



SCHOOLS RESOURCE PACK

CUSP

By Mary Anne Butler.

An ATYP and Brown's Mart Theatre Co-production.

Elvis wants Rosie. Rosie wants to escape. Maddie doesn't know what the hell she wants, but it sure isn't this.

While Rosie balances the needs of community with her own life dreams, Elvis juggles a life of crime with a tougher path into the straight-and-narrow, and Maddie faces life as a single parent.

CUSP juxtaposes the Northern Territory's vast Top End landscape with the turbulent lives of three emerging adults as they swim against the tide of irrevocable change. Balancing choice versus fate in a world where, as Elvis observes, "Some people just get better choices than others."

From the Education Coordinator

CUSP is the story of three young people standing on the threshold of adulthood, waiting for the right moment to jump. Elvis, Rosie and Maddie are each grappling with life-altering choices that will echo into their futures – but how can you ever know the right choice before you've made it?

We all face tough decisions that mark the path of our lives. For students contemplating their lives post-school, *CUSP* is an urgent, eloquent summation of the joys and trepidations of taking the next step.

Mary Anne Butler has crafted a coming-of-age story that deftly navigates challenging terrain, while showing that the best way to forge a path forward is by being true to yourself.

How to use this resource

This resource has been created to help you explore some of *CUSP*'s key dramatic themes in your classroom.

Inside you'll find practical drama activities that will enrich not only a study of this play, but also general studies of dramatic storytelling and playbuilding. Also included are curriculum links to help connect *CUSP* with your programs and information about the production.

Production Information

Season

SBW Stables Theatre:
11-28 March 2020
Parramatta Riverside Theatres:
31 March – 1 April 2020

Schools Matinees

13, 18, 20, 25 and 27 March (Sydney)
31 March and 1 April (Parramatta)

Duration

70 mins + 20 mins Q&A

Bookings

Tickets \$23
1 free teacher ticket per 10 students
<https://atyp.com.au/ATYP-productions/cusp>

Suitability

Years 10-12

Audience Advice

CUSP explores some challenging subject matter.
The production contains:

- adult themes,
- frequent coarse language,
- descriptions of sexual acts,
- references to trauma, self-harm and suicide.

If you have been affected by any of the themes of *CUSP*, help is available.

Lifeline

13 11 14

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

Curriculum Connections

Stage	Subject	Outcome
5	English	EN5-5C EN5-7D EN5-8D
	Drama	5.3.1 5.3.2
6	English	EN11-5 EN11-7 EN11-8 EA11-5 EA11-7 EA11-8 EN12-5 EN12-7 EN12-8 EA12-5 EA12-7 EA12-8
	Drama	H3.4 Australian Drama and Theatre The Voice of Women In Theatre
Themes	Indigenous Australian Stories Family and Community Individual vs Community Expectations	

Creative Team

Director

Fraser Corfield

Writer

Mary Anne Butler

Set Designer

Cj Fraser-Bell

Lighting Design

Jessie Davis

Sound Designer

Brad Fawcett

Sound Design Mentor

Matt Cunliffe

Stage Manager

Sorie Bangura

Cast

Stevie Kyriacou

Josh McElroy

Nyasha Ogden

*"Air draped around me like a warm wet blanket
Feel the seasons
Change and turn.
Sweat through the buildup.
Dance through the wet.
Duck as the dragonflies
Herald the dry."*



Activity: Performative Perspectives

The story of *CUSP* unfolds in two interweaving narratives, with the duo of Elvis and Rosie occupying a separate space to Maddie until a pivotal moment in the play draws them all together. As well as occupying these separate conceptual spaces, their scenes are characterised by distinctly different performance and language techniques. While Elvis and Rosie converse in naturalistic encounters, positioning the audience in a traditional way 'outside' the action, Maddie spends most of the play speaking in direct address, which creates a different relationship between the actor and audience.

Task: In pairs, read the script excerpt opposite. Then improvise a short scene between at least two characters which is inspired by the monologue. It might follow the narrative arc of the monologue from a new perspective or be a distinct scene inspired by a certain image or line from the monologue. Share your piece with the class, then discuss the process of adapting and recontextualising pre-existing material to create a new piece of drama. Consider the different linguistic devices used and the differences in the actor/audience relationship.

Script Excerpt

*Feel like I hardly know you. Try to get you talkin':
Tell me a story, Connor.
What about? You say.
About when you were little.*

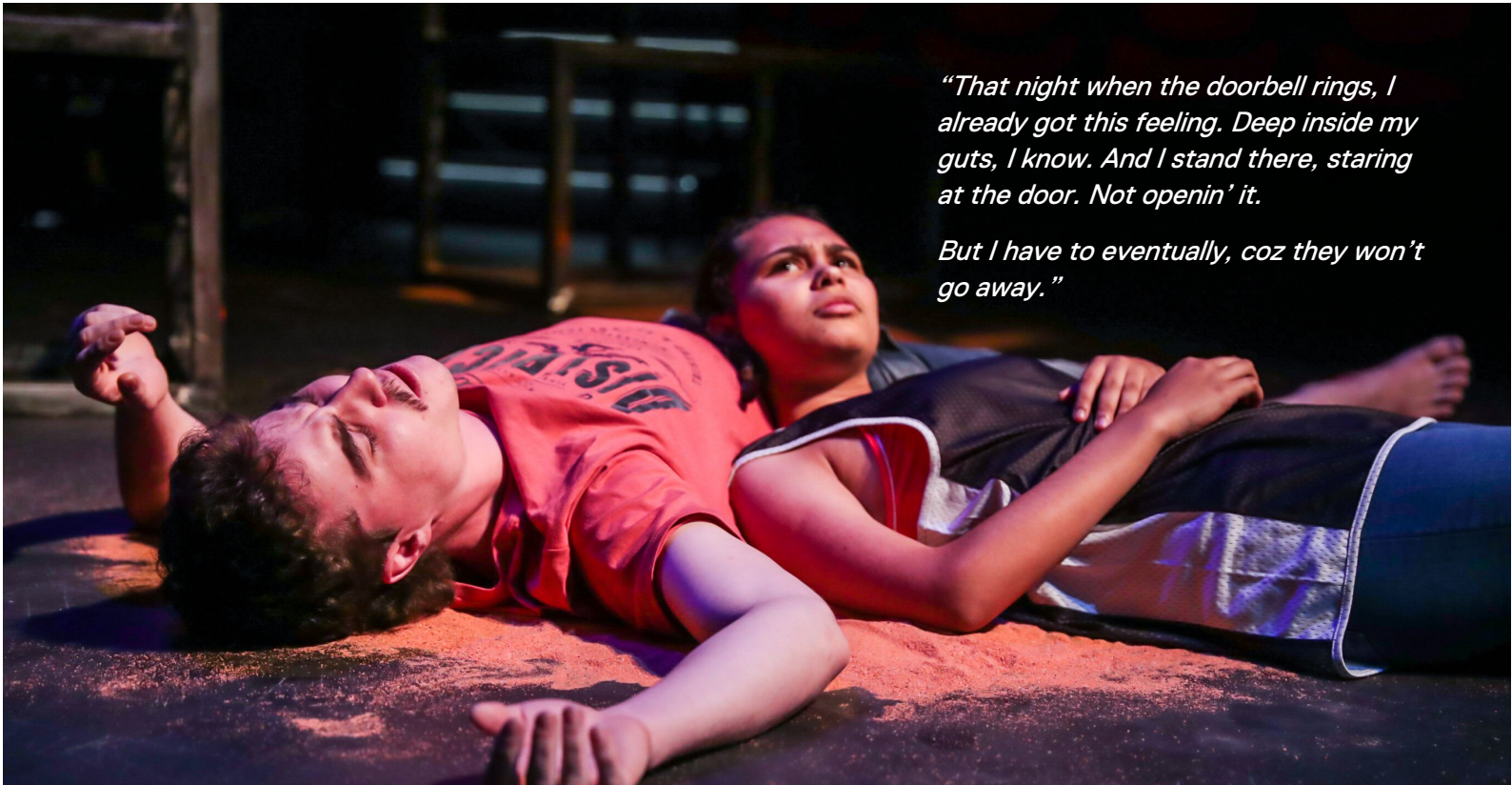
So you tell me how one night, when your dad was still around, him and your mum didn't come home at all, so you and Elvis are left alone there all night. And there's no food in the house. Elvis is only five, and he starts crying, he's that hungry. So you try to make something; outta this bit of milk and custard powder but the milk's gone off and the custard powder's crawlin' full of little bugs. Then you remember one time when you stashed a pack of M&M's in your jocks drawer. Bit melted, but they're still there - so you tell me how you get out two bowls and two cups and two of your big plates, and you make Elvis a three course meal.

You explain all the courses like you're at a fancy restaurant: the red and orange ones are prawns, and you even make him peel 'em, coz he's never had a real prawn before. And then roast chicken with potatoes - that's the brown and yellow M&Ms. And then the green and blues ones are jelly and blueberry icecream.

And I think that's the best story in the world, and how I wish I'd had a brother like you. But you don't see it that way.

*"One thousand k's down the Stuart Highway.
Red dust turns to dirt. Shrubs turn to trees.
Termite mounds rise like ancient ghosts from the land.
And something in me just wants to keep on driving. Forever.
...windows down..."*





"That night when the doorbell rings, I already got this feeling. Deep inside my guts, I know. And I stand there, staring at the door. Not openin' it.

But I have to eventually, coz they won't go away."

Activity: Conflicting Narratives

CUSP has three narrators: at different times each character speaks directly to the audience.

In these candid moments they share secrets and insights with the audience which they might not share with each other. In this way the playwright signals to the audience how a character's thoughts and actions might be at odds, which in turn creates dramatic tension as we watch them wrestle with their internal conflict (and the external conflict that often results).

Because we normally rely on characters to faithfully present their stories to us, it can be an interesting source of suspense or intrigue when their perspectives begin to clash with or contradict each other.

Task: In pairs think of an event that both your characters were present for (i.e. a birthday party). Then, come up with four or five 'beats' that chart the progress of that event (i.e. arriving, meeting other guests, cutting the cake, an argument, etc.). One character is going to have a positive perspective on the event, while the other is going to have a negative perspective. Together on stage, take it in turns to recount, beat-by-beat, the event from your characters' conflicting perspectives as separate intertwining monologues. Then discuss as a class the effect the listening to two conflicting narrators has on how an audience perceives the story and characters.

Activity: Responding to Place

The setting of *CUSP*, the vast landscape and small towns of the Northern Territory, are powerfully present in the words and imagery used within the play. Playwright Mary Anne Butler draws on images of nature to highlight Rosie's connection to her country, juxtaposing it with Elvis' restlessness. Director Fraser Corfield and Designer Cj Fraser-Bell also incorporate red dirt, symbolic of the sun-scorched terrain that forms the backdrop to the story, as a way of bringing the natural world into the theatre.

Establishing a strong sense of place can be an effective way of building atmosphere in drama. Characters' relationships to the place they find themselves in can also be a useful source of dramatic tension.

Task: Individually or in small groups devise a short monologue or scene about a character who relates strongly to the place they find themselves in. Their reaction could be positive or negative; they could feel attracted or repelled by it. Share your piece with the class, then afterwards discuss how each performer represented their character's connection to place.

Resource Credits

This resource has been created by ATYP Education.
Images: Helen Orr

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Australian Theatre
for Young People

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