



Saplings

Education Resource

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Authored by Dr Meg Upton and created in collaboration with Arts Centre Melbourne and Australian Theatre for Young People with a focus on Theatre Studies (VCE)

Welcome to the Education Resource for 2026 production of Saplings. This resource responds to the selection of the play to the VCE Theatre Studies Playlist for 2026. The resource addresses performance analysis for both Unit 3 – Outcome 3, and Unit 4 – Outcome 3.

This resource does not provide a definitive interpretation of the production. Instead, it asks teachers and students to feel confident in making their own interpretations, drawing on the script and/or performance they see, and analysing, evaluating and discussing to respond to the Key Knowledge and Key Skills as outlined in the relevant Theatre Studies Unit and Outcome.

This resource can be read in conjunction with the Sydney Opera House's resource for NSW students, one that contains great activities and reflections for students who are not studying in Victoria.

This resource honours the liveness of theatre, and the unique experience students and teachers will have when see the performance they choose to see. There is no one response, so you are invited to remain curious.

Queensland Curriculum Links

Saplings explores themes of identity, resilience, youth justice, family, friendship, incarceration, voice, hope and belonging. It examines the differing experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the legal system. These themes align strongly across multiple learning areas.

Senior Secondary Syllabi Year 11- 12 Suggested Subjects

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies

Unit 4: Looking Forward, Looking Back

Topic 1: Resilience

- Analyse the viewpoints and perspectives represented in forms of cultural expression and associated responses.

English

Unit 2: Texts and Culture

- Analyse the relationship between language, representation, identity and cultural context.
- Consider how texts reflect or challenge social and cultural perspectives.
- Investigate how language, text, purpose, audience and context create representations of identity within cultural contexts.

Drama (Years 11–12)

Unit 1: Share

- Discuss and reflect on storytelling processes and their value across diverse cultural contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- Describe how drama, from contemporary practices to inherited traditions, documents, celebrates, empowers and informs audiences.

Unit 3: Challenge

- Explore how drama can educate, challenge, empower and entertain audiences within political, sociological and philosophical contexts.

Legal Studies

Unit 4: Human Rights in Legal Contexts

Topic 1: Human Rights

- Explore the rights of Indigenous peoples to live in dignity and to self-determination.

Philosophy and Reason

Unit 4: Social and political philosophy

- Analyse philosophical arguments about rights and the principles that enable human flourishing.

Year 10 Curriculum Links (Australian Curriculum v9.0)

The Arts

Drama – Year 10

Exploring and Responding

AC9ADR10E01: Investigate how elements of drama, performance skills and conventions are used to communicate and challenge ideas, perspectives and meaning across cultures, times and contexts.

English – Year 10

Literature

AC9E10LE03: Analyse how text structures, language features and literary devices influence audience response.

AC9E10LE04: Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts.

Literacy

AC9E10LY01: Analyse and evaluate how people, places, events and concepts are represented in texts.

Language

AC9E10LA07: Evaluate how visual features in still and moving images shape representation.

Humanities & Social Sciences

Citizenship, diversity and identity

AC9HC10K05: Examine challenges to sustaining a resilient democracy and a cohesive society in Australia and/or in our region or globally.

The World of the Play

The world of a play is the world created from the moment you, as audience, enter a performance space until the moment you exit (and arguably it continues in your post show discussions and analysis). In many ways, seeing live theatre is a contract. You agree to suspend your disbelief and agree to engage with the world of the play for an agreed period of time. On stage, the world of the play is the time, place and point in the story which the audience experiences - possibly when the lights go down, and when the play finishes – possibly when the lights go up.

This doesn't mean you are still not part of your present world. You are alert to your peers, how you feel before you sit down, how you feel at – if there is an interval – how you respond to and observe others in person and perhaps on social media.

In terms of VCE Theatre Studies, the world of the play suggests you critically focus on the interpretation of the script to the stage, consider production roles, think about the elements of composition, the design, the story, the actors, the audience, audience culture and the interrelationship between these aspects. The script can provide a sense of the world of the play. If you are studying the script, consider: What does the script suggest is/are the world or worlds of this play?



“...the themes within [this play] are asking us to actually comprehend the livelihoods of these young people. And if you put a fourth wall/screen in... in front of that, you can sit comfortably. I think the theatre aspect of Saplings is asking us to sit with the discomfort of it. So, it has to be theatre.”

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis, Director**

Synopsis/Overview

Would you risk breaking bail for a packet of Mi Goreng? Would you snitch on a mate to save your own skin? Around here, ordinary days can turn on you so fast you've still got a smile on your face as your hopes die in your hands.

After premiering at The Rebel Theatre for the Sydney Festival in 2024 and winning Sydney Theatre Awards' Best Production for Young People, Yuwaalaray playwright Hannah Belanzky and Kalkadoon director Abbie-lee Lewis bring *Saplings* to the stage once again. Four talented young actors take on multiple roles in this collection of hilarious and heartbreaking stories born from workshops with young people experiencing the youth justice system, from Marrickville to Moree. Set in contemporary Australia, across multiple locations, and across time.

Yani wants to go to the Easter Show, Kai wants a sense of home, Shanika wants her Mum back, and Lachlan... well, he just wants his bowl of noodles. But when the justice system is all that stands between these young people and what they want, it raises an important question: how do young people grow when the system keeps cutting them down?



In the words of the Director:

"I think *Saplings* is about young people coming into contact or being around, the youth justice system, and how they navigate their interactions with it, and kind of bringing to light sometimes the absurdity of the youth justice system. I think it's about the complexity of how they come into contact with it. It's a play that highlights, the idea that nothing is cut and dried, that mistakes can happen, and that our youth justice system doesn't really allow for complexity."

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis**

In the words of the Writer:

"This is the kind of work that that has multiple functions, but I guess one is the advocacy point of view, so packaging the play into a way that people in positions of power can see it. It also has that social justice component, who the work can speak to, to hopefully change minds and opinions, and the way that legislation is made. So there's, like, that aspect of it. Then the other aspect of it is for young people to see it, and to... for that work to sort of resonate with them as well. I think theatre has that capacity to reach people, and it's that shared experience as well...everyone is experiencing these stories together in the one room in a live capacity that makes it...quite special and impactful."

– **Hannah Belanzky**

Creative Team

Playwright

Hannah Belanzsky (Yuwaalaraay)

Director

Abbie-lee Lewis (Kalkadoon)

Associate Director & Associate Producer

Ryan Whitworth-Jones

Dramaturg

Jane Fitzgerald

Set & Costume Design

Angela Doherty

Set & Lighting Design

Morgan Moroney

Composer & Sound Design

Michael Weir

Fight Director

Tim Dashwood

Voice Coach

Angela Sullen

Production Manager

Abbey Pace

Stage Manager

Anastasia Mowen

Producer

Hayden Tonazzi

Cast

Talijah Blackman-Corowa

Maliyan Blair

Sam Harmon

Danny Howard

From Scene 5: Juvie – Ryan, Billy and Sal



Characters

The following characters appear in the above 10 scenes (in order of their character names below). Four cast members play all roles. The script suggests the following casting: 1F (First Nations), 2M (First Nations), 1M (non-Indigenous).

Kai – Male, First Nations

Jonty – Male, First Nations

Yani – Male

Leo – Male

Mara – Female

Lachlan – Male

Alinta – Female

Sandon – Male

Ryan – Male

Billy – Male

Sal – Male

Shanika – Female

Isaiah – Male

Jade – Female

Jarraah – Male

Ash – Male

Nikki – Female

Darius – Male

Corban – Male

Scenes/Settings

Scene 1: The Reserve

Scene 2: Stolen Watch – Leo’s house

Scene 3: Mi Goreng Interrogation – Police Station

Scene 4: The Courthouse – Children’s Court

Scene 5: Juvie – Boy’s Unit at a Juvenile Justice Centre

Scene 6: Train Station

Scene 7: Photography

Scene 8: Birthday Cake – Jarrah’s house

Scene 9: Bail bed – at Corban and his Aunty’s House

Scene 10: Community Garden (two years have passed) – Regional Youth Justice Centre

Origins of Saplings

The play is structured as 10 scenes (see above information). These scenes offer a range of interactions of young people as friends, family members, and as young people who engage with the juvenile justice system. The origins of the play are drawn from an arts program developed between Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) and Youth Action. The purpose of the arts program was to run workshops with young people who had been in and out of the justice system in NSW. In the first instance Youth Action organised the workshops. From there a playwright was engaged, Hannah Belanszky (Yuwaalaray).

How to Make a Play

Here the ATYP workshop facilitator, **George Kemp**, speaks about the beginnings of the project and then its development into a theatre performance.



“We spent time with these kids. We went in with a plan to run like, drama games and actual workshops. It ended up eating a lot of pizza and playing a lot of table tennis and basketball, and basically gaining trust with these, young people. After a while, building that trust, that then formed, you know, that then turned into them wanting to talk to us about themselves and their stories, and...our job there was really just to keep those conversations going, and help [the young people] feel like they were being listened to”.

The playwright, **Hannah Belanzky**, speaks about how this process of working with young people became a play.



“Everyone was safe [discuss] to tell us about their experiences. I wanted to be truthful and not feel like their stories are being used for something else, if that makes sense. I spent so much time, listening to them talk and trying to make the characters as truthful as possible. The main thing for me was spending time with them and listening to them”.

Exploring Contexts & Background

As discussed in the previous section about creating the play, Saplings explores young peoples’ experiences of the youth justice system in Australia. Below are some links to read more about the Victorian Youth Justice System.

[Please note: The links discuss young people, incarceration, and discuss young First Nations people]

Victorian Justice System:

Our vision for a leading youth justice system:

Youth Justice strives to:

- reduce offending by children and young people and improve community safety
- work with others to provide genuine opportunities for children and young people to turn their lives around.

Youth Justice works in partnership with families, communities, services and professionals.

Read more: <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/justice-system/youth-justice>

Wirkara Kulpa Wirkara Kulpa (pronounced WEE-ghara GHOU-lyar) meaning alongside, next to/taking/speaking in Barkindji/Paakantyi)

This strategy is written for and by Aboriginal children and young people and captures the aspirations and changes Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities want to see.

Wirkara Kulpa is focused on supporting Aboriginal children and young people so they remain outside the youth justice system and can live culturally rich lives.

It has been led by the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, under the umbrella of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, and is a key initiative of Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja (AJA4) and the Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030

Read more: <https://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/Aboriginal-youth-justice-strategy>

Australian Government, Institute of Health and Welfare

This report looks at young people who were under youth justice supervision in Australia during 2023–24 because of their involvement or alleged involvement in crime. It explores the key aspects of supervision, both in the community and in detention, as well as recent trends. Some data are included from the period during which COVID-19 and related social restrictions were present in Australia, specifically between March 2020 and June 2022.

Read more: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-justice-in-australia-2023-24/contents/summary>

Question

After reading the origins of the play and exploring some of the contextual materials what questions do you have about 'justice', and youth justice in particular?

Performance Space

Saplings is being performed in the Cremorne Theatre at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), described as an intimate and versatile 274-seat theatre. Below is an image of the seating bank which suggests the space.

Question

How is the performance space a factor in the way an audience experiences a performance? How will it impact your capacity to analyse and evaluate?



After Seeing the Performance

Recall

In pairs, tell each other story of the play in five minutes maximum.

- One person begins and tells as much as they can, finishing with 'and then' and the other person picks up the story from there. You can correct each other if you recall differently.
- In small groups select a key moment from the story and recreate it as a freeze frame
- In your freeze frame try and capture the mood and feeling of the moment
- You might use a small section of the script as a prompt.

Write

Working in pairs again, use a Padlet/Google Doc or other share platform and make dot point notes on the following:

- At what point in the characters' lives do we, as audience, enter?
- At what point in the characters' lives do we, as audience, exit?
- How much time transpires across the play?
- How did the performance make you feel? What did it make you think?
- Pick a character. What were some of the challenges this character faced?
- What did this character want?
- How did you feel about the characters in the play? Did you have a favourite?
- What is one significant thing you noticed about each of:
 - Costume, make-up, hair, set, lighting, sound, music, properties, language?
- How many different places and locations did the performance take you to?
- Did you feel you were asked to take sides within the performances? Whose side did you take?
- What key ideas/concepts were being explored in the performances?
- Does theatre or performance need to have a key idea or theme or purpose? Why/Why not?
- How important was audience to the performance? Did you feel you had a role to play? What was that role?
- What was your overall opinion of the performances? Did you enjoy it? Why/Why not?
- If you could ask a question of the creative team, what would it be?
- How would you describe the performances to a friend, a parent, a stranger?

Discuss similarities and differences in responses and understandings

- How can we account for this? Is it okay to have different interpretations?
- How will you provide evidence to support your interpretation and understanding?

Exploring Unit 3

Here are the Key Knowledge and Key Skills as a reminder of how you will work towards the Outcome for Theatre Studies Unit 3, Outcome 3.

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse and evaluate the interpretation of a written script from the prescribed VCE Theatre Studies Playlist in production to an audience. To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

Key Knowledge

- approaches to analysis and evaluation of a theatre production
- the contexts of the written script and how they have been interpreted in the production and any recontextualisation choices
- theatre styles in the written script and those used in the play in performance
- production roles and their application in developing the written script for performance
- evidence of the interpretations of the written script made by the creative team
- the nature of audiences and audience culture
- theatre technologies and their application in the production
- elements of theatre composition and their application in the production
- terminology to describe, analyse and evaluate a theatre production.

Key Skills

- analyse and evaluate ways in which the contexts of a written script were interpreted in a performance of a production to an audience
- analyse the interpretation of audiences and audience culture in a production
- analyse and evaluate the intended meaning of a written script with the meanings conveyed in the performance of the production
- analyse and evaluate the application of production roles to develop the written script in production
- analyse and evaluate the application of theatre technologies in the production
- analyse and evaluate the application of elements of theatre composition in the production
- apply relevant theatre terminology.

Theatre Styles



"...vignettes, is a style. It's not verbatim, I don't know if that's a word that schools love, but it's not...Vignettes is a style, you know, monologue is a style."

– **George Kemp, ATYP**

The director, playwright and workshop facilitator at ATYP say that Saplings incorporates a range of styles and conventions including - **epic, direct address, vignettes, episodes, dialogue driven, realistic, multi-locational, saturated, comedy.**

Use the table below to guide you to:

- Select one moment or scene from the production that included conventions of particular theatre styles
- You could draw on the script excerpts presented later in this resource as potential scenes OR on some of the production images included in this resource as prompts
- What conventions of other theatre styles were present? What evidence of these conventions did you see/hear?

Theatre Style	Scene	Evidence - Design	Evidence - Acting & Direction
Dialogue			
Political Theatre			
Episodic/Vignettes			
Realism			
Monologue/Dialogue			
Non-Realism			
Epic Theatre			
Comedy			

Settings in the Play

Break into pairs, select two of the settings listed near the beginning of this resource and brainstorm how the **production role of design** contributed to creation of that location eg set, props, lighting, sound/music, costume, hair and make-up...

Analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of one or more of these settings in terms of conveying particular contextual information:

- What was literal?
- What was symbolic?
- How did colour work?

Analyse and evaluate how the locational contexts were conveyed through the application of production roles such as direction, acting, design – set, props, costume, lighting, sound/music.

Talking About Audience & Audience Culture



“I personally think that the audience member is a part of the cast, so... or a part of... a part of the world, and I never want to forget about the audience. But also, at the same time, I can't pander to the audience. I can't give them everything that they enjoy. But I do like helping them”

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis, Director**

Discuss the comment above by the director:

- In what ways do you think you were guided or helped to understand this production?
- What aspects of the play did you enjoy? What aspects were you challenged by?
- Where were you sitting in the auditorium? What impact might that have?
- What is the relationship between directorial decisions and sight-lines (where an audience is sitting in the auditorium)?

Audience culture refers to the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours of a particular group of people who engage with theatre performances. In this study, audience culture pertains to an intended audience and may be directly related to or informed by the historical, political, social and cultural contexts in which a script was written. Audience culture is also related to theatre styles, conventions and movements (VCAA, 2024).

- Who is the audience for this play?
- Provide a justification for your decision/thoughts
- Consider language, content, contexts, themes, structure etc.

Direction



"I do have a taste that I do tend to work with. So, you know, I... I don't know if I've coined the term or I've heard of this term, but I like to work with what I call is, like, a saturated realism, and so that is working with technical elements like lighting and sound and set that, is realistic, however, there's moments of what I kind of call, like, epicness. The lighting, for example, in Saplings has a saturated feel to it. There's... it's not, exactly, realistic day time, or a realistic night time, that these elements of lighting that allows, a theatrical element to it. That's kind of, that's my taste, that's something that I like, and that's something that I also find exciting. And again, if this was film, I think it would warrant something very naturalistic, but we're in a theatre world, so we get to kind of play with the elements a little bit."

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis, Director**

Discuss the director's comments above

- What directorial decisions did you see that drew on the conventions of "epicness" or Epic Theatre?
- What directorial decisions created realistic moments?
- What are your thoughts about "saturated realism"?

The performance space and direction



"I have to think about the space in between the scenes so often, and I think Hannah, delivered something in her writing that, each scene felt like you could take it out and just see that scene and it and still understand what the themes were kind of talking about, but the space in between the scenes, the transitions, if you call them... I often think of it as, like a photograph. Sometimes the negative space in a photograph says so much more about the picture itself. So, the negative space, the transitions, are so much part of the production. I came in thinking about that first before we were actually up on the floor rehearsing, because what can tend to happen in a production is if you don't think about those moments, then they can feel just an add-on, or just getting from A to B, and actually not about the entire journey."

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis, Director**

Question

How do you think the design of the performance space impacted the interpretation of the script to the stage in relation to

- Direction
- Elements of theatre composition – cohesion, motion, rhythm, emphasis, contrast, variation
- Decisions about the proximity of the audience to the performers?

Use the following image of Jonty and Kai to **analyse and evaluate** particular directing choices in the production focussing on the performance space.



From Scene 1: The Reserve – Jonty and Kai

Set & Properties



“The set of saplings is...very... like, it looks like a big concrete block, that you might find out in the city, or something like that, or even just, like, in the township of, like, a regional town or something like that. But, it’s not an exact, realistic, it’s an example of what that block would look like. There is a highlighted, kind of saturated elements of it, so... and part... partly...also partly sometimes when we’re dealing with very kind of realistic themes or ideas.”

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis, Director**

“[The design is about] housing all the different worlds that are in the play, like, the different locations, then light really, really feeds into that as well, and takes the audience into, like, for instance, it’s in a house, a fan comes down, and there’s a silhouette on the wall, and instantly you know that you’re in a lounge room. And, then in the scene where they’re in jail, a mesh screen comes across, and...the actors are behind that, and that’s particularly beautiful, I think.”

– **Hannah Belanzky, Playwright**



Production image of the set design for Saplings

Here are some lists of the set and prop items in the production. However, your keen eyes may have picked up more! The list is offered as reminders only.

Set Pieces: stepped platforms for the actors to sit, elevate and generate different levels and locations, plant beds, fire pit, screen/curtain, working fridge, ceiling fan (with light)

Props: phones, cake, table lamp, watch, takeaway pack, digital camera, gardening tools, backpack

Discuss and analyse the statement made by the director about the set and its intentions in setting up the world of the play.

- How did particular set pieces contribute to the world of the play ie contexts?
- How did set pieces contribute to conveying particular theatre styles/conventions eg realism, non-realism, duologues, monologue, direct address, epic theatre?
- How did set pieces enhance intended meaning ie the interpretation of a moment in the script?
- Use the image included BELOW to more deeply discuss the effectiveness of set design in the production overall.



Discuss and analyse the use of props in the production. Select one or more props to address the following questions. Also consider the characters who used the props.

- How did the props contribute to creating the world of the play ie contexts?
- How did the props contribute to conveying conventions of particular theatre styles?
- How did the props enhance intended meaning ie the interpretation of a moment in the script?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the use of props in the production overall. How do they enhance the acting, contexts, intended meaning?

Settings in the Play

Break into pairs, select two of the settings listed near the beginning of this resource and brainstorm how the production roles of directing, acting and design contributed to the creation of that location.

Analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of production roles in one or more of these settings in terms of conveying particular contextual information:

- What was literal eg. real set, props, lighting and costume
- What was symbolic eg. design elements that spoke to the title of the play
SAPLINGS?



From Scene 8: Birthday Cake – Jarrah, Ash, Nikki and Darius



From Scene 3: Mi Goreng Interrogation – Lachlan

Costume, Makeup & Hair

Analyse the two images above in relation to costume, hair and makeup:

- How would you describe the aesthetic of the costume choices?
- How would you describe the colour palette?

Select one of the characters from one of the scenes above and analyse their costume, hair and makeup in more detail.

Evaluate how costume contributes to establishing contexts and conveying/enhancing character with specific reference to the selected scene.

Lighting



“Every sort of piece has a...practical light in it, whether it’s the fridge, the light from the fridge. Or the light from the fire that they’ve lit, or the lamp in their grandmother’s house”

– George Kemp, ATYP

Use the following images to consider how the production role design: lighting was applied to interpret the script.

- **Discuss** each image
- **Analyse** how lighting design was utilized in each of the images
- **Evaluate** the effectiveness of lighting in conveying intended meaning, mood, location in each of the images.



From Scene 5: Juvie – Ryan, Billy and Sal



From Scene 3: Mi Goreng Interrogation – Lachlan



From Scene 8: Birthday Cake – Jarrah, Ash, Nikki and Darius



From Scene 7: Photography – Jade

Sound Design & Composition



“I was talking about rap and hip-hop being kind of the key anchor of tone, then the set designers came to me and go, hey, what if we chuck up some graffiti up on the back wall, and what does it say if we paint over it? You know, how does that highlight the kind of elements and themes that we’re talking about without signposting it directly? For me, hip-hop and rap is a music genre that allows for truth to exist, and truth of a life and a world where, you know, that’s how it started...it’s the idea of telling the truth.”

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis, Director**

Discuss the director’s comment about music – especially hip-hop and rap, documentary voice, fusion of both:

- How does music contribute to the world of the play?
- How does the selected style of music contribute to the world of the play?
- How does it contribute to the element of theatre composition – rhythm?
- How does it contribute to intended meaning in relation to the script i.e. how did you feel when hearing the hip-hop and rap music?
- How does music contribute to and enhance the structure of the production eg. transitions, tension, time passing?
- **Discuss** how music was used to both underscore and segue moments – motion, emphasis.
- Select a scene or moment and dive deeply into the **analysis and evaluation** of the use of music to interpret the script to the stage.

Theatre Technologies

In VCE Theatre Studies, theatre technologies refer to diverse theatre-specific and other technologies that are used in theatre productions including digital, electrical and mechanical technologies.

In Saplings, the following (and other) technologies are present: smoke machine, curtain/screen, lowering of a ceiling lamp, technical lighting of a fridge ie as a fridge but also to shed light on the scene. What other technologies did you observe?

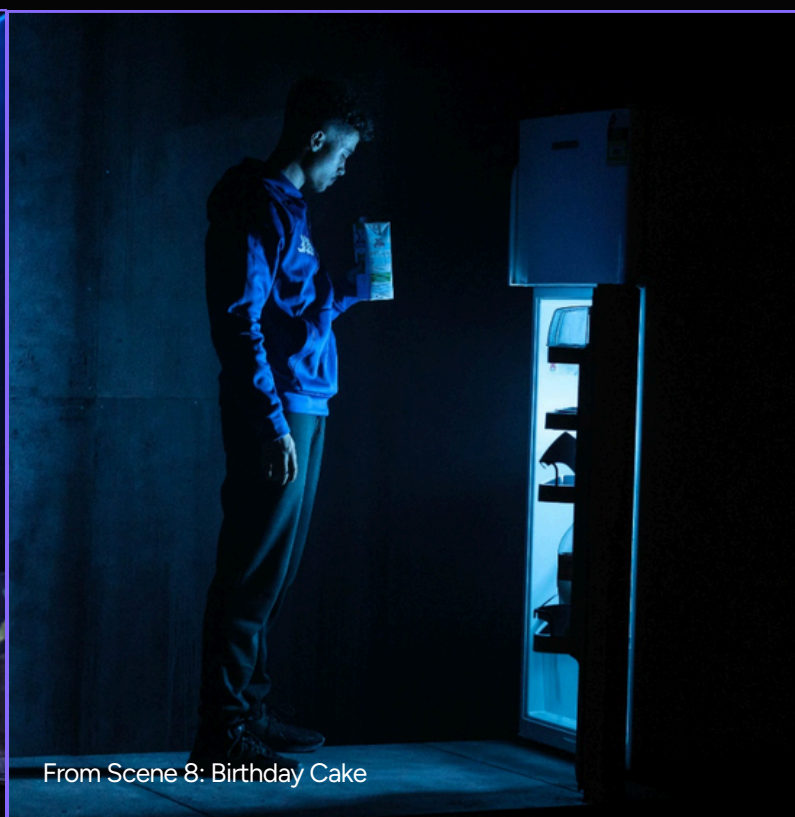
Discuss the use of theatre technologies in the production.

- How were technologies evident/present in the performance?
- Which technologies did you most notice?

Analyse and evaluate the application of theatre technologies in the production.

- How did theatre technologies contribute to the intended meaning?
- How did they contribute to theatre styles?
- How did they enhance acting and direction?

Discuss the images below and what it offers in relation to use of theatre technologies.



Exploring Unit 4

Within the Theatre Studies Study Design there is an interrelationship between Unit 3 and Unit 4 in relation to interpretation of script, elements of composition, and production roles. Some of the previous discussion, analysis and evaluation will inform the following focus on character.

Here are the Key Knowledge and Key Skills for Unit 4, Outcome 3 which provide the framework for discussing, evaluating and analysing Saplings for this Outcome.

Key Knowledge

- the character/s in the production including the function and purpose, objective/s, motivation/s, status and traits
- interpretation of a script in performance by actor/s, director/s and designer/s acting skills used by the actor/s to realise character/s, including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness and silence
- acting and directorial decisions made in interpreting a script and application of direction in the production design decisions made in interpreting a script and application of design in the production
- application of elements of theatre composition in the production
- focus and verbal and/or non-verbal language to convey the intended meanings of the script
- establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- the interrelationships between acting, direction, design and theatre style/s utilised in the production theatre terminology and expressions to analyse and evaluate a theatre production.

Key Skills

- analyse the character/s in the production including function and purpose, objective/s, motivation/s, status and traits
- analyse and evaluate interpretation of a script in performance by actor/s, director/s and designer/s, including the acting, direction, design and elements of theatre composition used and the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- analyse the use of focus, the acting space and verbal and/or non-verbal language to convey the intended meanings of the script
- analyse and evaluate:
 - the acting, directorial and design decisions made in interpreting a script
 - the application of elements of theatre composition in interpreting a script
 - the use of acting and design in the performance
 - the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- analyse the ways that actor/s, director/s and designer/s work with the theatre style/s utilised in the production
- use theatre [studies] terminology and expression appropriately.

Looking Deeper into Character



“[The play is concerned with] deep diving into character and all that, that, you know, drama stuff of given circumstances and backstories and all of those things that we love, that drama teachers do...is really important and interesting and exciting in this play, I think, because that’s how... that’s why it exists, for us to form a greater understanding of these young people, and the decisions that they make, and why they make them, why sometimes they’re forced into making them and they don’t actually make them.”

– **George Kemp, ATYP**

“The given circumstances, and understanding the stakes for the characters, even though they are having a conversation that’s just about something that seems kind of small and everyday but the stakes are high for them. So, looking at what the subtext is of that line it’s written as perhaps everyday naturalistic language, but everything means something”

– **Hannah Belanzky, Playwright**

Closely discuss these comments about character, stakes and subtext. Then, use the table below as a guide to select one of the key characters and respond to the prompts to expand on the use of acting skills – facial expression, voice, gesture, stillness and silence, focus and language/non-verbal language.

Character	Acting Skills	Use of Focus	Use of Verbal Language	Use of Non-Verbal Language

Characters – function, purpose, objectives, motivations/stakes and status.

Select TWO characters from the character table you have completed.

- How would you generally describe the **function and purpose** of each character?
- Analyse the use of acting skills to demonstrate the way the selected characters **act and interact**
- What are the characters **motivations** when engaging with others?
- How would you describe the **status** of the selected character in the selected scenes, and does the status change within the scene?
- What are the **stakes** for the characters for example outside the Courthouse, seeking a place to spend the night, aspirations for making your own music?
- What specific **traits** do the characters express eg voice, gait, movement

Focus Question

How did the four actors use their acting skills to **play different characters** within the production? What devices were at play eg voice, costume, movement, gait, focus?



Use of Language in the Production



“And I think it’s so great for actors as well to play with, is that it’s really, actually hard to write two characters that talk to one another, like you, like the real tennis match of a conversation and so Hannah’s done that absolutely beautifully. That in itself is a difficult thing for a writer, new writers, to kind of really wrap their head around. It...it takes a skills writer to be able to do that. You know and I can say this because I’ve tried! She’s really captured multiple voices.”

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis, Director**

Spoken Language

- **Discuss** the use of spoken language in the play – you can use the script itself or refer to the script excerpts at the end of this resource
- How would you describe the spoken language? What characteristics does it have eg. contemporary, age-based, accented, overlapping, paced?

Non-Verbal Language

- How is non-verbal language present in the production eg. Those who are present but not speaking, those who are speaking but using non-verbal language?
- **Discuss** the three images on the next page from the scene outside The Courthouse
- **Analyse and evaluate** the application of non-verbal language in these images

From Scene 4: The Courthouse – Alinta and Sandon



Exploring First Nations Concepts & Content



"I'm a First Nations director (Kalkadoon), so anything that I put on is going to have a First Nations lens to it. That's just how I see the world. Is... I can't help that. And the cast are a majority First Nations cast. But I wouldn't say it's a First Nations play. For me, it was important to highlight the different experience of non-Indigenous people in the system, and Indigenous people in the system. And the fact that our people, especially our young people especially, are being targeted. This is due to biases that exist in Australia systemically. My First Nation lens on the play I think helps highlight that. I wouldn't call it a First Nations play, but it's my vision as a First Nations woman."

– **Abbie-Lee Lewis (Kalkadoon), Director**

"First Nations young people are more likely to have a higher rate of being targeted by the police or have a higher percentage in the justice system and that's why they are represented that way in the story. Unfortunately, that's just the truth of the situation, but that doesn't mean this play does not have non-Indigenous characters. We also spoke to non-Indigenous young people as well. I wouldn't say it's an exclusively First Nations story, but we spoke to a lot of First Nations young people when we were working on this project."

– **Hannah Belanzky (Yuwaalaraay), Playwright**

Discuss the comments by the Playwright and Director and the lens they bring to this work.

Reflecting on these comments, the contextual information, and the script, how does this production offer insights into the experiences of First Nations peoples and juvenile justice?

Exploring Script Excerpts/Scenes

The following examples of script excerpts offer opportunities to explore **interpretation, character analysis, production roles, and themes.**

Further, the script excerpts offer exploration as 'evidence' of analysis and evaluation for responding to Outcomes and examination questions in Theatre Studies Units 3 and 4.

Note: The page numbers are from the script available through Australian Plays Transform.

Excerpt from Scene 1 – The Reserve – Jonty and Kay (page 6)

JONTY I know what we could do

He looks at KAI, who knows exactly what he's suggesting.

KAI Not this again

JONTY Oh, come on

KAI I told you, it's not my thing

JONTY Let me pitch it to you one more time

KAI Nooo

JONTY Yeah, imma pitch it one more time

KAI Ehhh

JONTY Kai and Jonty: Music Duo

Pause.

KAI Bro that sounds lamer than the first hundred times you said it

JONTY It's just the concept. You know, the vision?

KAI I could never

JONTY Two brothers on the Reserve making music together

KAI People would laugh

JONTY No they wouldn't. Not if we were good. Not if we got famous

Excerpt from Scene 2 – Leo’s House – Leo, Yani and Mara (pages 20 – 21)

Sounds of movement outside on the street. They’re all instantly on edge.

You hear that?

They listen.

YANI Is that your nan?

LEO I think they’re outside

YANI Quick, pretend you’re asleep

LEO turns off the lights.

They hear footsteps coming closer.

They wait, in suspense.

Loud knock on the door.

LEO Fuck!

YANI How’d they find us already?

MARA I told you that woman saw us

Another knock.

What do we do?

LEO You can’t be here, they’ll find out I broke bail

Excerpt from Scene 4 – At the Courthouse – Sandon and Alinta (pages 29-30)

ALINTA I’m stuck here too

SANDON But you were all “first rodeo” like maybe you know how to rodeo or something?

ALINTA How can I? It changes all the time. Different rules, different words.

Sometimes it just depends who you get, what mood they’re in, if they like your lawyer, if your lawyer likes you, if your lawyer even knows what they’re doing or cares what they’re doing or even has time

SANDON That made things much clearer for me, thank you

ALINTA What do you want me to say?

SANDON I just thought you might have something more helpful than “that sucks”

ALINTA Well, it does suck. The whole thing sucks. Court is nothing like TV until it’s exactly like TV. And then that’s not even a good thing because it probably means it didn’t work out the way you want. Because that’s better television

SANDON Wow, you’re really ruining this for me now

ALINTA Sorry

SANDON I just wanted to enjoy my first day at court, but everyone is determined to make me, I don't know, "face reality?" Dad is probably out there now planning an outfit for his first prison visit, 'As you can see, I couldn't possibly have raised my son to do anything like the charges laid upon our name'

ALINTA Sometimes you get tricked and there is nothing you can do about it

SANDON I guess my life is over then

ALINTA I guess you're really annoying then

SANDON No one can save me now

ALINTA Just plead not guilty and you'll be fine

SANDON Really?

ALINTA No

SANDON Then what do I plead?!

ALINTA I can't help you. I can't control it. I don't even know how it works

Excerpt from Scene 5: Juvie – Billy and Sal (page 34)

Stage directions: Free time outside on the Boy's Unit at a Juvenile Justice Centre

BILLY What time is it now?

SAL Nearly lockdown

RYAN Back to our rooms

BILLY My brother's getting married today

SAL True?

BILLY It might be happening soon. Really soon

SAL I love weddings

BILLY I was gonna be one of his—You know the guys that stand up the front?

SAL I've always wanted to be one of them

BILLY Same

SAL Get to wear a nice suit...

BILLY When they planned it we thought I'd be out by now

SAL ...With a little flower

RYAN Weddings are overrated

SAL It's a day of love, family

BILLY It's my big brother

SAL And suits!

Excerpt from Scene 6 – Train Station, Shanika and Isaiah (pages 44-45)

SHANIKA You're moving out?

ISAIAH Somewhere close. I just wanna work, you know... Stable income, money to have fun with my life, do something. You know what it's like with her—no matter what, something always happens and—and it's gonna be me who has to fix it and it'll just ruin everything I've been working on and...

He looks at SHANIKA. She has melted completely.

Shanika?

She turns away from him.

Sis?

She won't let him see her face.

I just wanna start fresh

Pause.

SHANIKA Don't leave me, Isaiah

ISAIAH I'm not

SHANIKA Please don't leave me

ISAIAH I'm not leaving you, I just don't wanna live with her

SHANIKA But if you're not living with her that means you're not with me. It was meant to be us three together. Us three together at Aunty Kay's, before—before everything changes again

ISAIAH This change could be good

SHANIKA Good for you. But what about me? What am I 'sposed to do? I'm not ready. I don't know how to be a Mum

Excerpt from Scene 10 – Community Garden, Jonty and Kai (pages 61-62)

Two years have passed since Scene 1.

JONTY is working in the garden at a REGIONAL YOUTH CENTRE.

He plays music off his phone –something with a good beat. He sings along as he works.

He's giving himself over to the music when he spins around and finds KAI staring at him.

JONTY Shit!

He drops his shovel.

KAI Hey

JONTY Kai—Uh...

He tries to stop the music, but fumbles. He can't get it to stop.

He finally recovers and turns the music off.

When—When did you get back?

KAI Yesterday

JONTY I didn't hear

Pause.

How are you?

KAI Glad to be home

KAI Yeah

JONTY warily approaches KAI.

They go to hug, but don't.

KAI awkwardly plays with JONTY's stubble instead.

What's this?

JONTY A beard

JONTY tries to shrug him off.

KAI You call that a beard? Bro. That's two hairs. Three!

Thinking About Themes in Saplings

The above extracts from the script of Saplings suggest different themes within the story. **Discuss** how the following themes have been explored – **home, identity, family, friendship, love, incarceration, justice, hope, future.**

Finally

After preparing for, attending, analysing, and evaluating the production, this resource leaves you with some final reflections. What do you take away from your experience of seeing Saplings? What does the following image suggest?



From Scene 10: The Community Garden – Kai and Jonty



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