

In Memory Of...

An Interactive Theatre Experience Exploring History and Memory

Characters

TEACHER: Male. Aged between 30 and 50. He likes to encourage his students to think deeply about complex issues surrounding history.

STAN GRANT: An Aboriginal male, 54 years of age. He works for the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) as the Indigenous Affairs Editor and has a reputation for independence and integrity.

NEWS PRESENTER: A female in her early 30s – early 40s. She embodies the persona and appearance of a typical news show host and works for the ABC.

PERPETRATOR: The vandal who graffitied the Captain Cook statue. He was described as male, Caucasian, sporting a full – faced beard and wearing black sunglasses, black track pants and a khaki jacket.

FAKES: Planted members of the audience. They write specific answers to the question polls to encourage the audience to contribute and

stimulate the debate.

ALEX: Outgoing, extroverted and loud. S/he believes that the debate should be solved through creating a statue which conveys multiple perspectives of Cook and his relationship with the Indigenous Australians.

TAYLOR: Strongly opinionated and believes his/her opinion is the best one. S/he believes that the only way to solve the issue is to change the statue's plaque to reflect an Indigenous perspective.

JORDAN: A nerd and comes at the debate from an intelligent perspective. S/he draws on past knowledge to arrive at the opinion that the gap between white and black Australia should be bridged and that the Captain Cook debate is a perfect opportunity to do so.

SAM: A British immigrant. S/he has grown up learning history from a British perspective, consequently believing that Cook's 'discovery'

of Australia is valid and should be remembered as is.

BAILEY: A history buff. Through analysing the statue as an historical source, s/he concludes that historical terms should be considered in the solution to the issue.

SASHA: Of Indigenous heritage and culture and a symbol of all Indigenous Australians. S/he brings the resolution at the end of play through his/her opinion derived from Stan Grant's article "America Tears Down Its Racist History, We Ignore Ours."

Note: all characters can be played by actors of any nationality, unless otherwise stated in the character description. All STUDENTS can be played by actors of any gender, preferably between the ages of 15 – 16.

Setting

While the graffitiing of the Captain Cook statue takes place in Hyde Park, Sydney, the classroom of students can be in any school across Australia, co-ed or otherwise.

Author's Note

Debate 1 is based on an interview of Stan Grant from the Australian Broadcasting Company.

The lines of Verbatim theatre are indicated in blue.

Classroom 1

The stage is lit to indicate a classroom. Tables and chairs are arranged in a classroom arrangement. A scrim is hanging upstage. The date Tuesday 22nd August 2017 is projected onto it. A bell rings. The STUDENTS enter carrying folders with books and pens. All the STUDENTS are laughing and boisterous, except for SASHA. As the TEACHER enters, they quiet down slightly.

TEACHER: Ok, everyone. Quiet down.

STUDENTS fall silent.

TEACHER: Thanks. So, today we're going to continue looking at our topic on history, memory and monuments by beginning a case study on the debate surrounding Captain Cook's statue in Hyde Park. Over the weekend, Stan Grant criticised its plaque (*an image of the plaque is projected onto the scrim*) saying that it was a "fiction" which conveyed emptiness and invisibility felt by Indigenous Australians. What we're going to do is investigate this issue and see how it ties in with the themes we were discussing last week. Sound good?

ALEX: (*enthusiastic*) Yes.

TEACHER: Great. Ok, so, just to get your initial thoughts, how do you think this

part of Australian history – its discovery by Captain Cook – should be remembered? I want respectful and insightful answers. Bailey.

BAILEY: I guess you have to consider when the plaque was written. Like, we may choose to remember Cook in this way because the people who erected the statue did.

TAYLOR: But I don't think that's going to fix it Bailey. Who cares what people in history thought? The fact is that the plaque is discriminating against Indigenous peoples!

JORDAN: So, are you saying that we should just focus on what history is saying right now, rather than what it was saying at the time?

TAYLOR: Yes! It's right now that's important.

TEACHER: Ok, so on that Taylor, do you think that the Captain Cook statue symbolises past values in the present?

TAYLOR: Yeah, it definitely does. It symbolises invasion and dispossession – two values that Australia doesn't believe in in the 21st century. Cook's statue needs to keep up with the change in ideas and reflect them.

BAILEY: You're saying that statues can't stand as a reminder of the past?

TAYLOR: Yes, obviously.

SAM: You see, the thing I don't understand about this whole thing is that why does everyone have to see Cook so negatively? Think about it. Most of you guys would not be Australians if he didn't claim this land for the British Crown.

ALEX: Yes! Thankyou Sam! This is why we need convey multiple perspectives. Not everyone has the same opinion of Cook.

TEACHER: Convey both sides of history – is that what you're saying Alex?

ALEX: Uh-huh.

SASHA is pleased with this suggestion.

TEACHER: Interesting. I like it. Does anyone have anything they absolutely want to say? Jordan? Sasha? You guys haven't said much.

All STUDENTS are silent.

TEACHER: No? Good, because it's break time.

The STUDENTS begin frantically gathering their stuff together. The TEACHER'S next lines become drowned by the noise of scrambling and a school bell.

TEACHER: Please keep your eyes open for any further developments in the debate. We'll continue this next lesson.

The TEACHER collects his things and exits.

Debate 1

As he does so, a CAMERA CREW enters. The crew are wheeling a camera and a monitor. They set up the camera and the monitor and rearrange the desks and chairs to resemble that of a news program. Once the set-up is established, the NEWS PRESENTER and STAN GRANT are ushered on stage. They are seated and ready to begin the interview. A cameraman gives the "go" signal and the show begins. The date Wednesday 23 August 2017 is projected.

HOST: Good evening Australia. It's been a week of great controversy about our Australian history since Stan Grant criticised the inscription on the Captain Cook statue in Hyde Park. His claim that it neglected the history of Indigenous Australian triggered many opinions across Australia. Tonight, we are lucky to have Stan with us to discuss his opinion on this hotly contested issue. Good evening Stan. It's great

to have you.

GRANT: Thank you. Glad to be here.

HOST: Now, in your article last Sunday, you write that the statue of Captain Cook didn't acknowledge the discovery of Australia by Indigenous Australians. Why do you think this is an issue?

GRANT: Well, we need to ask the question, with a statue that says, "Captain Cook discovered this territory, 1770," well we need to understand what we're talking about. The whole doctrine of discovery, which went hand in hand with the doctrine of *terra nullius* meaning "empty land" – came from the fifteenth century [and] underpinned...Captain Cook claiming this land for the Crown. Now, those doctrines have been discredited... We have... ceremonial welcome to country...and we have a statue that stills says it was discovered by Captain Cook. Those two things... don't sit comfortably side by side.

HOST: Do you see a situation then where some of these statues might be pulled down...?

GRANT: I don't think it's a case of pulling down statues...my argument has been we need to have a discussion about our history. History

is not static. History is uncomfortable, and it should be uncomfortable. You take something out of context and apply another context to it...we need to ask ourselves, do we fall silent on a past that we know for Aboriginal people in Australia was founded on a racist idea that we were not here...? Now, that's our history and we need to look at it and ask questions about it.

HOST: It certainly is a difficult issue isn't it? That was Stan Grant, the ABC's Indigenous Affairs Editor. Thanks Stan. *(turns to the audience, as if the camera is only focussed on her)* In similar news, the City of Sydney council has referred the issue to its Indigenous board to discuss what should happen with the plaque. After the break, we'll be talking with our White House correspondent about recent firing of President Trump's cabinet.

Backout. The ABC news fanfare is played. The CAMERA CREW, NEWS PRESENTER and STAN GRANT exit.

Idea Exploration: Perspective

The STUDENTS have the following conversation through voice-over in the darkness.

ALEX: That's exactly what I was saying on Tuesday! We need to have a

discussion about our history! Then multiple perspectives will be considered.

SAM: But what if the discussion weighs too heavily on one perspective? We could lose one side of history completely.

TEACHER: That's what we must consider Sam. What do you think about that Sasha?

SAM: *(confused)* But –

The dialogue fades away.

A single question is projected onto the scrim: "Should we remember history as multiple perspectives or one dominant perspective?" The audience then can text their answers to a poll. These answers are then projected onto the scrim. The FAKES will text prepared answers during this segment to encourage the audience to interact. The segment lasts for about 1 – 2 minutes.

The 'scene' ends.

Classroom 2

This entire scene is spoken in voice-over. As the dialogue is playing, the audience see a silhouette of the set for the next scene: the Captain Cook statue centre stage. The date Monday 28th August 2017 is projected onto the scrim.

TEACHER: Welcome back guys.

ALEX: We're absolutely thrilled to be back.

JORDAN: Did anything to do with the debate happen on the weekend?

TEACHER: Well yes, in fact it did. *(surprised)* Do you know what it is
Sasha?

A brief silence.

TEACHER: *(as if noticing BAILEY'S attention – seeking enthusiasm)* Of
course you know what it is Bailey.

BAILEY: Yeah, but I'm not telling.

An outburst. The STUDENTS ad lib "Aww, c'mon", "Seriously".

BAILEY: Hey, hey! I'll give you a teaser. Someone was triggered and
decided to take the idea of perspective into their own hands.

The lights dim and the voice-over fades.

Debate 2

The stage is lit to communicate night time and the glow of a full moon. The audience can see a silhouette of the statue in the middle of the stage. The cool breeze of a winter's night is felt by the audience, accompanied by a soundscape of a city in the middle of the night.

The PERPETRATOR enters. As he does so, the gong of a city clock is heard, indicating that it is 2am. The PERPETRATOR moves in and out of the shadows in such a way that the audience only catches glimpses of him. As he moves closer towards the statue (or is he?), the putrid smell of spray paint is wafted out to the audience.

The PERPETRATOR exits.

Idea Exploration: Symbols

The lighting and set remains unchanged. The STUDENTS have the following conversation through voice – over. The date Monday 28 August 2017 is projected.

ALEX: I'm confused. What just happened?

TAYLOR: He didn't tell us anything.

BAILEY: Because that would spoil the surprise.

ALEX: *(incredulous)* Why do we need it to be a surprise?

TEACHER: So I can keep your attention. Meaning, that I have a question for you now and an explanation later. What do you think of symbols and history? Do you think that monuments and statues symbolise different attitudes and values in history? What happens when we change them?

The dialogue fades away. A single question is projected onto the scrim: “Does changing symbolic statues and monuments change our perception of the past? Yes/No.” The ‘scene’ unfolds the same as Idea Exploration: Perspective. It lasts for about 1 -2 minutes.

The ‘scene’ ends.

Debate 3

The stage begins to lighten mimicking a sunrise. The sounds of an early morning in a city park are heard. The gong of a city clock is heard to indicate it is 7am. The words “1 day earlier - Saturday 26 August 2017” are projected. Suddenly, a sun-like spotlight snaps onto the statue. All sounds cease, except for the artificial sound of the spotlight that is heard at the snap. The statue begins to rotate on its pedestal, revealing the spray - painted phrases “no pride in genocide” and “change the date” on the base. The spotlight is held for a few dramatic seconds, then snaps off, along with the same sound effect.

Idea Exploration 3: The Importance of Remembering History

The STUDENTS have the following frantic conversation through voice – over.

SAM: We didn't commit genocide!

TAYLOR: Finally, someone who sees my view!

SAM: Thanks.

TAYLOR: I wasn't talking about you! I was talking about the graffiti-er. The plaque needs to reflect an Indigenous perspective.

ALEX: We understand that, Taylor. Ugh, this is stupid. This whole thing's being exaggerated. 'Genocide'? 'Change the date'? Are all Indigenous now?!

JORDAN: That's the thing! What are we remembering?!

The dialogue fades.

A single question is yet again projected onto the screen: 'If we change Cook's statue, is there an aspect of Australian history that we are solely remembering? As the audience text their answers to the poll, the FAKES will text legitimate answers which contradict the audience's answers. The purpose of this is to communicate the flawed broadness of the question.

Throughout the segment, a faint ticking noise is heard. The segment lasts for about 4 minutes.

The 'scene' ends. Lights down.

Classroom 4

The set is converted back to the classroom arrangement. As the lights come up, the STUDENTS and the TEACHER are already onstage.

SAM: I give up. I honestly do not see the point of this anymore. Now you don't even know what you want to convey on the statue?

TAYLOR: I think we should convey the Indigenous perspective.

JORDAN: *(trying not to be visibly annoyed at TAYLOR)* Yes, we know you want that, but I think a better solution would be to bridge the gap between white and black Australia.

ALEX: How? If you convey the statue from a white perspective, you're ignoring the Aboriginals. But, if you convey from an Indigenous perspective, you're ignoring the white Australians.

SAM: Thank you.

ALEX: You're not white Australia.

BAILEY: See, this is the problem: we can't possibly come up with a solution to the issue. There isn't one answer that satisfies everyone.

The STUDENTS are silent as this 'duh' moment sinks in.

The silence is suddenly interrupted by a raised hand. The class is shocked as SASHA slowly becomes the centre of attention.

TEACHER: Yes, Sasha?

SASHA: You guys are looking at this issue from the wrong angle. Yes, we should convey more than one perspective, but we should convey these perspectives together. What Australia needs to remember is that every story is intertwined. Cook arrived when we were living on this land. He's as every part of our story as he is yours.

Australia shouldn't try to distinguish between these stories. She just needs to admit that each story helps the other give one narrative of Australia.

The lights fade to black as the SASHA stares out at the audience as the buzz of the STUDENTS discussing this new idea begins.