



BIG DRAMAS second edition

Water Pressure

TEACHER NOTES *by Anna McHugh*

Suitable	Suitable for Year 7
Difficulty	Text language ●●●●● Lesson concepts ●●●●●
Genre	Choral speaking drama
Themes	Perseverance, history, commemoration, public opinion, tragedy
Literary and dramatic techniques	Visual techniques, tableaux, narrator, representative character, narrative compression, cartoon, diorama, frame narrative
Cast	4 main characters, 24+ small parts

Why choose this play?

A fascinating episode and great human achievement is pulled from the archives and presented in this short play. The Goldfields Pipeline and the man who engineered it, CY O'Connor, are now features in a museum visited by a boy and his mum. The boy, who represents the audience, is fascinated by the epic—and ultimately tragic—story, while his mum is merely keen to see the collection of regional teapots. A study in economy, visual technique and engaging ways to present Australian stories, this play will surprise even the most reluctant students of Australian history and drama.

Practical considerations

You'll need access to the internet for the following articles, which are integral to the lesson. If you don't have access, you could swap the listed articles for others about the Goldfields Water Pipeline, but they should be of the same text type.

1. 3-minute [film clip](#) from the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA)
2. Short and easy [non-fiction article](#) from Australian Geographic
3. Transcript of an ABC [interview](#)
4. [Local news](#) piece from ABC Goldfields

Plan for 40 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 *Water Pressure* by Sue Murray

Learning objectives

Students will:

- learn about how great texts are economical and precise, able to capture the essence and allow the reader's imagination to do the rest
- analyse the dramatic techniques used to control information and presentation in the play
- compare these techniques to the conventions that govern other text types
- evaluate which mode and medium of communicating information works best for them as learners
- select, imagine, plan and compose a brief dramatic scene using the techniques identified in the understanding activities.



Meeting outcomes: Australian Curriculum—English

Year 7 content descriptions	Literature: Examining literature	ACELT1622	Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches
	Literacy: Interpreting, analysing, evaluating	ACELY1721	Analyse and explain the ways text structures and language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose
	Literature: creating literature	ACELT1625	Create literary texts that adapt stylistic features encountered in other texts, for example, narrative viewpoint, structure of stanzas, contrast and juxtaposition
Cross-curriculum priorities	Sustainability	OI.6	The sustainability of ecological, social and economic systems is achieved through informed individual and community action that values local and global equity and fairness across generations into the future.
		O.I.8	Designing action for sustainability requires an evaluation of past practices, the assessment of scientific and technological developments, and balanced judgments based on projected future economic, social and environmental impacts.
General capabilities	Critical and creative thinking		In the Australian Curriculum, 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.





1. Approaching the text

Do a complete read-through of the text, pausing to make sure that the class understands the idea of dioramas and tableaux. You could also briefly discuss what the museum might look like, and how regional history museums are often more intimate and idiosyncratic than larger, busier, national-scale collections.

2. Introducing ideas

i) Texts about historical events often have to cover a lot of material. They use various devices to bring that material to the viewer in an accurate, engaging and memorable way.

Point out to students that this script is a very compressed and economical way of presenting a lot of information: the diorama/tableaux are super-smart ways to present a kind of visual ‘dot point’. Narrative texts frequently have to find some way of compressing lots of information into a brief space of time and they draw on literary and dramatic devices to do this. This is a good way to explain *why* it’s helpful to understand techniques and devices—many students find identification and analysis of techniques pointless or irrelevant. Interesting students in *how* techniques work and *why* they achieve effective and efficient communication frequently makes classes a bit more ‘sold’ on learning the mechanics of texts.

Understanding activity

Ask students to consider what devices are used to help guide the viewer through the material and compress this big story into memorable ‘chunks’. After a little thinking time, write these terms on the board and explain them if necessary: tableau; framing narrative; narrator; representative character. Talk the class through Murray’s use of these devices and how she uses them to compress and present her material. You should come up with something like this:

Technique	Example	Function
Tableau		These summarise lots of information and discrete events in a single visual ‘snapshot’. Only the most important verbal cues are used.
Framing narrative	Aziz and his mum go to the museum to find out about the history of the Goldfields. They see the Pipeline display and Aziz is intrigued about the story.	The modern characters’ trip to the museum gives order, sequence and plausibility to the inset narrative (which is essentially a series of brief sketches).
Narrator	Bridget O’Connor	She narrates the links between the tableaux and connects the viewer to the material.
Representative character	Aziz (and his mum)—both represent the different ways modern Australia has treated the extraordinary story of CY O’Connor. Aziz is fascinated; his mum is bored.	Aziz represents the audience and acts as their link to the inset story. He asks the right questions, which get the narrator started.

ii) We can discover a lot about how text types function, and how individual learners use them, by comparing how the same material is covered by different text types.

This play offers lots of techniques unique to the drama text type, but the same story is covered in three other ways in the links listed in the Practical considerations section above (numbers 1 to 3). Take number 1, which is a teaching website put together by the National Film and Sound Archive,



and jointly make a list of the conventions of the text type. You can examine only the film clip or the whole webpage if you want to look at multimodal texts.

Understanding activity

Look back at your findings for the first understanding activity, where the class worked out what conventions in the drama text type were used to shape and guide audience understanding. Extend the same questions to the NFSA film clip. You might come up with something like this:

	Condense and communicate complex information	Give a context for the information and our questions	Show why we should be interested in the topic	Explain the sequence of the story
Play	Tableaux summarise lots of information and discrete events in a single visual 'snapshot'. Only the most important verbal cues are used.	The modern characters' trip to the museum gives order, sequence and plausibility to the inset narrative (which is essentially a series of brief sketches).	Aziz represents the audience and acts as their link to the inset story. He asks the right questions, which get the narrator started.	Bridget narrates the links between the tableaux and connects the viewer to the material.
Film clip	Historical photos and re-enactments show the important and engaging parts of the story in a brief and arresting way.	The film clip is part of a series about 'Constructing Australia', and presents the topic in the context of great engineering achievements which built the nation	The experts who are interviewed act as the 'voice of the present' and make clear the importance of the project and the topic for today's society, as well as the scope of the achievement.	The narrator connects the visuals and explains the story sequence
Interview transcript				
Non-fiction article				

When students are clear about the way to analyse a text for its handling of the material, split the class into two groups and ask them to complete the last two texts in the list, a transcript of an ABC interview and a short non-fiction article from the Australian Geographic. Remind the Australian Geographic group to consider images as well as text.

iii) Ultimately, the success of these texts depends on whether they've persuaded the reader/viewer to see things their way.

Nowadays there are many different modes and media through which information can be presented—we don't just separate things into 'short story' and 'information article'. Websites, apps, games (digital and non-digital), tweets and posts are all ways of communicating factual information—and that's before you count the text types normally used by fictional material!

As they progress through high school, English students will be asked to evaluate the success of different types of text, as a way of making sure that they consider all text types before selecting the best one for their aim. Strong students will use some metacognition, a knowledge of which way works best for them as a learner.





Understanding activity

Ask students to consider which text type conveyed the information in the most memorable and engaging way. Remind them that everyone will have a different answer. Ask them to list the reasons that this text type worked best for them and then to reflect on what it tells them about themselves as learners. How could they use this information to work and study more effectively in the future?

3. The learning activity

Read the article ‘Water to the desert: Stories from the Goldfields Water Pipeline’ from the ABC Goldfields website. There are five stories mentioned directly and hyperlinks to many more. Ask students to work alone or in pairs and to choose one story from the selection (no double-ups, though). They should imagine that Bridget O’Connor extends her speech to include more stories from later in the pipeline’s history.

BRIDGET: My father’s achievement links people across the Western Australia. Their stories fuel the great pipeline of Australian life, running from sea to desert, wheat belt to goldfield, watering our continent with history and humanity, and hope.

Students should write Bridget’s next line, introducing their story, and compose a tableau with a few brief lines conveying their narrative, which could be added to the scene in the museum.

4. Rounding up

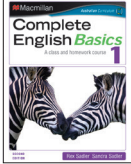
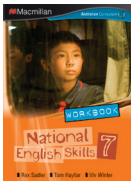

This play has some great visual techniques in it for budding dramatists or those who simply like imagining the visual presentation of drama, but for English students its real genius lies in the compression of a big story into a very small text. As students go on through high school, their texts often become rambling and wordy—Sue Murray’s play, and the three texts which support this lesson, show that you can use economy, precision and technique to convey complex things in accessible and engaging terms.

Assessment ideas

- i) CY O’Connor was a brilliant man, unjustly treated. Give students an image of him (Google his name and a standard portrait appears) and ask them to compose a creative piece using the portrait as a stimulus. They should explain, in his own words, what he’s thinking as he has his photograph taken. You may like to give them a brief biography of his life, which was interesting but cut tragically short. Assess them on how effectively they draw in their knowledge of him, and how well they use language.
- ii) There is a good collection of poetry inspired by the Goldfields Water Pipeline available [online](#). Some of the poems are contemporary with O’Connor and others come from the long history of life along the Pipeline. Give students one poem and ask them to explain (perhaps in structured paragraphs) how the poetic techniques are used to represent themes of harshness, water, achievement and so on. Or give students two poems—one from the past and a modern poem—and ask them to point out how poetic writing about the Pipeline has changed, and suggest why.
- iii) The play uses several metaphors to describe the project and CY O’Connor’s attitude to it: water pressure, pipe dream and lifeline. Ask students to take one of these metaphors and write a creative piece about the significance of water to Australians today, drawing on the metaphor to inform the structure or content of their work.

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.

	<p>Complete English Basics 1 (2nd edn)</p>	<p>Unit 6: Feelings and emotions, pp35–9 Unit 18: House and home, pp107–12</p>
	<p>National English Skills 7</p>	<p>Unit 1: Texts—purpose and audience, pp1–3 Unit 2: Texts and contexts, pp9–15 Unit 5: Informing, pp38–42 Unit 10: Multimedia texts, pp82–4</p>
	<p>English Workbook 1 (3rd edn)</p>	<p>Unit 3: Reading: 'medicine for the soul', p81, p93 Unit 4: Imaginative and informative texts, pp129–30</p>



Linked texts

Water Pressure could support and relate to the following Board of Studies prescribed texts for Stage 4 (among many others)

- *Skellig*, David Almond
- *Tuck Everlasting*, Natalie Babbitt
- *Life Bytes*, edited by Alwyn Evans
- *Refuge*, Libby Gleeson
- *The Singing Hat*, Tohby Riddle
- *Australian Imaginings*, Jill Bryant
- *Tough Stuff*, Kirsty Murray, illustrated by Harry Harrison

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