



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

**ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER  
GUIDELINES FOR  
DRAMA/THEATRE  
EDUCATION**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be aware that this publication may contain images of and/or references to deceased persons.



# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER GUIDELINES FOR DRAMA/THEATRE EDUCATION

I need a bouquet of words today  
to bind my heart  
in interplay  
To strengthen my will  
to grind to grist  
to lighten the dark  
and the shrouded mist  
to remove the mask  
unclench the fist  
To better the world  
For tomorrow.

*Need by Jack Davis*  
*Black Life Poems*  
(1992, University of Queensland Press [UQP])





## ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER GUIDELINES FOR DRAMA/THEATRE EDUCATION

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It is envisaged that periodically this document may be reviewed and possibly revised however at the time of its publication (2007) it had undergone an extensive consultative process. Drama Australia welcomes feedback on its guidelines documents. Any feedback can be sent to the Director of Projects, Drama Australia.

This document supersedes the document produced by Drama Australia (then known as the National Association for Drama In Education, NADIE) entitled, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Studies, A Policy Statement and Guidelines for Drama Educators' (NADIE, 1995). Interested parties may wish to obtain a copy of the 1995 document to gain an historical perspective on how the 2007 document has been revised compared to the original.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document was prepared by Dr Maryrose Casey\* and Ms Liza-Mare Syron\* under the guidance of the Director of Projects of Drama Australia (2005-2006) Mr Richard Sallis.

\*Please refer to information on the writers below

The current Director of Projects of Drama Australia is Ms Jo Raphael (2007-)

Drama Australia also wishes to thank its member association presidents, DALOs (Drama Australia Liaison Officers) and other national, state and territory committee members who provided feedback on the drafting of this document and sought advice from outside individuals and organisations.

The preparation of this document was commissioned by Drama Australia as one of its projects and was written by:

### **Dr Maryrose Casey**

Maryrose Casey is an ARC Postdoctoral Fellow with the Australian Studies Centre at University of Queensland. She has a PhD in theatre history from La Trobe University. Casey has presented papers on Indigenous Australian performance at conferences and symposiums in Australia, Europe and Asia. Her publications include articles and book chapters on contemporary Australian theatre practice, primarily focused on contemporary Indigenous theatre. Her recent publications include the multi award winning monograph *Creating Frames: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre 1967-97* (UQP, 2004). Her awards include Rob Jordan Book Award 2006, Dwight Conquergood Award 2006 and the Walter McRae Russell Book Award 2005. She has recently edited 'Parading Ourselves' a special issue of *Journal of Australian Studies* and 'Horizons of Race' a special issue of ACRAWSA e-journal. She is currently collaborating with Wesley Enoch to write *Telling the Story: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre practices* for Routledge's *Theatres of the World* series. This book is a series of case studies of specific practices.

### **Liza-Mare Syron**

Liza-Mare Syron is a descendent from the Birripi people of Tuncurry NSW. A Graduate of the Victorian College of Arts (VCA), she has just completed her Masters in Creative Arts Research at Wollongong University (UOW). Her teaching qualifications include a Masters in Adult Education (UTS). Other training qualifications consist of Certificate in Playwriting (NIDA), Certificate in Small Theatre Production (NIDA) and the Integrated Theatre Management Program (DEET). Liza-Mare has been the full-time co-ordinator of Theatre Studies at the Eora College of Aboriginal Studies, Centre for Visual and Performing arts in Redfern Sydney for six years.

Poem: *Need* by Jack Davis, reproduced with permission.

## PREAMBLE

*Our culture didn't die when Captain Stirling arrived - there is a new urban Aboriginal culture emerging that remembers the past while looking to the new.*  
Jack Davis playwright

DRAMA AUSTRALIA is an affiliation of the eight state/territory drama education associations in Australia. With this national focus in mind, DRAMA AUSTRALIA has been progressively involved in contributing to and providing documents for a national perspective and approach to drama education. DRAMA AUSTRALIA appreciates human diversity and accepts differences in culture, aspirations needs, and abilities of Australian students studying drama. DRAMA AUSTRALIA recognises the importance of addressing issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as students, teachers and artists contributing to and participating in education and the arts within the association's conference programs, professional development, publications and other activities. It does these things by producing material for drama educators that encourages access and participation in learning. The current resources include *Drama Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [ATSI] Education and Studies Policy Statement and Guidelines*(1995). We encourage teacher confidence by reporting on a range of knowledge, experiences and different perspectives in drama education.

One such area of study in drama that requires analysis of social practices and contexts is the study of Contemporary Indigenous Theatre in Australian (CITA). By its mere existence, the study of CITA challenges educators to include Indigenous educational perspectives of cultural appropriateness, processes, and learning styles into their delivery. Indigenous educational perspectives can include the histories, cultures, values, beliefs, and languages that make up this perspective. Providing Indigenous educational perspectives can seem like an overwhelming task for drama educators due to its cross curriculum demands. However, ATSI educational perspectives can be refined in order to be more relevant and accessible to both drama educators and students.

There are many documents that provide protocols and guidelines for ATSI educational perspectives. These are produced by various state and national educational departments and arts organisations. So, what makes the DRAMA AUSTRALIA ATSI guidelines any different to these documents? **Access and participation in learning** are the **priorities of this document** that seeks to take the broader context of **Indigenous educational perspectives** and redefine their relevance in the study of **Contemporary Indigenous Theatre** in Australia for **drama educators**.

NB. Throughout this document 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably. Both terms are usually acceptable to First Australian people, though most individuals will prefer one or the other term. The important aspect to remember with such terms is that they are adjectives referring to 'people' rather than nouns in themselves.

## ATSI GUIDELINE STATEMENT

*The biggest thing that stops reconciliation is fear.* John Harding playwright

DRAMA AUSTRALIA acknowledges and respects the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia as traditional custodians of Australia and its territories. We acknowledge the connection between the arts, culture, language, land, and sea in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society. In addition, we encourage the awareness and maintenance of this knowledge through drama education.

DRAMA AUSTRALIA's responsibility is to assist its members so that they might build the confidence and skills to effectively use **drama and theatre** as a means of addressing the criteria repeated in the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report (R290):

*Across curriculum schools need to reflect the fact that Australia has an Indigenous history and Indigenous viewpoints on social cultural and historical matters. It is essential that Indigenous viewpoints, interests, perceptions, and expectations be reflected in curriculum, teaching and learning in schools.*

Essential also to an inclusive curriculum is that all students should have knowledge of:

- **The diversity of Indigenous cultures, languages, beliefs, and histories**
- **The importance of Indigenous history to Australian heritage**
- **Issues that relate to Indigenous people**
- **The effects of European settlement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples**

Non-Indigenous teachers and students as well as Indigenous teachers and students all have something to discover through drama and theatre and drama/theatre education about Australia and its Indigenous peoples.

*... the territory of the theatre is to bear witness.* Jack Davis playwright

## IMPLICATIONS FOR DRAMA EDUCATORS

*Indigenous Australians and their writings have a complex place within Australian drama and literature and within the Australian identity. This complexity means that teaching contemporary Indigenous writings presents a range of challenges to any teacher regardless of their own cultural background or experience. At the same time, these texts offer an extraordinary opportunity to engage actively with teaching and learning as we negotiate different social, cultural and historical experiences.* (Indigenous Drama in the Classroom, 2005)

For many people within the Australian community confronting Indigenous issues can be a difficult and challenging task. As teachers and students there are many ways of **approaching texts** by Indigenous Australians whether they are plays, novels or critical commentary. They can be approached as representative of Australia's political and social history, or of Australia's race relations practices or as examples of aesthetic practice by individual artists. The choice of approach depends on the particular curriculum. However, one of the elements of the complex layers of racism past and present is the generalizing of individuals under a single term denying difference and individuality. Indigenous Australian people, artists and texts represent issues or problems not people and their experiences and

writings. One of the major aims of Indigenous playwrights has been to foreground the humanity of Indigenous Australians in the face of dehumanizing discourses and practices. Approaching the texts in the first instance as a writer's story rather than primarily as a representation of Aboriginality may, as well as avoiding generalizations, be a productive way to negotiate with resistance to Indigenous stories and Australia's past and present and make the process less intimidating. This is not to suggest that research into the specifics of the story is not an important aspect of engaging with the text. If the plays were written by Native Americans or Germans the stories within the text would be approached as a journey of discovery where the research supports the individual's story. This type of approach to Indigenous Australian texts has the potential to make the journey of discovery one that supports and develops understanding of a different experience and world view. It also removes the pressure to be an 'expert' on Indigenous culture and history by bringing the focus back to the specificity of the particular writer and their story.

## CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Contemporary Indigenous Theatre in Australia, as well as being a creative form of expression for Indigenous theatre makers, fills two main important roles. One is to challenge simplistic representations of Indigenous people's history and culture by creating new artistic forms of representation, which encourage social and cultural debate in dramatic contexts. The other is to create space for Indigenous Australian self representations. Within education, drama can play an important role in helping to foster understanding and knowledge of Australian Indigenous people and social change through knowledge.

The drama educator has the potential to assist with the process of understanding and knowledge. This process does not require individual teachers to become an expert on Australian Indigenous people, culture, or history. The position of expert is an enormous challenge even for Indigenous Australians to assume. The presumption of knowledge can be problematic for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and students. Indigenous teachers and students come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. With the history of removal and assimilation in this country, Indigenous people can find connection to traditional knowledge difficult and sometimes traumatic. The presumption that all Indigenous teachers and students have traditional Indigenous knowledge can be embarrassing and cause concern for the individual. Similarly for non-Indigenous teachers and students, the lack of knowledge can sometimes hinder involvement or participation in the classroom environment. Talking to local Indigenous communities and artists offers teachers and students an important and positive means of gaining information and understanding. The processes of consultation and conversation between students and teachers and Indigenous artists or members of Indigenous communities are shared learning experiences that require mutual respect and are an important part of the process of engaging with indigenous texts.

**The following sections introduce a number of aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance practices and the issues relating to extending the knowledge available through conversations with ATSI communities and individuals.**

## 1. TRADITIONAL VERSUS CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES

In Richard Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead*:

*The crows from the writer's country are a signifier of death and grieving. He told this fantastic story of going out into his back yard and there being over forty crows on the lawn, which freaked him out, this was how much grief he was carrying.* Wesley Enoch

*Traditionally, the storyteller was born to the role. There was also the opportunity to earn their position-learning and telling stories - this was the traditional way stories were passed on.* Pauline McLeod actor

*The story telling tradition is used where the audiences are given address, and a character will step and say; now I am going to tell you a story.* Wesley Enoch

There is usually a distinction made between traditional and contemporary performance practices. Practices that are regarded by communities as sacred, secret and strongly connected to culture, society, land, objects, dreamings and history has become known as traditional performance. Traditional is usually understood as practices that existed precolonisation or have a strong connection to practices and ceremony that has existed precolonisation. Though named by non-Indigenous people as such, traditional performance is known and defined in form by Indigenous Australians. Contemporary performance is generally understood as work that, though it may draw on traditional practices, is created or has been created post-colonisation and therefore within the frameworks of European dominance.

In Australia, traditional indigenous culture/performance can date back to over forty thousand years. Traditional stories were told through performance practices such as storytelling, song and dance and sand and body art. Traditionally the storyteller was born to the role. Appointed members of clans who were the custodians of certain knowledge retold these stories over generations. Some of these stories have been recorded in writing in recent times. Often referred to as dreaming or creation stories, they contained knowledge of spiritual, societal, and cultural significance.

Contemporary Indigenous theatre achieved public profile with the first recognised Indigenous drama text, *The Cherry Pickers* written by Indigenous poet and activist Kevin Gilbert in 1968. Since then there have been hundreds of productions of plays and performance texts created by Indigenous Australian artists. Many of these shows have toured nationally and internationally. The processes and results of these productions have included the publication of dozens of plays; the establishment of culturally specific performing arts schools and courses in most capital cities in Australia; and the establishment of more than fifteen cross cultural or exclusively Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre companies of varying longevity and purposes (*Creating Frames*, 2004).

Regardless of the differences between traditional and contemporary work, many traditional aspects of Indigenous culture still find their way into its contemporary counterpart. There is a substantial amount of traditional cultural material used in contemporary productions, for example ochre, smoke, traditional languages and motifs such as dots, ceremonial instruments such as didgeridoos and animal stories that have traditional backgrounds. The cultural material can also include traditional stories presented in a contemporary performance context.



For Indigenous theatre makers this material has many layers of meaning.

Acknowledging that art and performance was an integral part of traditional indigenous culture is essential to the understanding the development of contemporary practices. There are still many communities and places where traditional performance is enacted either in public or private ceremonial spaces. In many instances there are strong connections to traditional forms in contemporary productions either through intangible cultural heritages such as the ways of telling a story or through an artist's active choice to incorporate traditional elements. Part of the journey of learning about Indigenous theatre is engaging with the layers of cultural heritage within the texts.

## 2. DRAMA & THE DIVERSITY OF INDIGENOUS LIFESTYLES

*In the same way that there is no homogenous Aboriginal nation (accepting the fact that we are a collection of peoples of this continent but with a diversity of languages, cultural practices and geographies) there is neither a generic Aboriginal experience to write of.* Wesley Enoch

Amongst other layers, Indigenous plays deal with the complexities of contemporary Indigenous lifestyles. By lifestyles, we mean the differences in experience between specific localities such as remote communities, rural communities and urban experiences. The texts explore the connections and conflicts that exist between these localities and conceptions of Indigenous identity. For example the stereotype of a 'real' Aboriginal person as someone who lives in a remote community following traditional Law, when the reality is that most Indigenous Australians live in rural and urban areas. This in no way diminishes their identity as Indigenous Australians. The texts in effect discuss these complexities of locality within the context of the effects of occupation of Australia by non-Indigenous peoples.

These complexities apply equally to processes of consultation. There are a range of issues that need to be considered when discussing locality including individual, educational and community. These considerations involve differences in approaches to knowledge and protocols. Documents such as this one can therefore be utilised as a **guide for drama educators** by providing **strategies, knowledge, and resources** that **assist in classroom delivery of Australian Indigenous Contemporary Theatre**.

## TEACHING CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS THEATRE

*I think that a lot of Aboriginal Theatre is also about documenting the past and documenting our history, to counter balance the absence of it out there in the public sphere.* Wesley Enoch

*Most of the plays up until now have been about the community and the effects of acts on the community, on family and on ones responsibility towards community.*  
Katharine Brisbane critic and publisher

*Every Aboriginal play by definition needs to have cultural material being discussed, dealt with, referred to and enacted.* Wesley Enoch

## 1. CULTURAL AND CROSS CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Since DRAMA AUSTRALIA produced its first ATSI document for drama/theatre educators in 1995 there has been an explosion of protocols and guidelines for consulting Indigenous communities. Many of these have been produced by educational, arts, government and health professionals. Included in the 'Resource list' of this document are web links to some of these sites. What most concerns us here are the **reasons for community consultation and the relationship** to the study of Contemporary Indigenous Theatre in Australia.

There is a perception that Indigenous writers primarily engage in a process of recording personal or historical experiences of Indigenous life, predominantly verbatim and biographical, taken from real stories. From this perspective Contemporary Indigenous writers of theatre are often exclusively discussed in terms of the biographical elements of their work. There are layers of truth in this type of analysis especially in relation to many early works such as *No Sugar*, *7 Stages of Grieving*, and *The Cake Man*. *No Sugar* is said to explore Jack Davis' family history of removal from traditional lands and their experiences of mission realities. *7 Stages* was conceived from the personal experiences of both Enoch and Mailman growing up in contemporary urban settings in Queensland. *The Cake Man* also is believed to reflect Bobby Merritt's life as a young boy growing up on a Cowra reserve. Other semi-biographical writings include *Box the Pony* by Leah Purcell, *Ningali* by Ningali Lawford and *White Baptist Abba Fan* by Deb Cheetham. Though these writers, like any writer from any culture, draw on their personal experience and knowledge for their work, a text for performance is the expression of an individual's interpretations of their experiences in a dramatic form. However, unlike the work of Euro-Australian artists, the work of Indigenous Australian artists is always complicated by the social and historical context. Whilst it is important to recognize that the plays are aesthetic constructions by artists, at the same time given the experiences these writers share with other Indigenous Australian people and the lack of alternative sources of knowledge about their experiences, the work is read and understood as speaking for Indigenous Australians.

This reading is strengthened by the fact that a lot of Contemporary Indigenous Theatre intentionally documented past practices and the history of Australia in terms of Indigenous and non-Indigenous encounters in order to counter balance the absence of this information within the public sphere. For drama educators this knowledge encourages the practice of inviting community members to participate in telling their history and stories. Within Indigenous communities, some Elders have experienced many of the situations revealed in these texts. The drama educator may want to invite a community member to confirm the very 'realness' of these experiences. To do this the drama educator would then need to follow community protocols and guidelines.

## 2. CONNECTING WITH LOCAL INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES

Talking with members of local Aboriginal communities is an important element in the development of meaningful learning about Aboriginal perspectives. This is very relevant when studying **ATSI theatre texts** and/or **ATSI perspectives in drama**. Protocols such as *Working with Aboriginal Communities: A Guide to Community Consultation and Protocols* prepared by the NSW Board of Studies (listed in the Resource list at the end of this paper) provide a starting point for teachers and schools to initiate contact with Indigenous Australian communities. Documents such as these have been developed to support teachers who wish to include Indigenous perspectives within their curriculum. These documents have been written in consultation with communities, Indigenous education workers, consultants and teachers. Many teachers have expressed a need for clear guidelines to begin the process of

consulting with local Indigenous communities to allow them to include Indigenous people in their teaching. *Working with Indigenous Communities* provides advice on how to start this process and encourage a relationship with the local Indigenous community. As mentioned earlier, between and within communities there are many differences, these in turn inform local protocols. However, general protocols can be used as a starting point.

Before starting the consultation process, it is critical that educators recognise that the social and political issues that affect Indigenous communities, issues such as Aboriginal deaths in custody, the Stolen Generation, Reconciliation, Native Title, Land Rights, social dislocation, and racism – are ongoing matters that many Indigenous people find it difficult to speak about, particularly to people unknown to them.

Observing appropriate protocols when working with Indigenous people and their communities is critical to establishing positive and respectful relationships. Consultation with Indigenous communities should always be seen as a two-way process, with both parties learning together and from each other. Students, schools and communities all benefit from encouraging Indigenous people to share their knowledge and life stories. A good way for students to learn about Indigenous history and culture is to listen to the experiences of Indigenous people. Many are willing to talk about their family, their community and their history, but teachers need to make them feel welcome at the school and respected.

To assist teachers and community members there are Aboriginal education officers and support personnel available within State and Federal Departments such as Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Education Assistants and Aboriginal Programs Unit Student Services. These people are a valuable resource for teachers.

*Theatre is an area where you can educate as well as entertain. People don't want to be preached at... you can make them cry and make them laugh.* Richard Walley

*... to confront white and black audiences with a truthful uncompromised picture of urban Aboriginal life is in itself political.* Jack Davis

## **DRAMA/THEATRE RELATED CONSULTATIONS WITH LOCAL INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

### **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- Introductory protocols are important. Be prepared to spend time sharing personal background information about yourself and the purpose of your visit
- Be patient when asking questions. Look, listen and learn, as it may take time for some community people to become involved. Some people may work towards giving their opinions by initially talking about other issues or stories
- Do not expect every Indigenous person (including students in the school) to know about or want to talk publicly about Indigenous cultures, families, histories or issues
- Some Indigenous people might not openly express an opinion. They may choose to talk indirectly about an issue if they do not agree with the previous speaker. Not all Indigenous people will share the same opinions and feelings. All opinions should be acknowledged and valued

- In some communities, direct eye contact may be expected and accepted because of your teaching role. In others, however, it may be considered offensive. The use of direct eye contact differs from community to community, and from individual to individual. Protocols will need to be determined for specific cases. Contact your education department, education sector office or diocesan workers for advice.
- The use of silence should not be misunderstood. Silence can play a positive role in Indigenous communicative contexts. It may mean people do not want to express an opinion at that point in time, or they are listening and reflecting about what has been said. It is important that this silence is respected and not interrupted unnecessarily. Silence is not a chance to take a break or leave the room, but rather an opportunity to contemplate what is being spoken about and build bonds of trust.
- There are different types of knowledge – for example, spiritual knowledge and scientific knowledge – and these may conflict. One should be sensitive to these differences when talking to an Indigenous person about issues and experiences.
- Do not force a point of view. Indigenous people and communities have knowledge that may differ from yours. Remember you are there to seek their knowledge and opinions
- Use language that respects the integrity and beliefs of the person or group with whom you're meeting. Avoid jargon and do not use acronyms.
- Be prepared to accept that some questions may remain unanswered – for example, sacred/secret knowledge or knowledge from people who have not grown up with their cultural ties
- Family obligations and funerals affect many people in an Indigenous community and may impact on previous obligations made to a school. Immediate and extended family obligations will always take first priority. Deaths can affect not just one family but a whole community. Refer to systemic support personnel as to the local protocols regarding speaking the name of a person who has passed away, and showing their photograph.
- Remember that different families have different values and cultural beliefs, even if they are from the same community. Consult with a variety of community people.

## GLOSSARY

### TERMINOLOGY: THE POWER OF WORDS

#### 1. THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

The importance of language to Indigenous Australians is in relation to its connection to land, social and spiritual beliefs. Language is the core of cultural identity. It links people to land and it protects history. The use of traditional languages and Aboriginal Englishes (sometimes called Kriols) in the text fill a number of important and different purposes within plays by ATSI artists. First and foremost, in Contemporary Indigenous Theatre the use of ATSI languages are signifiers of specific cultural heritages and contemporary culture. Language and campaigns against the use of language are important sites of policies of oppression within colonising regimes and in resistance by the colonised. There were many campaigns and acts aimed at banning Indigenous languages such as by missionaries and reserve managements as well as more subtle campaigns such as splitting communities and relocating them with speakers of other languages. Within contemporary texts the use of traditional languages acts

in part as a statement of its existence. There were assumed to have been up to 750 distinct language groups in Australia before European settlement. Of these at least 250 languages have been recorded. Aboriginal Englishes or Kriols are living languages that carry the identity markers and grammatical features of the earlier traditional language. As with the traditional forms, these languages are a social signal of group links and linguistic heritage. People still exist but within changed contexts linguistically and culturally.

## 2. DEFINING LANGUAGE GROUPS

Language groups belong to territorial boundaries. A map of Indigenous Australian clan names and boundaries can be found at <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/pathways.asp>.

The use of traditional languages redefined by contemporary boundaries such as states can be found in nearly all plays written by Indigenous writers. Noongar language from Western Australia in Jack Davis' *First Born Trilogy*, Murri language from Queensland in Wesley Enoch and Deb Mailman's, *7 Stages of Grieving*, Koori language from NSW in Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man*. All Contemporary Indigenous plays that contain traditional language contain glossaries at the back to assist with understanding of meaning and purpose.

### Major Language Groupings

**Koori-** usually used by Aboriginal people from NSW, Victoria and Tasmania

**Murri-** usually used by Aboriginal people from QLD particularly northern parts of the state. In the south east of the state many identify as Goori

**Nunga-** sometimes used by Aboriginal people from SA usually round the Adelaide area. People in the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara Lands in north western South Australia and Central Australia call themselves Anangu; other group names include Arabana, Diyari, Adnymathanha, Nukunu and Narungga.

**Noongar-** usually used by Aboriginal people from the south west of WA

**There are many other substantial language groupings specific to regional areas such as the Yolngu-** used by Aboriginal people from the language grouping in Arnhem Land.

## 3. DEFINING HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES

The experience of language for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and students is significantly defined by locality. Although English is the recognised first language for many Indigenous Australians it is not always the case. In remote communities, traditional language still plays an important role in the lives of Indigenous communities where many students are bi-lingual. In some rural communities, language revival projects are springing up where local languages are being researched and retaught to Indigenous communities. Whilst in urban areas, particularly in the south east of Australia, which bore the impact of colonization, traditional language is a subject of further investigation.

## 4. APPROPRIATE USE OF LANGUAGE

Following European settlement, most Indigenous Australians in direct contact with settlers and missionaries were forbidden to speak their own languages. The English language was used to describe and communicate with Indigenous people. This often led to the use of and development of inappropriate and discriminatory language. Terms to describe Indigenous Australians is an evolving language as it is now driven by Indigenous people and how they wish to be addressed as well as finding appropriate terminology in English for many concepts, beliefs and histories of their own. In Indigenous plays, the use of contemporary language to describe characters can sometimes be confusing, for example Indigenous characters calling each other 'Blackfellas'. It is best to remember that within the context of a play the

Indigenous writer's position is to highlight the use of language by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters.

Below are two tables one containing current terminology accepted/ recommended by Indigenous Australians with accompanying explanations and the other containing inappropriate terminology.

Accepted Terminology	Explanation
<b>Indigenous/Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander</b>	<p>There has been a long debate over the correct terminology used to describe <b>Indigenous Australians</b>. In this document the word, <b>Indigenous</b> encompasses both <b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia</b>. However, not all Indigenous Australians identify in this way due to its generalist overtones</p> <p>Unfortunately both terms are imposed terminology to describe the original inhabitants of Australia. In any case, it is important to understand that both Aboriginal and Indigenous are spelt with a capital just as Australian and Arabic are. The use of lower case 'aboriginal' refers to indigenous people from any part of the world. The history of the debate about the word Aboriginal is focused on its use as an adjective to describe a person rather than as a noun.</p>
<b>Community</b>	<p>It is generally accepted that <b>community</b> refers to Indigenous people living in a particular geographical area. However, it is important to remember the diversity of people living in a community.</p>
<b>Country</b>	<p>The term country refers to the homelands of an extended family or language grouping. For example <b>'Wiradjuri country'</b> (See map of traditional boundaries and names).</p>
<b>Elder</b>	<p>The traditional meaning of <b>Elder</b> is someone who has been recognized within a community as a custodian of knowledge, culture, or lore. In contemporary Aboriginal Australia an Elder may be a traditional Elder or someone who is above a certain age. This person is usually affirmed by the group as being knowledgeable and experienced, and often referred to as Aunty or Uncle by the group.</p>
<b>Nation</b>	<p>The word nation is a word that describes a particular traditional clan boundary. For Example; The <b>Eora Nation</b> of the Sydney region. The words clan, tribal and nation are all contemporary terminology.</p>



<b>Invasion/settlement/colonisation</b>	The experience of occupation by the British on Australian soil is determined by its terminology. Indigenous Australians experience was one of <b>invasion followed by dispossession</b> . The British experience was one of <b>colonisation and settlement</b> . It is important to consider these experiences when discussing this time in our history.
<b>Pre/post contact</b>	<b>Pre/post contact</b> is the accepted terminology for the periods before and after settlement/invasion/colonisation.

<b>Inappropriate terminology</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Mixed Blood/ Half Caste/ Quarter caste/ Full blood/ Part Aboriginal/ Percentage of blood.</b>	All of these terms were originally invented to justify the separation of Indigenous children from their traditional lands, culture, language, and society. The politics of the day centred around solving what was described as the ‘Aboriginal problem’, which consisted of the refusal of Indigenous people to give up their heritage and live on missions and reserves so their traditional lands could be used for farming and livestock. In Australia today people identify as <b>Indigenous/Aboriginal/ or specific group name (Anagu) or regional identity (Nunga)</b> . Heritage cannot be measured by terminology but by lineage and social and cultural experience and acceptance by the group.
<b>Primitive Culture</b>	Indigenous Australian culture is reported to be over 40,000 years old. It contains highly complex social systems as well as lores that govern use of culture, land, and society. It was by no means primitive.

## RESOURCE LIST

### ABORIGINAL PERFORMING ARTS COMPANIES IN AUSTRALIA

There are numerous Indigenous performance companies some of the major companies include:

#### **Bangarra Dance Theatre**

Bangarra is a leading dance company that fuses traditional Aboriginal dance with contemporary dance.

<http://www.bangarra.com.au/>

#### **Jagera Jarjum**

Jagera Jarjum is a Brisbane-based traditional Aboriginal dance company. The company is committed to educating the community about the importance of cultural integrity and is dedicated to being a positive role model for young people.

[http://www.qpac.com.au/fivetomidnight/whats\\_on/the\\_main\\_stage/jagera\\_jarjum/](http://www.qpac.com.au/fivetomidnight/whats_on/the_main_stage/jagera_jarjum/)

#### **Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre**

Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre [Yir-raarh Yaarh-kin Noong-aarh] an Aboriginal theatre company based in Perth.

<http://www.yirrayaakin.asn.au/>

### **Kooemba Jdarra**

A contemporary Indigenous Theatre, based in Brisbane.

<http://www.kooemba.com.au/>

### **Ilbijirri**

Ilbijirri is the longest running Indigenous Theatre organisation in Australia and is based in Victoria.

<http://www.ilbijerri.org.au/Export2.htm>

## **BOOKS AND ARTICLES**

Brisbane, Katharine. *The Future in Black and White Aboriginality in Recent Australian Drama*. Currency Press.

[http://www.fuel4arts.com/touring/tips/pdf/aia\\_theatre.pdf](http://www.fuel4arts.com/touring/tips/pdf/aia_theatre.pdf)

*A leading theatre critic's personal perspective on the changes within Indigenous theatre practice.*

Casey, Maryrose. *Creating Frames. Contemporary Indigenous Theatre in Australia 1967-97*. University of Queensland Press. 2004

*A social history of the production of Indigenous Australian theatre, the book is based on archival and interview based research. It includes extensive interview material from Indigenous theatre practitioners.*

Chalmers, Samantha. *Indigenous Dance: Defining Traditional & Contemporary Dance*

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts/diwurruwuru/yanyuwa/Resources/Chalmers.htm>

*As the title suggests the article sets out to define traditional and contemporary indigenous dance.*

Enoch, W. 'Tread Softly with Padded Feet', *DRAMA AUSTRALIA Journal*. 17 (3) pp 15-20. 1993.

*An article that focuses on an Indigenous practitioners work and approach.*

Enoch, W. 'Indigenous Performance'. In *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Arts and Culture*. Oxford University. 2000

*An encyclopaedia essay by a Murri practitioner identifying the elements of Indigenous performance.*

Gattenhof, Sandra (ed) *Drama and Indigenous Perspectives*, *ADEM (Drama Australia Education Magazine)* No 10. Drama Australia. 2005

*A special issue of ADEM focusing on approaches to teaching Indigenous drama in the classroom.*

Gilbert, Helen. 'Reconciliation? Aboriginality and Australian theatre in the 1990's'. *Our Australian theatre in the 1990s*.

Rodopi Amsterdam. 1998.

*A chapter focused on interrogating the reception of Indigenous theatre within Australian theatre in the 1990s*

Gilbert, Kevin J. *Because a white man will never do it*. Angus and Robertson. 1973.

*A seminal text by the renowned Kevin Gilbert focused on providing a forum for Indigenous voices. It includes a chapter on Indigenous theatre in the 1970s.*

Marshall, Anne and Gordon Beattie (eds) 'Sun Sisters and Lightning Brothers Australian Aboriginal performance'

*Australasian Drama Studies* No 37 October 2000

*A special issue of the ADS journal focused on Indigenous Australian theatre and drama.*

Mooney, Mary &, Jennifer Nicholls (eds), *Drama Journeys: Inside Drama Learning*, Currency Press, 2004

*A resource book for primary school teachers on the art form of drama. The book introduces the forms and conventions that are*



commonly used in drama teaching and will show educators how these forms can be developed and used in the classroom.

Mudrooroo, Narogin. **Writing from the Fringe. A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature**. Hyland House. 1990.

*An overview of Indigenous writing including a section on Aboriginal theatre. It includes Mudrooroo's argument that Indigenous writing operates in a different way from European writing.*

~ **The Indigenous Literature of Australia. Milli Milli Wangka**. Hyland House. 1997.

*A second edition and further development of Writing From the Fringe.*

Page, Stephen. 'Kinship and Creativity', in Katharine Brisbane, (Ed) **The Parson Lectures**. Currency House. 2003.

*Stephen Page, dancer and choreographer and actor, and a founder of Bangarra talking about his work and the influence of traditional and contemporary Indigenous culture and life within his art.*

Shoemaker, Adam. **Black Words White Page**. University of Queensland Press, Brisbane. 1989.

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*by some Indigenous writers. Based on archival and interview based research the book gives an overview of Indigenous writing in the 1960s to 1980s.*

Syron, Liza-Mare. 'Artistic Practice in Contemporary Indigenous Theatre'

<http://search.arrow.edu.au/apps/ArrowUI/>

[?adapter=ViewSearchResultsAdapter&personField=Syron,%20Liza-Mare](http://search.arrow.edu.au/apps/ArrowUI/?adapter=ViewSearchResultsAdapter&personField=Syron,%20Liza-Mare)

*An exploration of Indigenous theatre practices incorporating archival and interview based research.*

Thompson, Liz. **Aboriginal Voices**. J.B. Books Australia. 1990.

*A collection of interviews with Indigenous Australian writers and artists including Jimmy Chi talking about their lives and their work.*

Turcotte, Gerry. **Jack Davis, The maker of history**. Angus and Robertson. 1994.

*A collection of essays by academics focused on Jack Davis' plays.*

## PROTOCOLS FOR WORKING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies

[http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research\\_program/grants/grants\\_assets/ethics\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research_program/grants/grants_assets/ethics_guidelines.pdf)

Board of Studies

Working with Aboriginal Communities. A Guide to Community Consultation and Protocols

[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/aboriginal\\_research/pdf\\_doc/work\\_aborig\\_comm.pdf](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/aboriginal_research/pdf_doc/work_aborig_comm.pdf)

## ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS ONLINE

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Website

<http://www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au/>

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/>

FATSIL Protocol Guides

<http://www.fatsil.org/guides.htm>

## RECONCILIATION ORGANISATIONS

### Reconciliation Australia

<http://www.reconciliationaustralia.org/aboutus/howweare.html>

### Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation

<http://www.antar.org.au/>

## PLAYS

Anderson, Tammy, Richard J Frankland, John Harding, Jadah Milroy, Tracey Rigney & Maryanne Sam, *Blak Inside: 6 Indigenous Plays from Victoria*, Currency Press in association with Playbox Theatre, 2002.

1. *Enuff* by John Harding is about an Australian future where black patience has run out. A violent uprising is planned for Reconciliation Day - will retribution or forgiveness prevail?
2. *I Don't Wanna Play House* by Tammy Anderson is the moving story of her childhood as a one person show.
3. *Belonging* by Tracey Rigney recounts the taunts and temptations of a school girl, and her personal struggle to remain true to her culture, and herself.
4. *Casting Doubts* by Maryanne Sam is about an actors' casting agency with more colour charts than a paint shop, and the problems that Indigenous actors face.
5. *Crowfire* by Jadah Milroy is the story of a young, urban Indigenous Australian woman, and a man from a desert community lured into the city. The story of a search for identity and the need for reconciliation.
6. *Conversations With The Dead* by Richard J Frankland is a poetic and savage play that takes you into the aching sorrow of deaths in custody.

Bennett, Roger. *Funerals and Circuses*, Currency, 1992.

This is play that examines the issues of cross-cultural marriage in a small rural community. The play begins in the theatre's foyer, co□

and produced as a promenade piece.

~ *Up The Ladder*, Playlab Press, 1997.

This is the story of a boxer, Jack Hassan. Hassan was an Aboriginal boxer who accidentally killed his opponent in a world title match and stopped boxing.

Chi, Jimmy & Kuckles'. *Bran Nue Dae*, Currency & Magabala Books, 1991

A joyous musical from Broome. Willy and Old Uncle Tadpole flee the city to embark on a journey of personal discovery and outrageous adventures back to their Aboriginal homeland.

Davis, Jack. *Kullark/The Dreamers*, Currency, 1982.

In *The Dreamers* an old man who is dying recedes from urban hopelessness into his imagination and the land of his ancestors as his family deals with school, work and contemporary urban life.

*Kullark* has been described as a 'documentary on the history of Aboriginals in WA'. The action begins with a version of the first contact between Europeans and the Noongar peoples culminating in the death of Yagan in 1833, and covers the forcible separation of families and communities and removal to reserves and the ongoing discrimination against Indigenous people such as the treatment of Indigenous returned servicemen after WWII. The action moves between the different time frames and places in WA; the Yorlah family's kitchen in Perth 1979, a farm in the Pinjarra region in 1829-34, the Moore River settlement in the 1930s and the Yorlah family's humpy in 1945.

~ *No Sugar*, Currency, 1986.

The story of the Millimurra family's stand against government 'protection' in the Australia of the 1930s.

~ **Honey Spot**. (Sydney: Currency, 1988).

The friendship between a black boy and a white girl raise issues of race relations and conservation in a funny, warm, touching story of two families who seem to have nothing in common.

~ **Barungin**, Currency, 1989.

Set in 1988 *Barungin* completes a trilogy started with *The Dreamers* and *No Sugar* and deals with issues that include land rights, alcohol abuse and black deaths in custody.

~ **In Our Town**, Currency, 1992.

Two young men, one Aboriginal, one white, return from serving in the army in the Second World War but discover that their close friendship cannot be maintained in peacetime since the people of their town feel threatened by the changing status quo. Racism flares when David, a hero in war, falls in love with Sue, a white woman.

~ **Moorli and the Leprechaun**, Currency, 1994.

A children's play in which the mythic Aboriginal character Moorli and his counterpart the Irish leprechaun enjoy making a basketball team's trip to Uluru, they join forces.

Enoch, Wesley & Deborah Mailman. **The 7 Stages of Grieving** Playlab Press, Brisbane. 1996

*7 Stages...* tells a collective story that merges personal and family history with instances of public grief as a one woman show. The text includes a number of essays contextualising the work.

Gilbert, Kevin. **The Cherry Pickers**, Burrabing Books, 1988

Based on the experiences of itinerant rural workers, the play explores issues of family, spirituality and dispossession. The text presented non-Indigenous Australians with one of the first examples of Aboriginal Englishes written by an Aboriginal person as standard language use.

Harding, John. **Up The Road** Currency in assoc with Playbox. 1997

*Up the Road* is set in the remote Aboriginal community of Flat Creek, where life is pretty simple - that is until Ian Simpson, Canberra bureaucrat, comes home.

Harrison, Jane. **Stolen**, Sydney: Currency Press, 1998

*Stolen* is a play about the Stolen Generations. Five young Aboriginal children are forcibly removed from their families and brought up in a repressive children's home, where they are required to forget their families, their homes and their language. The story explores their identity, both within society as a whole and within themselves.

James, Andrea. **Yanagai Yanagai**, Currency, 2004.

Munarra is a black woman, thrown from the skies into the Dreaming so that she may heal her land, the mighty river Dhungula (the Murray) and her people. *Yanagai! Yanagai!* is a war cry, the first recorded Yorta Yorta words spoken to the white men who went onto their land uninvited.

Janson, Julie. **Black Mary & Gunjies**, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1996.

*Black Mary* is a dramatic account of Maryanne, a real bushranger who was Aboriginal and a woman. Maryanne is not unknown in the historical record but her story is usually overshadowed by her companion Captain Thunderbolt. The main narrative in *Gunjies* is Aranda's story, she is an urban Koori girl attending high school. The play shares her journey from naive school girl to a powerful woman as a result of tragic events.

Johnson, Eva. **What Do They Call Me?** in *Australian Gay and Lesbian Plays* ed Bruce Parr Currency. 1996

This is a one woman show exploring three stolen generation stories from one family's point of view, the mother, and her two daughters.

Manning, Ned. **Close to the Bone**, Currency, 1994.

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Merritt, Robert. *The Cake Man*, Currency, 1978

~ Revised edition of *The Cake Man* Currency, 1983

A story of life on a mission in Western NSW in which white Christian paternalism is seen from a black point of view. The first play by an Aboriginal writer adopted by the Australian stage is published with notes on the Wiradjuri and memories of the mission where Merritt was raised.

*Mudrooroo/Muller Project*, NSW UP, 1993

Mudrooroo's text frames and interrogates Muller's text drawing parallels between the French revolution and European settlement in Australia through a narrative focused on urban Kooris in Sydney in the 1990s. The narrative of Mudrooroo's text follows a group of Aboriginal performers rehearsing the Muller text to be performed as part of a political demonstration.

Purcell, Leah. *Black Chicks Talking*, Hodder, 2002

*Box the Pony* is a semi biographical work drawing on Purcell's life. The narrative is in an active story telling style delivered as direct address to the audience. Within the monologue Purcell plays seventeen characters or groups of characters. The text includes extensive essays from Purcell and Rankin.

Saunders, Justine. *Plays From Black Australia*, including *The Dreamers*, *Murras*, *Coordah* and *The Keepers*, Currency Press, 1989

Four two-act plays, each bringing a new insight into the relationship between black and white Australians:

1. *The Dreamers* Jack Davis
2. *Murras*, Eva Johnson
3. *Coordah*, Richard Walley
4. *The Keepers*, Bob Maza. Introduced by Justine Saunders.

Winmar, Dallas. *Aliwa*, Currency, 2003

Traces the true story of three Aboriginal sisters whose mother was determined to keep her children when officials wanted to remove them following the death of their father.

Try also the **Australian Script Centre**

<http://www.ozscript.org>

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