

# Drama 2019 v1.1

Unit 2 sample assessment instrument

October 2018

## Stimulus booklet for *Black Diggers* — Queensland Theatre (QT)

This publication may contain names or images that cause distress to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Context	
<b>Title of work:</b>	<i>Black Diggers</i>
<b>Writer:</b>	Tom Wright
<b>Director:</b>	Wesley Enoch
<b>Set Designer</b>	Stephen Curtis
<b>Costume Designer</b>	Ruby Langton-Batty
<b>Lighting Designer</b>	Ben Hughes
<b>Composer/Sound Designer</b>	Tony Brumpton
<b>Dramaturg</b>	Louise Gough
<b>Cultural Consultant</b>	George Bostock
<b>Researcher</b>	David Williams
<b>Characters and cast:</b>	<p><b>Characters:</b> Nine Indigenous male actors who play multiple roles and ethnicities, also crossing genders</p> <p><b>Cast:</b> George Bostock, Luke Carroll, David Page, Hunter Page-Lochard, Guy Simon, Colin Smith, Eliah Watego, Tibian Wyles</p>
<b>About the text:</b>	<p><i>Black Diggers</i> was a co-production with Queensland Theatre Company and the Sydney Festival. It was first performed as part of the 2014 Sydney Festival and went on to have a second season, as part of the Brisbane Festival in September, later that year. In 2015 it toured nationally, visiting Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Melbourne.</p> <p>The play draws on extensive research and in-depth interviews with the families of men who fought for the British Commonwealth in World War I. The play explores the dynamics of race relations among men who, at home, did not socialise together, but in the trenches, shared the brutality of combat. When war broke out in 1914 patriotic young men all over the world enlisted, including hundreds of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander Australians. <i>Black Diggers</i> focuses on the forgotten role of these warriors who were often shunned in their own country. The play investigates a time in Australian history where Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people were segregated, unable to vote and powerless when their children were taken away. Many took up arms and faced the horrors of war where they often experienced less racism and had more rights than they did at home. Stories of comradery and acceptance emerged from the battlefield between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. While they were given the same wages as white soldiers, they returned home to the same inequality and discrimination.</p>
<b>Excerpt summary:</b>	<p>Scene 1: Bertie wants to enlist 1917 — Frying Pan Creek, NSW. Bertie, his mother and grandfather discuss enlisting.</p> <p>Scene 2: Bertie at war writes a pleading letter to his mother in 1917.</p>

**Scene 1:**

Bertie wants to enlist 1917 — Frying Pan Creek NSW. Bertie, his mother and grandfather discuss enlisting.

**Unit 23— (Bertie wants to enlist 1917 – Frying Pan Creek NSW)**

*The tension is broken by the sound of chopping wood. Slowly the scene dissolves into the darkness and comes up on a woman doing the work. Her son.*

**MUM** And what good will that do?

**BERTIE** If you say I was born in eighteen ninety eight they'll say righto.

**MUM** But you weren't.

**BERTIE** No, but if you say, I mean if you write it down they reckon that'll do 'cos there are no other records, no-one would know.

**MUM** And if I do say you were born then what will happen? Will the sky suddenly stay blue all year? Will I get a new hat?

**BERTIE** But you'll get me out of yer hair.

**MUM** You're a boy. No letter will change that. You've barely seen the sun rise. Your muscles fail after an hour's work. And you reckon you can waltz around with all the white boys do you? That they'll make life easy for you, suddenly you're their dearest little black mate. Suddenly you'll be a man, and a white one at that? That doors will open for you? Do you?

**BERTIE** You know what, mum? Yeah, I do. Something like that.

**Glossary**

**Righto:** *colloquialism*; to agree

**Waltz around:** *colloquialism*; to move with joy and/or pride

**Scene 1 (continued):**

Bertie wants to enlist 1917 — Frying Pan Creek NSW. Bertie, his mother and grandfather discuss enlisting.

**Enter Grandad**

- GRANDAD**                    **What's he rabbiting on about?**
- MUM**                         **Bertie here wants to join up.**
- GRANDAD**                   **Join up what?**
- BERTIE**                      **The army. Earn money. See the world. Fight for country.**
- GRANDAD**                   **We've been fighting for country for a long time.**
- BERTIE**                      **Yeah well if Kaiser Bill comes over the ridge and the bosh start spearing us all on their spike things then we'll really know what it is to fight for country.**
- MUM**                         **Whose been putting this stuff in your head? You been hanging around outside the School of Arts again?**
- GRANDAD**                   **You know, my grandfather, he could walk for three days, follow the sun this time of year. How many fences did he have to cross? How many gates did he have to shut?**
- BERTIE**                      **None. You've told me and told me, pop, I know. Now it's all fences, we're fenced, I know. But this isn't just about us. It's about...a bigger world.**
- GRANDAD**                   **Bigger world never seemed interested in you. Why you so interested in it?**
- BERTIE**                      **Ever since I was small you said we were fighters. Long time ago, we would be men. You know, men, the old people, move through the bush, silent, stand up. Everyone look at them. All that palarver.**
- MUM**                         **What's palarver? Speak the King's English.**
- BERTIE**                      **I'm going to be a fighter too. For us but not just for us. For Australia.**

**Glossary**

**Rabbiting:** *colloquialism*; to talk a lot

**Palarver:** extended discussion

**Kaiser Bill:** *historical reference* Wilhelm II (Bill) — German Emperor (Kaiser) at the time of WWI

**King's English:** correct use of British English language — *historical reference to King George V*

**School of Arts:** *historical reference* — a local community hall

**Scene 1 (continued):**

Bertie wants to enlist 1917 — Frying Pan Creek NSW. Bertie, his mother and grandfather discuss enlisting.

**GRANDAD**                    **Australia. Never heard of it. You, Dor?**

**MUM**                        **Think the coppers like to talk about it. Must be a magic fairy land somewhere with oak trees and shepherds pie. Don't see much Australia round here.**

**BERTIE**                    **Will yer write the letter or won't you?**

**GRANDAD**                **Don't look at me, you know I can't write nothing.**

**BERTIE**                    **Mum?**

**MUM**                        **You know what, I will write it. I'll say you were born in eighteen ninety eight out at Walter's Run. I'll do what you want. But I'll tell you something right now. You know when the Narrandera Show's on? And for a week the whole racecourse down there feels like every story book has come to life? And you and your sister would go and hang around, lounging on the barbed wire like a pair of skinned rats, looking in? How'd you feel? Like a big fancy circus, a big show of light and excitement, eh, and you could never get in? Would never get in? That's what the world's like, son. You can go to the Tower of London or the Pyramids or wherever, it's still the world. And you won't be allowed through the wire.**

**Glossary**

**Narrandera:** Riverina region of southern New South Wales

**Show:** *colloquialism*; annual agricultural exhibition

**Scene 1 (continued):**

Bertie wants to enlist 1917 — Frying Pan Creek NSW. Bertie, his mother and grandfather discuss enlisting.

**BERTIE** They need me. They need lads. For the first time, they need us. Changed the rules, make it easier for aborigines they reckon.

**GRANDAD** Think about why that might be.

**MUM** And you know when the Show's over each year, when you go down the grounds the next week, what's there?

**BERTIE** Nothing. Nobody.

**MUM** That's what this war will be like for you. There's no fancy land at the end.

**BERTIE** So you'll write it anyway.

**MUM** Imagine if I don't. You'll only run away to god knows where. I'm lookin' in your eyes Bertie. I've already lost you. Maybe this way there might be someone decent who'll look out for you. What're you laughing at Dad?

**GRANDAD** Someone decent. All these blokes, you're going off to lick their boots. Same blokes, same boots that have kicked us for years. And you can't wait.

**BERTIE** Sorry Pop. I really am. (*Granddad exits speaking in language*) I'll stay standing mum! I'll stay standing.

**Scene 2:**

Bertie at war writes a pleading letter to his mother in 1917.

**Unit 34– (Bertie writes to his mother 1917)**

*Field hospital. Bertie, strangely stiff and unemotional. Writing.*

**BERTIE** Dear Mum, You have to write to get in touch with the protector's office, tell them what my real age is - (*Starts again*) Tell them the truth about what you wrote last time. I am in the pit of Gehenna I am being chased by the dogs of hell -

**MEDICAL ORDERLY** You need to cover it.

**BERTIE** Sorry?

**MEDICAL ORDERLY** Dictation: "We are in good spirits here, all is well. Your loving son".

**BERTIE** Lies.

**MEDICAL ORDERLY** You tell your mum not to worry. She'll know to start worrying then.

**BERTIE (*Starts again*)** Remember you talked about when the Show is in town? I am in the Show. I have got through the fence, I have seen what the grown-up world is like. Your boy. Bert.

Wright, T 2014, *Black Diggers* (script.), Playlab, South Brisbane, Queensland



Scene 1 — 1915, Frying Pan Creek, NSW



Images by Jamie Williams (photographer) for *Black Diggers*, Queensland Theatre, 2014

Scene 2 — 1917 Field hospital



Images by Jamie Williams (photographer) for *Black Diggers*, Queensland Theatre, 2014