

Acting Green

The Case Studies

These case studies are presented to show examples of how **Acting Green: Drama Australia Guidelines for sustainable drama practice and drama teaching** can be implemented in drama in education and theatre practice.

Case Study One: Wild: Amazing Animals in a Changing World

A collaboration between Melbourne Museum, Drama Victoria and Thomas Carr College, Melbourne – creating drama about endangered and extinct wildlife (2009).

Case Study Two: Happiness Project

A Malthouse Theatre initiative that invites students in Years 9 and 10 to respond to aspects of climate change through the medium of theatre. Students are then hosted by the company and they perform and share their process (ongoing).

Case Study Three: The Hobbit

A school based production using recycling, reducing and reusing from the ground up. Created by Scotch College, Melbourne with students in Years 7, 8 and 9 (2010).

Case Study Four: ZEBRA! Sydney Theatre Company

In 2009 the Sydney Theatre Company made a commitment to creating sustainable practice in all areas of its theatres and administrations. The STC Education Program honours this process. *ZEBRA!* by Ross Mueller explores how a major performing arts company approaches sustainable practice both practically and aesthetically (2011).

Drama Australia welcomes more case studies from members as examples of putting the Acting Green guidelines into practice. Please contact the Director of Projects- Jo Raphael.

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*1 ream of paper = 6% of a tree and 5.4kg CO2 in the atmosphere
3 sheets of A4 paper = 1 litre of water*

CASE STUDY ONE

Wild: Amazing Animals in a Changing World

A collaboration between Melbourne Museum, Drama Victoria and Thomas Carr College, Melbourne

The Project

The Drama Australia *Footprints Project – Wild Things* – created a unique partnership between Thomas Carr College in Tarneit, the Melbourne Museum and theatre designer, Tanja Beer. Using the newest and now permanent exhibition, *Wild! Amazing Animals in a Changing World* as a springboard, ten Year 9 students, under the guidance of Head of Drama, Michael Dalley, devised a theatrical performance in response to the issues raised – threatened, endangered and extinct creatures.



Teaching sustainability through drama: Sustainable drama and theatre practice.

Embedded in the project from the very beginning was the concept of *sustainable theatre practice*. It made sense to everyone involved that an exhibition about extinct and endangered species required a strong environmental and sustainable approach. Early in the devising process, the students from Thomas Carr worked with Theatre Designer Tanja Beer in sharing ideas about the creation of set items, costumes and props that could be made

from sustainable materials to reduce waste, or ones that could be reused and recycled. They asked themselves three key questions: What did they already have? What could they use that could be reused? If they did use something, was it recyclable?

'It is vital to train our future theatre community in environmentally and socially responsible theatre practices - "Wild Things!" was a great opportunity to get involved in spreading this message in a creative and effective way' – Tanja Beer, Theatre Designer

'It helped bring across our message – sustainable theatre – the main focus of the project .It was drama as it should be without the lights, expensive costumes, natural and recyclable' – Holly



The students used the stimulus of a picture story book, a fictional account of an explorer – complete with pith helmets, hunting rifles and binoculars - seeking out the Tasmanian tiger in the belief that it couldn't possibly be extinct. The story consisted of strong caricatures with action that was suitably epic, providing a solid base for devising work within tight timelines – only two weeks.

'We thought it would be good to go for an Australian animal. We had a story book that had a simple story and that was our main stimulus. It was like a blank canvas' – Alannah

'For me the project was about using drama as a way of informing people about endangered species' - Holly

It is important to note that this was a day time performance which meant that lighting choices did not need to be considered. In theatre, lighting is the biggest single *hungry beast* of energy. In recent times I have spoken with Paul Jackson, resident lighting designer at the

Malthouse Theatre, who talks about the need for theatre directors to work 'more darkly' and to use theatre lighting in a much more considered way, a practice that is slow in its uptake and application. I wonder about how the next generation of students may be the torch bearers for this.

'When we started we couldn't name ten species of endangered animals ourselves' – Kiandra

'Out of all of us' – Ben 2

'We struggled to name ten. It was really sad' – Sam

The Performance

As the delegates were led through the museum to the exhibition it was really pleasing to hear their own gasps of awe as the exhibition revealed itself. Then, drum roll, enter the human animals in the form of the Thomas Carr students, dressed in lab coats and dotted around the space! They magically became an ostrich, a chimpanzee, a possum, or a bird. Suddenly appearing amongst the delegates and, importantly, amongst the general public who were also there on the day – unaware of what was about to unfold.

'We all picked a spot in the exhibit and we hid. We crouched in spots, even among the public. Sometimes we had to duck down where their legs were. I think we all got really stared at' – Sam.

'I had to go around and actually head butt strangers' – Marcus

'I was on the balcony thing and I had to cue people and one of the museum people started speaking to me and mid-conversation I started making bird noises! I think he thought I was on something' - Kiandra

'One of the great things was that we actually involved the audience. We got right up in their faces and took on these animalistic characters and it really brought out the play' – Holly.



Audience members commented on the wonderful surprise elements of the performance. The location of the performance in and around the exhibition provided new aesthetic dimension to experiencing the museum space and new perspectives on the themes of the exhibition. Museum personnel commented on the success of the project from their point of view.

'The Footprints Project was highly successful on a number of levels. It involved a current exhibition; it was site specific; we have a strong visual record of the event; the response was strong and the audience were highly engaged - those who were invited and those who stumbled across it! There was a wonderful blurring between the performance and the audience. As a pilot project it was a win-win' - Sally Druitt, Melbourne Museum



The Impact

As a reflective practitioner, I feel strongly about the empowering effect that this project had on the students involved. Even six months later when I spoke to them they were still energised by the experience and were able to articulate what were the highlights and 'cool' moments as their comments articulate and describe. They continued to have realisations about the impact of humans on the natural world and what they and others could do. Their comments showed an increasing awareness of the importance and potential of their performance making to increase their own understanding and to inform others. As an advocate of sustainable theatre practice I felt that this project was highly successful. The

learning that took place was invaluable, the awareness of the students about the relationship between what they experienced with the exhibition, working with the designer and what they created impacted strongly.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of:

The students of Thomas Carr College who devised performed and presented 'Wild Things!' - Holly, Laura, Kiandra, Ben 1, Ben 2, Alannah, Samuel, Marcus, Kate & Jordan, together with teacher Mr. Michael Dalley

Sally Druitt, Education, Melbourne Museum

Tanja Beer, Green Theatre Designer

Written by Meg Upton, project facilitator on behalf of Drama Victoria





CASE STUDY TWO

The Happiness Project 2010-11

Malthouse Theatre

The Project:

Happiness is a Malthouse Theatre Education commission designed to empower Year 9 and 10 students, as young adults, to make decisions about issues surrounding climate change. Like the best theatre, *Happiness* is not didactic but prompts a series of questions, propositions and provocations for both the theatre-makers and the theatre audience.

Happiness was conceived in 2009 by Malthouse Theatre's Education Program Manager Fiona James and created by Malthouse Theatre artists to create a conversation between young people as artists and professional theatre making. This dialogue is inspired by Malthouse Theatre's policy on sustainable practice, *Malthouse Greenlight*, which encourages theatre making practices that minimise the company's carbon footprint.

The structure of the Project

Happiness is both a show and an education program. The *Happiness* script, by Maryanne Lynch is the cornerstone of the program providing a rich textual stimulus which students use to create their own short ensemble piece in school (Term 3). Parallel to this, a Malthouse Theatre ensemble also creates a work, directed by Kate Sulan, and in Term 4, all participating ensembles come together over one day to present their work. The performance day is facilitated in order to encourage discussion with participants (students, teachers and the Malthouse Theatre artists) about the process of theatre-making and the choices each ensemble has made when approaching the stimulus. Students are approached and encouraged to discuss and present their work as artists who have a shared investment and creative contribution to make to each work.

The *Happiness* script is an episodic theatre work for an ensemble of four actors (minimum) and is approximately 60 minutes in duration consisting of 5 stand-alone Episodes (10 - 12 minutes each). Written by Maryanne Lynch, *Happiness* is a work that traverses time and space through a variety of theatrical forms whilst approaching 5 cultural responses to climate change within each episode:

- Episode One: Passion (Life is full of Promise)
- Episode Two: Resilience (Hope in the face of fear)
- Episode Three: Procastination (Leave as is)
- Episode Four: Desperation (A warning)
- Coda: A step into the Unknown... (A call to action)



The **Happiness** program uses a NiNG (educational social networking website) to provide participating artists with instructions and materials including:

- The Happiness script by Maryanne Lynch
- Instructions on the Happiness program and how to approach and plan
- Stimulus materials (photos, YouTube links)
- Background information including design and staging specifications, Director's Notes on the Happiness script, lighting states, props lists
- One-on-one advice and guidance on approaching the Happiness program

Teaching sustainability through drama: Sustainable drama and theatre practice

The theme of sustainability is embedded in the overall concept, the script and in the instructions given to students and teachers. The Malthouse Ensemble performance of **Happiness** works very closely with the design team to caretake the focus on sustainable practice. Designer, Anna Cordingly, creates a set design that uses recycled materials and these, in turn, are constantly recycled beyond their use to the production. Costumes are minimal and not reliant on large amounts of materials, with a conscious effort to make them transferable across the five episodes. A focus of the design is the use of ice that as it melts is then retained and recycled.

Lighting is the single most energy hungry aspect of theatre making and this is the constant challenge of making theatre. Compromising the aesthetic with sustainability is the ongoing tension. All student performances have access to the same lighting design, the same set pieces and the same performance space. They make decisions about what aspects of these they will use. Any additional props required must fit in a suitcase.

The Impact of the Project

Fiona James, who devised the project says, '**Happiness** combines best teaching and learning practice with best theatre practice and aims to actively engage students – turning the lights on to both their processes and ours. **Happiness** is an opportunity for unfettered creative responses to climate change. There is nothing preachy or didactic here. Instead this project offers students a collaborative act in which they can engage with climate change in a meaningful and creative way'.

In 2012, **Happiness** will tour regional Victoria. A new script has been commissioned by Malthouse Theatre for its in-house version and the overarching project has been re-named **The Suitcase Series**, details of which can be found at:

<http://www.malthousetheatre.com.au/backstage/education/the-suitcase-series/>



CASE STUDY THREE

The Hobbit – A Middle School Production

Scotch College, Melbourne.

Through their work, artists can raise awareness, facilitate dialogue, and empower people by inviting them to imagine their own solutions... Scientists may provide precious data and design solutions to address the climate crisis. But what artists can do, perhaps better than anybody, is to create the narrative that will make this endeavour an exciting and even spiritually rewarding one.

Chantal Bilodeau, *Addressing Climate Change One (Theatre) Artist at a Time*

They knew that they were drawing near to the end of their journey, and that it might be a very horrible end. The land about them grew bleak and barren, though once, as Thorin told them, it had been green and fair. There was little grass, and before long there was neither bush nor tree, and only broken and blackened stumps to speak of ones long vanished. They were come to the Desolation of the Dragon, and they were come at the waning of the year... if anything was to be done, it would have to be done by Mr Baggins, alone and unaided.

J. R. R. Tolkien *The Hobbit*



THE PROJECT

The Hobbit is a story about how even 'quite a little fellow in a wide world' can make an enormous difference, if he's brave enough. Bilbo is the hobbit least likely to journey out of the comforts of his hobbit hole. Somehow, he must find the inner resources to destroy the dragon that has laid desolation to the land.

Similar to Bilbo, the Year 7 and 8 students from Scotch College and Presbyterian Ladies' College involved in this production are part of a generation that must find solutions to a number of challenges. Some of these solutions may require people to step outside of the comforts of how they have operated in the past. While they may still be 'little', like Bilbo, they will need to work with others, using their resourcefulness and creativity in order to find solutions.

Teaching sustainability through drama: Sustainable drama and theatre practice

This production incorporated environmentally sustainable theatre practices. The aim was to convey an environmental message, without being didactic about the process of sustainability. Rather, it aimed to celebrate young people's capacity for ingenuity. The directorial vision was an anachronistic setting of *The Hobbit* on a pile of rubbish which evolved throughout the play to reveal the creatures, pathways and monsters of Tolkien's fantasy world. While Bilbo and the dwarves are on a journey through Middle Earth, they traverse a recognisable mountain of twenty-first century decadence and waste. Ultimately, they faced Smaug, the dragon who had laid desolation to the land. The pile of rubbish transformed into the shape of the dragon: ultimately, it was the pile of waste which Bilbo had to overcome.

Our production also featured puppetry as an artistic expression of our capacity to transform rubbish into something useful or aesthetically pleasing. These young people invested their energy and creativity in bringing to life the trolls, wizards and dragons of middle earth; similarly, our students and production team invested energy in recycling rubbish, giving those objects new life.



In 1st term 2010, 104 students in Year 7 and 8 Art classes worked with two artists in residence to build a number of puppets that audiences met in this play. The boys worked in a space under the stage to build the creatures out of wheelie bins, sleeping bags, plastic tubing, broken toys and other hard rubbish that was rescued by the students. The artists, Al Ouchtomsky and Hugo Aitkens, and teacher, Yudha Pandji, helped guide the students to clean the rubbish and assemble the sculptures. The product of the sessions was four large puppets: three trolls and one dragon's head. The trolls were then large enough to require seven students each to operate them during the play. The dragon's head sat on top of the pile of rubbish which comprised the main part of the set (constructed from

materials left over from the puppet build), designed by drama teacher and Head of Drama at Scotch College, Stephen Ritchie.

Costumes and props were also constructed using a number of recycled elements. Students worked with teachers, Drama teachers Catherine Garrett and Ophelia Hopkins, to select appropriate materials from the set and puppet build collection and attach them to costumes recycled from other productions. This helped the dwarves and other characters blend into the junk aesthetic.

Posters and postcards promoting the play were printed on recycled card and using vegetable inks. Students were involved in developing lino-cut responses to descriptions from Tolkien's novel during art classes and the poster design is based on their work.

In the foyer during the production, work developed in art classes was displayed. Aside from the puppets used during the play, students had also created masks and small models using recycled materials, in response to the stimulus provided by the text and the working practice of the artists in residence.

Theatre technician, Jamie Lane, also worked with new LED theatre lighting which each draw only 70 watts of electricity (the equivalent lights draw 1000 watts).

Drama education teaches young people to work collaboratively, creatively and practically. We need these types of thinkers to combat climate change. While many of the messages about our environment can be quite negative, I'm incredibly hopeful. I believe that young people, like the ones involved in this production, will make an enormous difference in our wide world.



Asking the questions but not always finding the answers

The sustainable theatre making process was not always clear and we found that there were some areas where there were not yet adequate solutions. Rather, our aim was to ask the question about how we might reduce our impact. Some challenges included:

- Serving coffee for patrons in the foyer generated an environmental impact. We asked whether we could serve coffee in crockery, though found that the energy, water and chemicals used in the process of washing these in the industrial machines may have had as much of an impact as using recycled cardboard cups and then recycling them again. Using recycled cardboard cups is also a cheaper option
- While we utilised hard rubbish in the construction of our set and costumes it was difficult to find the best way to recycle this material after the bump out. Much of the plastics used could not be recycled. While several of the set pieces were recycled for wood or in parts for other productions, and while we separated out as much of the paper and metal for recycling as possible, a large amount of landfill was generated. While we momentarily created another aesthetic use for the materials, ultimately the plastics ended up in landfill.
- Using LED lighting was insufficient in the theatre space in which we were working. We needed to use incandescent lighting to highlight faces as the LEDs created a 'fuzzy' light which interfered with reading subtle expressions used by the young and relatively inexperienced cast members over a large distance. Despite our efforts, ultimately the low level of lighting compromised the audience's enjoyment of the work with some audience members reporting that they had difficulty clearly seeing the faces of the actors on stage. We discovered the lighting technology was not yet at the stage where we could adequately light the entire play with LEDs.
- Given that our puppets, set, costumes and props were created from recycled material, many of the objects were weather worn and degraded. As such, many of the objects started falling apart during the season. A great deal of additional work

was



required to sustain them.

The Impact

Despite the challenges, artistically and pedagogically the project was a success.

- The project increased awareness of sustainability issues and entertained audiences for the students and the broader school community
- The project facilitated partnership between the Art, Drama and English departments (English students also studied the novel and responded to the text through the process) in the school
- The project allowed students to work with artists who are working with recycled materials.
- The project allowed the Scotch Drama department to further explore questions of sustainability. While the department has operated for many years recycling sets, props and costumes, we were able to deepen our enquiry into the possibilities of enhancing our practice using new technologies and ideas.

Written by Michael Waugh,
Director, *The Hobbit*
Scotch College Melbourne
2011



CASE STUDY FOUR

ZEBRA! @ The Wharf

An example of Sydney Theatre Company's sustainable theatre policy in practice

Background

Sydney Theatre Company's home at The Wharf located on Sydney Harbour, has been transformed into a living demonstration of how all buildings – even heritage ones – can be made more sustainable. STC now draws energy from the sun, collects precious rainwater from the roof and reduces the waste leaving the Wharf to landfill.

As we make making our home more sustainable, so too are we changing the way that theatre is made, from efficient lighting to set construction, from marketing to archives. Our 2011 production of ZEBRA! typifies this approach:

The Project

ZEBRA! by Ross Mueller is set in Winter, 2009 in 1930's New York City bar in an 1860's building. The global housing bubble has well and truly burst, leaving the inhabitants of the previously buoyant city deflated and contemplating the impending age of austerity. While CNN reports that ruined New Yorkers have begun to exchange goods for services, trading iPods for cab rides, the deal of the century is going down in a Manhattan Irish bar called 'The Big House'. But believe it or not, the Irish paraphernalia isn't the greenest part of the set for ZEBRA!

About ZEBRA!

Writer Ross Mueller

Director Lee Lewis

Set Designer David McKay

Costume Designer Julie Lynch

Lighting Designer Damien Cooper

Composer and Sound Designer
Paul Charlier

With Bryan Brown, Colin Friels,
Nadine Garner

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/2011/zebra



Image 1: Bryan Brown and Colin Friels on the set of 2011 Sydney Theatre Company production *Zebra!*. The set was constructed largely from recycled timbers. (Image: Brett Boardman)

The creation process - a bit about the team and process

As part of our Greening Policy, STC endeavours to only use sustainable building materials. e.g. plantation softwoods, in our sets. From time to time, however, certain designs like Zebra, with its intricate timber detail, call for the use of hardwoods. In such designs, the use of softwoods “faked” to look like hardwoods would severely compromise the design, particularly in an intimate theatre space. Therefore on ZEBRA! our primary aim was to source recycled timbers. The age and condition of these timbers, as you can see, has been a great asset in creating the look of a 1930’s bar in an 1860’s New York building.

Sustainable Theatre Practice

Challenges

Balancing aesthetics and easy choices against sustainability can be challenging. Some questions that required answering were:

1. *Timber choice* – what can we use instead of the lightweight, cheap, and commonly used Luan-ply that comes from old growth rainforests?
2. *Waste* – how can the Company reduce its storage of flottage or even sending it to landfill?
3. *Aesthetic* – How can we achieve an old hardwood look when those timbers are either too expensive or not available?
4. *Budget* – How do we achieve all this on a relatively tight budget, particularly considering the set dressing the script requires?
5. *Environmental impact* – How can we reduce our overall environmental impact for the production?
6. *Responsible sourcing of timber* – The design requires the use of Luan plywood which notoriously comes from old-growth rainforests in areas such as Borneo and the Amazon, and is often illegally logged. How can we ensure materials are from sustainable and ethical sources?



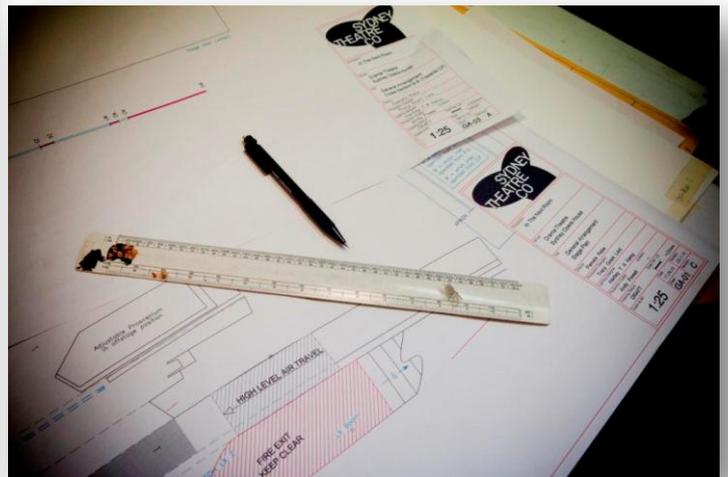
For shows where an old hardwood look is important (such as Zebra!), STC selectively uses its stockpile of second hand aged timber. (Image: Brett Boardman)

The Impact on Practice

1. STC now sources birch ply usually with Forest Stewardship Council certification. Our pine products are generally sourced from Australian and New Zealand plantations.
2. In addition much of the flattage used to make the walls is recycled from previous shows as is the brickwork and all the doors.
3. For designs where an old hardwood look is important, STC also selectively uses our stockpile of second hand aged timber.
4. Despite the intricate build, the reuse of old materials has saved the Company and the production costs came in under budget.
5. Changing the type of timber we use to build sets has a positive environmental impact. Set designers also consider the re-use or recycling of previous stock materials that can be adapted for use in their design.
6. Despite our reluctance to use this material, we have had to use several sheets of Luan plywood, a tropical hardwood ply. STC managed to source a legally verified supplier.



Sydney Theatre Company now sources birch ply usually with Forest Stewardship Council certification (Image: Brett Boardman)





Sydney Theatre Company's sustainability philosophy influences the purchasing and use of the vast array of materials that go into set construction. STC works with a supplier who salvages these timbers from demolition sites. In fact the Silky Oak was once laboratory bench tops in the old Sydney University Chemistry Department and the Jarrah floor was from a local school! Recycled timbers include:

- Mixed Australian Hardwoods – Main floor
- Jarrah - DS floor and bar skirting
- Blue Gum – Bar top
- Silky Oak – Bar and Door Mouldings Tasmanian Oak – Walls skirtings
- Blackbutt floorboards – used on the main steps, last seen STCs 2007 production of Rifle Mind.

The back of the set is like a patchwork of plays past, with recycled flats from Ying Tong, The Grenade and Tusk, Tusk, while the hardwood featured in the set has been recycled from Rifle Mind and Rabbit, and even a University of Sydney laboratory. What hasn't come from within Sydney Theatre Company's own store has been sourced from demolition sites and second-hand dealers.

But our commitment to sustainability doesn't stop there. The considered manner in which the set has been designed and constructed ensures that the materials can be re-used again and again in different configurations, and enjoy more than just fifteen minutes of fame!

About Greening The Wharf

The Greening The Wharf project is the vision of the STC Artistic Directors. An innovative rainwater harvesting system stores water in a huge pipe suspended beneath the pier's structure. The roof is home to the Australia's third largest capacity roof-top solar energy system, which allows STC to derive the majority of its required energy from renewable sources. A unique Green Design Policy encourages STC designers to consider sustainability from the earliest stage of the design process and, where possible, to implement sustainable materials and processes in the construction phase. All creative contracts for 2011 productions and beyond include the policy as a standard condition. For those interested in STCs broader sustainability program, please visit:

www.sydneytheatrecompany.com.au/greening

www.greeningthewharf.com

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Sydney Theatre Company