



FLAK

True stories of men who
flew in World War II

Teachers' Resources

2015

ellis
productions

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource has been created to provide teachers with some preliminary ideas as to how to extend their experience of **FLAK** beyond the presentation and workshop. The activities are designed to be open-ended and multi-ability. They may need differentiation for your specific cohort.

The performances and workshops included in the Education & Families program are designed to offer students engaging performing arts experiences with strong links to AusVELS. Each Education & Families performance varies in its content and as a result the scope for integration across the curriculum varies. Please feel free to contact the Education and Families team on (03) 9644 1808 or at education@rav.net.au if you have any questions about this resource, its content or its implementation within your classroom.

ABOUT REGIONAL ARTS VICTORIA

Regional Arts Victoria inspires art across the state. Through creative facilitation, touring, education, specialised resources, artistic projects and advocacy, we develop and sustain creative communities and artistic practice all over Victoria.

Regional Arts Victoria is an independent, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation working in long-term partnerships with every level of government, fostering contemporary and innovative regional cultural practice across five decades. We advise and impact on decision-making across multiple portfolios and levels of government.

Regional Arts Victoria is the peak body for regional artists and arts organisations, and the leading organisation for regional creative practice in Victoria.

Our artistic program

Regional Arts Victoria inspires creative communities, creative places and creative catalysts.

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES	CREATIVE PLACES	CREATIVE CATALYSTS
Regional Arts Victoria stimulates and connects our state's communities of practice.	Regional Arts Victoria champions the places where art is made, experienced and discussed.	Regional Arts Victoria fosters current and next generation creative capacity and practice.
<p>Members and membership services: fostering active and engaged artists and arts organisations across the state; supporting arts professionalism through specialised resources and professional insurance</p> <p>Resources, workshops and events program of forums and activities through our Regional Cultural Partnerships Program</p> <p>Networks: hosting specialised state-wide and national networks (including Regional Cultural Network, Festivals Network, Arts Teachers); participating actively in regional development networks; accessing and developing New Networks at membership and organisational level</p> <p>Strategic partnerships with governments, universities, tourism, planning and development bodies as well as arts and cultural organisations</p>	<p>Performing Arts Touring: opportunities, tools and support for regional and remote touring across Victoria and Australia</p> <p>Education & Families: performances, workshops and projects in schools, accompanied by AusVELS aligned teacher resources</p> <p>State-wide place-making projects including –</p> <p><i>Home is where the hall is:</i> November's month-long celebration of arts events in regional community halls</p> <p><i>Eco-Cubby:</i> promoting the principles of sustainable design and architecture in schools, hands-on</p> <p><i>Small Town Transformations:</i> innovative projects of significant local and regional impact, combined with state-wide thought leadership on "How can art transform your town?"</p>	<p>Advocacy and leadership: leading state-wide arts conversations; creating exposure for regional artists; providing strategic advice</p> <p>Creative Leadership Program: annual program for emerging arts and thought leaders</p> <p>Creative Arts Facilitators: our regional staff team work directly with artists and communities, in close partnership with local and federal government</p> <p>Access and diversity including Indigenous engagement and cultural exchange</p> <p>Grants programs: facilitating and supporting high quality applications to quick response, presentation and project grants, administered on behalf of state and federal government</p>

EDUCATION & FAMILIES TEAM

Regional Arts Victoria's Education & Families team pride ourselves on providing relevant and exciting activities for children and young people that are complementary to both Victorian and Australian curriculums. All of our tours come with a free set of education resources to further enrich your arts experience.

Our team is available to provide local contacts and links to research, and offer advice on how to make the most of the arts at your school or centre. Our office is a resource for Victorian teachers, so we encourage you to make use of us!

We also provide significant subsidy assistance (up to 50% of program costs) to eligible remote and disadvantaged schools. Your school may be eligible so please contact us to find out more!



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CURRICULUM LINKS

Discipline based Learning	Physical, Personal & Social Learning	Interdisciplinary Learning
The Arts -Drama <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating & Making • Exploring & Responding 	Interpersonal Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building social relationships • Working in Teams 	Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening, viewing & responding • Presenting
English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading & viewing • Writing • Speaking & Listening 	Personal Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Individual Learner • Managing Personal Learning 	Design, Creativity & Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating & designing • Producing
Humanities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical knowledge and understanding • Historical knowledge and understanding 	Civics and Citizenship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic knowledge and understanding • Community Engagement 	Thinking Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasoning, processing & inquiry • Creativity • Reflection, evaluation & metacognition

VICTORIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

VCE Theatre Studies	Unit 2: Modern Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOS 3 – Analysing a play in performance Unit 4: Performance Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOS 1 - Monologue interpretation • AOS 3 – Performance Analysis NB: This production is not on the VCE Playlist but could be used as an additional resource
VCE Drama	Unit 1: Dramatic Story Telling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOS 4 – Analysing drama performances presented by other practitioners Unit 2: Non-naturalistic Australian Drama <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOS 4 – Analysing Australian drama performance Unit 4: Non-naturalistic solo performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOS 1 - Working with stimulus material
VCE History	Unit 4: Australian History <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOS 1 – Testing the new nation 1914-1950 – Outcome 1

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM LINKS

Disciplines English Civics and Citizenship The Arts: Drama The Arts: Media Arts	General Capabilities: Intercultural Understanding Ethical Understanding Critical and Creating Thinking Personal and Social Capability
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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

'Flak' is five extraordinary but true stories of combat, courage and survival as experienced by some of the men who flew and fought in the air during World War Two - performed in the voices and characters of the men themselves.

Author and performer Michael Veitch - who has had a lifetime passion for the subject - spent several years in the company of these remarkable but modest men, seeking out their stories for two highly-selling books, *Flak* and *Fly*. Michael Veitch's life-long obsession with the aircraft of the Second World War led him to conclude that every single person who flew, or flew in them has at least one extraordinary story to tell. With most of these veterans in their eighties, he knew that it was a matter of urgency to find them now, before their personal stories disappear forever.

So, over the course of a year, Veitch interviewed over 50 former aircrew across Australia, many of whom had never spoken about their experiences before, even to their families. The result is *Flak* - a collection of vivid, unforgettable stories from RAAF veterans about their experiences of combat in World War II. It is also an account of the strange, sometimes obsessive journey of the author himself, as he explores a passion held since childhood.

The tales he has chosen to include in this stage version include Bruce, an Australian bomber pilot, who survived being literally blown out of his exploding Lancaster bomber in 1945; Brian, a Welshman who crashed into the North Sea in 1941 in the middle of a raging North Sea icestorm, spending two horrendous days in a dinghy as his crew perished around him; James, a still-dashing ex-RAF Spitfire pilot who survived an ordeal with a German bomber over Kent, and Dudley, an Australian flying boat captain who, after sinking a German submarine in extraordinary circumstances in 1943, befriended his one-time adversary, the sunken U-Boat captain, decades later.

"Flak" in its unique, 'direct voice' style, tells the stories and experiences of war, but also provides context, with Michael Veitch bringing much of his passion and deep interest in the subject to life in a compelling, and at times humorous way. There is even a short power-point on some of the less-than-successful aircraft flown by our air forces during the Second World War, and the sometimes bizarre stories behind them.

'Flak' is an ideal show for young people interested in the human side of wars, in a way that combines drama and performance.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

Michael Veitch



Actor, author, television and radio presenter - there's not much that Michael Veitch hasn't done in a long and varied career in media and entertainment. Having cut his teeth back in the golden age of Australian comedy in legendary programs such as D-Generation and Fast Forward where he created some of our most legendary comic characters. He's also turned out a brace of books on subjects as varied as World War Two airmen, and the 'forgotten' islands of Bass Strait.

Michael has worked on stage with the Melbourne Theatre Company and appeared in high-end musical productions like 'The Full Monty', and kept radio audiences amused across Victoria and Tasmania.

Michael has also appeared in a plethora of Australian TV productions from Halifax, City Homicide, McLeod's Daughters, Shock Jock, Stingers, Blue Heelers, The Mercury, Something in the Air, as well as a variety of children's programs including Ocean Girl and Chuck Finn to name a few.

With a long interest in the arts, Michael was particularly proud to be chosen by the ABC to present their prestigious Sunday afternoon arts program where, for five years, he met and interviewed many prominent artists, composers and celebrities, including one very special afternoon spent one on one with Liza Minnelli!

Michael's radio presenting began with a long association with the ABC's Jon Faine's morning program in Melbourne, co-hosting, then filling in over summers when bushfires were raging and quick thinking was required to handle the emergency 'rolling coverage' broadcast. Michael was then offered his own programs in Hobart with the ABC, where for three years he broadcast daily across Tasmania, at various times, hosting breakfast, afternoons and evening shifts.

SUGGESTED PRE-VISIT ACTIVITES

1. FLAK – Characters

Bruce – 1945, Lancaster Bomber, 29th trip, shot down in Sweden, only survivor

Brian – joined RAF at 18 in 1937, Welshman, the storm of 1941, the lifeboat, only survivor

James – Battle of Britain, jokester, loss of leg

Heinz – ex German Luftwaffe pilot, living in Australia, evacuated German soldiers from Stalingrad

Dudley – flew Sunderland flying boats, U-boat tracker, U-461, dropped a lifeboat to the crew.

Michael, the narrator

All the characters are played by the one actor, Michael Veitch. Discuss how one actor could achieve this. What skills would they use? How would they make each character distinct and believable?



2. The Battle of Britain – historical overview

Flak recalls five fighter pilots experiences of flying in what became known as the Battle of Britain during World War II (1939-1945). But, what was the Battle of Britain?

In the summer and autumn of 1940, a battle for national survival was waged in the skies over Britain. Not only would this struggle, the first to be fought primarily in the air, decide the fate of the United Kingdom, but on it also rested the freedom of Europe and the outcome of the Second World War.

By the end of June, 1940, the United Kingdom stood alone. The forces of Nazi Germany and her allies had conquered or dominated the rest of Europe from Norway to Sicily and the British Expeditionary Force and its allies had undergone a humiliating retreat back across the Channel under Operation Dynamo. In early July the German leader, Adolf Hitler, turned his attention to the British Isles, the last bastion of European democracy. His intention was to force the surrender of Britain through blockade, bombing, or, as a last resort, invasion.

Source: <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/thebattleofbritain.cfm>

In the summer and autumn of 1940 the Royal Air Force (RAF) fought a prolonged battle in defence of Britain against an experienced and numerically superior German *Luftwaffe*. This air campaign, known as the Battle of Britain, officially lasted from 10 July to 31 October 1940. The battle began with German attacks on coastal convoys in an effort to draw RAF fighters into battle. These attacks were followed by brief and unsuccessful raids on British radar installations and concerted raids against RAF airfields in southern and south-western England. *Luftwaffe* bombers suffered heavy losses to RAF fighters - Spitfires and Hurricanes - but fighter losses were about even. The *Luftwaffe* suffered from over-confidence, changing operational priorities, and a misreading of RAF strength, losses and aircraft production figures. In September 1940 Hitler postponed the planned invasion of England, Operation Sealion, but fighting continued into the winter.

Twenty-five Australians were considered eligible for the Battle of Britain clasp to the 1939–45 Star. Others flew during the battle with RAF Bomber Command and Coastal Command but the total number involved in the battle did not exceed 35. Eight Australians became air aces by shooting down five or more enemy aircraft. Pat Hughes from Cooma had 14 successes, which puts him among the ten leading aces of the battle. Of the total of 537 RAF Fighter Command pilots who died at least ten were Australian. Another four who were enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force also died.

Source: https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/battle_of_britain/

ACTIVITY: Analysing historical events

What have you learnt from reading these two short descriptions?

What questions do you have? What do you want to know more about?

Work in pairs and follow the links to find out more

What other source material can you find on this famous battle?

Are there other points of view that are not represented here?

Who writes history?

3. The Life of a Bomber Pilot in WWII

Flak draws on the experiences of real pilots who flew and fought in the Battle of Britain and in other air battles of World War II. Read the following description of the life of a British bomber pilot...

As the Battle got under way in the hot summer of 1940, the daily scramble for supremacy in the skies often began benignly as the mist burned off while the dawn chorus of birds filled the air around stations and units. But the birdsong would soon be replaced by the rattle of machine guns, the sound of mighty engines straining, the whining of aircraft in their death throes and the spluttering of damaged Spitfires and Hurricane as they just made it home or crash landed in a field. The paradox of daily life and death struggles of a nation on the brink of defeat set against clear blue skies, as many carried on their normal lives, be it farming or taking the train to London, was not lost on Churchill.

The daily routine of the fighter pilot during the Battle of Britain hardly had a less glamorous start. Officers were roused with a cup of tea by their batman at around 4am as dawn broke. A Sergeant pilot would have to get himself up and make his own tea! Either way their day would not end until nearly sunset. A lorry would collect all the crews and drive them out to the dispersals beside the grass runways. Meanwhile the aircraft fitters, riggers and armourers would be busy running up the engines, checking on the repairs to damage inflicted the day before and loading munitions. If everything worked and the aircraft signed off for flight, the petrol tanks were filled with 85 gallons of high-octane fuel. Meanwhile the pilots made some breakfast in readiness huts if they were close to dispersal or made do with a tent with a couple of deckchairs outside – anything as long as it was within sprint distance of their aircraft.

The flight commander had by now rung through to Operations and placed his men as “ready for business” – and the waiting begins. Britain’s secret weapon was a highly-developed system of radar which superseded crude listening devices and the “Mark one eyeball” with binoculars: this enabled controllers to order scrambles and intercept the incoming enemy from further away rather than avoid wasteful air patrolling. This targeting of incoming aircraft continually frustrated German pilot and their boss, Reichsmarshal Herman Goering.

And now the wait began. Pilots spent their time reading popular magazines of the day such as Lilliput or Picture Post, playing chess and dominoes, all the while contemplating what the day might hold.

Source: <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/lifeasabattleofbritainpilot.cfm>

ACTIVITY: The Arts, Drama

Making and Creating

Discuss the above description. Try to imagine sounds, feelings, and actions that would bring the description to life.

- Divide into small groups of 4-5.
- Using the dramatic convention of 'freeze frame' and drawing on the description and your discussion, create each of the following as a frozen image
 - Cup of tea at dawn
 - A crowded lorry
 - Aircraft check
 - Waiting...waiting...
 - Scramble!
 - Take-off
- Find a way to transition between each image using sound
- Try to capture a central feeling or mood in each image (but remain frozen)
- Present your images to the class

Responding

Reflect on how each group created the images. Discuss how the groups used their bodies, how they incorporated sound to transition, how feelings were conveyed. How might you have felt in those circumstances as a young pilot in 1940?

4. ACTIVITY: Geography

The following places are named in the script/production.

Bay of Biscay	Politz in Germany	Baltic Sea
North Sea	Kattegat	Denmark
Helsinborg	Sweden	Berlin
River Spree	Cologne	Kiel
Cambridgeshire	Volga River	Stalingrad

Work in pairs or small groups

Select one of the named places above and locate it on a map of Europe from 1940

Research the significance during of that place during WW2 and why it was significant

Discover some details about that same place now, in the 21st century

So for the next four years I was prisoner of war. They treated me well. Very well at the beginning. They even took the bodies of the crew on board the plane and buried them with full military honours. That impressed me. I've never hated the Germans. No real reason to. But that man who made us fly into that storm, well that's another matter entirely – Brian

5. AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL VEITCH, Writer/Performer and HELEN ELLIS, Producer/Director



Teachers and students may find the following interview very useful as background information to the production, as a prompt for what they will see in the performance, and then as a reference point after seeing the play.

Why do you want these stories to be told?

Michael:

Two reasons. The primary one is selfish. Researching the two books and finding these surviving airmen was the culmination of a lifelong interest in WW2 aircraft. When I met the airmen to hear their stories, most of whom I tracked down through chaotic and vicarious means, I sort of fell in love with them. I found them incredibly interesting. The way they told their stories to me was in a way that created a total contrast between what they did and what they said. They were all so modest and self-effacing. There was no sense of blowing their own trumpet. I deeply admired them for that. I think the stories are extraordinary. To be a kid plucked from suburban life and made to fly in a war is an intense experience. Nothing else in life that can replicate that. To become them for an hour on stage each night is to keep them alive.

Essentially, *Flak* presents small but intense snippets of people's lives that may have been buried forever given that most Battle of Britain and other airmen are now in their 90s! But I didn't want *Flak* to be anything particularly patriotic. I didn't want to make it pro-war or a militaristic drum beating exercise. On the contrary, I like to think that it's a kind of anti-war statement. I find latter day ANZAC hysteria annoying as do many of the airmen as I discovered. That's why few of them march on ANZAC Day. I used to like ANZAC day marches when the marchers were greater than the crowd but now it's the other way around. So *Flak* is concerned with telling the stories of these airmen, but not for glorification.

Helen:

I was interested in this work from the beginning. In the telling of these stories, Michael begins creating each character as an old man, but as he narrates you begin to see them as young men. It is quite beautiful.

Michael, why did you decide to do a theatricalized version of your books?

Theatre generates a different audience for these stories. Having said that, performance is what I do. I write and I act so *Flak* combines both of these skills and drives. *Flak* is the sort of show that I have always wanted to see so I thought I may as well do it myself and get a producer along to organize it! As far as I know, a dramatization of airmen's stories hasn't been done, at least nothing quite in this vein. I felt that it was so simple and so obvious. So, before someone else did it I thought I would.

Given that this year marks the 100 year anniversary of the Gallipoli landing, does *Flak* take on a greater significance for you?

No not really. I think maybe it will have greater significance for the audience. To be honest, in the hype around the Gallipoli anniversary, World War II is being overlooked and so many people are dying. This is a key reason why I am remounting the production. I see it as being complementary to the Gallipoli anniversary. In the process of research and presenting these stories I discovered that it is easy to celebrate ANZAC when you don't need to go and fight. It's somewhat romanticized. I don't want to do that with *Flak*. I feel it is important to tell the truth about war. None of the men I interviewed think much of ANZAC Day.

Michael, you spoke to several airmen who flew during World War II – why these five stories?

In writing the script, there were six stories to begin with. If we ever swap or include an additional one I know what I will put in. It is a Pacific story which I feel is not represented in the current production. I chose these five because they are contrasting characters. I wanted to give voice to a range of men and provide an international perspective. So there are two Australians, an Englishman, a German and a Welshman, all who flew over Britain and Europe in a range of roles. These five characters present the audience with a series of powerful stories that represent the incredible flying experiences these men had.

Do you have a favourite story?

I think Dudley is my favourite, the pilot who flew the flying boats. He was a real character and his story really stuck with me, especially the dignity with which he told it. He was deeply moved and affected and he wasn't afraid to let me know that. He was honest. When he returned to Australia he was a big wig in Mildura as a citrus grower. To be honest, I love all of them. Sometimes it feels like I am channelling them and I can picture them. Often the most vivid one is **BRIAN** in the dinghy, in the middle of the **NORTH SEA**. He was certain he was going to die. Astonishingly none feel they are particularly courageous. They just survived to tell their story.

What do these men have in common?

They survived...with a lot of luck. They all thought war was a pretty bad idea and that is a pervading value. They were all volunteers. A lot signed up because they didn't want to go into the army they thought the air force would be safer, which was a gross falsehood. The early part of the war was a meat grinder in the RAF. Most of the squadrons who flew later in the war were flying better aircraft, ones that meant the chances of survival were greater. Before that the statistics were stacked against you. However, airmen were well paid, they had accommodation and if they weren't flying they had a pretty good life. Contrary to those who served in the army, if airmen survived the war their health was good. Mentally, however, they were scarred. The strain of knowing they were unlikely to live, was nerve shattering. Some airmen sought discharge from the

air force for this reason. They were classified as having LMF – lack of moral fibre – a discharge stamp that negatively labelled them and their contribution to the war.

What might *Flak* offer a younger audience? What might they need to know?

Essentially, young people don't need to know that much. The production is about story-telling, stories of survival, courage and adventure. They will experience true and extreme stories about life in war as reminiscence.

Michael you are the author of “*Flak*” the book as well as the playwright. What has been the scripting process for you?

Strangely quick. I had seven stories to choose from. I wanted it to run about an hour and it runs sixty-five minutes. In a way the hardest bits were the in-between bits. I massaged the language, cut to the chase and condensed the stories. As I was writing I imagined it on the stage. I imagined it to be sparser than it is, but Helen felt that people would like more images in order to connect them to the key moments. For instance partners, friends, weddings, the ocean.

The role of the narrator in *Flak* is me. Structurally the play needs that role and it tends to provide the lighter aspects of the show. There a discussion about types of aircraft, it's a bit educational, I throw in a couple of funny voices, bit of tap, bit of feathers, vaudeville and bawdy bit of Tiv; no not really but I do talk about my childhood and my deep interest in aircraft. It's a way of connecting not just the men's stories but connecting with the audience.

Would you talk about the staging of *Flak*, what choices have you made?

The staging involves three mini-sets which give a sense of the different worlds of the men and I suppose the different social statuses. One mini-set comprises a writing desk, another is a large lounge chair, and another setting is for Heinz who lived in a little one bedroom in Prahran, Melbourne in the Masonic Lodge. Heinz was shot down in Scotland and sent to a Masonic hospital where they looked after him so well he decided to be a Mason.

There is also a large screen or cyclorama and onto are projected images that represent aspects of some of the stories. As the narrator I also use it for the 'lecture' on different aircraft of WW2. The original idea was to do an old fashioned slide show but there were problems with this. You can create digital images out of slides but you can't turn digital images into slides. As well, there were issues around where to put a projector and the size of the image. We wanted to make sure that the audience could see them.

Helen, would you talk about your role as director?

Initially I was just going to produce *Flak* but Michael and I got along so well he suggested that I direct. He knew I would respect his vision of the writing it and his purpose in performing it. It didn't need to go off in any other direction. So the directorial role in this instance was concerned with giving the work more visual body in order to enhance the stories. I added extra images, especially with regards to the airmen's surrounds to enhance the audience's experiences. There is one image we still disagree on and that is the bride and groom but I wanted to connect with the women who might be seeing the play, some of whom may have or had mothers who'd lived through a war bride experience. Another aspect I felt was important to the work was lighting each of the stories in order to create the 'worlds' of the characters. A key consideration was directing the work so that it could go into a number of different spaces but still feel intimate.

There was little I had to do with Michael's performance because he was so connected to the characters. However, I did assist him in finding the moments and pauses within the work. That it was okay to have time between the characters and find a simple costume changes to create each character. For instance Heinz puts on a dressing gown and has a walking stick and this

captures him immediately. Dudley wears a red cardigan and glasses and he immediately appears.

Michael, in your performance do you actively seek to inhabit the characters or do you represent them?

I do inhabit the characters. That was my intention, to be absorbed in them. That's the only way I know how to do it. I have them all on tape so I could remember their voices. The scene with **BRIAN** and the rolling ocean behind him really captures for the audience the power of his story as a sea plane pilot.

How might you describe the theatrical style of *Flak*?

I would say it is talking in pictures, story-telling to present a series of images to people. That's what theatre is really. It's true to the characters, I get absorbed in them.

Helen: You have a very naturalistic style.

Michael: I do but I like structure. You can't present it verbatim. So I have tailored and massaged the men's words into these contained stories and that is reflected in the structure of the play. I found it very compelling sitting and listening to them and what I want to convey is how interested I was in listening to them. If the audience can have that experience then I have succeeded. *Flak* is story-telling. I love stories. Everyone loves hearing stories. So, in its simplest form it is a story and the overarching connection is Michael's personal story.

For Michael as the narrator I feel that I go back in time but that is for the audience to determine. That's my aim in narrating parts of my childhood. It is my intention that the audience goes back in time too. We don't use too many images because we want to allow people to imagine. You don't want to crowd the images in people's head. The very first performance was at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne without projection. Some people said they liked having no images except for the ones in their head.

Helen: Because you are dealing with a range of audiences and ages now I think it is important to acknowledge that. So stylistically, the images are part of the set but also part of the story-telling, to help audiences connect, to feel that bitter cold, and that ocean. To put you there in that moment with those men.

What are the values that compelled these men to go to war? Is it different now?

I don't think that that generation performed any differently from other generations. People still went to Vietnam knowing what war was. Young men are still leaving to fight in Syria and the Middle East. I think the danger is that people are easily led and we need to be careful of that.

ACTIVITY - Analysis and Discussion

What does this interview reveal about the key **themes and ideas** the play is exploring?

What is revealed about the writer/performer, Michael Veitch?

What is revealed about the staging of the play?

What do you learn about the characters?

How does the interview comment on war and why young men go to war?

6. FLAK – A GLOSSARY OF TERMINOLOGY

Throughout the performance of *Flak*, the airmen and Michael as narrator use quite a few words that relate very much to the time, and to the business of flying. Here are a few:

Ack-ack gunners - anti-aircraft gunners

Airfix and Revell 1/72 and 1/32 scale models – plastic aeroplane model kits.

Bombardier – this is an American term. The British and Commonwealth air forces used 'bomb aimer'. The crewman who aims the bombs through a target sight in the nose.

Coil – part of an aircraft engine

Conning tower – smallest compartment of a submarine

Cordite – an element of gunpowder

Cowling – engine cover.

DSO medal – Distinguished Service Order. Bravery medal awarded to officers only.

Flare – emergency light used at sea that works through pyrotechnic composition

Flight engineer – assists the pilot with the workings of larger aircraft, fuel systems, electrics etc.

Hot target – heavily defended target

Jettison – throw or drop something from an aircraft or ship

Knots - unit of speed equal to one nautical mile (1.852 km) per hour,

Mid-upper gunner – located in a clear capsule at the top of the plane.

Navigator – the crewman who determines the route the aircraft will fly.

Neutrality - A neutral country in war is a sovereign state which officially declares itself to be neutral towards the aggressor/belligerents

Pathfinder – flare-dropping aircraft used to mark the target for other bombers.

Raid – An air attack, usually as in 'air raid'

Rear gunner – The rear or tail gunner operated a flexible machine gun placement on either the top or tail end of the aircraft with an unobstructed view

Schnapps - German alcoholic drink

Scrambled - called into the air to intercept enemy aircraft

Skip – Skipper/captain

Sortie – a combat mission

Squadron - a unit comprising a number of military aircraft and their aircrews typically with 12 to 24 aircraft

Tour – An airman's period of active service. For bomber crews, usually thirty operations.

U-boats – German submarines

ACTIVITY: What's in a word?

Which of these terms were you familiar with? Which were new?

Do any of the above terms have a different meaning now, in the 21st Century?

What other words do you recall that seemed very specific to that time?

Why do you think certain professions, practices and industries develop their own 'jargon' or terminology?

SUGGESTED POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

1. ACTIVITY - VCE Drama, Theatre Studies, The Arts – Exploring the theatrical form of *Flak*

This section of the education resource explores the theatrical form of *Flak*. It draws on the interview with Michael Veitch and makes direct reference to the performance in order to analyse how the work was staged and performed.

The World of the Play

It is my intention that the audience goes back in time too – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer

- As you watched the performance, what ‘world’ or ‘worlds’ did you feel the characters were in?
- Was it contemporary times? Was it in the past as the playwright suggests?
- What aspect of the production enabled you to feel this – the writing, the projection, the characters?

Stimulus Material

The stimulus material for the production is the real life experiences of men who flew during WWII.

- Discuss the choice of this stimulus material for creating a theatre performance
- How is the stimulus material manipulated to create a theatre performance?
- As a drama student, what did you notice about what was included in the performance?

Structure

Flak is a scripted play that draws on verbatim interviews with several past airmen.

I wanted to give voice to a range of men and provide an international perspective. So there are two Australians, an Englishman, a German and a Welshman, all who flew over Britain and Europe in a range of roles. These five characters present the audience with a series of powerful stories that represent the incredible flying experiences these men had – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer

- Discuss the structure of the performance
- Was it linear? Was it non-linear? What is the difference?
- Did the structure of the performance feel logical to you?
- How else could you have structured these five stories into a piece of theatre?

Theatrical Styles

Flak is story-telling. I love stories. Everyone loves hearing stories. So, in its simplest form it is a story and the overarching connection is Michael’s personal story – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer

- Discuss story telling as a theatrical style/form
- Did you feel you were being told stories?
- How effectively did the use of this style engage the audience?
- Which moments did you feel most engaged and why?

Michael Veitch also plays the narrator

- Discuss the device of a ‘narrator’.
- How does it contribute to the overall structure of the performance?
- Could this device be removed or do you feel it is an essential element? Why?
- How did the narrator’s role contribute to your understanding of the performance?

Verbatim theatre:

In verbatim theatre - The playwright interviews people who are connected to the topic that the play is focused on and uses their testimony to construct the piece. In this way they seek to achieve a degree of authority. Such plays may be focused on particular events, on politics or on place and locations.

A verbatim style of theatre uses the real words from interviewees to construct the play. Crompton Decent, Australian playwright and author of the verbatim theatre play *Embers*, said it is "not written in a traditional sense... but is... conceived, collected and collated". It is a creative type of drama to help tell the story of what actually happened

- Discuss how the production used aspects of verbatim theatre
- Why do you think this type of theatre exists? Why not just write a book?
- What is the impact of hearing the stories of particular events 'live'?

Non-naturalism – What aspects of *Flak* would you consider to be non-naturalistic?

- For instance, did the performer transform character?
- Was time manipulated?
- Were stagecraft elements manipulated in order to create place and location?
- Was there a 'fourth wall'?
- What were we asked to imagine?

Characterisation

I chose these five because they are contrasting characters – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer

- Discuss how the performer created the five characters – voice, facial expression, movement, gesture, use of costume
- Analyse and evaluate how the characters contrasted.

I do inhabit the characters. That was my intention, to be absorbed in them. That's the only way I know how to do it. I have them all on tape so I could remember their voices – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer

- What does the performer mean by 'inhabiting' the characters?
- Analyse and evaluate how truthfully and authentically each character was portrayed.
- Why do you think remembering voices may be a useful way to inhabit a character?

Which character did you find the most compelling? Engaging? Why?

Stagecraft

The staging involves three mini-sets which give a sense of the different worlds of the men and I suppose the different social statuses. One mini-set comprises a writing desk, another is a large lounge chair, and another setting is for Heinz who lived in a little one bedroom in Prahran, Melbourne in the Masonic Lodge – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer

- Discuss and analyse how the production used three mini-sets to give a sense of different places
- Discuss and analyse how the stagecraft element of costume contributed to the creation of the characters.

There is also a large screen or cyclorama and onto are projected images that represent aspects of some of the stories. As the narrator I also use it for the 'lecture' on different aircraft of WWII – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer

- What types of images do you recall as being projected?
- Did these enhance the production? Why/Why not?
- How was projection used to create mood, location, time, to manipulate emotion?

Another aspect I felt was important to the work was lighting each of the stories in order to create the 'worlds' of the characters. A key consideration was directing the work so that it could go into a number of different spaces but still feel intimate – Helen Ellis, producer/director

- Discuss how flexible you feel the staging was in the production.
- Could it be staged in numerous locations? What was the venue like where you saw the play?
- What does Helen Ellis mean by the term 'intimate'?

2. ACTIVITY: The Arts, Drama

In this activity you will explore the stories you heard in the performance through dramatization. The excerpts presented below can be explored as short monologues or as small ensemble pieces that explore non-naturalism.

MONOLOGUES

Select one of the short monologues below and prepare it for performance. In your preparation consider:

- Who you are, where you are, what you are doing – the given circumstances/context of the piece/world of the character
- Voice, facial expression, movement, gesture, stillness, focus
- Dramatic tension, mood, climax, **actor/audience** relationships

OR

ENSEMBLE:

Working in groups of five or six present the following excerpt from the script of Flak.

- Who you are, where you are, what you are doing – the given circumstances/context of the piece/world of the character
- Use of voice, facial expression, movement, gesture, stillness, focus
- Dramatic elements – tension, mood, sound, contrast, symbol, rhythm, timing.
- Conventions – transformation, use of space, disjointing time
- Actor/audience relationship

BRUCE: And then...and then...a big white light and...nothing. Didn't hear anything. No pain. No gust of air. No sensation of any kind. And it was perfectly peaceful. I remember – quite clearly - the thought coming into my head '*Well, I'm dead. It doesn't hurt. Mum's going to be upset*'. And I seemed to be floating. No sound, nothing. Then something was in front of me, something was I noticed, moving, turning, spinning. And I looked at it. I looked at it closely. And I thought, 'That's a piece of the cowling' And then my brain sort of well, began to work backwards I guess. 'If that's a piece of the cowling, then the aircraft must be in pieces, and falling, and I am falling with it, so now might be a good time to open my parachute'. Which I then did.

BRIAN: The storm was easing off now, and as the dusk came on, I settled into a sleep which I knew was going to be my last. And then the plane appeared. Out of nowhere, roaring straight overhead. And it was German. A Heinkel 59 seaplane in fact. I could see their front gun trained on me and thought he was going to open up. But he turned about and touched down on the water just a few yards away. They hauled me on-board, took off my wet clothes gave me a blanket and swig of schnapps and I was unconscious.

JAMES: I joined the RAF in 1937. My father didn't want me but once I turned 18 he couldn't stop me. I just turned up to an Air Ministry office in Whitehall, stood in front of a selection committee

of three officers and they just looked me up and down a bit and one of them said, 'what games to you play?' And I said 'rugby and cricket, Sir'. 'Right', he said, 'go down that corridor and sign on'. And that was it.

HEINZ: It is minus 18 degrees centigrade. I cannot turn off my engines or we will not get them started again. We load on the wounded. My co-pilot panics, says we are too heavy and will not get off again. More and more they come. Then the men start to move forward towards the plane. They grab the wings, the doors, the tail, anything. Then shooting. Our own soldiers, military police are shooting them. Shooting their own men. I can see them still the blood on the snow.

DUDLEY: The sea wasn't rough, but it wasn't smooth either if you know what I mean. We were very low down - literally touching the waves at times. I could feel the tips of them hitting the hull. I tried to make it so that two of the subs couldn't open up on me without risking hitting the other one. I could see this side of this grey submarine looming up at me as I got closer, and suddenly it didn't look small at all. I had to literally pull up to go over the conning tower to clear it. I can still see it disappear underneath the nose

WRITE a reflective piece about your performance of the monologue/ensemble

- How do these two monologues explore the themes in *Flak*?
- Compare interpretations within your class
- Account for the different interpretations

3. ACTIVITY: English – Reading and reviewing, writing

Read the following two poems by Philip A. Nicholson, a British Airman of WWII

The Air Gunner

*Alone in his transparent shell,
A speck in space,
He sits, poised in his airy kingdom;
At his back the unknown,
Before him the unfolding map
Of his journey.
Guardian of seven lives,
Taut with the concentration of survival,
He swings his turret through vigilant arcs,
Eyes straining for the fighters,
Braced for the violence of surprise.*

Supreme and proud

*We had no common bond
Save that of youth.
No shared ambition,
Except to venture and survive.
Until, aloft within that roaring fuselage,
Each dependent on the others,
We found in war's intensity
Good cause to say with pride in later years,
To those who chronicled the great events
We flew in Lancasters.*

ACTIVITY: Analysis

Which words, phrases, or lines do you respond to most strongly? Discuss your responses.

What is the “unfolding map” the air gunner sees?

How might an air gunner be a “guardian of seven lives”?

What does the second poem say is the common “bond” of the aircrew?

Discuss how each poem captures “war’s intensity”.

How do these poems capture emotions and feelings?

How do these poems relate to the performance of *Flak*?

3. ACTIVITY: History

Research one of the following conflicts/political situations:

- The Arab Spring
- Syrian uprising
- Rwandan civil war
- South Sudanese War
- Afghanistan
- World War 1
- Vietnam conflict

PRESENT your research to the class using a **pecha kucha** [<http://www.pecha-kucha.org/what>] model – create twenty images for your topic that you show for twenty seconds each. During the twenty seconds you comment on the image and its relevance or the points that it raises

4. ACTIVITY: Civics and Citizenship

Debate: Research, writing, planning, speaking and listening

- The politics and ethics of war
- Duty and Honour
- The first casualty of war is truth

5. ACTIVITY: World War II – Famous quotes

Never before in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few – Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, September 1940

The battle of France is over. The battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the future of Christian civilization – Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, June 1940

*Germany must either be a world power or there will be no Germany – Adolf Hitler, German leader, from *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).*

Gentleman, you are about to witness the most famous victory in history – Adolf Hitler, German leader, June 1940.

They sowed the wind, and now they are going to reap the whirlwind – British Air Marshall ‘Bomber Harris’, 1942, at the beginning of the bombing campaign against Germany.

We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets; we shall never surrender! – Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, June 1940

We learnt in WWII that no single nation holds a monopoly on wisdom, morality or right to power, but that we must fight for the weak and promote democracy – Joe Baca, US Democrat.

Circumstances cause us to act the way we do. We should always bear this in mind before judging the actions of others. I realized this from the start during World War II. – Thor Heyerdahl, Norwegian adventurer and anthropologist.

I know that, in spite of the emotions we are all feeling, you will show that Australia is ready to see it through. May God in His mercy and compassion grant that the world may soon be delivered from this agony – Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia, declaration of war, September 3 1939.

ACTIVITY: English – persuasive language

Read each of the above key quotes that were made during or soon after WWII.

Which do you find the most powerful/compelling? Why?

Working in pairs, select a quote and analyse its use of language. What words are particularly persuasive?

Are these quotes 'political'? Why/why not?

Discuss the meaning of the term 'rhetoric'.

Write a short persuasive piece that seeks to inspire and convince your peers about a particular topic

6. ACTIVITY: Elder Interviews

Essentially, Flak presents small but intense snippets of people's lives that may have been buried forever given that most Battle of Britain and other airmen are now in their 90s – Michael Veitch, playwright/performer.

- As a whole class, discuss who the elders are in your school or local community, possibly even consider local indigenous custodians.
- How will you find this out? Who can you ask? Identify them.
- Consider what your school, community or the land on which they sit was like 40, 50, or even 100 or more years ago.
- What would you like to know about? Devise six key questions that you could ask your selected 'elders'.

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES: What do you think will be good interview techniques?

- Perhaps practice on each other, asking questions, listening, asking further questions that may draw the answer out, thinking about prompting phrases such as – Interesting, could you tell me more? Did that happen to everyone? Could you give an example?
- When you feel you are ready, set up the interview with the elder.

PRESENTING THE INFORMATION: How will you report back?

- Michael Veitch chose a book then a play to present his interviews
- How will you present yours?

7. ACTIVITY: Flak - Theme Exploration

Discuss – courage, honour, patriotism, friendship, loyalty, fear, luck, memory,

- Select one of the **themes** above
- Brainstorm / mind map the theme – What does it mean to you? To others?
- What does it mean for each of you, how could it be symbolised or represented, if it were an animal what animal would it be, if it were a colour what colour would it be, if it were a shape what sound would it be, if it were a sound what sound would it be, if it were an element what element would it be?
- Think now about a series of PHOTOGRAPHS that may be taken in order to try and capture what is happening
- Working on the floor create a series of 5 pictures / tableaux / freeze frames that depict that theme and are a representation of those flashes or shots taken by a camera
- Use your bodies, facial expressions, levels, interaction, reaction, fabric perhaps, exaggerated movement, tension, focus
- The images may come from your memories of the play OR they could be ABSTRACT

Consider TRANSITIONS between the images – how will you move from one to the next, will the audience close their eyes, will you snap your fingers, can you utilise lighting, will you use movement

Reviews:

FLAK ... not to be missed.

Every now and then one goes to a show that is extra-ordinary. Something you will never forget. FLAK is such a show. I am not sure what I was expecting. With a one-person show it is often hard for the performer to hold the space and your attention. I was connected and engaged from the start. It never flagged.

Michael has followed a hobby and an interest he has had since childhood. There is no doubt about the thoroughness of his knowledge and his research. From these connections and the stories he has heard he has selected and arranged them into vignettes that segue from Michael talking about young Michael and his hobbies into real airmen and their stories.

Respect for these men and their daring, their courage, and their perceptions of right and wrong, runs throughout the performance. The stage is simple, armchairs and coats, and yet as Michael walks across into another story something happens a little like Platform 9 ¾ in Harry Potter. He enters another realm, a new space, a story comes that is so poignant and revealing. With a new coat, jacket or dressing gown, it is like we enter the house with Michael for the interview, and end up transported through character, accent and being into a plane flying on an operation in World War Two. As I watched even Michael's face seemed to change into another character.

This is truly the work of an artist. Michael has taken hobby, to interest, to pursuit, to research, to connection and interviews, to a book and from all this treasure has transformed the stories into an artistic whole. No-one could watch this show without being moved. There is humour, pathos and engagement. The stand out art of all is in performance. With the connection he has made to these men and their stories Michael achieves what one of them replied when he was asked what he wanted. "To be remembered" was the answer. Well this is a show to be remembered. It is one I will never forget.

As a school principal I would recommend this to all students in secondary school. It should be compulsory for anyone wanting to get a flavour of the history of the 20th Century. Ten stars out of ten from me.

John Davidson, Education Director, The Armidale Waldorf School

Allied aircrew in WW II had a one in three chance of surviving a tour of duty. Most of the men taking part were young, some straight out of school and they flew or crewed complex craft on highly dangerous missions. Those that survived then came home and, except at annual reunions, rarely talked about their experiences.

It's this reticence that makes Michael Veitch's books Flak and Fly such fascinating reading. Veitch interviewed RAAF crew when many were in their last decade of life and now he has made a stage show, Flak, using the material from both works. The result is a very simple, very polished and very moving hour of theatre. Veitch has few props; a chair, a projection screen, boots, a stick. He also has a fine actor's ability to swiftly move from one character to another, with a change of voice, accent and physicality. The five characters in Flak each have very different stories to tell and include Bruce, blown out of his Lancaster Bomber over Sweden; Heinz, whose gruelling experiences in the Soviet Union scarred him for life and Dudley, who became friends with the U Boat captain whose vessel he destroyed.

Veitch also gives fascinating and humorous (if at time gallows humour) context to the aerial war effort. In a section called Lemons, he shows a succession of some of the worst aircrafts ever designed and the reminiscences of those unlucky enough to have to fly them. He gives statistics and personal anecdotes too, about a small boy with a fascination for flying. They included an ambition to track down men who had flown in the Battle of Britain; yet as he reveals in his show, they are a rare breed, numerically as well as in character.

This is theatre at its truest and best, storytelling in a darkened room, telling tales of ordinary people in extraordinary situations. With Flak, Veitch is on to a winner.

Fiona Gruber writer/broadcaster

In May 2013, we were honoured to premiere Michael Veitch's Flak, to great success. Indeed we could have filled our seats twice over. Full House boasts a very discerning and loyal audience whose ages range from 40 to 75 years, and all were equally entertained and emotionally involved in Flak. It prompted comments like "My dad never spoke about the war" and "I wish I'd known more." Michael Veitch is a consummate theatre actor. For 65 minutes, he held his audience spellbound with the strength and honesty of his storytelling and performance, which was strategically peppered with keen observation and humor. Flak is Australian theatre that reflects upon a tumultuous era in our history, both on personal and historical level. Notably, the airmen Michael re-creates on stage are memorable characters marked by humanity and humility. Flak is a must-see theatre experience for all audiences throughout Australia. I am sure that Michael and Flak are on the path to greater success, especially via word of mouth and recommendations. I thoroughly enjoyed Michael's performance and will endeavor to get a copy of his books. The stories and his characterizations were respectively inspiring and touching – so can I ask you to convey my thanks and admiration for his performance. Paul A Whitelaw, Senior Lecturer Victoria University. Michael Veitch's one-man show Flak is a 'tour de force'. Michael inhabits each character with understanding and humanity. There is a strong sense of drama, dignity and immediacy as each pilot unfolds his brush with death. To put it directly, - Flak is compelling theatre.

Peter Rosenberg, B Juris; LL B Helen Mariampolski FULL HOUSE - Presenter

FURTHER READING

SUGGESTED LINKS:

Australian War Memorial – Battle of Britain

https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/battle_of_britain/?query=Battle+of+Britain

Poet Philip A Nicholson

<http://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2013/10/fromlordashcroft-the-touching-war-poems-that-inspired-the-heroes-of-the-skies.html>

<http://www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/airgunners1.html>

Aircraft of World War II

<http://acepilots.com/planes/main.html>

Verbatim Theatre

<http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/verbatim-theatre-iid-2551>

WEBSITES:

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Contact the Education and Families team at education@rav.net.au with further questions or, even better, examples of your work!

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