



FOR EVERYONE

BY GEOFFREY ATHERDEN

# BLACK COCKATOO

DIRECTED BY WESLEY ENOCH



An Ensemble Theatre Education Resource By Kelly Young

**BLACK COCKATOO**  
**By Geoffrey Atherden**  
**Directed By Wesley Enoch**

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# 1. Syllabus Links

## Suitable for Years

7 – 12

## Season Dates

Term 1

4<sup>th</sup> January to the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2020

11<sup>th</sup> February to the 16<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre in Murrumbidgee

18<sup>th</sup> February to the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020 at Riverside Theatre in Parramatta

### a. Drama

#### Stage 6

- Year 12: Australian Drama and Theatre (Core Topic)  
(Outcomes: H3.1, H3.2, H3.3)
- Year 11: Theatrical Traditions and Performance Styles (First Nations Story/Aboriginal Theatre)  
(Outcomes:  
Making: P1.3, P1.4, P1.6  
Performing: P2.4, P2.6  
Critically Studying: P3.1, P3.2, P3.3, P3.4)

#### Stage 5

- Compulsory Study of Theatrical Form/Style (First Nations Story/Aboriginal Theatre)  
(Making: 5.1.3, 5.1.4  
Performing: 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3  
Appreciating: 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3)

#### Cross Curriculum Content

- Aboriginal and Indigenous
- Civics and Citizenship
- Difference and Diversity

#### Key Competencies

- Communicating Ideas and Information
- Literacy

### b. English

#### Stage 6

- English Advanced Year 11 Module A: Narratives that Shape our World
- English Advanced Year 11 Module B: Critical Study of Literature (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)

Across the stage, the selection of texts **must** give students experience of:

- texts which are widely regarded as quality literature
- a widely defined Australian literature, including texts that give insights into Aboriginal experiences in Australia
- a wide range of literary texts from other countries and times, including poetry, drama scripts, prose fiction and picture books

- English Standard Year 11 Module B: Close Study of Literature  
(Outcomes 3, 5, 7, 8)

Students are required to study ONE substantial literary print text in Module B, for example, prose fiction, drama or a poetry text, which may constitute a selection of poems from the work of one poet.

Students must study a range of text types drawn from prose fiction, drama, poetry, nonfiction, film, media and digital texts.

#### **Stage 5**

- Study of Drama  
(Outcomes 3, 6, 8)

#### **Cross Curriculum Priorities**

- Australian and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

#### **General Capabilities**

- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical understanding
- Collecting, analysing and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities
- Literacy

#### **c. History**

#### **Stage 6**

- Historical Investigation  
(M11.2, M11.3, M11.4, M11.5, M11.6, M11.7, M11.9, M11.10)

#### **Stage 4**

#### **History**

- History, Heritage and Archaeology.  
(HTE4-1, HTE4-2, HTE4-6, HTE4-7, HTE4-8)
- Ancient to Modern World: Depth Study 6.  
Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, Colonisation and Contact History

#### **Cross Curriculum Priorities**

- Australian and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

#### **General Capabilities**

- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical understanding
- Collecting, analysing and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities
- Literacy

#### **Issues and Concerns/Key Ideas**

- Language, Culture and Representation
- Identity
- Colonisation

## 2. An Introduction to BLACK COCKATOO

BLACK COCKATOO is a new Australian play written by iconic Australian screenwriter, Geoffrey Atherden directed by award winning director and playwright, Wesley Enoch.

BLACK COCKATOO tells the story of Johnny Mullagh, a Jadawadjali man from Western Victoria, and his unique experience representing Australia as a member of the first Australian International test cricket team, made up of 13 Aboriginal men from Victoria, to tour England in 1868. The first team to travel to England at the height of the Empire, they should have come home to celebration and acclaim – but they did not.

While a key moment in Australian sporting history, it remains largely unacknowledged and unknown by the greater Australian community. BLACK COCKATOO will celebrate the achievement of and bring to light the dispossession of Australia's First People, and the documented beginning of the Stolen Generation.

This distinctly Australian production gives voice to this significant moment in sporting history, racial relations and national identity.

*BLACK COCKATOO is an epic tale of personal triumph against a background of betrayal and tragedy.*



The First Australian Cricket Team, Swansea 1868. Source: Cricket Australia

### 3. Meet the Team



**Playwright:** Geoffrey Atherden

**Director:** Wesley Enoch (Noonuccal Nuugi)

**Associate Director:** Yolande Brown (Bidjara Clan)

**Cultural Consultant:** Uncle Richard Kennedy (Wotjobaluk Traditional Owner and Descendant of First XI Team Member Dick – a – Dick)

**Set and Costume Designer:** Richard Roberts

**Lighting Designer:** Trent Suidgeest

**Composer and Sound Designer:** Steve Francis

**Dramaturg:** Jane Fitzgerald

**Stage Manager:** Natalie Moir

**Assistant Stage Manager:** Vanessa Martin

**Dialect Coach:** Amy Hume

**Costume Supervisor:** Sara Kolijn

**Associate Lighting Designer:** Shiloh Jarrett (Gumbyngirr/Anmatjere)

**Deputy Lighting Designer:** Ryan McDonald

**Sound Design Intern:** Tim Gray

#### **Cast:**

**Joseph Althouse:** Brandon / Ensemble

**Luke Carroll:** Curator

**Chenoa Deemal:** Tina / Lady Bardwell

**Aaron McGrath:** Johnny Mullagh

**Colin Smith:** Alex / Lawrence

**Dubs Yunupingu:** Kimberly / Ensemble

#### 4. Notes from Wesley Enoch



Australian Cricket is full of characters and stories, some we know about but many we don't. From unsavoury stories of ball tampering and sledging through to the amazing untold story of our women cricketers and their extraordinary international successes. But, few would know about the first ever Australian team to tour to England; the fact that it was in 1868 and that the team was made up of 13 Aboriginal cricketers from Western Victoria, that one player died and was buried in London or that Johnny Mullagh was our first Australian sporting hero.

The pages of history have not been kind to our First Peoples, often neglecting or ignoring the achievements whilst dwelling on falsehoods, generalisations or the demeaning. *Dark Emu* written by Uncle Bruce Pascoe and the Bill Gammage book *The Biggest Estate on Earth* talk about a different view of history and the recorded stories of sophisticated farming techniques, established villages, complex social structures that have been lost in our public storytelling about the First Australians. The story of the First XI is one of these stories that somehow doesn't fit in to our view of the country's history and that even now the artefacts and records of the tour sit in personal collections or in multiple locations so that the public find it difficult to access these fragments of history.

Telling neglected stories is what theatre can do so well. Through the insightful and emotional renderings of characters we can get closer to the human endeavour. As writer Geoffrey Atherden writes in the script "...although there are some facts about the tour, they're only fragments, isolated separate fragments. So in order to tell the whole story, the bits between those fragments have been made up." This is a play that gets inside the story and fills out the facts with fictions about the players, what they may have been feeling and thinking during their time overseas and ultimately, on their return, how their lives had changed or not.

The decision to have an all Indigenous cast, where the actors are playing all the roles including white English characters, is a way of owning the whole story and providing a commentary on the race politics. Actors switch seamlessly from being actors today, Aboriginal characters in 2018 and a range of characters in 1868. Time and place are fluid as we connect the past, present and future to tell this story.

We are excited about telling this story and thank Uncle Richard Kennedy (a descendent of the First XI players) for his cultural guidance, Cricket Australia for their amazing support of this project and a huge thank you for Josie Sangster who is an absolute legend in supporting and running the Harrow Discovery Centre which celebrates Johnny Mullagh and the First XI.

Enjoy the show and the making of history.

Love Wesley.

## 5. Three Questions with Playwright Geoffrey Atherden



In 1868, a team of Aboriginal cricketers travelled to England, the first team from anywhere in the world to play against the English in the home of cricket. BLACK COCKATOO is based on this little known piece of our history. It is a story of triumph and tragedy, promises and betrayal, people smuggling (in the other direction) and it celebrates Australia's first Indigenous sporting hero, Unaarramin, known as Johnny Mullagh. It is a great story and, I think, an important story, a part of the shared history between black and white Australia. It is also about the truth, about which truth we choose to tell and why we make that choice.

Over the years, BLACK COCKATOO has evolved from being a dramatization of the story of the 1868 Aboriginal Cricket Tour of England and a celebration of its star player, Johnny Mullagh and has become, at least in part, a response to the call from the Uluru Statement from the Heart for a truth telling about our history. The play also covers the displacement and dispossession, the removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands which occurred at the time of the tour. And it offers some alternative interpretations of the tour, looking at whether cricket was an excuse to get backing for the tour and to gain access to the cricket grounds when the real purpose was to put on a money making display of Aboriginal people as a curiosity; staging a mock battle, throwing spears and boomerangs.

### i. What attracted you to the story of Johnny Mullagh and the Australian XI?

My early reading about the background to this part of our history revealed a number of elements, which I thought, would lead to a good story. Some of those elements were:

- The team was smuggled out of Australia. The Colonial authorities were going to try to stop the tour so the organisers arranged to smuggle the team out of Victoria and around the coast and into New South Wales. This gives the story a good, dramatic start.
- Johnny Mullagh walked off the field in York and refused to play because he was denied admission into the lunch tent in York. He said, "I'm not going to play cricket with someone who won't eat lunch with me." This told me that Johnny Mullagh was a strong and proud man who wasn't going to submit to racial insults.
- When the team came back to Australia, the Colonial government in Victoria made it illegal for Aboriginal people to live on their own country and moved them onto reserves and missions. This gave the story a tragic background. While there may have been other reasons for the Victorian government adopting this law, it is likely that the 1868 tour was a factor that led to that decision. Johnny Mullagh refused to obey this law and went on living on the country where he was born until he died. This gave me a story of resistance and survival.

ii. What processes did you go through to write BLACK COCKATOO?

I began by doing a lot of reading. There are books that have been written about the 1868 tour and I read them and made extensive notes. I travelled to Harrow and Edenhope in Western Victoria to visit the towns where the team came from. I visited the Melbourne Cricket Ground and looked through their museum. I did some research in IATSIS in Canberra to learn more about the history and the people of this part of Victoria. I also travelled to England, visited some of the main cricket grounds where the team played and spent some time in the British Library Newspaper Reading Room, further researching contemporary accounts of the tour.

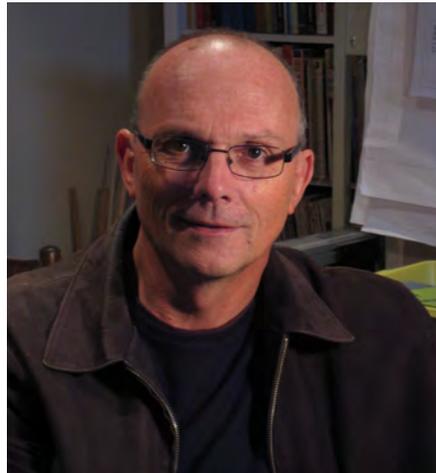
Then I began writing drafts of the script. The play was designed to have a small cast – only five actors. This was to make the production affordable. This decision meant that I had to concentrate the story on only a few characters. I would not be able to include every member of the team. I decided to focus on Johnny Mullagh because he was the star player of the tour and his story is the strongest. As part of the writing process, I showed early drafts of the script to some Indigenous writers I know to get their feedback and comments. I took a draft of the script to the Ensemble Theatre to see if they might be interested in staging the play. Their reaction was positive and, in fact, they thought that BLACK COCKATOO might be something the Sydney Festival could be interested in. So I sent a copy of the script to Wesley Enoch at the Sydney Festival and that led to a meeting with Wesley at which he said that he would like to see the play included in the Festival and that he would like it to be staged with an all Indigenous cast. This led to a series of workshops with Aboriginal actors and directors as well as two further trips to Harrow and Edenhope. On these trips I was able to meet some of the descendants of the team and some members of the local community. Through this process, I have written several further drafts, working with a dramaturg, until now when we have arrived at a script, which is ready to go into rehearsals. I expect that the actors will have further input as part of the rehearsal process and so the version of the script which will be performed on opening night may be different from the one we have now.

iii. This play is about ownership of story, history and knowledge. Can you tell us about how you consulted with community as you developed this project?

Most of the consultation with community has been through Uncle Richard Kennedy, an elder and also a descendant of one of the team. Uncle Richard has been engaged as a cultural consultant to the play. I have also made several trips to Harrow in Western Victoria to meet with community representatives. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the input the script has had from all the Indigenous writers, directors, actors who have given comments and feedback and taken part in readings and workshops.

The Ensemble Theatre has provided regular updates to the three Aboriginal corporations and land councils whose members include the descendants of the First XI - Barendgi Gadjin Land Council, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation. We have also worked closely with Cricket Australia's Indigenous Engagement Specialist who was instrumental in introducing us to the descendants of the First XI in Western Victoria.

## 6. Three Questions with Set and Costume Designer Richard Roberts



### i. Can you explain your creative process?

It's difficult to say as every project seems to require a different approach – there are so many variables in any design project – each project is different - the director, the actors, the other designers, the company, the venue, the budget and of course most central to it all, the script.

What I can say is a constant, is that everything I offer in the way of a design choice is guided by the script. The script is the key to everything. If a design choice doesn't help propel the story along than it's not the right one. When I'm thinking about the set, the venue is also a key to the solution – one venue will suggest a certain approach that would be unthinkable in a different space – this can make designing for a touring show quite tricky.

When I'm thinking about costumes – the cast is also key to what we might end up with. I like to involve them in design choices as much as I can.

### ii. BLACK COCKATOO moves between time, place and situation. Can you discuss the importance of the designer in enhancing the impact of this for the audience?

Because the play switches back and forth so quickly between three different realities – the past, the present in the 'museum' and the present in the theatre, it's important that the audience don't get lost – design choices can help with the telling of that story. When actors are playing multiple roles – sometimes changing quite rapidly from one to the other – it can be quite confusing for an audience, and costumes can provide a way of making that change clear. The wide range of locations also presents a design challenge. Locations include a museum in Australia in the present day in the Wimmera, a three masted ship bound for England in 1868, a cathedral in York, numerous houses in Victorian England, numerous cricket grounds in Victorian England – and that's only a few of the settings! Clearly we couldn't depict all of these naturalistically in the intimate theatre at the Ensemble – there isn't the space nor the money. In any case it's so much more powerful if we can enlist the imaginations of the audience - isn't that what theatre is all about and what differentiates it from film?

### iii. What challenges did BLACK COCKATOO present to you? Can you explain what these were and how you resolved them?

The challenges are really the ones we've just talked about – multiple time frames and multiple locations. So the first thing we decided right at the start was we needed to find a single location that might provide the right springboard for the various locations while also giving us an appropriate metaphor for some of the ideas that play is dealing with. We settled on the idea of setting the play in the storeroom of a museum – where all the 'real' objects (the props) from the story of the first Australian cricket tour

were stored, and that as they are revealed, so is the story. This allows us to flip around the various locations simply with the talisman of a particular prop to set our imaginations going.

With costumes it needed the same approach. With the exception of the actor playing Johnny Mullagh who only plays him, every other actor plays multiple roles sometimes changing in seconds. So we decided to place the actors in neutral black clothes from the contemporary story but with details that support each of their contemporary characters (they are after all four people breaking into a museum hoping to avoid detection! They even have black balaclavas). Then when they take on the character of one of the figures from the nineteenth century, it's simply a matter of adding an item of period clothing that might have some colour in it allowing it to 'pop' out from the black.



**Set design for BLACK COCKATOO by Richard Roberts**

## 7. Three Questions with Costume Supervisor Sara Kolijn



### i. Can you explain what a costume supervisor does?

It's my job to make the designers dream into reality. To take the sketches, and either buy from around the world, hire, or make (or have made) costumes that work within the needs of the era, the performers, the lighting and the budget. It's my job to dot all the i's and cross all the t's when it comes to the costumes. I work with the designer to make sure all the key costume items are perfect, but also to make sure that all the little items like socks and glasses have been thought about and that everything functions in a way that will allow us to tell the story correctly.

### ii. How did you become a costume supervisor?

I studied fashion design and majored in costume, and did my first few (not very well paid) jobs working on music videos and children's theatre on my nights and weekends to gain experience. I realised quickly that I preferred doing costume fittings and running around backstage then sitting behind a sewing machine, so from there I worked all about the place, mostly as a theatre dresser learning my way around the ropes. I always enjoyed working with directors and performers, and had lots of energy and a strong eye for detail so the progression happened quite naturally.

### iii. How do you manage the complexities of having actors play multiple role with all of the associated costuming complexities?

A lot of paperwork! Sometimes I fill up multiple notebooks with all the lists and charts that explain all the things the different characters need, before finalising it into one easy to read document for everyone else to use.

## 8. Question with Associate Lighting Designer Shiloh Jarrett



- i. Can you talk to us about why the BLACK COCKATOO story is an important one for you?

BLACK COCKATOO is an important story to me because it really shows the patience and dignity Aboriginal people held at a time when they were treated as inferior. These 12 men were brave enough to travel overseas to win 14 matches and draw 19 matches, they managed that while under great stress. They were stand out athletes that myself and the rest of Australia can be proud of. It is important to bring to light the history and struggles that our people have faced in a way that makes wider Australians listen. It's also important to show that our people had amazing physical and mental strength. I'm so excited to help bring to light the story of the BLACK COCKATOO.



Associate Lighting Designer Shiloh Jarrett and Stage Manager Natalie Moir in rehearsal for BLACK COCKATOO, rehearsal image by Prudence Upton

## 9. Cast List and Profiles

### Principal Characters

**Johnny Mullagh** (Unnaramin): A young Jadawadjali man from Western Australia – 27

Lady Lydia Bardwell: An English woman of the upper class – late 30s.

Charles Lawrence – English cricketer – 40ish.

### One Male Actor

Mounted Constable Kennedy – member of the Colonial police

Goodwin – Head Butler in Bardwell's house in York

Mr Norton – Father in an upper middle class family in Maidstone

Burru – President Surrey Cricket Club

Singer – Music Hall

Drummond – Head Butler at Mote Hall

Other team members

### One Female Actor

Maid – a maid in the Yorkshire house

Mrs Norton – mother of an upper middle class family in Maidstone

Newspaper Readers

Other team members

### Recent past (2018) Characters

These five people know each other as the tutor and classmates in a course in Indigenous History and Politics at a Melbourne university.

**ALEX** - working class background, a very capable high school teacher with a natural tendency to want to organise.

Alex will play Charles Lawrence.

**TINA** – A lawyer with thoughts about a possible future in politics. And a cricket fan.

Tina will play Lydia Bardwell

**KIMBERLY** – has a casual position at a university which suits her while she's a single mother but she'd like to gain additional qualifications so she can move up the pay scale and into a more secure position. Her playful attitude to life is a protection.

Kimberly will play the multiple female roles

**BRANDON** – He's been an actor who was briefly famous for a role in a soap. Can be a bit all talk not much action.

Brandon will play the multiple male roles

**GARY** – Gary is the tutor who's running the class. Charismatic, outgoing, enthusiastic with an energy and passion that's hard to resist.

Gary may share some of the minor roles with Kimberly and Brandon.

## 10. Understanding BLACK COCKATOO: A Scene by Scene Breakdown.

The teacher could organise the class to undertake the following activity below in groups or as a class. This might depend on the ability level of the class and their confidence.

- i. Divide the script into scenes. The class group, or small groups, could fill in a table that covers the following;

Scene	Describe the action in the scene in 2 sentences.	What theatrical styles and techniques have been used? Give an example.  Or Identify an Element of Drama that might be used in this Scene.
Scene 1		



Aaron McGrath and Colin Smith in rehearsal for BLACK COCKATOO, rehearsal image by Prudence Upton

## 11. Issues and Concerns of BLACK COCKATOO

BLACK COCKATOO explores a number of important issues and concerns. Four of these are outlined below with suggested class activities to explore each.

- i. Why is narrative important in history? Why does it matter?
- ii. The intersection of hegemonic narratives of race, class and gender to establish and maintain colonial power in Australia.
- iii. The power of language in establishing and challenging colonial power and historical narrative.
- iv. The relationship of story, language and memory to the Land.

As you work through practical examples from the text in your classroom, it may be helpful to structure the complex issues and concerns of BLACK COCKATOO in table form. This may allow students to see the relationship between the issue and concern and the theatrical forms, styles and techniques used by the playwright to explore them. The table below (broadly) mimics the structure of a paragraph.

Issues and Concerns	Theatrical Forms/Styles/Techniques	Putting it on the Stage	Impact on the Audience.
The importance of truth in Australia's historical narrative.			
The Intersection of hegemonic narratives of class and gender to establish and maintain colonial power in Australia			
The Effect of Racism and Colonial Power			
The triumph, dignity and positivity of Mullagh and the Australian XI			

### The Importance of Truth in Australia's Historical Narrative:

**Activity 1:** This group could be approximately 4 - 6 students and they should allocate and rehearse the script extract below.

1. The Present Day Western Victoria: ".....the curator, wearing white cotton gloves is onstage, looking through boxes until he finds each of the objects detailed below.... to Off Stage, the sound of glass being broken.... (pp. 3 - 4)

Have the students create this moment for the rest of the class with one student taking the role of The Curator and the others in the "audience" receiving their artefacts. Provide The Curator with white gloves as per the stage directions. You may like to ask the actor to wear glasses and add any other symbols of colonial/white institutional centres of learning.

When the scene has concluded question the students who watched the scene;

- a. What are the proxemics of the scene? Who is seated? Who is standing? Who has the status?

- b. What does the role of The Curator represent? Whose valuables are they asking the audience to hold? Where have they been? Why might we need to symbolically “carefully unwrap them”? (pg. 3)
- c. What does the costuming suggest about this role? How does it reinforce the narratives of racism (discussed below in Racism, Colonial Power and History)?

The teacher can guide the students into filling in each box as the class discusses the performance.

As the students in Activity 1 are rehearsing, students in Activity 2 should also be devising the following;

**Activity 2:** Provide each student in another group/s (other than the 4 rehearsing the scene above) with as many cut out lines of dialogue as possible from each of the scenes in the Wimmera Discovery Centre that are related to finding out the truth. For example “Yeah, yeah. Of course I know, but I don’t know if this is the truth you want to tell”. (pg. 41) “Is there any evidence for that”? (pg. 42)

Ask the students to devise a scene in which the characters from the Wimmera Discovery Centre use only this dialogue and the same props as The Curator to explore their understanding of the Johnny Mullagh story.

Perform these activities side by side and question the students;

1. Who controls the stories of the props? How do we know this?
2. What does the second performance immediately after the first show us about the impact of the ownership of story on the owners of the story?

### **The Intersection of hegemonic narratives of class and gender to establish and maintain colonial power in Australia.**

BLACK COCKATOO explores the destructive intersection of the constructions of colonial class and gender that impact on Johnny Mullagh and his people.

**Activity 1:** Provide student volunteers with dialogue from Lawrence, Kennedy and Lady Bardwell that demonstrates their attitudes and assumptions about race through the prism of class and gender that keeps Johnny Mullagh and the Aboriginal people from being able to escape from racism.

Ask the volunteers to take on these characters for the audience. They could read their scripted dialogue in character for the audience. The teacher and audience can then participate in a panel with the characters, in which questions from the audience can be asked of the characters, allowing students to see and hear the ways in which class and gender reinforce racism and colonial power.

Examples from the script could include;

**Lady Bardwell:** “These snobs, calling themselves the gentlemen of York... not all of my countrymen are so...” (pg. 11)

“Would you mind calling me Lady Bardwell, Mr Mullagh.... Just Mrs makes me sound like my housekeeper” (pg. 13)

**Kennedy:** Let me tell you about the gentlemen of the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines... who have your welfare at heart”. (pg. 18)

**Lawrence:** And now you can see that a contract can be.... If you sign a contract with a scoundrel.... (pg. 23)

“This is one of those things about English society that you are never going to understand” pg. 43

“Women like Lady Bardwell are not to be trusted... do you know what I mean”? pg. 43

“Lady Bardwell is not your friend”. Pg. 44

“And by the way, where is this “Lady Bardwell”? (pg. 69)

“They’re really quite civilised, aren’t they?” pg. 30

There are many more to choose from in the script.

After the students have undertaken Activity 1 they could devise a scene in which Johnny and the Australian XI respond to and provide their interpretation of the inconsistencies, racism and sexism that they experienced in England.

### **Racism and Colonial Power.**

This play deals with the devastating impact of racism in all its forms. The process of colonisation involves stealing country and then establishing and maintaining racist discourse to ensure that the theft is unquestioned and colonial power unchallenged.

BLACK COCKATOO explores the ways in which this discourse has been established over Australian history and the devastating impact of it in the present.

From here, students may devise a performance that explores the impact on these narratives on Johnny Mullagh as he tries to understand the ways in which the English maintain their destructive power over his people. The activities below could occur in different groups and be devised at the same time. When presented to the class, the teacher could join the threads for students.

Students could;

- i. Stage Scene 14: The Norton House. Rehearse this scene with the class with student actors taking on the characters. Have the audience watch the scene and discuss the following;
  - What symbolic activity has Lady Bardwell invited Johnny Mullagh to be a part of? Why has she done this? What does it symbolise for her?
  - What does afternoon tea symbolise for Johnny Mullagh? This is an important question for the teacher to unpack for the students. The act of "taking afternoon tea" may appear to most students as being part of an ordinary (if class based) Anglo - Saxon ritual. (The teacher could discuss the cultural rituals that are embedded in this typically British act of eating and drinking and the colonial history of it). Further, when the playwright adds Lawrence's instructions to Johnny Mullagh, the racist assumptions that underpin the invitation are obvious.
  - How does the scene being played by First Nation's actors also amplify the "performance" of the idea of "civilisation"?
  - How is Johnny instructed to behave in this situation? Why is he instructed to behave this way?
  - How does Johnny challenge the racism in this scene? (Note to the class that Johnny Mullagh breaks the 4<sup>th</sup> Wall in this scene and discuss the reasons why this might be). Discuss with the class the ways in which Mullagh is able to identify the racism in the scene and manage it with dignity and humour.
- ii. Write a scene between Johnny Mullagh, Dick – a – Dick Tarpot and King Cole. In this scene, these characters could be discussing their understanding of the English. What do these characters understand the idea of "civilisation" to mean? How do they experience the English idea of "civilisation" in practice? How does this devised scene work if the images of the Australian XI in Scene 16, with the images of the team, are placed in the action?
- iii. Stage Scene 16. What is Johnny's experience in this scene? What are the racist ideas that are exhibited?

### **The Triumph, Dignity and Positivity of Johnny Mullagh and the Australian XI**

**Activity 1:** Research the Australian XI of 1868. What did they achieve? How does this compare with other cricket teams Australia has sent to England. Students and teacher to reflect on their achievements. Contrast these achievements with the newspaper reports of the period – the ones that the playwright has included for the audience. What are the differences between the achievements of the team and the reporting of those achievements.

**Activity 2:** Students to research other First Nations sporting heroes. They might like to look at Nova Peris, Cathy Freeman or Adam Goodes. If possible, they should try and find newspaper

headlines/articles that originated in the period that these athletes were working. Are there similarities in the achievements? Are there similarities in the reporting?

**Activity 3:** Students to devise a performance that takes the form of a TV advertisement. Their job is to take on the roles of the athletes they have chosen and make a public service announcement that highlights the achievements of the athletes they've researched. Each advertisement should celebrate the achievements of the team/athlete in a way that showcase their success.

The script for these advertisements should be either;

- i. The teacher should provide the script for half of the students. These scripts should be extracts from reports that celebrate the achievements of non - First Nation teams and athletes. Students may only use the extracts that are provided for them and the teacher should not provide this information until the debrief afterwards.
- ii. The other half of the class should use the extracts that they have been able to find online relating to their team/athlete.

Once the performances of the advertisement are finished, the teacher should interrogate the differences between the language used. What are the language differences between the way Australians celebrate the triumphs of our First Nation sporting heroes? What impact does that language have on the perception of these achievements?

How can all Australians celebrate our First Nations heroes? How can we celebrate their achievements? How can we pay attention to the dignity, talent and positivity of our heroes? What can Johnny Mullagh teach us in 2020 about celebrating this positivity? Brainstorm the answers.

**Activity 4:** Divide the class into groups of 5. In their groups they can write a script for the protesters as they greet the police and the media, considering the questions below;

- i. What do you think that they say to the police and waiting news media about Johnny Mullagh and his legacy?

Each group should stage this moment for their peers. The class should discuss the positivity of the messages being staged and consider the following questions;

- ii. Why is it important for this celebration to occur in the media?
- iii. What benefits might this bring to Australians – both First Nations and non – First Nations?

## 12. Narrative Structure

BLACK COCKATOO has non – linear narrative structure and moves seamlessly between time, place and situation.

**Activity 1:** Place all of the locations of the play on a map.

**Activity 2:** Choose different colours. Colour the different historical periods in different colours.

**Activity 3:** Allocate different time - periods and locations to different groups in the class. Have each group design the lighting palette and sound scapes for the transition into the scene. Students can discuss the ways in which the design team can enhance the dramatic meaning for the audience as characters shift across time and space.

If the teacher and students have access to a lighting rig, they could experiment with different gels to create the lighting design for each historical and geographic space in the script.

**Activity 4:** BLACK COCKATOO explores the importance of ownership of story, history and knowledge. Brainstorm with your students how the non – linear narrative structure enhances the exploration of our first issue and concern – the importance of truth in Australia’s historical narrative.



Mood board inside the rehearsal room for BLACK COCKATOO, rehearsal image by Prudence Upton

### 13. Approaching Role and Character

Atherden has made the choice to use role and character in BLACK COCKATOO.

**Role:** A stereotype or a simplified part that an actor takes on and this can be reduced to either a societal description or state of emotion. E.g., "The Mother" or "The Angry Girl". Used in Political Theatre to draw attention to a societal or cultural issue. In BLACK COCKATOO, an example would be "The Singer in the Music Hall".

**Character:** A complex, psychologically developed person. Most often encountered in Realism. In BLACK COCKATOO, an example would be Johnny Mullagh or Kimberley.

**Activity 1:** Using the definitions above, make a list of the roles in BLACK COCKATOO. Then, make a list of the characters in BLACK COCKATOO. Teacher and students could brainstorm what they notice about who plays the roles and who plays the characters. Why might Atherden have chosen to do this?

**Activity 2:** BLACK COCKATOO requires the actors playing the characters in the recent past (2018) to play, or transforms, into the other roles in the play. The teacher could explore;

- i. **Walk as Though:** Students to walk around the space. The teacher could call out character/role attributes for each character. Have students experiment with how this might look and feel as they walk.
- ii. Teacher could then ask students to pick an attribute for three characters. Students to walk around the space transforming quickly between their three characteristics as the teacher calls "change".
- iii. Teacher to provide a props table that has small items of clothing or props that suggests different roles. This could include the props specified for the Curator, a maid's apron, a music hall song and dance cane or feather boa etc. Have the students choose a prop/costume item and put it on. As they do, they should take on the physical characteristics of the role in BLACK COCKATOO. Students to experiment. Have the teacher time this experimentation. After 30 seconds, students could swap their item of costuming or prop and immediately take on the physical characteristics of the new role. Repeat.
- iv. Discuss with students: What was it like to transform into different roles so quickly? What did your body do? What did the other actors look like? What was effective about what they did?

**Activity 3:** BLACK COCKATOO celebrates the sporting achievements of Johnny Mullagh. In preparation for exploring Mullagh's character, students could choose a sporting hero that they identify with and research that person's attributes – physical, emotional and personality based.

Students could find the similarities between their chosen character and Johnny Mullagh's character to build their understanding of Johnny Mullagh and the way that they might portray him on the stage.

## 14. Costume Design

We have seen that the playwright, Geoffrey Atherden, uses both role and character to tell the story of BLACK COCKATOO.

This may mean that the costume designer has to shift conventions between Realism and Political Theatre when making choices about the designs.

When exploring this with your students you may wish to scaffold this discussion.

**Activity 1:** The teacher should provide a list of all the characters and roles in the play – enough for the class to be divided into groups of 4.

- i. Each group should organise the names provided to them according to the character or role conventions. That is, do they have names? Or, are they referred to by the role they play in society?
- ii. Students to place each character and role on a status line with the role/character with the least status to the left and most status to the right. Teacher could guide the discussion with the groups as this occurs.
- iii. Keeping the status line intact, students to use post – it notes to identify the three broad historical periods – the present day, 2018 and 1868 – that the roles and characters emerge from.
- iv. Teacher to allocate an historical period to a group of students. They can create a mind map of the ways in which they could show an audience the difference in status across the characters/roles in the period that they have been allocated. This could include colour, fabrics, texture or accessories, for example.

**Activity 2:** Each group could be allocated the following;

- i. Assign the class into different theatre departments. Allocate the role of director and assistant director, costume, set, props, sound and lighting design.
- ii. Provide the director and assistant director with their design team. Each team is to work with the director to realise a design vision for the production. Working with the director and assistant director, each group should present a design concept to the rest of the class.



Joseph Althouse, Aaron McGrath and Dubs Yunupingu in rehearsal for BLACK COCKATOO, rehearsal image by Prudence Upton