

Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Dead Puppet Society and Brisbane Festival,
in association with Screen Queensland, present



Dead Puppet Society's

ISHMAEL

By David Morton

Education Notes



Brisbane Festival is an initiative of the
Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council



Ishmael Education Notes

The activities have been included to be used in your classroom both before and after the show. They are practical and written activities that you can use and adapt for your students. If you have any questions about the notes, please feel free to email Stephanie Tudor : [**steff.tudor@gmail.com**](mailto:steff.tudor@gmail.com)

About the show

A dead earth

A climate refugee

A voyage to the outer solar system

On the resource-depleted earth of a not so distant future, a young climate refugee named Ishmael is given the chance to build a new life, provided she can survive a voyage to the outer solar system aboard the MV Pequod under the command of the obsessive Captain Ahab.

Moby Dick reimagined as a contemporary space saga, *Ishmael* recasts earth's no-longer-vast oceans with the immensity of the universe, and the endless possibilities and terrors it holds. In weaving the story to life, this boundary pushing production melds live film making with live action, miniature sets, puppetry and an original score by indie pop musician Bec Sandridge to tell a captivating story about individual hope and collective redemption.

Ishmael is a world premiere production as part of Brisbane Festival and is the latest work by the internationally acclaimed Dead Puppet Society (*Laser Beak Man*, *The Wider Earth*) who lend their trademark magic to Herman Melville's beloved classic *Moby Dick*.

Estimated running time 1 hour 20 minutes (no interval)

Suitability Grades 7 – 12

Warnings

Themes

- * Climate change
- * Class system
- * Fate
- * Limits of knowledge
- * Power
- * Culture
- * Rebellions / activism
- * Loss
- * Powerlessness
- * Identity
- * Obsession

Curriculum Links

DRAMATIC FORM AND STYLE

- * Contemporary Theatre including Design Led Theatre
- * Visual Theatre including Object Theatre
- * Mediatized Performance
- * Cinematic Theatre

DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS

- * Openness of Form
- * Appropriation
- * Hybridity
- * Contemporary Music

Cast and Creatives

Writer, Director and Designer David Morton

Creative Producer Nicholas Paine

Associate Director Matt Seery

Composer Bec Sandridge

Projection Designer Justin Harrison

Sound Designer Tony Brumpton

Lighting Designer Christine Felmingham

Co-Designer (props and locations) Jennifer Livingstone

Costume Designer Nathalie Ryner

Dramaturg Louise Gough

Cast



Ellen Bailey



Patrick Jhanur



Barb Lowing

Curriculum Connections

The curriculum connections are provided based on the *Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) General Drama Senior Syllabus Drama (2019 v1.1)*.

General Senior Syllabus

UNIT 4 – TRANSFORM

The unit involves students manipulating and shaping the dramatic languages to reframe text, purpose, context and meaning, drawing on conventions and philosophies of Contemporary performance. Students re-imagine, adapt and transform texts from inherited traditions into an expression of their emerging artistic voices, addressing the needs of a 21st century audience.

Inquiry questions

- How can drama be used to reframe purpose, context and meaning through contemporising texts?
- How can you manipulate and shape dramatic languages to communicate to 21st century audiences?
- How can drama reshape and transform meaning of inherited texts through skills of drama, including devising, directing and acting?

TAKEN FROM QCAA DRAMA 2019 V1.1 – GENERAL SENIOR SYLLABUS

ACARA

YEAR 9 AND 10 BAND DESCRIPTORS

- Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles
 - Considering viewpoints – contexts: For example – How does the drama relate to its social context in which it was created? What culturally symbolic movements are evident in this drama? What historical influences have impacted on this drama? How are global trends in drama influencing Australian drama?
- Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect
 - Considering viewpoints – philosophies and ideologies: For example – How has drama theory been used in creating and performing this text?
 - Considering viewpoints – evaluations: For example – How successful were the actors and director in conveying the playwright's stated intent? How successfully have the design elements been incorporated into the drama?
- Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making.

Pre-Show Activities

INITIAL QUESTIONS

- What do you know about *Moby Dick*?
- *Moby Dick* was written in 1851, why do you think it is a story that keeps getting retold or continues to inspire new work?
- Dead Puppet Society specialises in design led theatre, where they use a range of new technologies to enhance the storytelling. Considering the following statement, "this boundary pushing production melds live film making with live action, miniature sets, puppetry and an original score." What does that statement make you think about?
- What excites you about seeing this production?
- *Ishmael* is set in 3021. Predict what you think 3021 will look like.

Identity

- What makes you who you are?
- Which is more important, nature or nurture?
- Are we destined to become a particular person based on our situation or environment?
- Can you successfully reinvent your identity or get away from your past?
- Are you defined by how people perceive you?

Obsession

- Define obsession.
 - Can obsession ever be a good thing?
 - Discuss your experiences with obsession.
 - Why do you think people become obsessed?
-

PLACE

Place plays a vital role within this production and ultimately changes each character's journey. It is through exposing these characters to the isolation of outer space that their fears and secrets are exposed. It is the 'immensity of the universe, and the endless possibilities and terrors [that space] holds' that impacts the characters and drives the narrative forward.

Place, architecture and environment exert a distinctive and powerful influence over the characters.

Ask students to consider their understanding and experiences with space.

- Ask students to describe space
- Have them consider key features of space and what makes it unique.

In small groups give students stimulus images of space. Ask them to look at the images created by Dean Hanson and list five words (these can be about the forms, shapes, atmosphere in the image) they would use to describe the image.

In groups students create a freeze frame that they feel in some way reflects the image. This can be an abstract representation, a literal representation or a symbolic representation. They may choose to represent the ideas within the image, i.e. isolation, cold, unforgiving, endless in a realistic tableaux or being inanimate objects. Once these are shown ask students to layer the image with at least one of the words they selected when describing the image. Show these to the class.

MUSIC MAPPING

Ishmael contains seventeen original songs composed by Bec Sandridge. These pieces were composed and reworked alongside the writing of the script and integrate with the scenes. The music not only helps to shape the mood but helps to propel the story forward.

To help students consider the role that music plays have them complete a music mapping exercise.

Play *Weird Spooky Spaghetti Western* and *Heading Out Alone* for students to listen to.

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/yr3v3drufri0unz/AABkd_jyz9nTRE1QaHNaHn67a?dl=0

Ensure you do not tell students the titles to begin with and that you repeat each piece. While or after listening students are to respond to the following questions:

- What emotions were brought to the surface when I listened to the piece of music?
- What story or images did my mind conjure up?
- What does the piece of music remind me of?
- What connections did I make, maybe to a memory, another text, a place or time?

After they have written down their answers and all songs have been played discuss these as a class. Pick out the similarities in their answers and challenge students to provide justification of why they think the music made them respond in that way. Discuss the importance of music and working with the music not simply using it as an additional feature.

Extension: Use one of these pieces of music to devise a scene.

Revisit this activity after watching the production. *Weird Spooky Spaghetti Western* is featured when Ishmael and Queequeg walk through the streets and then meet Ahab for the first time at the docks. *Heading Out Alone* starts as the Pequod leaves the dead earth and enters space. Ask students to consider these scenes.

- How did the music add to the scene?
- How did it create mood and / or build tension?
- Reread the interview with Bec Sandridge, and think about how she composed these pieces to fit the narrative.

MODERN ADAPTIONS

Moby Dick was first written in 1851 and since then it had been retold in countless movies, inspired art pieces, songs, tv shows and comic books.

Some examples include:

- Movie: *Heart of the Sea*
- Book: *Leviathan '99* by Ray Bradbury
- Music: *Moby Dick* by Led Zeppelin
- Art by Jackson Pollack
- Art by Frank Stella
- It has also been referenced in multiple TV shows and movies.

Think about what needs to be considered when using a reimagining narrative or using it as inspiration for a new piece. Using either *Moby Dick*, if you have studied it, or a fairytale to explore ways that you can transform the original text to make it relevant for a contemporary audience.

- Create a short scene based on the original story, no longer than two minutes
- Explore ways you can then adapt this by either adapt the characters, the way the narrative is told, the setting or the style and form
- Tell the story in one minute
- Remove one of the characters
- Use a non linear structure by either starting at the end or using flashbacks / flashforwards
- Tell the story from another character's point of view
- Change the time and place
- Tell the story as a news report / as a soap opera / as a musical
- Explore using different styles of theatre
- Participate in a discussion about the various conventions and techniques that the students used. How did this change the story for the audience and the actors? Refer to Appendix 1 to help with discussion points or have students fill in Appendix 1.
- Read the interviews with David Morton, Bec Sandridge and Justin Harrison to get their perspectives on reimagining a text.

MEDIATISED DRAMA

Break students into groups and ask them read the two excerpts below. Using projection and Cinematic Theatre conventions, as well as live action they are to create a scene using this as stimulus. Have them start by brainstorming ways this could be shown onstage. Ensure they unpack what they think the text is about first and portray this through the mediatised and live drama.

Have students read through the interview with Justin Harrison before they begin.

Extension:

Have students create a directorial vision for *Ishmael* using one of the script excerpts. Ask students to consider:

- The conventions used in the productions
- What message / idea you want to convey to the audience and how you will achieve this.
- Block your scene with other students, however, experiment with objectives, motivations and subtext for the characters. Which one more closely matches your initial vision and interpretation, and why?
- Consider the conventions and styles you would use to convey this piece. What are the differences in having a different actor play each role, rather than switching between them? Experiment with a range of conventions.

Read the interview with director and writer, David Morton, before beginning to see how he approaches directing.

Scene Excerpt 1
#1 REACHING FOR THE STARS
WORDS IN THE DARKNESS.

3021.

Earth is dead.

The planet is blanketed in a layer of cloud that smothers all but the tallest peaks.
From the mountaintops, the wealthy and their corporations look to the stars for resources.
Those left on the surface, below the clouds, live a half-life in the perpetual twilight.

To be born beneath the clouds is a death sentence.

ISHMAEL STANDS ALONE IN A LANDSCAPE OF SWIRLING FOG.

ISHMAEL (V/O)

We live our lives tied to an invisible line. All of us. All born with a noose around our necks.
Still we reach for the stars. Some of us even make it. In our immeasurable universe,
nothing else is inevitable, except the swift, sudden turn of death.

SHE RAISES HER PISTOL.

A DEEP BREATH.

SHE CLOSES HER EYES AND FIRES A SINGLE SHOT.

SHE LOWERS THE PISTOL.

SHE OPENS HER EYES.

SHE OPENS HER MOUTH TO SCREAM.

Scene Excerpt 2

**THE TRANSPORT BREAKS FREE OF THE STRATOSPHERE AND COMES TO REST IN LOW ORBIT.
IT APPROACHES THE PEQUOD.**

ISHMAEL AND QUEEQUEG LOOK AT THE SHIP THROUGH THE WINDOW.

STAR-BUC (V/O)

May I present MV Pequod. A fully customised, first generation Orbital Mining Vessel
on contract to Neom Corporation under the command of Captain V Ahab.

QUEEQUEG

She's beautiful.

STAR-BUC (V/O)

Glad to hear it droid. They don't make them like they used to.

ISHMAEL

Didn't know you had family here.

QUEEQUEG

You kidding? He's an operating system.

STAR-BUC (V/O)

Star-brand Bulk-Utility-Control, at your service.

QUEEQUEG

Thanks for the deets, Star-Buc.

SILENCE

ISHMAEL

You met your match there droid.

QUEEQUEG

Hardly. Hey, Star-BUC, the Pequod's beautiful.

STAR-BUC (V/O)

Glad to hear it droid. They don't make them like they used to.

QUEEQUEG

No, Star-BUC. They certainly don't.

THE TRANSPORT CAPSULE BEGINS ITS FINAL APPROACH TO THE PEQUOD. IT DOCKS WITH THE SHIP. THE
FULL EXTENT OF THE PEQUOD IS REVEALED AS IT HANGS HIGH OVER THE CLOUDS OF DEAD-EARTH. Cb67

READ AND RESEARCH

If you haven't read the novel or need a refresher these websites are a great place to start for a quick overview.

- Spark Notes *Moby Dick* - <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mobydick/>
- *Moby Dick* - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moby-Dick>

Moby Dick was written in 1851 so why read a novel that is 170 years old? Watch this TED-ed video that explores why the novel is still relevant for a contemporary reader.

- Why should you read *Moby Dick*? - Sascha Morrell <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmoFxVqZ9z4>

Read the following articles to find out some background information on Dead Puppet Society and the type of theatre they create.

- Visual Theatre with Dead Puppet Society <https://laboite.com.au/about/latest/visual-theatre-with-DPS>
- Dead Puppet Society <https://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/artists/dead-puppet-society>

Watch the following clip about the development process for *Ishmael* to get a sneak preview of the production and meet some of the creatives that have worked on the production.

- *Ishmael* Creative Development and Prototyping https://www.qpac.com.au/event/ishmael_21/ (video at the bottom of the page)

Dead Puppet Society talk about *Ishmael*, their inspiration, the production process and what excites them about this production.

- Modern Take On Mythic Tale Makes Its World Premiere At Brisbane Festival https://qpac-umbraco-cdn.azureedge.net/media/19892/mr_ishmael-premiere-season-on-sale_brisbane-festival.pdf



Post-Show Activities

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you believe was the key message of the play?
 - How did the actors communicate changes in scene and action?
 - Try to recall the plot. What stages led to the eventual climax?
 - Recall the moments of strong emotional connection. What led to these moments? Consider acting techniques as well as plot and design elements.
 - What do you believe is the best aspect of *Ishmael*?
 - How does the staging contribute to the production? Discuss the use of props, set, use of miniatures, and use of AV.
 - Consider the use of the projections and how these transform through the production. How did this impact you as an audience member? What would be the difference if these were not filmed miniatures but still images?
 - Why is this an important story to tell?
 - "It is an incredibly poetic form of storytelling. We have always tried to be quite epic in our storytelling. We like big sweeping stories that incorporate diverse perspectives." David Morton (Morton, 2009, *Drama Queensland Says: Insight*) Consider the above statement. How does this relate to what you saw in *Ishmael*?
 - How does *Ishmael* question or make a comment on Australian society and the world? Consider the references to political movements, cultural values, climate change and the ideas of class and power.
 - Ishmael begins the show by saying "... we reach for the stars. Some of us even make it." Do you think this is metaphorical or literal in the context of the show and do you think Ishmael 'made it'?
 - What impact did changing the gender of Ishmael and Ahab have on your understanding of the play?
 - What choices were made to ensure this story continues to remain relevant?
 - What is Ahab's 'white whale' in this production?
-

KEY MOMENTS

As a class identify 5 key moments from the production. Break students up into smaller groups and assign them each a key moment.

1. Have students recreate this moment as a series of freeze frames with no dialogue. The movements should be strong and your emotions evident to effectively convey this to the audience.
2. Students are then to add two words per freeze frame. These can be spoken to the other characters or direct address to the audience.
3. Add additional dialogue so the scene is complete.

OR

1. Have students recreate this moment as series of freeze frames with no dialogue. The movements should be strong and your emotions evident to effectively convey this to the audience.
2. Have them consider this a gallery walk through a museum. Have them add a title to each of these freeze frames to direct dramatic focus.
3. When presenting these, one actor must step out of the freeze frame and explain the title and the image, as if they were a tour guide explaining a painting.
4. Have students extend on this by turning each freeze frame into an abstract representation of that moment, focusing on the mood or character emotions portrayed, rather than the plot. Students can bring these moments to life in a movement sequence.

CHARACTER MAP

Create a “map” of the main characters. This is useful to do directly after viewing the performance, so students understand the narrative and nature of the work. This can also help later when constructing a response or critique. Consider the experiences within the play that define the characters’ journey, the status shifts through the production and how their actions demonstrate their belief systems.

Extension: The production explores perceptions of characters and how these can often be wrong. On your character map add your initial impression of each character, as well as the initial impression conveyed by other characters in the production. Does this shift during the production? If so, what causes this, and is this for better or worse?

KEY THEMES

Engage students in a discussion about the key themes and concepts explored throughout the production. Ask students which themes were most obvious and what their interpretation of them was. Link this to the manipulation of the dramatic elements and the dramatic meaning.

Extension: Ask students to answer the question “What is at the heart of *Ishmael*?”. After discussing their responses look at the responses from the three creatives to this same question. Ask students to compare and contrast all of the answers to find the similarities and differences. Link these back to the key themes and ideas.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Engaging theatre should not only entertain and engage an audience but prompt them to think about the world they live in and ask questions.

Brainstorm the questions that the play leaves you with and what it made you think about.

Compare these with a partner. Add to your mind map.

Finally create a class brainstorm.

Discuss the responses considering:

- What answers you have as a class.
- What are the unanswerable questions?
- What answers differ from person to person?
- What similarities were there in people’s thoughts?
- Where were there large differences?

This initial brainstorm could be completed as a connect, extend, challenge activity.

See <https://pz.harvard.edu/resources/connect-extend-challenge>

MAKING COMPARISONS

Students who have studied *Moby Dick* or know this text can use this performance as an opportunity to undertake a comparative critical analysis between the traditional text and *Ishmael*, using Appendix 2. This will help students develop stronger analytical skills and to draw comparisons. To extend students you can then ask them to consider the impact of the adaption and the relevance for a contemporary audience.

PERFORMANCE

- Revisit the scene excerpts
 - In groups read the scene aloud.
 - Try out extreme possibilities as actors might do during rehearsals.
 - Go through the scene twice, trying out two contrasting sets of desires / movement / intentions and share their work.
 - How do the circumstances and surroundings affect what is being said? Does the audience pick up on different agendas or attitudes when the surroundings change?
 - Layer in conventions. How does this change the meaning of the scene?
-

REIMAGINE

After viewing *Ishmael*, take a key moment that impacted you and use it as inspiration for a reimagining of a classic text.

Consider David Morton's comment, "I feel like the stories that last are the ones that have something universal built into their DNA that means they escape the ravages of time. Even though we move on socially and technologically speaking they all have some core gesture that still rings true".

- In 3 minutes, brainstorm universal themes and ideas. Think about things that are still struggles or driving forces no matter the generation. After you have a list go through with a partner and highlight commonalities. Do you see any trends emerging? If not think about what stands out on the list?
- As a pair brainstorm texts that deal with these key ideas or themes.
- Pick one or two and identify the "core theme or question that most speaks to [you] in the original work".
- Make a list of the key characters and relationships.
- Use this information to consider how you could recontextualise the original narrative. Use Appendix 1 to assist you.
- Workshop your ideas in the space.

Extension: Look at the overview written by David Morton in Appendix 3. Consider what is shown in this that you were able to identify in the final production. Use this as a template to document your own ideas for your reimagining.

Elements of Drama discussion

ROLE RELATIONSHIP CHARACTER

- Choose a specific moment of dramatic action that exemplifies one of the characters. How? Why? What dramatic meaning did this communicate to the audience?
- How would you describe each character? How are their characters portrayed through the voice and movement of the actors?
- How does Ishmael and Queequeg's relationship change over the course of the play?
- What are Ishmael's motivations in keeping her past a secret?
- Who has the higher status throughout the production? When does this power balance shift?
- The three characters have different belief systems, how is this exemplified through their actions and thoughts?

TENSION

- What were some of the key examples of tension during the production?
- How did the tension engage you?
- What were you invested in?
- How does the mystery impact the creation of tension?
- How did the music and use of projections impact the development of tension?

FOCUS

- Choose a specific moment of dramatic action that demonstrates shifts in the dramatic focus. How? Why? What dramatic meaning did this communicate to the audience?
- Think about the moments onstage where dramatic focus shifted. What happened onstage to facilitate this change?

TIME

- When was it written?
- When is the play set?
- How would changing the time impact the plays dramatic meaning?
- Consider the intertextual references, how is time relevant in relation to these?
- Time is against the characters in this play. Consider a moment when time was vital to developing tension.
- How does time become something to fear for each of the characters?

PLACE

- The vastness of space plays a major role in the piece. How was this communicated onstage?
- Consider if the play was set on Earth. How would changing the setting impact the plays dramatic meaning?
- How did the actors work with the projections to shape dramatic action?
- How were miniatures used to convey place?

SPACE

- Analyse the different ways that the stage was used throughout the production.
 - The play is set mostly in spaceship. Consider how this idea of being isolated in such a vast environment is communicated through the manipulation of space.
 - How did the use of the space help to convey the different settings and locations?
 - How did the lighting enhance the different use of the space?
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MOVEMENT

- Consider how relationships in the play are communicated through body language and movement. Consider how you can show a relationship without “explaining” it.
- Was the movement symbolic in anyway?
- How was movement contrasted by stillness? What effect did this have?

LANGUAGE

- How were words used to create power?
- What was the subtext behind some of the memorable lines?
- How was language used to shape character? Consider the different ways each character speaks / uses language.

CONTRAST

- Describe two contrasting moments in *Ishmael*. How were these moments created through sound, lighting, voice and movement?
- Analyse the ways in which contrast is used throughout the play in relation to the range of moods.
- Ishmael and Queequeg have contrasting opinions on life, opportunity and class. Examine how this is communicated and how it impacts their relationship.
- What other elements of contrast did you see throughout the production?

MOOD

- Discuss the impact of the sound design and music used to create specific moods. Use specific moments of dramatic action from the show and discuss how they made the audience feel.
- Consider how they would've been different if different artistic choices were made, such as alternative lighting or sound.
- How would you describe the mood when they see the Behemoth for the first time? How was this mood created?
- Consider the mood at the start of the play. How does this contrast with the end of the play?
- How did you feel when Ahab reveals what happened to her brother / Ishmael reveals what happened to her mother? What performance techniques and skills of the actors were utilised to make you feel this way?

SYMBOL

- Discuss the impact of the symbolic nature of the set. How did this impact your understanding of the production and the narrative?
 - Consider the use of the infinity symbol. What does it mean to you? What meaning does this have to the characters in the production?
 - There are strong symbolic references used in the AV. What moments stood out to you? How did it impact your understanding of the characters?
 - What is the Behemoth symbolic of?
-

Meet the Creatives



David Morton

***Moby Dick* is a text that has been turned into countless movies, referenced in TV shows, has inspired music and art. Why do you think people keep coming back to this story?**

I feel like the stories that last are the ones that have something universal built into their DNA that means they escape the ravages of time. Even though we move on socially and technologically speaking they all have some core gesture that still rings true. For me, *Moby Dick* falls into this category because of the way it examines the relationship that humanity has with the natural world, and more specifically what it means to face something that is so vast and awe-inspiring it defies comprehension.

When looking at a reimagining how do you begin?

In the early stages of a reimagining, I always start with the core theme or question that most speaks to me in the original work. From there I make lists of the key characters, and also the key relationships and emotional turns that are present in the story. Armed with this knowledge of the text I then start to think about the context of our adaptation, and how these core thematic, characters and experiences could be recontextualised to speak to a contemporary audience.

Your productions bring various technologies together in such a harmonious way. With this production, where did you start with layering in technology or was this always the vision from the start?

The technical vision for *Ishmael* was actually around prior to us landing on the concept for the story. We knew that we wanted to make use of miniature sets and to meld these with live action through a custom technical system.

How do you begin the playwriting process?

For me the playwriting process begins with outlining and story development; before diving into a draft I like to already have a mud map of what the core arcs, both thematically and for the characters, are going to be. This always changes and flows as the script comes together and the team begins to expand the creative vision. As the draft itself changes I often go back and edit this outline so that I always have a document that clearly and succinctly outlines the content and purpose of each scene as its a great reference for making larger decisions in bringing the production to life.

Can you talk us through the creation and development process?

Ishmael has had an extended development process. With this production we've not only had to hone and craft the story, but also the techniques and technology that we're using to tell it; it's about as far away from the good old "here's an existing script, now take four weeks to bring it to life" as you can get. We've had developments that have focussed solely on the scale of the models and the way the cameras capture them, we've had developments into the music and how it intersects with the script, and we've also had story focussed reading sessions. The outcomes of these developments are what has then influenced and informed the creatives as they move forward with their own specific areas of the production.

Explain design led theatre.

Design led theatre is the term that Dead Puppet Society uses to talk about the types of work that we make. The Australian theatre industry, particularly at a professional level, is dominated by processes that are geared towards the staging of a script and making production choices that serve that text. While our shows always have some level of spoken text in them, and our process is guided by a formal script, we see this document more as a blue print for what the performance is going to be in a narrative sense rather than the be all and end all. Ultimately, our scripts are drafted to serve a vision that encompasses not just the words that will form a part of the story, but the visual and technical elements as well. If we find a better way to tell something, then the script changes; it's there to serve the design elements, not the other way around, hence design led theatre.

What do you see is at the heart of *Ishmael*?

The heart of *Ishmael* is a story of redemption, both for the central character, but also for our species as a whole. I hope that through the dystopian future that it paints, and the obstacles that the central characters are forced to overcome, it might offer a vision for how small actions by individuals can change the course of the world we live in.

Could you discuss the use of projections in the production? How does this affect the blocking process?

As with the other technical elements, the projection is absolutely core to *Ishmael*; it's how we travel to such a range of locations, and also one of the primary visual storytelling tools. Because of the complexity of the content and the amount of time it takes to make, this has meant that the broad brushstrokes for how the staging works were already decided months ago. When we hit the rehearsals we'll be working within these existing constraints. It's a dance between fitting in with existing content while finding places to play and explore.

The feel of being haunting or unable to escape is so prevalent in this production. How are you going to go about conveying this onstage?

So much of the story deals with Ishmael's desire to escape to find a better version of life, but the reality of her situation is that almost everything is working against her. Not only is she on a tiny spacecraft headed into the depths of the abyss, she's also confronted with developing relationships and her own fear of connection with others.

How much of what occurs on the AV was in your head when you wrote it, or is it more about the mood that you want to create?

When I write the first drafts of our productions I always have a clear idea of the visuals. I usually don't know exactly how they'll be staged, or even if they are possible, but that's the joy of the collaboration; we set out to do something hyper ambitious, and then tweak and adjust as we go. Coming up with staging solutions with our team is one of my favourite parts of the whole process.

What do you see as the greatest challenge with this production?

The most challenging part of *Ishmael* is definitely going to be the complexity of weaving together the different elements while also making sure that have the right sense of timing and tone. The reality of working with so many parts is that a huge amount of work goes in before the rehearsals, but until you actually see things come together you don't know how successful each moment is going to be. Sometimes that means we have make some pretty epic sideways steps with very little time to make sure the show works as we need it to.

What is your directing process? Does this differ from show to show?

My process for bringing a project to life is always a little different from show to show, but there are a few things that are always the same. The first of these is leaning into the strongly collaborative nature of the DPS process and giving our creatives and performers a seat at the table that lets them weigh in on the key creative decisions and vision for the production and really own the elements that they are bringing. The second is that I do a huge amount of planning, both on my own and with the rest of the team. I like to go into rehearsals with a version of the show in my head that I'm pretty sure is going to work. Having said that, this mental version is only a starting point, a first offer for the team, from there we dream the whole thing to life together with the original concept as a lifeline I can steer us back towards if we need it. To be honest we hardly ever do.



Justin Harrison

How do you begin with the design process?

Design for me always starts with the script, lots of scribbles and drawings in the margins. Then, it's an ongoing conversation with the director. I gather lots of reference imagery early on, and map out the visuals in a storyboard.

The setting of the play, space, is so vast and isolating. How do you open the world on stage to show this?

We don't! And neither has any other sci-fi. Because it would be suuuuper boring. As an example, part of our story takes place in the Asteroid Belt. In reality, if you were next to a single asteroid in the belt, you wouldn't actually see any other asteroids. Turns out most of space is just space. We play a little bit with scale to show just how big planets and celestial bodies are compared to our character's ship, but really we're heavily condensing the environment to make it interesting.

There is a certain fear that the characters feel how did you try and capture that with the design?

There's a careful balance in this play of making things scary and making them beautiful. Our "white whale" is presented both as a dangerous, menacing threat, but eventually as something beautiful, to be admired and respected.

How do you ensure that the projections are propelling the story forward?

Quite simply, I have to keep up with everything else! There's a lot to show and lots of other stuff going on, so I basically have to hang on for dear life, presenting what's necessary as concisely as possible so the audience can focus on the narrative.

Can you talk us through the live capture process? How difficult was that to achieve?

We're not doing anything that fancy - broadcast news kind of does what we're doing live every night! It's mini sets with a green-screen element, shot by remote cameras, and we're then keying out the green to replace the background with environments. Like movie VFX, but not pre-recorded. Or...the weather presenter.

The main difficulty in our situation is one of touring size, budget, and hopefully getting a somewhat more cinematic look than ABC News 24.

What do you see as the greatest challenge with this production?

The audience getting motion sickness! No, we've got a lot of moving parts and it all has to be heavily automated, so the technical rig we have is quite complex, but at the same time has to be small enough for the show to easily tour. We're micronising a broadcast chromakey stage and running VFX shots live every show. There's also a lot of original content (ie, not something that can be pulled from stock imagery) to be created. Now I'm scared.

What do you see is at the heart of *Ishmael*?

Our *Ishmael* is a classic story reimagined for a modern presentation. One that fans of the original text will be able to recognise, but that will still excite those who haven't read the original.

Where do you get your inspiration from?

Everywhere! Movies, tv shows and video games are the obvious ones for this show, but I also love getting ideas by trawling places like Artstation, DeviantArt, digital art forums, cinematography groups, Youtube creators... anywhere people are creating imagery.

When students start to work with projections, what would be some key ideas that you think are crucial for them to know or experiment with?

Sometimes, less is more. Movement in your images can be distracting if your audience is supposed to be focussing on dialogue/performance from actors on stage. Pick your moments to really show off.

Get good at the math if you're not already! It'll help with projection throw distances, pixel mapping, resolutions... it's handy.

Also, know your wheelhouse in terms of creative technology. Either learn what you don't know (if you have time) or find people to help you. I like the second option because it gives you a chance to learn and collaborate.



Bec Sandridge

How do you begin with the composition process?

Before I began composing the songs for *Ishmael*, I decided that it was important to go back to the very beginning and bought a copy of *Moby Dick*. I felt it was important to make sure the sounds all nodded to both the original world and *Ishmael* itself... After reading both *Moby Dick* and the script, I then started curating playlists which would be the palette in which would frame the songs. I created a synth tones playlist, drum / percussion sounds, vocal effect playlist etc... and went from there! Most of the songs on this soundtrack were created from the drum-loops up so it was "vampable" and easy to manipulate from scene to scene.

What was your key inspiration from the script or the original narrative when composing?

I was really drawn to the recurring themes of fear and time. I really connected to *Ishmael* navigating the interplay between the two; feeling both excited and horrified of time running out and finding purpose in the confines of time and space. I wanted the songs to feel both expansive (or limitless) and stressful (in pockets).

How did the settings or the characters influence your composition?

In a couple of the songs, I tried to imagine how Ishmael herself would walk through a particular setting and tried to mimic that in the drum / bass lines... In other songs, I attempted to encapsulate how a setting would envelope or interact with each of the characters (ie whether they would feel suffocated by a particular setting and/or inspired or adventurous). I think I achieved these feelings by using more meaty / weighty synths and sub kicks drop in on more "confined" or stressful settings and also compressors on vocals for spaces that needed to feel more claustrophobic and for more expansive and inspiring or curious settings there are more "floaty" / sparkly synths and arpeggiators...

Did you take any inspiration from *Moby Dick* or did you work completely with *Ishmael*?

Moby Dick was definitely a foundational inspiration. Funnily, I'd never read the book until now!

Music is so beautifully integrated into the script; how did you ensure that the music works harmoniously with what was occurring onstage?

I feel like collaboration was / is pretty huge on this production! So there was a lot of back-and-forthing on emails / calls with Nick and David and also my producer Dave Jenkins Jnr helped me bring-to-life a lot of the songs, making sure the right elements popped at the right beats. I've been working remotely from my home in Thirroul, so I'm yet to see how the songs tee up with what is occurring on stage (I've only seen a couple of 10 second videos here and there) but I am SO excited to see the rehearsals in totality!

What do you see is at the heart of *Ishmael*?

I think the main takeaway for me was how curious and resilient Ishmael is as a character! When I finished reading the final script, the thing that stuck with me was how she always steps out in fear regardless of how much dread and trauma she has or is experiencing and her longing to connect to others and her environment around her. It's a constant struggle but she gets there!

Assessment Ideas

EXTENDED RESPONSE

Task 1

"At its core, *Ishmael* is a human story about personal redemption and the grace of humanity, told with hope and humour." David Morton

After viewing *Ishmael*, evaluate the effectiveness of the production by analysing the on-stage dramatic action and how the use of the dramatic languages created dramatic meaning. In your response consider how the play uses Contemporary Theatre conventions to facilitate the character's journey. Support your statements with perceptive and thorough evaluation and supporting evidence from key moments in the production. Use appropriate drama terminology throughout your essay.

Task 2

Use a key convention and two key elements of drama to argue supernatural intrusions into the fourth wall and two key elements of drama to argue a position about how the message in the cartoon represents the dramatic meaning communicated in *Ishmael*. <https://lgiron215.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/tim-burton.jpg>

Task 3

"They [Ishmael and Ahab] are both incredibly strong characters who embark on a literal journey of self discovery, one with challenges and adventures that transcend gender." David Morton

In response to the above quote you are to write an analytical essay evaluating how the audience has been positioned to view the journey of Ahab or Ishmael. You are to evaluate the success of the production and how it created dramatic meaning through the manipulation of the elements of character, symbol, tension and mood. You may want to consider the use of Visual Theatre conventions and the transformation from the original text in your response.

Task 4

"*Ishmael* is both timeless and contemporary: a relatable story with classic themes of redemption, determination and triumph of the human spirit that is reinvigorated and reimagined for a modern audience." Louise Bezzina

Use the quote above to argue a position about how effectively *Ishmael* manipulates dramatic focus and mood, in conjunction with a key convention, to communicate dramatic meaning.

DRAMATIC CONCEPT

Task

Working as a theatre-maker you will view *Ishmael*. Using this as stimulus, you must identify one key convention of storytelling used in this production and devise an original dramatic concept that shares an understanding of the human experience.

Your dramatic concept must organise information under the following headings:

Analysis and evaluation (400 words)

- how was the convention manipulated to contribute to the communication of the shared human experience?

My concept (800 words, 10–12 images)

- identify a chosen purpose and context
- make specific reference to the original chosen convention
- argue how the dramatic languages have been used to communicate dramatic action and meaning
- develop a storyboard with explanatory paragraphs and annotations that document your dramatic ideas.



Appendix

Appendix 1 – Adapted from Dramatexts

| | |
|---|--|
| Central question | What themes and ideas in the existing play relate to the context in which the new play will be made? How will the time period in which the play is to be set affect the scenography, character, themes and ideas? What is the central question – the reason for the new work existing? Why is it important that the work be recontextualised? |
| Dramatic structure | What is the dramatic structure of the original work? What structures are to be maintained? What events within the narrative are essential to maintaining the dramatic cohesion of the work? |
| Story | What elements of the story need to be kept intact? What elements need to be omitted? Whose story is being told? Why is the story to be told in this manner? |
| Dramatic form | How does the existing dramatic form reveal themes and ideas? Do new forms need to be introduced so that contemporary audiences can identify with the new work? |
| Dramatic codes, techniques and conventions | What dramatic codes and conventions will be kept in place? Which codes and conventions may shift? What other codes and conventions (multimedia, direct address) can be used in the new context? |
| Performance styles and language | What performance styles best serve the new work? |
| Symbols | How do symbols resonate between contexts? What meaning do they hold? How do symbols inform scenography? |
| Characters | How do the original characters find form in the new context? How do these characters change in light of developing socio-political movements such as feminism, egalitarianism and religious movements? |

Strube, H. (2010). *Dramatexts*. Milton, Qld: JacarandaPlus.: Chapter 5: *A Rose By Any Other Name: Re-imagining Shakespeare*.

Appendix 2

| | <i>Moby Dick</i> | <i>Ishmael</i> | Similarities / differences | Impact of the adaption |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|---|---|
| Setting | Ocean | Space | Both vast and isolating spaces. Space is unknown, dangerous and the next area to explore. This is similar to the ocean in 1851. | Changes the context and impacts the time and symbolism. |
| Time | | | | |
| Context | | | | |
| Themes | | | | |
| Symbolism | | | | |
| Mood | | | | |
| Language | | | | |
| Tension | | | | |
| Ishmael | | | | |
| Ahab | | | | |
| Queequeg | | | | |
| Ahab's motivation | | | | |
| Ishmael's motivations | | | | |
| Queequeg's motivations | | | | |

Appendix 3

| SEQUENCE | | SCENE | DESCRIPTION | TRANSITION | SOUND | | | |
|----------|--------|---|-------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | MUSIC | SOUNDSCAPE | SFX | "V/O (Pre-record)" |
| #1 | 0.1.1 | Prologue projection. | | | Song 1 begins | | | |
| | 0.1.2 | Prologue V/O. Ishmael standing in clouds. | | | s1 | | Gunshot | Ishmael prologue |
| | 0.1.3 | Return to prologue projection. | | Black | s1 | Soundscape? | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | 1.1.1 | Whispers in the darkness. | | | S1 ends | Soundscape? | | Ishmael & Grubb |
| | 1.1.2 | Immigration hall | | | s2 00:00 at the end | Waiting room/line | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| #2 | 1.2.1 | Elevator up cliff into cloud belt | | Side wipe | s2 00:06 | Elevator | | - |
| | 1.2.2 | Ishmael inside elevator | | | s2 00:20 | elevator | | - |
| | 1.2.3 | Elevator arrives in Tucket-9 | | Centre out split | S2 00:44 | Elevator stops | | - |
| | 1.2.4 | Elevator doors open to reveal Tucket-9 | | | s2 00:51 | Tucket-9 atmos | Doors open | - |
| | 1.2.5 | First sweep of Tucket-9 | | side wipe | s2 00:57 | Tucket-9 mid | Space cars? | - |
| | 1.2.6 | Ishmael walks the streets 1 | | | s2 01:09 | Tucket-9 close | | - |
| | 1.2.7 | Second sweep of Tucket-9 | | side wipe | s2 01:20 | Tucket-9 far | | - |
| | 1.2.8 | Freighter takes off next to Ishmael | | | s2 01:28 | Freighter | Freighter takes off | - |
| | 1.2.9 | Third sweep of Tucket-9. Freighter departs. | | side wipe | S2 01:46 | Tucket-9 far | Freighter flies away | - |
| | 1.2.10 | Ishmael walks the streets 2 | | | s2 01:59 | Tucket-9 close | | - |
| | 1.2.11 | Sun sets behind Tucket-9 | | Cross fade | s2 02:12 | Tucket-9 far | | - |

| SEQUENCE | SCENE | DESCRIPTION | TRANSITION | MAINSTAGE | | | | |
|----------|--------|---|------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|------------------------------|----------------|
| | | | | STAGING | ACTOR | PUPPETS | PROPERTIES | COSTUME |
| #1 | 0.1.1 | Prologue projection. | | - | - | - | - | - |
| | 0.1.2 | Prologue V/O. Ishmael standing in clouds. | | - | E | - | Pistol | |
| | 0.1.3 | Return to prologue projection. | Black | - | - | - | - | - |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | 1.1.1 | Whispers in the darkness. | | - | - | - | - | |
| | 1.1.2 | Immigration hall | | Immigration counter | E, B | - | "Tablet Ishmael Prox Tag" | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| #2 | 1.2.1 | Elevator up cliff into cloud belt | Side wipe | - | - | - | - | |
| | 1.2.2 | Ishmael inside elevator | | - | E | - | Bag, armband | |
| | 1.2.3 | Elevator arrives in Tucket-9 | Centre out split | - | - | - | - | |
| | 1.2.4 | Elevator doors open to reveal Tucket-9 | | - | E | - | - | |
| | 1.2.5 | First sweep of Tucket-9 | side wipe | - | - | - | - | |
| | 1.2.6 | Ishmael walks the streets 1 | | - | E | - | - | |
| | 1.2.7 | Second sweep of Tucket-9 | side wipe | - | - | - | - | |
| | 1.2.8 | Freighter takes off next to Ishmael | | - | E and Q | - | - | Hooded figure |
| | 1.2.9 | Third sweep of Tucket-9. Freighter departs. | side wipe | - | - | - | | |
| | 1.2.10 | Ishmael walks the streets 2 | | - | E and Q | | Pistol | Hooded figure? |
| | 1.2.11 | Sun sets behind Tucket-9 | Cross fade | - | - | | | |

| SEQUENCE | SCENE | DESCRIPTION | TRANSITION | VISION | | | |
|----------|--------|---|------------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|------------------|
| | | | | MODELS | BACKGROUNDS | CAMERA | PIXIE DUST |
| #1 | 0.1.1 | Prologue projection. | | - | Text | - | |
| | 0.1.2 | Prologue V/O. Ishmael standing in clouds. | | - | Swirling fog | - | |
| | 0.1.3 | Return to prologue projection. | Black | - | Text | - | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | 1.1.1 | Whispers in the darkness. | | | | | |
| | 1.1.2 | Immigration hall | | Immigration hall | Dead-Earth surface fog | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| #2 | 1.2.1 | Elevator up cliff into cloud belt | Side wipe | Cliff with elevator (full) | Through gloom into cloud belt | | |
| | 1.2.2 | Ishmael inside elevator | | Elevator internal (half screen L?) | From dense blankety cloud belt into open sky | | |
| | 1.2.3 | Elevator arrives in Tucket-9 | Centre out split | Cliff with elevator (full) | Above the clouds / open sky | | |
| | 1.2.4 | Elevator doors open to reveal Tucket-9 | | Yellow brick road | Above the clouds with ships flying | | |
| | 1.2.5 | First sweep of Tucket-9 | side wipe | Tucket-9 | Above the clouds with ships flying | Zoom in (model spin) | fog etc |
| | 1.2.6 | Ishmael walks the streets 1 | | City spinner | Sky | | |
| | 1.2.7 | Second sweep of Tucket-9 | side wipe | Tucket-9 | Above the clouds with ships flying | Tilt up face (no model motion) | fog etc |
| | 1.2.8 | Freighter takes off next to Ishmael | | Freighter dock | Cloud belt and clear sky towards horizon, heat ripple from engines | | dust blow at cam |
| | 1.2.9 | Third sweep of Tucket-9. Freighter departs. | side wipe | Tucket-9 w/ freighter | Above the clouds with other freighters lined up | Zoom out as Freighter leaves | fog etc |
| | 1.2.10 | Ishmael walks the streets 2 | | City spinner | Sky | | |
| | 1.2.11 | Sun sets behind Tucket-9 | Cross fade | Tucket-9 | Sunset behind Tucket-9 into cloud belt | Zoom out (model spin) | sunflare |

| SEQUENCE | | SCENE | DESCRIPTION | TRANSITION | LX | | | |
|----------|--------|---|------------------|------------|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| | | | | | MAIN | MINI | EFFECTS | PRACTICAL |
| #1 | 0.1.1 | Prologue projection. | | | Blackout | Blackout | Swirling fog | |
| | 0.1.2 | Prologue V/O. Ishmael standing in clouds. | | | Light for Ishmae | | | |
| | 0.1.3 | Return to prologue projection. | Black | | Blackout | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | 1.1.1 | Whispers in the darkness. | | | | | | |
| | 1.1.2 | Immigration hall | | | Artificial light, dark | Occasional searchlight through window | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| #2 | 1.2.1 | Elevator up cliff into cloud belt | Side wipe | | Blackout | Dim, almost no natural light | | Elevator |
| | 1.2.2 | Ishmael inside elevator | | | Same treatment as 1.2.1 elevator. Then blue sky | Match MAIN | | |
| | 1.2.3 | Elevator arrives in Tucket-9 | Centre out split | | Blackout | Bright natural light | | Elevator |
| | 1.2.4 | Elevator doors open to reveal Tucket-9 | | | Blackout | Bright natural light | | |
| | 1.2.5 | First sweep of Tucket-9 | side wipe | | Blackout | Bright natural light | | |
| | 1.2.6 | Ishmael walks the streets 1 | | | Bright natural light | Match MAIN | | |
| | 1.2.7 | Second sweep of Tucket-9 | side wipe | | Blackout | Bright natural light | | |
| | 1.2.8 | Freighter takes off next to Ishmael | | | Bright natural light | Match MAIN | Smoke | Freighter thrusters |
| | 1.2.9 | Third sweep of Tucket-9. Freighter departs. | side wipe | | Blackout | bright natural light | | Freighter thrusters |
| | 1.2.10 | Ishmael walks the streets 2 | | | Bright natural light | Match MAIN | | |
| | 1.2.11 | Sun sets behind Tucket-9 | Cross fade | | Blackout | Sunset | Zoom out (model spin) | sunflare |