

LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI

A play by Vidya Rajan, based on the book
by Melina Marchetta



BRINK

TEACHER'S NOTES

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ELDERS - PAST, PRESENT AND
FUTURE

Looking for Alibrandi was commissioned and first produced by Malthouse Theatre and Belvoir in 2022

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Malthouse Education Coordinator



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ICON KEY



LINKS



ACTIVITY



VIDEO



READ

WARNINGS



WE URGE YOU TO CONSIDER THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF YOUR CLASSROOM WHEN STUDYING THIS PLAY.

Take special care with any students with Italian or Mediterranean backgrounds in your classroom—especially when discussions arise around the language and themes of the play.

Be aware that the danger of talking about one's lived experience or culture 'in the abstract' can be just as confronting as talking insensitively about specifics.

You are encouraged to read the short list of content warnings below, explore this Prompt Pack in advance, use your best judgement when disseminating or discussing information, and make yourself and your students aware of the support offered by the organisations on the right.

COARSE LANGUAGE

This production contains occasional coarse language, in English and Italian.

STAGE VIOLENCE

There is only mild violence in the production.

One character is hit in the face with a bottle of tomato passata, and passata is occasionally used as stylised blood effect during the show.

SUICIDE

One of the younger characters dies by suicide offstage. This is relayed to other characters verbally, and has an emotional impact on the characters, but the death itself is not seen or described.

BEYOND BLUE
1300 224 636
beyondblue.org.au

HEADSPACE
headspace.org.au

REACHOUT
au.reachout.com

LIFELINE
13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

KIDS HELPLINE
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BLACK DOG INSTITUTE
1800 105 303
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

SUICIDE CALLBACK SERVICE
1300 659 467
suicidecallbackservice.org.au

THE SOURCE



MELINA MARCHETTA

MELINA MARCHETTA WAS BORN INTO A FAMILY OF AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRANTS, LIKE THE CHARACTER JOSIE IN LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI; THE STORY OF MARCHETTA'S GRANDMOTHER IMMIGRATING TO AUSTRALIA FROM ITALY IN THE 1930S LOOSELY INSPIRED THE NOVEL.

Unsure of her academic abilities, Marchetta left school at age 15, but later earned a teaching degree. She taught at a Catholic boys' school in Sydney for 10 years. Looking for Alibrandi, her first novel, was published in 1992 and became an instant hit, selling out its first print run in only two months. It earned a number of prestigious awards, both in Australia and worldwide, and Marchetta went on to also write the screenplay for the award-winning 2000 film adaptation.

'When this book came out, it was ground-breaking. It was a book that made it possible for a generation of young adults to identify as Italian-Australians. It showed them that they did not have to choose between one or the other.

And it became popular and loved largely because librarians and English teachers all over Australia believed students should not shy away from stories about themselves, dealing with issues they faced day-to-day. They decided not to focus on how 'exotic' Josie was, but how pertinent her story was to our national narrative. To read and teach this book focusing solely on 'ethnicity' would do the work a great disservice. Her Italian heritage is only one of many parts of Josephine Alibrandi's character. And her character is strung together by the stories her mother Christina and Nonna Katia tell her about strong, stoic women who do not conform to stereotypes.'

Alice Pung
Reading Australia

'For the very first time in my own life, there was a book that didn't fetishise a migrant upbringing. Josie wasn't somebody to pity or consider 'exotic'.

I identified with her world, the pressures and challenges of straddling what I considered at that age to be identities in competition with each other. I loved Josie's gutsiness, her insistence on making up her own mind about sex and not giving in to peer pressure. I loved her loud, vibrant, complicated family, and the fact that her experiences with racism vindicated my own.'

Randah Abdel-Fattah
The Book That Made Me

THE NOVEL



EXPLORE

Read Melbourne writer Alice Pung's full essay on *Looking for Alibrandi* [HERE](#), part of Copyright Agency's Reading Australia series.

What are the Italian-Australian cultural aspects of the novel that Pung, an Asian-Australian, identified with?

- Despite growing up in a different city, what were the geographical and/or moral familiarities she recognised from when she was a teenager?
- How does Pung describe the timeline and scope of Anglo-Australia's attitude towards and acceptance of non-Anglo writing, language and culture. How does she posit *Looking for Alibrandi* might have played a part in this?

‘There’s a legacy of teenage girl’s literature, from *Anne of Green Gables* to *Bend It Like Beckham*, of these girls being highly intelligent and precocious and restless to remake the world in their own image. And I think that’s very true to life. Teenage girls are often the canary in the coal mine of social change... Their coming of age is often loaded with interesting social and historical stuff.’

Vidya Rajan
Playwright

For playwright Vidya Rajan, *Looking for Alibrandi* sits in a fascinating tradition of young girls’ stories heralding major cultural shifts. Rajan’s approach to the adaptation drew on her own South Asian heritage, and the resonances the story has with more recent waves of migration.

- What might these resonances be? Brainstorm as many things—themes, events, language, culture—that Rajan may have connected with in the process of adapting the novel into a play.
- Consider and research the two examples of teenage girls’ literature Rajan mentions above: *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). What cultural shifts might these works have reflected or foreshadowed?
- What about *Looking for Alibrandi* itself? What social changes might this story have echoed or influenced?
- Can you think of any other Young Adult or teenage girl-focussed works—books, films, music—that similarly spoke to the zeitgeist?

GENESIS + HISTORY



**WATCH**

Watch the full video of Malthouse New Work Manager, Mark Pritchard, talking about his role, the dramaturgy process, and the genesis of *Looking for Alibrandi* **HERE**. In it, he reveals the background of the work as a new theatrical adaptation.

‘The story has always compelled me because it spoke so directly to the conflict I experienced, socially and internally. I was scared to embrace my identity for fear of not being able to access an Anglo-centric world. Josie was the first character I had ever read or seen on screen that understood what it was like. She made me proud to be a wog and I will thank Melina for creating her every single day.’

Stephen Nicolazzo
Director

Well-known Melbourne theatremaker—and Malthouse directing alumnus—Stephen Nicolazzo brought the idea of adapting *Looking for Alibrandi* to the Malthouse artistic team in 2019. Malthouse already had a relationship with stage and screen writer Vidya Rajan as a recent Playwright in Residence, and suggested the two work together to create the script—predicting Vidya’s experience growing up as an Australian of South Asian descent would bring an interesting perspective on the themes of cultural identity in the story.

CAST + CREATIVES



CREATIVES



STEPHEN NICOLAZZO DIRECTOR

Stephen is currently the Artistic Director at Brink Productions. He was Co-Artistic Director of Western Edge 2022-2023 and a member of the Associate Artist Advisory Panel at Melbourne Theatre Company 2022-2024. He was the founder and Artistic Director of Little Ones Theatre, an independent company focused on innovative queer theatre-making and studied at The University of Melbourne (2008) and NIDA (Directing, 2010).

He has directed for theatre companies and festivals on all of the main stages across Australia and his works have been critically acclaimed and toured to sold out houses. He is a Green Room Award winner for Best Direction (*The Happy Prince*) and has been nominated a further four times (*Loaded*, *Psycho Beach Party*, *Dracula*, and *The Moors*). His works have won 13 Green Room Awards and been nominated for a total of 45. His works have also won a Sydney Theatre Award and been nominated for a Victorian Premiers Literary Award and an AWGIE.

His recent credits include: *Loaded*, *Looking for Alibrandi*, *Loaded-Audio Experience*, *Considerable Sexual License*, *Merciless Gods*, and *Abigail's Party*.



VIDYA RAJAN WRITER

Vidya Rajan is an award-winning multi-disciplinary artist based in Naarm and Boorloo.

Her work takes the form of scriptwriting for television and theatre, contemporary performance making, and comedy. A former writer in residence at Malthouse, she has been the recipient of the Living Now commission, the Malcolm Robertson commission, Screen Australia's 'Developing the Developer' program, the Wheeler Centre's Hot Desk Fellowship and the Melbourne Festival Director's Lab program. Recent work for screen, stage and online include *Year Of* (Stan), *Deadloch* (Amazon Prime), *Diversity Panel* (MAV), *The Feed* (SBS), *At Home Alone Together* (ABC Comedy), *Nemeses: The Sitcom* (the Wheeler Centre), *Cancellation Adventure* (Liminal), *Small & Cute Oh No* (The Blue Room Theatre), *The Lizard is Present* (Jewel Box Grant/ Melbourne Fringe), *Playlist* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre), *Sleepover Gurlz* (Melbourne Fringe Festival), and *Asian Ghost-ery Store* (Griffin Theatre Company).



KATE DAVIS SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER

Kate is a multi-disciplinary artist working as a director, dramaturg, visual artist, and designer (set, costume, exhibition and floral.) She is the Co-Artistic director of experimental performance company THE RABBLE. Over the last twenty years, Kate has created work for many companies including - Lucy Guerin Inc, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne Theatre Company, Back 2 Back Theatre, Melbourne Fringe Festival, Speak Percussion, Belvoir St, Chunky Move, Carriageworks, Malthouse Theatre, Dance House, Terrapin Puppet Theatre, Joel Bray Dance, Sydney Theatre Company and many more. In 2022, Kate was awarded the Green Room Lifetime Technical Achievement Award for her design work with THE RABBLE.



DANIEL NIXON COMPOSER AND SOUND DESIGNER

Daniel is a composer, sound designer and multi-instrumentalist. He has performed with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria, John Farnham, Yothu Yindi, Sebina Meyer, Mikko Frank, and many others. He has written and recorded multiple albums and worked extensively as a session player, programmer, and producer. He has scored and designed numerous films, plays, and dance works, including work with Flashgun Films, Cascade Films, Little Ones Theatre, Red Stitch Actors' Theatre, American Girl, Universal Television, Disney Pictures, Al Jazeera, The National Gallery Australia, Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre, Malthouse Theatre, Chunky Move, Dirty Pretty Theatre, Griffin Theatre Company, Ensemble Theatre, Madman Entertainment, NBCU, ABC, Netflix, Arts House, HBO, Films by Jove and many others.

In 2020 he won the Green Room Award for Malthouse Theatre's production of *Loaded*.



KATIE SFETKIDIS LIGHTING DESIGNER

Katie Sfetkidis is a lighting designer and contemporary artist based in Naarm. She has worked extensively in theatre, dance and experimental performance for over 15 years both in Australia and internationally. Working broadly across the sector, Katie has collaborated with a range of companies and artists including; Malthouse Theatre (*Homo Pentecostus*, *Loaded*, *Chase*, *Looking for Alibrandi*, *SS Metaphor*, *Meme Girls*); Joel Bray Dance (*Homo Pentecostus*, *Garabari*, *Considerable Sexual License*, *Daddy*) Luke George (*Fell*, *Still Lives*) Melbourne Theatre Company (*Touching the Void*, *Come Rain or Come Shine*, *Abigail's Party*); Little Ones Theatre (*Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*, *Nightingale & the Rose*, *The Happy Prince*, *Merciless Gods*); and Aphids (*Oh Deer!*, *Exit Strategies*, *The Director*). She has received a Green Room awards for her work on *Meme Girls & Still Lives*: NGV (Luke George and Daniel Kok) and has numerous nominations.



ROSA VOTO CHOREOGRAPHER

Rosa Voto is an Italian born performing artist, vocalist, dancer, percussionist, and educator living in Australia since 2003. She is known as the founder and director of the Melbourne School of Tarantella, the first school in Australia dedicated to the teaching of Southern Italian traditional and ritualistic dances. Rosa has developed unique dance and movement programs for primary and secondary schools, nursing homes, and community groups. These programs fuse together the teaching of folk dances and street theatre (Commedia dell'Arte) with elements of dance and movement therapy, to help participants achieve physical, emotional, and social integration.

CAST



CHANELLA MACRI JOSIE

Chanella is an Italian-Samoan actor, writer, theatre-maker, and educator who grew up on Dharug Country. In 2017 she graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice, the Patricia Kennedy Award, and as Valedictorian of the University of Melbourne VCA and MCM. Theatre credits include *Australian Realness* (Malthouse Theatre), *Let Bleeding Girls Lie* (La Mama), *House* (Barking Gecko Theatre), *Whale* (Darebin Speakeasy), *Truly Madly Britney* (Theatre Works), *Moral Panic* (Darebin Speakeasy), *Suddenly Last Summer* (Red Stitch Actor's Theatre), and *Crazy Brave* (La Mama). Chanella is a member of the Red Stitch Actors' Ensemble, the New Working Group, a Lead Artist with Western Edge Youth Arts, and was the playwright commissioned for Malthouse Theatre's *Suitcase Series* in 2022.



LUCIA MASTRANTONE CHRISTINA / SERA

Lucia has a successful career in theatre, physical theatre, film, TV, and as a voice artist. Select theatre credits include *The Harp in the South*, *Talk*, *Marriage Blanc*, *Romeo & Juliet* (Sydney Theatre Company), *The Cherry Orchard*, *Atlantis*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Book of Everything*, *Scorched*, *Macbeth* (Belvoir St Theatre), *Young Frankenstein*, *Window*, *Cricket Bat*, *Dead Cat Bounce*, *Kill Climate Deniers* (Griffin), *Ladies Day* (Hayes Theatre), *The Hypochondriac* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company), *The Duchess of Malfi* (Bell Shakespeare) *The Merchant of Venice*, *VERONA* (STCSA), and *The Venetian Twins* (Melbourne Theatre Company). Physical theatre credits include *Blue Love* (Shaun Parker Dancers), *Under The Influence* (Legs on the Wall), and *The Longest Night* (Urban Theatre). TV credits include *The Secrets She Keeps* S2, *The Letdown* S1, *Home and Away*, *Pacific Heat*, *Rake* S3, and *Tangle*. Lucia's film credits include *Look Both Ways*, *Dog*, *Stealth*, *Spank*, and *Blackrock*.



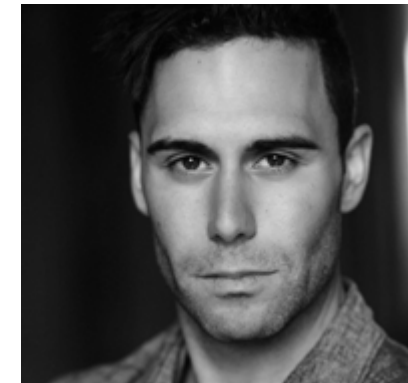
JENNIFER VULETIC NONNA / MARGARET THROSBY / SISTER BERNADETTE

Jennifer graduated from NIDA in 1984 and has since carved out an impressive stage career working with the "Who's Who" of Australia's directors. Her musical theatre credits include some of Australia's most loved productions. She has worked extensively in radio drama and her voice is synonymous with Australia's multilingual and multicultural broadcaster SBS. Jennifer appeared most recently in Malthouse Theatre's *Because The Night*. Other stage credits include *The Histrionic* and *Women of Troy* (Malthouse Theatre/Sydney Theatre Company), *Arbus & West* (Melbourne Theatre Company), and *Mamma Mia*. Awards include the Sydney Theatre Critics Circle Award for the Baroness in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and a Green Room Award for *Merciless Gods* (Little Ones Theatre/Griffin Theatre). Recent television appearances include Mandy the Mullet in *Wentworth* and Enid Holdstock in *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*. A multiple award-winning audio narrator, Jennifer is best known for the internationally awarded *Once My Mother*.



RILEY WARNER JACOB COOTE

Riley is a Pitjantjatjara actor from Scone NSW. Originally coming from a dance background and studying at NAISDA, he is about to graduate the Bachelor of Arts (acting) at WAAPA. At WAAPA, Riley has performed in *Macbeth* (directed by Stephen Nicolazzo) and *Beautiful Burnout* (directed by Matt Edgerton).



CHRIS ASIMOS MICHAEL

Chris is an international performing artist that has worked extensively on stage, television and film. His film and tv credits include –*Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, *Danger 5* (Season 1 and 2), *House Husbands* and *Bad Language*.

Stage work includes State Theatre of South Australia productions *The Puzzle*, *Three Sisters*, *The Give and Take* and *A View from the Bridge*. He also performed in the world premiere of *Barassi: The Stage Show* at Arts Centre in Melbourne.

Chris has been a resident performer for the Australian Shakespeare Company since 2012 appearing in *Willows*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Alice in Wonderland*.



ASHTON MALCOM IVY, JOHN BARTON

Ashton is an actor and theatre-maker based in Adelaide. She graduated from Flinders University Drama Centre in 2009, with First Class Honours, the Drama Prize and a University Medal, and went on to study intensively with Shakespeare and Company in the USA. Ashton has performed and created work with many award-winning local companies, including the State Theatre Company of South Australia, Windmill, Patch, Restless Dance Theatre and Vitalstatistix. Ashton is passionate about creating independent, community driven arts opportunities; and was a founding member of Adelaide's only artist-led theatre space, RUMPUS, where she served for two years as the Fundraising Coordinator. Later this year, she is excited to be performing in the national tour of AWGIE winning show, *Euphoria*. Written by Emily Steel and produced by Country Arts SA with STCSA, *Euphoria* is a funny, honest and heartfelt exploration of mental health in country towns.



ADDITIONAL CREATIVES

MUSICIANS

ROSA VOTO

RENATO VACIRCA

DIALECT COACH

PAULO BONGIOVANNI

CULTURAL + LANGUAGE CONSULTANT

LUCIA MASTRANTONE

TRANSLATION

MORENO GIOVANNONI

THE PLOT





BEFORE EVERYTHING

In dream-like semi-darkness, a female figure dances—perhaps on the deck of a ship. She loses her balance and steps on a tomato, and this long-ago memory is interrupted by reality as the figure—Nonna—is dragged into the present.

THE YEAR BEGINS

It is early 1996, and Josie is at her Nonna’s house with her mother, Christina, to make the year’s supply of passata. Josie, a second-generation Italian Australian, doesn’t feel a strong connection to her Nonna and her heritage—nor does she want to. She is about to sit her HSC year, but has to spend every weekend and Wednesday night at Nonna’s while Christina works extra shifts. Nonna speaks of the ‘curse’ that befalls the women of the family.

RADIO NATIONAL (FANTASY)

Josie has a fantasy of herself in the future—successful barrister, wife and mother, and Order of Australia recipient—being interviewed by ABC’s Margaret Throsby. Josie reveals Christina became a single mother at a young age and was thrown out of home by her father (Josie’s Nonno) as a result. Josie says she has never tried to find her own father, and that she has a scholarship to attend St Martha’s, an exclusive Catholic girls’ school.

SCHOOL BEGINS

Josie sits in study period with her best friend (and only other Italian student at St Martha’s), Sera, and bossy school captain, Ivy. Sera is applying a dubious homemade growth cream to her breasts and, even though Josie is deputy school captain, Ivy makes racist remarks to both of them.

WOG ASIO

As Josie and Sera go to the beach, a heightened physical sequence depicts what is, through Josie’s eyes, the invasive surveillance and information network within the Italian-Australian community (‘Wog ASIO’).

AFTERNOON AT NONNA’S

Nonna is sharing photos from her childhood in Italy. She reveals she knows Josie has been to the beach and warns her of the social risks of appearing promiscuous. Michael Andretti, a handsome lawyer who has just moved back to Sydney, arrives and is promptly fawned over by Nonna. Josie seems to know more about him than is revealed, and there is tension between them before Josie swiftly walks out.

BACK HOME

Later, Christina reveals to Josie she has also run into Michael earlier in the day, but both women confirm they ‘didn’t give anything away.’

HAVE A SAY DAY!

At the traditional youth speech day, Josie bumps into John Barton: captain of the local private boys’ school, politician’s son—and her secret crush. They are interrupted by the charming ‘total shithead’ Jacob Coote from Cook High, and John promises to meet up with Josie at the upcoming inter-school dance before leaving. Jacob delivers a rebellious speech to an ecstatic crowd of students.

DRESSING UP

A month later, and Nonna and Christina are adjusting Josie’s dress for the dance, which she hates. Neither Christina nor Josie have visited Michael since he moved back. Nonna laments being ‘the only one to keep this family’s reputation.’

DANCE!

At the dance, Josie tried to find John but fails. With typical malice, Ivy informs her John has already left. Josie talks with Jacob and, after Sera leaves with her new boyfriend and Josie is left without a ride home, accepts Jacob’s offer to walk her. We also glimpse Nonna, at home, looking through her photos.

WALK HOME

Josie connects with Jacob on the walk home. She tells him about her disconnection from both her Italian and the upper-class Australian cultures. When they arrive at Josie’s house, Michael is there arguing with Christina. She sends Jacob away and listens.

CONFRONTATION

In an exchange loaded with both volatility and magnetism, Christina has told Michael that Josie is his daughter and he is offering to help out. Josie bursts in angrily, and Christina sends Michael away so she can talk to her.

ENOUGH!

The scene moves fluidly between an abstract vision of Nonna in pain, Christina telling Josie she invited Michael because Nonna had worked out the secret of Josie’s paternity, and Nonna chastising Christina about her past and bringing on ‘the curse’.

CAREERS DAY

John apologises to Josie for not meeting her at the dance and explains he ‘wasn’t feeling well.’ After encouraging an excited Sera to consider studying medicine at university, he promises to show Josie around the USYD campus and leaves. Ivy enters and accuses Josie of being a bad influence on John, and racially provokes her until Josie attacks her. The girls are hauled into Sister Bernadette’s office and Josie, threatened with expulsion (and possibly litigation), begs her to call Michael instead of Christina.

ENTER ANDRETTI

Josie and Michael sit alone in Sister Bernadette’s office. They reconnect slowly as they share their inter-generational experiences of racism, and Michael encourages her the best revenge is ‘doing well in life.’ He offers her an after-school job at his law firm, and Josie notices there is possibly still an attraction between her parents.

FAMILY ROUND TWO

Christina learns about both Josie’s school fight and the internship offer and is angry at Michael’s sudden involvement in his daughter’s life. Recounting the abuse and neglect she suffered at the hands of her own father, Christina tells Josie she should reconnect with Michael if she wants.

JACOB COOTE PLEASE

Josie meets Jacob in his dad’s garage. She apologises for sending him away the night of the dance, he congratulates her for punching Ivy, and they kiss.

MORE JACOB

Josie and Jacob run excitedly through the streets and—pursued by Wog ASIO— eventually end up at her house. Their previous flirtatiousness subsides as Josie realises they have vastly different goals for their individual futures.

**COURTHOUSE FANTASY AND LIFE**

A montage scene switching between Josie working in Michael's office, Josie fantasising about an older, successful lawyer version of herself, and conversations between Josie and Christina in which Josie relays Michael's nostalgic attraction to Christina, they reveal they have both been avoiding Nonna for months now, and Christina entertains the idea of going back to study.

JOHN BARTON

John is showing Josie around USYD. They talk about education and class, their fathers, and how they used to have crushes on each other but are happy just being friends now. John gives Josie a letter—to read after the upcoming exams—about his future 'emancipation'.

NEW SERA

Josie tries to engage Sera in boy gossip, but Sera has committed to pursuing medicine and distracted with studying for her exams. Josie wonders if they've somehow 'swapped brains'—but they find common ground in identifying how much harder they have to work to break free from their Italian immigrant upbringings.

BACK AT NONNA'S

Josie is visiting Nonna after a long time, looking through an old photo album. Nonna recounts her experience coming to Australia as an immigrant, her arranged marriage, and working on a remote farm in Queensland. She balks at discussing an old photo of a handsome Australian man, Marcus Sanford. Josie invites Nonna to her house to celebrate Christina's upcoming birthday.

SURPRISE!

Josie and Nonna are waiting for Christina on her birthday but she arrives home late, and a man's voice is heard being hurriedly sent away. After first joyously assuming it was Michael getting back together with her mother, Josie is furious when she learns Christina is actually dating other men, and she runs away to go to Jacob's.

LIQUID COURAGE

Sera provides the requested alcohol and advice before Josie goes to Jacob's to potentially have sex for the first time.

JACOB + JOSIE

Josie and Jacob attempt awkwardly to have sex but everything 'gets weird' and it goes nowhere. Jacob has dropped out of school and Josie, although she cares for him, realises they are on very different paths in life.

FIRST EXAM**THE FUNERAL; THE LETTER****THE AFTERMATH****THE CONFESSION****PASSATA FOREVER**

Josie arrives at school feeling positive about taking her first practice exam, until Sister Bernadette stops her to inform her that John Barton has committed suicide.

A dialogue-less scene depicting John's funeral, Josie tearing open the letter he left her, and then emptiness.

Some weeks later, Christina and Michael talk about Josie's grief, their past and, despite Christina's forgiveness, how they will never be together. Josie emerges from her room and Christina leaves to continue her new TAFE studies. After talking to Michael briefly about Christina's relationship with her own father, Josie abruptly stands and leaves.

Josie confronts Nonna about the way she treated Christina as a pregnant teen. Nonna confesses that 'the curse' started with her—she had an affair with Marcus, the mysterious man in the photograph, and he is Christina's real father. She believes she has been trying to protect Christina and Josie ever since. Josie tells the audience she threw John's letter away; she hoped he had found peace, and let him go. She's now realised her behaviour—and that of the Alibrandi women before her—has always been in the pursuit of some sort of freedom.

The three Alibrandi women are back making passata like we first found them, but there is a new, lighter energy in their relationship— a reconciliation has occurred. They reveal Sera is going to be a doctor—she even got a higher HSC score than Josie—and they laugh as Nonna swears.

CONTEXT

TIME

THE HOWARD ERA

A NOTABLE CHANGE IN THIS STAGE ADAPTATION OF *LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI* IS TO SET THE STORY IN 1996 INSTEAD OF 1992, WHICH RECONTEXTUALISES THE ACTION UNDER THE NEW PRIME MINISTERSHIP OF JOHN HOWARD.

The March 1996 Australian Federal Election was the most important Australian election for more than a decade, decisively returning the Liberal-National coalition to office after thirteen years in opposition.

Howard swept into power with talk of sovereignty and strong borders, and pledged to create an Australia that was 'comfortable and relaxed' about its past, its present and its future.

Race and immigration emerged as a major election issue for the first time in many years. The campaign was full of racially charged rhetoric, notably from the then-emerging political personalities Pauline Hanson,

Graeme Campbell and Bob Katter. Hanson was dis-endorsed by the Liberals for her comments about Aboriginal people, but still won a seat as an independent, leading to an increasingly toxic focus on immigration policy in the ensuing years.

John Howard himself had become embroiled in the immigration debate in 1987, when he stated that levels of Asian immigration were too high. He subsequently modified his position and prior to the 1996 campaign, publicly apologised to the Asian community for his earlier remarks.

The second major issue of the campaign was the discussing of

Australia becoming a republic, which Howard—a staunch monarchist—pushed back against.

It was the Howard government that soon invented the cruel form of bureaucratic torture that is the Temporary Protection Visa, and began the policy of offshore detention for asylum seekers via prison camps on Christmas Island, Manus Island and Nauru, with Howard's ringing declaration that

'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.'



THE MID-90S

TIMECAPSULE

Research the mid-90s and gather as much information and material as you can to create a virtual 'time capsule' of 1996.

Arrange all the material into a digital or real dramaturgical booklet—one you could give a *Looking for Alibrandi* cast or creative team on the first day of rehearsals or at the beginning of the design process. Consider sections like:

- **MUSIC:** What was in the charts? What radio stations were there? In what format was music consumed? What made the Triple J Hottest 100 that year? Perhaps highlight the Australian artists.
- **TV:** What shows were popular at the time? What was new, and what was older but enduring? Are there any mentioned in the script to help you?
- **POP CULTURE:** How did people access pop culture, celebrity gossip and trends? What magazines were there? Consider the demographics they were aimed at.
- **FASHION:** Find images of what people were wearing. Consider pictures of celebrities or the front covers of magazines, but also find photos of regular people to get a balanced picture.
- **POLITICS:** The Howard Era section gives one overview of the federal Australian scene, but we are also affected by world politics. Who was in power, where? What were their political views, and did they have an impact here? What about local government? What was the political scene in Sydney at the time, and did that have an effect on local people?
- **NEWS:** What was happening—or what had happened recently—that might have an impact on people's lives or thinking? Again, think both local and global (ie Sydney had just been named in 1994 as the 2000 Olympics host city).
- **OTHER:** Housing, school, wealth, work, race, culture, the arts, weather, books, technology... Cast a wide net—time capsules usually are made up of the most overt, popular and/or meaningful relics of their time (like the early Internet!).

'The egalitarian myth was stripped of its collectivist spirit to become a glossy fantasy. In the same sweep, unionists became self-employed tradies, private and religious schools created one of the world's most segregated education systems, union membership plummeted, fragile institutions of First Nation self-determination were dismantled, cities bristled with McMansions in ever-growing suburbs and the bush was transformed by industrial mining.'

Julianne Schultz

The idea of Australia: forgotten history, power for power's sake and the collapse of the egalitarian myth

LANGUAGE

RACISM + THE TERM 'WOG'

THE TERM 'WOG' IS A RACIAL SLUR. IN THE UK IT REFERS TO A DARK-SKINNED PERSON FROM NORTH AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST OR SOUTH ASIA, POSSIBLY FROM THE TERM 'GOLLIWOG'. IN AUSTRALIA IT WAS USED TO REFER TO PEOPLE FROM SOUTHERN EUROPE, THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST.

'When I came here people were telling me that I had to give up being Italian and I felt the pressure to give up. They wouldn't play with you. They wouldn't MIX with you. They'd tease you. I remember getting on the bus and putting my school bag down in the line and the kids would come and kick it away, because you're a wog. So you had to wait at the back of the line and you were scared, you were intimidated. It was like they made you feel like you were dumb because you didn't speak English. Era bruttissimo a quei tempi, madonna! And in those days, you didn't want to be Italian, you wanted to be Australian. You wanted to fit in.'

Clementina

a Calabrian grandmother

Italian Language Maintenance in Sydney: New Perspectives for the Fourth Generation

In the 1980s, the term started to be reclaimed by some artists from those communities, including Nick Giannopoulos and Simon Palomares, George Kapiniaris and Mary Coustas, through shows like *Wogs Out of Work*, *Acropolis Now*, and *Wog Boy*. This came hand-in-hand with a lot of racial caricaturing, and there's a tension in some of these stereotypes in having both positive and negative impacts for those communities.

'The term 'New Australian' was used—un-ironically—to refer to recently arrived migrants, usually by people whose own 'Australian' ancestry dated back less than two hundred years. Like Asians, Mediterraneans appeared on commercial television only if they made fun of themselves. So we had Con the Fruiterer, Effie, and later, the multicultural cast of *Fat Pizza*... and we called this our self-deprecating, larrikin sense of humour. You were accepted if you

realised your 'woggy' or 'chinky' ways, and could make fun of your 'ethnicity'... People were still laughing at us, and not with us. So making fun of ourselves was often tinged with some degree of self-loathing.'

Alice Pung

Reading Australia

'This word, coming out of a white person's mouth, is a reminder of all that happened, of the racism endured and the art that was born from it.'

Koraly Dimitriades

Hey White People: Please Don't Call Me A 'Wog'



STYLE

FROM THE SCRIPT

‘ALL OF THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN THE ALIBRANDI KITCHEN, WITH THE ELEMENTS OF THE KITCHEN FLUIDLY TURNING INTO ALL THE OTHER SPACES. PASSATA STATIONS MAY BE SET UP AROUND THE SPACE.

‘THE ENSEMBLE ROTATES AROUND THE SPACE CONSTANTLY CREATING NEW SPACES AND IMAGES.

‘ALL SCENES ARE THROUGH THE LENS OF JOSEPHINE ALIBRANDI, SHIFTING BETWEEN REALITY AND ADOLESCENT FANTASIES/NIGHTMARES.’

THE TEXT/AESTHETIC PACKAGE

Josie Alibrandi sits at the centre of this play, as our narrator and guide. Around Josie is a rotating ensemble, with all other cast members playing multiple characters, and Josie witnessing and leading the construction of events.

The play also uses fantasy sequences that live in an expressionistic space. These are memories or imaginings of Josie

Alibrandi, more often than not related to Josie’s place within the context of 1990s Australia and its politics, as well as the looming cyclical nature of ‘the Alibrandi curse’.

Watch Malthouse New Work Manager Mark Pritchard discuss the history of the script creation.

Mark talks about director Stephen Nicolazzo’s unusual and appealing ‘aesthetic’ being a major reason

for commissioning the work, and Stephen then worked with playwright Vidya Rajan to develop the script over a few years. This makes studying the implied theatre styles in Vidya’s playtext as well as the previous stylistic work of Stephen’s—perhaps, here, a somewhat inseparable context—a valuable exercise in imagining what styles the final production may exhibit.



INVESTIGATE

What styles are implied in the script? What examples can you find to support your analysis? Consider:

- the actor-audience relationship and direct address
- visible character transformation and costume changes
- expressionistic set descriptions and mise en scene
- realistic acting styles suggested by language and dialogue
- satirical characters and heightened physical sequences (ie Wog ASIO)
- symbolism (ie use of passata as blood)

(Remember to avoid using the term ‘Eclectic’ in isolation. By definition eclecticism is a mix of styles— so what styles, specifically, contribute to your assessment of ‘Eclectic’?)

‘The style exists between heightened realism and expressionism—a world of high stakes drama and the melodramatic that is peppered with biblical imagery, gothic shadows, and elements of the divine. It is a world of overwhelming beauty, drenched in memory, in trauma, in history. The whole piece should unravel like a fast train, emulating the internal workings of Josie’s inner life.’

Stephen Nicolazzo
Director



EXPLORE

Now research director Stephen Nicolazzo’s body of work (stephennicolazzo.com) is a good place to start, as is his theatre company, littleonestheatre.com.au. How would you describe or define Stephen’s aesthetic? What theatre styles can you glean from the information and images? Your research may certainly change or add to how you imagine Brink’s stage interpretation, but it can also provide extra context to your script analysis. As Stephen also worked closely with Vidya in the development of the text, does it also help you identify further indicative style elements within the script?

THEMES

IDENTITY

SCENE 11

JACOB. SO YOU'RE REALLY REALLY ITALIAN THEN HEY?

JOSIE. NO. I'M NOT... ITALIAN OR... AUSTRALIAN OR ANYTHING. I DON'T KNOW.

Identity is the overarching theme of *Looking for Alibrandi*; it is intrinsically linked to almost every other topic or idea present in the play (as well as the source text and film adaptation). 'Who is Josie Alibrandi?' is a question whose answer Josie herself is in search of, and the many and varied things she loves or loathes, runs from or to, embraces or discards—as well as the prism through which she sees them—make up the building blocks of her ever-establishing identity.

Some—but not all—of these building blocks are explored a little more in this chapter.



ACTIVITY: KNOWING YOURSELF

First, to empathise with the complexity of Josie's (or anyone's!) journey towards self discovery and articulating her identity, let's focus on you.

Your teacher will lead you through this activity. You do not need to share your drawing/diagram/discoveries with anyone, or discuss anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.



DISCOVER

After you have looked at the many building blocks that make your own identity, repeat the exercise for Josie Alibrandi—as a class or in groups, on butcher's paper or on the whiteboard. Ensure every offer is supported by the playtext (you may even write down a page or scene number/s relevant to each suggestion).





ACTIVITY:
KNOWING
YOURSELF

Get students to find a quiet space for themselves, with a few blank pieces of paper (or a large sheet butchers' paper) and pens/markers. (This mind-map format can easily be adapted as a daisy model, list, chart or table, or even a Venn diagram.)

Remind them that they do not need to share their finished work with anyone, then guide them through the activity.

Draw a circle in the middle of the page and write your own name inside.

Now draw a line from this circle to another, smaller, circle, and write AGE inside. Write your age outside of this new circle, and connect them both with a line.

Now draw another line from the centre 'name' circle to another smaller circle, this time writing GENDER inside. Again, write your answer next to this new circle with a small line connecting them.

As you can see, we are beginning to create a mind map-style diagram. Some circles will have more than one answer or piece of information to write next to it. Continue with any of the following aspects of your 'identity' (teachers: use your discretion, and/or feel free to change or add):

- ethnicity/culture
- sexuality
- favourite food
- spirituality/religion
- favourite clothing
- superstitions or rituals
- favourite music
- what inspires me
- family members
- what makes me angry
- friends
- people who influence(d) me
- subjects I'm studying
- how I relax
- subject I want to study
- what role I take in a group
- what do I want to be?
- how I respond to conflict

Take a look at the vast, complex matrix that makes you... you. With a highlighter or a different coloured pen or marker, underline or highlight the things that you think are the most important, clear or influential in making up who you are. With another colour, you may wish to highlight the things that are currently developing or settling, in a state of change, or were otherwise difficult to answer.

Put your work away. Share any observations or discoveries with the class—only if you are comfortable doing so.

RELIGION

CATHOLICISM

THE PLAY FEATURES BOTH IRISH AND ITALIAN TRADITIONS OF CATHOLICISM, IN THE ELITE PRIVATE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT ST MARTHA'S AND IN THE ITALIAN MIGRANT COMMUNITY.

Until about 1950, the Catholic Church in Australia was overwhelmingly Irish in its ethos (think Brides of Christ). Most Catholics were descendants of Irish immigrants and the church was mostly led by Irish-born priests and bishops. Post-war immigration saw the congregation's demographic change dramatically, with Italians becoming the largest national group, but being held as outsiders, and in some cases a pastoral problem to the Australian Church due to differences in their approach to Catholic tradition.

The Italian migrants were largely from Southern Italy, where Catholic traditions involve Saints' days, statues, icons and other habits of devotion that crossover with pagan traditions and harvest cycles. In the 1950s the Australian Catholic Church subscribed to the government policy of 'assimilation' of migrants. Sacred images of Saints were often rejected by the Churches, and feast day celebrations had to take place outside the church.

Italian homes in Australia often display Catholic symbols, icons and images of saints proudly, linking them to specific villages back

home. Crucifixes are hung on walls or displayed in small shrines, and they're also commonly worn on a necklace or rosary.

'You don't often see the same paraphernalia in Irish Catholic homes as you do in an Italian house, where it's very prominent.'

Stephen Nicolazzo
Director

Italian religious orders such as the Scalabriniani, Cappuccini, and Francescani would often act as mediators between the local clergy and a group of Italian migrants, but overall the Church's quest for uniformity in religious practices implied that migrants had to renounce secular traditions of expressing the same Catholic faith in a different way. These tensions began to dissipate through the Whitlam era and the push around multiculturalism, but the distinctions between the two traditions are interesting to consider.

THE CURSE / IL MALOCCHIO

SCENE 2 **JOSIE.** (to us) NONNA THINKS ALIBRANDI WOMEN ARE CURSED. BECAUSE BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO US. EXCEPT THE ONLY BAD THING SHE EVER TALKS ABOUT IS MAMA GIVING BIRTH TO ME, SO...YEAH. ALSO THE DEVIL IS INVOLVED SOMEHOW.

Even before her father comes back into the picture, Josie, her mother and grandmother are forced to reckon with the narrative of shame that surrounds their family.

Italians have a long and deep-rooted tradition of beliefs about luck and things that give either good or bad luck.

In Italy there are colloquial names for bad luck—sfiga, iella—but the most notorious is Il Malocchio (mal = evil; occhio = eye).

Malthouse New Work Manager Mark Pritchard investigates this idea of Malocchio further in his Dramatugy Pack for the play. He explains:

‘Malocchio is the Italian version of the widespread belief that others can cast a curse of jealousy, envy, or malice on a person or a personal object, bringing them harm or misfortune.

Malocchio is rooted in a person’s envy, and its symptoms can include headache, excessive yawning, and a general malaise. It is usually cast by one person on another, but Nonna believes that the Alibrandis have put such a curse on themselves.

‘You can receive or give Malocchio through excessive praise, so compliments are often followed by ‘God bless you’ to avoid giving any accidental Malocchio.

‘A spell to rid someone of Malocchio involves making the sign of the cross with olive oil in

a dish of water while saying a prayer, and drawing meaning from the patterning of the oil. Another method involves a strega (witch) using scissors to ‘cut the air’ over the dish, make the sign of the cross three times and recite a prayer.

‘A cornicello or corno portafortuna is a gently twisted red horn-shaped amulet, similar to the color and shape of a chili pepper. The cornicello can be seen hanging in people’s houses, outside windows, inside cars, or worn as jewellery.’

FAMILY

SCENE 2 **JOSIE.** YOU KNOW IF IT’S SO MUCH TROUBLE WHY DON’T WE JUST GO DOWN TO WOOLIES AND GET SOME LEGGO’S? IT TASTES THE SAME.

Josie grins at us. Christina and Nonna freeze.

NONNA. LEGGOS...

CHRISTINA. OKAY, JOSIE. [Italian] HAVE SOME RESPECT. [English] YOU’RE NOT TOO OLD TO BE SLAPPED.

NONNA. [Italian, rapidly] SEE? SEE, CHRISTINA. LEGGOS. YOU DON’T LISTEN TO ME AND LOOK AT HER, [English] NO UNDERSTANDING OF TRADITION, [Italian] SITS THERE LAUGHING LIKE A GYPSY. LEGGOS. [English] CLOSE YOUR LEGS.

PARENTS



INVESTIGATE

As a group, explore the script and discuss the relationship each character has with their parent(s). Consider:

- Josie and her Christina
- Christina and Nonna
- Christina and Nonno
- Josie and Michael—both in his absence and when he returns
- John and his father
- Sera and her parents
- Jacob and his father
- Ivy and her parents
- Nonna and her parents back in Italy

What are the similarities and differences between these relationships? Are there any thematic links— whether due to the similarities or differences? What have been the effects of the characters’ relationships to the mothers or fathers— how has it shaped their personality and identity?



THE MIGRANT EXPERIENCE

SCENE 22

NONNA. IS VERY FAR, JOSIE. BUT WE MUST GO! WE GET DOWN FROM THE BOAT AND I MEET MAN I AM ENGAGED TO FOR FIRST TIME—YOUR NONNO. BUT THEN WE NOT STOP, HE IMMEDIATELY TAKE ME TRAIN AND BUS TO INGHAM. IS NOT CITY, JUST FARM. FULL OF ITALIANS WORKING IN FIELD—I WAS SHOCK, BUT NONNO SAY YOU DON'T KNOW HOW LUCKY YOU ARE—HE WAS IN CAMP IN WORLD WAR BEFORE I COME—THE AUSTRALIANS LOCK ALL ITALIAN IN CAMP JOSIE, WHAT THEY THINK OUR MEN DO? KILL THEM WITH TOMATOES? SO THEN I UNDERSTAND WHAT NONNO SAY AND I QUIET.

ITALIAN MIGRATION IN AUSTRALIA + THE INGHAM CAMPS

THE ITALIAN PRESENCE IN AUSTRALIA CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE FIRST FLEET. THE GOLD RUSHES LURED MANY HUNDREDS OF ITALIANS TO VICTORIA, WHO THEN STAYED ON ESTABLISHING SMALL, MAINLY FARMING COMMUNITIES, OR MOVING ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

While northern Italians arrived sporadically from agricultural regions like Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany and the Veneto, it was southern Italians who started to increase from 1901—mostly Sicilians, but also Calabrians, Abbruzzesi and Campanians. In Queensland, tropical sugarcane towns like Ingham witnessed dramatic rises in the Italian population from the 1920s, with almost half of the sugarcane farms in the Herbert River district owned by Italians.

There was a notable gender imbalance among the Italian community, with three or four men for every woman. Many consequently married Indigenous, South Sea Islander, and foreign Queensland women, forging early multicultural ties.

Life for Italians after 1933 deteriorated in an intense climate of suspicion and fear, reducing their arrivals. The Italian became fragmented into fascist, anti-fascist and politically disengaged affinities.

When Italy entered the war in June 1940, this highly visible minority group soon felt the deep-seated hostility of Australian locals, and were declared 'enemy aliens'. Queensland locked up almost 3,000 Italian-Australians, with

Italian community leaders in the cane growing districts being among the first to be interned. Men were arrested regardless of whether their loyalty was proven or not, in camps such as the Ingham camp referenced in the play.

Most were liberated after Italy surrendered in 1943, but so pervasive was the paranoia in North Queensland that the authorities refused to allow all to return home. Some were not released until late 1944.

'We early immigrants of 'enemy' origin had been treated by the government and the legally constituted Australian authorities during the course of the war... It was a treatment we did not deserve and was in sharp contrast with Australia's avowed policy of fighting for the rights and liberties of the oppressed peoples of the world, for the protection of minority groups and for the prevention of racial discrimination.'

Oswaldo Bonutto
ABC article, 2020

After World War II, Italians migrated to find better employment prospects and a better lifestyle, but conditions were not always what they had been led to expect. Until the 1960s, there were no national, ethno-specific welfare services for arriving migrants. Support was provided on a local level by volunteers from within the Italian community, often with the help of political organisations or the Catholic Church.

The massive influx of Italian migrants in the 1950s contributed to the expansion of what came to be known as 'Little Italy's' in the major cities. By the 1960s, whole precincts were devoted to Italian businesses, shops, entertainments, coffee bars and restaurants, and Italian social clubs sprang up across the country. By the 1970s, Italian names were found in the strata of business, politics and society, and Italian words—spaghetti, pasta, zucchini, pizza, gelato, cappuccino, vino—were integrated into the everyday experience of Australians.



PROXY BRIDES

MARRIAGE-BY-PROXY IS THE CELEBRATION OF THE UNION OF TWO PEOPLE IN WHICH ONE OF THE TWO SPOUSES IS ABSENT AT THE TIME OF THE CEREMONY AND IS SYMBOLICALLY REPLACED—BY ‘PROXY’.

It was authorised by the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century and was a widespread practice among many Italians who emigrated to Australia up until the 1970s. It's estimated there are approximately 12,000 Italian women who married men in Australia by proxy between 1945 and 1976.

Sometimes the future groom and bride were acquainted, at least by sight, as they often came from the same village. On other occasions, they knew each other well and were in love before the man left for Australia, but there were also several cases where the two had never seen each other before and were from different villages or regions of the Italian peninsula.

In these cases they met for the first time via images: they exchanged a photograph and if the two liked each other a paper correspondence started to get familiar. It could last for months, even years, until they decided to marry.

‘You don’t see a person, you dream. You dream what you do not see. You fall in love of that letter that you receive, and you anxiously wait for the next because there is nothing else.’

Carmela, a proxy bride
SBS article, 2019

The ceremony was still strictly religious, and had to take place in the church of the bride village. On the day of marriage the woman was accompanied to the altar by her father where she was awaited by a stand-in for her true husband-to-be: often the brother or a friend.

Following the wedding celebrations, the long bureaucratic procedures that were required to allow the new wife to emigrate to Australia to be with her husband began. Once everything was ready, the proxy bride would travel to Australia, in most of the cases by ship, a journey that lasted about a month.

SCENE 29

NONNA. YOU NOT KNOW HOW YOUR NONNO WAS JOSIE. WHEN THEY TELL ME THERE IS MAN FOR ME IN AUSTRALIA, I ALL SMILES. HE SO NICE IN HIS LETTER. ON BOAT HERE, I LAUGH AND DANCE, EXCITED. I DREAM MY NEW LIFE. BUT WHEN I COME HERE. ON FIRST NIGHT, HE SLAP ME. IN FRONT OF EVERYONE. I THINK MAYBE IS BECAUSE OF CAMP, MAYBE NOT HAPPEN AGAIN. BUT HE ALWAYS THE SAME. WHEN IN FARM, ALL ITALIAN WIFE SAD THEIR HUSBAND HAVE TO WORK SO MUCH, AND I SAY I WAS SAD ALSO, BUT I NOT SAD HE AWAY.

MY BODY... [Italian] FOR FIFTY YEARS HE TREATED ME LIKE AN ANIMAL [English] LIKE AN ANIMAL IN HIS HOUSE JOSIE ONLY THERE TO FEED HIM FOOD AND FOR... EVEN WHEN I DON'T WANT. THEN MARCUS COME TO INGHAM AND IT DIFFERENT.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

SCENE 14

IVY. JOSIE, I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY DO THINGS IN THE OLD COUNTRY OR WHATEVER MUD HUT YOU'RE FROM, BUT YOU'RE IN AUSTRALIA NOW, OKAY?

JOSIE. I KNOW WHERE I AM, IVY.

IVY. AND IN AUSTRALIA, AND I KNOW YOU'RE PROBABLY TRYING, BUT WE HAVE A WAY OF BEHAVING THAT ISN'T QUITE SO...

JOSIE. WHAT?

IVY. (takes a breath) NO... MY MOTHER HAS ALWAYS EXPECTED ME TO TAKE A CHARITABLE STANCE WITH THOSE LESS FORTUNATE. NEVER MIND, JOSIE.

JOSIE. OH YEAH CHARITY... IS THAT WHAT YOUR DAD WILL CALL IT WHEN HE BUYS YOU YOUR OWN TV SHOW? WHERE YOU CAN TALK ABOUT COUNTRY ROAD AND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO MATCH YOUR BAG WITH YOUR XENOPHOBIA?

IVY. WHAT DID YOU SAY?

JOSIE. OH, DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT WORD?

IVY. NO I JUST... SOMETIMES I CAN'T... UNDERSTAND WITH YOUR VOICE? BUT I GUESS IT'S TO BE EXPECTED. ENGLISH IS HARD.

JOSIE. I'M SO TIRED OF YOU IVY. I WAS BORN HERE AND YOU KNOW IT. IVY. MMMM BUT ONCE A DIRTY WOG, ALWAYS A DIRTY BASTARD WOG.

CLASS

JOSIE MAY BE FOCUSED ON AN 'UPWARD' PATH THROUGH MOST OF THE PLAY, BUT ULTIMATELY JACOB FORCES HER TO QUESTION WHETHER CLASS—AND THE ASPIRATION TO TRANSCEND HERS—IS SO IMPORTANT.

By the end of the play, Jacob goes from school captain to dropping out to become a mechanic; meanwhile Sera finds renewed academic focus on a medical degree and even gets better marks than Josie. And Josie winds up reassessing her own 'inevitable' path—prestigious high school scholarship, university, professional career in law—and understanding there are many valuable paths, and perhaps none as preordained as she first thought.



INVESTIGATE

Look at the script and see if you can identify the implied class, aspirations and belief in inevitability of all the school-aged characters (Josie, Sera, John, Jacob, Ivy)—and whether their views change over the course of the play. You can do the same (perhaps with some retrospection, perhaps not) for the adult characters.



PRIVATE SCHOOL CULTURE + THE BORN-TO-RULE MENTALITY

THE STATUS AND PRIVILEGE—AND SCANDALS—ASSOCIATED WITH PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF MUCH DISCUSSION IN THE MEDIA IN RECENT YEARS, ESPECIALLY INDEPENDENT ALL-BOYS SCHOOLS.

‘In Australia, we’re so adamant about telling the story of meritocracy and this being ‘the land of the fair go’—but this hides the truth... It can take four generations for someone with a low socio-economic background to reach the average income. Our divided education system exacerbates the social strata...

‘You’ve got schools where they’ve identified kids are turning up hungry and they want to be able to run a breakfast program and they can only afford to do that three days a week. You’ve also got schools in Australia who have firing ranges and orchestra pits and two- storey swimming tanks so that kids can learn to scuba dive.’

Bri Lee

Who Gets to Be Smart

The Howard era put a focus on consumer choice around education, encouraging competition between schools around success rates, while also injecting public funds disproportionately towards the elite private schools. This two-tiered public/private system can entrench educational inequality from a young age, lead to a widening divide in education outcomes from Australian students and, ultimately, shape the corridors of power; the composition of many recent governments hugely favour graduates from this same set of elite schools.

This theatrical adaptation of *Looking for Alibrandi* leans into these resonances, and the significance of these schools for migrant families as high-pressure opportunities for their kids to access what Vidya Rajan calls ‘white belonging’. While there are academic benefits that come with attending these elite schools, the major long-term impact comes from the networking and access these schools enable.

‘I was drawing on my own experience of going to law school at a ‘group of eight’ university. I went to public school in the suburbs, so I did not encounter any of these people who I did when I went to law school—the John Barton world. It was really interesting how even the aspiration to study law became this breeding ground for the nation’s politicians.’

Vidya Rajan

Playwright

PEER PRESSURE

HSC + MENTAL HEALTH

IN 2003 A REPORT FOUND PRESSURE TO PERFORM IN THE HSC CONTRIBUTED TO ONE IN 11 ADOLESCENT SUICIDES IN NSW. THE FORMER COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND AN AUTHOR OF THE REPORT, GILLIAN CALVERT, CALLED FOR AN URGENT INVESTIGATION OF HOW TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THIS STRESSFUL PERIOD, AND HOW TO WORK WITH PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY TO PROVIDE REALISTIC GUIDANCE TO STUDENTS.

‘As a group these were successful students, with records indicating they set high standards for themselves and worked extremely hard... the period leading up to their deaths was typically characterised by feelings of overwhelming pressure to succeed, coupled with an intense fear of failure.’

Gillian Calvert

Sydney Morning Herald article, 2003

The study examined 111 adolescent suicides together with another 76 deaths that resulted from deliberately risky behaviour such as drug use or reckless driving. The group accounted for almost a quarter of all deaths in the age group, and 70 per cent of those suicides were men. Two-thirds had experienced long-term difficulties with mental health, family or school problems, but many deaths were also precipitated by a bereavement, relationship breakdown or argument with parents.

There are now many support services and programs in Australia attempting to tackle this issue, and foster conversations in high schools about the pressures facing young people. These include Headspace, offering free assistance (both online and in person) to young people facing various issues or questions from physical and mental health to sexual help, and Beyond Blue, providing information about where you can seek assistance and support, who to contact, and what to expect.

Students may also wish to refer to the more comprehensive list of support services listed on page 3.

‘EMANCIPATION’

SCENE 2 **JOSIE.** (to us) I’M NOT SURE HOW MUCH OF THIS I CAN TAKE, HONESTLY. IT’S ALWAYS THE SAME OLD BLOODY THING. ‘TRADITION’. AND I’M JUST HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.
(to Nonna and Christina) I WONDER WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE FREE, TO BE EMANCIPATED.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Although more overt in the original novel, this playtext of <i>Looking for Alibrandi</i> also frames the events of the story as Josie’s pursuit of her eventual ‘emancipation’—liberation | from the trappings and outward signs of her cultural (non-white) roots, breaking free from traditional working class aspirations to become a successful barrister, and | finally proving the fallacy of the Alibrandi ‘curse’—all based on the perceived access and opportunities (and expectations) of the white, rich kids. |
|---|--|--|

SCENE 20 **JOSIE.** OOH. ‘THE EMANCIPATION OF JOHN BARTON’. I LIKE THAT.
JOHN. I DON’T THINK I’M QUITE THERE YET, BUT SOON.
JOSIE. AND THEN WHAT? WHAT WILL THE EMANCIPATED JOHN BARTON DO WITH HIS LIFE, HEY?

| | |
|--|---|
| The antithesis in the story of Josie’s more upward-facing emancipation is the eventual tragic release achieved by John Barton. John, the son of a wealthy politician, has had his life set out for him from a young age: like his grandfather and father before him, he’s expected to study law, go into politics, and possibly even become the Premier. Feeling stuck and saddled by parents’ high expectations is a burden both he and Josie share, but John feels so trapped by these expectations that he commits suicide. | Josie eventually conceptualises this as John’s own ‘emancipation’, and recognises just how important it is for young people to be able to make choices for themselves and feel good about their place in the world—the alternative, as John demonstrates, can be fatal. |
|--|---|

SEX

SCENE 25 He takes out a condom wrapper.
JOSIE. OH GOOD. (SHE PEERS AT IT) LARGE. LIKE A TAMPON. HEY DO YOU EVER WONDER WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO HAVE A PERIOD? LIKE AS A GUY?
JACOB. JOSIE, WE’RE GOING WEIRD AGAIN.
She kisses him hard. It escalates. She bites his lip.
JACOB. OW! WHAT? WHY?
JOSIE. SORRY!
JACOB. I THINK I’M BLEEDING.
JOSIE. QUICK, PUT SOME ALCOHOL ON IT TO DISINFECT IT.
JACOB. WHAT THE FUCK-
Before he can speak, she’s dabbed some whisky on his lip—it burns.
JACOB. OW. JOSIE, WHAT THE HELL—WHAT’S GOING ON?
JOSIE. WHAT DO YOU MEAN? WE’RE HAVING SEX!
JACOB. ARE WE??

| | |
|---|---|
| Despite her best friend Sera’s active sexual confidence, and Jacob’s overt solicitations, Josie initially resists any pressure to be explore her own sexuality as she instead focuses on her studies (and ‘emancipation’). It takes a fight with her mother and Nonna for her to change her mind—contextualising it for herself as not so much as giving in to peer pressure, but giving in to the Alibrandi ‘curse’: making a rebellious, potentially calamitous decision and letting her morals be judged by the community as retribution for her family’s perceived hypocrisy. | Ultimately (and in a slight tonal departure from the novel and film), both Josie and Jacob realise they are attempting to have sex for the wrong reasons—and that they have the power to break their or their families’ cycles of habitual behaviour—and they agree to break up and remain friends. |
|---|---|

IN THEIR WORDS

STEPHEN NICOLAZZO / DIRECTOR



WATCH

Click on the above icon to watch the whole interview, or use the **LINKS** to specific questions on the right. The whole video with timecodes of individual questions can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/LFADirector



What inspired you to take on this work?



How did you approach staging the rapid changes of character, place and time?



How did you work with the actors in rehearsals?



How do you collaborate with the designers when creating this production?



What has been the most challenging aspect of interpreting this play for the stage?



For you, what's the most exciting part of this production?



What do you want the audience to take away from this work?

I WAS AFRAID TO BE A WOG

[Looking for Alibrandi] spoke to the conflict that occurred as I grew older. I was scared to embrace my identity for fear of not being able to access an Anglo-centric world, I was embarrassed by custom, by smelling of salami or garlic, and growing hair on my chest just that little bit earlier than others. I was afraid to be a Wog. Just like Josie. Always trying to assimilate to a culture other than my own. I would try out a British accent, strive for excellence in my studies to escape being a concreter, and shut out the traditions that had brought me such love as a young person. I wanted to escape the curse of being a wog. Josie was the first character I had ever read or seen on screen that understood what it was like. Her story made me proud to be a wog and I will thank Melina Marchetta for creating her every single day.

Stephen Nicolazzo

Looking for Alibrandi show program

I wasn't in Australia in the 90s, and so missed the huge Alibrandi moment at that time, and actually only read the novel a few years ago, when I chanced upon it at a bookstore. I could not put it down though, and finished it in a night, immediately electrified, and swept away by a real sense of recognition. I guess this isn't surprising—I was a young woman from a migrant background too, a first-generation South Asian Tamil one in my case, who like Josie had also grown up in modest suburbs and chafed against the excesses of culture while dreaming of a grander future.

In adapting the book over the last couple of years, this initial sense of resonance is something I revisited. It felt worthy of investigation, that this novel still felt fresh to someone like me, whose family went through a much later and completely different wave of migration to this country. For many newer settler migrants, Southern European migrants might seem initially part of the fabric of 'Australia', but this was not always so, and there is much we can gain in finding solidarity and exchange across our stories. In my writing, I drew on echoes of similarity: rhythms of silence and speech, the intergenerational strength of women, feelings of alienation, internalised inferiority regarding the 'anglo establishment', and the pressures of self-actualising while honouring the sacrifice of those who came before you.

I hope this work lets the audience have a deeply felt experience of this vital moment of migratory history. In turn, it's also a way to connect with and perhaps even to look anew at what, if anything, has changed now, and which stories get to be considered classic parts of this country's trajectory.

Vidya Rajan

Looking for Alibrandi show program

KATE DAVIS / SET + COSTUME DESIGNER



READ

You can read the transcript of our interview with Kate Davis in the Resources at the end of this document—as well as download her original design images and pictures of the *Looking for Alibrandi* set model.







SOON AFTER THE PRE-PRODUCTION DESIGN PRESENTATION FOR *LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI*, THE SHOW'S SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER KATE DAVIS SAT DOWN TO CHAT WITH MALTHOUSE EDUCATION COORDINATOR LYALL BROOKS.

CHANELLA MACRI / ACTOR



WATCH

Click on the above icon to watch the whole interview, or use the **LINKS** to specific questions on the right. The whole video with timecodes of individual questions can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/LFAActor01

-  Intro
-  How did you prepare for the play?
-  What do you do to delineate the present and future version of Josie?
-  How do you see your relationship with the audience?
-  What character or part of the play do you have a strong connection with?
-  What part of the production most excites you?

‘I grew up in a very different world from Josie. By the time I was growing up in primary school, high school, being Italian wasn’t such a negative thing. Being half Samoan, being brown, was much more of an issue for me growing up... I grew up in the Blue Mountains, which in the late 90s was very white, a sort of gated community. That desire to be white, to be educated, to be wealthy—to just fit within the mould of what is beautiful and successful—was so strong ... I remember how embarrassing it is to be different, to be big, to not look the right way, to have parents that speak differently, a strange accent. There’s such white-hot shame about sticking out.’







Chanella Macri
The Guardian

LUCIA MASTRANTONE + HANNAH MONSON / ACTORS



WATCH

Click on the above icon to watch the whole interview, or use the **LINKS** to specific questions on the right. The whole video with timecodes of individual questions can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/LFAActor02

-  Intro
-  How did you prepare for the play?
-  What do you do to delineate your different characters?
-  How do you see your relationship with the audience?
-  What character or part of the play do you have a strong connection with?
-  What part of the production most excites you?

PAGE TO STAGE



CONTEXTS

THIS CHAPTER AIMS TO SUPPORT YOU TO RECOLLECT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE PRODUCTION, STRUCTURE YOUR ANALYSIS, AND BEGIN TO ARTICULATE YOUR EVALUATION OF HOW EFFECTIVELY THE CONTEXTS IMPLIED IN THE WRITTEN SCRIPT WERE INTERPRETED ON STAGE.

Consider how each production role contributed to the creative and imaginative interpretation of these contexts, and remember to keep these key questions in mind:

How did it happen? Why did it happen? What did I think of that choice? What effect did the choice have on the audience? Was the effect positive or negative?

Following are some of the contexts of *Looking for Alibrandi* you may have researched prior to seeing the show, together with a small selection of simple provocations to get you going.

How was the element of the passata—the processing stations, the tomatoes and their waste, the physical sauce—realised and integrated into the story and action onstage? Was it as you expected? Was it effective? Why or why not? Give examples.

STYLE + AESTHETIC

Further discussion on the theatre styles evident in the production is under Styles, on the next page.

Read the interview with set and costume designer Kate Davis in the Resources chapter, watch director Stephen Nicolazzo's interview in the previous In Their Words chapter, consider any research you undertook on Stephen's previous work, and look up more images from the oeuvre of Pedro Almodóvar.

Did you have any expectations of what the 'aesthetic' of this production of *Looking for Alibrandi* might be? If so, were these expectations met? Why or why not? Were the aesthetic choices on stage, as you now recognise them, effective in your understanding of the play's contexts and meaning? Why or why not? And how? Identify examples from the production you saw.

STYLES

ECLECTIC THEATRE?

ALWAYS TAKE SPECIAL CARE TO NEVER LABEL A PLAY AS ‘ECLECTIC’ WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE SPECIFIC THEATRE STYLES AND THEIR CONVENTIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO AND JUSTIFY THIS ‘ECLECTICISM.’

Following are just some examples of conventions of theatre styles that you may have noticed in either the script or the stage interpretation of *Looking for Alibrandi*. Remember, how you frame the intended style(s) of the play is entirely up to you—you can agree or disagree with any of these—so long as you can explain your reasoning!

How many of these conventions did you identify in the written script of the play?

Take a scene of the playtext and underline any instance of the conventions to the right. Work in a group, or take a solo pass at the scene before comparing your work with a friend and discussing.

How many of these conventions did you identify in the stage interpretation of the play?

Using a scene from the stage interpretation, consider each production role’s contribution and give examples of any of the listed style conventions that were evident. Were they clear? Were they effective in supporting the other production roles/elements, and ultimately the interpretation?

REALISM

- Naturalistic costumes
- Believable, relatable characters
- Realistic movement
- Un-heightened speech and everyday dialogue
- Psychologically driven drama
- Protagonist rises up against the odds and triumphs

NATURALISM

- Presence of poor or working-class characters
- Exploration of harsh topics (ie suicide, poverty, domestic violence)

SYMBOLISM

- Transformed or symbolic props (ie passata as blood)
- Lighting as atmosphere indicator
- Abstract stage settings
- Archetypal characters

EXPRESSIONISM

- Surreal atmosphere
- Abstract Scenery
- Use of bold or garish colours or patterns
- Single central protagonist
- Representative characters (ie wealthy/snobby)

BRECHTIAN/EPIC

- Traditional proscenium arch theatre (even without a prosc)
- Mix of realistic and non-realistic movement
- Direct audience address
- Multi-purpose set elements
- Visible lighting equipment

FARCE

- Consider ‘Wog ASIO’
- Broad comedic character types
- Heightened physicality and comedy (ie cartwheels)
- Design’s overt comedic focus (ie spotlights, caricatured costumes)

THE DANCE!

Cohesion | Contrast | Motion (Proportion, Spatial Flow) |
Rhythm (Pace, Timing) | Variation (Conflict) // Motivation | Focus |
Voice | Theatre Technologies



Arguably the seeds of Scene 10’s dance are planted at the start of Scene 9, as Josie dresses. There is a sense of family, tradition and incredible vulnerability to the image as Josie stands in her underwear, being lovingly helped into her dress by Nonna and Christina. There is something almost ceremonial; a rite of passage. And then, what was the effect on the audience of actor Chanella Macri portraying Josie’s disgust and embarrassment at the dress—antithetical to both the tender moment and Nonna’s pride in her beautiful handiwork? Laughter? Recognition?

The wonderful contrasts continue as the nighttime-blue lighting deepens and transitions to Alibrandi-passion-red; we know

Josie wants to be sexy, but Nonna’s puffy-sleeved satin outfit does not support it— and by now we are past the point of no return and at the dance. The red wash, haze, and blaring music are almost nightmarish, but the nostalgic mirror ball effect and Sera’s piercing shriek (effectively part of the soundscape) remind us this is all safely comedic.

Consider how the production suggested an energetic, inter-school dance scene with only six actors. Hannah Monsoon plays both John and Ivy, visually showing us two distinct characters in quick succession; Lucia Mastrantone’s Sera enters and exits at pace (and volume), carrying the high energy of the suggested student mass;

Ashley Lyons supports her with a uber-macho cameo as boyfriend Sergio; and Jennifer Vuletic’s Sister Bernadette, the sensible adult presence, swishes across the stage breaking up any potentially immoral behaviour.

Was all this an effective interrelationship between acting, directing and design? Were characters fully fleshed out or acting more functionally—relying on the audience’s uncritical recognition of types and motivations to create the framework of the scene and allow us to focus more on the advancement of the story?

PHOTOGRAPHY: XXXXXXX

THE FUNERAL

Cohesion | Emphasis | Motion (Arrangement, Pattern, Spatial Flow) |
Rhythm (Tempo) | Variation (Energy, Intensity, Use of Space) // Focus |
Voice | Symbolism | Gesture | Movement (Dynamics, Rhythm) |
Theatre Technologies



This is an excellent sequence to evaluate how a playtext can be imaginatively and unexpectedly interpreted onto stage, and—again—to explore how the interrelationship between acting, directing and design roles can create a cohesive whole.

Consider:

The slow lighting fade (like blood draining from a face?)

The warm yellow light (have we seen this colour palette in the production yet?)

Focussing the lighting through the architecture of the crates (possibly suggesting light through cathedral windows?)

Nonna singing in Italian (an unrelated character, but singing an elegy for both John Barton and something lost of her own?)

Flitter drop (symbolic of John's letter Josie is ripping up—suggesting both that she tore it up into more pieces and for longer than we see onstage, and the obliteration of her love/world/psyche?)

WOG ASIO

Contrast | Motion (Position) | Rhythm (Tempo) |
Variation (Use of Space) // Style | Physicality |
Movement (Dynamics) | Focus



Remember the direction from the beginning of the playtext: 'All scenes are through the lens of Josephine Alibrandi, shifting between reality and adolescent fantasies/nightmares.' and look up the script to recap how Josie herself describes the tight Italian immigrant community she belongs to.

What performance styles do you think were employed by the director and actors to create these extremely heightened characters and scenes? Farce? Pantomime?

Clowning? What physical skills did the actors utilise in support of this? What design choices or production elements did you notice?

How did the audience react to these sections?

How effective were they in conveying the meaning and contexts of the play? Consider the contrast of these characters and the simultaneous, more realistic performances of any other (named) characters onstage.

HOW DID THEY DO IT?



ACTING

REFER BACK TO THE CAST + CREATIVES BIOGRAPHIES ON PAGE 9. CHOOSE TWO OR THREE DIFFERENT ACTORS, AND ONE OF THEIR MAIN CHARACTERS. RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE CHANELLA MACRI'S JOSIE, JENNIFER VULETIC'S NONNA, HANNAH MONSON'S IVY/JOHN, OR LUCIA MASTRANTONE'S CHRISTINA/SERA.

PERFORMANCE

Select two actors and analyse how their use of acting skills—including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness, and/or silence—helped the audience to understand their character's function, purpose, status, traits, motivation, and/or objective. Was there a particularly effective use of

acting skills used by a performer to interpret their character? How was this achieved?

Select one actor and provide an example of their use of verbal and non-verbal language to convey the intended meanings of the script.

Select one or two actors and

describe their use of focus during the performance. First provide an example of the actor directing the audience's focus. Then identify any moments of them holding focus in a scene. How well did they achieve that required level of focus?

INTER RELATIONSHIP WITH DESIGN

Choose one actor and analyse how they used a prop/s to support the portrayal of their character.

Discuss and evaluate how one design area was utilised by the actors in the performance. You

could choose from set, props, costume, lighting or sound.

ACTOR-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

Describe one or two moments during the performance when you felt the most engaged or 'part of the story'. What about moments where you felt you were more distantly 'observing'? Do you think these were intended?

How did the actor-audience relationship enhance your understanding of the ideas, themes, and story of the play?

How did the way different scenes and spaces were established or delineated affect the actor-

audience relationship?

Provide examples of moments during the performance when you felt a strong connection to one of the characters in the play. How did the actor playing the character create a strong actor-audience relationship?

Describe any other strong actor-audience relationships that you witnessed during the play.



DESIGN

EXPLORE THE SCRIPT AND/OR PRODUCTION FOR SCENES OR MOMENTS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE WORK OF THE *LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI*'S DESIGNERS.



DIRECTION

SPACE + PERFORMANCE

How did the director manipulate the acting space to support A) the individual locations and times in the script, and B) the overall story and meaning of the play?

Consider the blocking and use of gesture or non-verbal language. How was direction applied to portray the various statuses of characters?

How do you think the overall direction of the play impacted the acting in the production?

Were there any moments in the performance where you felt the direction of the actor-audience relationship did not work? Why?

DYNAMICS

Identify three examples in the production of a major change in dynamics—energy, conflict and/or tension—led by the director. What was the impact of those changes or variations? Were they effective?

CULTURE

How did the direction of *Looking for Alibrandi* honour the play's integral Italian-Australian culture?

SET + COSTUME

How did Kate Davis' set design support the creation and establishment of the different worlds of the play?

What elements of the physical set design supported or offered opportunities for the directors and actors to manipulate dynamics—energy, conflict and/or tension—or the actor-audience relationship?

In what ways do you think the costume design may have impacted on the acting and direction? How were props used to portray different characters' statuses, functions, emotional states, and/or objectives?

SOUND + LIGHTING

Identify specific elements of theatre composition that sound designer Daniel Nixon and lighting designer Katie Sfetkdis applied to craft key moments in the stage production.

How effective were sound choices in communicating themes, contexts and/or intended meanings to the audience?

Identify three ways in which lighting was used to manipulate the acting space to support the story and meaning of the play.

THEATRE TECHNOLOGIES

Identify two major theatre technologies employed by the production.

How were they used? How might they have been constructed or operated?

Were the theatre technologies engaged by the stage production effective in supporting the telling of this story, or conveying the intended meanings and themes? Why or why not?

RESOURCES



LINKS

Note that all resources are hyperlinked to their source for those clicking on an interactive version of this document but, for those holding a paper version, shorter **BITLY LINKS** have been provided to copy into your browser.

THESE RESOURCES ARE DIVIDED UP INTO THE CHAPTERS AND SECTIONS FOR WHICH THEY WERE USED AS REFERENCES, BUT YOU WILL ALSO FIND SEVERAL RESOURCES HERE THAT INFORM AND PROVIDE RICH SOURCE MATERIAL ACROSS SEVERAL TOPICS.

CONTEXTS: THE SOURCE TEXT

- Reading Australia: Looking for Alibrandi**
Alice Pung | Copyright Agency | Essay
bit.ly/LFAContexts1A
- Still Looking for Alibrandi: Migrant Teens Deserve Their Own Young Adult Fiction**
Sarah Ayoub | The Guardian | Article, 2014
bit.ly/LFAContexts1B
- Looking for Alibrandi**
Melina Marchetta | Book, 1992
bit.ly/LFAContexts1C
- Melina Marchetta**
Writer Website
bit.ly/LFAContexts1D
- Anne of Green Gables**
L. M. Montgomery
Book, 1908
bit.ly/LFAContexts1E
- Bend It Like Beckham**
Film, 2002
bit.ly/LFAContexts1F
- ## CONTEXTS: TIME
- The Idea of Australia: Forgotten History, Power for Power's Sake and the Collapse of Egalitarian Myth**
Julianne Schultz
The Guardian | Article, 2022
bit.ly/LFAContexts2A

CONTEXTS: LANGUAGE

- Italian Language Maintenance in Sydney: New Perspectives for the Fourth Generation**
Manuela Di Giovanni
University of Technology Sydney | Thesis, 2020
bit.ly/LFAContexts3A
- Goodes Guttled by Racial Slur**
SBS News | Article, 2013
bit.ly/LFAContexts3C

CONTEXTS: STYLE

- Stephen Nicolazzo**
Director Website
bit.ly/LFAContexts4A
- Little Ones Theatre**
Theatre Company Website
bit.ly/LFAContexts4B
- Vidya Rajan**
Writer Website
bit.ly/LFAContexts4C
- Celebrate Passata Day**
Lisa Portolan
SBS Feast | Article, 2013
bit.ly/LFAContexts4D

THEMES: IDENTITY

- What Does It Mean To Be Italo-Australian Today?**
Laura Egan
Il Globo, 2018
bit.ly/LFAThemes1A

**LINKS**

Note that all resources are hyperlinked to their source for those clicking on an interactive version of this document but, for those holding a paper version, shorter **BITLY LINKS** have been provided to copy into your browser.

THEMES: FAMILY

Our Australian Girl: Meet Lina
Sally Rippin
Book, 2013
bit.ly/LFAThemes2A

**THEMES:
THE IMMIGRANT
EXPERIENCE**

WWII internment of Italians in Australia remembered on 75th anniversary of war's end
Tom Major
ABC News | Video and article, 2020
ab.co/3OpjHxT

Italian proxy brides: Australia's forgotten generation of female migrants
SBS Italian | Video and article, 2019
bit.ly/LFAThemes4B

**THEMES:
SOCIOECONOMIC
STATUS**

Who Gets To Be Smart
Bri Lee
Book, 2021
bit.ly/LFAThemes5A

Privilege Still Protects the Violent from the Consequences of their Behaviour
Julia Baird
Sydney Morning Herald | Article, 2021
bit.ly/LFAThemes5B

Why Public Schoolboys Like Me and Boris Johnson Aren't Fit to Run Our Country
Richard Beard
The Observer | Article, 2021
bit.ly/LFAThemes5C

**THEMES:
PEER PRESSURE**

Suicide Linked to Pressure of HSC
Sydney Morning Herald | Article, 2003
bit.ly/LFAThemes6A

More Action Needed on Body Image and Stress Victoria School Guides | Article, 2015
bit.ly/LFAThemes6B

OTHER RESOURCES

Looking for Alibrandi
Malthouse Theatre
bit.ly/LFAOther1A

INTERVIEW WITH THE SET + COSTUME DESIGNER

SOON AFTER THE PRE-PRODUCTION DESIGN PRESENTATION FOR LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI, THE SHOW'S SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER KATE DAVIS (KD) SAT DOWN TO CHAT WITH MALTHOUSE EDUCATION COORDINATOR LYALL BROOKS (LB).

LB: Tell us about your inspiration for the overall set and costume design of *Looking for Alibrandi*.

KD: When Stephen and I started talking about the design, the main symbol of the show felt like it was the tomato—and the aesthetic comes from that idea. We really wanted to bring in this idea of tomatoes and of live processes of making food, so that you would feel—either at the Merlyn or the [Sydney partner theatre] Upstairs at Belvoir space—a sense of community. We're creating passata

live onstage, so we wanted to see the tomato from in its whole form, being cut, being smooshed, being pureed, being bottled and then being eaten—and the smell of the tomato will be filling the theatre. We're also giving a nod to the Belvoir building being, quite literally, an old passata factory!

We recently got to go to a tomato day recently, and being a part of that of that made us realise what a kind of astounding emotional experience this work can be. Because of the way that people

interacted with the process of making the tomato sauce; cutting together and going through processes as a collective—it's been a really big inspiration.

(And I'll also say that on top of all this at this tomato day we got to meet this band called SANACORI who are this Italian Calabrian musicians, and they're going to be recording music with Dan [Daniel Nixon, sound designer and composer] for the show!)

LB: Haha right place, right time! So how do you take the tomato and the passata manufacturing process—and what it represents in terms of family and ritual and the kind of throughlines of Italian migrants in Australia—and let it inform your design?

KD: In terms of the aesthetic, we were talking about this idea of being both inside and outside. So the idea that it's maybe an Italian parlour or loungeroom—hence we have this beautiful, floral, nostalgic carpet—and the idea of making passata in a concrete backyard with plastic chairs and plastic tubs and all the mess and grime. Yes, it's messy, and in a practical sense we certainly have to be mindful of the manky-ness that may be caused!

But with the messy tomatoes and the outdoor furniture and the more refined aesthetic of floral carpet—there's a jarring there that I think is absolutely right for this show. It creates a wonderful tension—just like the book and play explore messy clashes of culture and family and community— and also allows the many locations of the play to be more simply and abstractly portrayed within this more thematic aesthetic.

LB: On that, can you tell us more about the practical side of the set and how you see it working?

What is your design's interrelationship with the performance and direction?

KD: Well we have this 14.4 metre-wide carpet—a very full-on, floral pattern with quite vibrant greens and pinks and things like that—and then basically we're creating the 'architecture' out of plastic vegie crates. These will be filled with REAL tomatoes (or at least on top, and the rest filled with packing or dummy tomatoes because we can't have them all real as they'll be out of season in July!).

So we're creating this beautiful architecture of crates that Katie [Sftekidis, lighting designer] can light through, and the actors—because of the organic nature of this show—can manipulate them in the performance to create the feelings of intimacy and family in the space. Basically because the crates aren't a built item, they're something that we can respond to in terms of what's happening on the floor, and sort of what can be transformed with these. We can move these crates wherever they need to go.

LB: And how do you see the design's relationship with the audience?

KD: We're covering the orchestra pit in the Merlyn so the audience and the stage all feels fully 'flat on the ground' which helps with this idea of intimacy. We're watching this family, they're on the ground, everything is human scale. Nothing is big. We keep talking about the 'operatic domestic'—it's quite operatic in that it's cavernous but minimal, but the human-size family and their dramas and the familiarity of the tomatoes with their feel and smell... they speak to each other. If you look at the set model [accessible in the Resources!] you can see an on-the-ground cooker with a massive stainless steel cooking pot where the passata will be made onstage—so we'll have the steam and the smell of the passata. We also have all these random kind of tubs which you'll see in my reference images [again, access via the Resources!] are often in lots of different colours, all mismatched, ones that have cut tomatoes in them; there's knives everywhere, there's water, there's all these things. So we've got all this dotted throughout, and these kind of old school chairs and outdoor furniture. And of course

a plastic tablecloth in a really loud print.

In one of the opening scenes, Josie comes in with a crate of tomatoes and we see them roll across the ground... there are things like that where the set is really responding to this community and family vibe, that we're inside a house, but also outside... that's how I see the audience too: they're witness to, but also an inseparable part of, the action.

LB: Tell us more about the colours and prints. What were your influences for these?

KD: The whole idea is to really smash prints together. And make it garish but quite beautiful.

So we'll have this plastic tablecloth with this beautiful carpet, and all the costumes are based on print and colour so the characters will really pop—especially with the enormous exposed black back wall of the Merlyn, it creates a wonderful contrasting black void sitting behind and allowing the colours and patterns and textures to explode.

In terms of another reference, we really started to look at the films of Pedro Almodóvar as the inspiration for the design of the work. You can see a similar wonderful contrast and balance with his aesthetic where patterns and textures clash together in a super-saturated, bold, striking way.

LB: And how does that get interpreted in your costumes? Can you maybe run through a few of the characters and how you approached their individual aesthetic?

KD: Sure! It all comes down to print and colour. And there are a LOT of costumes. I created an image page for each character [link in the Resources—follow along!]. The tomatoes playing

into the costumes means the red feels perfect as a colour for these Alibrandi women and how the red connects with each of them.

Our casual vibe for Josie is this 90s denim overall dress, maybe with some Doc Martens, with a red t-shirt.

For the dance, it's this red kind of satin puffy-sleeve with a polka dot red tuille or lace overlay. It just sounds disgusting, it looks... not

good. Her Nonna has made it, and she hates it. She will absolutely stand out with this red dress in this red tomato land.

The references for Nonna include shots from the Alibrandi movie, those Almodóvar films and prints. Florals again, knee-high beige stockings and red shoes; maybe an open red cardigan. And then I can see a dyed wig of red hair that's like not quite the right colour red—like

she's holding onto her youth maybe a bit longer than she should or wants to. (And maybe, just maybe, she's inspired by a Nonna we know in real life...!) It's not a great job, but it'll really work with the red shoes and cardigan and classic polyester print.

Christina is again all about print, floral and colour, but with form-fitting silhouettes. French-tip nails, gold crucifix—really clashing both



the patterns and identities. Red shoes again.

Quite a cinematic vibe.

There are lots of school uniforms in the work, too, and we've gone with this really full-on red-and-white gingham—it's really going to jump out with the tomatoes—and red blazer for Josie.

In general, for all the characters, I'm always leaning into texture and colour, including how it plays

against the stage's carpet. But always based in the truth of the characters.

Sera basically wants to be Madonna; Jacob is classic 90s hot boy with slapdash flannel and ripped jeans—very non-conformist; John is very refined, lots of bow ties and suits; Ivy has refinement shown through nice accessories like a headband for school.

LB: Thanks Kate, we can't wait to see how it turns out—and I hope you've inspired the next generation of designers with your daring, vibrant aesthetic!

KD: Thanks, me too!

FURTHER RESOURCES

THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES ARE A MIX OF RESOURCES REFERENCED IN THE BODY OF THIS DOCUMENT, AND EXTRA SOURCES TO FURTHER INFORM AND STIMULATE.



LINKS

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LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI RESOURCES

Looking for Alibrandi at 30:
There's a White Hot Shame About
Sticking Out
Walter Marsh
The Guardian | Article, 2022
bit.ly/LFAPress01

Writer, Theatre Maker and
Comedian Vidya Rajan
Vyshnavee Wijekumar
The Saturday Paper | Article, 2022
bit.ly/LFAPress04

Looking for Alibrandi
Prompt Pack A
bit.ly/LFAPromptPacks

Interview with Director Stephen
Nicolazzo
[vimeo.com/malthouse/
LFADirector](https://vimeo.com/malthouse/LFADirector)

Interview with Actor
Chanella Macri
[vimeo.com/malthouse/
LFAActor01](https://vimeo.com/malthouse/LFAActor01)

Interview with Actors Lucia
Mastrantone + Hannah Monson
[vimeo.com/malthouse/
LFAActor02](https://vimeo.com/malthouse/LFAActor02)

Interview with Malthouse New
Work Manager Mark Pritchard
[vimeo.com/malthouse/
LFADramaturg](https://vimeo.com/malthouse/LFADramaturg)

Set Model, Style Inspiration +
Costume Design by Kate Davis
bit.ly/LFADesign

Malthouse Theatre Engine Room
Blog
bit.ly/LFAEngineRoom

Looking for Alibrandi Collated
Reviews
bit.ly/LFAPress03

VCAA RESOURCES

Past VCE Theatre Studies Written
Examinations
bit.ly/LFAExams

VCE Theatre Studies 2019-2023
Study Design
bit.ly/LFATheatreStudies

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