

arts learning pack

FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS
YEARS 5, 6, 7 + 8



A MONKEY BAA THEATRE COMPANY
PRODUCTION

Yong

BASED ON THE BOOK BY JANEEN BRIAN
WRITTEN FOR THE STAGE BY JENEVIEVE CHANG

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this nation and honour their continued cultural and spiritual connection to the lands, waters and seas. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, on whose land we work, live and share stories.

We acknowledge that our theatre is located on Gadigal land. This land was home to storytelling long before Monkey Baa and we are grateful for the privilege of sharing our stories today. We engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, supporting their right to self-determine artistic identity while promoting artists and community engagement.

Always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

about this pack

EDUCATION MANAGER ALEXANDER ANDREWS

Hello!

My name is Alex, I am the Education Manager at Monkey Baa. I made this pack to support our touring production of Yong and your work in the classroom.

The pack follows Yong's journey from China to the gold fields of Australia and the story of the play, with historical context, plus activities for young people to do in the classroom.

The pack is designed for students in years 5, 6, 7 and 8 and includes activities for Drama, English and History with links to the Australian Curriculum.

Inside you will find information about Monkey Baa and how Yong made his journey from page to stage:

- **THE VISION**
- **THE SCRIPT**
- **THE DESIGN**
- **THE REHEARSAL**
- **THE PERFORMANCE**



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about monkey baa

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*OUR MISSION IS
TO EMPOWER
YOUNG PEOPLE
TO SHAPE AND
NAVIGATE THEIR
LIVES THROUGH
INSPIRATIONAL
THEATRE
AND CREATIVE
EXPERIENCES.*

”

Monkey Baa makes great theatre for young people and for over 24 years we have presented award winning theatrical experiences that inspire and empower young people across Australia and internationally.

For the past decade, Monkey Baa has made its home at the ARA Darling Quarter Theatre in Sydney and on Gadigal land. This is where we work, play and produce high-quality theatre.

We are one of Australia's widest touring companies with 28 national tours to 135 regional and remote communities, 5 international tours and over 3000 performances reaching over 1.5 million young people.

Nearly a quarter of a century of operation requires resilience and ingenuity. Much has changed since its inception in 1997 – particularly in the past 2 years – but Monkey Baa's appetite for development, transformation and renewal remains the same.

From 2022, with our founding director and Artistic Director, Eva Di Cesare and our Executive Director, Kevin du Preez, at the helm, we are embarking on an exciting new chapter of the Monkey Baa's story.

about yong

A STORM RAGES.

**THUNDER CRACKS, THE WIND A MOURNFUL HOWL, RAIN FALLS
AND WAVES CRASH.**

**THE WOODEN BOAT BUCKS AND HEAVES. YONG HOLDS ON TIGHT.
HE LOOKS UP AT THE MOON AND THINKS OF HOME.**

Set against the backdrop of the Australian gold rush of 1857, *Yong* is a new Australian play by Jenevieve Chang. Mixing historical fact and narrative fiction, *Yong* takes us on a journey across land and sea, from China to the gold fields of Australia.

Yong and his father leave their small village and travel across the seas hoping to strike gold and find their fortune in the gold fields of Ballarat. However, despite his family's desperate need for money, Yong does not want to be on this journey. On the surface, he is an honourable son, but bubbling below is deepening resentment for his father and a longing for home.

Faced with momentous change, Yong's courage and inner strength are tested, and in overcoming difficult challenges, he discovers a resilience in himself that he never knew he had.

The production of *Yong* is based on 'Yong: the journey of an unworthy son' by Janeen Brian.

“

YONG IS A UNIVERSALLY RESONANT STORY ABOUT A YOUNG BOY WHO MUST LEARN TO STEP OUT OF THE SHADOW OF OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS TO FIND HIMSELF. IT IS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SON, WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A PARENT, AND THE PUSH AND PULL OF COMMUNITY. MOST OF ALL, IT SHINES A LIGHT ON AUSTRALIA'S HISTORY, BRINGING FOCUS TO SACRIFICES AND CONTRIBUTIONS WHICH HAVE HELPED BUILD THE RESILIENT NATION WE ARE TODAY.

”

– JENEVIEVE CHANG, PLAYWRIGHT

the vision

Theatre begins with an idea, a spark of imagination.

This is what we call the vision.

At Monkey Baa our ideas come from all around us; the world we live in and the people we share it with are our biggest inspirations.

Many of our plays are inspired by picture books and novels by Australian authors and others from around the world.

Our play Yong is based on a novel by Australian author Janeen Brian, and it was our **Artistic Director, Eva Di Cesare** and Artistic Associate, Sandra Eldridge who thought it would make a great play.

Eva put a team of creatives together and developed this idea throughout 2021 and 2022.

CREATIVE TEAM

WRITER

Jenevieve Chang

DIRECTOR

Darren Yap

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

James Browne

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Max Lambert

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Ben Brockman

MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

Angie Diaz

SOUND & VIDEO REALISER

Zac Saric

PERFORMER

Wern Mak

ADAPTATION CONSULTANT

Sandra Eldridge

CHINESE CULTURAL CONSULTANT

Charles Zhang



the vision

INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR EVA DI CESARE

What is your role as Artistic Director of Monkey Baa?

Eva: My role as Artistic Director is to lead the company's artistic expression. I decide which work to present to our audiences through lots of consultation with artists, young people and our team.

What drew you to Janeen Brian's novel 'Yong: The Journey of an Unworthy Son'?

Eva: I have known about Janeen Brian's book for a few years. We were drawn to this story because its protagonist was a young boy being made to undertake a huge physical journey. But he was also making a very personal and emotional internal journey.

We have always been drawn to stories that come from history but also where the characters go through extraordinary situations and are changed at the end.

Why did you want to adapt the novel into a play?

Eva: We loved the drama in the story and the characters were so full. We were keen to see how we could turn this story with all these characters into a one-man show.

We could see straight away that this could make a fascinating and dramatic work for the stage. Starting with a huge storm at sea.

Another reason was the challenge of how we can turn something that's set very clearly in the 1850's, but how can we make it relevant to today's young people so that they connect emotionally to Yong.



yong's journey: sailing from china

Thunder cracks the wind
a mournful howl, rain falling
and waves crashing.
The creaking of the wooden
vessel as the ship bucks
and heaves.

Yong, a 13-year-old Chinese
boy, holds tight to the edge
of the heaving ship.

He and his father have
travelled a great distance
from China to Australia
in the search of gold.

—

YONG:

*Three full moons since
I last saw grandma.*

*And my brothers and baby
sister.*

*Sometimes it feels like we've
travelled so far from our
village.*

*That we'll soon drop off the
edge of the world.*

In the beginning of the play, Yong and his companions sail from China to Australia to seek their fortune on the gold fields.

News of the Australian gold rush reached China in the 1850s (nineteenth century/Qing Dynasty), leading to a great rise in Chinese migration to Australia. The discovery of gold inspired many Chinese people to travel long distances to Australia and try their luck in the gold fields. In the years between 1850 and 1870, many Chinese people worked in the gold fields in Victoria and New South Wales.

The play takes place between Robe/Bunganditj country in South Australia and Ballarat/Wadawurrung country in Victoria, where Yong and his companions finally arrive at the end of their long journey.

Yong's journey from China to Australia begins with dreams of discovering gold, just like many Chinese people who crossed the dangerous seas. Life at sea in the nineteenth century (1800–1900) was both uncomfortable and unsafe and all were required to bring their own clothing, utensils and bedding for the sea voyage. Along with the harsh storms, people had to deal with poor hygiene, little ventilation or light, cramped conditions and even disease. A disaster at sea or shipwreck on the coast left little hope for rescue. Few sailors or passengers could swim and there were rarely enough lifeboats for the numbers on board.

DISCUSSION
IF YOU WERE TRAVELLING
ACROSS THE SEAS TO
ANOTHER COUNTRY,
WHAT WOULD YOU
TAKE WITH YOU +
WHAT WOULD YOU MISS?

PACKING FOR A LONG JOURNEY

DESCRIPTION

Create a visual list of what an imaginary passenger might pack for a long journey across the seas

RESOURCE

Research tools, writing/drawing materials and/or device

SKILLS REQUIRED

Research, writing, drawing, imagination

HOW IT WORKS

Research life at sea for immigrants during the nineteenth century and discuss what life was like for passengers on their long journeys to Australia

In a handbook published in 1863 called 'Out at sea, or, The emigrant afloat : being a hand book of practical information for the use of passengers on a long sea voyage', by Philip B. Chadfield it is suggested that passengers pack the following items:

- 6 shirts
- 6 stockings (socks)
- 1 pair of shoes
- 1 pair of boots
- 1 warm coat or cloak
- 1 light hat
- 1 warm hat
- 1 mattress, 20 inches by six feet
- 3 pairs of bedsheets
- 2 blankets
- 1 towel
- Tin-pots (for food)
- Lantern
- Baking dishes and saucepan
- Cups and mugs
- knives, forks and spoons
- Mirror, brushes, combs, razors
- Soap
- Candles
- Baking soda and cooking oils
- Washing soda (for clothes, towels and bedsheets)

Create an imaginary character who is migrating from one country to Australia in the nineteenth century. Give this character a name, a profession and a country they are migrating from. Then decide what the character will bring on their sea voyage. You may want to pick items from the list above or come up with your own.

Create a visual list of what your character has packed for their trip. This may be a collection of drawings, a collage or images found online.

activities

drama

SOUND ENVIRONMENT + BUILDING A SHIP

DESCRIPTION

Create the sounds of the ocean and a ship at sea with voices and bodies

RESOURCE

Large, open space.

SKILLS REQUIRED

Imagination

HOW IT WORKS

Sitting in a circle, players one at a time create sounds to build into a soundscape of ship at sea in a storm. Players may use their voices or bodies to create sounds of the waves crashing, the boat creaking, the rain falling the lightning flashing or the thunder striking.

In two teams, players create a frozen image of a ship at sea. With both teams sitting in the audience space, Player A of Team 1 enters the performance space and takes up a frozen image. Player B of Team 1 enters the performance space and adds to the frozen image. This is repeated until all players of Team 1 have created an image of a frozen ship at sea. Repeat with Team 2.

Team 1 plays the scene (ship at sea), adding movement to the frozen image. Team 2 provides the sound environment for the scene. Repeat with Team 2.

the script

What is a playwright?

Just as a poet writes poems, a playwright writes plays. They specialise in telling stories for the stage. Playwrights create and write characters, scenes and plots in a play.

A play is a unique writing form, with two main elements: dialogue and stage directions. The play **Yong** was written by Australian playwright Jenevieve Chang, who writes stories, performs and develop scripts. **Yong** was written over many months and developed with the director, designer, composer and actor.

The Monkey Baa team even went to Ballarat, where the play is set, to develop the script together. While in Ballarat, Jenevieve and the creative team played around with the structure of the play, the dialogue, the stage directions and the design elements such as costumes, props, sets, lighting and sound.

Dialogue is what characters say, for example:

YONG:

Father! He's coming at me with a face more thunderous than the storm in the sky,

And straight away I know something isn't right.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Stage directions tell actors what do or the audience about world of the play, for example:

SOUND EFFECTS

*An ear-splitting shudder as the ship heaves to one side.
A beam of the ship breaks.*

LIGHTING EFFECTS

Lightning continues to streak through the sky and morphs into strobe effect.

STAGE DIRECTION

As Yong struggles to regain his balance, he reaches for the broken beam.

the script

INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT JENEVIEVE CHANG

What is your role as a playwright?

Jenevieve: I've taken the original story in the book by Janeen Brian to adapt it for the stage for young audiences. In the process, I've had to think about the specific requirements of the stage production, such as the play being a one-man show, and how to express the many worlds of the story into one theatre design.

Big thanks to Monkey Baa Artistic Associate Sandie Eldridge for getting me started on the creative journey.



What is exciting about adapting Yong for the stage and a new audience?

Jenevieve: I loved getting into the head of a 13-year-old boy from the 19th century who has to deal with what is universally relatable: being far away from home, the anxiety of not being 'good enough,' the loss of a parent. And it's such a privilege to be able to foreground the rich history of Chinese settlers in this country- their struggles, hopes and contributions.

What challenges did you face in adapting Yong for the stage?

Jenevieve: The process of adaptation always comes with big questions about how to bring the story to life in an entirely new context - what to preserve, what to leave out, what to re-imagine.

As a Chinese-Australian I also have a specific cultural relationship to the material, and to be able to lean into that while being sensitive to the source material can sometimes be a tightrope act.

Thankfully, I've had a supportive team around me to facilitate confidence and autonomy in creative choices, whilst providing rigour in dialogue!



yong's journey: exploring australia

Wide, open plains, grass, sky,
kookaburras, eucalyptus,
jumping kangaroos.
The image of a shapeshifting
cloud. The shape gradually
morphs into a kite which
dances across the sky,
it's trail morphing into the
shapes of embordered blue
and silver chrysanthemums.
Yong misses home.

—

YONG:

*We won't get home for
months and months.*

*I can see Grandma's face
now. Her brave smile.*

*I can see her watching the
seasons come and go,
wondering if we're ok.*

*And I can see her getting
weaker and weaker as she
scrapes around for food,
trying to feed my brothers
and sister.*

Next on Yong's journey, he and his companions land on Australian shores.

Many Chinese people were constantly on the move and little evidence exists about their exploration of the Australian landscape – there are few written accounts and sources from a Chinese perspective. We do know however, that many Chinese people came from impoverished areas in southern China. Pushed by environmental, economic and political difficulties in China and pulled by the lure of gold, many who arrived went into debt to pay their way under a credit system.

Here's how the credit system worked:

1. Australian businessmen would pay the fares for Chinese people sail to Australia
2. In return, Chinese people would be given their keep and a small percentage of any gold they discovered until the cost of bringing them to Australia had been repaid.
3. The unsuspecting Chinese people would land in Robe, South Australia and then be forced to walk to the gold fields of Victoria.
4. Once they reached Ballarat, the businessman would arrange for many of them to find or grow food and construct dams, water races, puddling mills and other mining equipment such as sluice boxes and crushers. The remaining workers would be involved with the actual digging for gold.
5. As the surface gold was soon exhausted, the chances of the Chinese people repaying their fares was very small, with most being left to fend for themselves when the gold ran out

Chinese people were a long way from home and most came without their families, as it was their main priority for gold seekers make enough money to support their families once they returned to China. The distance from their families led to sadness and depression among the Chinese. The only option was to work even harder, or pass the free hours gazing out to sea, perhaps with a soothing pipe or two.

WRITING A LETTER HOME

DESCRIPTION

Write a letter home from the perspective of a 19th century immigrant travelling by ship to Australia

RESOURCES

Research tools,
writing materials

SKILLS REQUIRED

Research, writing,
imagination

HOW IT WORKS

Research life at sea for immigrants during the 19th century and discuss what life was like for passengers on their long journeys to Australia

As he travelled by ship to Australia in 1850, John Davies Mereweather said:

"As the skuttles are blocked up by the berths and luggage, the whole compartment has a most lugubrious and dungeon-like aspect... The emigrants complain sadly of the skuttles leaking. Some of their mattresses are saturated with water; consequently, they rise in the morning with severe colds."

skuttle – a small opening or hatchway in the deck of a ship large enough for one person and with a lid for covering it

berths – a ship's allotted place at a wharf or dock

lugubrious – looking or sounding sad and dismal

In Arthur Wilcox Manning's journal kept between 1839 and 1840 as he travelled to Australia, he describes some of the conditions people experienced on board:

Dec. 1st

This week we first heard that Typhus Fever had shown itself among the Emigrants, and we were all in dread of it spreading.

Our minds were in a state of feverish excitement at our alarming position and depressed from the fear of being the next victim.

typhus – an infectious disease

Dec 2nd

This has been a beautiful day and the weather much cooler... Today, while the ship was tacking, one of the Emigrants was badly hurt by a rope, which swung with violence against his face. The poor man's lips and face were very much hurt, and three or four of his teeth were knocked out! This is the first accident we have had. I only wonder we haven't had many cases, as the decks are so crowded.

tacking – a way to change the boat's direction

CONTINUED OVER

WRITING A LETTER HOME cont.

Using the character you created in the previous activity, write a letter home to a friend or family member about your time travelling on a ship from your home country to Australia.

Here is an example:

Dear Douglas,

It has been three weeks since I left Scotland and I miss you and our sisters very much.

Three weeks on this ship has felt like three years and every day drags on and on. The first week I met lots of interesting people.

There is a young girl named Bonnie who is travelling with her father and young brother to Australia to dig for gold, just like us. Bonnie reminds me of our Freya, she is just as adventurous and loves animals – you should see her when a gull lands on the deck and nips at our lunch! She talks of the many different animals she has read about in Australia: kangaroos that jump across a room in one great bound, funny little bear-like creatures called koalas that sleep all day (imagine that!) and giant birds that don't fly but run faster than the speed of light – I think she called them emus. I am looking forward to reaching dry land and getting off this creaky old ship, not to mention discovering all the amazing things I've heard about in Australia.

Until we speak again,

Stuart

the rehearsal

What is a rehearsal?

A rehearsal is a practice session done before the play is seen by an audience. The rehearsal period is the time that leads up to the performance of a play. During this time, actors learn their lines and movement (called blocking), theatre designers dream up the world of the play, composers write the music and playwrights develop their scripts.

This all happens under the leadership of the director.

What is a director?

A director is like the captain of a ship, they oversee the entire production of a play. They supervise the actors, direct the action on stage and decide how the play will look and feel to the audience. The director leads the members of the creative team in bringing the artistic vision to life. **Darren Yap**, the director of Yong, collaborated with the creative team in bringing the script to life, he made decisions about what is happening on stage and collaborated on the design elements such as costumes, props, lighting, sets, sound design and music.



the rehearsal

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR DARREN YAP

What is your role as a director?

Darren: My job is to bring the story of Yong to life. I collaborate with the actor. As well as the set, costume, lights and music designers. Ultimately, I am responsible for bringing all the elements together to make a production.

What drew you to direct Yong?

Darren: As an Australian Chinese person I am very close to the story of Yong. It is about my ancestors who came from the gold fields. For me, it is important to tell this story today, so we never forget our history. Directing Yong is an incredibly personal experience for me. In the 1850s my great, great grandfather came to Australia to seek gold and return home to China. He never went home. Instead, he made Australia his home. Now my father is 94 years old and fading fast.

I am his youngest child and still desperate to seek his love and approval. I deeply feel the emotions and truth in **Yong**, a son who wants to prove himself to his father.

What challenges have you faced in directing Yong?

Darren: As this is a new work and a one-person-show (the actor plays numerous roles), I have to analyse and test out different ways of bringing the action and emotion to life.

It means sometimes the ideas will work and often it may not. This is the challenge of anything new. Testing and editing.

But I love the process!



yong's journey: walking from robe

Light rainfall in the clip clop
of horse hooves as their
journey begins.

YONG:

The track is full of holes.

*We don't belong, this track
and I.*

*Back home I knew the
direction of every house
and farm and hill and
stream*

But here, I know nothing.

—

*We will keep going all the
way to the goldfields.*

*And once we found gold,
will go home and help our
family and visit Ma's grave.*

*Imagine grandma's face
when we come home with
all that gold.*

*Her eyes will crinkle up and
she will brag to everyone.*

My son did this.

After Yong and his companions are dropped in Robe, they are forced to walk to the gold fields in Ballarat. Here they begin their long journey on foot.

Like many of the Chinese gold seekers during this time, Yong and his companions found themselves in the portside town of Robe in South Australia. When Chinese people first arrived in Robe, the population of 200 doubled overnight and before long, the Chinese population climbed to 3,000. The small town with only a handful of hotels, banks, shops, churches and house, grew enormously.

Chinese travellers landed on Guichen Bay (Robe) and camped on the beachfront until they found work and somewhere to live. Before heading to the gold fields of Victoria, Chinese people hired European guides to show them the way. They would walk around 30km (or 60 Li in Chinese miles) a day and on their journey would dig wells for freshwater and purchased sheep to eat.

Li measurement

Li is often referred to as a Chinese mile.

The Chinese character 里 combines the characters of field (田, tián) and earth (土, tǔ), since it was about the length of a single village. As late as the 1940s, a li did not represent a fixed measure but could be longer or shorter depending on the effort required to cover the distance.

The Chinese travellers passed through many towns, leaving messages for other Chinese people along the way. Some of the guides were dishonest and unreliable, and after one or two days of travel they would desert the Chinese travellers, leaving them stranded. They marked the way by inscribing Chinese characters in bark of trees, leaving a trail for other Chinese travellers. To this day there exists relics of those long forgotten Chinese travellers and their journeys, such as holy dollars and ginger jars brought all the way from China.

DISCUSSION
IF YOU WERE TRAVELLING
SUCH A GREAT DISTANCE ON
FOOT LIKE YONG, HOW WOULD
YOU FEEL AND WHAT WOULD
KEEP YOU GOING?

MAPPING YONG'S JOURNEY

DESCRIPTION

Map out and recreate Yong's walk from Robe to Ballarat

RESOURCE

Research tools,
writing materials,
large open space.

SKILLS REQUIRED

Research, mapping,
imagination.

HOW IT WORKS

Find the towns Yong and many Chinese travellers passed through on their way to Robe and create a map that clearly shows their route.

Below is a list of those towns:

- Guichen Bay
- Penola
- Dergholm
- Casterton
- Coleraine
- Dunkeld
- Ararat (founded by Chinese immigrants)
- Buangor
- Beaufort
- Burrumbeet
- Ballarat

In a large space like the playground or hall, create a physical map of the towns listed above and Yong's long walk from Robe to Ballarat. Use chalk, string or anything you can find to map out the journey and include town names and the distance between them.

Follow the mapped-out journey and discuss what it must have been like walking for such a great distance on foot.

EXPLORING CHARACTERISATION THROUGH MOVEMENT

DESCRIPTION

Create and explore characters through different types of walking and movement

RESOURCE

Large, open space.

SKILLS REQUIRED

Imagination

HOW IT WORKS

Players experience a variety of walks from which they build a character. The group work as individuals spread out over the space, working from a standing position. Each player imagines a string leading them from a specific part of their body, the string pulls them along, exaggerating their movement, encouraging them to walk in that way.

For example:

Head: A string pulls players up from the top of their heads, pulling them onto their toes.

Nose: A string pulls players up from their nose, pulling the neck and upper back forward and causing the top half of the body to lead the lower half.

Stomach: A string pulls players from their lower stomach, tilting the pelvis forward, curving the lower spine inward.

As the players walk, the coach asks What sort of person walks like this? Old, young, important, tough, scared, lonely, popular, sick, etc.? Players stop and meet another player, they introduce themselves by character name and have a short conversation (about the weather, or where they're going). Repeat until each player has spoken with a handful of other players.

Players choose a walk they wish to explore further. Players begin to work in silence, spread out across space, each working as individual.

Give all characters and objective (for example: to catch a train to the city).

Narrate a simple scenario as they walk. Give them an impetus to walk quickly, slowly to stop or look at something, to be distracted or pick up something from the ground, to think they are lost, to ask for directions or another character, and then let them reach their destination.

the design

What is a theatre designer?

There are many types of theatre designers, including costume, scenic, lighting, projection, and prop designers. Designers work with the rest of the creative team for a production, including the director, producer, and sometimes the playwright, to create the look and feel of the world of the play. A designer decides what the performers will wear, what kind of environment they will inhabit and the objects or props that appear on stage.

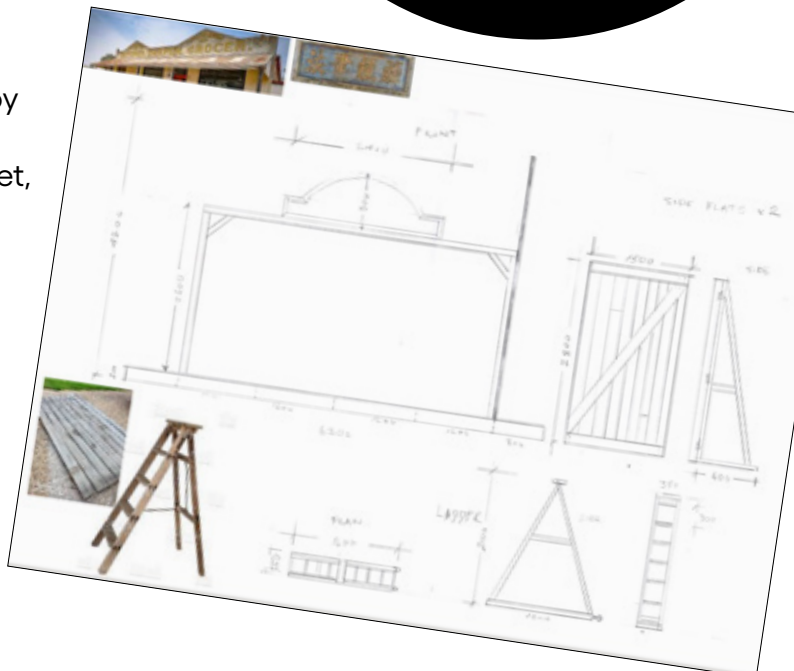
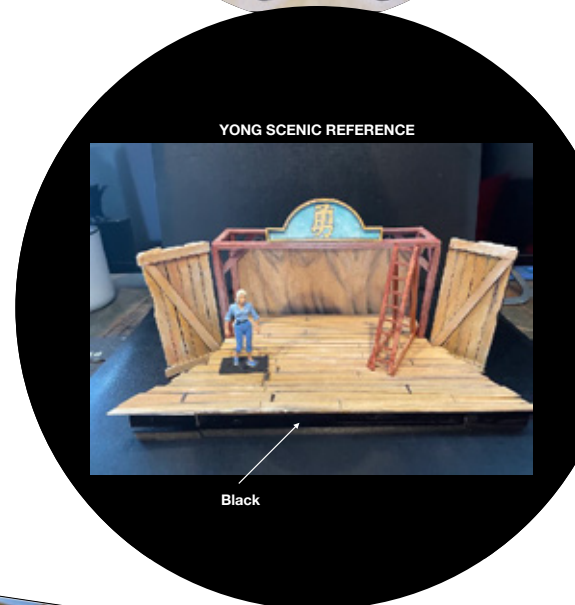
The theatre designer creating the world of Yong is **James Browne**, who designed the sets, costumes and props for the production. **Yong** is James' third show with Monkey Baa, he also worked on *Josephine Wants to Dance* and *Pete the Sheep*.

What are sets, costumes and props?

Sets (or scenery) are used as the setting or world for a play. A set may be just about anything, from a single chair to an elaborately re-created street, no matter how large or how small, whether the item was custom-made or is the genuine item, appropriated for the play.

Costumes are the clothing actors wear that represent a character or type of person. Costumes help tell stories, they provide actors with the basis for their performances and let the audience know who the characters are by providing context.

Props (or properties) are object used on stage by actors during a play. A prop is considered to be anything movable or portable on a stage or a set, distinct from the actors, scenery, costumes, and electrical equipment.



the design

INTERVIEW WITH THE DESIGNER JAMES BROWNE

What is your role as a designer?

James: As a designer for Yong, the first thing I do is read the script and take notes of what is needed to drive the story from a visual point of view. Then many meetings in collaboration with the director to develop the concepts and elements such as sets, props and costumes to form the world of the play. Then it's all about sharing that visual information to the rest of the team of producers, actors, lighting and sound designers, as well as builders. This is done by showing everyone research material, sketches, set construction plans, including the lay out of the stage and also miniature scale set models that help everyone visualise how it will look in the end. There are many decisions that have to be made along the way, every single detail must be considered.

What has inspired you when designing the sets, costumes and props for Yong?

James: Obviously the script and the original book of Yong were a huge inspiration. The text itself tells us so much about what location we are in and what is required for each scene. But it's the designer's job to research the characters, the place, the year its set in, even the weather and the time of day. Then we can have a starting point to base our design concepts and decide what everything will look like. In Yong we wanted to combine traditional Chinese elements of the era and mix them into in a colonial Australian environment. So, everything has great contrasting textures.

What has challenged you when designing the sets, costumes and props for Yong?

James: Because Yong has only one actor, we needed to find visual ways to help him tell the story and keep the audience entertained by presenting them with innovative ideas where they can use their imagination. We wanted to transform our stage space using abstract projection, lighting and props. Technically there are many challenges. The entire set, props, lights, sound equipment and costuming have to fit into one fairly small truck to travel so every element on stage has to collapse down in size to fit. Likewise, every theatre we travel to must be considered. So that every set element can fit through the doors and be seen by every seat in the audience and be set up in very short period of time with just a few people. We also have to make sure everything is safe but also spectacular!



yong's journey: arriving in ballarat

They discover dozens
of men in bamboo
working the soil.
Clanking sounds of tools.

YONG:

Over there, in the fields!

*Dozens of men telling
and hoeing soil.*

In long straight rows.

Just like at home.

The same hats.

The same tunics and pants.

*They're Chinese and they're
growing vegetables!*

Finally, father smiling.

At the end of the play, Yong and his companions finally arrive in Ballarat and set up camp in the gold fields and while they were happy to reach their destination, they experienced racism and prejudice from European settlers.

When Chinese gold seekers arrived in Ballarat, they joined what was known as the Chinese district, where they were under the watchful eye of a Chinese protector. The camps were originally composed mostly of canvas structures, but as time wore on some buildings became more permanent. Local newspapers commented on the features of the Chinese workers, from their clothes, languages and distinctive habits. Many admired their methods of hard work, tirelessness and productivity. From the beginning of their arrival in Australia, however, Chinese people were subject to wide range of negative reactions from European miners and any admiration of their work ethic was offset by envy and resentment when times were hard. Chinese people were often blamed by disgruntled European miners as seen in the violent anti-Chinese riots, such as the Lambing Flat Riots.

Chinese people were generally acknowledged as being peaceful, honest, industrious and kind. But their different language, appearance and manners made them an easy target for attacks. Abused and misunderstood, the Chinese only banded together more closely. The European diggers who were in close competition with the Chinese took revenge in 1860-61 in the Lambing Flat Riots, in New South Wales. They burned tents and destroyed provisions, and many of the Chinese miners had been driven off. On 30 June 1861, men began to gather with bludgeons and pick handles, crying out "No Chinese!" as they marched on Lambing Flat. The handful of police quickly abandoned any attempt to control the throng as it swelled to more than 2,000. Forewarned, the Chinese diggers headed for the gold fields and their empty camp was torn apart. Some Europeans on horseback managed to round up a thousand or more Chinese and the mob went to work with appalling hatred. Showing no resistance, the Chinese were mercilessly beaten and whipped, and all their possessions piled into huge bonfires. Similar acts of hatred and violence occurred in other parts of New South Wales and Victoria. The Chinese miners had paid the price for their industry, but as the gold in New South Wales and Victoria petered out, and new deposits were found in Queensland, a similar story unfolded.

activities drama

LIVING STATUES

DESCRIPTION

Bring statues to life

RESOURCE

Large, open space

SKILLS REQUIRED

Imagination

HOW IT WORKS

In small groups (suggestion: 4 – 5), players are moulded into shapes that are the starting positions for improvisation.

The coach gives the players a situation and location:

A young boy and his father arrive on an Australian shore and meet locals

A young boy walks through the Australian bushland and discovers Australian wildlife

A young boy and his father setting up camp in the Australian bushland

A young boy and his father arriving in the gold fields and digging/panning for gold

Team 1 stands in the performance space.

Team 2 moulds one player each into a starting position.

Once all are moulded, Team 2 return to the audience space and the short scene begins. Repeat with all teams.

activities drama

EXPLORING EMOTIONS

DESCRIPTION

Exploring emotions through physical activity

RESOURCE

Large, open space.

SKILLS REQUIRED

Imagination

HOW IT WORKS

Sitting in a circle, players make faces at each other in response to an offer of emotion. The teacher names an emotion and Player A looks across the circle to Player B and uses their face to express that emotion. The teacher names another emotion and Player B looks across the circle to Player C and uses their face to express that emotion, so on until all players have had a turn.

In small teams (suggestion: 4 – 5), the players physicalise an immediate response to a series of emotions and states.

Called in quick succession by the teacher.

The groups respond without talking to each other.

They make shapes together that depict the emotions and hold until the next emotion is called.

Emotions: Love, hate, fear, embarrassment, remorse, regret, suspicion, passion, bliss, grief, anger, bewilderment, loneliness, insecurity, confidence, abandonment, bitterness, betrayal, comfort, bravery, victory, alienation, desire, charm, or, sore end, inadequacy, shame, guilt.

Bring the group together to discuss emotions, what they are and how they affect us. Each player experiences emotions and imagines and express them in different ways.

No responses is wrong or better than another and all encouraged to share. Bring the frozen tableau to life with movement and speech in a short, simple scenes.

the performance

What is an actor?

An actor interprets and plays characters in a performance. Sometimes characters are based on real people or are made up (fictional). In the play **Yong**, the actor, **Wern Mak**, plays the character Yong and all of the other characters in the story. These characters are made up but based on the experiences of Chinese and Australian people during the nineteenth century.

INTERVIEW WITH THE ACTOR WERN MAK

What is your role as an actor?

Wern: My main goal and role as an actor are always to tell the story in the best way I can. Luckily in this show I have the lovely writer Jenevieve Chang, and director, Darren Yap to guide me to the heart and soul of these characters and the themes of the play. Then as long as I do my job well enough, this story can be told in the way they want with the desired intention and heart.

How did you prepare to play the role of Yong?

Wern: Preparation for this play has been a very collaborative experience. Jenevieve has written some very clever and clear characters which definitely helps in a one person show. Using that, Darren and I have worked on the floor to bring these characters to life in physical and vocal ways. Only with the help of this team have I been able to feel truly confident in putting on this piece and to be able to create the varying characters which are hopefully engaging for the 50 or so minutes of this play.

What has challenged you when playing the role of Yong?

Wern: The main challenge for Yong is that it is a one person show. So I'm playing all the characters and telling the story by myself on stage. It's scary and challenging, but the idea that I get to tell this story to a whole bunch of young people who arguably all share similar experiences with the titular character is making it a lot easier. But no matter what, having to be the only person on stage is terrifying. There is nowhere to hide, so I have to be switched on for the duration of the performance. But how exciting is that?!



yong's journey: settling in australia

A deep fog.
A tree with Chinese
characters carved
on it and an arrow
pointing to Ballarat.
A bird calls.
Tents and diggings
dotting the horizon.
They have arrived.

YONG::

Father, I made it.

*I finished the journey you
started.*

*I finished the journey you
wanted.*

And I made it mine.

I have walked.

And I have arrived.

After the play ends, it is suggested that Yong and his companions remain in Australia and build lives here, where they no doubt will make great contributions to Australian society.

Within the Chinese gold field community, many expanded their contribution with new stores, restaurants, teahouses, tailors and as herbalists, acupuncturists, interpreters, scribes and specialised artisans. There were Chinese theatres and, in some locations, a Chinese operated coach service that ran between gold fields towns. Many women also became independent entrepreneurs during the gold rush, panning for gold as well as establishing successful businesses. Many were economic pioneers who broke the mould of what was considered possible for women.

As gold and other minerals were discovered in Queensland, Northern Territory and north-east Tasmania Chinese more miners followed. Along with the miners came Chinese entrepreneurs who helped provide goods and services for the emerging Chinese population. Chinatowns sprang up across Australia in the major areas that they lived and worked in, such as the gold fields. The Chinatowns didn't just offer accommodation for the communities. Many businesses opened up there, including eateries, groceries, markets, laundries and groceries. The Chinese became the main suppliers of services and products like tea, furniture, silk, and food for the colonies.

In the years to come, from the gold rush to today, the contribution of Chinese people to Australia's social, economic and cultural development is enormous.

CHINESE CONTRIBUTION TIMELINE

DESCRIPTION

Create a timeline of Chinese contribution to Australia from the early nineteenth century to now

RESOURCE

Research tools,
writing materials

SKILLS REQUIRED

Research, writing,
imagination

HOW IT WORKS

Research Chinese contribution to Australian society between the 1800s to now and create a timeline that includes important historical events related to Chinese people living in Australia.

1800s → 1850s → 1900s → 1950s → 2000s → NOW

activities drama

FIRST AND LAST

DESCRIPTION

Create improvised scenes based on dialogue from Yong

RESOURCE

Large, open space.

SKILLS REQUIRED

Imagination

HOW IT WORKS

The first and last lines of the scene are given. The players invent the middle of the scene. Players develop the characters and location. The players develop the scene towards the last line. Give players the lines on a piece of paper or write them on the board as it is easy to forget the final line.

Encourage players to move through their scenes quickly and come to the final line.

First line: We won't get home for months and months.

Last line: We will manage here.

First line: They must be coming for us!

Last line: Let's march on.

First line: I need you to go fetch us some firewood.

Last line: I'm sorry father, I guess I wasn't thinking.

First line: What are you, your father's spy?

Last line: I'll know when to stop.

First line: I've lost something, I have to find it!

Last line: Thank you. Thank you for your help.

curriculum links

history

STAGE 3 HISTORY

Students develop knowledge and understanding about the nature of history and the key changes and developments from the past.

Students develop knowledge and understanding about key historical concepts and develop the skills to undertake the process of historical inquiry.

- HT3-1** Describes and explains the significance of people, groups, places and events to the development of Australia
- HT3-2** Describes and explains different experiences of people living in Australia over time
- HT3-3** Identifies change and continuity and describes the causes and effects of change on Australian society

STAGE 4 HISTORY

Students develop knowledge and understanding of the nature of history and significant changes and developments from the past, the modern world and Australia

Students develop knowledge and understanding of ideas, movements, people and events that shaped past civilisations, the modern world and Australia.

- HT4-2** Describes major periods of historical time and sequences events, people and societies from the past
- HT4-3** Describes and assesses the motives and actions of past individuals and groups in the context of past societies
- HT4-4** Describes and explains the causes and effects of events and developments of past societies over time

curriculum links

drama

STAGE 3 DRAMA

Students will develop knowledge and understanding, skills, values and attitudes in Making, Performing and Appreciating by engaging in role, dramatic contexts, elements and forms. In making drama, students learn how to investigate their world through devising plays, role-plays and imagined situations. In performance, they develop their skills and appreciation of dramatists, actors, playwrights, devisers, directors and designers.

DRAS3.1 Develops a range of in-depth and sustained roles

DRAS3.2 Interprets and conveys dramatic meaning by using the elements of drama and a range of movement and voice skills in a variety of drama forms

DRAS3.3 Devises, acts and rehearses drama for performance to an audience

DRAS3.4 Responds critically to a range of drama works and performance styles

STAGE 4 DRAMA

Students develop knowledge, understanding and skills, individually and collaboratively, through making drama that explores a range of imagined and created situations in a collaborative drama and theatre environment

4.1.2 Improvises and playbuilds through group-devised processes

4.1.3 Devises and enacts drama using scripted and unscripted material

4.1.4 Explores a range of ways to structure dramatic work in collaboration with others

Students develop knowledge, understanding and skills, individually and collaboratively, through performing devised and scripted drama using a variety of performance techniques, dramatic forms and theatrical conventions to engage an audience

4.2.1 Uses performance skills to communicate dramatic meaning

Students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills, individually and collaboratively, through appreciating the meaning and function of drama and theatre in reflecting the personal, social, cultural, aesthetic and political aspects of the human experience

4.3.1 identifies and describes elements of drama, dramatic forms, performance styles, techniques and conventions in drama

4.3.2 recognises the function of drama and theatre in reflecting social and cultural aspects of human experience

4.3.3 describes the contribution of individuals and groups in drama using relevant drama terminology



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