MTC EDUCATION TEACHERS' NOTES 2016 - PART A

oased on the novel by Craig Silvey adapted by Kate Mulvany

1 August - 9 September 2016 Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

Notes prepared by Meg Upton



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Melbourne Theatre Company

MTC is Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual mainstage season of up to 12 plays, the Cybec Electric play readings series, an annual Education program, and more. MTC is one of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world. Founded in 1953, MTC is also the oldest professional theatre company in Australia, and currently exists as a semi-autonomous department of the University of Melbourne.

As Australia changed, MTC has changed with it. We like to think that we have frequently been at the forefront of Australian culture, introducing new ideas and new ways of looking at our lives, our society and the world; helping to explain a swiftly evolving landscape as we moved through it. Today, with Southbank Theatre as our performance home and our headquarters in Sturt Street, Southbank, MTC strives to present Melbourne audiences with the best drama from Australia and overseas to the highest standards.

Our Vision: To enrich lives with understanding and empathy through the storytelling power of the finest theatre imaginable.

Our Artistic Purpose: To produce classic and contemporary Australian and international theatre with style, passion and excellence in order to entertain, challenge and enrich audiences.



Contexts and Conversations

"Theatre can be defined as a performative art form, culturally situated, ephemeral and temporary in nature, presented to an audience in a particular time, particular cultural context and in a particular location." (Anthony Jackson, 2007)

Because theatre is an ephemeral art form – here in one moment, gone in the next – and contemporary theatre making has become more complex, Part A of the *Jasper Jones* Teachers' Notes offers teachers and students a rich and detailed introduction in order to prepare for seeing the MTC production – possibly only *once*. In this first part of the resource we offer you ways to think about the world of the play, playwright, structure, theatrical styles, stagecraft, contexts – historical, cultural, social, philosophical, and political, characters, and previous productions.

Part B of the Teachers' Notes will provide images, interviews, and detailed analysis questions that relate to the Unit 4 performance analysis task. The extract below from the Theatre Studies Study Design is a reminder of the knowledge, skills and terminology you need to demonstrate in your analysis of the play.

Theatre Studies Unit 4 – Area of Study 3 – Outcome 3

Students attend a production selected from the Unit 4 Playlist. They analyse and evaluate how actor/s interpret the playscript in the performance and the relationship between acting, direction and design. In doing so students study the character/s in the play and how the actor/s interpreted them on stage.

Key Knowledge

- The character/s in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- Interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance
- Expressive skills including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness and silence used by the actor/s to realise character/s
- The use of focus and the acting space
- The use of language to convey the intended meanings of the play
- The interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- The establishment and maintenance of the actor-audience relationship
- The interrelationships between acting and theatrical style/s utilised in the production
- Understanding of theatrical terminology and expressions to analyse and evaluate a theatrical production

Key Skills

- Analyse the character/s in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- Analyse and evaluate interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance, including the acting skills used by actor/s to realise character/s, the use of focus and the acting space and the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- Analyse the use of language to convey the intended meanings of the play
- Analyse and evaluate the establishment and maintenance of the actor-audience relationship
- Analyse the ways that actor/s work within the theatrical style/s utilised in the production
- Use theatre terminology and expression appropriately

Charlie: You're superdelusional, my little Vietnamese friend. The definition of super is 'greater than usual'. So in every aspect – money, mansion, car, belt – Batman is indeed super. Added to this, he has an alter-ego, he has a costume, he fights for Truth and Justice, has arch enemies, and he does it without any weird mutations like the other 'superheroes'. He's just a really determined guy. He's normal. In him we see ourselves. And that's what makes him the best. To be Batman takes a lot of courage.

Plot Summary

The story takes place in Corrigan, a small town in regional Western Australia, 1965, during the Vietnam War and pre the 1967 referendum that resulted in Aboriginal people being included in the census and recognised as Australians.

The story begins when Jasper Jones comes to Charlie's window. Although he feels anxious Charlie decides to leave with Jasper. When they arrive at their destination, Jasper's secret glade in the woods, Charlie sees something he wishes he had never seen – the body of Laura Wishart.

Jasper is devastated. Charlie is physically ill. After a while Jasper tells Charlie he needs help with Laura Wishart's body because he wants time to find out who killed her before he is blamed, just as he is blamed for everything else. Charlie reluctantly agrees to help.

Charlie then struggles to deal with what he has done. This struggle is made worse when the town begins its search for Laura. While Charlie knows where she is he can't say due to the promise he made to Jasper. As the story progresses, Charlie builds a strong connection with Eliza, Laura's younger sister. He finds himself wanting to tell her what happened. He also finds himself feeling great affection for Eliza.

Jasper appears to disappear from Corrigan for quite a few days. When he reappears and goes to see Charlie, he tells Charlie that he's convinced that 'Mad Jack Lionel' is guilty of killing Laura.

Through Charlie's eyes we learn about his family dynamics, particularly his relationship with his mother, Ruth, who seems to hate Corrigan. We also meet and get to know Charlie's best friend, Jeffrey Lu, a skilled cricketer and the son of Vietnamese refugees. Jeffrey becomes a cricketing hero in a town that is slowly being torn apart by the missing Laura, the conscripting of young men to the Vietnam War, and formerly respected adults being outed as corrupt and abusive. In combination, these events have terrible consequences for the people of Corrigan and mean that Charlie and his young friends must rapidly come to terms with an adult world.

Jasper: This town thinks I'm an animal, Charlie. They think I belong in a cage and now here's the perfect chance for them to do just that. And it'll get even worse once I'm in there. You know what they do to fellas like me in prison?

Setting and Structure of the Play

Jasper Jones is structured as a linear narrative. It contains a series of scenes that are presented from the perspective of 13-year-old Charlie Bucktin. He is present in all scenes. The play is set in 1965 in a Western Australian country town. The language reflects some of that time and era but it is surprising how the perceived innocence of that period is somewhat betrayed by the language used by some characters!



Read through the script excerpts from *Jasper Jones* presented in these notes, look for the green boxes. What insights does each one give you with regard to:

- Characters
- Narrative

Themes

Setting

Language

Cast and Creatives



Ian Bliss Mr Bucktin/Warwick



Nicholas Denton Charlie Bucktin



Taylor Ferguson Laura/Eliza Wishart



Rachel Gordon Mrs Bucktin



Guy SimonJasper Jones



Hayden Spencer Mad Jack



Harry Tseng Jeffrey Lu



Sam Strong Director



Anna Cordingley Set & Costume Designer



Matt Scott Lighting Designer



Darrin Verhagen Composer/ Sound Designer



Leith McPherson Voice & Dialect Coach



Justine Campbell Assistant Director

Key Characters in Jasper Jones

Charlie Bucktin: The 13-year-old protagonist and narrator of the play. He is intellectual rather than athletic. This makes him

somewhat of an outsider in Corrigan, where sporting ability is highly valued. He aspires to become a writer, and reads notable books during the course of the novel. These books are the source of much of Charlie's

inspiration and guidance.

Jasper Jones: 15 years old. An Aboriginal boy, Jasper is an outcast in Corrigan. He is only 15 but Charlie thinks Jasper

looks much older. He is the town's scapegoat, and the first person to be blamed for any kind of trouble. Jasper's father is an alcoholic and there is rarely food in the house. Jasper knows his mother died when he

was young, but the circumstances of her death remain somewhat of a mystery.

Eliza Wishart: 13 years old. Eliza is described as intelligent and slightly resembling Audrey Hepburn. She is the younger sister of Laura.

Laura Wishart: 15 years old. Eliza's older sister. Her death sparks the events in the play.

Jeffrey Lu: 12 years old. Charlie's best friend. He is a year younger than Charlie but has skipped a year in school

because of his intellect. Charlie admits that Jeffrey is smarter than he is because of his Vietnamese heritage. Jeffrey often experiences racial discrimination from other boys in the town, particularly Warwick

Trent, despite his grand cricket abilities.

Mad Jack Lionel: The scariest bloke in town. Corrigan kids regularly take things from his property to prove their bravery.

Taking a peach from his tree is the highest achievement. Jasper blames him for Laura's murder after

discovering the word 'sorry' carved into a rusted car door on his property.

Ruth Bucktin / Wes Bucktin:

40-45-years-old. Charlie's parents. Ruth is desperately unhappy. Wes is a quiet hero and an ambitious writer.



Having read the plot summary and the setting of the play, imagine each of the characters as they are described:

- What are the suggested characteristics of each character?
- What do the ages of the characters suggest about them?
- Why would Jasper and Jeffrey stand out in a town like Corrigan?
- How might the setting 1965 impact the characters' relationships and their behaviour?

Charlie: Is Mad Jack tall? I heard he's about 8ft high and 4ft wide. Does he really have a scar down his face? Does he really have a glass eye that follows you wherever you go? And a tattoo of a skull and crossbones on his arm? Does he really smell like wee? What's his voice like? Raspy? Croaky? What? Does his hair really come all the way down to his knees? And did he really make a pact with the devil? I heard that once.



The following links offer a range of insights into the novel, the play and 1960s Australia:

From Page to Stage

WATCH:

- Video promo for the novel
- Barking Gecko Theatre Company 2015 production trailer

DISCUSS:

How is the story imagined for both the screen and the stage?

From the Author

LISTEN:

Podcast of Craig Silvey talking about Jasper Jones

DISCUSS:

What does the writer have to say about the story?

Australia on Screen

WATCH:

- A snapshot of life in Perth in the mid-1960s
 From the Film Australia Collection, directed by Henry Lewes
- 1960s Australia

DISCUSS:

- How was life in Australia captured on film during the 1960s?
- What values and pastimes were prevalent?
- What do you notice about the roles people played, cultural diversity (or lack of)?

Contextual Information

The Vietnam War - Australia's role

In *Jasper Jones*, some of the men in Corrigan are part of the ballot for national service. The husband of one of the characters, Sue Findlay, is killed in Vietnam. The Lu family as refugees from Vietnam become a target for prejudice and violence.

The Vietnam War, also known as the Second Indochina War, and known in Vietnam as the Resistance War Against America or simply the American War, was a Cold War era proxy war that occurred in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia from 1 November 1955 to the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975.

Jeffrey: Charlie...my family in Vietnam got killed yesterday

Charlie turns back to Jeffrey

Charlie: What?

Jeffrey: My aunt and uncle. Their village got bombed.

Charlie: Your family got blown up?

Jeffrey nods

The 'lottery'

Under the National Service Scheme, twenty-year-old men were required to register with the Department of Labour and National Service (DLNS), they were then subject to a ballot that, if their birth date was drawn, meant the possibility of two years of continuous full-time service in the regular army, followed by three years part-time service in the Army Reserve. As part of their duty, national servicemen on full-time duty were liable for 'special overseas service' including combat duties in Vietnam.

As the number of men eligible for call-up far exceeded the number needed for military service, the bi-annual ballot determined who would be considered for national service. The ballot resembled a lottery draw, even to the extent, in the case of the final five ballots, of being fully televised. Numbered marbles representing birthdates were chosen randomly from a barrel and within a month men whose numbers had been drawn were advised by the DLNS of whether they were required for participation in the scheme or not. Those failing to register, without an acceptable explanation, were automatically considered for call-up as well as being liable to a fine.

Source: Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs on the Vietnam War

The rights of Aboriginal people

In Jasper Jones, Jasper is openly called a 'half-caste' and is vilified by nearly everyone because of who he is – part Indigenous. Until 1962, Aboriginal people were prevented from voting and until 1967 were regarded by the law as part of Australia's 'flora and fauna'.

The right to vote the national referendum

In 1962 the Commonwealth Electoral Act was amended to give franchise to all Aboriginal people, extending the right to vote to Aboriginal people in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

In the Commonwealth 1967 Referendum more than 90% voted to empower the Commonwealth to legislate for all Aboriginal people and open means for them to be counted in the census. Hopes flew high that constitutional discrimination would end. It also empowered the federal government to legislate for Aboriginal people in the states and share responsibility for Aboriginal affairs with state governments. All states except Queensland abandoned laws and policies that discriminated against Aboriginal people. The first census fully including Aboriginal people was in 1971.

Source: Jens Korff, Aboriginal history timeline on creativespirits.info

Charlie: The weirdest thing is that in 100 years from now, more or less, everyone in Corrigan, in Australia, in the world, every parent, child, every animal, everyone will have died. Including me. In all sorts of different ways. And I can't stop thinking about that. About Laura. About how she died last night. Was it because someone just wanted to hurt somebody? Does Corrigan have its very own Eric Edgar Cooke? Is it Mad Jack Lionel? And when is the town gonna wake up and realise what's going on?

Themes in Jasper Jones

The novel and the play explore a number of key themes and ideas. Read the following excerpt from an interview with novelist Craig Silvey:

Jasper Jones contains a sharp and lively narrative drive found in all great storytelling (no doubt assisted by a superb and authentic use of dialogue), while inviting us to reflect more deeply on the qualities and flaws of the human condition. While covering the familiar territory of the coming-of-age novel, Silvey projects some fundamental moral questions onto each of the teenage boys, who in various ways represent for the author, 'what it's like to grow up smart or poor or Asian or black or shy or tentative in rural Australia'... Jasper Jones is also about first love and the depth of friendship that can hold outsiders together when faced with adversity.'

Source: Tony Birch, interview with Craig Silvey on readings.com.au

The following excerpt from the play examines the word 'sorry':

Charlie: In all the best books I've read the characters are caught between being good and being bad. They're stuck between right and wrong. But it's the truly good people that can tell the difference. And it's the truly good people that can admit fault and say Sorry ... Sorry belongs to the truly good people. It means you feel the pulse of someone's else's pain and it's an offering for someone who's suffering to take or leave. Sorry.



- What do these excerpts suggest are some of the key themes explored in Jasper Jones?
- Discuss the broader meanings of 'sorry'.
- Discuss Sorry Day, the formal apology to Aboriginal people by Kevin Rudd.



From the MTC website and your own research, look at how this production of *Jasper Jones* is being marketed. What scene is being depicted in the MTC poster? From what you know so far, consider how you would promote this production of *Jasper Jones* by designing your own poster that captures some of the key themes. Write a rationale that explains your creative concept.



Sam Strong (Director) spoke to MTC Education about his vision for the forthcoming production of Jasper Jones.



What appeals to you the most about the story of Jasper Jones?

Jasper Jones is a classic coming of age story but it is a coming of age story that takes place in very local environs. I encountered the play adaption before I encountered the novel and I read them in that order. Playwright Kate Mulvany is uniquely qualified as an adaptor of novels. She is able to generate a very theatrical narrative, while capturing the tone of the original novel. Within that process I think she is able to find her own playwriting voice. I was gripped by Kate's script. From that I made my way back to the novel. What appeals to me about the story is that it places the audience in the shoes of the protagonist. It doesn't matter how far away you are from Charlie Bucktin's age – thirteen – you end up going on the same journey, the same adventure, have the same experiences, and have the same realisation that Charlie has.

Knowing that Jasper Jones is a well-loved novel and studied quite often, what are the challenges of bringing it to life on stage?

I think when you are dealing with a well-loved property whether it is a film, a book or a classic play, you always encounter a series of expectations about what it should look like. I think that means you have an obligation to find your own path and point of view. There is always a challenge with regard to theatrical or cinematic representations of classic texts, and particularly much loved ones. Such texts live in people's imaginations and with any rendering of them, other than the reader or audience's own imagination, the result is not going to be as interesting. Any entity that is made concrete by one artist/writer will provide a challenge for someone creating a version of it. As a director you need to embrace the difference, embrace your unique point of view in telling the story and find a way to channel the spirit of the original onto the stage. Kate has done an enormous amount of work already. That is what I see my role as – to realise the spirit of the story.

What are the most compelling ideas that this play explores?

Firstly it is a very rich evocation and portrait of a particular time in Australia's history. It details the mid-1960s in Australia and the political and social events of the time including the Vietnam War, the Indigenous Referendum, and the role of women. It was a critical time in this country's cultural and social life. The play plunges us back to that time but it is also a compelling coming of age story that documents the archetypal journey from innocence to experience. For Charlie the journey is one whereby the world he thought he was inhabiting turns out to be something completely different. Charlie's life of relative innocence is at first forcefully and then gradually revealed to be complex, compromised and darker than the world he imagined.

There are several dark moments in this play. What is your vision with regard to staging those darker moments?

You can't shy away from or dilute the darkness in *Jasper Jones*. That does it a disservice and I don't feel you can sanitise such moments for an audience, particularly a younger audience. The power of the story for me comes from the facts that its protagonist encounters some very adult experiences and concepts. This play needs to take the effects these experiences have on Charlie and replicate them for the audience. The way we will approach the staging of some of those darker moments of the work is to create them for maximum impact in the theatre. As a director I want the audience to see the world as Charlie does and to experience the world as Charlie does.

For example, the first encounter we see him have with Laura Wishart has a profound physical effect on Charlie. He is physically ill. We want to be true to the scale of the effects of these moments. There are also practical considerations of how you stage some of the darker moments. One of the challenges of turning a novel into a play is that novels tend to be quite epic in their storytelling demands. They range through many locations and don't tend to have any regard for adaptation to other media, especially theatre. So, I need to find a vocabulary in order to address the cinematic or theatrical demands of the storytelling.



Discuss Darker Moments

The novel and the play explore some dark ideas – suicide, racism, violence and abuse. Discuss the director's comments about the darker moments of *Jasper Jones*:

- Do you agree that, as the director also says, 'you can't shy away' from the darker moments in the story?
- After reading through this resource, how do you think the darker moments may be staged?

In order to capture that epic quality and the world of Corrigan, how have you envisioned the design?

Anna Cordingley is the set and costume designer. We have worked together on another adaptation of Kate Mulvany's, Masquerade, for the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals. Our approach to *Jasper Jones* was to consider the town of Corrigan as another character in the story, and to find a way of putting Corrigan on stage in order to represent the town and its population, and to do it in a way that is suitable to the scale of the Southbank Theatre, the Sumner. The Belvoir production, performed earlier in 2016, was suitable for the Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir. The Melbourne Theatre Company's Sumner is a much larger theatre. We were keen to utilise its size and to lift some moments into a poetic or almost operatic realm. So the design straddles the literal and the theatrical or stylised. Like all good designs for the theatre I believe it has a balance of both.



Discuss Design

- What does this description suggest that the set design will look like?
- How might stagecraft and theatre technologies be used to enable the town to become another character?
- What does the director mean by 'straddling the literal and the theatrical or stylised'?



Set design rendering (detail) by Anna Cordingley

Theatre Studies students attending this production are really interested in understanding the theatrical styles of the play, both its written form and its interpretation to the stage. Would you talk about this aspect of the production of *Jasper Jones?*

I think that Jasper Jones has an interesting cocktail of styles. As a medium the novel already possesses a cocktail of styles: direct address to the reader/audience from Charlie, description, naturalistic scenes between characters that includes dialogue. A production of *Jasper Jones* needs to find a balance between these theatre styles and also between the tonal elements of humour and lightness, and the genuine darker moments. To find that balance is challenging for a director – to get the fun, joy and charm, while at the same time honour the darkness and the power.



Discuss Theatrical Styles

The story of *Jasper Jones* covers multiple locations, a period of several weeks and is quite epic in its narrative. Discuss Sam Strong's comments on the theatrical styles within the production:

- What is direct address in the theatre?
- What are the conventions of naturalism?
- How do you imagine that the stagecraft will enable the shifts in time and location?

The title of the novel and the play is Jasper Jones. Is it only Jasper's story?

No, I think it is each character's story. One of the strengths of Kate Mulvany's script is that it captures those different stories. She has fleshed out the different character's stories. In particular the mother, Ruth Bucktin's, story is given more stage time, and Charlie's dad is also given more focus. I think that Kate has written a balanced theatrical adaptation of the novel that presents each character's perspective and story.

I often think of this story in two ways and divide the characters into two groups. The younger characters that is the quartet of Charlie Bucktin, Jasper Jones, Eliza Wishart and Jeffrey Lu who all, in different ways, inhabit the younger world. Then there are the adult characters who comprise Charlie's parents, Ruth and Wes Bucktin, Mad Jack Lionel, Laura and Eliza's parents Peter and Mrs Wishart, and Jeffrey's parents Mr and Mrs Lu. Jasper is an elusive and enigmatic presence and appropriately so. We primarily see the world through Charlie's eyes but we get a strong glimpse of everyone else.



Discuss Characters

Unit 4, Outcome 3 suggests a focus on characterisation. *Jasper Jones* offers a range of endearing, quirky, and dark characters. Consider Sam Strong's comments on the characters:

- Why do you think the director divides the characters into the younger and older groups?
- What do the themes and concerns of the play suggest that may be helpful here?
- What is the importance of 'perspective' in narrative?
- What is meant by a 'coming of age' story?

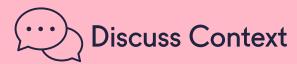
Charlie: There's one ball left. I'm not sure how many runs we need, but by the looks of things, there's a good chance we could win this if Jeffrey gets willow on leather.. The crowd ... the crowd are really hollering! They really want Jeffrey to do this!

Casting decisions for theatre in Australia have come under some scrutiny in the past few years. How important was it to cast in a culturally appropriate way for *Jasper Jones*?

I think it is very important. Jasper needs to be Indigenous and be played by an Indigenous actor. What is important about the Jasper character in this play is that his role depicts a moment in Australia's past that is highly significant. This is a time that pre-dates the 1967 referendum that removed certain barriers to Aboriginal Australians (note that Aboriginal people were given the vote in 1962). It is a time that pre-dates land rights. It is a world in which Indigenous Australians had a very different place in Australian society, a place I hope they feel is different now. Likewise with Jeffrey Lu. The presence of Vietnamese migrants in Australia when the Vietnam War broke out became highly volatile. When you are engaging in such political and social questions it is very important that you cast appropriately.

Is this a particularly Australian story?

Jasper Jones arrives at the universal through the particular. The play is a very particular picture of time and place, mid-1960s in the WA wheat belt, specific to its context/time/place but through that specificity it achieves something very universal. How these characters' journeys and pictures are drawn and the detail in which they are drawn, in such specificity and detail, allows us to better glimpse the universal stories that are about coming of age, from innocence to experience. Jasper Jones is a coming of age story – the journey from innocence to experience. The beauty of having two different versions is that the story achieves universal themes through two different portraits.



- What is suggested in these comments about the contexts and world of the play?
- From reading through these notes and possibly researching further, how do you imagine the contexts and world of the play will be captured in language, stagecraft, acting?
- What does the director mean by locating a play in a specific time also 'achieves something very universal'?

That particular time, are you honouring that quite strongly in the design?

We are honouring it strongly in the costumes. We're nudging around the reality through the sound. One thing that is important for me is how we draw that time so that it isn't necessarily a cheery exercise in nostalgia. If we get it wrong it can be too happily nostalgic. We are interested in reality. While the costumes might look somewhat nostalgic, they are also ones where someone hasn't washed them for a long time and people actually live in a remote country town. So we wanted a balance between the natural nostalgia that exists in that period, but also the reality of that period. That is true of Corrigan as well. We want to capture some of the quaintness of 1960s rural Australia but also the nastier realities of it such as the heat and the dust. So we have found a way to put that on stage as well.



Kate Mulvany (Playwright) was commissioned to adapt Craig Silvey's novel to the stage. Kate offers the following insights.



When the opportunity to adapt *Jasper Jones* to the stage came about why did you say yes? What attracted you to the project?

I was given the chance by John Sheedy, who was then the Artistic Director of Perth's Barking Gecko Theatre, which specialises in theatre for families. I'm passionate about writing for all ages, so when John put the book in my hands and asked if I'd be interested adapting, I immediately said yes – especially as it was a personal favourite. I love that the project doesn't shy away from big issues, even though it's for a broad spectrum of audiences. It deals with childhood, adulthood, mortality, ignorance and everything in between without talking down to its audience. It was tantalising to me to make the play as respectful and trusting of its viewers as Craig Silvey was to his readers.

What concepts/ideas does the play examine?

Ignorance, sexism, adolescence, love, hatred, diversity, belonging, acceptance, courage and hope.



\nearrow Discuss Themes

- What does this list of themes and ideas offered by the playwright suggest about the staging of the play? How do you imagine these ideas will be represented? Embodied?
- How might all these themes and ideas exist in one story? What do they suggest about communities? About people?
- Discuss what the writer means by theatre potentially 'talking down to its audience'.

In the adaptation of a novel to the stage, what stays and what goes? What couldn't be omitted?

I made sure I asked as many people I could find who had read the book what resonated with them most. Everyone said 'the Batman versus Superman' stuff and the cricket match! So those were a must. But I was also adapting a play about racism, sexism, and other very dark themes, so it was important to me to get everything as right as I could – I constantly checked in with everyone involved – from Craig Silvey, to our cast and crew – to make sure the story was being told respectfully and truthfully. Craig also gave me full license to flesh out the female characters a little more, which meant I got to put a lot of my own DNA into the play.

What are the essential elements and qualities of each of the key characters – Charlie, Jasper, Eliza, Jeffrey, and Mad Jack?

They are an amazing microcosm of our Australian cultural landscape. Jasper is our truth, and the legend of our history. He is our angry hero. He speaks the truth and he's not apologetic about it. And nor should he be. Eliza is our damaged heroine. She is speaking for not only herself and her sister Laura, but for young women everywhere – and she has a world of secrets to reveal. Jeffrey is our heart. He is exuberant, hopeful, pro-active and empathetic. We have much to learn from him. Mad Jack is our past. He is suffering now for the terrible choices he made through ignorance. But he can change, as can we. And Charlie is our eyes and ears. Through his storytelling, we see ourselves and our society – not just in 1965, but now. He is the portal through which we can ask, 'What has changed?' 'What should change?' 'What can I do to change the injustices of my society?' I would also add Mr and Mrs Bucktin to this list. They represent the fact that with love comes great sadness, and that the fairy tale doesn't always work out the way we plan. Ruth Bucktin in particular, represents a woman rebelling against the protocols placed upon her and who is demanding respect as a woman.



Discuss these character descriptions and consider the following:

- What are the characteristics of each character as described by the playwright?
- What relationships are suggested? Particularly consider the status between characters.

How would you describe the theatrical style of the play?

Slightly heightened, as we are seeing the world through the eyes of children.

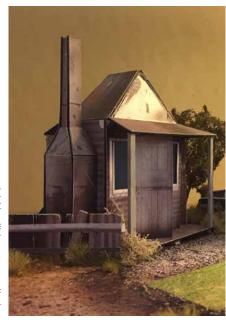


Discuss Theatrical Styles

- What is meant by 'heightened' in the theatre?
- How might language, acting, staging be heighted? What would you expect to see, hear and feel?
- Discuss why the playwright may particularly draw our attention to 'seeing the world through the eyes of children'. How might such a perspective generate a heightened style?

Did you imagine a set design as you wrote? Did you contribute to the design?

I always put full faith into the team of creatives around me. In the theatre, you can go fully realistic with a set, or you can turn a broom into a horse. If done with complete faith, the audience will follow. So with things like set design, I tend to just sit in awe at what a designer can make us believe. Anna Cordingley is one of my all-time favourite designers in the world, so I knew she was going to create a wondrous world for the MTC *Jasper Jones*. And she has!





Discusst Design

- What is the importance of imagination in the theatre?
- What do you understand by the term 'suspension of disbelief'?

Set model (detail) by Anna Cordingley



MTC Education -17-

The title of the novel and play is Jasper Jones. Is it only Jasper's story?

No. Jasper is the catalyst for a great deal of change in the town and its residents, therefore, it is right that the title is his. But his effect on the town of Corrigan and its citizens is immense, and so this play looks at all of those characters, who are all part of Jasper's world, whether they realise it or not.

What is particularly Australian about the play?

The themes are universal but the town of Corrigan is undeniably Australian. Keep an eye out especially for the vernacular – I've included Craig's as much as I can, but also some of my own Australian references, such as 'double gees' to really keep the play planted on Australian soil. And the design contributes so much to the world of wheat belt WA as well.



Discuss Context

What clues the writer is giving you here with regard to contexts and establishing the world of the play?

The play is set in 1965. What does that time and the things that were happening in Australia offer a contemporary audience?

From the innocence of the sleepout house and the cricket pitch, to the brutality of racial discrimination, mental illness and conscription, the heartbreaking thing about this play is that it asks the audience, 'What has really changed since 1965?' We watch Corrigan and its citizens and we say as an audience, 'But I heard that expressed only yesterday.' 'I saw that happen last week!' This is where theatre can change our world. It is a barometer of how far we've come politically, socially, morally. I hope that when people see *Jasper Jones* they don't watch through rose-coloured glasses of the past, but with the empathetic hearts of our future.



Discuss Darker Moments

- Discuss these comments by the playwright, and compare this to the response by Sam Strong (Director).
- Is it theatre's purpose to explore darker ideas?
- Do you agree with the playwright, Kate Mulvany, that there are things about humanity that just don't change?

You have performed in a production of Jasper Jones at Belvoir as Ruth Bucktin. What insights did that offer you as a playwright?

I loved performing Ruth. Craig allowed me to really flesh her out for the play, so I got to say a lot of what I wanted to say as a woman, not just in 1965 but right now. Performing in your own play gives you a real insight into the needs of everyone. It allowed me to listen to the other actors' needs on a really personal level. If someone had an issue with a line or an idea, I was there at all times to assist or change things. Particularly with the characters of Jasper and Charlie. I am a white woman putting words into the mouths of an Aboriginal and Vietnamese teenager. That's contentious territory. So I make sure I asked those actors, who had experienced the life of the characters much more than I could ever come up with, what their real truth is.



Discuss Adaptation

- Discuss this comment by the playwright.
- What is the significance of what she is saying?
- Discuss the ideas raised in this statement.

Even when I'm not playing Mrs Bucktin, I make sure I check in with every actor that ever plays these roles if there is anything they need me to add or take away as writer. By being in constant dialogue with a creative team, it means I get the truth of a story, and that the actors feel supported by their text and can own the narrative completely. It becomes theirs more than mine. That makes for better communication with the audience too.

Has the script changed since the first production?

The script is constantly changing due to what I mentioned above. Like a painting, a script is never fully finished. There's always a few brush strokes that I let the director, designers and actors apply. It makes for a more unique and personal experience for all!



Discuss Adaptation

- Discuss this description of a playscript by Kate Mulvany.
- Do you agree? Has your study of other playscripts confirmed this?
- Are playscripts fixed in time or are they free to be adapted?



Set design rendering (detail) by Anna Cordingley









When you visit Southbank Theatre, share your experience on Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag #mtcJasperJones and tag @melbtheatreco



Like our MTC Student Hub on Facebook for behind-the-scenes information about our Education Program and discover ways for you to get involved with MTC.

Facebook/MTCStudentHub



Check out our official YouTube channel for exclusive videos, including an interview with Sam Strong (Director) and Kate Mulvany (Adaptor) about *Jasper Jones*.

youtube.com/melbtheatreco

Attendance Information

Jasper Jones contains coarse language and references to violence, sexual abuse and suicide. Further information will be available closer to production season on our website. If you need to debrief with somebody about the themes in Jasper Jones, your school wellbeing coordinator is a good person to ask. There are also many helpful mental health resources online.

The MTC website has dedicated pages for teachers and students. Go online to read more about visiting with school groups and opportunities for students. mtc.com.au/education

Part B of the Jasper Jones Teachers' Notes will be available on our website once the production opens. Perfect for unpacking the performance after you've seen Jasper Jones on stage, Part B will also include photographs to help you remember key moments from the production.

Enquiries

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