

DARK EMU

Study Guide

for teachers and students



bangarra
DANCE THEATRE

Dark Emu Study Guide

The purpose of this study guide is to provide information and contextual background about the themes explored in Bangarra Dance Theatre’s production of *Dark Emu*. Reading the guide and responding to the questions proposed in Part 2 and in Part 4 will assist teachers and students to think critically about the work and form personal responses. We encourage the audience to engage emotionally and imaginatively with the work, and to embrace the many interrelated themes, stories and issues that are woven into the production.

This study guide also proposes perspectives and provides historical viewpoints sourced from a number of historians and writers about Aboriginal agriculture, aquaculture and land management. However it is important to note that Bangarra’s *Dark Emu* is a creative interpretation of these themes, breathing the essence of culture through the dance, design, music and sound aspects of the production. For full details about the performance please view the [Dark Emu program](#) on the Bangarra website.

We hope you enjoy *Dark Emu*.

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Australian Curriculum links

Cross Curricula priorities: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander histories and countries, Sustainability.

General Capabilities: Intercultural Understanding, Critical and Creative thinking.

Learning areas: The Arts (Dance, Music, Visual Arts), Science, Humanities and Social Science, English.

Curriculum links refer to Stages 4 and 5.

Part 1

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE – FOUNDED 1989.

Bangarra Dance Theatre was founded by American dancer Carole Y. Johnson, who first toured to Australia in the early 1970s with the New York- based Eleo Pomare Dance Company. As a young African American woman, Johnson had experienced the full impact of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and as a dance artist, had been part of the proliferation of new modern dance exponents across America who were focused on freeing dance from its institutionalised bases and using dance to make commentary on the contemporary world. Johnson knew the capacity of dance as an empowering communication and advocacy platform and she was a skilled activist.

During her visit to Australia in 1972, she was asked to conduct a number of dance workshops in the inner city Redfern Aboriginal community. These workshops were very successful and led to her creation of a new dance production that depicted the plight of Australia's Aboriginal people. *The Challenge – Embassy Dance* was about the Black Moratorium for Black Rights initiated by Australia's workers' unions in 1972, and the fight to maintain the presence of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra.

Johnson decided to move to Australia permanently and in 1976 established the Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Scheme, which was later to become the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association – known today as NAISDA Dance College. Around the same time, black theatre makers, playwrights, writers, and actors were creating works that reflected their culture in both its pre- and post-colonial states. Australia's settler history narrative was being given a serious shake up through this creative surge of Indigenous artists, who were intent of revealing the largely ignored truths about the colonisation of this land and the new issues around contemporary Indigenous life.

By the 1980s, NAISDA had developed a performance arm called the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, which showcased the development of students into professional dancers and also gave opportunities for these dancers to develop as choreographers. Then in 1989, Johnson founded a separate fully professional company, Bangarra Dance Theatre. Bangarra is a Wiradjuri word that means 'to make fire'. In 1991, Stephen Page was appointed Artistic Director and in the same year he premiered his first work for the company, *Up Until Now*. Page continues to lead Bangarra to this day.

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE IN 2018

Today, Bangarra is one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for its powerful dancing, distinctive theatrical voice and utterly unique soundscapes, music and design. The company is recognised globally for productions that combine the spirituality of traditional culture with contemporary forms.

Bangarra provides the opportunity for people of all cultural backgrounds to engage in a contemporary experience of the world's oldest living culture. The company has been a major contributor to the development of contemporary Indigenous performance, nurturing the careers of hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait professional artists, including dancers, choreographers, composers and designers. In over two decades, Bangarra has produced over 35 original works for its repertoire, collaborated on the creation of new productions with other Australian performing arts companies such as The Australian Ballet and the Sydney Theatre Company, and played an integral role in opening ceremonies of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the 2018 Commonwealth Games. In 2016, Bangarra created its first feature film, *Spear*.

Bangarra is supported with funding through the Australia Council (the federal Government's arts funding and advisory body), Create NSW (NSW arts policy and funding body), a number of private philanthropic organisations and donors. The company also derives earnings from performance seasons, special events and touring. Bangarra is also supported by several corporate partners. Based at Walsh Bay in Sydney, Bangarra presents performance seasons in Australian capital cities, regional towns and remote areas, and has also taken its productions to many places around the world including Europe, Asia and USA.

PART 2

STORY / HISTORY / NARRATIVE

Narrative is both about what we put into a story and what we leave out.

Greg Melleuish, in preparation for the Australian History Summit, 2006.

Since the first Europeans started to visit the Australian continent over 400 years ago, and the subsequent British settlement in the late 18th century, the Australian national narrative has been a fierce and furious work-in-progress. The history of Australia is a story that is under constant revision as evidence is revealed, considered and often contested. Contradictions of accepted truths are frequently proposed and examined, sometimes causing a major shift in peoples' understanding, sometimes changing nothing, and sometimes proving what everyone knew in the first place.

Challenge and controversy over Australian history has never been far from a political agenda and politicians have used history in a number of contexts to advocate for change, or for continuity. Historical information and/or perspective can consciously be manipulated to support a political, social or economic policy, and can also *unconsciously* be taken into the national narrative to become part of the 'story' that either supports or deconstructs positions of power. Primary source discovery can be exposed, camouflaged or blatantly denied. As society shifts its compass, and seeks to know the truth, knowledge barriers come down and new histories are written. In this respect 'official' history is an interesting concept. Is 'unofficial' history the voice barking in the background, unsettling mythologies and disrupting notions of national identity?

Bruce Pascoe's book, *Dark Emu BLACK SEEDS: agriculture or accident?* was published in 2014. Challenging some of the most assumed and accepted 'truths' in regard to Aboriginal people and their ways of life prior to European settlement, and armed with compelling evidence from an impressive body of historiographical research, the book shatters the myth that refers to Aboriginal society as being primarily (if not exclusively) a hunter-gatherer society, foraging for food, killing wild game and not engaging in agriculture or sedentism.

Building on the work of contemporary historians Rupert Gerritsen and Bill Gammage, as well as earlier history writers, Pascoe also sourced first-hand writings of the explorers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and spoke with a number of Elders and senior Indigenous community members. The result is a book that illustrates a world of highly sophisticated agricultural systems, land and water management strategies, sustainable fishing practices, construction methods and domestic living arrangements.

The title *Dark Emu* refers to *Baiame*, the dark shape in the Milky Way that resembles the spirit emu who left the earth after Creation. This practice of looking at the space between the stars is related to the themes in the book *Dark Emu*, to illustrate the way colonial settlers viewed the land for what could be exploited and reassigned to produce food, excavation of raw materials for development, and of course ultimately, to gain economic return. They did not see what was already there and they chose not to learn.

'Largely ignored was the knowledge of land and water management possessed by Indigenous minds as the colonial project organised the new settler relationship to the land under the dictates of Western capital – speculation, exploitation, alienation and profit.'

Leon Batchelor, 'Rethinking Aboriginal Land and Infrastructure' Inner Sydney Voice, Winter 2018.

Seeing the southern continental land as empty of productive use, and the Aboriginal people as not part of the 'civilised' world was analogous to not seeing the spirit of the land, the owners of the land, and the care and management of the land over thousands of years. And this blinkered perception was not innocent ignorance in any way. It supported the British settlement project in line with imperialist claims, appropriating a right to colonise and assuming the right to govern.

Bangarra Dance Theatre's *Dark Emu* invites the viewer to experience the spirit of the dark emu *Baiame*, and all it represents, and think about the knowledge barriers that have clouded Western perspectives since European occupation. *Dark Emu* presents an opportunity to be interested to know more about the ways Aboriginal people have cared for, and drawn life from this land for over 60,000 years, and how the deep and enduring connection to Land through ancestry and culture is fundamentally critical to the future of this land.

The start of that (sic) journey is to allow the knowledge that Aboriginals did build houses, did cultivate crops, did sew clothes and were not hapless wanderers across the soil, mere hunter-gatherers. Aboriginals were intervening in the productivity of the country and what they learnt during that process over many thousands of years will be useful to us today. To deny Aboriginal agricultural and spiritual achievement is the single greatest impediment to inter-cultural understanding and, perhaps, Australian moral and economic prosperity.

Bruce Pascoe, Dark Emu BLACK SEEDS: agriculture or accident?, Magabala, 2014.

URBAN PRE-HISTORY

Many people would claim that Australia's urban history began with the first European settlement. In the late 18th century, Europeans saw Australia as a land without large buildings or recognisable infrastructure, and a people who did not present in the look, language and behaviours of Europeans. Australia was proclaimed by the British as being Terra Nullius (*L. 'nobody's land'*). The fact that it took until the 1993 federal government's Mabo decision for this term to be over-ruled in law demonstrates the overwhelming strength of a socio-political agenda that sought to bypass any acknowledgement of Australia's Indigenous people as being the First Nation of this country, and ignore their complex, scientific and successful traditions that enabled them to live sustainably.

One of the signifiers of urban history is the construction of settlements and housing, and one of the most enduring mythologies in Australian history is that Aboriginal people were exclusively a hunter-gather society. However, in the diaries of the early explorers there are numerous descriptions of clusters of huts and permanent settlements across many areas of Australia both coastal and inland. Large villages consisting of permanent dwellings that would have supported around 800 to 1000 people were reported by Charles Sturt, and other such housing is documented in the journals and reports of explorers Thomas Mitchell, Willem de Vlamingh, Nicolas Baudin, Daniel Brock and Lawrence Wells to name a few.

They "... were made of strong boughs with a thick coating of clay over leaves and grass. They were entirely impervious to wind and rain, and were really comfortable, being evidently erections of a permanent kind to which the inhabitants frequently returned".

Charles Sturt, 'Two expeditions into the interior of southern Australia', 1833.

The building of houses for groups of people to live as a functioning community is purpose related to producing sustenance and shelter on a permanent or rotational basis. Locations that support food supply, access to water and other resources enable the practices of agriculture and aquaculture to develop. The pre-colonial Aboriginal agricultural economy was not based on individual or company ownership or competition and profit. This economy was developed *from* the land - not imposed *upon* it. It was sustainable, collectively managed and environmentally sensitive. As European forms of farming took over the land, the land suffered. Hard-hooved grazing animals destroyed the soil, blow flies came with the animals and brought disease, fertilisers contaminated the water ways. Aboriginal farming collapsed under this assault and the villages that the explorers described in their journals were abandoned.

Discussion starter:

- **What can be learned from knowing more about pre-colonial Aboriginal urban settlements, architecture and land management?**

ABORIGINAL AGRICULTURE

It is a commonly held view that Indigenous Australians in traditional circumstances never engaged in food production, specifically in terms of developing or adopting agriculture. Based on this assumption there had been extended debate on the supposed reasons for this. Such debates are meaningless if the initial premise is incorrect. And it may well be. Furthermore, if that assumption is incorrect it has significant implications for theories on the origins of agriculture.

Rupert Gerritson, *Australia and the Origins of Agriculture*, 2008.

The practice of agriculture before the time of white settlement is rarely noted in historical narratives about Australia despite there being considerable evidence found in explorers' journals and reports, and the fact that many preserved traditional practices exist to this day in a number of Aboriginal communities.

One of the most popular crops was Murnong (also known as the yam daisy). Murnong resembles the contemporary sweet potato with the texture of a water chestnut. It was grown and harvested in many of the wetter areas of the country, and is still enjoyed today in some parts of Australia. The tuber/root is full of nutrition, and the leaves and flowers are also edible.

Grain production was carried out in the drier areas. The *Panara* (grass people) collected and propagated seed, re-directed water to the crop, and harvested the grains which included sub-species of millet and barley. Grains were crushed and used to make paste or baked to produce bread. Surpluses were stored in specially constructed storage buildings and traded with other groups.

As the colonists spread across the grasslands and brought grazing animals onto the land, the ground that supported these highly nutritious crops was laid fallow and the soil structure was changed forever.

(at the time of colonisation), at least 19 different species of plant were being cultivated by at least 21 different identifiable Indigenous groups. These included species of yam, sweet potato and its relatives (such as "bush potato") "native millet", ngardu, "bush tomatoes" and "bush onions".

Rupert Gerritson, *Australasian Science*, July/August 2010.

In 1844, the explorer Sturt led an expedition party onto the Stony desert, reaching the point which is now called Cooper's Creek. The creek was completely dry and the party was dangerously fatigued and weak. They came across a large village of Aboriginal people who immediately offered them water (from underground water holes), roast ducks and cake. (Sturt, in Pascoe, p.75)

We do not know exactly how long Aboriginal people were roasting ducks and baking bread and cake, but we can speculate that perhaps these were the first people to do so. Aboriginal pre-history presents not only the challenge of sourcing evidence, but the willingness for history writers to see past embedded bias and trust the voice of those who hold the knowledge.

Discussion starter:

- **There is a growing body of evidence that challenges the broadly accepted view that Australian Aboriginal people were essentially a nomadic hunter-gatherer society, living off the meat of wild animals and fish and native plants. What are some of the reasons that this mythology was allowed to become so generally accepted?**

ABORIGINAL AQUACULTURE

Evidence of Indigenous peoples' fishing practices can be seen today in many places throughout the country, but one of the most famous of these is at Brewarrina in New South Wales, where there are fish traps said to be over 40,000 years old. Brewarrina is located on the Barwon river about 800 kilometers north west of Sydney.

There were hundreds of traps such as these throughout the Australian river systems and their capacity to harvest fish to feed thousands of people is not disputed. The technology involved an intricate construction of river stones that would drive the fish into shallow waters for easy capture. Also taken

into account was the amount of fish stock left in the river system to enable spawning and maintenance for future harvests.

Other forms of fish traps consisted of platforms built into the river bank and connected to a series of gates and tunnels where fish would be corralled for easy extraction. Again the amounts were controlled to take into account changing seasons and periods of drought.

In the Eden area of southern New South Wales, Yuin Elders talk about the abalone fishing, and special cooking methods employed to avoid the meat being tough. In Victoria, Aboriginal people employed some very innovative ways to net and spear crayfish, and stories of automatic fishing machines further reveal the vast amount of knowledge that has been lost as Europeans choose to ignore Aboriginal ingenuity. As we look at the current issues around fish stocks, land degradation and salinity we realise how much poorer we are for the lost knowledge.

Discussion starter:

- **Have a look at some images of Aboriginal fish traps, and research the technology that enabled their function. Could this technology be used today? How could Western culture make this technology work in a market economy?**

THE ECONOMICS OF COLLABORATIVE FARMING

In his book *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, Bill Gammage dissects the idea that Aboriginal people were not farmers, and shows evidence that Aboriginal people knew this country in ways that Europeans have never understood. With diametrically opposed policies about land use and land care, a great deal of fundamental knowledge has been lost, and the environmental impact has been significant.

If we look very hard, and listen to Elders and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, we can see and appreciate the value of Aboriginal land care and management, and learn from the very sophisticated practices that were developed over tens of thousands of years. These practices were based on a deep knowledge of plants, soils, seasons, natural resources, river systems and population. What one group of people had in surplus could be shared with another group who were in need. Water, feeding grounds, fishing nets and traps operated with efficiency and sustainability as priorities.

“They shaped Australia to ensure continuity, balance, abundance and predictability. All are now in doubt”.

Bill Gammage, The Conversation, 8 Dec 2011.

Using the land by changing it, and using the land by managing it are different. ‘Fire stick’ farming works in Australia – but not in Europe, so to the early settlers and explorers the concept of burning to regenerate was unknown. In Australia, controlled burning regenerates the bush to produce more food – for both game and people. It reduces fuel to prevent fire when it’s not required, and is practiced to the pattern of the seasons not the schedule of transportation, sales listings, buyer demand and profit outcome. Aboriginal farming is framed as an economic paradigm that is based on the needs of the community, as opposed to the needs of individuals or businesses. Aboriginal farming was practiced collaboratively, to maintain balance and abundance.

While it is difficult for mainstream contemporary society to see the vast so-called uninhabitable areas of Australia as being able to sustain large numbers of people, this is exactly what did occur. Knowing Country, respecting Country and living collectively in harmony with Country is a policy for land and resource management that cared for Country. Flood waters were stored and dispersed, crops were sown and harvested according to the natural climate patterns, and an economy of sharing and trading operated effectively and sustainably.

... more than the physical management of a geographical area it encompasses looking after all of the values, places, resources, stories, and cultural obligations associated with that area, as well as associated processes of spiritual renewal, connecting with ancestors, food provision and maintaining kin relations.

Altman, Buchanan and Larsen, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU (2007)

Discussion starter:

In the official [Basin Plan 2012](#), the Murray-Darling Basin Authority acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Murray-Darling Basin. “... *in the words of Ngarrindjeri elder Tom Trevorrow: “our traditional management plan was don’t be greedy, don’t take any more than you need and respect everything around you. That’s the management plan—it’s such a simple management plan, but so hard for people to carry out.”*”

Why do you think Mr Trevorrow suggests this is ‘so hard for people carry out’?



Tyrel Dulvarie and Beau Dean Riley Smith
Photo: Dan Boud



In the foreground: Yolanda Lowatta & Lillian Banks
Photo: Dan Boud

Part 3

CREATING DARK EMU

The creative process involved in the making of Bangarra's production of *Dark Emu* is inspired and motivated by stories and issues of Indigenous Australia. Making a new Bangarra work is always complex and challenging due to the sheer breadth of material that is being explored in the process of research and discussion, and because the task to find and awaken the unique spirit of the work that will tell the world a cultural story must be made with ultimate care and respect.

Bruce Pascoe's book *Dark Emu BLACK SEEDS: agriculture or accident?* provides a deep and inspiring well of information for Bangarra's *Dark Emu*. Fueled further by information passed down through Aboriginal communities, and discussions with a number of cultural consultants, the creative team of Bangarra's choreographers, dancers and designers start their creative process by examining themes and ideas that represent the stories that are needing to be told, and at the same time pouring their own individual responses into the mix.

Drawing up fragments of ideas and weaving them into sound, design and dance is a delicate and highly focused process. Words are important. They can become banners in the mind, and drive abstract ideas into more substantial concepts. These ideas and concepts start to gain traction, building in strength as more layers are uncovered. Textures, sound and light are imagined and the creative threads start to weave into the fabric of the work as a whole.

Some ideas are quite specific, such as the story about the Bogong moth season where people would capture thousands of moths in caves, harvest them, use the oil on their skin, eat the highly nutritious meat or ground it into a paste to be preserved as cakes. Other ideas were more abstract. For example, the idea of the sky looking at the earth and the earth being reflected in the sky. What would that look like? What would it mean? What is the energy that passes between, and how can we relate that to our own individual place in the world?

Gradually the creative process enables the work to take on a force of its own. The artists start to listen to the spirit of the dance and trust that spirit. It is an organic process and there are often surprises along the way.

Bangarra's *Dark Emu* presents a world that has been mostly extinguished from history. A world where this land was cared for and managed well by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and where the economy of the land was based on reciprocity, balance and deep knowledge. The audience is offered the chance to think about this world, and learn and value Aboriginal culture for its ingenuity, loss, beauty and hope.

The creative team for *Dark Emu* consists of an artistic director/choreographer, two additional choreographers, a dramaturg, a music/sound composer, set designer, costume designer and lighting designer. As well, there are a number of cultural consultants, the author of the book *Dark Emu*, a rehearsal director and eighteen dancers: all contributing to the creative process. It is a difficult process and there are no short-cuts. There are deadlines to reach and there is limited time to make the work. In the early stages a great deal of discussion and experimentation occurs among the creative team. The director offers ideas, the dramaturg brings information from research and reflection, and the designers try various illustrations and experiments based on the ideas that emerge and develop.

Once in the studio, the physical language enters the process and the dancers and choreographers play with movement responses to the ideas. As each movement motif develops into a sequence and takes on a structure, the arc of the production starts to form. The design elements begin to coalesce with the choreographic and sound/music elements. The final version of the production is usually complete just before the premiere. This is not unusual as every moment is important so every moment is used.

After the premiere, the new work will continue to grow and mature, and the artists will discover new layers to their interpretations. The life of a work is not over when the performance season is over because the impact for audience and artists will live on and move with them into their next experience.

PERFORMING DARK EMU

Dark Emu is structured as 14 interlinked sections inspired by stories of respect and connection. Each section illustrates lines of cultural lineage and traditional knowledge relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationship with the land and the environment of this country.

SECTIONS:

Dark Spirit of the Sky	<i>Looking into the void</i>
Ceremony of Seed	<i>Working with the cycle of life</i>
Forged by Fire	<i>Fertilised by ash</i>
Bogong Moth Harvest	<i>Oiling and feasting</i>
Crushed by ignorance	<i>The calamity of disregard</i>
Escape Through Dust	<i>A resilient lone spirit prevails, moving onwards</i>
Bowls of Mourning	<i>Tears mix with the earth in caps of clay</i>
Trampled by indifference	<i>A scourge of hooves, of flies and disease</i>
Rebirth Ritual	<i>Carefully we are restored</i>
Rocks of Knowledge	<i>Weaving traps with stone and skill</i>
Whales of Fortune	<i>The pinnacle of reciprocity, trust is shared with the cetaceans</i>
Smashed by Colonization	<i>A final, climatic massacre, an uncomprehending destruction</i>
Resilience of Culture	<i>A wonder and power that nurtures earth, sea and sky</i>
Baime	<i>The spirit of resilience and hope, singing up the land</i>

THANK YOU MY COUNTRY

I am the rock that holds the hear, after the sun has set
Thank you, my country

I am the grain that takes the oil, after the pouring is done
Thank you, my country

I am the stone soaking up water, long since retrieved from the pool
Thank you, my country

I am the spirit of country, still giving all life to the land
Thank you my country

CREATIVE TEAM (for full Bios see [Dark Emu program](#).)

STEPHEN PAGE

Artistic Director & Choreographer

Stephen is a descendant of the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambah Nation from South East Queensland. In 1991 Stephen was appointed Artistic Director of Bangarra, creating most of the works in repertoire and leading the company in its development and growth over the last 27 years.

DANIEL RILEY

Choreographer

Daniel traces his heritage back through the Wiradjuri nation of Central New South Wales. Since graduating from Queensland University of Technology in 2006, Daniel has danced for Leigh Warren & Dancers, Bangarra Dance Theatre, and Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre UK.

YOLANDE BROWN

Choreographer

Yolande is a descendant of the Bidjara Clan of the Kunja Nation, Central Queensland, with French and Celtic ancestry. Yolande was a Bangarra dancer from 1999 to 2015, and has choreographed X many works for the company. She is also instrumental in delivering the company's Winhanga-rra Teachers' Workshops and developing the new Knowledge Ground digital platform, which will be launched this year.

STEVE FRANCIS

Composer

Steve is a composer and sound designer originally from Adelaide. And has worked with Bangarra on 13 of its productions since 1997, many these in collaboration with David Page. Steve has worked with most of Australia's premiere theatre companies, and has composed for many film and television productions, and major public events.

JACOB NASH

Set Designer

Jacob is a Murri man who grew up in Brisbane. He graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) Design Course in 2005. In 2010, he designed the set for *of earth & sky* for Bangarra and received a Green Room Award for Best Design in Dance. He was appointed Artist-in-Residence at Bangarra the following year and is now Head of Design.

JENNIFER IRWIN

Costume Designer

Australian costume designer Jennifer Irwin's career spans 38 years designing for drama, opera, dance, ballet and the largest spectacular events ever staged in Australia. Jennifer's work has appeared in more than 70 countries and 500 cities including The Royal Opera House, London, Lincoln Center NYC, City Center NYC, Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Sydney Opera House.

SIAN JAMES-HOLLAND

Lighting Designer

Sian is an Australian based lighting designer, collaborating on productions both nationally and overseas. Sian has created work for a variety high-profile companies and projects, and is currently completing a Masters of Architectural Science (illumination) at The University of Sydney.

ALANA VALENTINE

Dramaturg

Alana Valentine has previously worked as dramaturg with Bangarra on *Bennelong* (2017), *Patyegarang* (2014), and *ID* from *Belong* (2011). As a playwright, she has collaborated with many of Australia leading First nations artists and her works have been produced by major Australian theatre companies.

Part 4

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

1. Refer to the list of references, further readings and interviews provided on page 12 in relation to Indigenous agriculture, aquaculture and farming, Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, land care and environmental science. If you are able to access a copy of Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu BLACK SEEDS: Agriculture or accident?* you could familiarise yourself with some of the main themes.
2. Explore the list of discussion starters in Part 2 and conduct discussions either as a class or in small focus groups, incorporating contemporary social-cultural perspectives that might emerge as conversations develop.
3. Discuss the Australian historical narrative evolution, examining how the 'narrative/s' have been revised and renovated over time.
 - 3.1 Over the course of Australia's post settlement times, what are some of the mythologies have been created and challenged?
 - 3.2 Are there continuing tensions between Western capitalist society (economic, cultural, social, political) and changing levels of awareness and respect for First Nation communities and their culture? If so, how are these tensions manifested?
 - 3.3 Build the discussion to incorporate a range of perspectives and encourage students to investigate the importance of being aware of the stories *within* the stories.
 - 3.4 Discuss how history is often a contested practice that requires thorough research as well as a level of objectivity and sensitivity.
 - 3.4 How can we investigate and re-investigate our history from multiple perspectives?

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Below are a few suggestions for post-show activities,

1. After experiencing Bangarra's dance theatre work *Dark Emu*, consider the themes and stories in the production and think about how they make you feel. How can the dance theatre form tell a story that is complex and largely based on historical record, but is abstract in presentation?
2. Is this a powerful form of story-telling? If so, why?
3. How do the dance, design and sound/music elements complement each other?
4. Were there any specific sections that made a particular impact on how you felt about something, stimulating a response that you weren't expecting?

REFERENCES, FURTHER READING AND LINKS

Interviews

NITV: Karina Marlow and Jericho Mandybur

<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2016/05/17/bruce-pascoe-storytelling-history-and-cultural-pride>

Conversation: Richard Fidler

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/conversations/bruce-pascoe/7134452>

Wheeler Centre: Tony Birch

<https://www.wheelercentre.com/broadcasts/podcasts/the-wheeler-centre/dark-emu-bruce-pascoe-and-tony-birch-in-conversation>

Podcasts

Word Up: ABC RN. Bruce Pascoe.

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/away/features/word-up/word-up/9591844>

Paper Tracker; 18 Oct 2017

<http://www.papertracker.com.au/radio/bruce-pascoe-and-dark-emu/>

Books

Dark Emu BLACK SEEDS: agriculture or accident? Bruce Pascoe, Magabala Books, 2014.

The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia, Bill Gammage, Allen & Unwin, 2012.

Australia and the Origins of Agriculture, Rupert Gerritson, British Archeological Reports International Series, Archeopress, Oxford, 2008

CURRICULUM LINKS

YEAR 7

History (Humanities and Social Sciences)

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- Students build on and consolidate their **understanding of historical inquiry** from previous years in depth, using a range of sources for the study of the ancient past ([ACDSEH001](#))
- The range of sources that can be used in an **historical investigation**, including archaeological and written sources ([ACDSEH029](#))
- **The nature of sources** for ancient Australia and what they reveal about Australia's past in the ancient period, such as the use of resources ([ACDSEH031](#))
- The importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACDSEH148](#))

HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Sequence **historical events**, developments and periods ([ACHHS205](#))
 - Identify a range of questions about the past to inform a **historical inquiry** ([ACHHS207](#))
 - Identify the **origin and purpose of primary and secondary sources** ([ACHHS209](#))
 - Locate, compare, select and **use information** from a range of sources as evidence ([ACHHS210](#))
 - **Draw conclusions** about the usefulness of sources ([ACHHS211](#))
-

The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse how choreographers use **elements of dance** and production elements to communicate intent ([ACADAR018](#))
- Identify and connect **specific features and purposes of dance** from contemporary and past times to explore viewpoints and enrich their dance-making, starting with dance in Australia and including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACADAR019](#))

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse composers' use of the elements of music and stylistic features when listening to and interpreting music ([ACAMUR097](#))
- Identify and connect **specific features and purposes of music** from different eras to explore viewpoints and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

VISUAL ARTS CONTENT

- Build on their awareness of how and why artists, craftspeople and designers realise their ideas through different visual representations, practices, processes and viewpoints
 - Design, create and evaluate visual solutions to selected themes and/or concepts through a variety of visual arts forms, styles, techniques and/or processes as they make and respond to visual artworks
-

Science

SCIENCE UNDERSTANDING

- Some of Earth's resources are renewable, including water that cycles through the environment, but others are non-renewable ([ACSSU116](#))

SCIENCE AS A HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

- Science knowledge can develop through collaboration across the disciplines of science and the contributions of people from a range of cultures ([ACSHE223](#))
 - Solutions to contemporary issues that are found using science and technology, may impact on other areas of society and may involve ethical considerations ([ACSHE120](#))
-

YEAR 8

English

LITERATURE

- Explore the ways that **ideas and viewpoints in literary texts** drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups ([ACELT1626](#))
- Explore the **interconnectedness of Country/Place, People, Identity and Culture** in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors ([ACELT1806](#))

RESPONDING TO LITERATURE

- Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate **opinions and arguments** about aspects of literary texts ([ACELT1627](#))
-

The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse how choreographers use **elements of dance** and production elements to communicate intent ([ACADAR018](#))
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of dance from contemporary and past times to explore **viewpoints** and enrich their dance-making, starting with dance in Australia and including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACADAR019](#))

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse composers' use of the **elements of music** and stylistic features when listening to and interpreting music ([ACAMUR097](#))
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of music from different eras to explore **viewpoints** and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACAMUR098](#))

VISUAL ARTS CONTENT

- Build on students' awareness of how and why artists, craftspeople and designers realise their ideas through different visual representations, practices, processes and viewpoints
- Design, create and evaluate visual solutions to selected themes and/or concepts through a variety of visual arts forms, styles, techniques and/or processes as they make and respond to visual artworks

Science

SCIENCE AS HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

- Science knowledge can develop through collaboration across the disciplines of science and the contributions of people from a range of cultures ([ACSHE226](#))

YEAR 9

English

LITERATURE

- Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1633](#))
- Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts ([ACELT1635](#))

CREATING TEXTS

- Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that present a point of view and advance or illustrate arguments, including texts that integrate visual, print and/or audio features ([ACELY1746](#))
-

History

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- The nature and extent of the movement of peoples in the period (slaves, convicts and settlers) ([ACOKFH015](#))
- The extent of European imperial expansion and different responses, including in the Asian region ([ACOKFH017](#))

MOVEMENT OF PEOPLES (1750 – 1901)

- Experiences of slaves, convicts and free settlers upon departure, their journey abroad, and their reactions on arrival, including the Australian experience ([ACDSEH083](#))
- The short and long-term impacts of the movement of peoples during this period ([ACDSEH085](#))

MAKING A NATION

- The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACDSEH020](#))
-

The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse a range of dance from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their dance making, starting with dance from Australia and including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider dance in international contexts ([ACADAR026](#))

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse a range of music from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider music in international contexts ([ACAMUR105](#))

VISUAL ARTS CONTENT

- Reflect on the development of different traditional and contemporary styles and how artists can be identified through the style of their artworks as they explore different forms in visual arts
 - Use historical and conceptual explanations to critically reflect on the contribution of visual arts practitioners as they make and respond to visual artworks
-

Science

SCIENCE AS A HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

- Scientific understanding, including models and theories, is contestable and is refined over time through a process of review by the scientific community ([ACSHE157](#))

SCIENCE ENQUIRY SKILLS

- Use knowledge of scientific concepts to draw conclusions that are consistent with evidence ([AC SIS170](#))
-

YEAR 10

English

LANGUAGE

- Evaluate the impact on audiences of different choices in the representation of still and moving images ([ACELA1572](#))

LITERATURE AND CONTEXT

- Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1639](#))
- Analyse and explain how text structures, language features and visual features of texts and the context in which texts are experienced may influence audience response ([ACELT1641](#))

INTERPRETING, ANALYSING, EVALUATING

- Identify and analyse implicit or explicit values, beliefs and assumptions in texts and how these are influenced by purposes and likely audiences ([ACELY1752](#))
-

The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse a range of dance from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their dance making, starting with dance from Australia and including dance of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider dance in international contexts
([ACADAR026](#))

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse a range of music from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider music in international contexts
([ACAMUR105](#))

History

HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Use chronological sequencing to demonstrate the relationship between events and developments in different periods and places ([ACHHS182](#))
- Process and synthesise information from a range of sources for use as evidence in an historical argument ([ACHHS188](#))
- Evaluate the reliability and usefulness of primary and secondary sources ([ACHHS189](#))

Science

SCIENCE AS A HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

- Values and needs of contemporary society can influence the focus of scientific research ([ACSHE230](#))

SCIENCE INQUIRY SKILLS

- Use knowledge of scientific concepts to draw conclusions that are consistent with evidence ([ACSIS204](#))
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