

Years 9 - 12

10 & 17 Aug

Belong

Bangarra Dance Theatre 2011 Season
contemporary Indigenous theatrical experience



SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE 

PHOTO: JORDON GRAHAM L-R: WAANGENGA BLANCO, PERUN BONSER, LEONARD MICKELO AND PATRICK THAIDAY

 **bangarra**
dance theatre

Introduction



A. Introduction

These Teacher's Notes have been designed to assist you with preparation and extension work for pre and post show activities relating to Bangarra Dance Theatre's production of *Belong*. We hope that this resource will assist your students to further enjoy and enhance their performing arts experience whilst on excursion and back in the classroom. The activities are designed for students from Years 9 to 12. The activities included in this resource provide opportunities for students to explore the themes and style of the performance. NSW Board of Studies syllabi have been used as guides for the planning of these activities. You should consider adapting and rephrasing the questions and activities to suit the particular terminology, curriculum foci and outcomes used in your school.

B. Performance Event Description and Synopsis

Welcome to *Belong* - a dance theatre double bill featuring two works: *ID*, by the company's Artistic Director Stephen Page; and *About* by company artist and emerging indigenous choreographer, Elma Kris.

ID is inspired by Page's personal observations of celebrating indigenous heritage and culture through dance theatre and how we, as a Western culture, struggle with finding our Australian Identity. He explores the desire to feel proud and belong and the Western affliction of often feeling lost and confused without any sense of belonging.

In *About*, Kris has explored her curiosity of the four winds (Gub) that make up the seasons in the Torres Strait Islands and which are influenced by the land, sea and sky. She always admired how her parents talked about the winds; a daily part of islander life. The winds appear to move and shape themselves in a magical and mysterious way, they paint colour in the day, the sky, and the seas. They are like spirits swiftly passing by, and merging with nature; they guide and nurture day-to-day life. Kris wanted to take a journey with them, travel with their moods and see how she could bring them to life through dance.

Bangarra bases its creative spirit on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and stories, producing a powerful new language that combines the traditional and the contemporary. Using this potent and distinctive style, the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples unifying the past and the present are told.



C. Classroom Context and Curriculum Links

Curriculum areas that may relate to the ideas and themes in this performance include:

English: Area of Study - Belonging; Responding; Critical Assessment; Describing Meaning

History: Changing Rights and Freedoms; Australia's social and cultural history in the Post-war Period.

Aboriginal Studies: Aboriginal identities, communities, culture; Aboriginal peoples' autonomy; Interaction with broader society; Attitudes towards and impact on Aboriginal Peoples; Research and communication with Aboriginal Peoples; Aboriginality and the Land; Aboriginal peoples' relationship to land and water; Dispossession and dislocation of Aboriginal peoples from land; Impact of British colonisation on land and water; The Dreaming and cultural ownership; Impact of colonisation on Aboriginal cultures and families; Diversity of Aboriginal cultural and social life

Dance: Dance Appreciation; Choreographic Forms; Elements of Dance; Dance as an Artform

Drama: Content - Australian Drama and Theatre; Making; Appreciating; Elements of Drama

Music: Context - Australian Music; Concepts (Structure, Dynamics & Expressive Techniques); Learning Experiences (Analysing, Listening, Evaluating)

Visual Art: Visual Art making; Critical and historical studies.

The following activities suggest new ways of approaching artform appreciation and composition. Students are encouraged to collaborate and work in a cross-artform manner, reflecting the cross-disciplinary style and practice shown in many performing arts companies' work today.

Suggested movement and dance post-show activities to be undertaken back in the classroom will ignite a sense of imagination, freedom and creativity in the students whilst activating gross motor skills by way of coordination, mobility, fitness and body alignment.



Music activities will impart knowledge and appreciation of traditional Indigenous instruments and their origins, alongside educating young musicians about scoring music for theatre.

English, Drama, Visual Art and Aboriginal Studies students will benefit from activities that engage storyboarding, script writing and composing of critical reviews to communicate thoughts and interpretations of the work.

These activities are suggestions only and should be adapted to the level, ability and needs of your individual students.



Activity One: Spotlight on Bangarra Dance Theatre

Curriculum links: Dance, Theatre, Music, Visual Art, Aboriginal Studies, English

1.1 Visit the following web link and ask students to explore the Bangarra Dance Theatre website.

<http://www.bangarra.com.au>

Lead a discussion about the Bangarra Dance Theatre. What makes it unique? Who is involved in the group? How does it explore Aboriginal culture and ceremony? Can students think of how the group may fuse traditional and contemporary artforms to make hybrid abstract work that pushes boundaries through physical, musical and visual expression?

1.2 Students could demonstrate their findings about the Bangarra Dance Theatre by creating a Facebook or MySpace style profile (using a template). They can incorporate visuals (performance stills and video from YouTube), and create a 'Friends List' of related performance groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander information sites, etc. They can post these online and keep developing the profiles throughout their study of the Bangarra Dance Theatre - for example, they could add their review of the performance.



Activity Two: Transforming Words into Movement

Curriculum links: Aboriginal Studies, History, English, Dance, Drama

2.1 Ask students to research Australia's culture, land and environment prior to colonial settlement. Book a research session in the school library and ask the Librarian to put together a book display on Aboriginal history, art and colonial art. Students could also watch selected sections of the recent SBS documentary 'First Australians' as part of preparing for this task. Lead your students in a discussion about their findings.

2.2 Sitting in a circle in the classroom, ask the students, one at a time, to think of words that best describes our environment of thousands of years ago.

Compile a list of words from each individual's response and write them up on the board.

2.3 Next to these words, ask the students to offer a juxtaposition or contrasting word to best describe our present day environment. They should produce two very contrasting lists.

2.4 Split the class into pairs. Referring to the two lists documented on the white board have one student (A) make a series of physical shapes incorporating low, medium and high level planes representing each of the 'past' adjectives and the other student (B) make a series of physical shapes that convey our 'present day' adjectives.

Facing each other, the students alternate the delivery of each shape so that it sequences in an A B A B format.

Once this has been completed have each student teach their sequence to their partner.

They then execute in unison the entire A B A B A format in a staccato fashion; changing sharply from one static pose to the next.

Have each pair perform their sequence to the class.

As a final extension, ask the students to find ways in which to link their static poses so that the sequence transforms to become a fluid phrase of movement.

This exercise offers practical ways to convey words physically and allows students to grasp the concept of making a unique and original movement phrase.



Activity Three Storytelling- Traditional vs Contemporary

Curriculum links: Aboriginal Studies, History, English, Dance, Drama, Visual Art, Music

3.1 Have students research and discuss the traditional culture, social customs and rituals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Can they find different types of ceremonies which demonstrate a range of occasions with differing purpose? For example: coming of age; funeral ceremonies; celebrations; singing, dancing and chanting to invoke ancestral beings to ensure a good supply of food or rain.

Suggested online resources:

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-indigenous-cultural-heritage>

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/stories/s790117.htm>

3.2 Ask students to research and discuss the tradition of passing on stories and culture to the next generation that is inherent in Aboriginal culture. How is this achieved? Ensure that students explore not only the oral storytelling tradition, but also the physical aspects such as meaningful body decoration and dance.

Suggested online resources for art-work examples:

<http://nga.gov.au/atsiart/>

http://www.aboriginalartprints.com.au/culture_details.php?pageID=46

Video links for traditional dance:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rspN1MUcIOk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN-E1qkJxVc>

3.3 Lead a class conversation about how they, as students, learn new things (this could be in the contexts of English, dance, music, theatre or visual art) today.

Video links for contemporary performing arts:

Street dance- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o8we0IJptM>

Contemporary electronica:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpGp-22t0IU>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5veolwDBNo>

3.4 Compile a list of similarities and differences between learning in traditional Aboriginal culture and your students' experiences of learning.



Activity Three: Storytelling- Traditional vs Contemporary (continued)

3.5 Have students list ways in which traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual and performing art practice differs to contemporary, art practices. Students may want to compare:

- traditional ceremonial dance and urban hip hop/street dance
- traditional music and electronic music
- traditional art and abstract mixed media art-work and installation
- traditional story telling and contemporary literature.

Have students make notes about these comparisons or create a Venn diagram to show differences and similarities.

3.6 Watch the following video link of Bangarra Dance Theatre and The Australian Ballet performing Rite of Spring at Sadler's Wells Theatre.

Here, you will see a marriage of traditional indigenous and contemporary dance forms fused with classical ballet to a traditional classical score by Igor Stravinsky.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84pnW-eHBjs>

This example best sums up ways in which traditional and contemporary art-forms can fuse successfully.



Activity Four - Research and Collaboration for New Work - Stage 1

Curriculum links: Aboriginal Studies, History, English, Dance, Drama, Visual Art, Music

4.1 Divide students into groups of six. Each group will storyboard an idea based on Aboriginal folklore and Dreaming. Appoint a representative from each group to be responsible for the following:

- Choreography
- Music
- Dramaturgy
- Set Design
- Costume Design
- Lighting Design

Allow at least a week for students to research stories and rituals that can inspire and shape their storyboard idea.

Useful links:

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-folklore>

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/dreaming>



Activity Five: Appreciating Live Performance and Interpreting Meaning

Curriculum Links: Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Art, English, History, Aboriginal Studies

5.1 Ask students to reflect on their experience of the performance, *ID*. What images, elements or sounds remain the strongest in the memory? Have them compile a list of observations.

5.2 Lead a discussion in what may have been the driving tenet behind this work? They may want to explore whether it was the notion of identity, urban versus traditional lives or understanding social custom, language and culture from a non-Aboriginal perspective.

5.3 Put students into pairs and have them come up with a list of 3 distinct points.

5.4 Have each pair create one response sample, from the relevant discipline of study below, in relation to the above listed observations and points.

- For **dance and theatre**, ask students in to create a short sequence of dance or movement to convey an image from the work.
- For **music**, have students use body percussion to juxtapose a conventional 4/4 time signature pattern with improvised alternative time signatures and polyrhythm as found in Indigenous music.
- For **visual art-drawing**, students sketch or paint an image to capture their interpretation of the work. They should use traditional and modern media and techniques.
- For **English and Aboriginal Studies**, students undertake a creative writing task to transpose the work into a poem or script.

5.5 In this activity, students share their work with the class one pair at a time. Encourage the class to then discuss the themes represented in each example.



Activity Six: Using 'Conventions'

Curriculum Links: Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Art, English.

6.1 Ask students to reflect in the responses to activity 5.5. They then explore how we each interpret and observe work differently. This can lead to a discussion about whether what is defined as art is subjective or objective.

6.2 Can the students suggest ways in which someone can successfully convey meaning through their creative work that an audience can understand or comprehend in our own unique way?

6.3 *Belong's* second work, *About*, expresses choreographer Elma Kris's curiosity with the four winds that make up the seasons in the Torres Strait and their influence on the land, sea and sky. In small groups, have the students compose in their area of study either a short dance, visual art, dramatic scene or music composition using the aforementioned synopsis and the 'conventions' described below to portray their observations of *About*.

Through lines are imperative for the creation of any work, and can be sustained through the use of a wide variety of 'conventions':

In **dance** we apply a range of choreographic devices inclusive of recurring motifs, manipulation of motifs into movement sequences, repetition, retrograded movement, scores of movement based on improvised tasks. These can be basic theatre directions molded into movement sequences.

In **theatre** we apply a dramatic form that includes a group of characters, conflict and tension to drive the characters, plot and sub plots, action and reactions.

In **music** often it is the juxtaposition of different instruments that offers a coherent and rich musical narrative. For example, a didgeridoo playing solo might suggest a traditional scene, whilst a didgeridoo fused with electronic beats or western instrumentation will immediately put the scene in an urban modern context.

In **visual art** there are numerous techniques adopted and mediums used. Aboriginal art techniques can range from using the crushed end of a stick, as used in some works to produce characteristic large smudged dots, to the fine brushes used to produce the delicate *rarrk* patterns of Arnhem Land art.



Activity Seven: Research and Collaboration for New Work - Stage 2

Curriculum links: Aboriginal Studies, History, English, Dance, Drama, Visual Art, Music

7.1 This exercise is an extension of Activity Four.

Divide the class into groups of four to six students. Each group is to work collaboratively to devise their own dance theatre work. Working as a team they must decide on:

- a stimulus for the work chosen from an Aboriginal folk tale or dreamtime story
- the work's intention. For example, to convey the specific message of the folk tale or story
- How they will convey the work through physical, musical and visual languages.

Within each group, designate an individual to lead and direct the movement, choreography, music, dramaturgy, lighting or set and costume design.

Students should initially produce a project plan or storyboard and present this to the class.

As an extension activity, students can then develop this initial group work into a major dance composition assignment and performance opportunity.

Useful Resource: The Intimate Act of Choreography by [Lynne Anne Blom](#) and [L. Tarin Chaplin](#)
http://books.google.com/books?id=5TpyppqptERYC&source=gbs_similarbooks



Curriculum link: Dance

8.1 Have students examine the picture of Bangarra Dance Theatre performing *ID* on the page after next.

As a class, discuss what the actions in this image suggest. What do they think is taking place? Continue the discussion until you have eight suggestions for the pose captured in this photograph.

8.2 As a group, have the class recreate the picture as a still image pose. Students should replace the elevated pose evident in this image as a grounded floor position. Once students have achieved this, read out the first idea of eight for them to then create their own still image pose. Each student can only make one physical movement each time. Repeat the process until a still has been created for each of the 8 ideas.

This basic task reveals how simple imagery and imagination can be manipulated to develop a series of shapes capable of inspiring movement. An excellent warm up exercise for students studying dance composition across years 9, 10 and 11.

8.3 For this activity, students will need to work in pairs in order to explore isolating different body parts and manipulating the body to create interesting shapes.

Ask students to nominate one person to be the movement guide. The other person is to be guided.

Facing each other, the movement guide will verbalise movement direction. For example: move your left foot to a forty-degree angle, place your chin on your chest then raise your right elbow and extend your left hip. A series of shapes will emerge. Ask students to direct movements to evoke shapes observed in *ID* and *About*.

Look up images from *Belong* online at <http://www.bangarra.com.au> to kick start their memories and inspire interesting shapes.



Activity Eight : Using a Still Image to Inspire 'Moving' Ideas (continued)

8.4 As an extension exercise, students are instructed to repeat activity 8.3 with a set of difficult 'conditions'. For example:

- the floor is moving or unstable
- the floor is slippery like ice and you must resist falling over
- there is a gale force wind and you must from A to B.

This will take the interesting, original poses and add momentum. By adding momentum you can generate movement - the key aim.

Many students struggle to create movement away from known traditional steps and syllabi. By generating creative, organic shapes and applying everyday movement direction, students can break free of their technical training and find their own unique choreographic voice.





Activity Nine: Appreciating Contemporary Music and Hybrid Composition

Curriculum Links: Music Composition and Appreciation

9.1 Have students listen to a sample of the music from *Belong*, composed by David Page. This Mp3 sample can be downloaded from the website page listed in further resources on page 13 or, alternatively, the score can be purchased on CD in the Drama Theatre foyer directly after the performance.

There is a mix of both traditional and contemporary instrumentations featured in David's work. Ask students to write a list of all the instruments they can identify.

9.2 Note the use of traditional language in both scores. Have students research both the Western and Indigenous names of the instruments and where and how they originated. Instruments to research include the Yidaki (didgeridoo), bamboo rhythm drum and handshaker.

9.3 The score for *Belong* fuses traditional Indigenous and Western sounds mixed electronically to create an ambience and resonance that reflects the work's subject matter.

Lead a class discussion on the processes Page may have undergone in order to create the score. They may want to consider whether he watched the entire work in silence first and then drafted the score or worked in stages with the choreographer to authentically generate each music scene. Students will need to justify their reasoning in a one paragraph music evaluation.



Activity Ten: Time through Movement

Curriculum links: Dance (composition), Music (listening)

10.1 In this activity, students will explore how traditional Indigenous music time signatures may vary from or be similar to the more commonly heard 2/4 or 4/4 meters found in Western music. As stimulus, listen to pieces of music from suggested albums below as examples. Suggested traditional music albums available on itunes: Woomera, Bama Muralug. Now listen to several samples of contemporary pop and rock music and note any similarities and differences in the time signatures.

10.2 In small groups, students use body percussion to compose a short phrase with multiple time signatures and pulses: e.g. 12 12 123 123 12 12 1234 1234 1234567 123456789 and repeat.

10.3 Invite half of each group to compose movements that travel in a directional plane across the floor. Students may walk, run or crawl in time with the changing patterns, in order to experience moving in time with the beat.



Activity Eleven: How to Write a Critical Theatre Review

Curriculum Links: Drama English, Dance, Music

11.1 In this activity, students are to write a 350 word theatre review of the performance, *Belong*. They must critically analyse all the elements of the performance including choreography, music, set design, dramaturgy and the performers' skills. Remind students to include any information on what they perceived to be the inspiration, message and theme of each work. To prepare for this task, we recommend students read some sample reviews by professional dance critics online.

Useful links:

Jill Sykes-Sydney Morning Herald review of *Clan*

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/06/27/1088274623949.html>

Jill Sykes-Sydney Morning Herald review Of *Earth and Sky*

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/dance/of-earth-and-sky-20100725-10qfb.html>



Further Resources

How to write a theatre review-La Trobe University

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/drama/assets/downloads/reviews.pdf>

Download music sample from score of Belong from ABC website

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/artworks/stories/2011/3258521.htm>

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