



Full Circle

TEACHER NOTES *by Anna McHugh*

Suitable	Year 10
Difficulty	Text language ●●●●● Lesson concepts ●●●●●
Genre	Theatre in the round, folktales
Themes	Folktales, multiculturalism, personal quest, human heritage
Literary and dramatic techniques	Narrator, embedded stories, parallelism, analogues and master narratives, symbol, motif
Cast	Highly variable, but 40 parts (of which many can be doubled)

Why choose this play?

Full Circle is a deceptively simple collection of folktales performed in response to a narrator's question about the Moon. Many students will have seen or read similar folk presentations or theatre-in-the-round performances in primary school and will wonder why it's being proffered again to more 'mature' readers. This is precisely the point of this lesson: simple texts often carry the most powerful ideological agenda and are excellent material to work with as students embark on the challenging concepts and tasks of senior English.

The play's narrator, Dotty Spotsworth, can be read as a clever parody of a particular political and ideological perspective, and the range of folktales she presents as she explores lunar legends are not only beautiful and engaging in themselves, but speak to wider social issues such as multiculturalism, cultural relativism and the ways we use the lore and knowledge of other cultures. The play's simple language allows even lower-ability or ESL readers to engage in a discussion of the politics of identity, difference and recognition, and ESL students in particular may have valuable insights into the practice of multiculturalism in Australia today.

Practical considerations

Plan for around 45 minutes to read through the text and around 90 minutes to set up and act it out. This lesson takes around 100 minutes to teach, including a class read-through of the play.



Teaching *Full Circle* by Sue Murray

Learning objectives

Students will:

- understand the difference between implicit and explicit values
- identify ideologies implicit in texts and align these ideologies with attitudes which they have encountered in institutions and events during their personal and school lives
- identify how higher-order concepts such as cultural relativism subtly inform literary texts and what underlying assumptions these indicate
- consider what constitutes a culture and whether sub-cultures are legitimate ‘cultures’, as well as questioning ideological powers behind such definitions
- analyse how texts often appear to say one thing but do another, or disclose inconsistencies which can be found through the process of deconstruction
- use the literary form and style of the text to offer their own perspective on sub-cultures and their cultural ‘ways of knowing’.



Meeting outcomes: Australian Curriculum—English

Year 10 content descriptions	Literacy: Interpreting, analysing, evaluating	ACELY1752	Identify and analyse implicit or explicit values, beliefs and assumptions in texts and how these are influenced by purposes and likely audiences
	Literature: Creating literature	ACELT1644	Create imaginative texts that make relevant thematic and intertextual connections with other texts.
Cross-curriculum priorities	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures	OI.3	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have unique belief systems and are spiritually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways.
		OI.5	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.
	Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia	OI.1	The peoples and countries of Asia are diverse in ethnic background, traditions, cultures, belief systems and religions.
General capabilities	Intercultural understanding		Students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped, and the variable and changing nature of culture. The capability involves students in learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect.



General capabilities	Critical and creative thinking		Students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems. Critical and creative thinking are integral to activities that require students to think broadly and deeply using skills, behaviours and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination and innovation in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.
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1. Approaching the text

There are many changes throughout this play, as different stories are told and develop the spatial significance of the story circle. Teachers may therefore find it easier to allow students to read the script to themselves rather than together. Before you begin, clarify with the class that the stage is used to represent the communal storytelling space important to many cultures, and which they themselves may remember from primary school. Make sure that everyone understands the idea of the multi-purpose blue cloth in the middle of the circle.

2. Introducing ideas

i) Multiculturalism is an implicit, or ‘background’, idea which informs many of the institutions in Australia, but it can also be made explicit and performative.

Check that everyone understands the meaning of multiculturalism as it’s practiced in Australia today; a working definition of multiculturalism means *both* the existence of diverse cultures and the policies which promote this. You can explain that multiculturalism is often contrasted to assimilationism. One of the values implicit in multiculturalism is the shared human heritage of all members of the community—a heritage which has diverse religious and cultural expressions, though often within the same categories.

Understanding activity

Hold a brief class discussion about multiculturalism as an implicit value in this play—making sure that everyone understands the difference between implicit and explicit values. You may need to think of such examples of implicit and explicit values being performed in events such as: Christmas, Yom Kippur, the opening of the Olympic Games, the World Cup, New Year, high school graduation, exams etc.

Students should be able to identify at least three elements which signal that multiculturalism is an implicit value in the play, for example:

- different groups are present
- these differences are characterised by different, though mostly political, categories
- the human activity of storytelling is recognised as formative to cultural identity
- the circle motif gestures to this identity-forming activity common to all humans and also establishes a symbolic space in which many groups are brought together
- the idea that Doty Spotsworth’s quest to understand circles suggests that our existence as human beings can be enhanced by observing and participating in different cultures.



ii) A knock-on effect of multiculturalism is believing that values like good or bad, right or wrong, are only valid for the culture they're used in. [This is called 'cultural relativism'.]

Explain to students that relativism refers to the idea that there's no absolute right or wrong, truth or validity—everything's relative. When we talk about cultural relativism we mean that no single culture is 'right' about an issue, that they are all equally valid. This is a hotly contested issue: on the one hand, ignoring cultural relativism can lead to events such as the deaths in custody of aboriginal prisoners. On the other hand, it also says that female genital mutilation should not be stopped because there is no absolutely right or wrong stance on the matter.

Knowledge is not entirely objective—we may think that the 'scientific' explanations of why the Moon is there and why it is round are the 'truth', while folk stories that seek to explain the same are just stories, substandard explanations invented without the benefit of access to modern technology. In privileging scientific explanations in this way, we are asserting objectivism: the assumption that that one way is right/better/true.



Understanding activity

When students understand that relativism just means the belief that values should only be applied within the culture that holds them, ask them for three ways in this idea is implicitly demonstrated by this play. They may say that: each story is presented as an equally valid answer to the same question (i.e. Dotty's); each group has the same time, space and materials with which to tell their story; they are all presented in the same dramatic mode, through a narrator who directs and explains the actions of the story; the motif of a circle suggests both unity and equality, and Dotty offers no concluding judgement about which story is 'right' or 'best'.

iii) Sometimes, however, texts—often unwittingly—show 'slippages' or gaps between their implicit values and what actually happens on the page.

Understanding activity

Now that students understand both multiculturalism as the political paradigm which motivates this dramatic performance, and cultural relativism as the mode which shapes it, ask them if they can see any aspects of the play which don't quite fit. They may point out that:

- All of the stories are told at the 'command' of Dotty, probably (though not definitely) a white woman who is evidently and volubly in control of the theatrical space
- Dotty's unwillingness to offer her own culture's story seems at odds with the values implied by the unifying, inclusive circle
- Dotty herself feels like a parody of the largely white, English-speaking, politically liberal arts patron whose attitude to other cultures is at once patronising, benign, colonial, and confusing. She doesn't actually come up with any answers, despite the wealth of explanations offered
- The groups all fall into slightly different categories—in fact, their only similarity is that they're not white and primarily English-speaking—for example:
 - the Zuni are a language group
 - Africa is a continent
 - Japan, Estonia and—to a degree—Tibet are national entities
 - the Inuit are an ethnic group, some of whom live in the country we call Greenland
 - the Maori are both a people and a language group
 - Australian Aborigine is a term of historical differentiation, used to signify the different peoples and language groups whose existence in the Australian continent predated the arrival of Europeans
- There are no representatives of what academics call 'sub-cultures' such as hippies, haul girls, hipsters, emos or punks—so the inclusiveness actually only privileges one definition of culture.



This is an example of ‘slippage’, where a text ‘slips up’ and exposes the gaps between its claimed foundations and what it’s actually doing. Finding the slippage is a key part of the procedure known as ‘deconstruction’, which is a tool in the post-structuralist approach to texts. Students who propose to do English Extension 1 in Year 11 and 12 will find this exercise useful.

3. The learning activity

- i) Ask students to work in groups to analyse one folktale from the play. They should pay particular attention to the literary and narrative techniques which explain the Moon’s existence and appearance. For example, the Aboriginal story uses personification and anthropomorphism to depict the Moon as a fat young man. His changing appearance is explained in terms of human behaviour, with particular reference to the emotions of shame, loneliness, and resilience. The Moon’s existence in the night sky and the change from round to thin is allegorised as a lover’s withdrawal after rejection by girls, and is explained by a secondary narrator, Wahn the crow.
- ii) When they have analysed some of the techniques used in the tales, groups should share them with the class so that everyone has a complete list of folktale techniques used by cultures to explain the Moon.
- iii) Working in pairs, students should choose a modern ‘sub-culture’ and write a short dramatic tale which would be included in Dotty’s cultural relativist smorgasbord of Moon stories. Sub-cultures include: sea punks, hipsters, gym bros, lads, emos, haul girls, gamers/geeks, Molly Sodas and Otherkin. Students can look up ‘current subcultures’ if they’re confounded by the sheer variety. They should consider how the folktales’ storytelling devices reflect values implicit to that culture, and which devices would be consistent with the subculture’s values. They must have a narrator, and use the blue fabric in some way.

4. Rounding up

Ask students what they think about multiculturalism: does it unfairly privilege some kinds of culture over others? Is it a waste of time dreamed up by white people who feel bad about having had things so good for so long? Or is it the first step in a truly blended humanity which will have to unite to face a common enemy such as climate change or another kind of global catastrophe?

Assessment ideas

- i) Present students with this situation: a member of the audience gets frustrated with Dotty and begins to heckle. They shout out ‘This is all patronising nonsense—you’re treating these stories like dashes of colour in a white world that you control!’ Students should write Dotty’s response as a dramatic monologue, explaining her views of multiculturalism and cultural relativism and why she has constructed the play and participated in it as she has. Students’ monologues should be assessed on:
 - a) The depth of their understanding of the concepts (multiculturalism, cultural relativism, implicit and explicit values, and textual assumptions)
 - b) The fluency and coherence with which they express these through the character of Dotty Spotsworth, maintaining the features of the dramatic monologue
 - c) Their understanding and analysis of literary and dramatic techniques used in the folktales, and how these correspond to the concepts listed above.
- ii) Having practiced composing a story for one sub-culture in point iii above, students should produce a finished version either for the same sub-culture or a new one. They should use the same theatrical paradigms set out in the play, and leave room for an intro and epilogue by Dotty.
- iii) Find another folktale about the Moon on YouTube, for example [this Korean one](#), and analyse it as both a composition which draws on some of the same repertoire of techniques and an example of multiculturalism in the digital domain. What literary and political values are implicit and explicit in this text?





Using the play with other resources

It is possible to combine this play with other Macmillan resources if you have them in your collection. The exercises in the following workbooks provide useful warm-up activities with which to differentiate the concepts in this lesson. Students could attempt one or two of the exercises at home as a preparatory exercise for this lesson.

	National English Skills 10	Unit 3: Cultural experiences, pp33–40
	English Workbook 4 (3rd edn)	Unit 4: Values and messages in texts, pp118–24

Further reading

- An [academic paper](#), by Dr Jan Pakulski at UTAS, concerns Australian multiculturalism and contains useful terminology and insights if you want to think more critically about the current social ideology informing Australian society and education.
- The ABC's well-received radio program, '[Mongrel Nation](#)', shows recent aspects of the discussion about multiculturalism.
- Princeton's online [encyclopedia of political and philosophical terms](#) is useful for those who want a fuller working definition of cultural relativism.

Linked texts

Full Circle could support and relate to the following Board of Studies prescribed texts for Stage 5 (among many others)

- *Green Monkey Dreams*, Isobelle Carmody
- *Borrowed Light*, Anna Fienberg
- *The Baboon King*, Anton Quintana, translated by John Nieuwenhuizen
- *Two Centuries of Australian Poetry*, edited by Mark O'Connor
- *My People*, Oodgeroo
- *This Way Out: Five Plays*, Isobelle Carmody and Steve Taylor
- *Plays from Black Australia*, edited by Jack Davis



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