

bangarra
DANCE THEATRE

Patyegarang

A gift of Australian history in a remarkable
dance experience about first contact

TEACHER'S
RESOURCE



WHAT IS IN THIS RESOURCE?

This resource has been designed to assist teachers in providing information and background to students prior to viewing a live performance of Bangarra Dance Theatre’s production *Patyegarang*.

When viewing a Bangarra performance, the audience is engaged in a conversation about Australian Indigenous culture, about contemporary reflections on ancient traditions and about the relationship between cultural inheritance and cultural renewal.

The audience is granted access to knowledge about the Australian Indigenous world through story-telling and theatrical presentation. This access can be referred to as ‘outside knowledge’ – knowledge that may be shared, as opposed to ‘inside knowledge’ - knowledge that is not to be shared. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and language groups around Australia work to uphold this knowledge, and ensure its care for future generations. Bangarra plays a vital role in making sure that our whole society is aware of, and feels a sense of mutual responsibility in maintaining cultural knowledge, sharing in its richness and recognising its vulnerability in contemporary times.

We hope that the information, suggested activities and additional references in this resource will assist in enriching students’ experience of the performance, while offering a range of study options related to the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island histories and cultures, as well as Aboriginal Perspectives, Indigenous Studies and Arts state curricula/syllabi.

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About Bangarra

Bangarra Dance Theatre is Australia's leading Indigenous performing arts company, and is recognised nationally and internationally for distinctive theatre productions that combine the spirituality of traditional culture with contemporary forms of story-telling through dance theatre.

Bangarra was founded in 1989 by dancer and choreographer, Carole Johnson and since 1991, has been led by Artistic Director and choreographer Stephen Page. Bangarra exists to create a foundation for the care and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural life. Bangarra provides the opportunity for all people of all cultural backgrounds to be able to share knowledge about the world's oldest living culture.

For more information about Bangarra and its productions go to:

www.bangarra.com.au

For specific Australian National Curriculum resources go to Bangarra Education Resources page:

www.bangarra.com.au/education

What is dance theatre?

Dance theatre, as a genre, involves a range of artistic disciplines, including dance, that come together in a collaborative process to create a rich palette of physical, visual and sonic sensations. While abstract in form, dance theatre productions can be highly compelling and emotionally charged. Dance theatre works may include narrative interpretation of fictional or true stories, a viewpoint regarding an issue (or issues) of social, political or cultural theme, or they can simply be works of performance art created to communicate intangible and/or abstract concepts.

The term 'dance theatre' emerged with the development of new dance performance works that emerged in the early 20th century, primarily in Germany and Austria. This form was also termed Expressionist Dance (*Ausdruckstanz*) and distinguished itself from classical ballet and traditional folkdance practice through its inventive use of movement language, form, sound and other theatrical elements. Over time the term has been applied as a common description for performance works that incorporate a broad range of movement techniques that can also involve dramatic, technological, textual and literary disciplines. Contemporary dance theatre is a form that is constantly evolving, challenging audiences' perceptions and incorporating a broad range of new technologies as they become available.

Patyegarang

Background to the story, the people and ‘the notebooks’

The story of Patyegarang is framed against the backdrop of early colonisation in the Sydney region between 1788 and 1791, as it explores the extraordinary first contact relationship between a young woman of the Eora nation, Patyegarang, and a British military officer with the First Fleet, Lieutenant William Dawes.

This is a story that floats above the scenarios of historical recount of 1788, revealing a human encounter that provides us with another perspective about the early times of colonisation in Australia.

William Dawes was exceptional amongst his peers, not only because of his talent as a scientist and as a highly capable officer, but also for his intellect, curiosity and insight regarding cultural and philosophical thinking.

As a naval officer, an astronomer, engineer and mapmaker he travelled to Sydney with the First Fleet with the primary mission to observe an expected sighting of a comet. Once afforded shore leave he immediately began to build an observatory on the site we now call Dawes Point. Despite the comet never arriving, Dawes spent many nights observing and recording the stars of the southern skies, as well as immersing himself in other projects he was commissioned to initiate; exploring and mapping the mountains around Sydney and across the Nepean River, as well as creating maps of the local areas as the settlement began to open up land for agriculture and grazing.

There was another area of study that Dawes pursued – that of linguistics and this has become a focus of interest for story-tellers and historians since 1972 with the discovery in London of two slim volumes of notes that Dawes produced over a relatively short period of time within his 3-year stay in the colony. These notebooks reveal a meticulously written record of his study of the local language and dialects, which he pursued with the assistance of local aboriginal people, in particular the young woman called **Patyegarang**. Through this relationship, Dawes developed a very personal approach to the volatility of the cultural interface that was unfolding in the new colony.

Patyegarang was clearly one of Dawes’ main teachers in the study of the so-called ‘Sydney language’, and there is speculation as to whether this relationship was intimate as well as pedagogical. There are also suggestions that she may have acted as a spy and/or an informant as the levels of suspicion and acrimony between colonists and Aboriginal people developed after it became clear that the new arrivals were here to stay. We really don’t know for sure.

It is speculated that Patyegarang was about 15 years old. Dawes himself was only in his late 20s, yet he had already seen conflict in the American War of Independence. Nowadays, Patyegarang and Dawes would be considered very young, yet in the late 1700s, when life expectancy was about 50 years of age, they would have been considered relatively mature.

Through the writings in Dawes' notebooks, it is clear that this relationship was exceptional, and quite possibly, in Dawes' case epiphanous. The fact that such a relationship occurred at all is in itself quite fascinating. Dawes was a military officer and a respected scientist who operated as part of a British empire building system that promoted specific cultural and social standards. At this time in history, scientific exploration and discovery were flourishing. In contrast, Patyegarang was a young women living in a 'hunter gather' society that functioned as a complex and sophisticated fabric of spiritual and community connection to land and kin. They were literally worlds apart.

We could regard Patyegarang and Dawes as two extraordinary people who met in extraordinary times and therein would lie a fascinating story – yet we can also examine this relationship as a unique and close interaction between two people coming from two vastly different worlds and meeting and learning about each other in a spirit of respect, trust and empathy.

Dawes' language **notebooks** were discovered by Australian librarian, Phyllis Mander Jones during the time she was working at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). While the original notebooks are still held by SOAS, a digital copy has been created and is available through the Mitchell Library in Sydney. <http://www.williamdawes.org/#>

Dawes' notebooks lists words and phrases of what is referred to as 'The Sydney Language', (a term attributed to Dr Jakelin Troy – AIATSIS, 1994) which was a collection of dialects of the *Dharug* (also *Dharuk*, *Darug*) language. Many of the phrases recorded by Dawes refer to actual events of the day, such as the level of fear experienced by the Eora of the soldiers' guns, and more personal references.

Some examples are:

Patyegarang: <i>Tyérun kamarigál</i>	The kamarigals are afraid
Dawes: <i>Mínyin tyérun kamarigals?</i>	Why are the kamarigals afraid?
Patyegarang: <i>Gunin</i>	Because of the guns
Dawes. <i>Murrá Bídyl?</i>	Is your finger better?
Patyegarang: <i>Bíal, Karunjum.</i>	No, (I suppose) worse.

Creating *Patyegarang*

Bangarra's process for creating a work like *Patyegarang* is a journey of purpose, imagination and reflection, and involves a great deal of research, collaboration and consultation before the actual creation of the choreography, music, and design began.

Research, collaboration and consultation

With the discovery of the notebooks at the SOAS in 1972, and the existence of various diaries from people who knew and worked with William Dawes, both during his time in Sydney and further into his career and life, historians have created an interesting portrait of the man. He was clearly a man set apart from his peers. He seems to have had little regard for engaging with political manoeuvring for influence and power or pursuing efforts towards personal material gain, yet he was extremely dedicated to his pursuits in scientific exploration and cultural learning. His actions often demonstrated a high moral regard for human rights, putting him at odds with many of his peers and other settlers.

While there is very little material about *Patyegarang* outside of Dawes' notebooks, there is quite a good deal of knowledge of other Aboriginal people and groups at that time, and so the nature of her life and her experience of first contact can be sketched to the extent of knowing that she must have been both courageous and strong in her conviction to engage with the white man. Not only was her sharing of language with Dawes a means to service his pursuit of linguistics, it provided him with insight into a world that regarded and valued its spiritual connection to land (country) and the cultural inheritance of ancestors above all else.

As with all Bangarra works, the creative team for *Patyegarang* consulted the local Indigenous community, engaging the special assistance of Richard Green, a descendent of the Dharug and Matthew Doyle, a descendant of the Muruwari and knowledge holder for the Dharawal. Richard and Matthew provided detailed knowledge of the Dharug language and people, and were consultants to Bangarra for cultural and language knowledge in regard to the creation of the music/soundscape.

Alana Valentine was engaged as dramaturge to support the choreographer in weaving the known aspects of the story with the imagined and reflective elements, in order to uphold the responsibility to tell *Patyegarang*'s story with care and respect.

Dance Practice

Patyegarang was created by the choreographer in collaboration with the dancers, the composer of the music and the costume, set and lighting designers who form the creative team. This collaborative process enables the dance to reflect the overall focus of the choreographer's ideas and directions.

The choreographer, the rehearsal director and the dancers work together in the dance studio for many hours each day over several weeks to create the choreographic elements for the dance, ensuring that their interpretation of the story follows the original motivations for telling the story.

Together they explore, invent and shape movements that speak to the artistic interpretation of the cultural and emotional layers of the story.

As with the creation of any new work, the dancers and choreographer experiment with each movement, practicing them over and over again. They slowly build the movements into phrases and arrange these phrases into sequences that eventually form separate sections, or scenes of the work. The scenes link together through a directorial and dramaturgical process that involves the whole creative team including the dancers.

Dance technique and performance skills

Using their dance technique skills, the dancers work collaboratively to blend and refine the movements to provide clarity, texture and consistency in execution before settling on a final version of the choreography.

The rehearsal director is present throughout this process in order to be able to guide the dancers in the rehearsal process, so that the key qualities and details of the choreography, as set by the choreographer, are retained and remembered as they progress from section to section. When the production moves closer to its premiere date, the rehearsal director will work with the dancers to make sure the dancers will perform the work to the highest standard possible. Also during this stage, the technical elements of the costume, set and lighting design start to be incorporated.

Production processes

In the week of the premiere, the dancers, rehearsal director, creative team and production crew move from Bangarra's studios to the theatre where they spend a day or two rigging the set, positioning and programming the lighting, checking the sound levels and making necessary adjustments to the choreography to fit the space of the stage. This is called the 'bump-in' and the production crew is largely responsible for coordinating this stage of the process.

Until the night of premiere no one has actually seen the finished production. This can be quite stressful but is also extremely exciting.

Extending the life of a dance theatre work

During the lengthy process of creating a new Bangarra production, ideas will change and surprising shifts in the original plans will occur. This is not unusual and probably one of the most exciting things about making a new work. Importantly, the things that do not change are the traditional elements – cultural information must always remain respected and intact. As the dance is performed over time, these stories are passed down from one dancer to another as different dancers are taught the choreography and perform the roles.

Presenting Bangarra's *Patyegarang*

Patyegarang tells a story from an Aboriginal perspective. Drawing on the material in Dawes' notebooks and informed by knowledge about the local Aboriginal people of the Sydney area, (provided by Richard Green and Matthew Doyle), the work is crafted through Bangarra's unique story-telling practice.

This story telling practice rests on a deep respect for cultural essence and traditional inheritance, which guide and inspire imagined interpretations of how the story may have played out. The emotional and environmental scenarios, the human actions and responses that were personal, are crafted to give the audience a new lens by which to examine the events of 1788 and the people who were at the centre of those events.

Patyegarang tells a story that is both intimate and universal. It illustrates very small moments in time, where a young woman from an ancient culture tells a young man, from a modern Imperialist society, about her life. Both the story-tellers and the audience are involved in stepping though the development of a very quiet and special friendship, against the disruption of colonisation and extraordinary collisions of culture that ensued at that time.

Patyegarang consists of **13 scenes** interconnected by their relation to the themes within the story.

The scenes:

- 1. Eora**
The spirit of *Patyegarang* awakens in a celebration of People and land.
- 2. Dawes**
A new arrival, a new connection to country.
- 3. Time**
A dedicated tracing of a universal law.
- 4. 'Maugari' (fishing canoe)**
Honouring the integral role of women and the beauty in living off the land and sea.
- 5. 2 Breaths**
An observation of this special first contact through language.
- 6. Dungara (to dance)**
A sacred ritual, refuelling for the hunt.
- 7. Proclamation**
The resolution to resist assimilation.

- 8. Hunt**
The absence of honour for sacrifice.
- 9. Night Sky**
A gift of cultural knowledge.
- 10. Intimacy**
A conscious connection.
- 11. Sacred**
Territorial tension
- 12. Departure**
A decision honouring friendship and spirit
- 13. Resilience**
Always was, always will be, our land.

The Creative Team

Full biographical information and program notes from each of the creative team can be found at:

http://issuu.com/bangarra/docs/bdt624_patyegarangprogram_issuu_sin

Choreographer.....Stephen Page

Stephen Page is a descendant of the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh Nation from SE Queensland. Stephen was appointed Artistic Director of Bangarra in 1991 and he continues to lead the company, now in its 25th year, and create new works for its repertoire.

"I believe Patyegarang was a young woman of fierce and endearing audacity, and a 'chosen one', so to speak, within her clan and community. Her tremendous display of trust in Dawes resulted in a gift of cultural knowledge back to her people almost 200 years later and I feel her presence around us, with us, as we create this new work".

Stephen Page, 2014.

Composer.....David Page

David Page is a descendant of the Nunkul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh tribe from SE Queensland. Over the last 25 years, as resident composer with Bangarra, David has created the music for many works within the company's repertoire.

Every work I've done for Bangarra features traditional language from the area where the story is based or from. In this case it is the Darug language of the Eora nation. My brothers Richard Green and Matthew Doyle are the gatekeepers in accessing the language and translation from English to language sentences, phrases and song lyrics. I am instantly inspired as soon as I hear the melody of spoken traditional language. It opens my creative world and allows me to dream and hear the songs, which make choosing the instrumentation easier.

David Page, 2014.

Dramaturge Alana Valentine

Alana Valentine is a writer, academic and dramaturge and has previously worked as a dramaturge with Stephen Page in 2011, for the creation of *ID* (from *Belong*).

“As significant as the notebooks were as an insight into the humour, tension, intimacy and depth of the friendship between Patyegarang and Dawes, of infinitely greater potency to the process of imagining the story of Patyegarang was Stephen’s long legacy of cultural knowledge gifted to him over the entire history of Bangarra from the many elders and countrymen and artists and ancestors with whom he has worked”.

Alana Valentine, 2014.

Set designer Jacob Nash

Jacob is a Murri man who grew up in Brisbane. He graduated from the NIDA Design Course in 2005. Jake was appointed as a Bangarra artist-in-residence in 2011, and to date has created the design for the Bangarra’s productions of *earth & sky*, *Belong*, *Warumuk – in the dark night*, *Terrain*, *Blak* and *Dance Clan 3*.

“... the colour palette I have explored and the textures I am using are a collection from around the Harbour. They are in my life every day and being able to find a contemporary way to explore and create with them has been a rich and unexpected experience. Hopefully I have been able to capture an essence of the world Patyegarang knew and the design holds the essential qualities needed for her story to be told today”.

Jacob Nash, 2014.

Costume designer..... Jennifer Irwin

Jennifer Irwin’s career spans 30 years designing and constructing costumes for drama, opera, film, and in particular for dance & ballet. Her designs for Bangarra include *Ochres*, *Fish*, *Corroboree*, *Mathinna*, *Walkabout*, *X300*, *Uniapon*, *Bush*, *Skin*, *True Stories*, *Fire: A Retrospective*, *Terrain* and *Dance Clan 3*.

“Even though Patyegarang is a narrative work, I always approach the subject matter for costume design in an abstract way. I want to steer clear of being too literal and obvious. Stephen's storytelling is beautifully sculptural, so it's possible to design in an abstract, suggestive way while drawing from tradition”. Jennifer Irwin, 2014.

Lighting designer Nick Schlieper

Nick Schlieper has created the lighting design for most of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and also works regularly in Europe and USA. Nick designed the lighting for Bangarra's 2003 work *Bush*.

"The thing that has most struck and fascinated me while working on this piece is the story itself. It's not only a wonderful tale, but an amazing piece of history, that resonates way beyond its immediate Australian context". Nick Schlieper, 2104.

Activities

Pre-performance activities

Explore

Have students become familiar with Bangarra's work, if they are not already. Visit the Bangarra website: www.bangarra.com.au

You might like to focus on the *Patyegarang* webpage, which includes:

- Behind the scenes of the Patyegarang photo-shoot.
- Patyegarang: the Creative Journey - Part 1.
- Patyegarang: the Creative Journey - Part 2.

<http://bangarra.com.au/performance/patyegarang>

For a comprehensive archive collection of Bangarra's productions over the last 25 years, including video, images and information about the works, go to:

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

For source information about Lieutenant William Dawes; his life, his role as a naval officer of the First Fleet - see the list of further references at the end of this Study Guide.

Reflect

Students can then be introduced to the story of Patyegarang and Lieutenant William Dawes and the contextual settings and socio-political themes that background the story, for example;

- Potential critical actions and responses around first contact between Indigenous people and the European settlers and convicts
- Post Age of Enlightenment focus on scientific endeavour, in particular astronomy, linguistics, and meteorology.

- Power of language to impact the nature of relationships - personal, social and political.
- The personal stories that reside within the broad expanse of historical reportage.
- How can stories change depending on the perspective of the story-teller/s?

Some questions for discussion:

1. How do we regard and understand the concept of First Contact?
2. How can we imagine ourselves meeting another individual from an ancient world, (pre Neolithic and Industrial Revolutions) without a common language or any knowledge of customary and/or social conventions/standards?
3. How might people we meet as a result of a situation or major event, impact our own personal journey?
4. How did the Europeans of the late 18th century regard the so-called Great Southern Land in terms of ownership and rights to settle?
5. What is meant by intercultural exchange? What is an example of this in our contemporary everyday life? How would this type of exchange be amplified across tens of thousands of years?
6. What personal qualities might Patyegarang have had in order to engage with Dawes as his language teacher?
7. What seems to have set William Dawes apart from his contemporaries in terms of personal values, background and abilities?

Post performance activities

Respond

After attending the performance, students will have a more tangible sense of the production, *Patyegarang*. Their responses can be captured and explored in the context of Arts curriculum learning topics, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island perspectives, histories and cultures.

For example, students could be asked to create one or more of the following:

1. **A dance specific response** – using the concept of a first meeting, devise a choreographic framework for a dance composition piece.
What type of movements would illustrate the chosen subject matter and what range of dynamics would be explored?
This task could be approached as exploration of an idea, performance of key movement phrases and/or discussion.
2. **A short essay** that identifies distinguishing choreographic motifs and/or structural elements of the production (e.g. how the sections relate, how the design, sound, movement are integrated) and how contemporary dance language is ‘spoken’ through expression of cultural knowledge and tradition.

3. **A visual/graphic arts response** in the form of a poster, painting, drawing, animation, postcard, collage, short film or other medium.
4. **A critical or creative writing response** in the form of a critical review, short story, short play, poem or a letter.

Students can investigate their response to their understanding of the creative process used in the making of dance theatre by asking the questions, based on their observations of the performance of *Patyegarang*.

For example:

1. How are the 13 sections of *Patyegarang* connected or separated and what linking techniques are used?
2. In what ways do the different sections reflect the perspectives of the choreographer, composer, and designers?
3. How important is it for the dancers to contribute to the process of making the movements to tell the story and is this evident in the work?
4. How are props and costumes utilised to tell the stories and enhance the choreography?
5. What use of technology is involved in the performance and how effective is it?
6. How does the music interact with the dance and assist with the story-telling and in your view what styles, vocal and musical content are most effective?
7. In what ways does the choreographer use individual solo performers, duets and the full ensemble to reflect ideas about culture, gender, personal life experiences and/or communities?

Further references

Books. (non-fiction and fiction)

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<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dawes-william-1968>

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