Following George Walker

Teachers' Notes

BY
Melissa Newton-Turner

BRINK

a note for the teacher

Hello
and welcome from
Brink Productions!

We are looking forward to welcoming you and your students to the production of *Following George Walke*r, devised and written by Rory Walker and Chris Drummond with Phillip Kavanagh.

The following Teachers' Notes are designed to complement your work in the classroom with your students as you prepare them for their visit to the theatre and afterwards as they respond and reflect on the performance.

We hope you enjoy the show.

Melissa Newton-Turner
Drama Education Specialist
and
Brink Productions

Following George Walker

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creatives

DEVISED
AND WRITTEN BY
Rory Walker

AND
Chris Drummond

WITH
Phillip Kavanagh

artist credits

DIRECTOR
& CO-DEVISOR
Chris Drummond

PERFORMER
& CO-DEVISOR
Rory Walker

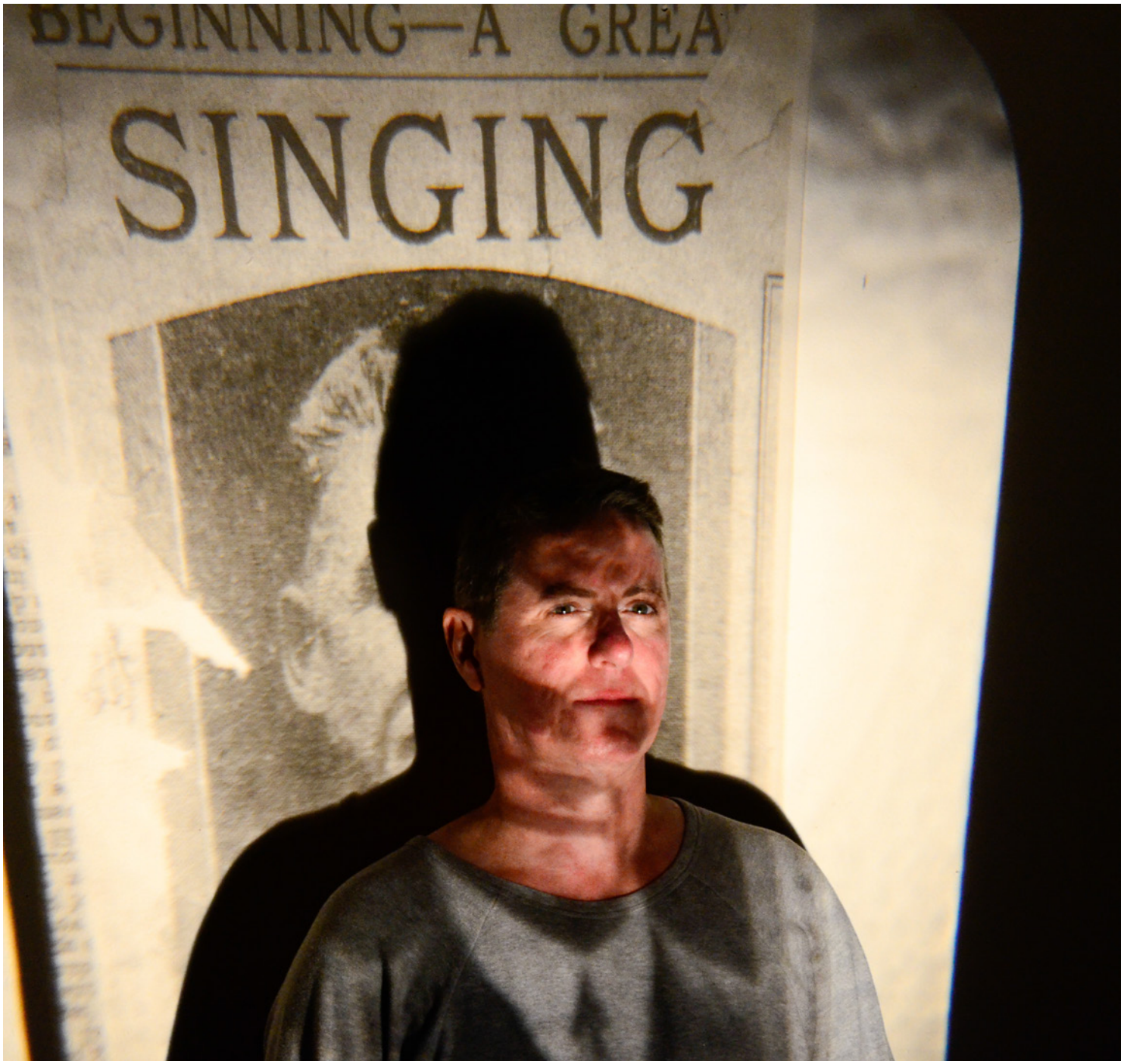
SOUND DESIGNER
& FOLEY ARTIST
Catherine Oates

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
Carol Young

DESIGNER
Wendy Todd

LIGHTING &
VIDEO DESIGNER &
TECHNICAL MANAGER
Tom Kitney

DRAMATURG
Phillip Kavanagh



synopsis

Following George Walker is inspired by the story of George W Walker, a vaudevillian performer, vocalist, manager, impresario and theatre proprietor of the early 20th Century and the story of his great grandson, Rory Walker, an actor trying to bring George's story to life on stage.

As Rory attempts to piece together George's journal entries into a one-man vaudeville show, it becomes clear that the ties between Rory and George, including their shared love of the theatre, are more than coincidental.

main characters

Rory

Born from a long line of performers, including his vaudevillian great grandfather, George W Walker, Rory shares with his audience the struggles he has faced bringing George's story to the stage. Travelling back and forward in time, Rory reflects on lives lived and the crisscrossing of time through generations.

George

Born in Scotland and great grandfather to Rory, George W Walker was left on a doorstep as a baby. Coming from nothing and nowhere, George ends up touring the world as a vaudevillian.

The Director

Patient - up to a point - and full of ideas, the unseen, but overheard, director from the show's first creative development conveys the difficulties endured as part of the creative process.

Miss Jessie Bunting

Gifted with a beautiful voice, Miss Jessie Bunting was George's long-term performance and travelling companion, touring the world for years with their vaudeville show. Jessie thought George to be a great man, but the true nature of Jessie and George's relationship remains a mystery for Rory and his family.

Willie

George's second son and Rory's great uncle, Willie travelled with his father and learned the tricks of the trade. Willie showed the makings of an accomplished magician, but his life as a performer was cut short, signing up to fight for his country in World War 1. Rory makes sure Willie's memory lives on.

Walford Bodie

Walford Bodie was a Scottish showman, hypnotist, ventriloquist and stage magician, famous for his 'mock' electrocutions involving a replica of *The Electric Chair* and his act of *Bloodless Surgery*, claiming he could use electricity, hypnosis and manipulation to cure "all kinds of ailments and disabilities".

Rory's Dad

Rory's father dreamed of being a musician but ultimately found success as proprietor of Adelaide's iconic John Davis Records in Twin Street.

Eliza

Eliza, Rory's loyal and equally artistic partner, shares Rory's dream of telling George's story to an audience.

Hope

Rory's great grandmother and George's loyal wife, Hope stayed in Scotland looking after their boys while George toured the world.

themes

Family ties and inheritance

The similarities and ties between Rory and George's lives are more than coincidental. Rory has inherited his love of the stage and performance from George and other family members, even performing on the same stages as his great grandfather.

The traveller

George Walker is the epitome of the traveller, maybe because he never knew where he came from. Left on a doorstep as a baby, to living a life forever on the road as a vaudevillian, for years George travelled the world entertaining audiences. Rory is a traveller of a different kind, venturing into his past to understand the present.

Home and identity

Having been left on a stranger's doorstep as a baby, George never knew where he came from. He grew up to become a performer travelling the world, spending years away from his family. How much his origin story impacted on his decision to stay on the road is difficult to say, but it is the kind of lifestyle that many performers follow, often at a great cost to family. As an actor, partner and father, Rory has had the same decision to make, whether to follow professional opportunities that will lead him away from home or to prioritise his role as a family man and build his career accordingly.

Transformation: Making something out of nothing

Following George Walker recounts Rory's struggle to transform George's journal entries into a fully-fledged theatrical performance. Rory provides the audience with insights into the creative process and the challenges he faces as he finds the right way to honour George's extraordinary story. George himself experiences his own transformation from a baby left on a doorstep to a world travelling vaudevillian.

Memory and imagination

It is often said that, for most of us, any memory of our time on earth will last no more than 4 generations. The power of imagination and storytelling are meaningful ways to counter our vanishing history. This is one of the reasons we have art! Neuropsychological data strongly indicates that the core network of brain regions that include the hippocampus support both mnemonic (memory) and imaginative functions. In a very concrete sense, Rory's act of imagination actually transforms his relationship to George into living memory. An act of illusion that is uncannily real!

theatrical style, conventions and context

ONE PERSON SHOW

Conventions

- direct address
- narration
- episodic
- flashbacks
- non-linear storyline
- symbolic and simple use of props/costumes
- video/projection
- multiple characters
- voice over

VAUDEVILLE

Conventions

- sketches
- song
- dance
- comedy routine
- ventriloquism
- impersonation
- magic
- acrobatics
- juggling
- athletics
- movies
- sense of magic

Context

- **Contemporary:**
  Rory shares with his audience the struggles he has faced transforming George's journal entries into a stage show.
- **Historical:**
  Rory steps back in time to capture George's extraordinary life.

elements of drama

Place/Space

- blurring of boundaries between performer and audience
- transformation of space to convey different times and places

Mood

- storytelling/strong imagery
- use of music to heighten, transform and contrast mood

Character

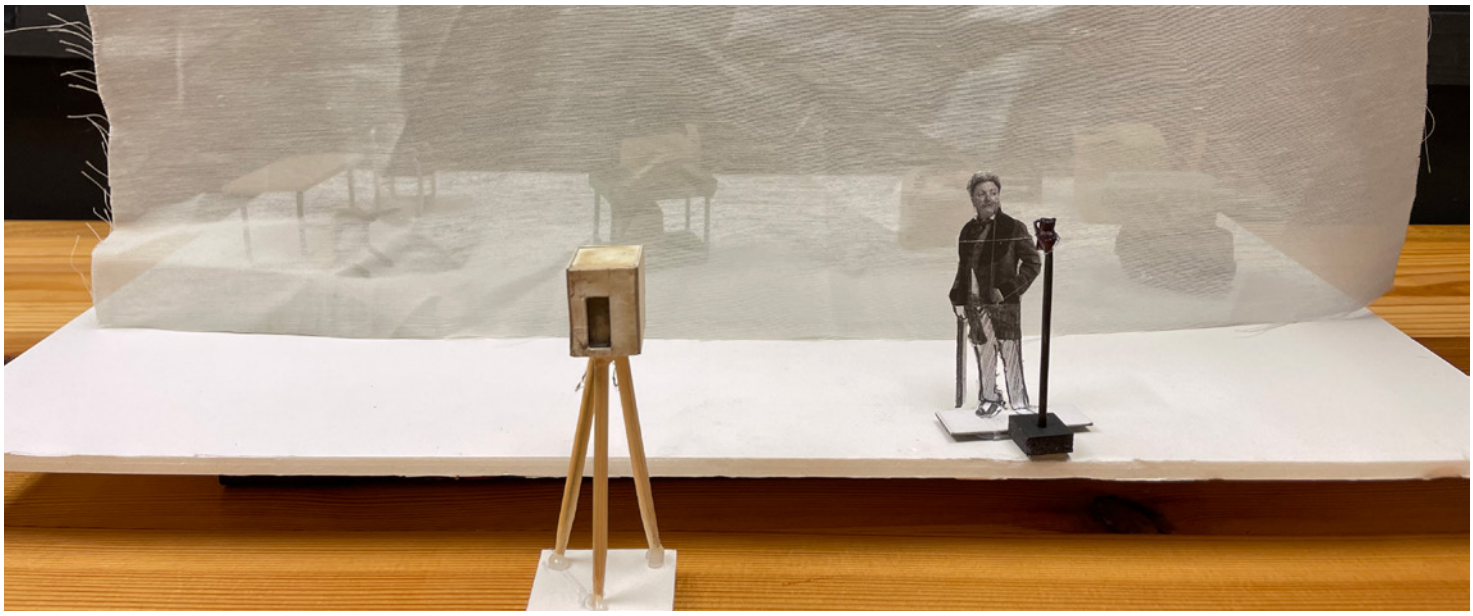
- use of voice and movement to convey multiple characters

Time

- variations in eras to tell the story and manipulate mood and dramatic meaning within each scene

Symbols

- journals are significant in telling George's story



learning experiences

YEAR 10

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM – THE ARTS (DRAMA)

Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised drama.
ACADRM047

Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles.
ACADRM048

Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance space.
ACADRM049

Structure drama to engage an audience through manipulation of dramatic action, forms and performance styles and by using design elements.
ACADRM050

Perform devised drama making deliberate artistic choices and shaping design elements to unify dramatic meaning for an audience.
ACADRM051

Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect.
ACADRR052

Analyse a range of drama from contemporary times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making.
ACADRR05

YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

1. What was it like in Aberdeen in the 1880s?

RESPONDING, FORMING AND PRESENTING

Ask students to enter the space and sit in front of a screen that will be used to show images of Scotland, particularly Aberdeen, in the 1880s, the time George W Walker was working as a vaudevillian.

Using projection, show students images of Scotland in the 1880s.
> SEE NOTE TO TEACHER

Ask students to respond verbally to the images:

- What words or phrases come to mind as you look at the images?
- Who can they imagine lived there?
- What images make the most impact and why?
- Given they are still images, what sounds do they think they would hear if the image came to life?

Explain to students that while the industrial revolution in Scotland was a time of great wealth and development, evident in the buildings shown in the images, it also created poverty, poor living conditions and periodic unemployment that would last generations. Given this social context ask students to look at the images again responding again to the questions:

- What words or phrases come to mind as the students look at the images?
- Who can they imagine lived there?
- What images make the most impact and why?
- Given they are still images, what sounds do they think they would hear if the image came to life?

Ask students to create groups of 5-6.

- Each group is to create a freeze frame of Scotland inspired by the projections and the impact of industrialisation on people in society. Remind students to use levels, space and movement thoughtfully to convey place.
- Once the freeze frame is created, ask students to discerningly add sound (as in a soundscape) to heighten dramatic meaning and mood.
- Students share their freeze frame with soundscapes with the class.
- Students as a class respond to each freeze frame evaluating each group's use of levels, space, movement and sound to convey meaning.

> NOTE TO TEACHER

Images readily available online show images of growing and established Scottish towns reflecting the tangible benefits of industrialisation in the Victorian era. However, the rapid growth of these towns, higher living costs and the nature of the free market often resulted in poverty, poor living conditions and periodic unemployment that would be felt for generations. This latter point will be addressed after students initially engage with the images.

www.aberdeentoday.co.uk/aberdeen-today/history-19th-century.htm

monovisions.com/vintage-bw-photos-of-scotland-from-between-the-1840s-and-1880s/

www.scran.ac.uk/scotland/pdf/SP2_5Income.pdf

YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

2. Who lives in the streets of Aberdeen in 1880s?

RESPONDING AND FORMING

Ask students to collect pen and paper and invite them to find a quiet space on their own either sitting or lying down with their eyes closed or covered with their hands.

Students are reminded of the images they saw in the freeze frames they created in the pre-show learning experience, 'What was it like in Aberdeen in the 1880s?' and the impact of industrialisation.

Begin playing music from Scottish composer, Alexander McKenzie from the late 1880s, particularly *Ames Piano Quartet III. Canzonetta con variazioni. Adagio cantabile e semplice*

> SEE LINKS

Accompanied by the music, teacher reads the following excerpt from *Following George Walker:*

'You're cold. It's snowing. It's early morning. Your heart is racing. You know which street you're heading for, the one with the big house at the edge of town. It's getting colder. You hunch over the box you carry, putting your hand inside you pull the crocheted blanket up a little closer. The wee bub. He gives a little start. Shhh shhhh... [hums a lullaby]. But then... too soon... you're there. The front door has a little shelter. You're bending down. You're placing the box on the top step. You ring the bell. And run. Run. Into the white of snow. Passing your own footprints as they make their journey towards that door. But now you're running in the opposite direction, wondering how that person, who made that journey, can ever feel the touch of love again.

We hear strings, perhaps a lilting guitar, and then the bustle of a busy fish market.

And now, the years are flying by. Your babe has grown into a fine young lad. And you're hiding at the corner across the street, waiting to see him leave the house for the markets. You can't help yourself. Every Sunday on market day you're here. There he is. Always humming or singing a tune. Skipping down the front steps and into the sunshine. You follow at a distance drinking him in. The sea air fills your lungs. You follow him past buskers around the fish markets, watching as he stops and listens to their stories and songs of loves and homelands far away.'

(*Following George Walker* script PG. 10)

Ask students to open their eyes. Invite students to choose a character from the excerpt and write a journal entry in role. The journal entry will be used in the following learning experience, 'Can we bring the streets of Aberdeen to life?'.

> LINKS

Ames Piano Quartet III. Canzonetta con variazioni. Adagio cantabile e semplice
www.earsense.org/chamber-music/Alexander-Mackenzie-Piano-Quartet-in-E-flat-major-Op-11/?ri=0

YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

3. Can we bring the streets of Aberdeen to life?

PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Drawing on their work from the pre-show learning experience, 'What it was like in Aberdeen in the 1880s?', students as a class and using the whole space are to create a freeze frame of Aberdeen, Scotland in the 1880s.

- Explain to students this freeze frame will provide the set for the performances of the journal entry they wrote in the learning experience, 'Who lives in the streets of Aberdeen in 1880s?'.
- Students can add sound to the freeze frame but are reminded to moderate their volume so the performance can still be heard.

Each student is invited to read their journal entry in role interacting with the freeze frame as they read. This will blur the lines between audience and performance.

> SEE CONVENTIONS PG 6

Remind students:

- that their interaction with the freeze frame while reading their journal entry can vary from complete stillness to moving constantly, and so their decisions need to be motivated by the text and the character's feelings and attitudes.
- to use voice and movement to convey role, mood and tension.
- to consider their use of silence and stillness as they perform to heighten tension and mood.

At the end of the performances, ask students to create a written or audio response to their own or one of their peers' performances analysing their use of the following to create dramatic meaning and engage the audience:

- Elements of Drama: space, mood, tension.
- expressive skills: voice and movement.

YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

4. What is Vaudeville?

RESPONDING, FORMING AND PRESENTING

As students enter the space, have visible:

- the quote from *Following George Walker*:

'Remember, this is vaudeville. You need to cast a spell.'

- vaudeville posters (search online – readily available)

Share with students that the performance, *Following George Walker* uses two theatrical styles:

- vaudeville
- one person show

Drawing on the quote, posters and their own knowledge, ask students to brainstorm and share with the class their understanding of either theatrical style including conventions, origins, and examples.

> SEE THEATRE STYLE PG 6 for a list of conventions

Share the following information about vaudeville that may not have been mentioned in the class brainstorm.

- Originated in France blending burlesque, variety shows and circus.
- Popular, travelling and family friendly light entertainment from mid 1890s.
- Evolved into short 10-15 individual unrelated comic or dramatic sketches and novelty acts called 'bills' each approximately 10 minutes in length including:
  - juggling
  - magic
  - acrobatics
  - singing
  - animal acts
  - dancing
- Played in grand, elaborate spacious theatres with responsive audiences from all social classes.
- On one hand provided escapism for audiences and on the other, addressed the social and political issues of the day.
- Strict rules set by theatre manager regarding audience behaviour. Challenge students to see if they can find the rules online.

> SEE LINKS

- Provided a respectful performance space for racially diverse performers.
- Particularly popular in the USA and provided the origins for England's Variety Shows.
- A growing film, radio and Broadway industry saw the decline of vaudeville in the 1930s.
- Inspired contemporary television variety show format.

Explain to students that vaudeville is not unlike the competitive nature of the contemporary entertainment industry and vaudeville formed the training ground for many movie, radio and Broadway stars.

Invite students to investigate the following stars of vaudeville (or one of their own choosing) and share their findings with the class. For an extra challenge, ask students to present their findings as a vaudeville 'bill' using one of the skills of vaudeville, such as juggling, dancing or magic:

- W.C. Fields
- Will Rogers
- Lillian Russell
- Harry Houdini
- Mae West
- Sammy Davis Jr
- Gracie Allen
- Bob Hope
- Marx Brothers
- Nina Mae McKinney
- The Dixie Sweethearts

> LINKS & REFERENCES

Vaudeville theatre rules
www.theaterseatstore.com/blog/vaudeville-theater

Hartnoll, P. (1972). The concise companion to the theatre. Omega
www.britannica.com/art/vaudeville
www.theaterseatstore.com/blog/vaudeville-theater

YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

1. What is my life's soundtrack?

FORMING AND RESPONDING

Music played a significant role in *Following George Walker*, providing a soundtrack to pivotal stages in Rory and George's lives.

Individually, students are to create a timeline of their lives highlighting significant events and people in their lives. Students are to choose a song or piece of music that aligns with the events and people, creating a soundtrack to their lives.

Students can present their timelines on paper, or if possible, use performance or other art forms, such as visual art, multi-media, or dance, drawing on their own strengths and capabilities in the arts.

To accompany their timeline, students write a reflection that explains their music choices and how they enhance the significant events and people in their life.

Invite students to share their timelines with a partner and with the class.

YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

2. What is the significance of symbol in performance?

RESPONDING

Symbol played a significant role in *Following George Walker* to heighten dramatic meaning.

Prior to students entering the space, place the following objects on the floor creating a 'symbol gallery' representing significant objects or images from the performance:

- envelope and letters
- journal/diary
- old blanket
- old box
- World War I memorabilia
- rope tied in a granny knot

As students enter the space, ask students to walk silently amongst the symbols.

Ask students to stop in the space and ask them to identify the significance of the symbols that were evident in *Following George Walker*.

Invite students to sit nearest the symbol that impacted on them during the performance and reflect upon:

- Why they chose the symbol?
- What was happening in the performance when this symbol was used?
- How did the symbol contribute to the dramatic meaning within the scene?
- Why are symbols used in performance?

Ask students to share their thoughts with a partner and then with the class.

YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

3. What would George say in his final letter to Willie?

FORMING AND CREATING

As established in the post-show learning experience, 'What is the significance of symbol in performance?', letters were significant symbols in the performance.

As students enter the space, ask them to find a spot on the floor by themselves with pen and paper (these will be required later in this learning experience).

Remind students that one of the major themes in *Following George Walker* was family ties and inheritance (see the Theme section for more information).

Invite students to share with the class the significance of their names:

- Were they named after someone, especially someone in their family?
- If they were named after someone in their family, what do they know about them?

Ask students to remember why Eliza and Rory named their son, William (named after Rory's great uncle Willie who died in World War I).

Ask students to recall the moment in *Following George Walker* when Willie died.

Invite students to close their eyes or lower their heads. Read students the following excerpt from the play:

'GEORGE:

Ah... um... I um ... I want to tell you...I wasn't completely honest with you at the start of the show... When I ... when I told you about my friend Harry. About his dear son ... That ... that was true. But um ... just before I went on tonight ... I also received a telegram ... my own son Willie has been killed at Arras.

I did not know what to do. How to face you. How to make you laugh, entertain you. Miss Bunting forced me on. How I've gotten through the show tonight I cannot tell.

And now, just now, backstage, amongst all the flowers and cards, I saw this has been delivered to me. It's a letter. From France.

He opens the letter.

He sees on the page his son's penmanship and drawings.

"My dearest Father,
For the last five days we have been lying in reserve, near Mount St. Eloi. With nothing to do, we've occupied our time watching the Belgian Army at work, as they make roads and railways, bore for water, and practise attacks in the old trenches. The rest of the time, we swim in the river and sleep in an open field.

Last night we were rudely awakened by German shells landing close by. So I guess our 'rest' is over. Tomorrow we march, to take part in the 'big push.'

I think of you often. I can't wait to hear of your travels in Australia. I've met some Australians over here. They're not exactly a disciplined lot. I like them enormously.

I'm sorry for not writing more often, but I've got some grand stories to tell when I get home. Thank you, Father, for instilling in me the courage to venture out and take on the world. I see now the future is filled with possibilities.

Your loving son,
William"'

(*Following George Walker* script PG. 30-31)

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE >

> FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Ask two students to adopt the role of George and to each sit on a 'hot seat' in front of the class.

- To one student on the 'hot seat' as George, students direct questions about what it felt like to receive the telegram informing him of Willie's death.
- To the other student on the 'hot seat' as George, students direct questions about what it was like to then receive the letter from Willie.
- As a class students discuss the contrast or similarities in the responses.

Drawing on the 'hot seat' experience, individually, in role as George, students are to write a final letter to Willie. Invite students to consider their use of contrast in the letter.

Using touch and talk (individually tapping students on the shoulder) invite students to read aloud their letter.

After each student has read their letter, teacher places an old box in the middle of the space and invites students to sit in a circle around the box. Invite students to share words or phrases that capture how they felt writing or reading their letter, or hearing the letters read, and how contrast was evident in the letters. When students are ready, invite students to stand and place their letter in the box.

YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

4. How can I use symbol, a letter and my family's extraordinary stories to create theatre?

FORMING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Ask students to recall what inspired Rory Walker to create *Following George Walker*; visiting the Themes section will assist students with this process looking particularly at:

- Family ties and inheritance
- The traveller
- Transformation: Making something out of nothing
- Memory and imagination

Explain to students that like Rory Walker, using their memory and imagination, they too will become a 'traveller' into their own family's history to find out how that history has been potentially inherited by their family members.

Invite students to:

- reflect on what extraordinary story from their own family they feel needs to be told that potentially has impacted on generations since. Remind students they are to choose a story that they and their family are happy to tell and share with the class.
- interview a family member who can retell the story (ideally, students record the interview).
- choose a section of the story that is filled with the potential for strong use of imagery, symbol and mood to reflect the style of *Following George Walker*. Students can draw on their work from the previous post-show learning experience, 'What is the significance of symbol in performance?' to help with their choice.

Once students have chosen a section from their family's story, they are to transform the story into a script considering the following:

- finding the balance between direct address to the audience and being in the action with the audience watching on.
- placing the audience as a witness to the story – the audience plays an important part in the process of the story being told.
- creating a sense of place.
- using imagery, the senses, symbol (such as a letter as in the previous learning experience) and mood to create a sense of place, heighten dramatic meaning and audience engagement.
- bringing the story back to simple story telling and pull back on emotion: it is more impactful for an audience to see a character trying not to cry than seeing them crying.
- moments of high emotion must be earnt by the character: avoid hysterics as the audience will retreat.
- using 'ums' and 'ahhs' might be genuine from the interview and may need to remain in the script.
- how the story has impacted upon their life in the present.

Students share a draft of the script with a partner for feedback.

Students then refine, rehearse and present their work to the class. Students are also encouraged to incorporate family photos/video if available as projections to accompany their performance.

Audience provides feedback about how the actor used a selection of the following to engage the audience to tell the story:

- expressive skills: voice and movement.
- Elements of Drama: symbol, character, mood, narrative, time and place.

YEAR 11 & 12 - PRE-SHOW

1. What is my life's soundtrack?

FORMING AND RESPONDING

Music plays a significant role in *Following George Walker*, providing a soundtrack to pivotal stages in Rory and George's lives.

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Students can present their timelines on paper, or if possible, use performance or other art forms, such as visual art, multi-media, or dance, drawing on their own strengths and capabilities in the arts.

To accompany their timeline, students write a reflection that explains their music choices and how they enhance the significant events and people in their life.

Invite students to share their timelines with a partner and with the class.

YEAR 11 & 12 - PRE-SHOW

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  - magic
  - acrobatics
  - singing
  - animal acts
  - dancing
- Played in grand, elaborate spacious theatres with responsive audiences from all social classes.
- On one hand provided escapism for audiences and on the other, addressed the social and political issues of the day.
- Strict rules set by theatre manager that made clear how audiences were expected to behave. Challenge students to see if they can find the rules online.

  > SEE LINKS
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- Harry Houdini
- Mae West
- Sammy Davis Jr
- Gracie Allen
- Bob Hope
- Marx Brothers
- Nina Mae McKinney
- The Dixie Sweethearts

> LINKS & REFERENCES

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YEAR 11 & 12 - PRE-SHOW

2. Why is an audience important in live theatre?

RESPONDING

Share with students that one of the main themes evident in the show is Transformation: Making something out of nothing.

> SEE THEMES PG 5
for more information

Share with students the following excerpt from *Following George Walker* as Rory speaks to the audience about the challenges he faced transforming his great grandfather's journal entries to a performance:

'So, I, I finally thought, screw it. And I booked some venues. And I brought it all with me. All the research and ideas and scraps of the show I've been building for years. Because I thought, what does a show need? What did George need? An audience. You.'

(*Following George Walker* script PG 3)

Considering this quote, invite students to create a written response answering the following:

- What role does an audience play in live theatre performance?
- What is the importance of this role?
- What is the difference between an audience's experience watching live performance in a theatre as opposed to watching a performance on a screen?

YEAR 11 & 12 - PRE-SHOW

3. Who belongs to the box and blanket?

RESPONDING AND CREATING

The following learning experience will introduce the students to George Walker, the main character in *Following George Walker*. Before the class, read the following information about the character that you can then use with students as they develop the character of George in the 'Round the campfire' activity below.

Information about George:

- born in Aberdeen, Scotland in about 1865 – 1870.
- placed in a box on a doorstep
- married Hope
- always humming a tune
- had an Italian singing teacher
- first performance was with a Miss Jessie Bunting (who became George's lifelong performance partner)
- toured the world, including Australia, as a vaudevillian
- lives to sing and sings to live

Before students enter the space, place an old box and blanket in the middle of the space with the following quote (from *Following George Walker*) written on an old piece of paper in an envelope placed near the box:

'He came from nothing, from nowhere, left in a box on a doorstep and ended up touring the world. For years.'

(*Following George Walker* script PG 2)

Invite students to enter the classroom quietly and to view the box, blanket and envelope. Explain to the students that these items belong to someone.

The envelope will need to be opened. A student may ask to open the envelope or as the teacher you may have to prompt students to open it. At this stage invite students to sit in a circle around the items with one student holding the envelope still unopened.

As students sit down, reveal to students the owner of the items is named, George.

Invite the student with the envelope to open it and read the quote. Ask students what this might tell them about George. Reveal to students that George was left in a box with a blanket on the doorstep of a house in Aberdeen, Scotland in about 1865 – 1870, and very little is known of George's mother, his family or the family who raised him.

Using the technique of 'Round the campfire' ask students to begin building the story of George, with you as teacher leading the character development drawn from the supplied character information at the beginning of this learning experience:

- Teacher begins the story with, 'So George was born between 1865 and 1870 in Aberdeen, Scotland. In the middle of winter, he was left on a doorstep in a box with a blanket covering him. George seemed to come from nothing and from nowhere – but he ended up touring the world as one of the most famous Vaudeville performers.'
- Teacher gestures towards a student in the circle and says, 'You knew George, didn't you (student's name)? You were ....(for example, George's best friend growing up)'. Student must take the offer of knowing George and share what they remember of George.
- From the information this student has shared and continuing to draw on the information you as the teacher know about George, choose another student in the circle and enrol them as someone in George's story. That student adds to the story.
- The process is repeated with you as the teacher drip feeding more information about George into the story and choosing students to add to the story.
- Explain to students that when they go to *Following George Walker*, they will find out more about George and encourage them to see how much of the story they created about George appears in the performance.

YEAR 11 & 12 - POST-SHOW

1. Who was George's mother?

RESPONDING AND FORMING

Prior to students entering the room, place in the middle of the space an old box and outside but near the box, an old blanket. Also place in the circle sticky notes and pens. Invite students to enter the space quietly and to sit in a circle around the box and blanket. Music such as *Both Sides Now* by Joni Mitchell can be playing quietly to heighten mood.

Invite students to close their eyes or lower their heads. Read to students the following excerpt from *Following George Walker*. As the excerpt is read invite students to use the sticky notes and pens to write down:

- the facts that are revealed about George's mother from the excerpt and place those in the box.
- what they imagine George's mother is like from the excerpt and place those notes outside the box on the blanket.

'You're cold. It's snowing. It's early morning. Your heart is racing. You know which street you're heading for, the one with the big house at the edge of town. It's getting colder. You hunch over the box you carry, putting your hand inside you pull the crocheted blanket up a little closer. The wee bub. He gives a little start. Shhh shhhh...

[hums a lullaby]. But then... too soon... you're there. The front door has a little shelter. You're bending down. You're placing the box on the top step. You ring the bell. And run. Run. Into the white of snow. Passing your own footprints as they make their journey towards that door. But now you're running in the opposite direction, wondering how that person, who made that journey, can ever feel the touch of love again.

We hear strings, perhaps a lilting guitar, and then the bustle of a busy fish market.

And now, the years are flying by. Your babe has grown into a fine young lad. And you're hiding at the corner across the street, waiting to see him leave the house for the markets. You can't help yourself. Every Sunday on market day you're here. There he is. Always humming or singing a tune. Skipping down the front steps and into the sunshine. You follow at a distance drinking him in. The sea air fills your lungs. You follow him past buskers around the fish markets, watching as he stops and listens to their stories and songs of loves and homelands far away.'

(*Following George Walker* script PG 10)

Once the excerpt is read and students have completed writing down their ideas on the sticky notes, invite one student to read the notes inside the box and another student to read the notes placed on the blanket. Invite students as a class to discuss the ideas read, allowing for clarification and elaboration of ideas.

Ask students to divide into groups of 4 and find a space in the room.

- Taking turns, each student in the group takes a turn on a 'hot seat' entering the role of George's mother. The remainder of the students in the group enter the role of George.
- Students in role as George ask his mother on the 'hot seat' questions he would like answered about his and her life.
- Student in role as George's mother improvises their responses, drawing on the ideas shared from the sticky notes.
- While in role, encourage students to consider their use of movement, gesture and voice to convey the character.
- Students can decide how old they would like to play George and his mother, allowing for variation in time and different states of their lives.

YEAR 11 & 12 - POST-SHOW

2. What would happen if George and his mother were to meet?

FORMING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Drawing on the work students completed in the post-show learning experience, 'Who was George's mother?', students divide into pairs. One student takes on the role of George and the other, the role of George's mother.

Students are to create and rehearse a scene where George and his mother meet. Students can decide when and where the scene is set, ensuring they remain true to the information they have gathered about both characters from the play.

Students are to consider the manipulation of the following in the development of their scene:

- **Time:**
  When is the scene set? How old are the characters?
- **Tension:**
  What is it like for both characters to finally meet?
- **Space, relationship and mood:**
  How will space be used to convey their relationship and the changing moods within the scene?

Students present their work to the class.

Once the scenes are presented, ask students, drawing on what they know about George and his mother, to write a letter from George's father to his son.

- Invite students to read the letters aloud.
- Once the letters are shared, invite students to engage in discussion about what it would have been like for George to know so little of his family of origin.

YEAR 11 & 12 - POST-SHOW

3. What extraordinary stories live in my family?

CREATING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Ask students to recall what inspired Rory Walker to create *Following George Walker*; visiting the Themes section will assist students with this process looking particularly at:

- Family ties and inheritance
- The traveller
- Transformation: Making something out of nothing
- Memory and imagination.

Explain to students that like Rory Walker, using their memory and imagination, they too will become a 'traveller' into their own family's history to find out how that history has been potentially inherited by their family members.

Share with students the following excerpt of text from *Following George Walker*. Students are to identify Walker's use of imagery, symbol and mood to heighten the dramatic meaning in the text:

'I'm making my way up the old road, it's getting colder now. I hunch over. Pull my collar up. The big house where I first lived looms ahead. The front door. Little shelter.

But I pass on, determined to follow the directions I've been given. Down a road I've never seen before. Stretching out, ahead of me, a path of white unbroken snow.

A corner, and there I am, standing in the night, at the door to her house.

I hesitate. Afraid to disturb those within. My mind tumbles with memories. Harry Lauder's debut on the Huntley stage, the mad Walford Bodie and his electrical machine, herring gutters in song... Jessie... Hope...Sydney, Australia...and Willie... my dear dear son.'

(*Following George Walker* script PG 33)

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> FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Invite students to:

- reflect on what extraordinary story from their own family they feel needs to be told that potentially has impacted on generations since. Remind students they are to choose a story that they and their family are happy to tell and share with the class.
- interview a family member who can retell the story (ideally, students record the interview).
- choose a section of the story that is filled with the potential for strong use of imagery, symbol and mood to reflect the style in the above excerpt from *Following George Walker*.

Once students have chosen a section from their family's story, they are to transform the story into a script considering the following:

- finding the balance between direct address to the audience and being in the action with the audience watching on.
- placing the audience as a witness to the story – the audience plays an important part in the process of the story being told.
- creating a sense of place.
- using imagery, the senses, symbol and mood to create a sense of place, heighten dramatic meaning and audience engagement.
- bringing the story back to simple story telling and pull back on emotion: it is more impactful for an audience to see a character trying not to cry than seeing them crying.
- moments of high emotion must be earnt by the character: avoid hysterics as the audience will retreat.
- using 'ums' and 'ahhs' might be genuine from the interview and may need to remain in the script.
- how the story has impacted upon their life in the present.

Students share a draft of the script with a partner for feedback.

Students then refine, rehearse and present their work to the class. Students are also encouraged to incorporate family photos if available as projections to accompany their performance.

Audience provides feedback about how the actor used a selection of the following to engage the audience to tell the story:

- expressive skills: voice and movement.
- Elements of Drama: symbol, character, mood, narrative, time and place.

YEAR 11 & 12 - POST-SHOW

4. What was it like to be a vaudevillian?

FORMING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Invite students to stand in two equal lines facing each other with approximately 1.5 metres between students in each line. Ensure there is a pathway between the two lines (enough space for a student to walk between). Ask students to recall George's and Rory's family members who featured in the performance (see the Character list pg 4 to assist this process).

Ask one student to volunteer to stand at the top of one end of the pathway and another student to stand at the other end. These two students will be facing each other. Enrol one of these students as George and the other as Rory.

Ask the students in the lines to firstly enrol as a member of George's family (students can double up on the roles). As teacher reads aloud the following (from the Themes section pg 5), ask the student in role as George to moderately walk up and down the pathway between the students enrolled as his family members.

Home and identity

Having been left on a stranger's doorstep as a baby, George never knew where he came from. He grew up to become a performer travelling the world, spending years away from his family. How much his origin story impacted on his decision to stay on the road is difficult to say, but it is the kind of lifestyle that many performers follow, often at a great cost to family.

Ask the student enrolled as George to continue to walk as his family members speak aloud words and phrases that capture what it was like for them to have George travelling as much as he did.

Repeat the process, with the student enrolled as Rory walking up and down the pathway between the students enrolled as his family members. Read the following (from the Themes section pg 5) aloud as the student walks:

As an actor, partner and father, Rory has had the same decision to make as George, whether to follow professional opportunities that will lead him away from home or to prioritise his role as a family man and build his career accordingly.

Ask the student enrolled as Rory to continue to walk as his family members speak aloud words and phrases that capture what it was like for them to have Rory, a performer, as their father. Ask students to consider how their responses might be the same or different to their responses to George.

- Out of role, ask students to sit together in a circle as a class. Invite students to share what might be the pros and cons for an actor and their family managing life in the arts industry.

Ask students in pairs and then as a class to identify the multiple vaudeville acts that were used in *Following George Walker.*

> SEE THEATRE STYLE PG 6 for more information

Drawing on their understanding of the theatrical style, vaudeville, from the pre-show learning experiences and watching *Following George Walker*, ask students to discuss as a class:

- What would a modern-day vaudeville show look like?

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Drawing on the information raised in the class discussion invite students as a class to create a contemporary vaudeville performance that reflects social and political issues society is currently facing:

Students may like to be:

- **performers:**
  - work individually, in pairs or in small groups.
  - create a 3–5-minute vaudeville 'bill'.
  - are encouraged to draw on existing skills or for an extra challenge students may like to try a new (and safe) skill. For example, magic.
  - are to create a stage name for their performance.
- **poster and program designers**
- **costume designers**
- **set designers**
- **SFX and LFX designers and operators** (encourage students to consider how they will use technology within the performance)
- **prop manager**
- **stage manager**

Students invite an audience to watch their performance. Prior to the performance:

- students may like to share with their audience the inspiration for their show.
- explain to the audience that in the era of vaudeville there were strict rules set by the theatre managers regarding audience behaviour.
  > SEE LINK

Students ask audience to follow the same rules!

Once students have performed ask students to create a written, verbal or digital response to their own performance which analyses and evaluates all or a selection of the following:

- use of expressive skills (voice and movement).
- use of the Elements of Drama: character, relationships (if applicable to size of group), focus (how did they gain and maintain audience focus), space.
- use of vaudeville conventions to create a performance that engaged a contemporary audience.

> LINKS

Audience behavior
www.theaterseatstore.com/blog/vaudeville-theater

BRINK

Brink Productions

PO Box 3262
Adelaide SA 5000

+61 8 8211 6565
www.brinkproductions.com
info@brinkproductions.com

Brink Productions Team

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Chris Drummond

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Karen Wilson

PRODUCERS
Amanda Jones AND
Bel MacQueen

FINANCE
Theresa Williams

TEACHERS' NOTES
Melissa Newton-Turner

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY
Shane Reid

CONTENT PHOTOGRAPHY
Heath Britton

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Katrina Allan

COMMISSIONING PARTNER

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