations that I went away from there and I thought; this is *never* going to happen, they can't decide on one word, how're they going to decide on a dictionary?

And a few years later, by then I'd moved to the city, a few years later I was teaching locally in Perth – I wasn't teaching language rather, I was an education worker, and you know, a flyer came around saying ... "If anyone's interested in Noongar languages or indigenous languages we are having workshops"; because prior to that about a hundred representatives from over the state had come in and spoken with the Education Department.

And because they were going to have Aboriginal studies in by 2000 and all the rest of it the others said: - "Well we want our language too. We want our languages taught in the schools", instead of French and you know, whatever: - "We want an opportunity". So, the Education Department said: "Well, you know, we'll give you all this, we'll do it through LOTE but it's got to be people working in the schools, they've got to have the training, all the elders that speak have to come in, there's got to be lots and lots of research" and whatever.

And of course there was Daisy Bates' records, there's Tindale maps, there's all kinds of things, but you had to have your own language recorded, your own particular language, you know.

### **And when did the recordings from – I've forgotten his name..? (CB)**

Laves? That come a long time ago, that's only come back a few years ago. So this is another thing now that's happening for us, but through all that then – the first time I went to the language group and there were different; the oldies were there saying: "This is the word, this is how you say it - you look, you try to say it." They did workshops and you'd all do particular things, you know like in the classroom. And we'd all have to get up and make a presentation.

And my first presentation, was nothing, mainly because I was overwhelmed, and then I thought, I'm going over these things in my head and with our language it's quite often a similar word, it means exactly the opposite. You might be wanting to say something that's nice and it turns out it's quite vulgar if it's said in the wrong way and I got up there and I froze and I thought, they're either going to laugh at me or they're going to growl at me if I say the wrong word – I'm a grown woman, you know!

We did a bit more and the next one I got up and then I was overwhelmed because the speaker that was there was actually the daughter of a lady that her and Mum used to talk back and forth, no matter where they were, and they were very fluent in several different dialects, you know, and Janet Collard, she was up there with me cause we were part of a team and the only thing I could say at that time was: "Well, I'm having a go, at the language, but I'm overwhelmed because it was my mother's language" and all of a sudden, all of a sudden in saying these words and actually, you know, speaking sentences and that; it's like a regrowth inside where you're - start right from your toes and just sort of comes right up and fulls you right up with something, you know, that was there all the time, really.

Well, it was missing, and all of a sudden you get this flood that sort of comes in and you know; "That's who I am; that's my language and that's what I'm meant to be doing."

And then the progress you get from there, meeting up with all these different people, different language groups and being able to tell children, teachers anybody – this is what it looked like, these are the Tindale maps; this is what it looked like before settlement. These were all the language groups – there's not roads or anything going through – and within each of those language groups there were all these different dialects, you know? So if you have a look at that and then think about first settlement, you draw your own conclusion.

And then gradually of course, if you had it there, you'd see the eraser; sort of going over, and those marks sort of fading, or blending into one, you know, and then comes the opportunity for regeneration....

### **When you're talking about regeneration, when you're talking about all the different dialects and languages blending – how are you trying to pull them apart? (CB)**

That's right across, that's how it happened, so then there was, when they decided in '92, luckily there were, down our way, there were still some speakers from different groups. And then, you know, then it was sort of, in the wider community, you knew it was *all right*.

It's all right now, you can come out from where you were if you still remember something, and you can start to share it with others. And oh boy, that sense of freedom and pride, you know? Just sort of really building up again, and yeah, with that coming, cultural things; tourism, all kinds of things coming, having cultural centres and that and people working from there but for me; I think it was very fitting that I should become part of a school or part of the school system.

Because that's what my mother fought so much for, was the school system. And with my own kids, you think, well you're going to have the best education that you can have and then you decide, with all the skills that you have and the gifts that you have you use them however you want. But her strengths sort of come through in each one of them, in gleaning and you know?

**It would be great actually if you could go over how your mother fought for the schools because we talked about it before but we didn't write it all down. So you were saying that your mother went out and tried.. (CB)**

When she went out and when she married and she had her children; at that particular stage, even though you're holding all the culture, you know that because everything's been, what do you call it?

**Suppressed (CH)**

Suppressed, you know the only way out is going to be education, to be able to stand on equal ground with others around you. I mean, that can be done in a lot of ways. But having the knowledge of education is another thing again to fit into the world that was around us at that particular time.

I mean, they couldn't probably stand up to us mob when it came to bush survival and all that kind of thing but there was these other stuff.

**And you said your mother went around and she found people to get into a school and she.. (CB)**

Yeah and there was a particular lady, Miss Fox, Mrs Fox and this was a tiny little school and you've got all these well-to-do cockies, you might say, around the place and it wasn't quite the done thing to have the blackfellas there. You'd be working or whatever and that's okay. And Mum took her children to the school and the young teacher welcomed them at the school – there was an uproar - but then there were all these meetings and whatever, and then it was okay for them to go to that school.

And I had the opportunity of meeting that lady, last year, at the age of 93 she was, to be able to tell her or show her how far we'd come as a people, and as a family, because of her actions of believing in equality. And I told her; "I love you, I love you because of what you did for our family". And she was able to tell me; "I believed in equality then and I believe in equality now."

.... further down the track of course, bout five years ago, we heard about "Oh someone's got papers, got files, it's the Noongar language."

**So it's only a couple of years ago? (CB)**

Yeah, but the process of actually *having*, returning Laves' files...

I mean that's the whole thing, you see.... it really annoys me when you hear people say; "Yeah those whitefellas they did this or these fellas they did that" you know, because it's really; when it all boils down, it's the act of an individual.

People are within the policies and it depends on how a person was to carry something out. You get people that were humane and people that weren't.

Yeah, and with the Laves files... In the 1930's, this is what we found out after; in the 1930's, Gerhardt Laves, he probably went around Australia, but he went to the South-West of Western Australia, into our home country and he spoke to about eight men who would have been leaders in their own family groups, you see. They were quite young men, I suppose. And they told him their language and stories associated with their country and that was like, a lot of cultural stuff, you know. And that was a way of learning, teaching; you know, through the story. Cause once you tell a story there's all these other layers, underlying stuff; you look at it as you turn the page – there's something else there.

After a time he probably grew tired of travelling or whatever and he went back to, ah, America, as I understand it; to his own country anyway. And he'd had enough of writing, it probably didn't earn him any money so he had to raise his family and he stored the manuscripts in his attic. As years went by, of course, they were forgotten, I think he passed on and people going through the stuff realised they were manuscripts from somewhere and they saw 'Australia' and 'Western Australia' and then they returned them to Canberra, I think it was first.

One of the mob was over there Canberra way, they must've been going through something – we're a very inquisitive people, you know, and – "Look here, this is from Western Australia, so why isn't it back over there?" So it goes back to a university over there. And then you have another mob who are doing things over there and they say:

- "What's those things – they're files, you know – well where'd they come from?"
- "Well there's a whole package of this stuff, you know and South West language, see."

In the meantime, we're already established now, in the schools, doing our languages, like all over on the West Coast, from North to South, people are doing LOTE. There was about 90 schools or 90 areas being used as LOTE schools so when I heard about it I thought:

- "Well if it's from our country and I'm teaching the language I want to be able to see it too because I want to know that I'm doing the right thing."

I want to be able to compare. If you're going to do a job you need to do it right. It might have been given as a token thing, you know, but it's not going to be token, I won't allow it to be a token thing; it's going to be real and proper.

So a bit more back and forth over say a year or so. So then we go and form a committee; Reference group, over with the uni and that. After that – what do we need to do now? Okay, you need to track down the descendents, so who do you look for? Okay there's Roberts over there, there's someone else there, there's Winmar there, they're all dead, so who's next in line – so you draw in all these people; send out information, everyone comes together and then, okay so we've got all this – not quite sure what to do with it!

But we've got it. And then Kim Scott, he's an author, an Australian author, at that particular time, he went to some kind of conference and it's funny how they're people there from the Book Council as well,

and one particular lady she said: "I'm looking for a project to work with Indigenous people" and he said "Well, you can work with us". "Well what are you doing?"

So he explained what was happening and of course she and several others, along with the State Library and that kind of thing; different people come on board, you know? And then we started having meetings with all other people now and you think – what the hell, what's going to happen or whatever, you know? and then one of the ladies says; "Well we'll be able to get funding through this, and funding through that and this is going to be a great project" and it sort of snowballed from there. There were people that come on board that were actually giving their time for nothing. You know? Because they believed in the regeneration of this language and giving back identity, you know, to the people.

And so it was arranged that we had three workshops, one starting off with how one would make up a book, another with illustration and people like Frenez Lessec who was a well-known children's illustrator came, and all the time the people that are there have an opportunity to learn and upskill themselves so that later on down the track, you know, it's not like – the difference was: it's wasn't like me doing it for me, you're doing it for the whole community, to raise them up in different areas and that..

Yeah, so then came time to ..we delivered everything back and it was that time that the oldies sat around and they looked at the way it was written by the linguist and then you know it was all on butcher's paper and everything else. We went through particular stories word for word: "Is that the right sound? Is that the right word?" So the process was just so long. And we had a long weekend doing that, and at the end of it, what they decided – there was a lady there from Allan & Unwin as well who sort of listened to the process and everything else and ah the oldies said; "Well there's three of these stories, if you like you can work on them".

And that was the beginning of all this hard work that we've taken on...for you know.. (*laughs*) ...to actually find illustrators and do the illustrations and then ah – because some of them had sort of dropped off, you know, the excitement had gone and they sort of dropped off along the way, I found myself being one of the illustrators!

...And all of a sudden, here I am now; have to do these paintings... which I did and then we took that product, we took it back to Albany – where we got the language from and gave packages now, of the three stories as a mock book-run. Three stories to about fifty of the families who we thought were the, the bosses, you know? Yeah. And they in turn, we said well, we'll come back, see that now, we'll come back later and in the Harmony Week we actually went back and we did presentations to all the schools in the area then. Alan Carpenter was there too, he's actually our Premier, because that's where he came from. But he didn't come as a Premier he came as somebody that had grown up with those people, it was part of his history as well as ours, you know what I mean?

And in going to all those schools we said: "Well, this is our history – yours and mine. You know. And this is – your ancestors were here also, when this language was recorded and taken away", you know. Really a two-way thing, really powerful.

And then we've just finished doing the same thing in the metropolitan area. But you don't have the time. I mean, my Principal has sort of given me time to go off and do this and you don't have time. But it's a full-time thing that you could be doing. And you're sort of promoting other languages .. as well.

And I always say to them, okay this is for *us*, this is what *we've* done and this is what *we're* doing. But you, from over there, you know Dutchy, you come from Dutchland, don't turn your nose up at your Nan

and Pop when they're talking, that's part of you and that will always be part of you because you're not, you can't be who you're not. (*laughs*) You know?

### **Yeah (CB & CH)**

Like, I'm Noongar Australian right and somebody else might be Bardi Australian. Whatever your heritage is you've got to carry that with you and it's once, I mean, that breakdown is what makes people stupid. (*laughs*)

You lose your identity, you know, and yeah, so we were actually working on the Laves, but to be able to – getting back to the play – that's where Mum went from, she went from her language, you know. And she carted it with her all her life. And that's why, to us, it's so important that that part of the land and the language is where the beginning of the story and it's – I'm not really putting this right, but you know what I mean?

### **Yeah, yep (CB & CH)**

That's why it's there. And she went back to it, you know? Through all the different things she was able to go back and still tell her mum's story of the stars, you know? But I s'pose that was like a light to her on her journey; all the way through, it didn't matter where she went. Look up there and there Mum's watching me, you know?...She found her home. Yeah.

And, I tell you, she gleaned everything. And she was never one to look down on this person or that person. She could go to the camps, she could go to the real poor people's places and she'd walk in there and she'd just blend in to the – nobody'd say: "Oh look here look here ... this flash woman coming" because she'd just blend into where they were. She had a beautiful energy....

**... I was wondering about was if there's a skin map of the – you know how like Yibiyung and Smiley can't get married because they've got the same skin? I once did a course and there was a circle that showed you which people weren't.. (CH)**

Yeah, but it's just too complex. Too complex.

### **Too complicated? (CH)**

Yeah and I mean, even now I mean wouldn't be able to understand it, I wouldn't be able to understand it, and it was bred out. It was sort of bred out, you know what I mean?

... And I mean I can go back to Mum and her family and all the way down and from me you know, about five generations down this way, and sort of connect kids up. Which I do every time someone comes to the school: "Where are you from? Who's your nana?". Okay, put you here and then go back that way and then branch it off and say: "Well, okay, these are your mob here", you know? And it's funny because you start seeing this way, this way, that way – like all ways.

### **Yeah (CB)**

And ah it doesn't matter where you go; 'Where are you from? Where you from?'

### **You're just mapping all the ways... (CH)**

Yeah, and in your head you're sort of processing – okay yeah, well, I know where you fit now. So they're quite used to me now, you know - so I just want to know where you are...

**And Kyle was saying there were like seven dialects in the... and that sometimes people will pronounce it and you'll say that's not the right way to pronounce it (CH)**

Actually, when I'm teaching I would never say that's not the right way... right from the onset you tell the kids: there's different areas, there's different dialects and sometimes there's different words for the same thing, you know?

But you'll find that right along, especially up North part, like the Kimberleys and the Pilbarra and all those places - they've kept their language, mostly. And because, like I say – because they have permission now, you know, they are very jealous of their language. I was told, that one lady, she said "Oh it's a cruel shame, because I took one group out, took the elder out, went out looking at all the herbs, and everything, you know, all the bush plants and you know, writing down all the names, and then I've got this other old lady, just from over here and ah took her out and she was telling me the language", and she said "I really thought that I was quite smart when I recognised the bush and recognised what it was going to be called and I said: "Oh I know this one, this is such and such, isn't it?" and the old lady says: "No, it isn't. For so and so, that's what it is but you're talking to me now and this is my language and I think - you know?"

**Ah, yeah.. (CH)**

So you need to actually know where you are, where the boundaries are, know the families. Otherwise you're insulting, you know. Especially with the older people, know what I mean?

**Yeah, cause it's important. (CH)**

**Do you think it would work if I tried to put in - you know how in the play Yibiyung sings Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, do you reckon I could put that into the Teacher's Notes because it's something that could be recognised? (CH)**

Yes. And that's in one of the Noongar dialects.

**Which one? (CH)**

Just Noongar.

**Just Noongar, okay. (CH)**

Baladong actually. But they're all similar.

**Baladong. Can you spell it for me? (CH)**

Baladong. B a l a d o n g. And that's with the LOTE writing by the way.

**Thank you. (CH)**

## The Director: Wesley Enoch

Sitting in a rehearsal room I sometimes ask why tell these stories? Stories that speak of a long-gone past, about people who lived almost a century ago. As the discussions develop amongst the cast I realise that we all have inherited a legacy from our forebears. While white Australia sometimes wishes to have a short memory, being black in this country is about having a long one. Seeing our lives in a context which stretches beyond the immediacy of interest rate rises, elections and the price of fuel



Wesley Enoch

Photo: Heidrun Löh

At the heart of every story lies the reason for telling it. Sometimes these reasons are personal and therapeutic, and sometimes the story takes on a social/political role – a national metaphor – and is told for the benefit of many. The stories of the Stolen Generation are like that. Over a decade ago these stories gave a very human face to the struggle for rights and acknowledgement of Indigenous Australians. Each story of hardship and pain chronicled a sense of national shame, but for Indigenous Australians each story represented a triumph. It symbolised another person making it back, heroic journeys and at last a public airing of stories that had been suppressed. Hearing each story provided a sense of joy. (Well it did for me.)

I think about the stories of my grandparents' generation and their struggle for human rights – the right to live, to have children, to have families. My parents' generation tell of political struggle – the right to vote, the right to determine our own futures, the right to education. The stories of my generation are stories of our cultural struggles – to know where we come from, have the right to speak our languages, the right to dance and to tell our stories.

Along with language, dance, art and song: stories have become a form of cultural capital around which we define our Aboriginality. Our stories document our history in all its complexity and help shape our lives and responses to events. Our history is our history. You don't get to edit out the hard bits; nor do you get to carry history like a weapon. You are forced to accept it for what it is. It's the future you get to make choices about.

Change happens. Sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, sometimes it takes generations, but the stories are a constant. In a post-apology world the need to tell these stories has not evaporated. **Wesley Enoch**

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### Questions to ask students after reading what Wesley Enoch says about telling stories: -

- What do you think is the reason for telling stories such as *Yibiyung*'s?
- Do you think these stories have a power to change our lives and responses to events?
- How did you respond to what Wesley refers to as the 'hard bits' of our country's history when watching the performance of *Yibiyung*?



## Rehearsing *YIBIYUNG*

*Yibiyung* rehearsed for 5 weeks in the rehearsal room at Company B's Administration and Production Warehouse at 18 Belvoir Street in Surry Hills. Rehearsals took place from 10am to 6pm Monday to Friday. A sixth week was spent in technical production rehearsals, on stage in the Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir St Theatre. *Yibiyung* is a professional theatre production and the actors, director and crew are paid for the rehearsal period. During the first week, rehearsals incorporated language lessons from Roma Winmar, Language & Cultural Consultant on the production, daughter of the real Yibiyung.

**REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHY:** Heidrun Löhrr



Miranda Tapsell, Melodie Reynolds, Roxanne McDonald, Jada Alberts, Annie Byron

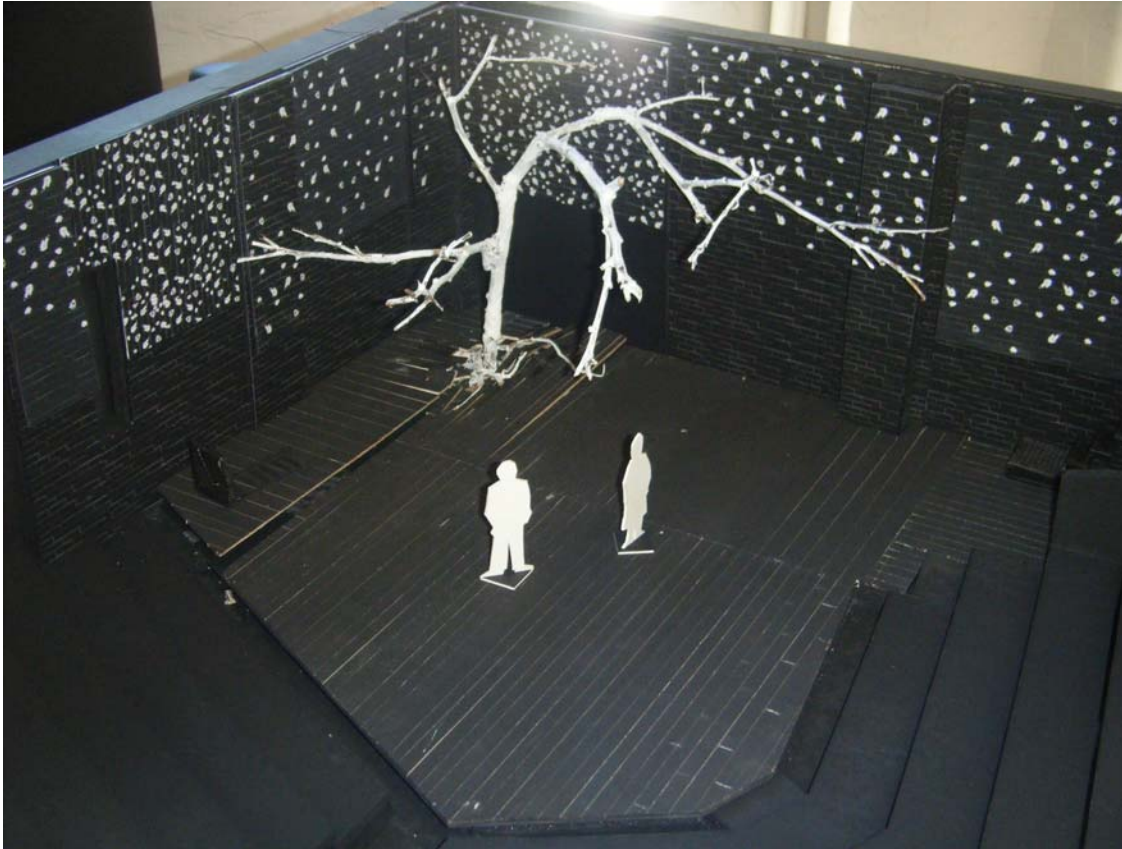
Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

<b>Matron</b> Names aren't important here
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### Questions to consider: -

- Why do you think Matron says that names are not important at Moore River?
- How does this demonstrate the huge contrast between the world of Moore River and the community Yibiyung is born into?
- In the play as a whole, what are the significance of names such as Yirribin, Yibiyung, Djindi, Smiley, Gertrude and Lily?
- What impact does it have that the Doctor and the Lady, Cook, the Farmer and the Farmer's Wife are referred to by roles rather than by their individual first names?

## Set Design in *YIBIYUNG*



Model box for *YIBIYUNG*: Jacob Nash

### THINKING ABOUT SET DESIGN: -

Set design for *Yibiyung* includes wooden floorboards, which were weathered by being beaten with chains to create the effect of years of use.

These floorboards become the ground of scenes set in the bush, at Carrolup Mission and at Moore River Native Settlement.

The furniture – a dresser, a round dining table, several chairs and an upright piano is dispersed around the sides of the set.

The tree bursting through the floor at the back of the stage is used in Act 1 as the tree under which Yirribin gives birth and later, near where she is buried. At Carolup the tree is used as the one beside the river where Djindi and Yibiyung go swimming. The tree becomes the fig tree in the Doctor's garden in Act 2 and as Yibiyung journeys home, it becomes a tree in the bush, also standing for the pine trees at Moore River Native Settlement that Yibiyung returns to, to say goodbye to her past in Act 3.

The stars covering the back walls are chalked on, more are drawn by the actors at the start of every show, accumulating over several performances. The lighting for the production includes UV lighting so that when the main lights are dimmed, the stars shine out brightly. During Act 2, a white lace curtain is run across the stage in front of the tree. Only in the scene set in the Doctor's garden is it pulled back.

### BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

**For students to consider: -**

How would you resolve the problem of creating a set that could be used for the following settings: -

- Bush, Mission (schoolroom), Train, Station, River, Settlement, Jail, Doctor's house, Kitchen, Garden, Showground, Boxing Tent, Farm & Camp?
- From looking at the picture of this model box, what is your understanding of the way the set designer for *Yibiyung* is choosing to resolve these difficulties?
- How can actors show through performance that they've entered into different spaces?



Wesley Enoch, Melodie Reynolds, Jada Alberts, Sibylla Budd, Russell Dykstra, Roxanne McDonald, Miranda Tapsell, David Page, Jimi Bani

Photo: Heidrun Löh

**Yibiyung** Remember me when you look at the stars

## AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

### Questions for your students to consider: -

- What effect was created when you entered the theatre to see actors drawing stars on the walls?
- Why do you think the tree sprouts out of the wooden floorboards? Do you think this has any meaning or significance relating to the themes of the play?
- Do you find floorboards an effective setting for bush, mission, settlement, house and farm scenes? Why might the choice have been made to have this floor, rather than earth?
- What feeling does it give you to see the tree and the stars as a constant presence on the stage, even when characters are locked up and unable to see them?
- How did the actors create an awareness in the audience of distinct spaces through performance and minimal use of props rather than through elaborate furniture or changed settings?
- Why do you think the men filed on to witness the rape scene silently from the back of the stage?
- What impact does it have on the audience to see Djindi, in the jail space, singing *Kaat, Koongat, Boornitj, Djen* (Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes)? Why do you think the choice was made to show Djindi in that area of the set when Yibiyung sees her again after she's died?

## PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

### Fig making in *YIBIYUNG*



The first picture shows a real fig

This is the effect the Production team wanted to create for the figs that are used in Act 2. The figs are shown in bags, hanging from a tree, however the actor playing Yibiyung, Miranda Tapsell, has to take a bite into a fig at one point and the fig is also squashed over her face in the same scene.

So a fig prop had to be made that could be filled with an edible substance that would look realistic and effective on stage but could be reused for performance after performance.

To come up with the eventual prop, a variety of approaches were tried to create both the outer shell of the fig and the edible innards.



Fig props for *YIBIYUNG*: Eddi Goodfellow

#### FIRST APPROACH:

Making a plasticine mould fig with two halves.

A real fig is used to create the plasticine mould. Then the plasticine mould is covered with silicone.

In this photograph Pinkysil skin safe silicone is the pink substance surrounding the fig. Once one side is done, the other side needs to be turned and covered in the silicone too. Then the plasticine would be removed so a case is created. The resulting effect wasn't exactly what the production team were after so a second approach was tried.



Fig props for YIBIYUNG: Eddi Goodfellow

## SECOND APPROACH:

Plasticine mould fig dipped in liquid latex.

The picture shows the latex dipped fig drying. 12 coats of latex were done on each fig and then the plasticine mould fig could be removed from the inside, leaving a fig casing which can then be filled.

6 fig cases were made which can then be reused and washed out nightly, but because of usual production wear and tear, more will be made during the run of the show.

## FINISHED FIG-PROPS:

Final product was latex dipped.

Final coat of latex had a drop of violet Indian ink in it to achieve the purple colour. Each fig casing has twelve coats of latex.

Earlier attempts had involved painting the figs – but the paint peeled off and the actor would have ended up eating it by accident, so was not as safe.



Fig props for YIBIYUNG: Eddi Goodfellow



Fig props for YIBIYUNG: Eddi Goodfellow

## FIG FILLINGS:

Each fig casing has a slit along one side where it can be filled with edible fig insides.

Inside the final fig casing couscous mixed with red and green food dye (very small amount, to prevent staining costumes) is combined with strawberry topping and a drop or so of chocolate topping (the topping creates the necessary tackiness). This makes a great fig-like inside effect, which the actor who plays Yibiyung finds tasty to eat each performance. She pulls aside the outer before biting into the fig on stage.

The assistant stage manager mixes up the filling and re-fills the casings as part of the pre-set for the show prior to each performance. The figs are then hung in their bags on the tree.

## ***Yibiyung*: Ideas of the Play**

### **AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE**

**For students to consider:** Ask your students to read the dialogue, exploring by discussion the play's approach to the following themes. Questions after each section can be a starting point for discussion. Reading your students the interview with Roma Winmar, on pp22-31 of these Notes, is also recommended – particularly sections on p23-24 and p 30 about Yibiyung's ability to 'glean' everything valuable from both cultures, to carry her own language with her and to learn other languages.

#### **Learning and Education: -**

<b>Yibiyung</b>	Don't want to learn from them wadjelas.
<b>Uncle</b>	You learn for me. Learn for yourself. Then you can teach me. Jus' try it for a little while

#### **Letter from Superintendent of Moore River**

We feel that it is in her best interests that she stay here for the time being. Giving her the opportunity to better herself in her life, through learning and education.

<b>Doctor</b>	I suspect that you will not learn as fast as a...white child. You're here to be domesticated and civilised.
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❖ When we first see Yibiyung what is she learning: -

- from Yirribin, her mother?
- from Kongkan, her uncle?

An argument the Policeman uses to persuade Yibiyung's uncle to take her to Carrolup is that she'll learn to read & write. How has Kongkan already been affected by his lack of *wadjela* learning?

❖ How eager is Yibiyung to learn from wadjelas: -

- Initially?
- At Carrolup?
- At Moore River?
- At the Doctor's House, from the Lady?

❖ What does Yibiyung teach: -

- Djindi?
- Cook?

❖ What value is placed on the learning that Yibiyung/Lily already has by characters such as: -

- Matron?
- Doctor?
- Cook?
- Farmer's Wife?

❖ What does Yibiyung learn that helps her to find her way home from: -

- Kongkan?
- Yirribin?
- The Tracker?
- Smiley?
- Smiley's Aunty?
- Djindi?

## Family & Belonging:

**Yibiyung** Always be your family, no matter where I go. Always be with you, always be thinking of you.

**Lady** Do you know why you are here Lily?

**Lily** Yes Mrs. To be your domestic Mrs.

**Lady** No...you are here because I wanted you here. I wrote to the Mission to send us a little girl. All my friends said that it was wrong to have you in the house. But I told them Lily. I told them. How can we not do our Christian duty, if not to love someone less fortunate than myself. You are here because I wanted you to be here. To become part of this family.

**Lily** Already have a family Mrs.

**Cook** Was four when I come to this place. Don't know why I was brought 'ere. All I remember is the Doctor's father visited my mother. She handed me to him. She was cryin'. Then I was 'ere. Told me that I belonged to them. That my mother didn't want me anymore.. Nothin', couldn't do nothin'. Too much time has passed. That's why it's easier for me to forget, I chose to stay. I want you to go when you can Lily. Don't want you to end up like me, regrettin'. Keepin' you 'ere, pretendin' this is where you belong, don't want to be like them.

**Aunty** You both same. Same skin. Best you go.  
Lots of fellas don't know. Too many families broken now. Good thing you did it the right way.

**Yibiyung** Sick of getting' permission. Permission to do this, permission to do that. Sick of cleanin' up for other people all the time. It's making me sick Aunty. What am I goin' to do?

**Aunty** You know what you mus' do girl.  
You gotta go, not jus' for yourself, but for all those other ones that never made it home.

When Yibiyung is at Carrolup her Uncle visits her and meets her friend Djindi.

- ❖ What does Yibiyung tell Djindi to call her Uncle & why?
- ❖ What does Uncle tell Yibiyung to do for Djindi & why?

Yibiyung, Smiley & Djindi form a bond at Carrolup that is strengthened by their time at Moore River.

- ❖ How do they look out for each other when in those institutions and in the world outside?
- ❖ How do they see this bond, what do they call it?

When at the Doctor's house the Lady tells Lily/Yibiyung she wants to adopt her.

- ❖ What does the Lady ignore when she tells Lily/Yibiyung she'd like to make her part of their family?
- ❖ How does Cook's history and the way she's treated demonstrate the danger of accepting this offer?

Yibiyung & Smiley want to get married and consult Smiley's Aunty instead of the Chief Protector.

- ❖ Why won't Aunty give them permission?
- ❖ How is this situation and the unhappiness that results to them both caused by the legislation that separates families and obscures traditional knowledge?

What do you think Aunty means by saying Yibiyung has to make it home for 'all those other ones'?

## Exploring **YIBIYUNG** Further

### Books to read:

#### Non-fiction

Haebich, Anna, For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the South West of Western Australia 1900 - 1940, University of Western Australia Press: Nedlands, 1992.

Reynolds, Henry, Why Weren't We Told?: A Personal Search for the Truth about our History, Viking Penguin: Ringwood, 1999.

#### Literature

Anita Heiss & Peter Minter (eds), The Macquarie Pen Anthology of Aboriginal Literature, Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, 2008.

[Extraordinary comprehensive anthology – including letters, petitions poetry, excerpts from longer fiction, glossary of language, short biographies of all the Aboriginal writers whose work is included and a selected reading list. Of particular interest in relation to *Yibiyung* are the writings of: -

David Unaipon “Aborigines, Their Traditions and Customs: Where Did They Come From?” (1924) pp18-21  
Pearl Gibbs - Radio Broadcast (1941) pp37-39

Jack Davis – poems (1970-1978) & excerpt from *No Sugar* (1986) pp 57-64

Glenyse Ward – from “Wandering Girl: Running Whenever She Needed Me” (1987) pp112-187

Bob Randall – song “Brown Skin Baby” (1990) pp130

Rita Huggins & Jackie Huggins – from *Auntie Rita* “Chapter 1: Don't Cry Gundaburries” (1994) pp150-155.

Doris Pilkington – from *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* “Chapter 5: Jigalong, 1907-1931” (1996) pp169-173.

Richard Frankland – poem “Two World One” (2001) pp205-206.]

Doris Pilkington & Nugi Garimara, Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence, University of Queensland Press: Brisbane, 1996.

[True family story - three Aboriginal girls escape from Moore River Native Settlement in 1931, two of them the writer's mother and her aunt. They walk the 1,500 miles (2414 kms) back home to Jigalong, following the rabbit-proof fence, managing to evade pursuit by police, officials and Aboriginal trackers]

#### Plays

Jack Davis *Kullark (Home)*, Currency Press: Sydney, 1982.

[Set in the Moore River Native Settlement; where the playwright lived for nine months at the age of fourteen, sent there after the death of his father. In the play, Thomas Yorlah, an Aboriginal man, is brought by force to the settlement and repeatedly attempts to escape.]

#### Films to watch:

*Rabbit-proof Fence* 2002 Director Phillip Noyce, Screenplay Christine Olsen. 94mins Rating PG.

[Including scenes at Moore River Native Settlement, which includes the character of A.O.Neville – Chief Protector of Aborigines at the time the film is set (1931)]

*The Proposition* 2005 Director John Hillcoat, Screenplay Nick Cave. 104mins Rating R

[Strong violence but the scenes involving the character of Martha Stanley, played by Emily Watson; an Englishwoman living in an Australia alien to her, would help older students understand the Lady]

*September* 2007 Director Peter Carstairs, Screenplay Peter Carstairs / Ant Horn. 85mins. Rating M.

[Set in WA in 1968, after the referendum on Aboriginal citizenship – focuses on the friendship of two 16-yr old boys, one Aboriginal (Paddy) and one white, (Ed). While Ed goes to school every day, Paddy works on the farm with his father for Ed's dad. After school they build a boxing ring and smoke and talk. As legislation is passed to tackle unjust discrimination towards Aboriginal workers, their friendship comes under intense pressure.]



## Websites to visit:

State Records Office of Western Australia: Aboriginal Records:

<http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/collection/aboriginalrecords.asp>

[Includes letters, information about the Aborigines Protection Board and an overview of records held]

An Index to the Chief Protector of Aborigines Files 1898-1908:

<http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/community/aboriginalhistory-index.asp>

[Includes a useful brief historical overview of the role of the Aborigines Department and the 1905 Aborigines Act]

Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission

Reconciliation & Social Justice Library – Bringing them Home, The Report

<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/stolen13.html>

[Focuses on WA, describes 1905 Act, including personal stories from members of the stolen generations]

Australian Indigenous Stolen Generation - PL Duffy Resource Centre

<http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/indig/stolen.htm>

[Comprehensively links to webpages w. information on all aspects of history of WA stolen generations]

## Downloadable web resources:

The Laws: Western Australia – Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/bth/download/laws/bth\\_lawsWA\\_8r.pdf](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/bth/download/laws/bth_lawsWA_8r.pdf)

[Clear downloadable details of WA laws in relation to Aboriginal people. Very useful overview for students.]

Brigitta Olubus and Lisa Greenwell. Re-membering and taking up an ethics of listening: a response to loss and the maternal in the “stolen children”, Australian Humanities Review, July 1999.

<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-1999/olubas.html>

[Explores possibility of radically re-imagining way witness accounts and stories of the Stolen Generation are heard and listened to by the wider Australian community, a collective openness to an ethic of reconciliation.]

A Protocol for Laves 1931 Noongar Field Notes September 2006

[http://www.linguistics.uwa.edu.au/\\_data/page/145576/Laves\\_Protocol.pdf](http://www.linguistics.uwa.edu.au/_data/page/145576/Laves_Protocol.pdf)

[Established by the Reference Group including Roma Winmar, in relation to the 1931 notes of Gerhardt Laves documenting Noongar language & culture – illuminating to read in conjunction with the interview with Roma Winmar, where she discusses the process surrounding the Laves notes and their return to the families.]

Anna Haebich, The Noongar stolen generations: Notes for paper presented to Albany seminar ‘Impressions – Albany’s History and Heritage’, 24 April 1997.

<http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/CRCC/fellows/haebich/stolen.html>

[Focuses on the specific stolen-generation experience of Noongar people in WA, challenges ideas about why children might have been taken from their families. Overview of the effects of legislation on Noongar people.]

Robyn McCarron, Noongar Language and Literature in SPAN, No 36 (1993) Postcolonial Fictions

<http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/lit/serv/SPAN/36/McCarron.html>

[Focuses on language & literature by Noongars in context of recent language revival. Includes information on language loss and renewal, and on Moore River & Carrolup as settings and central motifs in Noongar writing.]

## FURTHER RESEARCH: Topics students could research include: -

- ❖ History of Noongar people in Western Australia since white settlement
- ❖ Language groups in South Western WA and the different dialects of Noongar
- ❖ The 1905 & 1911 Acts in WA and the long term effects of these on Noongar people
- ❖ Aboriginal marriage laws – especially laws against people from certain kinship groups marrying (because they are of the ‘same skin’) the purpose and necessity of these.

## After the Show: MAKING THE MOST OF THE Q & A

After each school matinee performance at Company B there is a Q & A session with the actors. In order to make the most of this experience, you might like to think about the *sorts* of questions you might ask before seeing the show.

### School Matinee Q & A sessions: A Guide

- Ask questions about the production you have just seen, rather than other plays, film or television programs in which you have seen the same actors.
- Think of the Q & A session as an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the production you have just seen, rather than just an opportunity to learn about the actors' careers or the profession of acting.

### Class Activity

Use a play you have seen recently when composing questions for this activity, or think of some general questions which can acquire more detail once you have seen the play.

1. Students list 3 questions that an actor might be asked by a student audience after a performance.
2. Students rank these questions from most (1) to least (3) according to:
  - Level of sophistication
  - Interest to the student
  - Cliché or what an actor would always be asked
3. Students then share their best questions with the class – most sophisticated, of most interest and the one they won't ask because it is very clichéd.
4. Ask students to reflect on the idea that the Q & A session is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the production
5. List the areas in which students could deepen their understanding of the production such as: themes and ideas, message, the setting, costume and set design, characters, acting style.
6. Choose a play the whole class has seen.

In pairs, students are to select 2 areas of the production they would have liked to have known more about and compose 2 specific questions for each one.

7. One pair swaps their questions with another pair and composes answers for their questions.
8. Share question and answers with the class.