THE RIDDLE OF WASHPOOL GULLY

LEARNING RESOURCE

David Morton, Dead Puppet Society. Photographer Dean Hanson.

QPAC's brand new Creative Learning Program brings learning to life through creative and transformative experiences that champion access inclusion and cultural equity.

In Semester One 2026, QPAC and Dead Puppet Society are presenting *The Riddle of Washpool Gully* by David Morton.

The Riddle of Washpool Gully

This performance can be the starting point for a range of arts and literacy experiences before, during and after the performance. Please use the following learning experiences as a starting point to adapt to your classroom and year level. At the end a series of questions are included for students viewing the performance to explore Theatre for Young People.

About Dead Puppet Society

Dead Puppet Society is an international production house and design-led theatre company. They combine timeless craftsmanship with cutting-edge technology to create deeply imaginative experiences wrought with spectacle and wonder.

Recent box office hits include *Peter and the Starcatcher, Holding Achilles, The Wider Earth, Ishmael, Laser Beak Man* and *Storm Boy*. They also create captivating activations for events and public spaces, from open-air performances and large-scale installations, to one-of-a-kind laser-cut artefacts and exquisite, custom-made sculptures.

Dead Puppet Society has a Gallery and Fabrication Workshop space in Woolloongabba, Brisbane.

Key Creatives

Director and Designer **David Morton**

David is a writer, director and designer, and the Creative Director of Dead Puppet Society. Over the last sixteen years he has led Dead Puppet Society in the creation of large-scale design-led theatre works developed with international teams.

Some highlights from work produced includes the Australian premieres of *WE'RE ALL GONNA DIE!*, with La Boite Theatre Company; *Peter and the Starcatcher*, produced with JONES Theatrical Group, Glass Half Full and Damien Hewitt; *Holding Achilles*, which was supported through the Major Festivals Initiative and has had successful seasons with Brisbane and Sydney Festivals; *The Wider Earth* (Dead Puppet Society, Queensland Theatre, Trish Wadley Productions, Glass Half Full Productions), which was conceived in residence at St Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, New York City and enjoyed a six-month run in a custom-built theatre in London's Natural History Museum; *Laser Beak Man* (Dead Puppet Society, La Boite, Brisbane Festival, PowerArts), which was a collaboration with Tim Sharp, developed at the New Victory Theater in New York City.

Additional works include *Ishmael* (Dead Puppet Society, Brisbane Festival, QPAC); *The Riddle of Washpool Gully* (Terrapin, Dead Puppet Society); *Argus* (Dead Puppet Society, Lincoln Centre, Queensland Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse); Trollop (Queensland Theatre); and *The Harbinger* (Dead Puppet Society, La Boite, Critical Stages).

David has been nominated for five Helpmann Awards and an Olivier Award. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in puppetry and visual theatre from Queensland University of Technology.

Director **Sam Routledge**

Sam Routledge is a director, puppeteer and creator of contemporary puppetry with a strong record of innovation within the form.

Sam has been creating work for intergenerational audiences in schools, theatres and public spaces for over 25 years. Sam has a Bachelor of Arts Communication (Theatre/Media) from Charles Sturt University and Post-Graduate Diploma in Puppetry from the Victorian College of the Arts. A skilled collaborator across sectors and cultures, Sam's work has been presented in over 11 countries.

From The Atrium City Hall in The Hague to The John F. Kennedy Center for The Performing Arts to Smithton Primary School in the North West of Tasmania. His work has been presented by leading contemporary artists, venues, and festivals including Vancouver International Children's Festival (Canada), Soho Theatre (London), Festival De Betovering (The Hague), Sydney Festival, Sydney Opera House, Performance Space, Arts House, Perth International Arts Festival, Malthouse Theatre and Brisbane Powerhouse.

Composer **Heath Brown**

Heath Brown is an Australian composer with a strong focus on collaborative projects.

His work ranges from film and TV to performing arts and installation. He has written scores for five feature films (*Ancestry Road, The Comet Kids, Chocolate Strawberry Vanilla, 41* and El Monstro Del Mar!) and over 40 shorts, with his film work having been recognised throughout the world with a number of awards for original music composition, including the award for Best Original Score at the 2012 Maverick Movie Awards for his score to *41*. He also composed the score for the multi-award-winning web series *Noirhouse* (funded by Screen Australia, Screen Tasmania and the ABC) the ABC documentary series Bespoke, and the second season of the Shaun Micallef comedy series *The Ex PM.*

In 2015 Heath collaborated with Aly Rae Patmore in composing a performance-based musical element for Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey's large scale installation *The Shadow's Calling* at Detached and presented as part of DarkMOFO 2015.

As producer, sound designer and performer, Heath is a member of the Radio Gothic collective, which produces original live-performance works inspired by the tradition of broadcast radio drama. Radio Gothic has produced three episodes, all of which have been presented as part of Dark MOFO.

Heath has written extensively for the theatre, notably for Terrapin Puppet Theatre (*The Riddle of Washpool Gully, Red Racing Hood, Big Baby, The Waltzing Tree*) and Tasmanian Theatre Co. (*Sex With Strangers, Born From Animals, The Boy With the Longest Shadow, Poxed*).

His work has appeared in a number of arts festivals including Ten Days on the Island (*Babel*) and DarkMOFO (*The Geometry of Innocent Flesh on the Bone* – a collaborative installation work with Oscar Ferreiro, Radio Gothic Eps 1 - 3) and The Tasmanian International Arts Festival (Radio Gothic - Episode 1: The Pit).Heath has also written music for television and radio commercials, winning the 2012 Tasmanian Advertising Design Awards category of Best Original Music and the 2016 Diemen Award for Best Sound Design. In 2021 his string quartet Magnet, Furnace was premiered at the Salamanca Arts Centre as part of the Winter Light Festival.

Heath holds a BA (Philosophy) and BMus (Composition) from The University of Tasmania, where he is now a profile member of staff teaching music theory and composition units.

Lighting Designer **Ben Hughes**

Ben Hughes' lighting design spans theatre, dance, opera, concerts and events. Selected design credits include: for Dead Puppet Society, *Peter and the Starcatcher, Holding Achilles* (with Legs on the Wall, Brisbane and Sydney Festival, QPAC and Glass Half Full Productions); for Queensland Theatre, *A Few Good Men, Round The Twist, Noises Off* (with Melbourne Theatre Company), *Othello, The Almighty Sometimes, The Sunshine Club, Return To The Dirt, Boy Swallows Universe, Triple X* (with Sydney Theatre Company), *Mouthpiece, Antigone, L'appartement, Twelfth Night, Scenes From A Marriage*; for Melbourne Theatre Company, *37, Let The Sunshine*; for Sydney Theatre Company, *Poison Of Polygamy* (with La Boite Theatre), *Black Is The New White* (with Queensland Theatre); for Oombarra Productions, *Is That You Ruthie?, Breaking The Castle* (with Queensland Performing Arts Centre); for Prospero Arts, *Sweet Charity, Dusty The Musical: In Concert, Pirates of Penzance, Singing In The Rain* (with Queensland Performing Arts Centre); for Brisbane Festival, *Love Stories, Bananaland, Salamander*; for La Boite Theatre, *We're All Gonna Die, IRL, The Last Five Years, Away*; for Bangarra Dance Theatre, *The Bogong's Song*; for Queensland Ballet, *Celebrating Li, Strictly Gershwin, The Little Mermaid*.

Sound Designer **Brady Watkins**

Brady is a Brisbane-based Composer/Sound Designer who has worked with companies such as Queensland Theatre, La Boite, Dead Puppet Society, Woodward Productions, Neil Gooding Productions, Belvoir Street Theatre, Counterpilot, Queensland Museum and World Science Festival. Composition and/or Sound Design credits include *The 39 Steps, Shirley Valentine, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged* with Woodward Productions/ Gooding Productions; *Round the Twist the Musical, The Appleton Ladies Potato Race, First Casualty, Othello, Flower in Antarctica* with Queensland Theatre; *Macbeth, Fancy Long Legs, The Last Five Years, Away, The Neighbourhood* with La Boite; *We're All Gonna Die* with La Boite and Dead Puppet Society; *SWARM* with Dead Puppet Society; *Tiny Beautiful Things* with Belvoir St; *Arena Atomica: Skate-ology, Night of the Nerds* with Queensland Museum and World Science Festival; *Meet Your Maker* with Blak Social and Brisbane Festival; *Dance Nation, Sea Wall* with THAT Production Company. Brady holds a Bachelor of Music Technology from Queensland Conservatorium of Music.

Cast

Reagan Mannix is an Australian actor who has recently appeared as Bonox Baker in the acclaimed limited series *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Reagan has also appeared in the hit Netflix show *Boy Swallows Universe* where he played a character called Timothy. Additionally, Reagan has appeared in *Good Cop Bad Cop, Black Snow* and *Young Rock*. Reagan's Theatre credits include Queensland Theatre: *A Few Good Men*, and *First Casualty*, La Boite Theatre: *Away*,

and Shake and Stir': *The Twits*. Reagan's role as Thommo in Queensland Theatre's *First Casualty* earned him a Matilda Award Nomination for Best Emerging Artist in 2022.

Merlynn Tong is a Writer and Actor. Playwriting credits include *Legends (of the Golden Arches)* (co-writer, co-director, Performing Lines WA), *Congratulations, Get Rich!* (La Boite Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Singapore Repertory Theatre), *Antigone* (adaptation, Queensland Theatre, Mercury Theatre UK); and *Blue Bones* (Playlab Productions).

Stage performances include *The Poison of Polygamy* (La Boite Theatre & Sydney Theatre Company), *White Pearl* (Sydney Theatre Company & National Theatre of Parramatta) and *Legends (of the Golden Arches)* at MTC and Perth Festival with Performing Lines. Screen performances include *Top of the Lake: China Girl* (See Saw Films) and *In Our Blood* (Hoodlum Productions).

Her one-woman-show *Blue Bones* by Playlab Productions, won 6 Matilda Awards including The Lord Mayor Award for Best New Australian Work, Best Mainstage Production and Best Female Actor in a Leading Role.

Her work *Golden Blood* was short-listed for a Victorian Premier Literary Award, NSW Premier's Literary Award, and Sydney Theatre Award (Best New Australian Work).

She was the 2020 resident writer of Melbourne Theatre Company.

Hugh Parker With over twenty-five years in the world of professional acting, RADA-trained Hugh Parker has an extensive resume in television, film and theatre. His early career in the UK saw him appear in programmes including *Black Books, The Office, I'm Alan Partridge, Eastenders* and *Casualty*. After moving to Australia, Hugh found success with roles in the movies *Crooked Business, Sinbad & The Minotaur, My Mistress, Fatal Honeymoon, Bullets For The Dead, Space/ Time, Elvis, Runner, Godzilla & Kong: Supernova* and *Subversion*.

There were also roles in TV shows *Sea Patrol, The Strip, Secrets & Lies, Gallipoli, The Killing Field, The Family Law, Harrow, Rosehaven, Joe vs Carol, In Our Blood, Troppo* and *The Celebrant.*

Hugh's theatre productions include, for QT, *Twenty Five Down, The Clean House, Betrayal, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, Fractions, The Pitch, Kelly, Brisbane, The Seagull, Much Ado About Nothing, Tartuffe, Noises Off, Scenes From A Marriage, The 39 Steps, Nearer The Gods, Hydra, Our Town, Bernhardt Hamlet* and *A Few Good Men*. For La Boite, *Julius Caesar, Pale Blue Dot, A Doll's House* and *Straight White Men*. For Shake and Stir, *1984.*

Hugh has been an acting coach and mentor for over fifteen years.

Hugh was the joint recipient of The Equity Ensemble Award for his work in *The Family Law* and multiple awards for his work in *The Celebrant*.

Proud member of Actor's Equity since 1995.

About the show

Combining old-fashioned storytelling with contemporary puppetry and miniature sets, *The Riddle of Washpool Gully* by David Morton is a reimagined tale of Australian mythology about the incredible creatures that might still live in the uncharted corners of our vast country.

Far beyond the outskirts of the big city, near a tiny town that nearly everyone forgot, lay a dry creek bed of no special significance. Once upon a time it had been called Washpool Gully. But the world had moved on from insignificant things, and no one had time for dry creek beds. Except in Washpool Gully something was stirring. Shaken by the rumble of engines and darkening of the sky, something long asleep had decided to wake up.

Key concepts: Intergenerational tensions, isolation, displacement and moving frequently, the power of imagination, the symbolism of monsters, running away, exploration, extinct animals and the value of country.

Art forms: Shadow puppetry, contemporary puppetry DPS - style of laser cut, negative space design, and direct-contact approach to puppetry, narrative storytelling, soundtrack, and metaphorical dreamlike sequences. Nightscapes and torch-lit scenes enhance the atmosphere.

Dramatic forms and styles: Design-led theatre, visual theatre including puppetry, narrative, theatre for young people.

Dramatic conventions: Poetic image, narrator, puppetry, soundscape, dream-like scenes, miniature landscapes.

Language: Rich and evocative, with frequent rhetorical questions. Vocabulary is sophisticated at times, but many words (e.g. fossils, archaeologists) will be familiar to children through their interest in dinosaurs.

Conclusion: Delivers a strong message about environmental concerns, the importance of resolving family challenges, and the ways the mind can create and confront monsters.

Recommended audience: Suitable for Year 5+ in schools, and for general public/family audiences aged 6+ would be safe.

For Schools: Curriculum connections to English, The Arts, Geography.

Curriculum Connections

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

- Intercultural Understanding
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Literacy

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK V2.0

Children are connected with and contribute to their world.

Children are confident and involved learners.

Cross – Curriculum Priorities

Sustainability

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM V9.0 (The Arts, English, Humanities and Social Sciences)

This performance will provide teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities to cover the Achievement Standard aspects in the below examples from Prep to Year 2 in the Arts.

In The Arts Prep students:

- describe experiences, observations, ideas and/or feelings about arts works they encounter
- use play, imagination, arts knowledge, processes and/or skills to create and share arts works in different forms.

In The Arts Year 2 students:

- identify where they experience the arts
- demonstrate arts practices and skills across arts subjects
- create arts works in a range of forms
- share their work in informal settings.

Humanities and Social Sciences

This performance will provide teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities to cover the Achievement Standard aspects in the below examples from years 3- 6

In Humanities and Social Science Year 3 Students:

• Describe the causes, effects and contributions of people to change.

Content descriptors

• The features of familiar places they belong to, why some places are special and how places can be looked after (AC9HSFK03).

In Humanities and Social Science Year 6 students:

• Explain the geographical diversity of places and the effects of interconnections with other countries.

Content descriptors

• The geographical diversity and location of places in the Asia region, and its location in relation to Australia (AC9HS6K04).

English

This performance will provide teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities to cover the Achievement Standard aspects in the below examples from years 3 -5 English.

In English Year 3 students:

• Interact with others and listen to and create spoken and/ or multimodal texts including stories.

• Relate ideas; express opinion, preferences and appreciation of texts; and include relevant details from learnt topics, topics of interest or texts.

• Read, view and comprehend texts, recognising their purpose and audience.

• Identify literal meaning and explain inferred meaning.

• Describe how stories are developed through characters and/or events.

• Describe how texts are structured and presented. They describe the language features of texts including topic-specific vocabulary and literary devices, and how visual features extend meaning.

CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS

• Discuss characters, events and settings in different contexts in literature by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors and illustrators (AC9E3LE01).

• Discuss connections between personal experiences and character experiences in literary texts and share personal preferences (AC9E3LE02).

In English Year 5 students:

• Read, view and comprehend texts created to inform, influence and/or engage audiences.

• Explain how ideas are developed including through characters, settings and/or events, and how texts reflect contexts. They explain how characteristic text structures support the purpose of texts. Explain how language features including literary devices, and visual features contribute to the effect and meaning of a text.

Content descriptors

• Identify aspects of literary texts that represent details or information about historical, social and cultural contexts in literature by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors (AC9E5LE01).

• Explain characteristic features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text (AC9E5LY04).

The Arts

This performance will provide teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities to cover the Achievement Standard aspects in the below examples from by the end of Year 6 for students in The Arts (Drama):

In the Arts by the end of year 6:

• Explain the use of elements, concepts and/or conventions in arts works they create and/or experience.

• Describe how the arts communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts.

• Describe how the arts are used to continue and revitalise cultures.

• Use subject-specific knowledge, elements, concepts, conventions, materials, skills and/or processes to create arts works that communicate ideas, perspectives and/ or meaning.

• Present and perform their arts works in formal and/or informal settings.

CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS

• explore ways that the elements of drama are combined to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in drama across, cultures, times, places and/or other contexts (AC9ADR6E01)

• explore ways to combine the elements of drama to communicate ideas, perspectives and/ or meaning in improvisations, devised drama and/or scripted drama (AC9ADR6D01)

Learning Experiences

Key Words: fossils, creature, monster, discovery, fear, isolation, strange, gully, extinct, archaeologist, treasures, mysterious occurrences, memento

Key Questions: What do you do when you feel all alone? What is buried underneath? How does if feel to move from home to a new place? How do we care for land?

A Framework for Learning: Worlds of Performance

In this beautiful performance, where puppetry and live action flow effortlessly together, we are invited to journey through a constellation of interconnected worlds:

- The everyday world shared by a mother and her son.

- The boy's expansive imagination, his gully, and the monster who keeps him company.

- The living environment of the hidden gully, where land, story, fable and fossils intertwine.

- The intricate world the artists create, through visibly manipulated puppetry, sophisticated set mechanisms, evocative sound design and lighting; becomes integral to the illusion and the production's unique performance language.

Learning experiences will be framed through these worlds, encouraging students to inquire, interpret, and wonder. Each domain offers rich opportunities for deeper engagement with the performance's themes, environments, and creative practices.

FRAMEWORK 1 - THE EVERYDAY WORLD

ACTIVITY 1 Tangle and twists – taking the wrong turn

Step 1:

Purpose: To explore the dramatic action of the performance and the themes.

Students are placed in small groups and asked to imagine a space or place they discovered after taking a wrong turn. It might be familiar or unexpected, welcoming, or unsettling. Each group selects one place to explore in depth.

Students build the world of this place by considering its sensory details:

- What sounds can be heard here? Is it loud or quiet?

- What does the space feel like — open, cramped, safe, uneasy?

- What smells linger in the air?

- Who might you meet in this place, and why might they be there?

Using these ideas, each group creates a freeze frame that captures the essence of the place. Groups then share their freeze frames with the class.

The teacher unpacks each presentation, drawing attention to how physicality, spatial relationships and sensory choices communicate meaning. As a class, reflect on what we learn when we enter unfamiliar or untravelled spaces, and how taking a "wrong turn" can lead to new discoveries, perspectives and understandings, connecting this exploration to moments in the performance where characters encounter the unknown.

Step 2: Literacy extension

Following the drama activity, students select one of the spaces explored and create a short monologue titled "The Wrong Turn". The monologue is written from the perspective of a character who has entered this space after taking a wrong turn.

Students shape the monologue to reveal inner thoughts, emotional shifts, and moments of realisation, drawing on the sensory details and atmosphere developed during the freeze-frame activity. The voice may be reflective, uncertain, curious, or transformed by the experience.

In the monologue, students respond to the guiding question: In what ways does taking a "wrong turn" lead to learning, change, or new perspectives — both in the performance and in real life?

Students are encouraged to:

- Use descriptive language and imagery to evoke the space

- Show change or growth in the character's thinking or emotional state

- Make subtle or explicit connections between the character's journey and broader human experiences, including risk, discovery, resilience, or empathy

Monologues may be shared through spoken performance, recorded audio, or written presentation, allowing students to consider voice, tone, pacing, and audience.

ACTIVITY 2

Purpose: Understanding the characters through a range of devices

Select one student to sit in the **hot seat** and take on the role of the boy (or another key character).

- The rest of the class becomes the interview panel, asking questions to uncover the character's thoughts, feelings, motivations, and experiences.

- Encourage imaginative questioning, such as:

  - "What is your favourite place and why?"

  - "How did you feel when you faced a challenge?"

  - "What is your biggest hope or fear?"

- The student in the hot seat responds in role, exploring the character's inner world and choices.

- After the first round, rotate students so others can step into the character's shoes, deepening empathy and understanding of multiple perspectives.

Tip: Remind students that there are no "wrong" answers; the aim is to explore the character's thoughts, emotions, and motivations.

Step 2: Role on the Wall – Mapping the Character

Using a large sheet of butcher's paper, draw the outline of the chosen character. This will become the Role on the Wall.

- **Outside the character:** Students and teacher add descriptive words and phrases about the character's appearance, actions, or behaviours. Examples: small, tall, wears glasses, always smiling.

- **Inside the character:** Discuss the character's thoughts, feelings, values, and personality traits. Examples: kind, playful, thoughtful, worried about friends.

Encourage students to think beyond the obvious:

- What might the character feel but not say aloud?

- How might their past experiences shape their behaviour?

- What do their actions reveal about who they are inside?

Once the Role on the Wall is complete, step back and reflect as a class:

- How do the character's inner qualities connect to their choices in the story?

- How might understanding the character help us predict their reactions in different situations?

- What does this reveal about human emotions, empathy and relationships?

Step 3: Exploring Tension: Freeze Frame Activity

In the performance, the mother and son experience tension: moving house, the boy's trips to the gully, and the mother's new job all create challenges.

1. **Discussion:**

   Begin by discussing with students how tension appears between characters in the story. Extend the discussion to real life: what situations sometimes cause tension between young people and their parents or caregivers?

2. **Pair Work – Selecting a Topic:**

   Students work in pairs to choose one topic that they feel is important and relevant, something that can create tension in families or between parents and young people. Examples could be responsibilities at home, social media use, friendships, school stress, or personal independence.

3. **Creating a Freeze Frame:**

   a. Each pair creates a freeze frame (tableau) showing the moment of tension between the two characters.

   b. The teacher taps each student in turn, and they say one word that captures their character's feelings or perspective in the moment.

   c. Next, each student adds one sentence for their character that expresses a thought, worry, or perspective, linking emotion to action.

4. **Gallery Walk:**

   a. The teacher arranges for all pairs to share their freeze frames around the room.

   b. Students can record their dialogue on paper, then they can display this with their freeze frame and create an installation for all to view.

5. **Reflection:**

Discuss as a class: How do we solve these problems in real life? What strategies could the characters use to communicate better?

FRAMEWORK 2 –
THE BOY'S IMAGINATION

Activity 1

Step 1: Monsters in Our Head and Imaginary Friends

The boy in the story uses imagination to navigate challenges, creating monsters, imaginary friends, and fantastical worlds. Imagination can help us understand feelings, fears, and creativity in both literature and art. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky (influential in developmental psychology) suggests imaginary friends act as a scaffold: They help children practice social interactions and learn about the world in their "zone of proximal development," bridging what they can do alone and with guidance."

1. Introduction / Visual Stimulus

    a. Show students an image from visual art that represents a monster, (see below) imaginary creature, or fantastical world.

    b. Play a short song or musical excerpt that evokes imagination, tension, or the unknown.

    c. Ask students: Why do artists and writers create monsters or imaginary friends? Have you ever imagined a creature, friend, or world? When and why? How do these creations help us process feelings, fears, or challenges?

2. Discussion / Brainstorming

    a. Invite students to share experiences of imaginary friends, invented worlds, or personal "monsters" (thoughts, worries, or fears). Teachers, please assess if your class is ready for this type of open discussion.

    b. Record ideas on a **class mind map**, separating monsters, helpers, and neutral or funny imaginary beings.

    c. Discuss: How do monsters in stories or art help us understand fear, conflict, or growth?

Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim (in The Uses of Enchantment) argued that fairy tales featuring monsters help children confront inner turmoil: "The monster a child knows best and is most concerned with [is] the monster he feels or fears himself to be... Fairy tales give these anxieties form and body and then show ways to overcome them." He viewed monsters in stories as symbolic of internal struggles, allowing kids to master fears safely through imagination.

Monsters in Your Head by Unicorn Poppy

Activity 2: Bringing it to life

From The Script

The kid explores the scrub.

NARRATOR

The kid walked for hours. In circles and in lines. But every path they took led back to the house. So at last, they made a boat from the papers, because it was more than apparent they weren't good for much else. And launched it into the trickle of a creek.

♩#12 - MUSIC

The paper boat leads the kid through the scrub.

MOTHER

In front of the kid water roared down into a gully.

NARRATOR

The roots of eucalypts clawed their way from the dirt warning them to turn around, to go back to the house.

MOTHER

But their curiosity got the better of them.

NARRATOR

And they climbed into Washpool Gully.

♩#13 - GULLY

The kid enters the gully.

MOTHER

Down in the gully it was dark. The air was cool.

NARRATOR

From the outside this place would be completely invisible.

MOTHER

It was just the sort of spot a monster might live.

NARRATOR

And the kid wished they'd never found it.

Read the excerpt from *The Riddle of Wash Pool Gully* included above. Discuss the key ideas presented in the excerpt. How could you convey this onstage? What is building the tension? Why did the kid wish he had never found it? Students in groups of three to rehearse and share.

FRAMEWORK 3 – THE ENVIRONMENT

Activity 1: Underneath the land

Purpose: Have you ever been on land and wondered about what is underneath? In archeology, a cross-section is a vertical diagram or drawing that shows the layers of soil, deposits and features beneath the ground surface at an evacuation site. These illustrate stratigraphy the sequence of layered deposits overtime, revealing how the land underneath has built up through natural processes and human activity.

Stratigraphic Profile
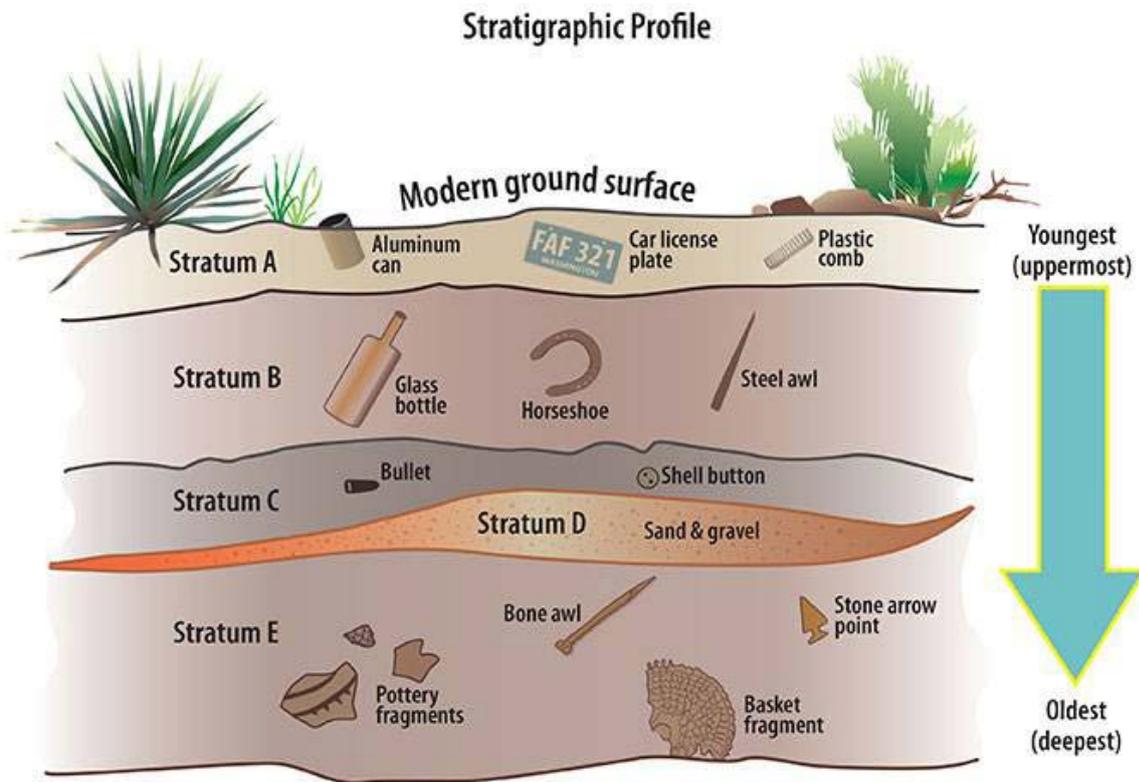
An example of a stratigraphic profile, courtesy of Crow Canyon Archaeological Center.

Source: https://www.southalabama.edu/org/archaeology/news/stratigraphy.html

Step 1: Ask students to consider a site they would like to explore and imagine what might be deep down. To help them imagine the underneath territory show students the following examples above and explore the images above:

Resources:

· Visit The Big Dig Archaeology Education Centre The Big Dig Archaeology Education Centre – Part of Sydney Harbour YHA for city examples

· An out west example - Cuddie Springs, a remote open-air site in the semi-arid outback of central-western New South Wales. Located about 40 km southeast of Brewarrina (on the traditional lands of the Wailwan people), it's one of Australia's most significant paleoenvironmental sites, showcasing human-megafauna interactions from over 30,000 years ago.

Unlike urban digs like The Rocks, this is an isolated, rural excavation in a dry lakebed setting far from coastal influences, highlighting arid adaptations and ancient environmental changes.

Online Resources:

· Australian Museum: australian.museum/learn/collections/natural-science/australian-archaeology/cuddie-springs-archaeological-site-new-south-wales – Features excavation photos, including profile diagrams

Step 2: Exploring Layers – Freeze Frame of a Site

· In small groups, students select a site, this could be a real or imagined location.

· Students brainstorm what might exist beneath the surface: soil layers, objects, fossils, hidden history, or imaginary creatures.

· Working together, students create a physical representation of the layers:

- They can use different levels (standing, crouching, lying down) to show depth or hierarchy.

- They can choose a metaphoric approach, representing ideas or emotions symbolically.

- Or they can aim for literal accuracy, with students on the floor showing the actual depth of layers.

- Groups devise and present their freeze frame to the class.

- After each presentation, discuss:

    - What appeared in your representation, and why?

    - How did your group decide which layers or objects were important?

    - What did you learn about the hidden aspects of the site?

Step 3: Investigating History – Questions and Concerns

- Encourage students to investigate and think about the history of their chosen space.

- Ask guiding questions:

    - What is the key concern for this environment or place?

    - Which objects, creatures, or features are now missing, and why might they have disappeared?

    - What questions arise about the environment, past use, or human impact?

- Students can record ideas as notes or sketches to inform the next step.

Step 4: Object Stories – Creating Narratives from the Land

- Each layer of the land tells a story.

- Students select an object or feature from their representation.

- They imagine a story of its use, origin, or significance in its time—realistic or imaginative.

- Ask:

    - What does this object tell us about the people, creatures, or environment of that layer?

    - How can storytelling help us understand history, culture, or change over time?

- Students can share their object stories orally, in writing, or as a short performance, connecting imagination, history, and creative expression.

ACTIVITY 2: Learning Maps – Collaborative Mural of Country

Purpose: Students will create a large collaborative mural representing the journey of the boy and his mother and capture the terrain and landscape.

This activity helps students understand story structure, and the importance of the gully/land as a symbolic place but also what is discovered there.

Resources:

- **For a Traditional Mural (Paint & Drawing)**

    - Large butcher's paper or canvas (big enough for a group project)

    - Paints (earthy tones like red, brown, yellow, plus blues, purples for the storm)

    - Paintbrushes & sponges (for different textures)

    - Crayons, markers, or oil pastels (for outlining symbols and details)

    - Charcoal or chalk (for sketching before painting)

    - Natural materials (leaves, sand, twigs) for texture and storytelling

- **For a Collage-Based Mural**

    - Coloured paper & magazines (for tearing and layering)

    - Glue sticks & scissors (safe for young children)

    - Fabric scraps (to add texture to landscapes)

    - Cotton balls or tissue paper (to create clouds and storm effects)

- **For a Digital Artwork (if using technology)**

    - iPads or tablets with a simple drawing app (like Procreate or Sketchpad)

    - Smartboard or projector to display a collaborative digital artwork

    - Stylus pens (optional for fine detail work)

Step 1: Explain that maps tell stories, they show where things happen and how places are connected and the creatures and vegetation that inhabit the space.

Ask:

- What places in *The Riddle of Washpool Gully* were important?

- What happened in those places?

- What animals and creatures lived in the spaces?

Step 2:

- Children are to create a large visual learning map (mural or digital artwork) representing the events of T*he Riddle of Washpool Gully.*

- Work as a class to sketch a rough map of the story on a whiteboard or large butcher paper.

- Discuss how they could represent these places?

- As a class or small groups, students map the locations of key events (e.g., where the story begins, the land at night and day, what is found at the land).

- Identify key locations in the story, such as:

  - The home

  - The boy running away

  - The mum searching for him

  - The ending when they return to protect the land.

  - Assign different sections of the mural to small groups. They create a painting, collage, chalk drawing, digital drawing tools or ephemeral art using natural materials (sticks, leaves, stones) to map the stories.

Step 3

  - Children present their murals, explaining the significance of how they represented the land and key moments form the performance.

  - Ask guiding questions: What images did you use and why? How does this story help us to understand the importance of the land? What other messages does the story help with?

  - Display murals for all to see.

FRAMEWORK 4 - THE WORLD OF ART

Activity 1

This performance is richly layered with dramatic elements, conventions and stagecraft that work together to beautifully convey the story. Puppetry is seamlessly integrated to transport the audience into other worlds and landscapes. An evocative soundtrack and purposeful lighting design further enhance dramatic meaning. The use of a narrator adds another dimension to the form, offering an alternative perspective for storytelling and communication. This section provides opportunities to explore and analyse these creative elements in depth.

Purpose: What is a puppet?

Dead Puppet Society draws on multiple forms and styles to create its unique style of design-led theatre. One of these is Puppetry. Puppetry has been used in theatre since the 5th century BC in Ancient Greece. Puppetry can take many forms, but at its core is the process of animating inanimate performing objects to help tell a story.

To find out more about the history of puppetry head to :

History of Puppetry https://www.theaterseatstore.com/blog/history-of-puppetry

Dead Puppet Society has created new methods for both creating and animating their puppets to be able to innovatively and creatively tell stories.

Consider the following statement from David Morton, "The use of puppetry expands the possibilities of the types of stories you can tell on stage. Think of it as the theatre's answer to animation."

Using this statement as a starting point, view some of Dead Puppet Society's previous works with puppetry.

Storm Boy - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXVPkI97KRs

Puppet Timelapse, The Wider Earth https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smaNWSplfzU

Ishmael https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqBQVqDcTlk

Engage students in a discussion about David's statement and the videos:

- Connect to what you know or have previously seen with puppetry.

- Challenge your perceptions of what you thought puppetry was.

- What questions or thoughts do you have about puppetry?

- Have students watch the above two videos and then read 'Elements of Manipulation' to create a puppet.

- Have students explore how to animate the puppet. Once they have created the puppet, students rehearse how the puppets move. Ensure they focus on working together so the movement of their puppet is unified and seems like one character, rather than a collection of independent parts.

- Ask them to experiment with movement and sound. Once they have experimented with this, ask them to work with another puppet to create a short scene. Show some of these to the class. Ask them to think about what the relationship between the two puppets is? How do we know this? Ask students to experiment without relying on dialogue.

(From *THE WIDER EARTH* | EDUCATION NOTES)

Activity 2

Puppetry/Visual Theatre Learning Experience

Purpose to explore puppet making and play:

- Explore puppetry manipulation techniques
- Build transformative monster creatures using objects and household materials

Instructions:

PART 1

Introduce the 3 principles of puppetry:

- Focus point/puppet eye focus
- Breath/puppet breathing
- Gravity/puppet weight
- Object Transformation

PART 2

Experiment with puppetry principles:

Focus Point

Ask the students to choose an object in the classroom (eg. stapler, scissors, pencil case, glasses, workbook, piece of cloth or give them each a piece of brown paper to scrunch into a shape. Instruct the students to indicate where they think the eyes of the object would be if it were to be animated/characterised.

Instruct students to use their object to look around the room and to look at things it discovers in the space. Encourage students to support the life of the puppet by throwing their own focus/gaze toward the puppet's head.

Explore movement language of nodding, shaking their head, looking up and down.

Breath

Encourage students to match their breath with their object and breathe in and out with the puppet character. Experiment with different types of breathing and breath language. How would their object breathe if they were anticipating something scary, if they were disappointed/surprised/shocked/ devastated etc. (ie sighing, panting, gasping, huffing, wheezing). Puppets need to breathe when they come to stillness to indicate life, or when highlighting an important emotional change in their physicality.

Gravity/Weight

Movement is the essence of puppetry. Gravity relates to establishing weight, movement quality and kinesthetic intelligence in a puppet. Gravity is also the force that means we do not float. Encourage students to experiment with holding their characterised object in a way that makes it appear heavier/lighter than it is. Now try and find a walk or crawl cycle with the object - how does it move, bounce, walk, dance?

Transformation: How to build a bigger monster

Now that each student has explored their individual object, instruct each student to combine their object with a partner, and build a new creature by combining their two objects together. Objects do not need to touch for them to be connected. Ask students to now re-find the creature's Focus Point, Breath and Gravity. Instruct students to find a new way of walking, crawling, flying, dancing, swimming. Play atmospheric music to assist the students with different movement qualities and moods for their creature. Now combine with a third student and transform the creature into a different monster with three objects. Puppet creatures are now ready to be used to devise short scenes, play games, meet other puppet creatures or actors and explore their emotional range. Students may add voice and sound to their creature to help express themselves.

Post Performance

To support learning post-performance the following questions may help? These questions are suitable for students exploring Theatre for Young People.

Post discussion questions

1. What was the main message of the performance?

2. What were the key events in the play, plot?

3. How does the staging contribute to the production? Discuss the use of props, set, use of symbolic staging, and use of AV?

4. What impact did the narrator have on the story? What effect did the narrator's questions have?

5. Describe the movement between stage action and puppets – how did this work?

6. "Visual theatre evokes a different kind of emotional response than realism or other text-based theatre. It awakens all of the senses, and asks for a different sort of imaginative engagement, because it's not just concerned with characters and a story but with building an entire world, which is why we really love it." David Morton. Consider this quote and describe the most vivid visual moments in the performance.

7. How did this work overall for younger audiences?

The Riddle of Washpool Gully

If you have any questions, please contact **education@qpac.com.au**.