

CREATIVE LEARNING RESOURCE PART A



BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

BY ANDREW BOVELL

23 AUG – 14 SEP HEATH LEDGER THEATRE



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

BLACK SWAN'S CREATIVE LEARNING RESOURCES ARE ALIGNED WITH THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM FOR DRAMA, ENGLISH AND LITERATURE. THESE RESOURCES ARE OFFERED IN TWO PARTS, DESIGNED TO ENHANCE THE VIEWING EXPERIENCE AND TO SUPPORT FURTHER EXPLORATION POST-SHOW.

Part A is to assist your excursion to the theatre by providing background information about the play, pre-show activities and research opportunities.

Part B includes production images, behind-the-scenes footage, and post-show analysis activities.

Icons to look out for within each pack include:



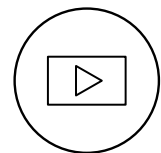
ACTIVITY



DISCUSSION



READING



VIDEO

Black Swan State Theatre Company of WA produced this Creative Learning Resource.

Compiled by Christie Sistrunk (Creative Learning Manager).

Cover image by Joel Barbitta.

Design by Troy Barbitta.

Black Swan State Theatre Company of WA acknowledges the Whadjuk Nyoongar people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We pay respects to all Aboriginal Elders and people and stand united towards a shared future.



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CONTENT WARNINGS & CURRICULUM LINKS

CONTENT WARNINGS

Mature themes, sexual references and mild simulated violence

Detailed content warnings can be found [here](#).

CURRICULUM LINKS

Literature

Unit 3: Texts in Context

Unit 4: Interpreting Text

Drama

Unit 4: Presentational, Non-Realist

Drama





ABOUT BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF WA

BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA CREATES HIGH QUALITY THEATRICAL EXPERIENCES THAT CELEBRATE, CHALLENGE, AND INSPIRE OUR COLLECTIVE HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

Founded in 1991, the Company has earned both critical and popular acclaim for its world premiere productions and highly distinctive reinterpretations of international theatre classics – all of which are infused with the unique culture of Western Australia. The Company is led by a Board of Directors, chaired by Francois Witbooi. Artistic Director is Kate Champion and Chief Executive Officer is Ian Booth.

State Theatre Centre Excursion Management Plan can be downloaded here.

[CLICK HERE](#)

OUR VISION

Connecting artists and audiences through the power of theatre to entertain, challenge and inspire.

OUR PURPOSE

To create exceptional, high-quality theatre that speaks to the world from our unique WA culture, landscape and moment in time.

OUR VALUES

Creativity. Creativity is essential to everything we do.

Connection. We collaborate to tell stories, nurture relationships and share knowledge, to maximise the impact and reach of our company.

Innovation. We are forward-thinking and responsive to the changing world around us, balancing responsibility with courage to make meaningful choices.

Quality. We engage a skilled and trusted team, prioritising diversity and respect, to deliver exceptional outcomes for our company and community.



THE ARTISTS

CAST



**ALEXANDRIA
STEFFENSEN**
SONJA, SARAH



CATHERINE MOORE
JANE, VALERIE



MATT EDGERTON
PETE, NICK, JOHN



LUKE HEWITT
LEON, NEIL

CREATIVES



ANDREW BOVELL
AUTHOR



HUMPHREY BOWER
DIRECTOR



FIONA BRUCE
SET & COSTUME
DESIGNER



MARK HASLAM
LIGHTING DESIGNER



ASH GIBSON GREIG
COMPOSER & SOUND
DESIGNER



SYNOPSIS

Speaking in Tongues by Andrew Bovell is a powerful Australian drama that explores trust, infidelity, and the complexity of human relationships through a non-linear narrative, offering students valuable insight into contemporary Australian theatre-making and a solid foundation for examining style, subtext, and ensemble performance.

Set in 1997, during summertime in suburban Australia, the play unfolds over three Acts and features nine interconnected characters, played by four actors, caught in a web of deception and emotional fallout.

- **Act 1:** Begins with two couples unknowingly crossing paths during acts of infidelity.
- **Act 2:** Centres on the mysterious disappearance of a psychologist (Valerie), unravelling the emotional threads connecting her to the other characters.
- **Act 3:** Brings the characters into the same narrative space, revealing hidden connections and unresolved emotional tensions.



STYLE

***SPEAKING IN TONGUES* IS KNOWN FOR ITS NON-LINEAR STRUCTURE, POETIC LANGUAGE, AND OVERLAPPING DIALOGUE. IT WEAVES TOGETHER SEEMINGLY UNRELATED SCENES TO FORM A UNIFIED NARRATIVE.**

The dialogue is tightly crafted and rich in subtext, blending elements of naturalism and abstraction to explore themes of miscommunication and emotional disconnection.

Dramatic irony heightens tension and draws the audience in, inviting them to piece together the story as they stay one step ahead of the characters.

The play adopts a range of styles:

- Overlapping dialogue highlights parallel betrayals.
- Shifts between naturalism and abstract monologue to invite inner reflection.
- Simultaneous scenes demanding precision and clarity.
- Symbolic, surreal design to unify storylines and evoke layered meaning.



TRUST AND BETRAYAL

THE PLAY EXPLORES THE FRAGILITY OF TRUST WITHIN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AND THE LASTING EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF BOTH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL BETRAYAL.

Through its interwoven narratives, the play raises complex questions about guilt, accountability, and the possibility of redemption.

Can broken trust ever truly be repaired? Should all actions be forgiven, and who gets to decide? Bovell offers no definitive answers. Instead, he leaves these moral and emotional questions open, encouraging the audience to reflect on their own values and beliefs.



- What are the key factors that build and maintain trust in a relationship?
- What role does trust play in sustaining relationships, and how can betrayal, emotional or otherwise, fracture connection?





TRUTH AND PERCEPTION

THE PLAY EXPLORES THE SUBJECTIVITY OF TRUTH, HIGHLIGHTING HOW PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES SHAPE NOT ONLY WHAT CHARACTERS CHOOSE TO REVEAL OR CONCEAL, BUT ALSO HOW THEY INTERPRET THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS.

Truth in Speaking in Tongues is fluid and often unreliable, filtered through individual bias, emotional need, and fear. Bovell uses repetition, fragmentation, and overlapping dialogue to emphasise the fractured nature of communication, showing how easily meaning is lost or distorted. These stylistic choices reflect the emotional isolation that arises when genuine connection breaks down.



- In small groups, discuss responses to real-life moral dilemmas, such as discovering a friend's lie, keeping a secret, or overhearing a betrayal. Each group will present their scenario and response, highlighting how differing values, beliefs, and perspectives influence the choices people make.



Reflection Questions

- What values influenced your group's decision? (e.g. honesty, loyalty, protecting others, justice)
- Did everyone in your group agree? Why or why not? What happened when opinions clashed?
- How did each person's perspective or background shape their response?



Scene study

In groups of four, read the extract on the following page.

- Explore the underlying intentions of each character by annotating the scene with specific playing actions (e.g. to accuse, to conceal, to test, to reassure).
- Rehearse and perform the scene using these tactics to drive delivery, using tone, pause, and gesture to reveal the emotional subtext and power dynamics behind the words.



EXTRACT

A note on the text: Whenever the / symbol appears within the dialogues, it is to indicate that the remainder of the speech is spoken simultaneously with the speech following.

Sonja and Leon's place. Jane and Pete's place.
Later that night.

SONJA is waiting. PETE is waiting. LEON enters and looks at SONJA. JANE enters and looks at PETE.

LEON/JANE: You're home.

SONJA/PETE: Been out?

LEON/JANE: I'm so tired.

SONJA/PETE: Where?

LEON/JANE: I went for a

JANE: Stroll.

LEON: Drink.

JANE: Along the beach.

LEON: In some bar. There's so many people out tonight.

JANE: Have you seen the streets?

LEON: The traffic, / it's a nightmare.

JANE: It's a nightmare.

LEON/JANE: It's so hot.

LEON: I took a stroll as well, just to get some air.

JANE: I stopped off and had a drink as well, something to wet my mouth.

PETE/SONJA: That's not like you.

LEON/JANE: What?

PETE/SONJA: To go for a

PETE: Drink.

SONJA: Stroll.

JANE/LEON: I called you.

PETE/SONJA: When?

JANE/LEON: Earlier tonight. There was no answer. I thought you must have stayed back at work.

PETE/SONJA: I did.

JANE/LEON: I thought as much, so I called you at work.

PETE: Did you?

LEON: But they said you had gone.

PETE/SONJA: I'd probably left by then.

JANE: That's what they said.

PETE/JANE/LEON/SONJA: It's so hot.

JANE/LEON: I thought I might sleep alone. You know how I toss and turn when it's so hot.

PETE/SONJA: Do you?

JANE: Of course I do.

LEON: You know that.

JANE: You know that/ I toss and turn.

LEON: I toss and turn.

LEON/JANE: You look tired. Is there something wrong?



Self-reflection

- What actions did you choose for the character you played, and why?
- How did focusing on intention (not emotion) affect your performance?

Peer observations

- What shifts in power or tension emerged through changing tactics?
- What did this reveal about the complexity of communication?



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BLACK SWAN FUTURE FUND

Supported by Minderoo Foundation, generous philanthropists, and legacy gifts, Black Swan's Future Fund was established in 2017 to build a strong financial foundation to support growth and sustainability. The investment fund enables the delivery of works of exceptional quality, scale, and ambition. We thank those who have supported the Future Fund, in particular, we acknowledge the extraordinary generosity of Nicola and Andrew Forrest, and look forward to creating many more opportunities for our artists and audiences.

FUTURE FUND FOUNDING PARTNER





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