



QPAC IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
OOMBARRA PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

# IS THAT YOU, *Ruthie?*

Written and Directed by Leah Purcell

Based on the books *Is That You, Ruthie?* –  
first published by the University of Queensland  
Press in 1999 – and *Buthalangi: A Maranoa  
Woman* written by Dr Ruth Hegarty

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## **Cultural Warning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Viewers:**

This production contains culturally sensitive stories and may contain images of those who have passed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are warned that historical records used in this production may contain language and attitudes that are not considered appropriate today and has the potential to cause distress and offence.

All production images are from the 2023 World Premiere of *Is That You, Ruthie?* Cremorne Theatre, QPAC.  
Starring Melodie Reynolds-Diarra and Chenoa Deemal. Photographer – Peter Wallis.

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

*QPAC rests on the lands of the Jagera and Turrbal peoples.  
We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this country  
and recognise their rich cultural heritage and enduring connection  
to the land, waters and skies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples  
are this country's original storytellers, and it is our privilege to continue  
to share stories and be a place of gathering on this land  
that has been a meeting place for millennia.*

# A Message from Leah Purcell

*Yowalla Ukaminbiya (Hello & welcome).*

So happy to be back with this return season! We've found new stuff folks! Always exciting when returning to work, especially with a new actor!

I don't think I (we, cast and crew) have worked so hard on something that I hope will be so right, and that our shared experience in the theatre for this return season of *Is That You, Ruthie?* will be unifying.

Embarking on the extraordinary journey of bringing Dr Ruth Hegarty's 95-year life story to the stage is an unmatched privilege and a pivotal moment in my career as a writer/director. Navigating the intricate details and assuming the responsibility of conveying her narrative with the utmost respect is a professional milestone. This venture echoes the intensity of my earlier work on *Box The Pony*, marking an unparalleled commitment to ensuring the authenticity and resonance of this production.

Considering the narrative structure of *Is That You, Ruthie?* I chose to mirror the life path dictated by the government policy, The Act, upon Buthalangi and Munya. The narrative unfolds with a rich tapestry of truth-telling, understanding, and celebration. Also, taking a non-linear approach, reminiscent of how Mob recount tales, we embark on a journey that starts at a point, deviates purposefully, returns to the original storyline, and culminates in the purpose for this yarn. This storytelling technique, deeply rooted in our ancient traditions, keeps our cultural practices and protocols alive.

Through tears and laughter, this production invites you to witness a performance and an immersive experience where the essence of Aunty Ruth's life converges with the resilience of our shared history.

A heartfelt thank you to my creative team of exceptionally talented collaborators: Jeanette, Chloe, Carli and Katherine, Ben, Wil, Justin, Alex, Kate and Kylie for your tireless dedication in bringing this play to fruition. Special gratitude to new CE Rachel Healy, Jono Perry and their dedicated QPAC staff for their unwavering support and belief in this return season of *Is That You, Ruthie?* I sincerely appreciate each of you; you're all too deadly, u'fella!

A very special thank you and gratitude to my partner in life and business, Bain Stewart.

We are Gunggarri. We share connection and story to Wakka Wakka Country. A heartfelt appreciation to Aunty Ruthie for your faith and trust in me. Noella nuggera Moira and Becky Bligh for your unwavering dedication and support in bringing this play to the stage. Special thanks are extended to the Hegarty and Duncan families.

To my incredibly talented actors, Melodie Reynolds-Diarra and new cast member Shakira Clanton, you've got this! Big love!

May this theatrical journey resonate as a testament to the strength of truth-telling for understanding in our Country.

*Noella nuggera.*

*Aljteringa yirra Biame!*

*Yantelour-oo*

**Leah Purcell**



## Dr Ruth Hegarty

Ruth Hegarty won the 1998 David Unaipon Award for her manuscript *Is That You, Ruthie?* Her sequel memoir, *Bittersweet Journey* (UQP, 2003), recounts her life after Cherbourg Mission as a wife, mother and advocate for the Indigenous community. She has raised a family of eight children and lives in Brisbane.

In 1998 Ruth was awarded the Premier's Award for Queensland Seniors for outstanding service to the community. She is a recognised public speaker and leader and has lectured at many educational institutions including the Australian Catholic University. Her advocacy in the 'Stolen Wages' campaigns and recognition for her dormitory sisters in Cherbourg knows no bounds. In 2010 Ruth received 'The Queensland Greats' Award for 40 years of involvement in Indigenous issues and programs; and in 2014 an Honorary Doctorate from the Australian Catholic University in recognition of her contributions to Australian literature, Indigenous Education and Community Leadership.

In 2023 the adaption of *Is That You, Ruthie?* for the stage takes her story to another level and hopefully shines a spotlight on the impact of the Aboriginal Protection Acts on the lives of her people who were caught in an unjust system of protection, segregation and assimilation.

For full biography of Ruth Hegarty please see:

[Biography - Ruth Hegarty - Indigenous Australia](#)

Ruth Hegarty hoped her autobiography would shed light on the experience of Aboriginal girls raised in institutions.

I cry when I remember my sisters, we would be a forgotten generation if I didn't write up about what we experienced. I write for them so that their lives and the treatment they received will always be remembered.

Hegarty, R. *Is That You, Ruthie?* (1999, pp. 43)



# Cast and Creatives

## Leah Purcell AM

Actor/Director/Producer/Writer

Leah Purcell AM is an internationally acclaimed Actor, Director, Producer and Writer on stage and screen and a proud Goa-Gunggari-Wakka Wakka Murri woman from Queensland.

Leah stars opposite Sigourney Weaver in the recent Amazon Prime Video limited series *The Lost Flowers of Alice Hart* (Amazon Studios/Endeavor Content/Made Up Stories). She also stars in both the drama series *High Country* (Curio Pictures/Foxtel/Binge), and the feature film *Shayda* (Executive Producer, Cate Blanchett) which had its world premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival. As one of Australia's most in demand actors, Leah has appeared in films such as *The Last Cab to Darwin*, *Lantana*, *Jindabyne* and *The Proposition* and in TV series such as *Wentworth*, *Police Rescue*, *Redfern Now* and *Janet King*.

Leah's debut feature film, *The Drover's Wife The Legend of Molly Johnson*, had its world premiere screening in competition at SxSW 2021 and was released theatrically in the US by Samuel Goldwyn Films. Based on her multi-award winning play *The Drover's Wife*, Leah produced, directed, wrote and starred in the film, winning the 2022 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Award for Best Lead Actress in Film, 2022 Australian Directors' Guild Award for Best Direction in a Feature Film, 2023 Film Critics Circle of Australia Award (FCCA) for Best Actress, 2021 Asia Pacific Screen Award Grand Jury Prize and 2021 Australian Screen Industry Network Award (ASIN) for Best Writer/Screenplay.

Leah also directed two chapters of the recent anthology feature film *Here Out West* which premiered at the Sydney Film Festival in 2021.

*The Drover's Wife* play premiered at Belvoir in 2016 and swept the awards season winning Best New Australian Work, Best Play, Best Direction and Best Sound Design at the 2016 Sydney Theatre Awards and Best New Australian Work, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Play at the 2017 Helpmann Awards. The script was awarded Best Stage Play, the David Williamson Prize for Excellence in Writing and the Major Award at the 2017 Australian Writers' Guild Awards. Leah has also adapted the story into a novel of the same name which was published by Penguin Random House in 2019 and has recently been translated and released in China.

Leah has also worked extensively as a TV director and writer, setting up *My Life Is Murder* (Network Ten/CJZ) starring Lucy Lawless. She was also the set-up director on the hit series *Secret Daughter* (Seven Network/Screentime) and directed five episodes of the critically acclaimed genre series *Cleverman* (ABC/Goalpost) which was broadcast in the US on Sundance TV and in the UK on BBC3 and directed two episodes of the critically acclaimed series *Redfern Now* for ABC and has written two episodes on the AACTA Award winning series, *The Twelve* (Warner Bros International Television), *Redfern Now*, *Love Child* and *Ready For This*.

## Melodie Reynolds-Diarra

Cast

Melodie is a Wongutha, Nadju/Mirning woman from Western Australia. She made her acting debut at the age of 16 in *No Sugar* at Belvoir St and went on to graduate from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) in 1996.

Melodie has performed in several ABC radio plays and recorded the audio book of *My Place* by Sally Morgan. Some of her theatre credits include *Coranderrk* (Ilbijerri Theatre Company/Sydney Opera House), *The Dirty Mile*, *Chopped Liver* (Ilbijerri Theatre Company), *Black Sheep*, *Glorious Bastards* (Ilbijerri Theatre Company/Melbourne International Comedy Festival), *Headhunter* (Ilbijerri Theatre Company/Polyglot), *Gunawarra* (Ilbijerri Theatre Company/Melbourne Theatre Company), *Wild Cat Falling*, *Honey Spot*, *King For This Place*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Dreaming Festival/STC), *Actors at Work* (Bell Shakespeare), *Holy Day* (Playbox), *Stolen*, *Shrunken Iris*, *MasterBuilder*, *Quilting the Armour*, *Yandy* (Black Swan State Theatre Company), *Yibiyung* (Company B), *The Man from Mukinupin* (Melbourne Theatre Company), and *Jackie* by Elfriede Jelinek (Red Stitch Theatre).

Melodie's television credits include *Natural Justice*, *Broken Shore*, *Hard Rock Medical*, and *Redfern Now* (series 2).

In 2013 Melodie made her debut in an associate directing role in *The Shadow King* at Malthouse Theatre.

Melodie has recently appeared in the successful 2017, 2018, and 2019 seasons of *Black is the New White* for Sydney Theatre Company.

In 2015, Melodie's first play *Skylab* was picked up by the Yellamundie Festival and in 2016 was selected for the National Play Festival at Malthouse Theatre. In 2018 *Skylab* made its world premiere in Perth, as a co-production with Black Swan Theatre and Yirra Yarkin Theatre.

## Shakira Clanton

### Cast

Shakira is a NIDA graduate who has worked consistently across film, television and theatre for the last ten years. She has graced our stages in some of the country's most successful productions in recent years. These include *Don't Ask What The Bird Look Like* – playing Pattie (Queensland Theatre), *Long Forgotten Dream* (STC dir. Neil Armfield), *Barbara and the Camp Dogs* (Queensland Theatre/Belvoir), *I'm With Her* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company), York (Black Swan Theatre Company) and scored herself a Best Actress nomination at the Sydney Theatre Awards for the critically acclaimed production *The Weekend* (Moogahlin Performing Arts/Carriageworks).

Shakira has also enjoyed a sold out season of her self-written, one women cabaret *Still I Rise* for the Darlinghurst Theatre Company.

Recent screen credits include *Scoby* (Contra Stories), *Wellmania* (Netflix), *Summer Love* (ABC), *Frayed* (ABC), *Preppers* (ABC), *Eden* (Stan), *Diary of an Uber Driver* (ABC), *Doctor Doctor* (Nine Network) and *Hyde and Seek* (Matchbox Pictures).

Shakira is a proud Wongatha, Yamatji and Noongar, Gitja yorga (woman) from Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar (Perth) on her mother's side, as well as being African American with First Nation ancestry on her father's side.

## Bain Stewart

### Executive Producer –

### Oombarra Productions

Bain Stewart is a Ngugi-Goenpul-Noonuccal man and a Traditional Owner of Quandamooka, that includes Minjerribah and Mulgumpin (North Stradbroke and Moreton Islands), Queensland. Bain is also the Managing Director and Executive Producer of Oombarra Productions and a leading producer of creative content across film, TV, theatre, and a mentor to First Nation artists across the creative industries.

His producing credits include the IF Award winning documentary *Black Chicks Talking*, the Helpmann Award winning play *The Drover's Wife*, the play *Box the Pony*, and the short films *She. Say* as well as *Aunty Maggie* and the *Womba Wakgun*. In 2023 he was Executive Producer for the AACTA award winning comedy, *All My Friends Are Racist* and Producer for the award winning feature film *The Drover's Wife The Legend of Molly Johnson*.

Bain is currently producing *Is That You, Ruthie?* the stage adaptation of the award-winning novel by Dr Ruthie Hegarty for the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) season in March. He also has numerous projects in-development, more notably; *I am Molly* (Premium Limited Series), *Koa Kid* (Feature Film), *Netball* and *Moxie Girls* (series) and the screen adaptation of the *Is That You, Ruthie?* play.

Bain is also a Producer with Oombarra Taxi, a new strategic alliance between Oombarra Productions and Taxi Film Production, created to bridge the gap in narratives and content for the inclusion of First Nation talent, especially in commercial production. Credits include the recently filmed, *Grooming Hides Behind Harmless* for a national media campaign on behalf of the Bravehearts Foundation.

## Jeanette Fabila

### Choreographer

Specialising in Indigenous contemporary dance Jeanette is a teacher, choreographer, cultural consultant and performing artist. Her experience spans over 35 years of performing and teaching audiences locally, nationally and internationally about her Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island, Papua New Guinean and SE Asian heritage.

Career highlights include: 2008 Welcome to Country Ceremony at the 42nd Parliament House in preparation for the National Apology, then later 5th Anniversary of the National Apology in 2013, 2016 - choreographed the Indigenous Contemporary section for the NRL Indigenous All Stars Opening Ceremony with Nunukul Yuggera Dance Group and local Indigenous school. 2021 – 2024 Cultural Residency representing Moa Island under the guidance of Dujon Niue at NAISDA College of Dance, Kariiong NSW.

Jeanette continues developing Indigenous contemporary dance groups in schools across Brisbane for their NAIDOC celebrations and awards nights, in between her own performances and major tours.

## Ben Hughes

### Lighting Designer

Ben Hughes' lighting design spans theatre, dance, opera, concerts and events, including: for Brisbane Festival, *Bananaland* (with QPAC), *Salamander*; for Queensland Theatre, *Othello*, *The Almighty Sometimes*, *The Sunshine Club*, *Return To The Dirt*, *Boy Swallows Universe* (with QPAC), *Triple X* (with STC), *Mouthpiece*, *Antigone*, *L'appartement*, *Twelfth Night*, *Good Muslim Boy* (with Malthouse), *Scenes From A Marriage*, *An Octoroon*, *Noises Off!* (with MTC); for QPAC, *Singin' In The Rain* (with Prospero Arts), *Breaking The Castle* (with Oombarra Productions); for Sydney Theatre Company, *Poison Of Polygamy* (with La Boite), *Black Is The New White*, *The Effect* (with QT); for Australasian Dance Collective, *Three 2.0*, *Forgery*, *Aftermath*, *Converge*, *Mozart Airborne* (with OQ), *The Dinner Party*, *Carmen Sweet*, *Propel*; for Queensland Ballet, *Strictly Gershwin*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Peter And The Wolf*, *The Masters Series*, *Flourish*, *Giselle*, *A Classical Celebration*; for Opera Queensland, *Don Giovanni*, *Snow White*; for La Boite, *IRL*, *The Last Five Years*, *Away*, *The Time Is Now*, *Naked & Screaming*, *The Neighbourhood*, *From Darkness*; for Adelaide Festival, *Two Feet*; for Dead Puppet Society / Legs on the Wall / QPAC / Brisbane Festival / Sydney Festival, *Holding Achilles*. Ben lectures in lighting design at Queensland University of Technology.

## Wil Hughes

### Composer & Sound Designer

Wil is a composer, songwriter and sound designer for stage and screen. Recent theatre credits include *Yoga Play* (National Theatre of Parramatta/La Boite); *Closer*, *IRL*, *Capricorn*, *Tiddas*, *Single Asian Female*, *The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek*, *The Village*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Wind in the Willows* (La Boite Theatre Company); *Dear Brother*, *37*, *Rice*, *The Scene Project* (Queensland Theatre); *Straight from the Strait* (Opera Queensland and QPAC); *Is That You, Ruthie?* (Queensland Performing Arts Centre); *Blue* (Belvoir St); *Face to Face* (Playlab); *Lucie In The Sky*, *Arc*, *Still Life* (Australasian Dance Collective); *Cinderella*, *Mind Your Head*, *From Within*, *Sonder*, *B- Sides* (Queensland Ballet); *Every Brilliant Thing* and *Kill Climate Deniers* (That Production Company).

Wil is also an internationally acclaimed composer for film, television and other media, being the recipient of Best Music accolades from the Australian Screen Music Awards; California Independent Film Festival (USA); Festival du Film Marveilleux (France), amongst many others. Recent film credits include *Made It With My Hands* (SBS); *Still Life* (ADC, Kiosk); and *Bird Drone* (ScreenWest) – an official selection of nearly 300 festivals in 54 countries. He is a proud member of the Australian Guild of Screen Composers and the Australian Theatre Composers Guild.

## Justin Harrison

### Video Designer

Justin is a sound and video creative working across theatre, film and television, and video games. He has previously created video and sound design for Queensland Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre, La Boite Theatre Company, and has been the resident designer and technical manager of The Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe for 14 years. His most recent credits include *Is That You, Ruthie?* world premiere in 2023 for QPAC and Oombarra Productions, *Vietgone* (programming and mapping) for Queensland Theatre; *PodSquad* for QPAC and Dept. Health and Wellbeing; *The Lucky Country* for Hayes Theatre Company; *Lucky and the Flight of the Sky Puppies* for Grin & Tonic & The Simoni (2023 Brisbane Powerhouse, 2022 Cairns Children's Festival); *Ishmael* (2023 Tour, 2021 Brisbane Festival), *The Wider Earth* (2022 National Tour, Natural History Museum, London and Sydney Festival 2018, Brisbane 2016) and *Laser Beak Man* (National Tour 2019/20, Brisbane Festival 2017) for Dead Puppet Society; *An Ideal Husband* and *Caesar* for

La Boite; *Fangirls* (2022 Sydney Opera House, 2021 National Tour, 2019 for Belvoir St Theatre and Queensland Theatre), *Storm Boy* for Melbourne Theatre Company; and *Death of a Salesman* (2019), *My Name is Jimi* (2018 Sydney Festival, Cairns, Brisbane and Thursday Island 2017) and *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Los Angeles 2019, Montreal 2018, National Tour 2016-17, Brisbane 2016) for The Grin & Tonic Theatre Troupe and Queensland Theatre. In 2016, his work on *The Wider Earth* was awarded the inaugural Matilda Award for Projection Design, and he has since been nominated for Helpmann, Olivier, APDG and BADC awards.

## **Chloe Greaves**

### **Set & Costume Designer**

Chloe Greaves is a costume and set designer working in film and theatre across Australia and internationally. She was born and trained on the land of the Wurundjeri of the Kulin nation and is now based on the land of Turrbal people. Chloe acknowledges all elders past, present and emerging and the strong tradition of storytelling on this land. She studied at Victorian College of the Arts completing a bachelor of theatre production in 2008. Her theatre work has seen her design for companies including Belvoir, Malthouse, Chunky Move, Melbourne Theatre Company, Red Stitch, La Boite, Dance North, Queensland Theatre and The Juilliard School. In the film industry, she has worked with companies including Madman Productions, The Directors Group, Pixel Kitchen, Otto Empire, Pancho and Guilty. She has designed music videos for artists including Guy Sebastian, Alison Wonderland, DZ Deathrays, Montaigne and San Sisco. From 2017-2019 she was a panellist for the Green Room Awards theatre companies panel. In 2021-2022 Chloe was the designer in residence at La Boite Theatre. She is a member of the Australian Production Design Guild.

## **Carli Griffin**

### **Stage Manager**

Carli Griffin is a highly experienced stage manager and arts professional holding a Bachelor Degree of Fine Arts in Technical Production from QUT. Based in Brisbane, Carli has spent over 10 years working extensively in opera, musical theatre and live events across Australia and internationally.

Her impressive career includes work with Opera Queensland (OQ), State Opera South Australia, Victorian Opera, Opera Australia (OA) and various touring productions.

Throughout her career, Carli has contributed to a diverse range of productions, from large-scale operatic works such as *La Traviata* (OQ) and *Carmen on the Sydney Harbour* (OA), to providing professional stage management for the Queensland Academy of Excellence in Musical Theatre productions and producing festivals in the outback with Opera Queensland. A career highlight for Carli was working at World Expo 2020 Dubai in the United Arab Emirates for six months during the pandemic.

Carli is honoured to be part of the return season of *Is That You, Ruthie?* and looks forward to bringing this powerful production to QPAC audiences.

# Introduction

This learning resource provides contextual background and structured learning experiences to accompany *Is That You, Ruthie?* Designed to support artistic exploration and critical analysis, it aims to deepen students' engagement with the performance and its historical significance.

Through thematic exploration and thought-provoking discussions, these materials encourage students to critically reflect on the play's key messages while inspiring their own creative responses. We invite educators to consider how their students can use dramatic arts to engage with the themes of *Is That You, Ruthie?* and contribute their voices to its profound questions and revelations.

This resource fosters both critical and creative thinking through carefully designed pre- and post-performance activities that promote reflection, discussion, and artistic practice. For English and History students, these experiences provide an opportunity to explore the deeply significant historical narratives presented in the play.

Educators are encouraged to tailor and adapt the activities to fit their specific teaching contexts and time constraints. The resource is divided into three sections:

1. General background information about the play and its creative team
2. Suggested learning experiences aligned with curriculum and assessment
3. Additional resources for further study and engagement.

Through this resource, we hope to support meaningful dialogue, artistic expression, and a deeper understanding of *Is That You, Ruthie?* and its critical place in Australian history.



# Background Information

## What is Truth-telling?

Truth-telling, broadly speaking, encompasses any activity or process that exposes historical and/or ongoing truths. It often acts as a record of historical experience as part of a process of relationship-building, political transformation or reconstitution of political relations in divided societies. Truth-telling should be understood as a multifaceted and ongoing process (as opposed to a predetermined end) which deepens over time.

For further reading:

[What is truth-telling? – AN TAR](#)

## What is intergenerational trauma and approaches to best practice?

The colonization of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and the (ongoing) oppressive practices that followed have resulted in a legacy of unresolved intergenerational trauma for Indigenous Australians. Not only is the experience of unresolved historical trauma a risk factor impacting Indigenous Australians' social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB), but re-traumatisation and the cumulative effect of trauma-on-trauma can manifest through other risk factors such as family violence, incarceration, substance misuse and self-harm (McCallum 2022). This trauma can be passed between generations both vicariously and through prolonged exposure to stressors, leading to a cycle of trauma that is left unaddressed.

[Intergenerational trauma and mental health](#) page 4

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation work report (Dudgeon et al. 2016) identified several critical factors that are indicative of successful whole-of-community, on the ground, whole-of-government approaches to SEWB, mental health and suicide prevention (Dudgeon et al. 2016).

Central to these frameworks is the fact that they:

- are guided by expert Indigenous groups
- privilege Indigenous ways of doing, knowing and being, including program design, methodologies and delivery
- involve the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Indigenous Leadership.

The following essential criteria are identified by the CBPATISIP Evaluation Framework (CBPATISIP 2018). They are based on evidence of what works in suicide prevention and SEWB programs and services. These criteria assess whether programs and services:

- assist in Indigenous capacity building
- prioritise Indigenous knowledge and experience
- respect cultural values
- recognise Indigenous rights and self-determination
- facilitate cultural strengthening
- facilitate and promote Indigenous leadership and governance
- foster genuine partnerships and community engagement
- promote healing

For further reading please consult:

<https://www.indigenoumhspsc.gov.au/getattachment/6f0fb3ba-11fb-40d2-8e29-62f506c3f80d/intergenerational-trauma-and-mental-health.pdf?v=1309>

# Curriculum Connections

## Australian Curriculum General Capabilities

Ethical Understanding, Literacy, Critical & Creative Thinking, Personal & Social Capability.

## Australian Curriculum (Drama) Year 9 & 10 Achievement Standards:

By the end of Year 10 students analyse the elements of drama, forms and performance styles and evaluate meaning and aesthetic effect in drama they devise, interpret, perform and view. They use their experiences of drama practices from different cultures, places and times to evaluate drama from different viewpoints.

Students develop and sustain different roles and characters for given circumstances and intentions. They perform devised and scripted drama in different forms, styles and performance spaces. They collaborate with others to plan, direct, produce, rehearse and refine performances. They select and use the elements of drama, narrative and structure in directing and acting to engage audiences. They refine performance and expressive skills in voice and movement to convey dramatic action.

## Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01 • develop performance skills and/or techniques to manipulate elements of drama and/or use conventions to communicate the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions.

AC9ADR10D01 • reflect on their own and others' drama or practices to refine and inform their use of elements of drama, conventions and/or approaches to shape and sustain dramatic action.

## Drama 2025 V 1.2

### Unit 1: Share

How does drama promote shared understandings of the human experience?

- Students explore the importance of drama as a means to tell stories and share understandings of the human experience in a range of cultures.
- They begin with a focus on Australian voices and experiences, including those of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and/or those from the Asia–Pacific region.
- They manipulate and shape the dramatic languages to explore a range of linear dramatic forms and non-linear dramatic forms through scripted and Non scripted texts. They explore hybridity of styles in storytelling practice.
  - **Inquiry question**
    - How can we recreate people's stories in linear and non-linear dramatic forms?

### Unit 3 Challenge

Explore how drama can be used to challenge our understanding of humanity over time?

- Students investigate dramatic styles that are united by social commentary, and that question their world and advocate change.
- Students explore how dramatic form can be used to express philosophical and political viewpoints in action in society.

#### **Inquiry question**

- How can drama help to educate, challenge and empower us to question society at this time and advocate change?

# Drama in Practice Applied senior syllabus 2024

This performance has direct links with:

## Unit Options A: Collaboration

## Unit Option D : Commentary

In this unit, students explore the power of drama in commenting on social issues. As theatremakers, students explore and respond to the issues and events that affect our lives on a local, national and global scale.

Students explore theatre practitioners and the commentary made in their works through viewing live or recorded live productions. Through the study of the work of real-world practitioners, students explore theatre-making processes to build understanding of how drama comments on contemporary issues.

## Module 3: Staging the stories of our community

- Verbatim theatre (and its variations) reflects a community's identity through the telling of stories.

## Year 10 - Australian Curriculum English (V9)•

Understand how language can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people –

AC9E10LA02 • analyse representations of individuals, groups and places and evaluate how they reflect their context in literary texts by world authors.

AC9E10LE02 • analyse how the aesthetic qualities associated with text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features, and the context in which these texts are experienced, influence audience response.

AC9E10LE03 • evaluate the social, moral or ethical positions represented in literature.

AC9E10LE06 • analyse and evaluate the aesthetic qualities of texts.

AC9E10LE07 • analyse and evaluate how people, places, events and concepts are represented in texts and reflect contexts - AC9E10LY03.

AC9ADR10D01 • reflect on their own and others' drama or practices to refine and inform their use of elements of drama, conventions and/or approaches to shape and sustain dramatic action - AC9ADR10D0

## Practice exam question for General Drama

In the performance of *Is That You, Ruthie?* a non-linear approach is used to capture this important historical story. How is the use of movement sequences, symbols and the integration of sound and images used to create the journey of the characters?

## Scenario

Leah Purcell's powerful new play, *Is That You, Ruthie?* brings to life the story of First Nations Elder Dr. Ruth Hegarty, the Dormitory system, the forced indentured labour and Stolen Wages. Set against the backdrop of Barambah Station (now Cherbourg) in Queensland, the play explores the harsh realities of life under *The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*. Told in a nonlinear form, it follows Dr. Hegarty's journey from childhood in the Great Depression through dormitory life, domestic servitude, motherhood, and her rise as a writer.

It also captures the life of George Duncan, Ruthie's grandfather, who was self-employed, an entrepreneur and had 31 pounds in his pocket when the family were forcibly removed but none of this was taken into consideration. This breaks the stereotype of why First Nations people were placed on mission/reserves.

Interwoven with personal struggles and family reunions, the play delves into the trauma of forced separation and the complex process of healing. It particularly focuses on her relationship with her mother after their forced separation. With elements of humor, movement, and physical theatre, it highlights the resilience, resistance, and creative expression of First Nations people in the face of oppression.

## *Is That You, Ruthie?* – Key Questions

Here are a range of questions for you to prompt discussion before the performance:

- What is Truth-telling?
- What do you know about the impact of colonization?
- What do you know about kinship structures in First Nations Torres Strait Islander communities?
- What are 'Stolen Wages' and forced indentured labour?
- Do you think that the impact of trauma can be passed on from one generation to another?
- How do people and experiences from our childhood impact on our lives?
- How do our personal perspectives impact our role in society?
- Do we intuitively inherit unconscious biases?
- What makes some memories remain longer than others?
- What is the Dormitory system in Queensland?
- What does the term Domestic Servant mean?
- What is 'The Act'?
- What was the curfew that operated in Qld?
- What was the Great Depression in Australia?
- What was the difference in education offered in the dormitory for First Nations students compared to other schools? What did it focus on?

## Key words and concepts

Storytelling Dormitory Yumba fringe-dwellers cultural identity Intergenerational trauma

The Act order of removal Depression Stolen Wages

## **Key Themes**

Families being torn apart by the government

Mother and daughter relationships

The importance of truth-telling/storytelling

Childhood removal and Life in the Dormitory

The complexity of reunions

Not just 'making do but mending'

The power of language, how words can hurt and empower

Art as a means of escape

The call to writing

Healing through art as a form of therapy and making meaning / to create awareness

## **Key people in the story**

Nanna Ruby

George Duncan

Ruth

Inspector

Matron

Frank

Marcia

## **Key places in the story**

Mitchell

Monaro River

Cherbourg

Caledion Club Brisbane

## **Examples of Key Contemporary First Nations plays**

Ningali Lawford-Wolf's *Ningali* (1994)

Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman's *The Seven Stages of Grieving* (1996)

Jane Harrison's *Stolen* (1998) and *The Visitors* (2020)

*Box the Pony* (1997) Leah Purcell and Scott Rankin

*Capricorn* (2023) Aidan Rowlingson

*Face to Face* (2023) Emily Wells

## **Learning Activities**

In this section you will find suggested activities that can be undertaken before the viewing of the live performance. They are designed to focus attention on aspects of *Is That You, Ruthie?* before the viewing takes place.

## **Elements of Drama**

Here are some examples of how the elements appear in the performance:

### **Key Elements of *Is That You, Ruthie?***

#### **Roles and Relationships**

- The performance centres on the journey of Ruth and her mother, exploring the profound impact of government policies on their lives.

#### **Tension**

- Tension arises as Ruth navigates her relationships and the restrictions imposed by government policies.
- Suspense is created as Ruth explores the dormitories, uncertain of her fate.

#### **Mood**

- The overall mood is somber and emotional, with moments of comedy and movement providing contrast.
- Comedy is used satirically to poke fun at authority and lighten the tone in certain moments.

#### **Language**

- A mix of naturalistic Australian dialogue and the formal legal language of government documents.

#### **Time and Place**

- The narrative is nonlinear, shifting between different time periods.
- The setting changes dynamically to reflect different environments.

#### **Symbolism**

- Calico sheets and aprons are used to heighten the emotional impact and underscore key themes.

#### **Contrast**

- The performance balances moments of stillness and tension with movement and lightness.

#### **Movement**

- Physical theatre and choreography are integral, with actors working in unison.
- The Charleston is performed to reflect social life and moments of joy.
- Elements of cultural movement keeps the project grounded and honours tradition.



# **Dramatic Conventions in *Is That You, Ruthie?***

## **Narration**

- The story is presented through a combination of narration and dialogue, offering insight into the characters' experiences.

## **Direct Address to the Audience**

- Ruth, as the narrator, speaks directly to the audience, drawing them into her story in the present tense.

## **Historical Artefacts**

- Government documents and reports are projected to illustrate the acts and records kept on Ruth.

## **Multiple-Role Playing**

- Two actors portray all the characters, shifting seamlessly between roles.

## **Symbolic Set and Projections**

- Visual projections display paperwork, maps, words, and images of Ruth and her family.
- The set is metaphoric, reinforcing historical and emotional themes.

## **Symbolic Use of Props**

- Props such as calico fabric symbolise trauma and enhance the emotional atmosphere of key scenes.

## **Time and Location Shifts**

- Frequent shifts in time and place occur based on the narration.

## **Non-Linear Structure**

- The story is told in a fragmented, non-chronological order, guided by Ruth's narration.

## **Physical Theatre**

- Actors move in unison to depict daily routines and communal experiences.
- Dance sequences, such as the Charleston, highlight moments of joy and cultural expression.

# Activities PRE-PERFORMANCE

The following activities will support readiness for the performance.

## Activity 1

Purpose: What was life like living under 'THE ACT'?

Device: Research and Role on the Wall

Resources: Butcher's paper and pens

### Link to research Resources:

Students to research the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, refer to page 12–20 in the following document [Aboriginal-timeline-FINAL-updated-25-July-2018.pdf](#).

Students read about the Protectionist Laws, ask students to consider:

- What were the basic freedoms removed?
- Who was the Regional Protector?
- What did "living under The Act" mean?
- What was a mission station and reserve?
- What was forbidden?
- Who made decisions about resettlement, removal of children without proof of neglect, marriage, censoring of mail, working for low wages, and seizing of property?
- What schooling did they receive?
- How was their work organised?
- After 1939 what changes occurred to The Act?
- How many children were forcibly removed from their families between 1910 and 1970?

Discuss responses in class.

**Role on the wall:** The outline of a figure is drawn on a large sheet of paper and is stuck on a wall.

Name each of the outlines with a character living in QLD in 1929/30 e.g. An Inspector for The Act, a teacher in the school, a First Nations mother living in a reserve, a First Nations father working on a farm/property, a farmer, a priest on the reserve.

Explain to the students that we will examine the motivations, questions and concerns of the characters as they may have felt during this time.

Working in small groups, students on the outside of character use words and phrases to describe the character. On the inside they devise and source words to describe how the character is feeling internally, what questions they might have, how they are feeling about their daily life and what are their hopes for the future? Each group shares the completed outlines.

Teacher to highlight key motivations, questions and concerns.

## Activity 2: To explore life as member of a dormitory

**Purpose:** In the dormitory at Cherbourg where Ruthie is interned following separation from her mother she is housed in a separate dormitory to her mother. They can see each other but cannot touch or talk to each other. This role play will allow students to create the mood in the reserve and imagine what it would have felt like to not be allowed to talk to your parents.

**Device:** Whole class improvisation and role play

**Resources:** Teacher in role as the matron

**Step 1:** Discuss with students' what rooms would be needed in the building where they are housed on Cherbourg. (Display the photo?)

In the classroom space use furniture and props to outline a kitchen (or another room if the students suggest e.g the sleeping rooms). Teacher explains there will be a divide between the mothers and their children, on one side the mothers will be sitting and on the other side the daughters. Talk about the struggle this must have been and how might the students have reacted.

**Step 2:** Ask students to enroll as mother or a daughter, they then pair up to create a mother and daughters set. After they have all identified their mother and daughter, they are instructed to find their place in the kitchen room that has been created.

Explain that you will all be in the improvisation but can only use body language and facial expression to communicate, and to start in silence. Ask students to imagine what it would be like to not communicate with your family members in the same room. What might they try and do?

Teacher in role as "The matron" starts to give instructions.

Matron: Children line up and get your food, don't speak, your mothers will be next. No speaking.

Allow the improvisation to start running.

Matron: Ok hurry up and sit down you lot, mothers start to line up. No rushing, keep quiet all.

Matron patrols as mothers start to line up and select dinner. Children sit and eat now.

Matron: You should all be sitting quietly now and eating.

Allow the improvisation to develop and build the tension at times by reminding them of the rules.

Matron: Finish your dinners and head to your sleeping quarters. Mothers to the right, daughters to the left.

Finish the improvisation and de brief with students. How did they feel? What did they notice?

What would be the long-term effects of this situation?

### **Activity 3: To understand the idea of truth-telling and its importance in 2025 and review other art forms.**

**Purpose:** To explore other artistic expressions of truth-telling and class discussion

**Devices:** Links to the art forms, images etc

**Resources:** 1) [History of truth-telling in Australia – ANTAR](#) 2) [Truth-telling through art and connection - Reconciliation Australia](#)

**Step 1:** Show students the timeline of truth-telling in 1) above. Asks students to select one point on the timeline and create a freeze frame of the moment.

**Step 2:** Ask them each to add a word/phrase to the presentation, in groups rehearse.

**Step 3:** Present to the class. Discuss after why has this come about? Why is it important? What did you notice? When have you heard about it?

**Step 4:** Students to view artwork Mayapa Weeyn, a sculpture that was created in Portland Victoria by Gunditjmara Original Custodian Walter Saunders. Please see Link 2) above.

**Step 5:** Students to read article truth-telling through art and connection by Walters Saunders.

Discuss: What is the artist trying to say here? What do you notice and why has art been used? Why was this monument created? What effect did its creation have in the community?

### **Activity 4: To reflect on how the past can impact on the present – pg 38 *Is That You, Ruthie?* novel “It’s funny how things from the past can impact on your life.”**

Leah Purcell reminds us of the importance of truth telling for a better understanding of the past. In a recent interview she recalls the words from Dr Ruth Hegarty:

“This is what our ancestors blessed us with our voice, and our ability to perform, and if we were back in the old days, we were the storytellers and we must continue. Aunty Ruthie, this is her story; she is living history and she cannot be denied this. For people to say this didn’t happen, she has lived this! “

[Is That You, Ruthie? Leah Purcell speaks on her latest work - ABC listen](#)

**Step 1:** Students to be shown the above quote from the interview. Listen to the full interview.

**Step 2:** Why has Leah Purcell written this play? Who does she want to have the power? Place a large butcher’s paper in the classroom. Students to one by one, write their responses and add any questions they have before viewing the performance.



## Post-performance learning opportunities

These activities are designed to support deep understanding of the performance and to promote artmaking. They should be used after the students have viewed the performance.

### Activity 1

**Purpose:** To examine key government policies that affected First Nations peoples.

**Device:** Freeze frame and tap and talk.

**Step 1:** Students to discuss the impacts on First Nations and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the following:

Stolen Generation, Stolen Wages, Forced Separation, Marriage Approval, Curfew.

**Step 2:** In groups create 3 images to capture moments when the above policies were impacting on a family. Each student to imagine the interior monologue of the character they are creating. What are they thinking?

**Step 3:** Groups to present their images, teachers to tap students at intervals in the presenting so their interior monologue can be heard.

**Step 4:** Teacher to read/share the following quote from Leah Purcell:

George Duncan, Ruthie's grandfather, was self-employed, an entrepreneur – he had 31 pounds in his pocket when they were forcibly removed but none of this was taken into consideration. This is what is different about this story, and I know there were more Aboriginal people like this, but because of the colour of their skin or their cultural identity they were treated differently. And it was the policy of The Act, that broke Aboriginal people – connection to self, culture, and simple human rights. This breaks the stereotype of why First Nations people were placed on mission/reserves.

Leah Purcell (2025)

**Step 5:** Discuss and debrief. What was the stereotype? What are the basic human rights being denied? Students to in pairs discuss and prepare a statement to the questions.

Students to be directed to research and data to ensure they are aware of the dates and times of these policies.

Please see: ([Is That You, Ruthie? Leah Purcell speaks on her latest work - ABC listen](#))

### Activity 2: Re-enactments of lines and sections

**Purpose :** Students to explore the following lines from the performance to extend understanding and summarise key messages of the performance.

**Device:** Chorus performance.

**Resources:** Lines from the performance:

He will come for us .....

I am a ward of the state.

All night on a dark station?

What happened to the paperwork?

Like an old rag my family ripped apart.

I shouldn't be here.

**Step 1:** Read the lines with the students and identify when they occur in the play and spoken by which character.

**Step 2:** Students select 2-3 lines and, working in pairs, devise a movement sequence to accompany the performance. Present to the class.

**Step 3:** Students discuss and then devise three lines each in response to the performance. These lines are said as a Direct Address to the audience and capture their understanding of the message of the play. Students create music to accompany.

Rehearse and present.

**Step 4:** Class journals key messages from the play. What did they learn?

## Activity 4

**Purpose: Responding questions to support comprehension and writing.**

1. Describe the key roles in the performance?
2. What was her life like before she was taken – compare her family before and after?
3. What is the central relationship of the performance?
4. What is the key driving tension? What is the struggle for each of the characters?
5. What mood dominates the performance?
6. How did she feel when her name was called out in the dormitory?
7. Why is the play called “Is That You, Ruthie? “
8. What happened to Ruth and her mother after she was sent to school?
9. What were the Duck Pond days?
10. How does the performance move from one time to another?
11. A soundtrack is used in the performance – what do we hear?
12. The projection is used to convey many documents and images, describe how effective that is?
13. Multiple role-playing is an important convention in the performance; how do the actors make this work?
14. Evaluate and analyse the success of the purpose of the performance; what is the key message communicated to the audience?

## Acknowledgments and thank you

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Leah Purcell for her advice and feedback.

### Works cited:

Hegarty, R. *Is that You, Ruthie?* (1999) University of Queensland Press Australia.

Hegarty, R. *Buthalangi* (2022) Link-Up Queensland.

### Digital resources:

[https://www.qhrc.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/10606/Aboriginal-timeline-FINAL-updated-25-July-2018.pdf](https://www.qhrc.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/10606/Aboriginal-timeline-FINAL-updated-25-July-2018.pdf)

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/projects/bringing-them-home-chapter-5>

[https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0034/429937/brief-history-aboriginal-islanders-qld.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0034/429937/brief-history-aboriginal-islanders-qld.pdf)

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### Articles:

[Is That You, Ruthie? returns to QPAC | National Indigenous Times](#)

### Recordings:

[Leah Purcell's return to theatre, and Miwatj Yolŋu - ABC listen](#) (Podcast)

[Is That You, Ruthie? Leah Purcell speaks on her latest work - ABC listen](#)