

TEACHERS' NOTES for

MY GIRRAGUNDJI

Produced by Canute Productions and Young Australia Workshop
Presented by the Arts Centre's Performances Program 2006

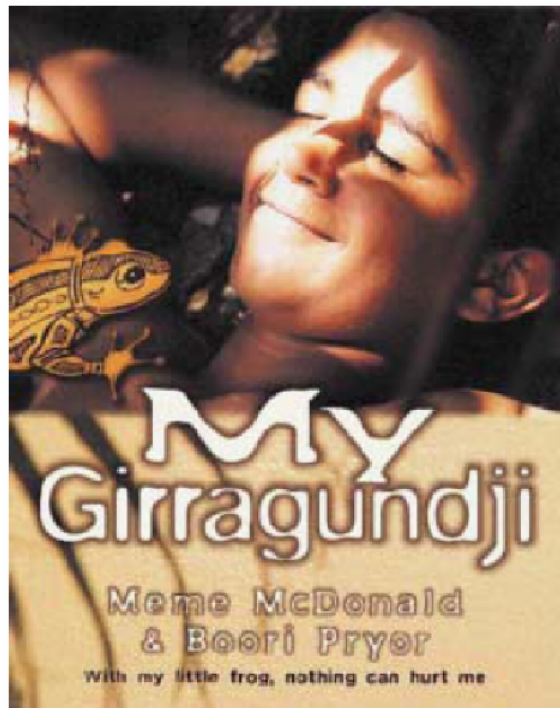


Photo courtesy of Meme McDonald and publishers Allen and Unwin

The Arts Centre's Performances Program is dedicated to fostering the arts by giving schools the opportunity to see a diverse range of excellent theatre in fully produced form.

NOTE: Please remember to arrive 30 minutes before the starting time of the show.

the Arts Centre

Teachers' notes by Jack Migdalek

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Activities below are broadly categorised into

Written



Spoken



Visual Arts



Performance Arts



The contents list also indicates prime focus areas of activities and if these are recommended for individual/group work.

This page is intended as a reference guide only. Teachers are encouraged to adapt and remodel exercises to suit individual situations and relevant learning outcomes, as clearly there is much scope for overlap and divergence across learning areas.

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ABOUT 'MY GIRRAGUNDJI'

This stage production is an adaptation of MY GIRRAGUNDJI, the book, by Boori Pryor and Meme McDonald.

In adapting the story, Chris Canute travelled up to Queensland with Boori Pryor, met his family and was taken to all the places in the story.

My Girragundji is an insight into the awkwardness and challenges of growing up told through the eyes of a young Aboriginal boy.

A young boy feels lost, scared, alone – stuck somewhere between childhood and adolescence, lost between his family's traditional culture and the world of his schoolmates, scared of the school bully, of crocodiles and a bad spirit that appears in his house in the dark of night. Until one day, a bright green tree frog hops onto his shoulder and into his life. Slowly his murky thoughts turn into feelings of courage, hope and confidence.

Director, Adaptor	Chris Canute
Designer	Jacob Nash
Music	Matthew Doyle
Stage Manager	Luke McGettigan
Assistant Stage Manager	Adam Hornhardt

Cast:

Boy	Nathan Ramsay
Frog, Nicky	Waniga Blanco
Dad, Kevin, Pauly	Rod Smith
Chicky, Sue, Mum, Sharyn, Aunty Lil	Lisa Flanagan

Translation guide:

Migaloo	white person
Quinkin	spirit
Gulmra	toilet
Jalbu	woman or young girl
Yibulla	you follow
Girragundji	green tree frog
Wirrell	shell fish (for eating)

further reading by Boori Pryor: *'Maybe Tomorrow'* 1998

For some students, seeing MY GIRRAGUNDJI may be a first experience of live theatre. The following page can be used as a worksheet to promote discussion on what constitutes appropriate audience behaviour at a live performance.

THEATRE ETIQUETTE



Live theatre differs greatly from other medium such as film or television. For audiences, the experience of seeing a live performance differs to that of watching a pre-recorded one. For performers as well, working to a live audience is vastly different to performing in a studio to a camera.

What constitutes appropriate audience behaviour at a live theatre event?

Certain behaviour is expected of audiences at live theatre events. Please ensure that you observe the following;

- Arrive on time. Missing the start of a performance will diminish your enjoyment and/or understanding of the piece. It will also disrupt the show for others.
- Turn off any mobile phone, Walkman or other electronic device. These are disruptive to the performance and distracting to audience members and performers.
- If necessary, visit the bathroom prior to the commencement of the performance. Going to the bathroom during the performance disrupts the show for yourself as well as others.
- A member of the front of house staff will usher you to your seats. Follow their directions.
- During the performance observe the following;
 - no photography
 - no talking
 - no eating food
 - remain seated
- Applauding or cheering is the most appropriate way to acclaim the performance and performing artists. Ordinarily this occurs at the conclusion of the performance.

All of the above are to ensure that you and other audience members get the most out of the production and your visit to the theatre.

'MY GIRRAGUNDGI 'WORDSEARCH

Look for the list of words on the grid and circle them



D	T	V	S	A	Y	E	R	F
M	R	I	T	U	A	L	A	A
I	A	E	R	O	R	D	I	M
G	D	W	A	R	N	E	N	I
A	I	Q	P	M	O	R	A	L
L	T	H	I	S	T	O	R	Y
O	I	S	P	I	R	I	T	T
O	O	D	A	N	C	E	M	I
K	N	A	T	U	R	E	X	E

DREAMTIME
FAMILY
MIGALOO
SAY
LOOK
RITUAL
RAIN

ART
STRAP
TIE
WARN
TRADITION
HISTORY
TRAP

VIEW
YARN
DANCE
MORAL
NATURE
ELDER
SPIRIT

Choose a story or theme, and make your own WORDSEARCH for other class members to solve

COLLOQUIAL DICTIONARY - communication, English



Expressions are used in 'My Girragundji', that many people may not understand, eg.

Migaloo	white person
Quinkin	spirit
Gulmra	toilet
Jalbu	woman or young girl
Yibulla	you follow
Girragundji	green tree frog
Wirrell	shell fish (for eating)

Discuss how language and the way people use language varies across cultures and communities.

Working in small groups, have students imagine if a visitor from far away were to come into their community. Have groups **create clear explanations of words and expressions that they feel may be unique to their community or generation**. Some examples of expressions that may warrant listing and explanation may include; tellie, barbie, loo, sweet, ace, rapt, cool, catch ya later, out of the loop, fully sick, etc.

Arrange expressions in alphabetical order and **compile a mini dictionary**.

ORAL PRESENTATION - English, history, culture, society



Have students **choose areas of interest to research further**, eg. Aboriginal history, culture, beliefs, folklore, the dreaming, land rights, stolen children, land rights, discrimination. Students may wish to look Aboriginal history in their school area, or to compare Aboriginal history and culture with other people's histories and cultures.

Have students access libraries, the net, institutions to find out more about their chosen topic and **prepare oral presentations** on their findings to be given to the rest of the class.

STORY TELLING - English, communication



The telling of stories is a vital element of Aboriginal culture.

Discuss with students the skills involved in the telling of a story. Where students have seen MY GIRRAGUNDJI, reflect on how the characters narrated stories within the play. What qualities maintain or heighten a listener's interest? List these, eg. eye-contact, facial expression, gesture, pause, variation in rhythm, stress, pitch, pace, volume, etc. What qualities might lose a listener's interest? eg. shuffling around, mumbling, fidgeting, speaking in a monotone, speaking too slowly/quickly, etc.

Working in small groups, **tell simple stories** to one another bearing the preceding discussion in mind. These may be true or fabricated.

Ask students to **retell their stories**, but **once in a comic way, and then in a serious way**. Observe how the same story can shift from comic to serious (or vice versa) according to how it is told.

In small groups ask students to **devise and tell a story together, using action to enhance it** in any ways they can.

ISSUES - English, history, culture, society

The following conversation starters can be taken up to stimulate discussion relevant to issues in MY GIRRAGUNDJI. Students should have seen the play or read the book to most effectively enter into topics.

What do Meme McDonald's **photographs add to the reading** of 'My Girragundji'?

Where students have read but not seen the performance of 'My Girragundji', **anticipate** how the book might transform into a live show.

In 'My Girragundji' the boy overcomes his **fears**. Identify and then compare what children and adults are most afraid of. How can fear be overcome?

In 'My Girragundji' we see the boy **grow up**. In what way/s? What makes people grow up?

Superstition is part of the boy's everyday life. Identify similarities and differences between superstitions of different cultures. Where do superstitions come from?

In 'My Girragundji' we see different **systems of belief**, eg. that the Hairyman can kill you, that a person can get warts from touching frogs, that mud is dirty, etc. Where do these notions come from? Compare beliefs of different cultures. Why might differences and similarities exist?

ISSUES continued...

The boy has a great deal of **respect** for his elders? What does he learn from them? Can older people learn from the young? What?

The boy's father teaches him never to kill unless for food. Some cultures **hunt for sport**. Is that acceptable? Why? Why not?

Identify similarities and differences between the **day to day life** of the boy in 'My Girragundji' and that of children of other cultures and backgrounds.

'My Girragundji' centres around a boy's **connection** with a frog and with **nature**. What is special about relationships people have with animals and with nature?

Review the book and the live show of 'My Girragundji'. Compare them. What differences were there between the **impact of the book and the impact of the play**? How effectively was the book transformed into a live show. What could have been done differently? Why do you think the director added the scene where the boy has a narrow escape from a crocodile?

Aboriginal Australians did not have the right to vote until 1967. Why not? What is **discrimination**? Identify where/when it occurs in Australia and elsewhere.

What is **Reconciliation**? Are younger generations responsible for their parents actions? What steps should be taken to right past wrongs?

How are Aboriginal people **depicted in the media** and in white folklore? How has the representation of Aboriginal people changed over time?

Boori Pryor (the author of 'My Girragundji') says 'Look at white people's story books. **Everything good is white**, like princesses, brides and angels. Everything evil is black, like witches and death' ('Maybe Tomorrow', 1998). What is he suggesting about the way people come to view the world?

Where possible, **interview** elderly people of different backgrounds. Find out about their lives, beliefs and personal memories. Identify how peoples' experiences differ, and also what they have in common.



TOTEM - art, design

preparation: art/craft materials

In MY GIRRAGUNDJI, the boy feels a strong connection to the frog. In aboriginal culture, people have strong spiritual connections to the land and nature. The symbolism and meaning of specific animals and/or elements can vary from individual to individual, clan to clan.

Have each student **choose an animal or element** and **design and create a totem** in sculpture, mask or other form. A totem is normally a symbol of the natural or supernatural that is treated with reverence and often used in rituals

Display or parade these.



THEATRE DESIGN - craft, design

preparation: students need to have read the book and/or seen the performance of MY GIRRAGUNDJI, art/craft materials

Have students **design/re-design costumes, sets** for MY GIRRAGUNDJI.

Have students list locations and characters that feature in the story.

Groups **sketch or make models of designs** and present these to one another.

In 'My Girragundji' we hear a lot about 'The Hairyman', but we never actually see him. Why do students think the director would have chosen to do this?

Have students consider what the Hairyman may look like. **Design/construct a costume or puppet** to represent him.

In extension, groups can create performances that incorporate their designs.

MONOLOGUE - drama

preparation: Students should have seen the play or read the book of 'My Girragundji'



The story of MY GIRRAGUNDJI is told through the eyes of the young boy. Have students **choose another character in the boy's life and retell an episode of the story** from their point of view. Characters that students may select could include one of the boy's relatives, one of the boy's teachers, schoolmates, a bully, Sharon, the frog (Gundji), crocodile, snake, etc.

In doing this task, encourage students to consider a setting and point in time for their character to deliver their monologue. They should also consider how to convey their characters' age, disposition, physical condition. How should the monologue start/end? How would the character speak? eg. accent, speech patterns, language. Students may incorporate costume and/or props.

View monologues. Share responses.

ANIMAL MOVES - drama, movement



Where students have seen MY GIRRAGUNDJI, reflect on how the roles of the frog and turtle were performed/embodied. How else could those roles have been embodied?

Ask students to use their bodies and travel across the room and **try to represent a chosen or allocated animal**. Watch one another and see if class members can guess the animals being depicted. Sounds can also be incorporated. Identify performance qualities required to indicate size, weight, strength, disposition, etc.

Have students perform simple scenes as their animal characters, eg. hunting, eating, playing with a ball, running away from a predator, fighting, etc. Discuss performance qualities that made these characters and activities easily identifiable.

TABLEAUX - drama, movement

preparation: rhythm sticks or drum, music recordings (optional)

Organise students into groups of 4 - 6. Each group is to **create 4 interrelated tableaux** (frozen poses) **representing a chosen or allocated part of the story of MY GIRRAGUNDJI**. Each tableaux must involve the entire group.

Using a tambour, beat a slow regular rhythm and ask students to be in each of their 4 tableaux positions by count 8 of every 8 beats. ie using counts 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 to move into the next tableaux.

Give groups some time to consider and rework how they might **move between tableaux** (on counts 1,2,3,4,5,6,7) for maximum dramatic effect. Using music may also be an option.

The sequence is set out below;

	COUNTS 1 2 3 4 5 6 7	COUNT 8
1st bar of 8	Move into TABLEAUX #1	TABLEAUX #1
2nd bar of 8	Move from TABLEAUX #1 to TABLEAUX #2	TABLEAUX #2
3rd bar of 8	Move from TABLEAUX #2 to TABLEAUX #3	TABLEAUX #3
4th bar of 8	Move from TABLEAUX #3 to TABLEAUX #4	TABLEAUX #4

Perform sequences for one another.

MOVEMENT AND SOUND - dance, music: improvisation

Preparation: percussion instruments/implements

Divide the class into two groups; musicians and dancers. Musicians form a circle around dancers and use voice and percussion instruments to improvise sounds. Starting from stillness, the dancer group **improvise movement to the sounds** they hear. Encourage the musicians to incorporate changes in volume, pace, pause, pitch.

Reverse this. Have the movement group start in stillness and silence and begin to move their bodies. The musicians are to **improvise accompaniment in response to the movement** they see.

Style of motion and sound for this activity may be suggested in advance, eg. representing or inspired by native animals, elements, spirits, etc.

SOUND EFFECTS - drama, voice, music

preparation: implements for making sound effects, eg. pots, pieces of wood, sand-paper, metal, glass, etc. tape recorder (optional)

Sound effects (both recorded and live) are used in MY GIRRAGUNDJI to enhance the production. They add to the mood and atmosphere of the story.

Form small groups. Using voice and implements, have **groups create and record soundscapes** representing elements such as bad spirits, good spirits, a storm, stalking crocodile/s, heat, night, etc. These can be recorded (optional).

Play or perform these for one another. See if students can **identify what other groups' soundscapes represent**. Discuss how groups used tempo, volume, rhythm, pause, speed and pitch to evoke different feelings or atmospheres.

Extension: Improvise or **prepare short movement sequences/dances to recorded soundscapes**.



CONVEYING MESSAGES - drama

preparation: students need to have read the book and/or seen the performance of MY GIRRAGUNDJI

Discuss with students what MY GIRRAGUNDJI (book and/or play) might have communicated to them, eg. did it convey messages in regard to growing up, respect, responsibility, fear/courage, etc. In what way/s were these values communicated?

Working in small groups, Have students choose a message to convey, eg. perhaps around themes concerning intercultural understanding, human rights, respect, discrimination, superstition. Have groups **create and perform dramatised pieces with the aim of conveying chosen message/s.**

Share these works with other students. Discuss responses. Were the intended messages conveyed through the performances? If so, identify how.

STORY TO STAGE - drama, writing, dance, music, design

Where students have seen the performance, discuss what was involved in **transforming MY GIRRAGUNDJI from a book into a play.**

Working as a full class (or in smaller groups) decide on a written (or original) story for students to transform to theatrical form.

Using the production of 'MY GIRRAGUNDJI' as inspiration, this activity could easily snowball and develop into the making of a polished, powerful performance piece.

Production tasks can be divided between students and may include script writing, design (set, prop, costume, poster), dance, music, direction, choreography, sound, lighting, stage management, etc.

