Teachers’ Notes

The purpose of these Notes is to give teachers a starting point to plan lessons and units for their students in the process of writing and producing original work, focusing on the play, boy girl wall. It includes Creatives’ Insights suggested activities, suggested assessment, post performance questions and more.

Links to online interviews with creatives and scenes from boy girl wall are used throughout the Teachers’ Notes, making this guide interactive. The videos are a sample of those available in a new resource that Drama Queensland, PixelFrame and The Escapists have developed to give teachers an in depth look at the process of devising original and contemporary Australian work. This resource will take teachers and students through the elements of producing new work in the classroom for peers or for a larger audience.

Visit the Drama Queensland website www.dramaqueensland.org.au for further information.

Synopsis: boy girl wall
Thom and Alethea, two neighbours in a West End apartment block, try desperately to keep their lives from falling apart…and this is the story of The Wall that stands between them, who has decided they belong together.

Short Scene
Click to view the video excerpt from the play which is available in the boy girl wall education DVD resource.

Connecting boy girl wall to the Curriculum
boy girl wall is a magical, engaging piece of theatre that can connect to many aspects of the Drama Curriculum. It is a Contemporary, Australian play, collaboratively created by The Escapists.

Suitability: Schools Performance: Mature year 9s, 10s, 11s and 12s
General Audience Performance: Mature year 10s, 11s and 12s
(Some coarse language)

Duration: 70 minutes

Styles of Performance:
• One-person performance
• Comedy
• Satire
• Puppetry
• Physical Theatre
The Escapists

The Escapists is a collaboration between award-winning contemporary independent theatre makers, who value strong stories and an aesthetic that remixes traditional approaches to theatre and performance into a contemporary context. The Escapists are nationally-recognised Brisbane theatre-makers Lucas Stibbard, Matthew Ryan, Neridah Waters and Jonathon Oxlade.

The Escapists aim to diversify the type of productions presently found and expected in professional main-house theatre seasons, and attract the next generation of audiences to Australian theatre. Working beyond the conventions of the predominant text-based theatre, their aim is to produce adventurous, high-quality performances that truly celebrate imagination, theatricality, and the joy of play.

Contemporary, unique and exquisite, The Escapists aim to challenge younger audiences to, ‘Rethink theatre’.

Click to view the video excerpt from the interview which is available in the boy girl wall education DVD resource.

boy girl wall Collaboration

Story by Lucas Stibbard
Script by Matthew Ryan and Lucas Stibbard
Realised by Matthew Ryan, Lucas Stibbard, Neridah Waters and Sarah Winter
Performed by Lucas Stibbard
Music performed by Neridah Waters
Lighting design by Keith Clark
Photos by Amelia Dowd
Inspiration/Stimulus
The following is written by The Escapists.

**boy girl wall** is influenced by the work of Dylan Thomas (specifically *Under Milk Wood*), the one-man shows of Daniel Kitson (*C-90, The Ballad of Roger and Grace* and *At 10pm Daniel Kitson Will Be Taking Tea* and *Blowing Minds*), the methodology of Robert Lepage and the music of Sufjan Stevens. Ok, I know that is four but that’s just scratching the surface of what makes this project tick. I would be remiss not to mention the main source of inspiration for the Escapists in general – comic books and books about comic books (specifically *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* by Michael Chabon).

Creative Development
Creative Development is the process by which new work is researched, massaged and brought to the initial stages of fruition via consultation, experimentation and the use of a both convergent, (all ideas brought together and found to relate – logic, order) and divergent (broad tangential, abstract and associative leaps – creative and poetic) set of cycles or iterations of work. This methodology follows a collaborative model, with all forms honoured equally and all members of the team responsible for all areas at once. We are all writers, directors and designers — hence the title co-creator. It should be noted that at certain points this is then curated or guided by persons with more skill in that area, but only once everyone has had their say.

Creative Development also means that we have the time and space set aside to be ‘allowed’ to create freely.

Original Concept that was Proposed and Developed
A man in a suit produces a piece of chalk from his pocket and proceeds to mark out a pair of small bed-sit apartments. We watch as he decorates them, using the chalk to describe their contents and lay-outs. At some point he notices us and starts to tell us a story about the current occupants of the apartments, how they met and how they fell in love.

Speaking in a mixture of first and third person, switching between locations, times and characters both animate and inanimate, we are taken through a number of digressions on subjects like evolution and Feng-shui, on the way to a story about love (but not necessarily a love story). When he requires props he draws them on the walls or on black ply, seeming to pluck them from the air.

The creative process envisaged entails the artists involved to become a part of cycles of research and experimentation with text and other resources – chalk, illustration, shadow puppetry, object manipulation, simple stage illusions, projection – with each individual bringing their respective skills and aesthetic, but all being responsible for the project in a holistic sense, as opposed to just being ‘writer’ or director’ or ‘performer.’

The current performance text is based upon a series of short stories written in the last decade by Lucas Stibbard and a short-film script. These stories have been deconstructed and picked apart for their good bits and are now being reassembled into a draft one performance text. This will then be redrafted by Lucas Stibbard, Matthew Ryan, Nerida Waters and Sarah Winter with all co-creators having rewriting duties. From this a second draft will emerge, which will again be re-written by the group before the third draft enters into the Creative Development Festival. What we are testing during the Creative Development Festival is the text as it stands at that time (Does it tell the story well? How can it be improved?); the manner in which it is delivered (Do the styles envisaged relate well?); the illusions, tricks, concepts and manipulations that the style requires (Can we really draw a set? Can you use regular toaster as a puppet? Etc.)

Process
Click to view the video excerpt from the interview which is available in the **boy girl wall** education DVD resource.
Lucas Stibbard – Creative Notes

Tom works in an office for the government, but on the first day of his job he didn’t have the guts to ask exactly what they do and as such, he has continued without any idea since...

At night Tom looks for supernovae. He took the bus at age X discovering a piece of astrological anomaly like an asteroid whilst young in a piece of blind luck and has been searching for a supernovae ever since – something practically impossible to see with the eye... (the supernovae is his expression of the kiss).

Now I could do this to show the embrace but that could be silly – so I’ll find something with a little more poetry;
a) Her ideas
b) Him supernovae

Or do they want me to do the kissing thing?

More on history of astronomy of the stars...

The future of the story...

Because this is a story, we can bend time in ways that we can’t visually. A man finds that his partner of fifty years has fallen asleep for the last time. He quietly goes to the bathroom get some pills. He kisses her softly, lies down again and smiles, knowing he’ll see her again soon...

Yeah its a bit of a downer but...

Thom has the tendency to sometimes whistle, hum or sing songs that were strangely fitting to the situation...

That’s the end, what about the middle? The bits that led there?

Lucas Stibbard’s Insight
Click to view the video excerpt from the interview which is available in the boy girl wall education DVD resource.

Creative Notes
Click to view this resource which is available in the boy girl wall education DVD resource.
From Matthew to Lucas May 19
SUBJECT – BOY GIRL WALL

Most of my approach, surprise surprise, is centered around structure. I’ve reorganised the script into a different order, which helps to keep the stakes going up and up.

(I think pretty much all of the events are still there). The next was condensing. What I did here was condense the events of the story into three days (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday). It loses it’s drifty summery feel (summer never came into it for me), but I think it’s vitally important to keep the events compact. By having three days play out, one after the other, the audience has a strong organic sense of where we are in the proceedings (beginning, middle and end). I think this is important with a one-man show to keep the audience engaged at all times.

A lot of the ‘information content’ has been determined by pace. I’ve also tried to keep the stakes up, so things just get worse and worse for them. I’ve tried to keep the elements of the story up in the air, (magpie, Terry etc.) so they all add and pile up, with none left behind or resolved too early. The basic premise being, all the bad events lead to one nice bit.

I’ve used the page format I usually use so I had a sense of stage time. I’ve called you narrator (helped with objectivity) and have used dialogue wherever I could. I’ve made some scenes more lively to balance the speeches and even managed to put in a few things you had talked about last year that you didn’t get in.

Thanks for being open-minded and letting me do my thing. I hope you enjoy it.

- Matt

From Matthew to Lucas Aug 5
(NO SUBJECT)

I found these lines looking through an old draft and quite liked them. Did you want to use them?

But to the terrified imagination of Alethea it was conceivable that the little big-balled terror was so unimaginably horrifying that it could have got it up there himself. Without her notebook she would be lost. But without her life she’d be dead. And so, Alethea walked slowly home, her cheeks hot as she held back tears.

It has a nice resonance with ‘end of career Vs 24 hours of theatre sports.’

- Matt

Matthew Ryan’s Insight
Click to view the video excerpt from the interview which is available in the boy girl wall education DVD resource.
Production Elements

Music and Sound

Neridah Water’s Insight
Click to view the video excerpt from the interview which is available in the boy girl wall education DVD resource.

Activity:

- Working with the music teacher/s at the school, ask to borrow a number of instruments from the music room.
- Ask students to choose an instrument.
- Discuss as a class different moods that can be created with music. Relate this discussion to music the students listen to and enjoy.
- Choose a few scenes from films with music and play them to the students. Help them understand the idea of creating mood with music and ask students to identify how the images are more powerful and meaningful with music.
- Ask students to choose 1 scene from a film they enjoy.
- Ask them to then write a short piece of music that creates a specific mood for this scene. Students do not necessarily need to use music notes to write the music, they can just use their ear.
- Ask students to share their piece of music to the class and ask the class to identify the mood the music creates.
- Students can then be inspired by this music to create a short scene for the stage.

Lighting

Lighting Designer, Keith Clark’s Insight
Click to view the video excerpt from the interview which is available in the boy girl wall education DVD resource.

Activity:

- Using the music the students composed in the previous activity and after the students have devised a short scene to use with their music, ask students to design lighting for their piece.
- Discuss with the students what moods are created with lighting.
- Ask students to identify moments in boy girl wall, where lighting was important in creating meaning and mood. E.g. The last scene where the lighting is low and soft on the narrator and fades to black, as Thom and Alethea meet. This creates a ‘magical and mysterious’ mood.
- Ask students to draw the stage where they could possibly present their piece. They are to draw and describe the main lighting, including colours they would use throughout their scene.
Post Performance Questions

• Brainstorm as a class the main themes of the play.

• Brainstorm as a class the different characters in *boy girl wall*, played by Lucas Stibbard.

• Choose 4 of these characters. Identify and discuss how Lucas Stibbard changed his physicality and voice to play each character.

• Identify and discuss how the space was used to tell the story of Thom and Alethea.

• How did the production elements of music and lighting play a major role in telling the story of Thom and Alethea? Discuss the mood and meaning the production elements created, using specific scenes to justify your answer.

• Why do you think some of the music was played live and how do you think this affected the story telling process? Was it effective? Why? Why not?

• Begin by identifying elements of Australian plays, then ask students the question; What makes *boy girl wall* uniquely an Australian play?

• Identify and discuss techniques Lucas Stibbard used to change from one character to the next. Consider the use of space and sound.

• What makes *boy girl wall* a contemporary play?

• Did you relate to the story or the characters? If so, who and why?

• Did you recognise some of the stereotypical characters Lucas Stibbard played from your own life?

• How was satire used in the play to create humour?

• Make a list as a class of performance elements used in *boy girl wall* to tell the story of Thom and Alethea. E.g. Sock puppets, chalk drawings.

• What aspects of the play did you like and why? What aspects of the play didn’t you like and why? Use specific examples from the play to justify your answers.

• Activity: Search for reviews of *boy girl wall* online. Discuss as a class the reviews and compare their perspectives and opinions with your own.
Suggested Assessment Tasks

**Forming Activity**

Students can devise a 10 – 15 minute original scene in groups. They are to collaboratively develop the piece, which can be a part of a larger story, or a scene that stands alone.

Using the Insights from the artists of *boy girl wall* as examples, ask each student to keep notes on their creative ideas for the following task, including any music they may want to use, or lighting design concepts they have for the scene.

Ask students to sit in a group and swap stories from their lives that have happened in a local setting, or a story that includes a local ‘character’ they all might know. E.g. The magpie in *boy girl wall* is based on a true story about a ‘famous’ magpie that attacked everyone who past his nest on Montague road in South Brisbane. Ask students to reflect upon and choose ideas that make their piece uniquely Australian.

Guide students through the following process. (Ensure that productive and constructive conversations are being had in the groups. This is an important skill for students to develop for collaborative work. You may need to guide the conversation so students understand how to negotiate ideas and make effective and efficient choices. This process may take a few lessons):

- Students are to discuss their skills and the area of producing a play they would like to focus on for the piece. Each person will give input to every aspect of the scene, however they are each to identify and discuss their speciality. E.g. Story, acting, set and costume design, lighting, music.

- Students share their personal stories.

- Choose 2 stories/ideas that everyone agrees on.

- Research these ideas further by using inspiration from various mediums of their choice. E.g. Music, books, comic magazines etc.

- Ask the groups to refine the ideas further, to begin developing characters and the story.

- Ask students to write character profiles.

- Through collaboratively developing the ideas, ask the students to begin writing a plot structure in point form.

- The group ‘fill’ the ‘bits in between’ that need to be worked to develop the story in more detail. A script does not need to be written. The scenes can be developed through rehearsal.

- Students are to rehearse their piece, playing with production elements that will help them tell their story with more depth E.g. Music, lighting, puppetry.

- After students have rehearsed their pieces until they are polished it is time to present.

- Give students time to reflect on the process, what worked, what didn’t and the experience of developing something collaboratively.

**Additional Resources**

- **Characters - boy girl wall**
  Click to view this resource which is available in the *boy girl wall* education DVD resource.

- **Workshop - boy girl wall**
  Click to view this resource which is available in the *boy girl wall* education DVD resource.

- **Draft Scripts - boy girl wall**
  Click to view this resource which is available in the *boy girl wall* education DVD resource.
Responding Task

Consult relevant curriculum documents to assist with developing these tasks further.

“It is important to identify the limitations and parameters of the process and ‘play’ with these limitations.” (Lucas Stibbard, Matthew Ryan and Sarah Winter)

“We are asking the audience to imagine.” (Sarah Winter)

After seeing boy girl wall, consider these quotes in reference to the following questions:
• What did Lucas, Matthew and Sarah mean by these words?
• How did they ask the audience to imagine?
• Were they successful in doing this?
• What did you imagine?

Writing an essay, reflect and then discuss how The Escapists ask the audience to imagine. Discuss the ‘limitations’ of the production elements utilised throughout the performance and how these were manipulated to ask the audience to imagine.

Consider the following:

• 1 person play
• Use of multiple roles
• Mood, tension and space
• Use of existing architecture and how this was manipulated to develop the story and the set
• Production elements including live music, lighting design, use of OHP and puppetry

Senior students only to include the following in their essays:
Identify and discuss the dramatic action and meaning throughout the play by analysing and evaluating the above points. Develop a justified dramatic perspective and ensure your ideas are reinforced with appropriate examples.

Education DVD resource available at www.dramaqueensland.org.au/boygirlwall