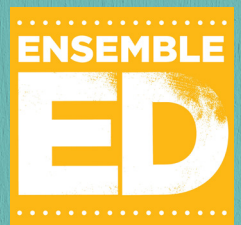


# MCGUFFIN PARK

BY SAM O'SULLIVAN | DIRECTED BY MARK KILMURRY



AN ENSEMBLE THEATRE  
EDUCATION RESOURCE  
BY SOPHIE KELLY





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## ICON LEGEND



Discussion  
Activity



Create and  
Perform



Reflection

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Ensemble Theatre proudly acknowledges the Cammeraigal people of the Eora nation as customary custodians of the land on which we stand and share our stories.

In harmony with the land and water, its seasons and cycles, the Cammeraigal people practiced their culture for thousands of years and the connection continues to this day.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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# PREFACE

This education resource for Ensemble Theatre's production of MCGUFFIN PARK, by Sam O'Sullivan, has been designed for secondary students and teachers across Australia. Exercises have been designed to encompass theoretical and practical components and can be applied to different stages of learning at the discretion of the teacher, class, and context.

## CURRICULUM LINKS

For NSW based students, MCGUFFIN PARK and its accompanying resources have links to the following syllabus outcomes within the NESA Curriculum:

### DRAMA

#### STAGE 4

Compulsory Study of Theatrical Form/Style (Political Theatre and Realism)

Making: 4.1.1, 4.1.3, 4.1.4

Performing: 4.2.2, 4.2.3

Appreciating: 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3

#### STAGE 5

Compulsory Study of Theatrical Form/Style (Political Theatre and Realism)

Making: 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.1.4

Performing: 5.2.1, 5.2.3

Appreciating: 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3

#### STAGE 6

Year 11 Theatrical Traditions and Performance Styles (Political Theatre and Realism)

Making: P1.3, P1.4, P1.6

Performing: P2.1, P2.4, P2.6

Critically Studying: P3.1, P3.2, P3.2, P3.4

Australian Drama and Theatre (Core Study) H1.3, H2.4, H3.1, H3.3, H3.4

### ENGLISH

#### STAGES 4 & 5

Study of Drama Outcomes 3, 5 and 8

Note: McGuffin Park could be used as a launching point for an interdisciplinary exploration of modern Australian politics in History and Society & Culture Units of Study.

## KEY COMPETENCIES

- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical understanding
- Collecting, analysis and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities
- Literacy

## KEY THEMES AND IDEAS

- Modern Australian Politics
- People Power
- Democracy and Political Process
- New Australian Theatre

# SYNOPSIS

In the small Australian town of McGuffin, the local council is thrown into disarray when the mayor suddenly resigns a week before the mid-term election, despite being a shoo-in to keep his seat. When a self-proclaimed 'sovereign citizen' with an anti-government agenda is revealed as next in line for the top job, two friends step up and announce their rival candidacies. Complicated pasts, a meddling journalist and blackmail rumours push friendships to the limit – can they handle the mess of politics? Or will their friendship crumble under the pressure? Buckle up for a bumpy election ride!

## CHARACTER LIST

### PERFORMED BY THOMAS CAMPBELL

Ken  
Bridget  
Banjo  
Bar Fly  
School Children  
Football Player  
Stephen  
Kirsty



### PERFORMED BY JAMIE OXENBOULD

Eric  
Seamus  
Survival Shop Customer  
Bertolt Brecht



### PERFORMED BY LIZZIE SCHEBESTA

Dayle  
Judy  
Susan  
Bakery Customer (Max)  
Kitty  
Mel  
Man in a Tin Foil Hat



### PERFORMED BY ELOISE SNAPE

Fiona

### PERFORMED BY SHAN-REE TAN

Jack  
Bar Fly  
School Children  
Football Player



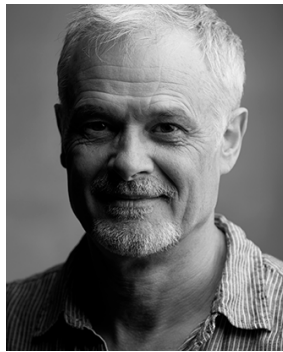


# MEET THE TEAM

## CREATIVES



**SAM O'SULLIVAN**  
PLAYWRIGHT



**MARK KILMURRY**  
DIRECTOR



**SARAH ODILLO MAHER**  
DRAMATURG



**SIMON GREER**  
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER



**TRUDY DALGLEISH**  
LIGHTING DESIGNER



**JESSICA DUNN**  
COMPOSER &  
SOUND DESIGNER



**LAUREN TULLOH**  
STAGE MANAGER



**LARA KYRIAZIS**  
ASSISTANT STAGE  
MANAGER



**EVELYN EVERAERTS-DONALDSON**  
COSTUME SUPERVISOR

## CAST



**THOMAS CAMPBELL**



**JAMIE OXENBOULD**



**LIZZIE SCHEBESTA**



**ELOISE SNAPE**



**SHAN-REE TAN**

# Q&A WITH SAM O'SULLIVAN, PLAYWRIGHT



## WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE MCGUFFIN PARK, SAM?

Democracy has copped a beating over the last decade or so and I wanted to write something that talked about the challenges it was currently facing, but also ultimately celebrated it. To paraphrase Winton Churchill, Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. And I think there are tactics at work today that are seriously threatening the institutions that keep democracy going. Democracy can be very messy but it's also precious and we need to remember to not take it for granted. If you think it's a chore, try one of the alternatives.

## ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS OF MCGUFFIN PARK IS YOUR USE OF BRECHTIAN OR EPIC THEATRE TECHNIQUES – CAN YOU EXPLAIN A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT THIS MEANS AND WHY YOU USED IT FOR THIS PLAY?

Brecht is known for creating political theatre and used the "verfremdungseffekt" or 'distancing technique' to encourage the audience to think about what they were watching, rather than feel. It's a broad term that covers anything that draws the audience out of the world of the play. We've mainly used narration that gives the audience more information about a character or undermines what they're saying because we want people to think about what other motivations characters might have. Politics is about tactics and the Verfremdungseffekt is a fun way of drawing that out.

## CAN YOU REMEMBER THE MOMENT YOU DECIDED YOU WERE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PLAYWRIGHT? WAS THERE A LIGHTBULB MOMENT? OR WAS IT SOMETHING YOU DISCOVERED OVER TIME?

My grandfather encouraged my writing from an early age and after training and working as an actor for many years it was a logical progression. These days, I consider myself very lucky to spend my time thinking up stories and characters while everyone else goes to work! It's the best job ever.

## ANY ADVICE FOR BUDDING PLAYWRIGHTS?

See lots of stuff. Read lots of stuff. Learn about genre. Learn about structure. And then get writing.

## AND FINALLY, SAM, IN THE OPENING SCENE OF YOUR PLAY, YOU REFER TO A "MCGUFFIN" – A DEVICE USED TO IDENTIFY AN ARBITRARY GOAL FOR A MAIN CHARACTER TO PURSUE IN A STORY. WHEN YOU WERE WRITING THIS PLAY, WHAT WAS YOUR "MCGUFFIN"?

Without completely giving the title of the play away, McGuffins aren't important. What's important is what you do to get the McGuffin.



MCGUFFIN PARK rehearsal photos - Prudence Upton



# Q&A WITH MARK KILMURRY, DIRECTOR

## CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PROCESS AS A DIRECTOR?

Well, my process depends on the play and will change depending on themes, characters and staging. But before rehearsal begins, I read the play many times, look up all references so I know what all the words mean if obscure or unfamiliar (particularly if a classic play), and make lots of notes. I may have a hunch about staging, maybe a visual idea of a scene and note that too. And before we step into the rehearsal room, I discuss ideas and thoughts with the creative team of set, costume, lighting, and sound designers. Once in the rehearsal room I like lots of discussions and detailing of the script and then up on the floor to block the play. The next stage is allowing actors to bring ideas into the space.



## AS A DIRECTOR, YOU'VE WORKED ON A WIDE RANGE OF PLAYS AND GENRES. WHAT MAKES THIS PLAY SO UNIQUE?

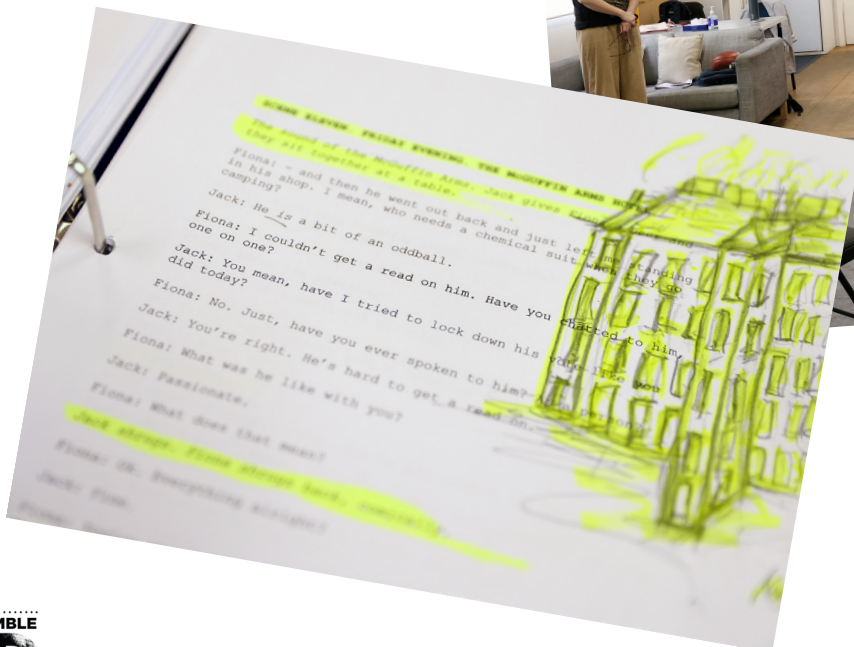
Sam O'Sullivan's play has a clever concept at its centre: we explore the *idea of staging a play* within the actual play itself. This 'Brechtian' notion is only a jumping off point though. Sam and I talked about how to present lots of characters with a small cast of 5 actors and how we might tell this funny and political story through physical theatre ideas. Sam also has written a very funny play and it is a joy to work on this, our second collaboration together.

## WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING THING ABOUT DIRECTING THIS PLAY?

As above! The way we need to make the story clear with doubling roles and telling a story that is part thriller and partly a look at political shenanigans in the run for mayor. It will be a good challenge!

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING YOUNG DIRECTORS?

Take your time. Read the play. Allow actors to have ideas, you don't need to know everything. Keep calm, keep the ball rolling, enjoy putting the work together and always respect each other and the process. In terms of career, do as much work as you can when you can and work with like-minded people. Create your own work if and when you can.



MCGUFFIN PARK rehearsal photos - Prudence Upton

# TEACHING AND LEARNING

## ACTIVITY 1 – SCENE STUDY – FINDING THE BEATS



### DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

In this excerpt from Scene 14, Fiona wrestles with the responsibility of her new role and the lengths to which people go to protect themselves or undermine others. In groups of 4, read through the scene and colour-code the moments that shift the mood of the scene. This shift might be a development in a character's understanding of something or someone; it might be a moment where something new is revealed; or it may even be a moment where the whole play shifts. This is called finding the 'beats' of a play. It is often a structure used in rehearsals to help bring clarity and precision to the telling of a story.

#### **SCENE FOURTEEN. LATER. MCGUFFIN'S MUFFINS BAKERY.**

*The stage is empty for a moment before Actor Five speaks to us.*

Actor Five:           *(To audience)* Later. McGuffin's Muffins Bakery.  
Fiona enters.

*Fiona enters.*

Actor Five:           *(To audience)* She grabs a tea towel and cleans her face.

*She grabs a tea towel and cleans her face.*

Actor Five:           *(To audience)* After a moment, Bridget enters.

*After a moment, Bridget enters.*

Bridget:               Are you alright?

Fiona:                 That was a set up.

Bridget:               That's politics.

Fiona:                 Are you joking? This isn't politics, Bridget. Jack deliberately set out to humiliate me in front of the whole town.

Bridget:               He's trying to get you to quit.

Fiona:                 That group hijacked the whole thing. The M.S.C. -

Bridget:               They're confused. There's a lot of noise out there.

Fiona:                 But they can't actually believe what they were saying.

Bridget:               Oh no. They believe it. They're what we call, "Useful Idiots". Fringe groups who think they're fighting some kind of crusade. All they need is someone from the mainstream to invite them in and you get a mess like today. I thought Jack and The Party were above that. I guess I was wrong.

*Dayle enters.*

Dayle:                 Ah, excuse me. Fiona?

Fiona:                 What now, Dayle?

Dayle:                 I was wondering if we could talk. In private.



Bridget: Can't you see this isn't the time?

Dayle: I know, but I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important.

*Bridget goes to Fiona.*

Bridget: I told you people were jerks but that doesn't mean you have to be. Don't get sucked into playing The Party's game. The town is still counting on you. Shake it off and get on with the job.

*Fiona nods.*

Bridget: That was off the record, Dayle. If I read it on the McGuffin Mail, I'll break your thumbs.

Dayle: Good to know. Thanks, Bridget.

*Bridget leaves.*

Fiona: What do you want?

Dayle: Are you Ok?

*Pause.*

Dayle: I need you to talk to my source.

Fiona: I'm not interested, Dayle.

Dayle: If you think you're getting through this without getting your hands dirty, you're wrong. Sooner or later everyone gets muddy.

Fiona: Well, then maybe I quit.

Dayle: Too late. You have a responsibility.

Fiona: Dayle, I just got my own pie thrown in my face.

Dayle: That only happened because you let it.

Fiona: Excuse me?

Dayle: Bridget just told you not to get sucked into The Party's game but there's only one game here. And you're losing because you're the only one playing by the rules. Everybody lies. Everybody cheats. Even me.

*Dayle takes out his phone.*

Dayle: The McGuffin Mail has an app. And as moderator I have access to all my user's metadata, including their geolocation. That's how I know Ken is in Bali. With Diane. They never broke up.

Fiona: Dayle, that's -

Dayle: And if they never broke up it means he resigned for some other reason. Something stinks here.

Fiona: Sure, but that's a huge invasion of privacy. You shouldn't be telling me any of this.

Dayle: Like I said, sooner or later we all get dirty. You've made The Party very nervous. Nervous enough to try to destroy you in front of the whole town. It's all connected. Somehow. And if you talk to my source I think they can give you what you need.

Fiona: To do what?

Dayle: To bring them down. The Party. The M.S.C. Jack. You can bring them all down.

Beat.



## CREATE AND PERFORM

Reread the scene with your group, activating the beats throughout your performance. Make sure the drama occurs at the right moments. In your rehearsal, discuss and focus on the following ideas in your performance:

- What Brechtian elements could you include in your performance?
- Dayle, Bridget and Fiona all have different objectives in this scene – how can you make each character objective clear?
- Consider the status of each character – who has the most power in this scene? Or who *thinks* they have the most power?



## REFLECTION

Once you have rehearsed and performed the scene, use your logbook to reflect on the elements of performance you have created. Consider:

- What do we learn about each character in this scene?
- How do the Brechtian elements help us make sense of this scene?
- Do you think this scene could mark the beginning of a shift in Fiona's objectives?





## Q&A WITH ELOISE SNAPE, ACTOR

### YOUR CHARACTER IN MCGUFFIN PARK GOES THROUGH A SIGNIFICANT PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION – HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR PLAYING A ROLE LIKE THAT?

Fiona's journey through the play, and in particular, her transformation is the most challenging part of the process for me so far. In saying that though, it's also the most satisfying, and fun! Luckily, Sam's writing is so good, he has done a lot of the work for me. Part of my preparation is to be really detailed and thorough with learning and analysing the script. I am also playing with the idea of Fiona's own ability to use the 'distancing technique', which is one of the major themes of the play. If Fiona starts in a place where she is open and vulnerable, but by the end of the play has learnt she has to disconnect in order to play the political game, hopefully her transformation will be clear, and a satisfying watch for the audience.



### ON THE SURFACE, MCGUFFIN PARK IS A PLAY ABOUT POLITICS, BUT THERE IS ALSO A BEAUTIFUL STORY OF FRIENDSHIP AT ITS HEART. WAS THIS SOMETHING YOU DISCUSSED DURING THE REHEARSAL PROCESS?

Yes, this has been a major conversation in the rehearsal room - Jack and Fiona's friendship is really the emotional centre of the play. Mark has been working those scenes separately with me and Shan-Ree, so we are able to map out the journey of their friendship clearly. Running them one after the other, as opposed to where they actually sit in the play is a very helpful process as you are really able to detail how they are able to push each others buttons and how their objectives shift from scene to scene.

### IN THE PLAY, YOUR CHARACTER HAS A FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING. PEOPLE OFTEN ASSUME ACTORS ALWAYS FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE, BUT THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE. HAS THERE EVER BEEN A TIME IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN NERVOUS TO TALK IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE? HOW DID YOU MANAGE THOSE FEARS?

Absolutely! I find there is a huge difference between performing as an actor or 'performing' as yourself, whilst giving a speech. While you are obviously vulnerable as an actor, there is an element of being able to hide behind a character. When it's just you speaking as you, there is no hiding! I find that incredibly nerve wracking. I remember an acting teacher once telling me a great piece of advice - ask yourself the question: what's the worst-case scenario? You forget what to say? Someone laughs, in a bad way? Sure, that's uncomfortable and not very nice, but at the end of the day, it won't hurt you. You won't die. Reminding yourself there is actually no danger and you are safe, is really helpful. And remembering that everyone is on your side! They want you to succeed in that moment.



### IN THE FINAL SCENE OF THE PLAY, FIONA GIVES US A STIRRING SPEECH ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOCRACY AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE PLAYWRIGHT'S INTENTION WAS IN THIS MOMENT?

I love this moment in the play. I think Sam wants people to think about what a beautiful thing democracy actually is. That we are lucky to have it. But also, that it is under threat. And that it's all very well for a politician to campaign, and win. But it's what they do with their power that really matters. And who do they have to become, in order to win? There is so much potential, yet so much disappointment. Why?

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE THINKING OF PURSUING A CAREER IN AS AN ACTOR?

Being an actor is a total joy. It's such a privilege to love your job. And I love it! And while it is fun, it takes a lot of hard work. Immerse yourself in theatre and film and television. See as many plays as you can. There are wonderful regular drama classes, holiday programs and workshops. Join them, and practice. Ask lots of questions. And always remember to believe in yourself and stay true to who you are. You will get cast for what you bring to a role - the qualities that make you unique and special. Lean into those and just be you.



## Q&A WITH SHAN-REE TAN, ACTOR

### YOUR CHARACTER COMPARES HIMSELF TO JACK IN THE FAMOUS WILLIAM GOLDING NOVEL, THE LORD OF THE FLIES - HOW WAS THIS COMPARISON HELPFUL TO YOU AS YOU WERE PREPARING FOR YOUR ROLE?

Fiona's journey through the play, and in particular, her transformation is the most challenging part of the process for me so far. In saying that though, it's also the own ability to use the 'technique', which is one of the major themes of the play.

If Fiona starts in a place where she is open and vulnerable, but by the end of the play has learnt she has to disconnect in order to play the political game,

hopefully her transformation will be clear, and a satisfying watch for the audience.

In the novel, the Jack character begins as innately arrogant and entitled, and when confronted by Ralph's natural leadership, he decides to pursue an alternative path to power, even at the cost of his own responsibilities to the rest of the boys trapped on the island. He soon learns how to exploit personal loyalty, mockery, division, cruelty and eventually violence to target others and maintain his own authority over his own "tribe", instead of doing what's best for everybody.

We definitely don't go quite that dark in our story, but it absolutely helped me to model my character Jack's motivations. Sam's written a character who it's easy to imagine is driven by some essentially childish motivations - especially that real schoolboy willingness to turn on his friend and exploit personal weaknesses just to be popular - where popularity ultimately means power. He's not all bad - but the choices he makes definitely determine how you're going to see him over the course of the story.

### IN THE PLAY, JACK AND FIONA HAVE BEEN FRIENDS SINCE HIGH SCHOOL AND SUDDENLY FIND THEMSELVES RIVALS IN THE LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTION. WHAT DOES THIS DO TO THEIR FRIENDSHIP? WAS THIS TRANSITION FUN TO PLAY AS AN ACTOR?

It's been incredibly fun to play, particularly opposite the brilliant Eloise Snape as Fiona. We went through a lot of drafts about how to draw this friendship so an audience will believe they'd been friends for so long - so we go from them laughing at their in-jokes and enjoying each other's company and chronic quirks and foibles to a sudden and real sense of betrayal and, eventually, the knowledge that their entire friendship is absolutely on the line for what might seem, to an outside observer, to be kind of low stakes. But to both of them, it's everything - it's a lifetime's worth of their own secret opinions about each other coming to the fore. Being able to change tones and turn what looks like a harmless comedy into such a personal drama is always a challenge and a thrill - when it works it means we've made you care about the relationship.





## **THIS PLAY UNASHAMEDLY USES BRECHTIAN THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS TO TELL THE STORY, WHY DO YOU THINK THE PLAYWRIGHT CHOSE TO DO THAT?**

Well, certainly, because Sam O'Sullivan is a very clever playwright, and he's also deeply and sincerely concerned about the political moment we live in. Hopefully it's clear that he wants the audience both to enjoy the story we are telling, but also constantly to consciously engage with the underlying observations he's making about political tactics; what people are willing to do to get ahead; what public responsibility means; and of course, what all this can do to a real relationship, and the choices and compromises those friends are capable of making. If you were just caught up only in the emotion or the immediate world of the storytelling, you might not make all of those connections so quickly. And also - I think he uses Brechtian conventions in a genuinely original and very funny way (I've never laughed this much while watching any actual Brecht plays, for what it's worth). It helps to be snort-giggling while your mind digests all these ideas.

## **WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT BEING IN A REHEARSAL ROOM?**

I think it's that feeling of always making new discoveries and coming up with ways to creatively solve problems as a team, whether it's grappling with thorny bits of the script, a totally different take on a particular bit of the playing, or as simple as "how do I get this piece of furniture off stage without falling over it or whacking my castmate in the head?". When you've got a group of creatives and a cast this fun and switched on, it doesn't feel like work at all - everyone is constantly bringing new ideas and offers into the room every day. Honestly, an audience doesn't get to see most of the ideas we try out. Some of them are brilliant and hilarious but they don't work for the show for one reason or another. I love being in rooms like this because I feel I have so much to learn from everyone every day. (And then there's technical rehearsal where you get to see what the design, lighting and sound creatives have been cooking up all that time!) It's always amazing when you get to the end of the five week process and you think - we started with a script and a blank stage and now we have all this.

## **IF YOU HAD ANY ADVICE FOR STUDENTS WHO WERE INTERESTED IN PURSUING A CAREER AS AN ACTOR, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

Well, you have to be doing it because you love it, firstly. There's a lot about the industry that is outside of your control, so you have to live with uncertainty a lot of the time - and sometimes the offers and opportunities are scarier than the rejections! You can always work on your own craft and your own professionalism though - always be watching shows, reading scripts, learning from other actors and creatives and their experiences. Be a great person to work with as well - it's long days in the rehearsal room or on set and just like any other job, everybody loves to work with people who are generous, patient and pleasant to be around. Every room is a bit different so it's a matter of reading that room and working out what the pace is, and then bringing your best to that environment for the director, your castmates and the rest of the creative team. And then properly looking after yourself and having meaningful and fulfilling activities and relationships in your life outside of the profession is, I personally think, almost more important for actors than for a lot of other jobs - the healthier and more balanced your life is generally, the more you're able to bring to your performance.



# TEACHING AND LEARNING

## ACTIVITY 2 – CHARACTER ANALYSIS & HOT SEAT



### DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Exploring character is an important part of the rehearsal process. After reading this scene, using the table below, identify five examples in this script excerpt where Jack or Fiona reveal a new piece of information about themselves.

| CHARACTER | DIALOGUE | WHAT IS REVEALED? |
|-----------|----------|-------------------|
|           |          |                   |
|           |          |                   |
|           |          |                   |

### SCENE THREE. LATER. JACK'S CAR.

*Jack is driving. Fiona is in the passenger's seat.*

Fiona: (To Jack) Any idea who it is?

Jack: No. Can't remember. It wasn't a Party member though. I can tell you that much.

Fiona: That's a shame for you.

Jack: It is. Can you imagine? Four votes. Fifty percent of the council. That'd be sweet.

Fiona: Ooft. Brutal.

Jack: What?

Fiona: Ken only just stepped down. His marriage is barely cold on the operating table!

Jack: That's politics. Sorry.

Fiona: The poor guy. Diane and he seemed so happy.

Jack: I always knew there was something suss about them. The whole influencer thing. Sharing every aspect of their lives on the internet.

Fiona: You can't deny he's been good for the town. And the influencer stuff is more Diane's thing.

Jack: Yeah but it rubbed off on him too. The façade he put up as mayor.

Fiona: What façade?

Jack: Always smiling. Remembering little facts about everyone.

Fiona: What a monster!

Jack: No one's that nice.

Fiona: Some people are that nice, Jack. Some people are just good people.

*Jack laughs.*

Fiona: They are!

Jack: No. You're right. Some people are. You are for instance.

Fiona: Oh. Don't do that.

Jack: What?

Fiona: Don't call me a "good person".

Jack: You just called Ken a "good person".

Fiona: Yeah, but when you say it, I can hear the subtext. What you actually mean is "simpleton".

Jack: What I mean is that you have principles. You're like Ralph in Lord of the Flies.

Jack: Most people are Jacks, guided only by self-interest.

Jack: They know where power lies in a situation and will adapt to get closer to it.

Fiona: And then there's Ralph -

Jack: Exactly. Ralphs stand for something more. They're guided by morals, even if it puts them at a disadvantage.

Fiona: They can't -

Jack: They can't help it. Exactly.

Jack: I've known you all my life and you are a textbook Ralph.

Fiona: And I guess that makes you a Jack?

Jack: Well, my name is Jack.

Fiona: Ruthless and manipulative?

Jack: Possibly.

Fiona: Someone who's your friend in private but then throws you under the bus when someone cooler comes along?

Jack: Ouch!

Fiona: A Jack might even say they'll be in your tent group on Year Seven camp but then when Chris Ackermen and Kelly Pritchard start putting a group together they'll totally bail on you. And then laugh at you because you have to share with Patricia Banks.

Jack: ...yes.

Fiona: Who actually turned out to be great company, by the way. Despite her B.O.

Jack: Yes. See? (He points at Fiona) Principles.

Fiona: You don't know everything about me. I can be a Jack if I want to. I'll sell your grandmother for some magic beans. Just watch me.

Jack: Wrong Jack. But good effort.





## CREATE AND PERFORM

Choose a character from MCGUFFIN PARK and put them in the 'hot seat'. What questions would you like to ask them? Think about the relationships they have with other characters and their individual backstories. What would you like to know about them that isn't discussed in the play?

Invite one of your peers to be in the 'hot seat' while you ask the questions and then switch – making sure to explore a different character.

Remember, if you don't know the answer to a question, use your imagination! This is your opportunity to embody the characters from the play as you see them.



## REFLECTION

Use your logbook to reflect on your hot seat experience. Consider:

- What did you discover about Jack and Fiona?
- What did you learn about their relationship in the past?
- How was your interpretation different to your peers?



# TEACHING AND LEARNING

## ACTIVITY 3 – EXPLORING STYLE



### DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Playwright Sam O'Sullivan deliberately uses a specific style of theatre to tell the story of McGuffin Park. The style borrows heavily from a very famous theatre practitioner called Brecht. Brecht pushed against the naturalistic plays of the time and created a type of theatre that engaged with political ideas, used minimal sets, props and costumes and pushed the audience to remain objective at all times. Consider the opening scene in the play: the action begins in a town hall, but the same playing space becomes a garage, a football field and a bakery.

Discuss as a class or in small groups with your peers how you would stage the introductory scene.

- What tone would you like to evoke for your audience?
- What techniques could you use to encourage your audience to remain 'objective'?
- What kind of impact do you think this style of theatre will have on the audience?



### CREATE AND PERFORM

Using the script excerpt above, bring the scene to life using as many Brechtian conventions as you can. Consider these elements:

- Breaking the fourth wall
- Montage
- Use of song, music or dance
- Breaking out of character
- Using placards

After you have rehearsed, perform your excerpt for the class.



### REFLECTION

Perform a staged reading of the script excerpt above including your soundscape. Ask your audience what impact your soundscape has on them. What emotions do they feel after they hear it? Is this different to the emotions that you experienced when you saw the production live? Write a logbook entry summarising your discussion.





# TEACHING AND LEARNING

## ACTIVITY 4 – DEVISING NARRATIVE



### DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Watching a theatre production can often be the first step in developing your own ideas about how the characters in the script could be portrayed. Think about what you'd like to know more about from certain characters, or how the direction of the play would change if we were in a different time or place.? What if this play was set in a major Australian city and was about a major political party, rather than a local government group?



### CREATE AND PERFORM

Write a short monologue from the perspective of one of the characters in the play. Set the monologue either **BEFORE**, **DURING** or **AFTER** the timeline of the play. For example, write from the perspective of Jack after his final conversation with Fiona. How is he affected by their final conversation? How does he feel about Fiona becoming mayor?



### REFLECTION

Share your monologue with the class and invite conversation between your peers. Did some monologues take you by surprise? What stuck out to you? How did your perception of a character change now that you have more information? What do you have more questions about?





# CREATING THE WORLD – SET AND COSTUME DESIGN DEEP DIVE BY SIMON GREER



**YOU'VE DESIGNED OVER 100 SHOWS OVER A 20 YEAR PERIOD, BUT I'VE HEARD YOU SAY THAT DESIGNING THE SET FOR MCGUFFIN PARK WAS ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING DESIGNS YOU'VE DONE IN YOUR CAREER – CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY?**

Couple of reasons - it is a new play - so changes in script take place all the time. Scenes are cut, characters are changed - so compared to a fully published play - things undergo changes all the time. It just means you have to be really flexible and you have to be prepared to change your mind as things develop.

SET: You have to plan a long way in advance for a set to be built, for example, but things may change with the script after a lot of set has already been built - so it can be challenging. This play is written in a very filmic way - scenes flow really fast from one to another and there are multiple locations. Council chambers, a bakery, a park, a sports oval, a school pedestrian crossing - just to name a few. There is no way we could achieve all these places naturally, as it is so fast. So - the idea was to find a location where everything could potentially work. It just took a while to decide exactly what location could do everything! Mark, the Director, and I went through 4 different versions of what the set could have been. It started with a very abstract set which slowly developed into what we ended up with - which was a community Town Hall.



Every Aussie town has one - and it is often the place in town where lots happens meetings, concerts, dinners, parties, elections - they are often big social hubs of towns. So - this is what we landed on in the end. As the play is also written as a group of "actors" playing characters, the inherent theatricality of a local hall also works.

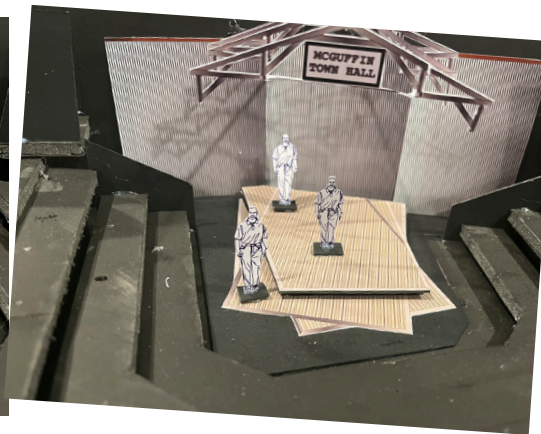
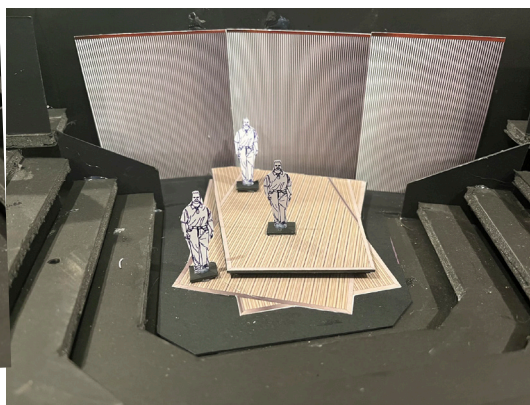
COSTUME: In a similar way - characters can change with a new script - so you gotta be flexible again. This play is also tricky as some of our actors have to play multiple characters that can change instantly. There is no time to go offstage and change a costume - it all has to happen in front of the audience and often in one line. So - like the set - it is making a decision about a costume that can do multiple jobs. The last thing you want to happen is for the play stop while we wait for an actor to change. So - even though the actors only have one main costume - this can be tricky as the one costume has to do so many characters (and some characters even change gender). So - we have real-life actors playing actors who are then playing multiple characters in an Australian country town that can change within seconds! Easy. :)







MCGUFFIN Set Design: Versions 3,4 & 5



## AFTER YOU READ A SCRIPT, WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU DO TO HELP YOU BEGIN TO START MAPPING OUT A DESIGN?

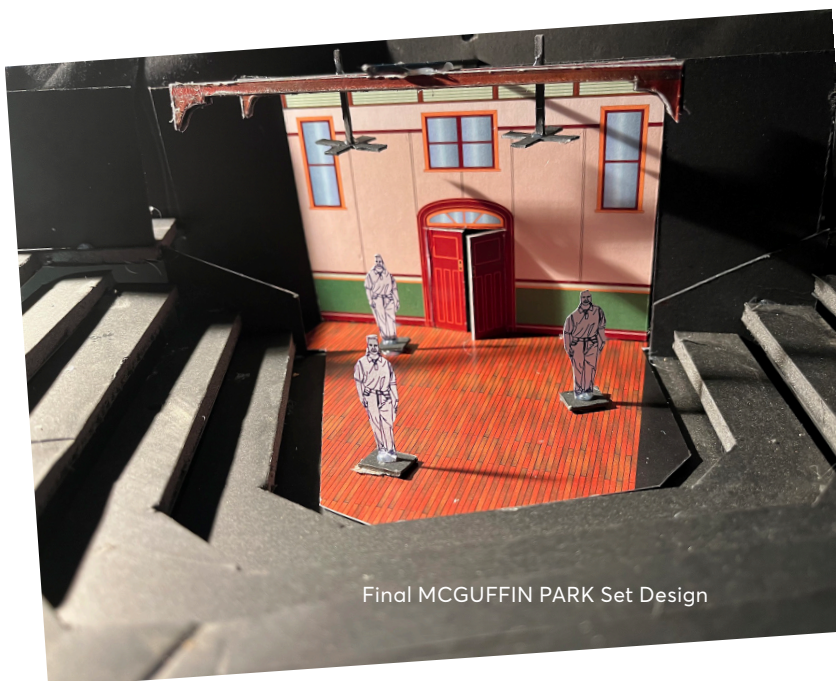
I read the script a couple of times to get my head around it. Also this play was tricky with the fast movement of scenes and characters so I did a big spreadsheet to track who was playing what in what location with what costume and with what prop. This was constantly updated as script changes happened. Every designer works differently. I generally think and think and think and then I usually "vomit" all my ideas out over a couple of days. I work with Vectorworks, which is a CAD program. I design like an architect would on a computer and draw plans. Other designers do sketches or build a 3D model version straight away - I draw ground plans. It's like a draw in 2D but design-think in 3D! During this process, you chat a bit with the director. You research lots (I have lots of photos of what Australian country Town Halls look like). This is important as there are often little details all through your research that you can incorporate. There might be a style of architecture you like in this photo, and then a colour wall you like in this photo, with a style of floor you like in this other photo. As you have all this research - you can make decisions. It also means you have a lot of reference to show your director and other creative team members to help them picture the place we are in. It works very much the same with costumes - lots of time searching for pictures of people. I often do a mood board of costume photos to give a bit of a "vibe" of what I am thinking could be possible. I then do drawings which are more detailed in what the character will actually wear.

## WHY IS SET AND COSTUME DESIGN SO IMPORTANT IN THEATRE?

Designers are storytellers too. Actors tell the story with their physicality, their presence and their voice - designers tell a story with colour, texture, light and space. Every decision I make I always come back to supporting the story telling. This is the most important thing to any designer. You may end up designing the most beautiful looking set ever - but if it not right for the play and doesn't support the story - you have wasted your time.

## AND FINALLY, DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR BUDDING SET AND COSTUME DESIGNERS?

Watch lots, read lots - observe the world around you lots. Be a great collaborator - performing arts is one of the most collaborative artforms you could ever have - it's a massive team effort. Be prepared to do other stuff - break a brush out and help paint a set, learn some simple sewing, get practical and build some props, work stage crew - just get out there and practically do stuff. The best way to learn is to get up and just do it!



Final MCGUFFIN PARK Set Design



