

Symphonie of the Bicycle

Teachers' Notes

BY
Melissa Newton-Turner



BRINK

a note
for the
teacher

**Hello
and welcome from
Brink Productions!**

We are looking forward to welcoming you and your students to the production of *Symphonie of the Bicycle*, written and performed by Hew Parham.

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

We hope you enjoy the show.

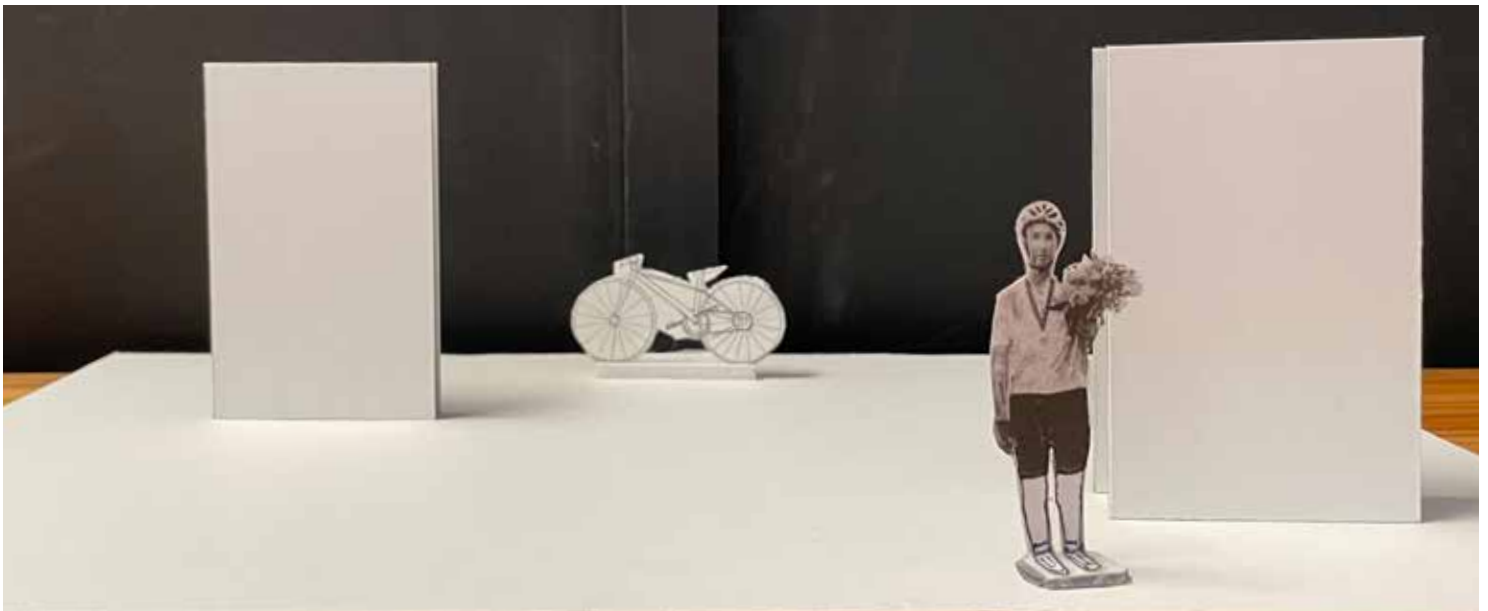
Melissa Newton-Turner
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Symphonie of the Bicycle

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creatives

WRITER + PERFORMER
Hew Parham

DIRECTOR
Chris Drummond

COMPOSER +
SOUND DESIGNER
Will Spartalis

SET, COSTUME +
LIGHTING DESIGN
Wendy Todd

ASSOCIATE LIGHTING
DESIGNER +
TECHNICAL OPERATOR
Aaron Herczeg

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Lachlan Turner

DRAMATURG
Caleb Lewis



synopsis

On the surface, *Symphonie of the Bicycle* could be seen as the simple story of Hew, a passionate wannabe cyclist going nowhere fast, and the story of the great Italian cyclist, Gino Bartali, winner of the 1938 and 1948 Tour de France.

But *Symphonie of the Bicycle* is in fact a complex story about one man's search for self-acceptance, paralleled with a reluctant hero's tale who risked his life to save hundreds of Jewish people trapped in Nazi occupied Northern Italy in World War II.



main characters

Hew

Hew is in a malaise. With no job and no purpose, his life seems to have stalled. Seeking inspiration, he attends a men's self-help group led by an ex-professional cyclist. But harbouring a pathological envy of his old high school friend, Hew discovers he is about to go on the ride of his life.

Jake Johnson

Professional cyclist, Jake Johnson is a charming and all-round good guy with the perfect life. Jake also happens to be Hew's more successful high school friend and number one arch-nemesis.

Gavin Chestnut

Overbearing, lycra wearing, mulleted motivational show pony, Gavin Chestnut is a former Australian cycling champion who is prepared to win at any cost. He takes Hew under his wing and teaches him 'how to be a winner'. However, underneath the lycra it turns out there is more to Gavin than meets the eye.

Gino Bartali

Winning the Tour de France in 1938 and 1948, Gino Bartali was a revered champion Italian cyclist. Decades later it would be revealed that Bartali was significantly more than a sporting hero. With Germany's occupation of northern Italy in 1943, Bartali's dedication to cycling proved life saving for Italy's Jewish community. Hiding

and transporting fake IDs in the frame of his bicycle, Bartali helped hundreds of Italian Jewish people evade capture by the Nazis. But the load he carried came at a cost.

Guilio Bartali

Gino's younger brother, Guilio is articulate and insightful, seeing things in people others don't. Sharing healthy banter and a love of cycling, the brothers are close. They ignore their father's warnings that cycling is dangerous, something Guilio discovers all too soon and haunts Gino for the rest of his life.

Adrianna

Adrianna works in a fabric shop and captures Gino's heart. She encourages Gino to return to cycling after tragedy strikes.



themes

Acceptance of self

The theme, 'acceptance of self', features significantly throughout the play, particularly from the male perspective:

- Hew feels like his life has amounted to very little and projects this sense of failure onto Jake, accusing him of stealing his wife, life and glory.
- It is important for Gavin to present as a high achiever who is celebrated by his adoring fans. Consequently, Gavin has the impressionable Hew in his sights, breaking him down and rebuilding him into what he considers to be a 'winner'. But underneath it all, Gavin struggles to accept who he really is without the ego and the lycra.
- Early in his life, Gino had to struggle with accepting his limitations – all he can do is ride. However, by embracing his gifts as a cyclist he unlocked his full potential.

What makes a hero?

Uncomfortable with the title of hero, Gino Bartali is famous for his quiet nobility. He keeps his war efforts quiet throughout his lifetime - it only surfaced posthumously. In contrast to Gino's dignified reserve, narcissist Gavin, is the epitome of a hero who readily boasts about his successes. Hew is the conduit between the two extremes. Desperate to prove himself, for a time he follows Gavin's path of machismo and bravado but ultimately must come to terms with his true nature. *Symphonie of the Bicycle* explores the dichotomy between individuals in society who are desperate to be acknowledged, to be seen and to win and those who choose to stay out of the limelight.

Absence

The absence of another, literally and metaphorically, impacts the

characters in different ways. For example, both Hew and Gavin have, for different reasons, isolated themselves in life, each living alone and barely socialising with the outside world. All Hew has are his childhood memories. All Gavin has are his medals and stories. Both characters struggle to understand who they are as adults, and as men in a world that defines masculinity as the need to dominate, achieve and be seen.

Gino struggles with the death of his brother Giulio, and his ensuing absence. His father's grief (and recrimination at Giulio's death) creates a gulf between father and surviving son, compounding Gino's feeling of isolation. Gino hides away from the world but ultimately realises that he needs to confront the overwhelming sense of loss to move forward.



theatrical style, conventions and context

ONE PERSON SHOW

Conventions

- Realism and Non-Realism
- actor playing multiple characters
- direct address
- narrator
- non-linear timeframe including use of flashbacks
- transitions including use of music to glue the different time frames together
- audience in role
- simple and symbolic use of set and costumes

Theatrical context

- Contemporary: story of Hew and his struggle to accept who he is.
- Historical: story of champion Italian cyclist, Gino Bartali and his fight to save Italian Jewish people in World War II



elements of drama

Mood, place and time

- use of music to enhance mood and denote place and time
- overlapping of Hew's and Gino's stories

Symbol

significance of

- bikes and training wheels
- the 'race' of life, up mountains and down valleys

small/big acts of kindness

- Hew helping the guy in the laundromat, Gino distracting the Nazis to help the Jewish family escape

Contrast

- definition of what it is to be a hero through the characters of Gavin and Gino
- differences between Hew and Gino's bike race
- Hew's story told in contemporary Australia paralleled with Gino's story told in historical Italy



learning experiences

YEAR 10

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM – THE ARTS (DRAMA)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

1. Can I be a racing bike?

CREATING

Ask students to form pairs and stand in the space.

Working together in their pairs, students are given 5 seconds to create a freeze frame of the following objects called by the teacher (the objects resonate with the production):

- washing machine
- racing bike
- volcano
- shiny black boots
- trophy

Students can use voice to add simple sound effects to the object.

Divide the class into four equal groups and ask each group to stand in a corner of the space, so the centre of the room is a performance space. Assign each group a number from 1-4. When the teacher calls a group's number, they are to move into the performance space and are given five seconds to create a freeze frame of a significant landmark: For example,

- Uluru
- Sydney Harbour Bridge
- Adelaide's Malls Balls
- Leaning Tower of Pisa
- Eiffel Tower

Once the group has created their landmark, teacher invites students to discerningly add the following to enhance the freeze frame:

- voice to add simple sound effects to the freeze frame
- simple repetitive movement to the freeze frame

Teacher calls, 'Whoosh' and another group number is called, and the process is repeated.



YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

2. Can I tell you a bit about myself?

CREATING

Ask students to sit in a traditional audience/performance space format.

Invite each student individually to narrate their life story in two minutes in the performance space, highlighting the significant moments in their life so far. For example, birth, who is in the family, first day of school, learning to ride a bike.

Ask students to avoid sharing events that are too emotional or personal as this work will be extended upon later.

As students tell their story as narrator, members of the audience spontaneously enter the space and physically improvise individually or with other audience members the moment in the story. For example, if a student says they were born in Sydney, members of the audience could spontaneously create the Opera House or Harbour Bridge in the performance space.

Once that moment of the story is told, members of the audience sit down, and the story continues.



YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

3. What was a significant moment in my life?

CREATING

Individually students find a space on their own with pen and paper/laptop/recording device.

Drawing on their work from the ‘Can I tell you a bit about myself?’ learning experience, students choose a moment in their life they would like to develop in more detail to potentially share with an audience.

Students write or record in detail as a letter or diary entry the events from the chosen moment and reflect on:

- Why it was a significant moment in their life.
- Did they learn something about themselves?
- Did they discover something about someone else?
- How did the event change them?

Also ask students to consider how they will manipulate time to tell the story – will it be told in a linear or non-linear fashion? Will the story be a flashback or be told in real time?

YEAR 10 - PRE-SHOW

4. How do I present a significant moment in life?

RESPONDING, CREATING AND PRESENTING

Ask students to create groups of four. Invite students to share their significant moment in their life from the previous 'What was a significant moment in my life?' learning experience.

Each group chooses one of the events to transform it into a 1–2-minute performance, drawing on their work from the previous pre-show learning experiences which used freeze frame, voice and repetitive movement.

When devising the work, students will consider the use of:

- the role of narrator to directly address the audience to tell the story. The role can be:
 - shared amongst the group
 - part of the physical action of the story as it is told
 - or separate to the action standing in a designated space on stage.
- freeze frame with potential addition of selectively used sound and movement to enhance the freeze frame.
- voice and movement to manage playing multiple roles.
- smooth transitions to change role/place and time.
- simple props/costumes (optional) to denote change in roles.
- the Elements of Drama: role, relationship, movement and time to engage their audience.

Invite each group to present their work to the class.

After each performance, invite the audience to provide feedback to the actors about their manipulation of the following to create dramatic meaning and engage an audience:

- narrator
- multiple roles
- movement, voice and sound.

YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

1. What was it like to be Gino Bartali's son?

CREATING AND RESPONDING

Ask students before they enter the space to have materials to write a reflection. As students enter the space quietly, *Momentum* by Nils Frahm plays. Placed in the middle of the space is Italian champion cyclist, Gino Bartali's quote:

Good is something you do, not something you talk about. Some medals are pinned to your soul, not to your jacket.

>SEE LINK

Ask students in silence to read the quote and find an individual spot to sit in the space. Invite students to sit quietly with their eyes closed or heads down and reflect on how this quote was evident in the play, *Symphonie of the Bicycle*. Encourage students to consider how the quote reflects Gino's quiet nobility evident in the play in contrast with high-achieving Gavin (see Character section for more information).

Using touch and talk, (teacher gently touches each student on their shoulder or top of their head as an indicator to speak), invite students to share either a word or phrase that comes to mind from their reflection.

Remind students that in his lifetime, Bartali did not speak about his war time efforts, and it was in 2002, two years after his

death that Bartali's son, Andrea began to understand his father's involvement in WWII.

- Share with students that *Symphonie of the Bicycle's* writer and performer, Hew Parham considered what it must have been like for Andrea Bartali to live with his father and not know of his father's involvement in World War II. Hew considered what would it have been like for Andrea if his father had spoken of his heroics during his lifetime. Consequently, one of *Symphonie of the Bicycle's* main themes is 'absence' (see Themes section for further information).
- Invite students to step into the shoes of Andrea Bartali in 2002 when he found out about his father's involvement in WWII. As Andrea, students are to write a letter to his father about how it feels to finally uncover his war efforts and what it was like to only know about them once his father died. Remind students of Bartali's quote in the middle of the space.
- Using touch and talk, invite students to read their letters to the class.

- Once the letters are read, ask students to sit in a circle around the quote. Invite students to discuss and justify with the student beside them and then as a class:
 - why they thought Bartali chose to be a reluctant hero and not speak about his involvement in the war?
 - what it might have been like for Andrea Bartali growing up and what it felt like when he discovered his father's hidden story?
 - how different Andrea and Gino's relationship might have been if Bartali had shared his war experience with Andrea?

Invite students to individually consider their responses to the following questions. Give students the option to share their responses with the class:

- Considering the theme, 'What makes a hero?' (see Themes section), when you personally contribute to society, do you relate more to Gino, Hew or Gavin? Why?
- Who do you admire in the world for their contributions to society and why? How does this choice reflect your personal character?

> LINKS

quotefancy.com/quote/1759632/Gino-Bartali-Good-is-something-you-do-not-something-you-talk-about-Some-medals-are-pinned



YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

2. How can film enhance performance?

CREATING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Share with students that *Symphonie of the Bicycle's* writer and creator, Hew Parham, described the performance as “cinematic and filmic”.

Invite students to identify where in the performance this was particularly evident. For example, in Wendy Todd and Aaron Herczeg’s lighting design.

Encourage students to consider how they will each use lighting or even the stage space to recreate a “cinematic”

atmosphere to accompany the letter they wrote in role as Andrea Bartali in the post-show learning experience, ‘What was it like to be Gino Bartali’s son?’. Students are to consider the following Elements of Drama in their choice of lighting and/or stage design:

- symbol
- contrast
- mood
- tension

Individually, students rehearse the reading of their letter accompanied by their choice of lighting and/or stage design.

Students present their work to the class. Audience verbally responds to the work regarding the lighting and/or stage design’s impact on the reading of the letter.



YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

3. What was it like living in Northern Italy in 1943?

CREATING AND PRESENTING

Invite students to sit in a circle and lower their heads or close their eyes.

Read students the following excerpt from *Symphonie of the Bicycle*:

'I follow the General down a tunnel of dark stairs, an officer walks behind with a rifle. A door opens and I am struck by the smell, putrid, faeces and vomit, there are strange strangled sounds. Screams. Black walls with trickles of dank water running down them. I pass a

cell, I see a man sitting on a bunk, eyes staring forward, hands upwards on his thighs, jaw tight, he stares ahead like he's looking from the back of his eyes.'

(PG. 35)

Ask students to:

- raise their heads/open their eyes.
- recall where the excerpt occurred in the play.
- share with a partner and then as a class which images from the excerpt were most impactful and why.

- identify some of the thoughts and feelings evident in the excerpt.

Ask students to create groups of 5 and:

- provide each group with a copy of the excerpt.
- each member of the group researches two facts about Nazi's occupation of Northern Italy in 1943.
- group members share their facts with the group.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE >

Drawing on the facts they gathered from their research and the class discussion about what images from the excerpt were most impactful each group:

- creates 3 freeze frames depicting the excerpt. Students can portray human and non-human objects within the excerpt.
- considers how they will convey the thoughts and feelings of the characters they portray in the freeze frames.
- considers their use of the following Elements of Drama as they create the freeze frames:
 - symbol
 - space
 - role
 - relationship
 - tension
 - focus
 - mood.

- considers their use of the following expressive skills to convey role:

- movement
- facial expression
- posture
- gesture.

- devises a smooth transition between each freeze frame

Invite students to sit as an audience with their group members in front of a performance space.

- Assign each group a number – this will be their performance order.
- Explain to the class that as the teacher you will call, ‘Eyes closed’ and the audience will close their eyes. The first group will be given 3 seconds to take up their first freeze frame. Teacher will call, ‘Eyes open’ and the audience will open their eyes and observe the first freeze frame and then they will transition to their second and third freeze

frame. Teacher will call, ‘Eyes closed’ and the group silently returns to the audience and the next group silently and automatically sets up in the space. Each group’s performance therefore becomes part of one fluid class performance.

- The process continues until all groups have presented their freeze frames.
- Music will accompany the performance such as *Momentum* by Nils Frahm.
- Remind students they are to maintain their focus while in their freeze frames.

Once the performances are completed, invite students to individually create a written or verbal response that analyses how they used select Elements of Drama and expressive skills to convey the thoughts and feelings of the characters in their freeze frames.



YEAR 10 - POST-SHOW

4. How was voice used to convey character?

RESPONDING

As a class students brainstorm the multiple characters the actor, Hew Parham, played in *Symphonie of the Bicycle*. In preparation for the performance, Hew identified that he would concentrate on voice to convey the different roles. Individually, ask students to choose two contrasting characters from the performance that they felt were most engaging.

Students create a written or oral response and:

- analyse how Hew used pace, pitch, pause and volume to convey each of the characters.
- evaluate how effectively Hew used pace, pitch, pause and volume to show difference in these characters and engage an audience.
- reflect on what aspects of Hew's manipulation of voice they can use in their own performance work.

Invite students to share their responses with a partner to compare and clarify their ideas. Invite students to share their ideas with the class.



YEAR 11 + 12 - PRE-SHOW

1. Can I be a racing bike?

CREATING

Ask students to form pairs and stand in the space.

Working together in their pairs, students are given 5 seconds to create a freeze frame of the following objects called by the teacher (the objects resonate with the production):

- washing machine
- racing bike
- volcano
- shiny black boots
- trophy

YEAR 11 + 12 - PRE-SHOW

2. How do I transition between two ideas?

CREATING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Ask students to form groups of 4-5.

Show students two images: one of a racing bike and a Nazi Tiger Tank.

Drawing on their work from the previous 'Can I be an exercise bike?' learning experience, in their groups students are to use their bodies to create a freeze frame of the 2 images. Students are to consider their use of the Elements of Drama, movement and space in the creation of their freeze frames.

Students are to devise a way to transition smoothly from the freeze frame of the bike to the freeze frame of the tank. Students are to consider their use of the Element of Drama, time, in this process considering how quickly or slowly they transition from one freeze frame to the other.

As students are devising their work, teacher overlays their work with Nil Frahm's *Momentum* (used in the development of *Symphonie of the Bicycle*) to enhance mood. Explain to students that in the performance of *Symphonie of the Bicycle*, playwright and actor, Hew Parham describes the music as the 'glue' that sticks the scenes together as they move between time and place.

Students show their work to the class with music accompanying.

Audience responds to the group's use of movement and space to create the bike and tank and how timing was used in the transition.

YEAR 11 + 12 - PRE-SHOW

2. Who is Gino Bartali?

CREATING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

Show students contemporary footage of the Tour de France from YouTube.

> SEE LINKS

Ask students can they identify the race?

As a class ask students to brainstorm their knowledge of the race, including:

- how often it is raced (annually)
- when was the first race? (1903)

Show students historical footage of the 1938 Tour de France from YouTube.

> SEE LINKS

At the end of the footage show students an image of Gino Bartali, the Italian cycling champion who won the 1938 race and then again in 1948.

Explain to students the Tour de France was raced only twice during 1938 and 1948. Can students suggest why this was the case – what was happening in history that caused this? (World War II).

Ask students what might have happened to Gino during the decade between 1938 and 1948? As students share their ideas, inform them:

- that due to an irregular heartbeat, Gino couldn't enlist as a soldier.
- he was made a war messenger and used his bicycle to conduct his duties.
- in 2013 posthumously Gino Bartali was made a Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem due to his war efforts.

To allow students to further understand the historical context of the play and Gino Bartali's story ask students to form groups of 4 and research 5 facts about each of the following topics:

- Gino Bartali's cycling success
- Gino Bartali's war efforts
- The Nazi occupation of Italy in 1943.

Ask students as a class to document their findings on 3 pieces of butcher's paper titled with each of the topics.

Once documented, students read the facts on each of the butcher's paper. Sitting in a circle, students share with the class the fact that most resonated with them as they begin to create a picture of Gino and life in Italy during WWII. The research will be used in the following learning experience.

> LINKS

Excerpts of contemporary Tour de France
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdXUFYuyXt4
www.youtube.com/watch?v=khNB4kSu1bk

Excerpts of historic Tour de France
www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VWIH-HAas4



YEAR 11 + 12 - PRE-SHOW

3. How do I transform research into theatre?

CREATING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

In their groups of 4 from the previous research learning experience, the group chooses 1 fact from each of the sheets of butcher's paper. Drawing on their work from the previous learning experience, 'How do I transition between two ideas?' that saw them physically transform from a racing bike to a tank, students are to:

- Create 3 freeze frames that depict each of their chosen facts. For example, a freeze frame of Gino winning the

1938 Tour de France, Gino hiding the Goldenberg family in an apartment he owned, and Italian Jewish children not being able to attend school. Students are to find a way to transition between the freeze frames and choose music to enhance mood and engagement with the audience.

- be deliberate in their use of facial expression, posture, movement, that depicts the joys of Gino's success as a

champion cyclist and the danger of his involvement in WWII and the impact of Nazi occupation in Italy.

Students share their work with the class. The audience respond to the work identifying how the actors have used one or more of the following to create dramatic meaning:

- movement
- music
- facial expression
- posture



YEAR 11 + 12 - POST-SHOW

1. What makes me unique?

CREATING AND RESPONDING

Symphonie of the Bicycle's creator and actor, Hew Parham, deliberately addresses the theme, 'acceptance of self' in the performance, which includes seeing your own uniqueness and owning who you are (see Theme section for more information).

Invite students to find a place on their own in the room with materials suitable for them to respond creatively. Materials can be as simple as pen and paper, or extend to visual art materials, musical instruments, technology etc.

Ask students to make a creative response that captures what makes them unique.

Invite students to share with a partner and/or the class.



YEAR 11 + 12 - POST-SHOW

2. Can I tell you a bit about myself?

CREATING

Ask students to sit in a traditional audience/performance space format.

Invite each student individually to narrate their life story in two minutes in the performance space, highlighting the significant moments in their life so far. For example, birth, who is in the family, first day of school, learning to ride a bike.

Ask students to avoid sharing events that are too emotional or personal as this work will be extended upon later.

As students tell their story as a narrator, members of the audience spontaneously enter the space and physically improvise individually or with other audience members the moment in the story. For example, if a student says they were born in Sydney, members of the audience could spontaneously create the Opera House or Harbour Bridge in the performance space.

Once that moment of the story is told, members of the audience sit down, and the story continues.

YEAR 11 + 12 - POST-SHOW

3. How does “a silly little show” become *Symphonie of the Bicycle*?

CREATING, PRESENTING AND RESPONDING

As a class, invite students to identify the theatrical style *Symphonie of the Bicycle*'s writer and performer, Hew Parham used to create and perform the show.

Ask the students to brainstorm the conventions of one-person show (see the Conventions of Style section) used in the performance.

Share with students Hew's description of how the initial idea for the play came about:

“The show was going to originally go in a completely different direction... I was at Tour Down Under (cycling race held annually in Adelaide) and I thought maybe I could come up with this silly little clown show that I could put on in a tent there. I sometimes think it would have been simpler if I ended up with that... I always want to make a silly little show and it always ends up being a deep tragedy... I somehow feel I need to tell this story.”

Then share with students the next stage of Hew's creative process:

“I often start with something of myself and a core feeling, or looking at something like envy, but then I will often use a metaphor or allegory to project out on. Hew, the character, projects his hate out on to Jake because Jake's taken his life. But it's not really about Jake in the end... envy has stayed at the core of the show...”

Considering Hew's approach to creating a piece of work, invite students individually to:

- choose a significant moment from their life drawing on the work from the post-show learning experience, ‘Can I tell you a little about myself?’.
- identify a strong feeling they were experiencing in that significant moment.
- create and develop a metaphoric dramatic context where the feeling can be placed deciding on who, what and where.

At this point, invite students to share their idea with a partner to consolidate and workshop their ideas.

Once students' ideas are consolidated, students adopt the role of either playwright, director or designer to transform their idea into a scene, director's pitch or design concept for a one-person show. Students are to draw on the conventions of one-person shows discussed earlier to shape their ideas.

Students share their work in small groups or as a class, initially outlining the feeling and metaphoric context that initiated the work.

Students respond to their own work (verbally or written) analysing how they manipulated the conventions of a one-person show to create dramatic meaning and engage an audience.

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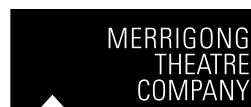
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