



HELL'S CANYON by Emily Sheehan

Teacher Resources 2021

Ideal for Years 9-12

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource has been created to provide teachers with links between *Hell's Canyon* and the Victorian Curriculum. It includes some pre- and post-show activities, and ideas for how to extend your students experience of *Hell's Canyon*. The activities are designed to be open-ended and multi-ability. They may need differentiation for your specific cohort.

This education resource is for students and teachers in Years 9-12. It gives focus to students who are studying drama and the some of the activities address the capabilities of personal and social learning, critical and creative thinking and literacy. The final section of the resource gives significant focus to those students studying Theatre Studies, Unit 3.

The performances and workshops included in the Arts & Education program are designed to offer students engaging arts experiences with strong links to the Victorian Curriculum, VEYLDF, and VCE subjects where appropriate. Each Arts & Education program varies in its purpose and content, and as a result the scope for integration across the curriculum varies.

If you have any questions about this resource, its content or its implementation within your classroom please do not hesitate to contact the Arts & Education Department on (03) 9644 1808 or at education@rav.net.au,

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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.

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The Arts and Education program also provides significant subsidy assistance (up to 75% 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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INTRODUCTION TO *HELL'S CANYON*

“Sometimes there are things you can’t forget about, even when you try. They show up in your brain outta nowhere. I don’t know what’s so wrong about remembering.”

Hell’s Canyon

Caitlin and Oscar used to be mates, but not anymore. Six months after the death of Oscar’s brother/Caitlin’s boyfriend, Caitlin and Oscar haven’t spoken. These days, Caitlin texts boys to meet her in public parks while Oscar eats his lunch in the teacher’s staffroom. But when Caitlin sends Oscar a text message, he comes running. After receiving a medical diagnosis that morning, Caitlin is scared. She convinces an unsuspecting Oscar to run away with her. To go “full on missing”.

Hell’s Canyon is a new Australian drama about friendship, grief, loss and rebellion that directly connects to a youth audience. *Hell’s Canyon* is a play that comically depicts the challenging journey of adolescence from childhood into adulthood. It shows how friendship and empathy overcome challenging circumstances and celebrates the tenacity of teenage adventure and the human spirit.

CREATIVE TEAM:

Playwright	Emily Sheehan
Director	Katie Cawthorne
Set/Costume	Tyler Ray Hawkins
Sound	Kimmo Vennonen
Lighting	Martin Kinnane
Stage Manager	Laura Barnes

CHARACTERS:

Caitlin – 17 years of age, wears a hoodie, denim skirt and high-tops

Oscar – 15 years of age, wears a baggy polo shirt with a school logo, cargo shorts and dirty sneakers



Isabelle Ford and Connor Leach, 2018 production

It’s called being normal, Oscar. It’s like one second everything is really funny, then the next you’re really depressed, and then you’re really angry. You can’t be just one thing. It’s always like fifty thousand, which is why it’s completely impossible being seventeen!

- Caitlin (from Act 2, scene 1)

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Emily Sheehan: Playwright

Emily Sheehan is an award-winning playwright and theatre-maker who completed her Masters in Playwriting at the Victorian College of the Arts and her Bachelor of Arts (Acting) in 2011. Her plays include *Hell's Canyon* (Old 505 Theatre & La Mama Theatre), *Daisy Moon Was Born This Way* (The Joan), *versions of us* (Canberra Youth Theatre), *The Art of Disappearing* (Victorian College of the Arts). Her plays *Hell's Canyon* and *Daisy Moon Was Born This Way* are both published by Currency Press.

Katie Cawthorne: Director

Katie was the Artistic Director of Canberra Youth Theatre from 2015-2018 and completed her Masters of Fine Arts (Directing) at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA). Katie the co-director and founder of The Anchor theatre company with Laura Lethlean and Jessica Arthur, which has produced work in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

Benjamin Nichol: Cast

Benjamin Nichol is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting) and Masters of Playwriting. Benjamin's theatre work includes *Love dir. Susie Dee* (Dee and Cornelius / MILKE / Teatro Biennale in Venice), *A Midsummer Night's Dream dir. Mark Wilson* (Essential Theatre national tour) *Crazy Brave dir. Melanie Beddie* (La Mama), *Bread Crumbs* (Poppy Seed Theatre Festival) and *Three Blind Mice* (Melbourne Fringe Festival). Benjamin has directed five productions with the Fresh Theatre for Social Change, a program utilising theatre for its social change potential with at-risk youth. Benjamin is a proud member of Actor's Equity.

Freya Patience: Cast

Freya Patience is a recent graduate of the National Theatre Drama School Advanced Diploma of Acting. Recent theatre credits include *DNA* (Chapel off Chapel), *Stay* (Chapel off Chapel), *Much Ado About Nothing* (National Theatre Drama School), *Pains of Youth* (National Theatre Drama School) and *Antigone* (Edinburgh Fringe Festival). Earlier in her career, she toured to Hong Kong and the UK to perform *Threepenny Opera* and *Pinocchio* at multiple schools. Freya is a trained singer.

Tyler Ray Hawkins: Designer

As a 2017 NIDA Masters of Fine Arts in Design graduate, Tyler has worked with Sydney Theatre Company, Opera Australia, Belvoir Theatre, Griffin Theatre Co, ATYP, *Romance was Born*, *Sass & Bide*, *Dollhouse Pictures*, and *Underbelly Arts*.

Kimmo Vennonen: Sound Designer

Kimmo Vennonen is a Green Room Award winning sound artist specialising in combining sound, music and electronics. He regularly works with companies around Australia, frequently in music, dance and theatre.

Laura Barnes: Stage Manager

Laura is currently studying a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Production) in stage management at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). Working predominately in independent theatre, her recent theatre credits include: *Ellida*, *Windows*, & *La Nonna* (La Mama), *Everything is Fine* (Four Letter Word) and *Feed* (Ringtail Theatre). She aspires to support theatre-makers in creating challenging and exciting works with interesting technical elements.

SUGGESTED PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

The following activities are designed for teachers and students to explore before seeing *Hell's Canyon*. They offer students and teachers an opportunity to predict – what do they imagine – and prepare for the experience of seeing the production. They may also assist in providing students with a focus for watching the performance – important if you are only able to see the show once!

1. Questions to consider before seeing the show

Drama, Critical and Creative Thinking

This may be one of your first experiences in a theatre, watching a play – or it may be one of many! Before discussing these questions, think about what you already know about live theatre performance, what it means to be an audience member, and why theatre is a different experience from film and television. These questions also allow you to consider some of the terms and content that the show gives focus to.

After reading the synopsis to *Hell's Canyon*, discuss the following:

- What are your theatre experiences?
- What types of theatre performances you have seen? Musicals, comedy shows, drama etc
- What theatre have you made in your drama classroom or in other contexts?
- The terms *friendship, grief, loss and rebellion* are stated in *Hell's Canyon's* synopsis. What do these words suggest? How do you imagine they will be conveyed in a theatre performance?
- What is a graphic novel? Do you read them?
- Have you ever stayed in a motel overnight? What features do motel rooms have?
- What do we consider to be 'the outback'? Have you been somewhere that could be described as such?

2. Imagining *Hell's Canyon* – Thinking about design

Drama & Theatre Studies, Critical and Creative Thinking

Using the two scenes' sets – **a public park and a motel room** – create a Pinterest or mood board of images that represent the types of design elements you could use as stimulus for designing each of these spaces. For example, what colours, textures, materials, set pieces, props, aesthetic (feel), era?

3. Program notes and getting inside the world of the play

Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking

Human nature is predictable no matter where we sit in history. No matter who we are, we all have times in our lives where the life we're living is difficult. Many of us have times that are more than difficult, they're truly challenging. And then some of us experience moments where life is actually gruelling. Caitlin is experiencing this at the age of seventeen. The secret she is keeping is beginning to pull her downwards and is much heavier than she anticipated. Oscar holds a secret too. At fifteen he has seen things adults wouldn't want to contemplate (Directors Notes from program, 2018)

- Consider this description of the play as written in the program for the first production.
- What do you think is meant by 'human nature is predictable'?
- What ideas does the description conjure for you about what the play is about?
- What does the description suggest about the relationship between the two characters?

4. Exploring Context and Dramaturgy

Drama & Theatre Studies

In theatre, contexts are generally understood to be the historical, socio-cultural, political and philosophical conditions in which a play was written – the world of the playwright, the contexts evident in the playscript, and the contexts of the performance. For instance, Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in the 1950s (the playwright's context) but he drew on the historical, socio-cultural, political and philosophical contexts of the Salem witch hunts of 1692 (the play's contexts) in order to draw a parallel with the hysteria and persecution experienced by many people during the McCarthy era in the United States (the political context).

Of course, many plays are written for and of their time, and the contexts in which the play is written are directly reflected in the script, and the performed play. *Hell's Canyon* is such a play – recently conceived, developed, written, workshopped and produced in an Australian context.

4.1 – The broader contexts of the play

Hell's Canyon is set in Australia in contemporary times.

- From your reading of the script, what clues are there that indicate this?
- For instance, language, props, stage directions?
- Consider – could this play be RE-CONTEXTUALISED?
- Where would the new setting and era be for these characters?
- How would this new context retain the key ideas, relationships and 'stakes'?

4.2 Exploring immediate contexts

Drama & Theatre Studies

Consider the following setting descriptions from the script:

Set (from Scene 1): *A public park. Red brick wall. Cement. A green wheelie bin. A rusty swing that could give you tetanus.*

Set (from Scene 2): *Midnight. A dingy room at a highway motor inn. A double bed with a mustard coloured dust cover. An old television mounted to the wall (perhaps hanging crooked from a previous occupant's attempt to pry it off). Ugly art hangs above the bedhead.*

- What do these descriptions conjure? What do you imagine?
- Do these descriptions impact your Pinterest/ mood boards from Activity 2? Would you change anything?
- After you have seen the show reflect on how these setting descriptions were realised

5. Exploring the features of the script

Drama & Theatre Studies, Literacy

- In the introduction to the script, playwright Emily Sheehan states that within the writing: The symbol / indicates the exact point of interruption in overlapping dialogue
- The ellipse of three dots ... indicates the character is choosing not to speak, page 24 of the script in Scene 2 has examples of these writing features.
- Pair up and read the script from this page using **the / (forward slash) or the ... (ellipse)** as the playwright intended
- What do these writing features sound like when spoken/applied aloud?

6. Theatre Styles

Theatre Studies

Realism and Naturalism

Realism concerns looking at society and its various strata, but Naturalism pursues contradiction inside human behaviour. Maybe that is the defining difference – Chris Mead (Literary Manager, MTC, 2016).

- Discuss this comparison between realism and naturalism by Chris Mead
- Picture a day in your life and how it would be represented on stage. Is this possible?
- What does 'naturalistic' dialogue sound like?
- In reading *Hell's Canyon*, does the dialogue between the characters seem realistic?
- Select a page from the script, work in pairs and aim to deliver the dialogue as if you feel it would be delivered in real life
- Do we always wait for people to speak separately? Do we overlap and interrupt?
- The writer's use of the forward slash and the ellipse in some of the dialogue capture a more naturalistic approach?

Magic Realism

Thinking about these two words MAGIC and REALISM:

- What do they mean separately?
- Once you have a definition and/or meaning for each word, put the meanings together. What new meaning do they make?
- Can you think of novels, graphic novels, films, online games that could be described as have elements of Magic Realism?

Playwright Emily Sheehan directly addresses aspects of *Hell's Canyon* and its shift into Magic Realism. She states:

The elements of the play which have had the most focus in terms of development and dramaturgical intervention have been the moments of magic realism. Through the development process I was definitely challenged to understand exactly why I was using this device, what the internal logic of the worlds were, and how they ultimately affected the audience's understanding of the work.

You know how there are these moments in life where something shocks you to the core, and the external world all of a sudden seems almost inappropriately banal compared with what is happening in your internal world? Well the play's form changes as the characters experience this phenomenon.

Magic Realism typically refers to the coexistence of the real and fantastical, the natural and the supernatural, the normal and magical worlds. Fairy tales are renditions of magic realism. However, in *Hell's Canyon*, the inclusion, function and purpose of Magic Realism is to amplify Caitlin's internal world.

- Explore the following two links
- How do they expand on your understanding of Magic Realism as a theatrical style?

Link: <https://theconversation.com/explainer-magical-realism-51481>

Link: <https://thedramateacher.com/magical-realism-in-the-theatre/>

7. Exploring dramaturgy and writing

Drama and Theatre Studies

The following extracts from an interview with playwright Emily Sheehan in 2018 offer insights into the development and dramaturgical process of the play

What inspired you to write *Hell's Canyon*?

*I wrote *Hell's Canyon* to try make sense of the grief and rage and pain I felt as a young person. When your world is falling apart it can feel impossible to hold onto any sense of optimism. It's only in the moments you realise who and what makes it all worth it, can you find the will to swim to the surface, even if all you want to do is sink.*

What I like about my play is...

It feels like a genuine expression of my voice as a playwright, and I think audiences will get a real sense of my sensibilities as a writer from the work. There aren't any elements of the text that I wish I could change or re-explore. It feels complete and that's a very satisfying feeling.

In terms of this specific production (at Old 505 Theatre and then La Mama), the artistic team are blowing me away with their execution of the work. Katie, our director, has been directing the actors with a real intimacy and precision to keep the work extremely clean and refined. As well as constantly working with the sound and visual design elements in mind to draw out the world of the play. And Tyler Ray Hawkin's vision for the design is beautiful. Tyler's work is extremely polished and stylised, which is one of the things I love about theatre that it's theatrical and feels other worldly.

- What insights into the world of the play do these interview extracts offer you?
- How has the playwright dramaturged their work in order to bring it to production?
- How has the collaborative process with other creatives enabled her vision to be realised?



Well, everything is broken, alright? Mum's being totally mental. My friends suck. You're boring. And life is totally completely unfair – Caitlin (Act 1, Scene 1)

SUGGESTED POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:

The following activities have been designed to be explored after seeing *Hell's Canyon*. They aim to enable students to reflect upon and creatively respond to the production through writing, analysis and evaluation, and making drama/theatre.

1. Remembering the play

Drama, Critical and Creative Thinking

- In pairs make some dot points about the main story or stories in the performance – where did they begin and where did they end?
- How did the performance make you feel? What did they make you think?
- Who were the characters? What was their relationship to each other?
- How did you feel about the main characters? Did you have a favourite?
- What other characters are spoken about by the two main characters? What is your impression of these characters (even though we don't see them)?
- What did you notice about the use of costumes, set, props?
- How many different places and locations did the performance take you to?
- Were these places created on stage? What production elements or acting and direction enabled this?
- Did you feel you were asked to take sides in either of the performances? Whose side did you take?
- What key ideas / concepts were being explored in the performances?
- Does theatre or performance need to have a key idea or theme or purpose? Why/Why not?
- How important was audience to the performance? Did you feel you had a role to play? What was that role?
- What conventions of Naturalism/Realism and Magic Realism did you see in the performances – try to give specific examples.
- What was your overall opinion of the performances?
- If you could ask a question of the creative team what would it be?
- How would you describe the performances to a friend, a parent, a stranger?

2. Focus on Production Areas – Analysis and Evaluation

Drama, Critical and Creative Thinking, VCE Theatre Studies

2.1 Acting and Direction

Acting – Caitlin is described as 17 years of age, wears a hoodie, denim skirt and high-tops **Oscar** is described as 15 years of age, wears a baggy polo shirt with a school logo, cargo shorts and dirty sneakers

Analyse and evaluate how the actors playing these characters established *belief, focus and authenticity*. Consider:

- Expressive skills such as voice, movement, gesture, facial expression
- Performance skills such as energy, focus, timing, tension
- How convincingly did they interact with each other?

Acting – Verbal and non-verbal language

The use of language in *Hell's Canyon* is very conversational and aims to be naturalistic, the language used by contemporary teenagers. Theatre is also about non-verbal languages such as embodied, visual, and aural. The language of text messaging and social media is also present. All these 'languages' convey meaning.

- Discuss the use of verbal/spoken language in the play.
- *What IMPACT* did it have on you?
- Why do you think the characters spoke to each other in the way that they did?
- Does the language in the play sound authentic? (i.e. do teenagers speak this way?)

Consider *the image below*:

- Analyse what the non-verbal languages such as physicality, movement, gesture, facial expression of the character of **Caitlin** may be conveying in this moment.
- Do you recall this moment in the play?
- Can you find it in the script?



Direction

What do you recall about **the production area of direction** in the play? Consider the two sets of stage directions below taken from the script:

Stage directions (from Scene 1):

OSCAR slowly takes a sandwich wrapped in aluminium foil out of his backpack. He unwraps it slowly. It's extremely noisy and irritates CAITLIN

Stage directions (from Scene 2)

CAITLIN enters with her backpack. She checks her reflection in the mirror. Decides to reapply lip gloss. She looks into her eyes in the reflection, then inhales and exhales with determination.

OSCAR enters. Dumps his backpack on the floor. Surveys the room. Checks out the bathroom.

- How were these stage directions realised / interpreted in the performance you saw?
- Were they exactly as written? Did they differ from the script?
- Evaluate the directorial choices made in these moments

2.2 Set, Properties and Costume



Set

The image above is from the **original production** of *Hell's Canyon*.

- How does this image reconnect you with the set design from the play you saw in performance?
- How would you describe the aesthetic (feel) of the design in the image? In the performance
- How would you describe the textures and colour palette in the image? In the performance?
- How does the design impact the performance space in terms of how the actors may use the space?
- How did the design in the performance create space? What actor-audience relationships were intended?
- How does the set design in the image reflect or contribute to the theatrical styles apparent in the script?
- How did the set design in the performance reflect or contribute to the theatrical styles apparent in the script – ie realism, naturalism, magic realism,

Properties

Some props that are used in the play include backpacks, lip gloss, a sandwich, pencil case, Hell's Canyon gothic novel

- What other props do you recall?
- Consider the *symbolism* of these props to the characters and the story – what is important about certain props and for whom?
- Do the props work within the world of the play?
- Are the props present in the show reflective of what is mentioned in the script?
- Discuss how the minimal use of props contributed to the theatrical style of the production?
- Do you think there could have been more props? What type?

Costume

The characters remain in the same costume throughout the performance. In the script the costumes are described as follows:

- Caitlin wears a hoodie, denim skirt and high-tops and
- Oscar wears a baggy polo shirt with a school logo, cargo shorts and dirty sneakers
- Is this an accurate description of the costumes?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of these costumes in conveying the characters
- Discuss how the costumes contributed to the theatrical styles of the play

2.3 Sound & Lighting

The original production of *Hell's Canyon* used a sound design by Kimmo Vennonen. Consider the following description of the role of a sound designer.

Sound

I have strong feelings about [designing sound for theatre]. I'm really quite uninterested in diegetic sound – eg using sound effects to create a world of actuality. I see that as a cop out and a substitute for creativity, a job for a technician going through a list perhaps. I don't like sound being used to merely underline or flesh out a moving image or to make up for some failing of a script, but this happens often in what we consume. Sound becomes banal or functional rather than profound. Why not admit that a sound designer can be an abstract artist with the power to interpret the work, to convey the inner truths and intentions to the audience in sometimes indirect ways. It can be a very creative act to paint with sound and this might need bravery and care – Kimmo Vennonen, Sound Designer for Hell's Canyon

Source: <https://thetreetcbr.wordpress.com/2019/02/12/getting-to-know-kimmo-vennonen/>

Discuss this quotation by sound designer Kimmo Vennonen:

- What insights does it offer you in regard to the designer's approach to sound and music in theatre?
- Now think about the performance you saw - how does sound/music function within *Hell's Canyon*?
- Is the sound 'abstract'? Were there realistic aspects?
- Does it convey 'inner truths and intentions to the audience in indirect ways'? What is a key moment when sound was used effectively in the performance? What made it effective? What did it enhance, symbolise, indicate? How did it make you feel?

Lighting

Please note: The lighting design used in a school setting may differ from that depicted in information and images below due to school facilities available.

The **original production** of *Hell's Canyon* used a specific lighting design by Martin Kinnane. Visit the following website of lighting designer for the production Martin Kinnane – <https://www.martinkinnane.com/> – and explore the images.

- What images stand out for you?
- How does Kinnane use lighting to evoke mood, place, time etc?
- What is the overall role of a lighting designer in the theatre?

Sound and Lighting – analysis and evaluation

Please note: The lighting design used in a school setting may differ from that depicted in information and images below due to school facilities available.

Recall the sound and lighting in the performance *you* saw of *Hell's Canyon*

- What specific sounds and lighting states do you recall? Why do you recall these
- How did they impact on you? Make you feel? Enhance the moment?
- Select two sound/music moments from the play and return to the script
- Compare and contrast how these production areas were used but were not necessarily written into the script – how do you account for this?
- Do the same with any lighting states and lighting moments.
- What diegetic sounds (sounds within the world of the play) were present in the performance? What sounds appeared to be coming from offstage?
- Overall, how did the sound / music and lighting contribute to the mood of the performance and to the world of the play?
- How did sound/music and lighting dramaturge the story or provide subtext for the story – what was happening 'beneath' the top layer of the story?

Theatre Technologies

Please note: The lighting design used in a school setting may differ from that depicted in information and images below due to school facilities available.

In your own theatre making you can APPLY a range of theatre technologies across all three stages of production. In performance analysis you focus on what theatre technologies you see and hear in the presentation stage (the performance) and compare these to what may be suggested in the script.

- What types of theatre technologies were used and were evident in the production of *Hell's Canyon*?
- How did the use of theatre technologies contribute to the theatrical styles of the performance?
- How do the technologies used in the performance reflect what is suggested in the script?

2.4 Audience Culture

My ultimate goal as a playwright is to have audiences leaving feeling like they've just been witness to a piece of humanity. I think live performance has a way of plugging straight into your heart if you can get all the elements right. That feeling, to me at least, is like being instantly connected with our own humanity – Emily Sheehan, Playwright

Actor-audience relationship and audience culture

Through the writing, dramaturgy and the elements of theatre composition, the audience is placed in a relationship with the world of the play.

- What actor-audience relationships were established in the production?
- Was there a 'fourth wall'? Was there direct address?
- Was there distance between the audience and the performance space? Was it intimate?
- How would you describe the style of the performance space? End on, proscenium, thrust, studio?
- What assumptions does the play make about its audience? Eg knowledge of the contexts, language, circumstances, world beyond the play
- What is familiar about the world of Caitlin and Oscar? How do the theatrical styles contribute to this familiarity? – Consider use of language, interaction, use of props.

- Consider the use of TIME in this production – what is now, what is represented as being in the past, what is suggested will be the future? Are there gaps in time that we are left to imagine?

It's the end of the performance – what do you feel?

- Who is this play for?
- Who would you bring to see this play?
- What do you think has happened to Caitlin?
- What do you think has happened to Oscar?
- Read the above quotation by the playwright and discuss whether the play has 'plugged straight into your heart'.

2.5 Elements of Theatre Composition

- Consider the elements of theatre composition and how they may be evident within the production. *Cohesion* – Analyse and evaluate how acting and direction contributed to generating cohesion in the production.
 - Did it seem there was **unity and balance**, were the actors in the 'same world'?
- *Motion* – Discuss how the actors used/were directed to use the space, the set pieces and properties effectively.
 - Given the main theatrical style was naturalism, did the movement and use of the space reflect this?
- *Rhythm* – Analyse and then evaluate the pace, timing and tempo of the delivery of the spoken text, the shifts in location and time, the shifts into moments of magic realism.
 - How were these achieved? Are they what you imagined when reading the script?
 - What was one highly effective moment you recall?
- *Emphasis* – What aspects within the production were given particular emphasis? Words, silence, sound/music, lighting, movement?
 - Why do you think these were emphasised?
 - Select two moments and discuss in detail, comparing with the script.
- *Contrast* – The play makes a strong shift into **magic realism** as a way of exploring Caitlin's inner monologue and conflict.
 - Discuss how these contrasting moments are created theatrically; in the acting, direction, design elements.
- *Variation* – Playwright Emily Sheehan talks about the **push/pull effect** between the two characters.
 - Think about when the characters push against one another, and when they pull towards one another (literally but, importantly, metaphorically).
 - Select two moments from the play that represent these two 'variations' in dynamic. How are these moments created?
 - Consider expressive skills, intensity, energy, use of space, silence, movement, volume, production areas

3 Write a letter

(Drama, Literacy)

Write a letter from Caitlin to Oscar or from Oscar to Caitlin:

- In the letter, you want to tell the other person why you ran away with them OR why you went back home.
- Use your experiences of seeing the production to try and find an authenticity to the letter – how you believe either character would address the other in a real way.
- Could this letter be a new monologue for the play? Or in fact an epilogue?
- Consider how you can use play making techniques to create a monologue or solo performance from this letter.

4 Ensemble Piece

(Drama)

Use the following script extract to create a mini ensemble theatre performance that is your interpretation of this scene. Think abstract, think eclectic

OSCAR leaves.
An explosion of light.
Silence.
Deep under water. CAITLIN watches as the light on the surface of the water ripples across space. The ocean bursts from the drawer in the bedside table. A turtle lands at CAITLIN's feet.
CAITLIN: Merlin? Hey, little guy. Sorry I killed you. There are worse things I guess. Oh, I packed us something.
She takes two bright yellow floaties from her backpack.
A flotation device. In case of emergency.
She puts them on.
It's safer this way. More buoyant.
She lies down in a puddle next to the turtle. She attempts backstroke. It's pointless in such a small amount of water.
Useless. Like all my plans (p 33)

- Divide into smaller groups
- Create a series of tableaux that represent each of an explosion of light, silence, deep under water, the ocean bursts, a turtle lands.
- Also consider what moods and emotions are present in this scene
- Create a sound scape that accompanies each of the tableau
- Use transitions of movement, sound, gesture and words from the script to move between the tableau.
- Present your mini ensembles and critically reflect on them.

5 Monologue – Exploration

Drama/Theatre Studies

Use the following monologue extract from the play to explore as an acting and directing activity

CAITLIN: It's scary.

OSCAR: ~~Gotta decide soon, but. Need to hitch a ride while the tide's still in.~~

CAITLIN: I don't want to. I don't want to just hope for the best. I hate not knowing what's gonna happen before it happens.

OSCAR: ~~You'll figure it out.~~

CAITLIN: ~~Nah, not this.~~

And my body shrinks and I'm wearing a Finding Nemo rashie.

I'm swimming with Mum; she's teaching me to bodysurf.

I'm on the top of the swell, but I can't kick fast enough.

I'm kicking and kicking, but it's no use.

I'm too little to outsmart this massive wave.

I topple headfirst over the top, and it dunks me, sucking me under, my body's spinning outta control and I genuinely think I'm gonna drown.

I suddenly realise that if I don't breathe, that if I don't get air, then ...

But then my cheek hits the sand, and the wave washes away, and I'm fine, but I'm crying.

My tears wash me all the way back to my bedroom, and I'm on the couch with Mum. She's sitting next to me and she says,

'When you think your heart might break.

Let it.

It's hard for the world to get bigger

when you're clinging to a piece that's about to break.

So let it break,

and let it break open.'



6 Themes & Scene Exploration

Drama, Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking

Some of the themes explored in *Hell's Canyon* are friendship, loyalty, grief, resilience, and courage. What other themes do you think are present? Consider the following scenes from the play. What central themes are present within the writing?

Scene 1:

OSCAR: Or we could swim to the surface?

CAITLIN: I'm too heavy.

OSCAR: I can swim for two.

CAITLIN: It's scary.

OSCAR: Gotta decide soon, but. Need to hitch a ride while the tide's still in.

CAITLIN: I don't want to. I don't want to just hope for the best. I hate not knowing what's gonna happen before it happens.

OSCAR: You'll figure it out (p. 35)

- How does this scene depict or capture the relationship between Caitlin and Oscar?
- What does Oscar mean when he says he 'can swim for two'?

Scene 2: Caitlin and her mother

'When you think your heart might break. Let it. It's hard for the world to get bigger when you're clinging to a piece that's about to break. So, let it break, and let it break open.' (p. 36)

- What do these words by Caitlin's mum mean?
- How might they offer hope and comfort to Caitlin?

Scene 3: Caitlin and Oscar

CAITLIN: I told you I didn't want to talk about Hunter.

OSCAR: Why not?

CAITLIN: Because it's depressing.

OSCAR: It's still a part of me.

CAITLIN: No it's not. It doesn't have to be. It doesn't have to define you.

OSCAR: I can't help it. Sometimes there are things you can't forget about even when you try. They show up in your brain outta nowhere. Walking home, or in the line at the canteen, or when we were making out before. It smacks you right in the face. Right outta nowhere ... I don't know what's so wrong about remembering.

CAITLIN: Well, try harder to forget.

OSCAR: I don't want to.

Silence. OSCAR is *clearly* upset.

I don't want to forget. It's like a part of me likes that right now everything is so weird and shit and horrible. Because that's what it is. I don't want it to become normal, that he's gone.

CAITLIN *sits next to him, tries to take the book from him. He holds onto it.* What?

CAITLIN: I wanna see.

OSCAR: You already saw it.

CAITLIN: I wanna remember (p. 22)

- What themes are explored in this scene?
- What is the loss they are discussing?
- What does Oscar mean by 'I don't want it to become normal, that he's gone'?

7 Reviewing the reviewers

Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking)

Consider the following two extracts from reviews of Hell's Canyon's first production in 2018.

- Do you agree with the critics' reviews?
- What are they focused on?
- How do these reviews address production areas, narrative, theatrical style, audience culture?

What's most celebrated here is the depth of the friendship between these two complex characters, the strength that paradoxically emerges from their fragility. Caitlin copes with her despair through a variety of destructive behaviours – risky sex, self-harming, testing her friends. Oscar, on the other hand, is an introvert, possibly on the spectrum, who finds it hard to talk to people, still floundering in the wake of his brother's suicide. They hurt each other deeply, but each also recognises why the other lashes out. And they are both smart and funny. Ford and Leach are appealing actors who play the text truthfully, with the understatement necessary for both its humour and feeling. Nothing about their performances, or the production, patronises these characters.

– Witness, Alison Croggan, 2018

This is a play "for young people" – presumably because they are the two protagonists and my 14 year old daughter was hooked from the first words and experienced the play with visceral pleasure and pain. As an adult audience member, I was similarly captivated due to the writer's ability to effortlessly capture complicated multi-faceted segues: the pain and dislocation of transition from childhood to adulthood, the language of naturalism and the language of magic realism, the world of the teenager which is her content, and the craft of making a play in the edited, intricately constructed world of performance.

– Daily Review, Joanna Murray-Smith, 2018

8 Written Responses

Theatre Studies

1. Analyse and evaluate how **acting and direction** were used to interpret the following excerpt to the state

CAITLIN: Nah, let's do something crazy.
OSCAR: KFC?
CAITLIN: No, something totally mental. Something big. Something way beyond what anyone ever reckoned we could.
OSCAR: And waste a perfectly good TV-watching afternoon?
CAITLIN: That is the saddest thing I've ever heard.
OSCAR: Don't fix it if it ain't broke.
CAITLIN: Well, everything is broken, alright? Mum's being totally mental. My friends suck. You're boring. And life is totally completely unfair.
OSCAR: Well, if everything's so awful and you're so angry about it why don't you just leave.
CAITLIN: Maybe I will.
OSCAR: Good luck with that.
CAITLIN: Good luck with learning to wipe your own asshole.
OSCAR: Not one of your bests. *Pause*.
CAITLIN: Maybe I *should* just run away. Mess everything up and see if anything changes. If I make enough of a mess.
OSCAR: Don't be thick.
CAITLIN: We could though. Think about it. No-one knows we're here. We could just totally run away. Go full-on missing.
OSCAR: I don't wanna go missing.
CAITLIN: Because your life is so great?
OSCAR: What's wrong with my life?
CAITLIN: It's a nightmare. It's worse than mine.

2. Evaluate how **two production areas** other than acting and direction were used to interpret the written script to the stage. Use specific examples from the script and the production.
3. Discuss and analyse how **one element of theatre composition** was used successfully to interpret the script for performance.

Resources and further links

INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT – EMILY SHEEHAN

<https://www.pwa.org.au/news/in-conversation-with-emily-sheehan-hells-canyon/>

INTERVIEW WITH EMILY SHEEHAN AND CONOR LEACH - OSCAR

<https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/about-us/news/hells-canyon-playwright-emily-sheehan-and-actor-conor-leach-in-conversation>

REVIEWS:

<https://dailyreview.com.au/hells-canyon-theatre-review-trades-hall-melbourne/78011/>

<https://witnessperformance.com/the-turmoil-of-being-young/>

SHOW TRAILER <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw9OTIVqHkU>

CURRICULUM LINKS – Victorian F-10 Curriculum

Discipline based learning	General Capabilities
<p data-bbox="204 239 606 275"><i>English/Literacy (Level 10)</i></p> <p data-bbox="204 282 766 353">Texts in context (theatrical text) – comparing texts that represent ideas in different ways</p> <p data-bbox="204 398 750 544">Creating texts - plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative or persuasive texts and experiment with text structures and language features</p> <p data-bbox="204 589 502 622">Achievement standards</p> <p data-bbox="204 629 470 663"><i>Reading and Viewing</i></p> <p data-bbox="204 669 606 703">By the end of Level 10 students:</p> <ul data-bbox="252 710 750 1205" style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of Level 10, students evaluate how text structures can be used in innovative ways by different authors. • They explain how the choice of language features, images and vocabulary contributes to the development of individual style. • They develop and justify their own interpretations of texts. • They evaluate other interpretations, analysing the evidence used to support them 	<p data-bbox="788 239 1204 275"><i>Personal & Social Capability</i></p> <ul data-bbox="836 282 1388 562" style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness and management • recognition and expression of emotions, • development of resilience • Social awareness and management • appreciation of diversity and understanding of relationships • working collaboratively <p data-bbox="788 607 1101 640">Achievements standards</p> <p data-bbox="788 647 1189 680">By the end of Level 10, students</p> <ul data-bbox="836 687 1380 1765" style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect critically on their emotional responses to challenging situations in a wide range of contexts. • They demonstrate persistence, motivation, initiative and decision-making through completion of challenging tasks. • They evaluate personal characteristics, strategies and sources of support used to cope with stressful situations/life challenges. • They analyse the effects of actions that repress human rights and limit the expression of diverse views. • They analyse factors that influence different types of relationships. • They critique their ability to devise and enact strategies for working in diverse teams, drawing on the skills and contributions of team members to complete complex tasks. • They develop and apply criteria to evaluate the outcomes of group tasks and make recommendations for improvements. • They generate, apply and evaluate strategies to prevent and resolve conflicts in a range of contexts

Discipline based learning	General Capabilities
<p><i>The Arts, Drama (Level 10)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore & express ideas • Drama practices • Present & perform • Respond & interpret <p>Achievement Standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of Level 10 students: • Develop & sustain different roles and characters to realise dramatic intentions and engage audiences • Perform devised and scripted drama in different forms, styles and spaces • They plan, direct, produce, rehearse and refine performance • Select and use the elements of drama, narrative and structure in directing and acting • Apply stagecraft • Use performance and expressive skills to convey dramatic action & meaning • Analyse the elements of drama, forms and performance styles and evaluate meaning and aesthetic effect in drama they devise, and see 	<p><i>Critical & Creative Thinking</i></p> <p>Questions and Possibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore the nature of questioning and a range of processes and techniques to develop ideas • Reasoning • Explore how to compose analyse and evaluate arguments and reasoning <p>Meta-cognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the use of strategies to understand, manage and reflect on thinking and learning processes <p>Achievement standards:</p> <p>By the end of Level 10, students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct and evaluate questions, including their own, for their effectiveness. • They demonstrate a willingness to shift their perspective when generating ideas, resulting in new ways of perceiving solutions. • Structure complex valid arguments. • They explain and apply a range of techniques to test validity within and between arguments. • Identify, articulate, analyse and reflect on their own and others thinking processes. • Use, monitor, evaluate and redirect as necessary a range of learning strategies. • Define, develop, justify and refine criteria to evaluate the quality of ideas, proposals and thinking processes.

VCE THEATRE STUDIES

Theatre Studies Unit 3: Outcome 3 – Analysing and evaluating theatre

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate the creative and imaginative interpretation of a written script in production to an audience. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

Key knowledge

- ways to analyse and evaluate a theatre production
- the contexts of the written script and how they have been interpreted in the production
- theatre styles in the written script and in the play in performance
- evidence of decisions taken by a creative team of theatre practitioners to interpret the written script for performance
- production roles and their application in developing the written script for performance
- theatre technologies and their use in the production
- elements of theatre composition and their use in the production
- terminology and expressions used to describe, analyse and evaluate a theatre production.

Key skills

- analyse and evaluate ways in which the contexts of a written script were interpreted creatively and imaginatively in performance to an audience
- analyse and evaluate the application of production roles to develop the written script for performance
- analyse and evaluate the use of theatre technologies in the production
- analyse and evaluate the use of elements of theatre composition in the production
- use appropriate theatre terminology and expressions.

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

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