



BIG DRAMAS second edition

Mango Time

TEACHER NOTES *by Anna McHugh*

Suitable	for Year 8/9 (late Stage 4 or early Stage 5)
Difficulty	Text language ●●●●● Lesson concepts ●●●●●
Genre	Social issues drama
Themes	Social issues (multiculturalism, racism, bullying); culture and identity; school experiences (bullying, new schools, growing confidence and self-assertion); first person narrator, timeslip, autobiography in drama
Cast	10 characters (nominally female), chorus

Why choose this play?

Sue Murray's short social-issues drama *Mango Time* will engage even reluctant English students with its accessible language and characters. Students will recognise familiar social and emotional situations in the protagonist's experience of racist bullying, and can draw on their own experiences of inclusion and exclusion. The upbeat ending affirms the possibility of improvement for both bully and victim, and there's opportunity for both visual and verbal comedy throughout.

Teachers will value the play as a related text about issues such as multiculturalism, racism and empowerment (especially of girls and women). *Mango Time* also works well to explore literary techniques such as dramatic narrators, the use of a chorus, and time shifts in dramatic texts. The use of a chorus allows all members of a class to participate in reading aloud or acting the text.

Practical considerations

A number of sensitivities may be raised, including experiences of bullying; problems of racism, particularly in small communities; parent-sanctioned bullying; and issues of unemployment in rural Australia. The text does not specifically address experiences of racism towards Indigenous Australians. The protagonist is an Australian girl of Fijian-Indian background, but this part can be read by any student willing to identify with the character.

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



Teaching *Mango Time* by Sue Murray

Learning objectives

Students will:

- explore the meaning of visual language in a playscript and imagine different ways of realising this on stage
- understand that visual and verbal languages do not always support each other, and that this can be part of a complex message as the play seeks to represent aspects of the world
- practice identifying elements of both visual and verbal languages in a short scene, and reflect on their joint effect on audience reaction.



Meeting outcomes: Australian Curriculum—English

Year 9 content descriptions	Literacy: Interpreting, analysing, evaluating	ACELT1745	Explore and explain the combinations of language and visual choices that authors make to present information, opinions and perspectives in different texts.
	Literature: Literature and context	ACELT1633	Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts.
Cross-curriculum priorities	Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia	OI.7	Australians play a significant role in social, cultural, political and economic developments in the Asia region.
	Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia	OI.8	Australians of Asian heritage have influenced Australia's history and continue to influence its dynamic culture and society.
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.
	Personal and social capability		Students develop personal and social capability as they learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. The capability involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, establishing and building positive relationships.



1. Approaching the text

Perform a class read-through of the text, marking it into sections as you go. Each section should correspond roughly to one of 21-year-old Manjari's brief apostrophes to the audience. The lesson activity requires students to analyse a short section of the play in pairs or threes, so you need enough sections to allot the whole play to the class.

2. Introducing ideas

i) Verbal language builds characters

Begin by asking how we get to know characters in a drama—it's mostly by what they say.

Understanding activity

Ask students to list the building blocks of a character's language. They might include:

Content: e.g. high or low register, expressed by a choice of 'in-group' or general listener topic, socially appropriate or inappropriate topics, and private or public voice-orientation.

Spoken language: elements like accent, tone and volume.

Shared language: includes the speaker's listening aspect, expressed in turn-taking or interruptions, open or closed questions, and allusions to cultural norms (sometimes called a *shibboleth*, a word pronounced only by people 'in the know'. By extension, it's a test of political views, such as " 'everyone' is anti-asylum seeker").

Mechanics: includes things like language games, e.g. rhetorical questions, puns, loaded questions, and how comfortable these make the speaker and listener with each other.

ii) Visual language builds meaning

Now explain that there's a second language at play in the drama: visual language. Space on the stage can be thought of as a blank page, and the actors and props as words and syntax. Working with play texts means working with two languages; readers, directors and viewers must check what the other language is saying before they make a claim about what one language communicates.

Understanding activity

Give students an example of visual space: the lighting of the Olympic flame at the Games' opening ceremony. Together, describe what viewers see in this part of the ceremony, and what meanings can be drawn from it. You might include:

- Huge space of the stadium which evokes a Greek temple
- The long flight of steps to the flame which builds apprehension and reverence
- Last runner is the focal point, celebrating the human being and the human body
- Lighting the flame symbolically connects the athlete with the flame, which stands for purity, energy, power, the divine etc.

iii) Two languages compete or complement

Finally, explain that the two languages working together convey one perspective on the drama and help to shape the audience's opinion. These languages can present complementary or contrasting messages—supporting, modifying or undermining each other.





Understanding activity

Ask the class quickly to fill in this table (available to download). The entries in italics suggest likely answers:

Visual language	Verbal language	Support, modify, or undermine ?	Explain
<i>Manjari and Miss Kent standing in front of world map.</i>	<i>'I mean, look at you! You're Indian, dear'.</i>	<i>Modify</i>	<i>The visual language suggests that the whole world is open to the child, and the teacher is the guide to this, but the verbal language suggests that the teacher will only allow the student to belong to a small part of it.</i>
<i>Sherona enters, eating gum lollies out of a packet.</i>	<i>'What are you doing here, Mango Tree?'</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Both verbal and visual language confirm the greed and ignorant unpleasantness of Sherona.</i>
<i>Manjari enters the playground, in which chorus members are playing games.</i>	<i>'Dirt! C'mon, let's dig a hole and plant the mango tree!'</i>	<i>Undermine</i>	<i>The visual language of children at play is undermined by the viciousness of the words.</i>

3. The learning activity

Give pairs or small groups a section of the play, and ask them to determine:

- how verbal and visual language shape character and convey authorial perspective
- whether one language supports, modifies or undermines the claims of the other
- what the audience's eventual opinion is at the end of the scene.

Students could tabulate their findings as shown above, then write a structured paragraph explaining how the two languages influence the audience's reaction.

4. Rounding up

Ask each group to read one example of how the two languages interact in their scene. Together the class should have produced a complete close reading of how verbal and visual language are used in *Mango Time*. If time allows, round up by asking whether verbal and visual languages generally supported, modified or undermined each other in the play, and what this might be suggesting about the world around them.

Assessment ideas

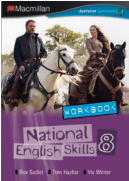
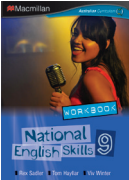
- Teacher selects an appropriate clip from a film (such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Ever After*, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Red Dog*, *The Cup (Phörpa)*, *The Princess Bride* or *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*) in which visual and verbal languages support, modify or undermine each other. Students must identify which of the three relationships predominate in the scene and how it affects the audience's reaction. Drawing on the elements of spoken and spatial language discussed in the lesson, students may enter their observations of the scene in a table like the one above, but should be assessed on:
 - the accuracy of their observations
 - the fluency with which they use the meta-language of visual and verbal language
 - the coherence of their argument about the languages' effect on audience reaction to the scene.



- ii) Ask students to choose a clip from a movie or play (easily found on YouTube, although beware of copyright restrictions), which should be no more than 2 minutes long, and present the clip to the class in a 5-minute oral presentation (including the clip time), explaining how the verbal and visual languages play off against each other to inform audience reaction.
- iii) A written assessment opportunity would be to ask students to select a 3-minute clip from a movie, to remove the dialogue, and replace it with a soundtrack which either supports, undermines or modifies the visual message of the scene. Students should write a reflection explaining what effect they hoped to create and why they selected these elements.

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 Macmillan 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.

	National English Skills 8	Unit 2: Visual texts, pp 9–11 Unit 16: Drama, pp 139–44
	National English Skills 9	Unit 16: Drama, pp 166–74

Further reading

A '[visual literacy toolbox](#)' from the University of Maryland, directed to teachers in the US and abroad. It has a number of online activities, activity plans and learning objectives along with a bank of questions which allows students to explore and test themselves on the components of visual literacy.

The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance, P Allain and J Harvie (2006), is a bumper book of theatrical and performance criticism, history and terminology which can be drawn on by teachers of Drama, English, Art, History and Media Studies. Entries for 'mise en scène' and 'visual theatre' are relevant to this lesson.

Linked texts

Mango Time could support and relate to the following NSW Board of Studies prescribed texts for Stage 4 (among many others):

- *Parvana*, Deborah Ellis
- *Nips XI*, Ruth Starke



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