

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**

**PRE-SHOW
IN-THE-KNOW**

A woman with dark, curly hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a white, long-sleeved, button-down shirt. She is looking upwards and to her right with a thoughtful expression. Her right hand is raised, holding a piece of light-colored, textured fabric. Her left hand is near her chest, with fingers slightly curled. The background is a soft, textured, light-colored fabric.

STOLEN

**BY JANE HARRISON
DIRECTED BY IAN MICHAEL**

Sydney Theatre Company acknowledges the Gadigal of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom we work and with whom we share stories.

Cover: Kartanya Maynard. Photo: Rene Vaile.

Compiled by Kelly Young.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. You can contact the Education Team on **education@sydneytheatre.com.au**

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KEY INFORMATION

STOLEN

BY JANE HARRISON

DIRECTED BY IAN MICHAEL

CURRICULUM LINKS

Suitable for Years 9 – 12

- Drama Stage 5 & 6
- English Stage 5 & 6
- History Stage 5

THEMES & IDEAS

- Identity and Culture
- Racism in Australia
- Impact of the Stolen Generation

FORM AND STYLE

- Monologue
- Realism
- Political Theatre
- Contemporary Indigenous Theatre

APPROX. DURATION

90 mins, no interval

CAST

Jimmy Jarron Andy
Sandy Mathew Cooper
Ruby Kartanya Maynard
Anne Stephanie Somerville
Shirley Megan Wilding

CREATIVES

Director Ian Michael
Designer Renée Mulder
Lighting Designer Trent Suidgeest
Composer & Sound Designer James Brown
Assistant Director Megan Sampson
Movement Director Danielle Micich
Fight Director Tim Dashwood
Voice & Text Coach Charmian Gradwell

CONTENT

Strong language, racist language, depiction of suicide, references to child abuse, violence, and intergenerational trauma.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- How does playwright Jane Harrison use form and style to create a societal experience through the stories of five individual children?
- How do the actors use their performance skills to create different characters and roles?
- What does the audience experience at the end of the production? Why?



SYNOPSIS

As children, Sandy, Ruby, Shirley, Jimmy, and Anne were all stolen from their families and put in government homes.

Sandy is a traveler, thinker and storyteller whose early experiences make him feel he never really belongs anywhere.

Ruby is an abused young woman who turns the poor treatment she's received in on herself.

Anne is adopted into a wealthy family and is largely ambivalent about her Aboriginal heritage until she begins to feel a longing for 'going back'.

Shirley is a stolen child who goes on to watch her own children be taken from her. There is nothing she can do to stop it.

Jimmy is a mischievous boy, turned sullen, angry man with just one ray of hope.

Each of them is forever changed by what happened to them. The result of all that has come before. They will never stop looking for that special place. Home.

CREATING CULTURAL SAFETY

Remember when teaching students about the experience of First Peoples that content exploration must be done culturally sensitively. Teachers should consider the protocols of their local community, listen to Elders, and engage respectfully. Most importantly, in exploring a text, students should not be encouraged to take on roles that are sensitive, enact trauma or cruelty. When establishing student understanding of First Peoples and western history, teachers and students may wish to explore the ways knowledge and history inform each other.

Acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and knowledges are not able to be easily contained and summarised within one tradition is an important part of creating cultural safety in the classroom. There are common attributes among various Peoples and language groups, but the complexity within each is vital to acknowledge. For example, the transmission of history, culture and story occurs using an oral tradition in First Peoples culture, whereas in some non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and history is written down.

If this activity is completed with the class, work with your local Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group (AECG) to explore traditional knowledge in your local area. The following link is from the NSW Department of Education and can be used by all schools in the state.

aecg.nsw.edu.au/aecg-regions

TEACHING THE CONTEXT OF *STOLEN*

The following content and teaching strategies are designed to develop student understanding of Jane Harrison's individual, social, political, cultural and artistic contexts.

Before teaching *Stolen*, teachers and students should have a clear understanding of the interconnected nature of Australia's First Peoples society, culture, and politics – all of which is interrelated and originates from the ancestors. This NSW HSC Drama Syllabus separates and makes distinctions within these areas, asking teachers and students to separate individual, social, political, cultural and artistic contexts when studying theatre.

This means that teachers and students should understand both Australian First Peoples' pre-invasion contexts and hold an understanding of imperialism and colonisation, to fully comprehend the destructive structural power relationships within Australian society established at invasion.

Imperialism is the way in which one country extends its power and control over another. There were four imperial strategies actioned by the British during this period of history. The first was the invasion and subjection of the original owners of the land. The second was to establish power and control through economic expansion which in the case of the British, involved land stealing and extraction of natural resources for their industrial economy. The third and most relevant to the immediate context of *Stolen*, is a form ideological control designed to destroy the culture, knowledges, and relationships of First Peoples. The result is to establish a global hierarchy of humans which we now call racism. Finally, and less commonly identified as an imperial strategy is the control of knowledge and ideas in which the human mind is controlled by the ideas of the hegemonic power (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012).

Colonisation should be understood as but one of several strategic choices that can be made by an imperial power to extend its influence over another group of people. In the case of Australia, the landing of the First Fleet on 26 January 1788 marks the official date of the commencement of colonisation.

“Colonisation is an imperialist strategy and is based on the theft of land and its material wealth. Colonisation begins with the invading power overtaking the land of the invaded country. They establish ports and basic infrastructure to access and extract resources and capture developing markets. The colony that develops around the newly developed economic infrastructure becomes the site for disseminating the invading country's culture.” (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012)

From the first moment that the British set foot into Sydney Cove, the colonial process of destroying culture, language and connection to land was begun. One of the later strategies is stealing children, disrupting families, and destroying culture – the Stolen Generations .

It is important to note that the forces of imperialism and colonisation have been, and continue to be, actively resisted by First Nations peoples across the world, including Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012)

INDIVIDUAL CONTEXT

JANE HARRISON

Playwright Jane Harrison was born 1960, a Muruwari woman (Bourke and Brewarrina, NSW). She is descended from one of Australia's most formidable and skilled sheep shearers, William "Deaucem" Smith, a Muruwari man. Harrison grew up in Victoria and worked in advertising after she finished her education.

By her own account, Harrison did not have any direct experience of being a member of the Stolen Generations.

Harrison writes in *My Journey Through Stolen* (2008)

"...At the time of my commission, (to write *Stolen*) in 1992, I was quite ignorant about the history, despite my Aboriginal heritage. My ignorance was fairly typical of the wider community at the time... it was absent as part of 'our' history." (pg. 62)

Harrison writes that the process of researching and writing *Stolen*;

"...left me wounded. So how must those who were at the 'sharp end' of those actions feel... What was crucial was to acknowledge the stolen children's suffering and their survival." (pg. 67)

Directed by Wesley Enoch, the first production of *Stolen* premiered in 1998 as part of the Melbourne International Festival. Its success was immediate and *Stolen* enjoyed 8 consecutive seasons (8 years) in production. Harrison says;

"...the play also toured most of the east coast of Australia, England (twice), Hong Kong and Japan and had readings in Canada and New York. It was the right play at the right time." (pg. 69)

Classroom Activities

1. Working as a class, locate Muruwari land on a map of Australia.
2. In groups of 4 – 5 research Muruwari man William "Deaucem" Smith, Harrison's grandfather. Find his place of birth and work on the map and note his achievements. Improvise an old-fashioned news reel report to perform to the class, highlighting Mr. Smith's achievements. Quotes from the historical period of his life would be beneficial in creating a sense of depth in the report.

3. Harrison has written;

"Although never having met me before, the relatives knew who I was – a descendant of my grandfather, the gun shearer Deucem Smith. My mother's cousin took me out to the cemetery to visit the graves of cousins who had died too young. The most powerful moment for me was when a young, black relative greeted me, a stranger, with a grin and 'G'day cuz'." (pg. 71)

In the same groups as Activity 2, create a freeze frame shape that represents how Harrison might have felt about her interaction with her family. Show each image to the class and discuss the emotions that have been explored in each. During this process, draw out an understanding of the complexities of the emotions that have been explored.

POLITICAL & SOCIAL CONTEXT

Prior to invasion, Australian First Peoples organised their society through the laws given to them by the ancestors, or creator beings. It is written into the land and, as a result, is ancient and unchanging. This law is the foundation for everything that occurs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life, including the cultural expression, knowledge systems, kinship systems and beliefs.

When exploring *Stolen*, it is important to hold an understanding of the 'grand narrative' of imperialism and its specific strategies and impacts on colonised people. After British invasion and the establishment of economic centres (towns) for the benefit of the imperial power, the establishment of a system of rules and regulations about how to treat colonised peoples by denying them all or part of their humanity "...justified either extermination or domestication... the process of dehumanisation was often hidden behind justifications for imperialism and colonialism, which were clothed within an ideology of humanism and liberalism." (Tuhiwai-Smith pg. 29)

Australian colonial powers, therefore, in order to control, stigmatise and exclude First Peoples, implemented policies such as assimilation with the wider aim of destroying connection to land through the displacement from ancient law and culture.

Stolen was premiered in 1998 and deals with the legacy of the Stolen Generations. The Stolen Generations were children who were forcibly removed from their parents, communities, culture, and land because of government policy enacted by the government, church, and welfare bodies, designed to promote the assimilation of some First Peoples into wider Australian society.

Once taken from their families, the children of the Stolen Generations were placed in institutions and forbidden to see their families, use their language and connect with culture. The results were deeply distressing, with lasting intergenerational trauma impacting on the health and well-being of individuals, extended families, and communities.

Stolen was written at a time when the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission were investigating the impact of the policies of assimilation on

First Peoples. In 1997, the Bringing Them Home Report was published, and it contained 54 recommendations for redressing the wrongs done, including an apology from the Australian Government. This apology was made by the Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, in 2008, after the Howard Government refused to honor this recommendation.

"Unlike white children who came into the state's control, far greater care was taken to ensure that [Aboriginal children] never saw their parents or families again. They were often given new names, and the greater distances involved in rural areas made it easier to prevent parents and children on separate missions from tracing each other" (Bringing Them Home pg. 108).

Classroom Activities

1. The Bringing Them Home Report is dedicated to:

"This report is a tribute to the strength and struggles of many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by forcible removal. We acknowledge the hardships they endured and the sacrifices they made. We remember and lament all the children who will never come home.

We dedicate this report with thanks and admiration to those who found the strength to tell their stories to the Inquiry and to the generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people separated from their families and communities."
(Bringing Them Home pg. 1).

2. The link below is from Parliament House. It contains the transcript of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology. More importantly, it also contains the response from spokesperson for the Stolen Generations, Lorraine Peeters (Weilwun and Gamilaroi Peoples). Peeters gave the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition a glass coolamon made by Bai Bai Napangardi from the Balgo Community in Western Australia.

aph.gov.au/Visit_Parliament/Art/Icons/Apology_to_Australias_Indigenous_Peoples

POLITICAL & SOCIAL CONTEXT

As a class, read the apology from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the response from Lorraine Peeters. Discuss the importance of the apology to Australia's Stolen Generations. From there, make a list of adjectives that best describe Lorraine Peeters' response. Write these words on the whiteboard and use them as a word bank to create a freeze frame. Each freeze frame should be a shape that encapsulates Lorraine Peeters' message to the Australian people.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Stolen addresses the impact of British imperialism on the culture of Australia's First Peoples, with a particular focus on the loss of family connection, kinship ties, language, and culture. Before studying *Stolen*, it is vital to be informed about the importance of and connection between land, kinship ties, language, and culture before invasion. Without this understanding, the exploration of Harrison's script will be less impactful.

It is important to note that kinship practices and transmission of language and culture differ across Australian First Peoples, but there is also similarity amongst them. When investigating the cultural practices of Australia's First Peoples, connections with local Elders and Communities is vital to ensure a respectful classroom environment appropriate to students' local communities.

The form and language of *Stolen*, written in English and mostly removed from connection to language, culture, and land, is a bleak depiction of the impact of lives lived outside of cultural connection. In fact, Harrison's *Stolen* relies on the absence of important cultural connections to illustrate powerfully the impact of assimilation policies on Australia's First Peoples.

When exploring Harrison's *Stolen*, it is important to hold an understanding of First Peoples' culture appropriate to your community, the racist and imperialist strategic thinking behind assimilation policies. These wider societal and cultural experiences should also be held when experiencing the outcome of such policies on the individuals that experienced them.

Classroom Activities

A. Working as a class:

Goal: Build a human knot without letting go of hands.

1. Creating a Human Knot (Part 1)
 - a. Students stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Everyone lifts their right hand.
 - b. Everyone grabs the hand of someone else in the circle. They cannot hold hands with the person next to them.
 - c. Everyone lifts their left hand.
 - d. Everyone grabs the hand of someone else in the circle. (Not the same person as with the right hand.) They cannot hold hands with the person next to them.
 - e. All communication must be non-verbal.
2. Creating a Human Knot (Part 2)
 - a. Students stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. At this point in the game, the teacher should move some of the students into different parts of the space. This could be done by birth month, or star sign so that the decision is arbitrary.
 - b. Ask students to lift their right hand and grab the hand of someone in the circle. In the first instance they may hold the hand of the person next to them.
 - c. Evaluate the creation of the knot. Were the students able to build one? If so, what was the outcome for those who had been moved?
3. Creating a Human Knot (Part 3)
 - a. Students stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. At this point in the game, the teacher should move some of the students into different parts of the space. This could be done by birth month, or star sign so that the decision is arbitrary.
 - b. Ask students to lift their right hand and grab the hand of someone in the circle. In this instance they may not hold the hand of the person next to them.
 - c. Evaluate the creation of the knot. Were the students able to build one? If so, what was the outcome for those who had been moved?

CULTURAL CONTEXT

4. Discussion (Part 4)

As a class discuss the following questions:

- In the first activity, what did the group rely upon to create their knot?
- In the second activity, when some of the group had been moved outside of the area where connection between participants occurred, how did the remaining group achieve a connection of sorts? What was the result for those that were excluded?
- In the third iteration of the activity, what was the result for the entire group, and how did it make people feel?
- Whilst in no way an approximation for the grief and loss of Australia's First Peoples, what might this activity suggest about the importance of connection? What happens when important parts of the group are excluded? Removed?

B. Working as a class:

1. Listen to the songs below:

- *They Took the Children Away* by Archie Roach
nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/taste-sounds-australia
- *The Children Came Back* by Briggs ft. Gurrumul and Dawayne Everttsmith
youtube.com/watch?v=3-wMbFnrTo

2. Discuss the following questions;

- What is each song about?
- What is the dialogue created between the two songs? Why might Briggs have chosen to have this dialogue?
- In groups of about 4–5 students, create symbolic images that represent each song's message. Present these to class and discuss the feelings generated by each image.

OTHER RESOURCES

STC Virtual

Shari Sebbens performs an extract from *Stolen*
sydneytheatre.com.au/stc-virtual/stolen

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Shari Sebbens performs an extract from *Stolen* <https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stc-virtual/stolen>