

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

YULDEA



STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Bangarra Dance Theatre pays respect and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, create, and perform. We wish also to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose customs and cultures inspire our work.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Bangarra acknowledges the industry standards and protocols set by the Australia Council Protocols for Working with Indigenous artists. Those protocols have been widely adopted across the Australian arts communities to respect ICIP and to develop practices and processes for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultural heritage. Bangarra incorporates ICIP into the very heart of our projects, from storytelling, to dance, to set design, language, and music.

USING THIS RESOURCE

This study guide provides contextual background to the stories and inspirations that have fuelled the making of *Yuldea*. The research phase for *Yuldea* was conducted On Country, through interview with Cultural Consultants and through published literature. This guide spotlights the areas that were the focus of this research.

It is important to note, the study guide is not an analysis of the work, nor a literal explanation of each section. Instead, it aims to illustrate the pathways that the creative team explored in their development stages, which in turn fuelled their creative journey in bringing the work to the stage.

We hope this information will support and encourage teachers and students to think critically about their experience of *Yuldea* and be inspired to explore and learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures while considering the multiple perspectives that abound.

YULDEA

A PRODUCTION BY BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

CURRICULUM LINKS

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

GENERAL CAPABILITIES:

- Intercultural understanding
- Ethical understanding
- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability

LEARNING AREAS:

- Humanities and Social Sciences: History, Civics and Citizenship
- Arts: Drama, Dance, Music, Visual Arts, Media Arts
- Science: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy
- Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages
- Health and Physical Education

THEMES:

- Indigenous perspectives
- Historical Inquiry
- Colonisation
- Contested Histories
- Environmental Science
- Environmental Sustainability
- First Knowledges
- Innovation
- Cultural Rights
- Human Rights
- Social Justice
- Concepts of Power

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Full program information

<https://www.bangarra.com.au/media/hdlbplOt/yuldea-digital-program.pdf>

YULDEA



SYNOPSIS

***We are memory.
Glimpsed through shimmering light on water.
A story place where black oaks stand watch.
Carved into trees and painted on rocks.
North - South - East - West.
A brittle landscape of life and loss.***

Yuldea awakens the earth and sky worlds to tell the story of the Anangu people of the Great Victorian Desert and the Nunga people of the Far West Region of South Australia, who have experienced every chapter of colonial incursions since British settlement, their traditional life colliding with the ambition of western capitalism and the Age of Imperialism.

Like many other places across Australia, this was the site of unprecedented decisions and actions that resulted in a forever changed landscape. The building of the Trans Continental Railway in the early 1900s brought the great steel serpent to the Nullarbor, draining the desert soak water source, *Yooldil Kapi (Yuldi Kapi, Youldeh Kapi, Juldi'kapi)*, that had sustained life for thousands of years. The arrival of the Missionary movement in the 1930s, saw people 'come in' from Spinifex country to interact with the

ways 'civilisation'. In the 1950s, came the 'black mist' from the atomic testing at Maralinga, forcing the Anangu people to leave their desert homelands where they had lived for millennia.

Memories, artefacts, and evidence of times before and after colonisation, now lie scattered across the scarred land. But the Anangu endure, determined to keep strong their knowledge systems of Land and Sky, honouring their eternal bonds of Kinship between People and Place.

A note to readers.

In much of the literature, Ooldea is the name and the spelling most used to refer to the site of the famous Ooldea soak. Alternative and possibly older versions of the name are, Youldul, Youldeh, or Yultulynga.

Ernest Giles, a British born explorer who was guided to the soak in 1875 by two Aboriginal men, wrote the name as Youldeh, but the following year the Surveyor-General, who was based in Adelaide, decided to change it to Ooldea, and the name has remained the most common in use.¹

When traditional Aboriginal spoken languages started being written down in English, spelling would vary due to inconsistencies in English spelling-to-sound (grapheme-phoneme) correspondences. Bangarra Dance Theatre has chosen to use the *Yuldea* spelling for the title of their production after consultation with the Yalata Anangu Aboriginal Community Council.

CELESTIAL TERRAINS / CHAOS AND ORDER

'Country includes, seas, waters, rocks, animals, winds and all the beings that exists and make up a place, including people. It also embraces the stars, Moon, Milky Way, solar winds and storms, and intergalactic plasma. Land, Sea and Sky Country are all connected, so there is no such thing as 'outer space' or outer Country' - no outside. What we do in one part of country affects all others'.ⁱⁱ

First Nations people around the world have been mapping celestial terrains for millennia. The skies are a library of knowledge about the Earth and beyond, a catalogue of stories that tell of the origin of our planet, the journeys of ancestors, as well as information about life cycles and seasons of weather - all there to be read by us.

The Earth came into existence about 4.5 billion years ago following the explosion of a star. This type of event is called a supernova. Supernovas occur very rarely - about two per century and are the biggest explosions human beings have ever witnessed. They are the site of unbelievable chaos, with massive amounts of nuclear interactions occurring at and around the core of the event.

The supernova that formed Earth caused gas and debris particles to drift as mini-colonies and collide with other materials providing the new planet with new substances, including heavy elements (metals). Eventually, from all this confusion and chaos, the planet Earth magically became the site of many complex and ordered ecological systems that could support life. Aboriginal people's understanding of these balanced yet fragile systems is extensive, and well evidenced in their 65,000 years of caring for the planet.

In the skies over the Western Desert of South Australia the story of the Ming-arri sisters is told in the stars.



The eternal cyclic battle between the oldest sister Kambugudha (The Hyades star cluster) and the hunter Nyeeruna (Orion) wants one of the sisters for himself. Nyeeruna has a fire-magic club, the giant red star we know as Betelgeuse, and Kambugudha has her own form of fire magic that manifests in her left foot (the star known as Aldebaran) which she uses to kick dust into Nyeeruna's face. The sisters also have a pack of dingos to protect them, Babba and his pups (Orion's shield).

The above story is but one of the many versions of the 'Seven Sisters' story - a tale that researchers claim has been told by people around the world for up to 100,000 years and is played out every night in the Pleiades star cluster and the Orion constellation. The Seven Sisters mythologies are arguably the oldest stories in the world, as we look to the stars to connect to the past we are engaging in a form of timeless storytelling.

When astronomers talk about 'looking back in time' they are referring to light years, and because light has a finite speed, they are able to calculate distance and time simultaneously. To illustrate this concept, the moon is about 380,000km from the Earth, so it takes 1.3 seconds for light to travel from the Moon to Earth. So, they are looking at the moon as it was 1.3 seconds ago.



Discussion point: Concepts of time.

Consider three concepts of time - *monochronic*, *polychronic*, and *infinity* (timelessness).

- The *monochronic* concept of time is based on there being a before, a now, and a future.
- The *polychronic* concept of time is based on there being several things happening at once at any given time, and it is the relationship between these that is central. This is where time is non-linear and unpredictable.
- *Infinity* as a concept is mostly represented by the universal signifier for the concept of infinity. ∞

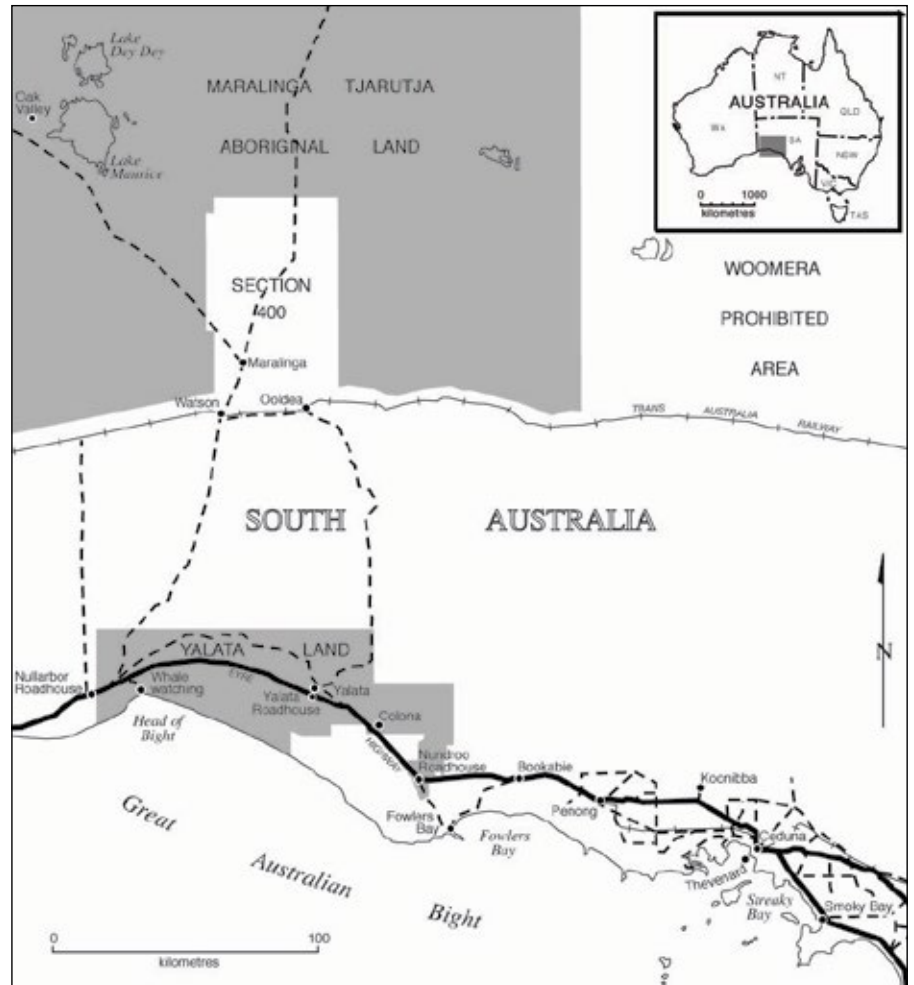
OOLDEA

Ooldea is located about 790km northwest of Adelaide in the Far West Regions of South Australia, at the point where the limestone surface of the Nullabor plain disappears below the sandhills of the Ooldea Range.

About 50 million years ago, during the Eocene epoch (55.8 to 33.9 MYA), the Nullabor (Latin: no trees) plain was a seabed. As the continent of Australia separated from Antarctica and slowly headed north, the broad cliffs of the Great Australian Bight were formed when this part of the seabed rose. The Nullabor is the world's largest limestone block and covers about 200,000 square kilometres. It is known as a karst landscape and is characterised by sinkholes, blowholes, and underground limestone caves caused by the water erosion of soluble limestone. In some areas, the limestone crust is only about 25 metres thick and in others, about 200 to 300 metres thick.

For the First Nations clans of the Nullabor and the Great Victorian Desert to the North, Ooldea is an extremely important place - culturally, spiritually, socially, and economically - largely due to it being the site of a permanent soak which served as an abundant water supply. It was a place where large numbers of people would gather for ceremony, trade tool making resources like quartz, conduct initiations, and arrange marriages.

It is also the site of some of the most impactful events in our colonial history.



YOOLDIL KAPI (OOLDEA WATER)

Water is a chemical compound and polar molecule. It is a liquid at standard temperature and pressure. The chemical formula of water, H₂O, means that one molecule of water is composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. Water is found almost everywhere on Earth and is required by all known lifeforms. About 70% of the Earth's surface is covered by water. Water is known to exist in ice form on several other stars in our solar system and beyond. Proof that it exists (or did exist) in liquid form anywhere besides Earth would be strong evidence of extra-terrestrial life.ⁱⁱⁱ

Living in the dry areas of South Australia, the Kokatha, Pitjantjatjara, Mirning, Wirangu, Adnyamathanha and Pangkala peoples developed extensive knowledge about the location of water sources across the Nullabor, including the quality and volume of water one could expect to find. To sustain supply, people would travel between water sources so that no one location would run dry, and they would build protection around these various sources to avoid evaporation.

Water was also the critical and primary requirement for early settlers and agriculturalists, so inevitably the colonists established their interests around water sources. Forms/types of water in the desert include soaks (shallow ground water); native wells (ground water and/or sub-artesian basin); rock holes (fresh water); springs (artesian basin). Aboriginal people's water management included the building of clay walls (dams), about five feet (1.5m) high, which were supported with boughs and foliage. Ooldea, being in an extreme desert region was one of the most important locations for water.

Today water remains just as valuable as Land in the context of access, use and ownership, and water rights and management, just like land rights and management, continue to be contested.

WATERFINDERS

Surviving in the desert is fundamentally about access to water. Without water, survival is not possible. Aboriginal people employ a number of strategies to locate underground water supplies and memorise the locations.

They also observe the behaviours and strategies of animals to learn the whereabouts of water sources, such as:

THE DINGO

The water-finding abilities of the Australian dingo are legendary. Scouring the surface of the land, seeking out underground river systems, this unique animal first arrived in Australia somewhere between 5 and 10 thousand years ago via Asiatic travellers. Aboriginal people look for areas on the ground where the dingo has scratched the surface, to identify where water might be accessed.

BIRDS

Aboriginal people observe the behaviours of particular birds to find water, for the obvious reason that for birds (and any animals) to thrive, they needed access to water. The zebra finch, striated pardalote and red-browed pardalote excel as desert waterfinders.

THE RED MALLEE TREE

Before colonisation the red mallee tree was found in most of the semi-arid areas of the continent. Aboriginal people utilise the water holding capacities of the roots of the mallee which run just below the surface of the ground. They select and remove roots from the tree and stand them against the tree to drain, collecting litres of water then storing and/or carrying it in waterproof bags made from dingo or kangaroo hide.

THE LETTERS PATENT

In 1829-1830, Charles Sturt led an expedition down the *Marrmabidya*^v (Murrumbidgee) river to understand where the inland rivers of the continent drained.

Once the existence of an inland sea was proven to be a myth, Sturt was commissioned to travel the length of this major river system and learn where they emptied into the sea. He followed the Marramabidya to the point where it joined the *Dhungala*^v (Murray) river, then continued until he came to a large body of water, Mungkuli^{vi} (Lake Alexandrina).

From the lake, he continued south to finally reach the Southern Ocean. In his report to the Colonial Office in London, he recommended the country around Mungkuli as being suitable for agriculture. The 'occupation' of already 'occupied' part of this land was about to begin.

Settlers seeking land for farming lobbied the Colonial Office in London for the area to be founded as a new colony, and in 1834, the colony of South Australia was established through an act of the British Parliament. As well as the claim that the land was largely an 'unoccupied' wasteland, colonists wanted it to differ from New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, in that it would be free of convicts and land would be sold (as opposed to granted) at a premium price to encourage only settlers with substantial financial means.

However, the Colonial Office in London, had a different perspective. They rejected the term 'unoccupied' and advocated for Aboriginal people's rights as original occupiers of the land be respected, and in an effort to ensure this they lobbied King William IV to proclaim, through a Letters Patent, the following:

'Provided Always that nothing in those our Letters Patent contained shall affect or be construed to affect the rights of any Aboriginal Natives of the said Province to the actual occupation or enjoyment in their own Persons or in the Persons of their Descendants of any Lands therein now actually occupied or enjoyed by such Natives'

By writ of Privy Seal. King William IV,
19 February 1836



The Letters patent of 1836 is one of the first and the most clearly expressed statements of intent regarding land rights for Australia's First Nations people. In 1838, the South Australian Act of 1834 was amended to include the King's provision. However, apart from some small portions of land being set aside for reserves and missions, the intent of the statement has been largely ignored and the dialogue around recognition of the South Australian 1836 Letters Patent continues to this day.

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THE TRANS-AUSTRALIAN RAILWAY



Railway construction workers in the desert, 1911-13. Sourced from the collections of the State Library of Western Australia and reproduced with the permission of the Library Board of Western Australia.

In July 1900, the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act was passed in the British Parliament and the six colonies of Australia became six states under a Federation. When the Act was passed, the Colony of West Australia (known as the Swan River Colony) made the construction of a railway across the southern part of the continent a condition of their joining the Federation. In 1909 a survey of the proposed route was conducted and in 1911 the federal Government passed legislation to build the Trans-Australian Railway and provide funds for its construction.

Prior to the railway, camel trains were used to move goods and people across the continent – a journey that could take over a month. For heavy and bulk freight, the only mode of transport was by ship across the often treacherous Great Australian Bight.

Construction began in 1912 at opposite ends of the route – Kalgoorlie in the west and Port Augusta in the east. It took over five years to reach the meeting point just outside the Ooldea siding, with the last spike being hammered into the railings in October 1917.

Building the 1,693 km railway involved 3,400 workers, 2.5 million timber sleepers, and 140,000 tons of steel railings. The railway included the longest stretch of straight-line rail track in the world, and it remains so to this day. In the 1950s, the timber sleepers were replaced with concrete and steel, and the steam engines were replaced with diesel-electric engines. The railway is still the main form of transport across the southern part of the continent.

To the Aboriginal communities of the desert, the train that slithered across the land they had lived on and cared for resembled a great silver serpent, a *'black monster hissing plumes of steam, roared and rattled into the newly built Ooldea siding'*^{vii}. Aboriginal people were barred from using the train following regulations established by the Commonwealth Railways.

'No native, however clean or well-dressed, may travel on the east-west line, unless special permission is given'^{viii}

The Trans-Australian Railway's construction was not only about fulfilling WA's condition for joining the Federation, it was also a major piece of infrastructure to support the growth of agriculture and other industries, and as such, it was promoted as a great milestone for the newly federated nation – something to be proud of and celebrated.

Today, East and West are indissolubly joined together by bands of steel, and the result must be increased prosperity and happiness for the Australian people.
Federal Treasurer, Sir John Forrest, 17 October 1917.

THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT



Image: Mrs Marion Green, Ooldea Mission, 24 June 1952.

A missionary can be described as someone who goes into a perceived disadvantaged society to make change. Usually associated with religious institutions, and their associated belief systems, the missional movement is recognised as having started around the time of Christianity.

By the 1900s, the missionary movement had based itself on a binary concept of superior and inferior, where Christian, white and western socio-cultural norms were superior and aligned with perceptions of 'civilised', and the 'uncivilised' were the heathen, non-white and socially 'other'.

In 1933, the interdenominational United Aborigines (sic) Mission (UAM) established a mission at the Ooldea Soak. In 1938, a 5000 square kilometre area of land around and including Ooldea mission was declared an Aboriginal Reserve. The mission consisted of a ration depot, a school, a church, and dormitories for about 60 children. The children were given English names because they were easier for the missionaries to pronounce. They learnt English songs and hymns and were given uniforms to wear. They were also assigned duties. There were tea girls, dish-up girls, wash-up girls, room girls, towel girls. There were room boys, wood boys, and goat boys.^{ix}

In 1952, due to some UAM internal problems, the mission at Ooldea closed down. The Lutheran Evangelical Church set up a new temporary mission around Yalata on a property

that had been purchased in 1951 by the South Australian Government, about 70 kilometres from Ooldea. A large group of Ooldea residents were moved to the new mission by trucks, while others were dispersed to various areas in the region. Some people simply chose to go 'home', back to 'Spinifex country' in the Great Victorian Desert.

In 1954, the more permanent Yalata Mission was established. It was primarily set up to contain the movements of Aboriginal people in order to make way for an exclusive zoning of land for Australia's Long-Range Weapons Organisation and the British Government's atomic bomb testing program.

The Yalata Mission operated as two camps – one was mobile and one stayed in a single location. 'Big camp' was moved around to ensure availability of water and firewood, and manage sanitation and social welfare issues. Aboriginal people would construct shelters (*wiltjas*) for themselves from branches and foliage. The missionaries would set up a makeshift rations depot, a store and a clinic, which would regularly be pulled down then set up in a new location. Children would be bussed into Yalata village to go to school. 'Little camp' was permanent and was the place for non-Indigenous workers' living quarters, missionaries and their families, as well as the elderly. In 1974 the reserve was transferred to the control of the Yalata Community Council, and the Yalata Mission ceased to operate.

DAISY BATES

Daisy May Bates (nee O'Dwyer) was born in Tipperary, Ireland in 1863. Her mother died when Daisy was an infant and she was placed in the care of her grandmother. Following the death of her grandmother she was sent to London (aged about 8) to live with the family of Sir Charles Outram. In 1884, she decided to migrate to Australia, where she started working as a Governess.



Over the next two years she lived in Townsville, Berry, Nowra and Sydney. She married and separated three times (without divorcing any of the husbands). After leaving the third husband she went back and rekindled the relationship with the second husband (Jack Bates) and had a son Arnold. She then returned to London for a few years, where she developed her skills as a writer and journalist. Coming back to Australia in 1899, she embarked on a personal mission as a mostly self-taught and self-styled anthropologist, welfare worker, researcher, journalist and advocate for Aboriginal people, who called her Kabbarli (grandmother).

In 1919 Daisy Bates set up camp at Ooldea. The controversies around Bates' motivations, tactics, claims, and reputation have been the subject of much analysis and in-depth review, resulting in a large body of her work being discredited.

My duty, after the first friendly overtures of tea and damper, was to set them at ease, clothe them, and simply to explain the white man's ways and the white man's laws.

Daisy Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, Benediction Classics, Oxford, UK 1938. Chapter 17.

"I did my utmost to arrest the contamination of 'civilisation' {But} the train was their undoing. Amongst the hundreds that 'sat down' with me at Ooldea, there was not one that ever returned to his own waters and the natural bush life.

Daisy Bates, 1935.

She helped feed, clothe and give medicine to Aboriginal people at Ooldea without any government or mission support. She was fearless and enterprising, but also treated the people she called "half-castes" with disdain and made false claims about cannibalism in her book, 'The Passing of the Aborigines'.

ABC podcast, *The Sands of Ooldea*, 2020.



Discussion starter:

What are some of the ways the impact of the missionary movement has written itself into the history of this country?

7

NATIONAL IDENTITY MYTHOLOGIES AND THE ROLE OF CINEMA



Image courtesy of STUDIOCANAL, UK.

In the wake of World War II, Australia moved into an era of massive change – economically, politically, and socially. It was a time for healing, after the horrors and disruptions of the war, and a time when investment and government assisted schemes would herald an era of prosperity and modernisation. This scenario also provided an opportunity to re-imagine the national identity for the predominantly white society, and the popularisation of cinema was a perfect platform to inculcate certain mythologies and characterisations.

Films like *The Overlanders* (1946), *Sons of Matthew* (1949), *Kangaroo* (1952) and *Phantom Stockman* (1953) promoted a settlers' interpretation of the 'the bush' – a place where pragmatic and tough men could forge a sense of 'belonging to the land' in a place called the 'outback'. These films told stories of heroes conquering harsh landscapes and engaging in conflicts with the First Nations people who were often simply referred to as 'the Natives' or 'the Blacks', casting them as a threat or barrier to progress. In the mid 20th century, this white man's history, told through the movies, seeped its way into a narrative that was largely accepted as the truth, validating the actions of settlers and their descendants.

BITTER SPRINGS

One film stands out to illustrate this scenario. *Bitter Springs* (1950) was directed by British born Australian Ralph Smart and tells the story of Wally King (Chips Rafferty) who travels with his family to take up a land holding lease from the SA government to run sheep. For King, the first and most important requirement is access to a permanent water supply, setting up the premise for the story.

At one point in the film, Trooper Ransom (Michael Pate), a government field officer, tells King:

'When whites take over Abo' land there are three ways of dealing with the natives: one, you can shove them off; two, you can ease them off; and three, you can find some way of taking them in with you. Now, you've got to make up your mind what you're going to do'.

Smart's original idea was for the ending of the film to depict the truth of the Frontier Wars, where many Aboriginal people were massacred or forced into labour. However, the film's producers in UK, (Ealing Studios), overruled this scenario and instead insisted on an ending where Aboriginal people decided to work with the settlers in a state of harmony.

The film required Aboriginal actors, so 130 men, women and children were brought from the United Aborigines Mission at Ooldea to Quorn where the movie was filmed. To this day, the children and grandchildren of these actors retain many memories of this event as being something of great interest and pride – as well as a level of amusement.



Discussion starter:

How has the cinema been used to promulgate different versions of the history of this country, at different points in time?

Some examples to look at might be: *Bitter Springs* (1950); *Jedda* (1955); *Walkabout* (1971); *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1978); *Fringe Dwellers* (1987); *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002), the TV series *Redfern Now* (2012) and *Mystery Road* (2018).

MARALINGA

In 1947, the Australian Government established the Wommera Prohibited Area (WPA) as part of the implementation of a policy to enable long range weapons testing, which in a post WWII period became a priority for major developed nations around the world. From 1953 to 1963, the inter-Commonwealth relationship between the United Kingdom and Australia provided the political launch pad for the testing of Britain's atomic weapons at various locations in the southern part of continent.

'The whole project is a striking example of inter-Commonwealth co-operation on the grand scale. England has the know-how, we have the open spaces, much technical skill and a great willingness to help the Motherland. Between us we should help to build the defences of the free world, and make historic advances in harnessing the forces of nature.'

Howard Beale, Minister for Supply, 1955.

There was little or no regard for the people who had lived and cared for those so-called 'open spaces' for tens of thousands of years, whose ancestry was embedded in the land, and whose future was about to be permanently and severely disrupted.

Most of the testing occurred at the place we now call Maralinga (*thunder: Garik language*). Until 1953, Maralinga was referred to as X300.

From the early part of the 20th century, some Aboriginal people of the area had been drawn away from the traditional lands by the lure of western influences, but many more were systematically removed and placed in missions and reserves. Away from their land and kin connections, they were conditioned into a high level of dependence, resulting in extreme disruption of Cultural practices. However, some small groups remained living in the Spinifex Country, and it was these people who were directly exposed to the effects of testing - in devastating ways.

THE BLACK MIST

The first atomic test was conducted at a place called Emu Field, on the lands of the Anangu. Mushroom clouds reaching a height of 1.4 thousand metres were observed, with radioactive dust (Black Mist) being blown to locations up to 170 kilometres away. The Black Mist was a gruesome experience for all who came into its sphere.

I looked up south and saw this black smoke rolling through the mulga. It just came at us through the trees like a big, black mist. The old people started shouting 'It's a mamu' (an evil spirit) ... they dug holes in the sand dune and said 'Get in here, you kids.' We got in and it rolled over and around us and went away.

James Yami Lester OAM (1941-2017), Yunkunytjatjara, at the 1985 McLellend Royal Commission into atomic testing which he was instrumental in initiating. Lester was made permanently blind from the effects of the Black Mist.

The Black Mist was a process of mist or fog formation at or near the ground at various distances from the explosion point ... Radioactive particles from the unusually high concentration in the explosion cloud falling into the mist or fog contributed to the condensation process ... The radioactive particles in the mist or fog became moist and deposited as a black, sticky, and radioactive dust, particularly dangerous if taken into the body by ingestion or breathing.

Ray Acaster, British meteorologist, 2002.

Acaster was part of the British team during the time of testing and advised not to run the test in the conditions on the scheduled day.

There were also around 200 minor trials of weapon components which caused Plutonium-239 to contaminate the ground. Plutonium-239 has a radioactive half-life of more than 24,000 years and is hazardous if inhaled, ingested, or absorbed through breaks in the skin.

The amount of contamination at Maralinga was not discovered until 1984, just before the land was to be returned to its Aboriginal owners. The next chapter in the story of Maralinga was to reveal the high level of disregard the government authorities had had for Aboriginal people, and the extent of the deception that was involved.

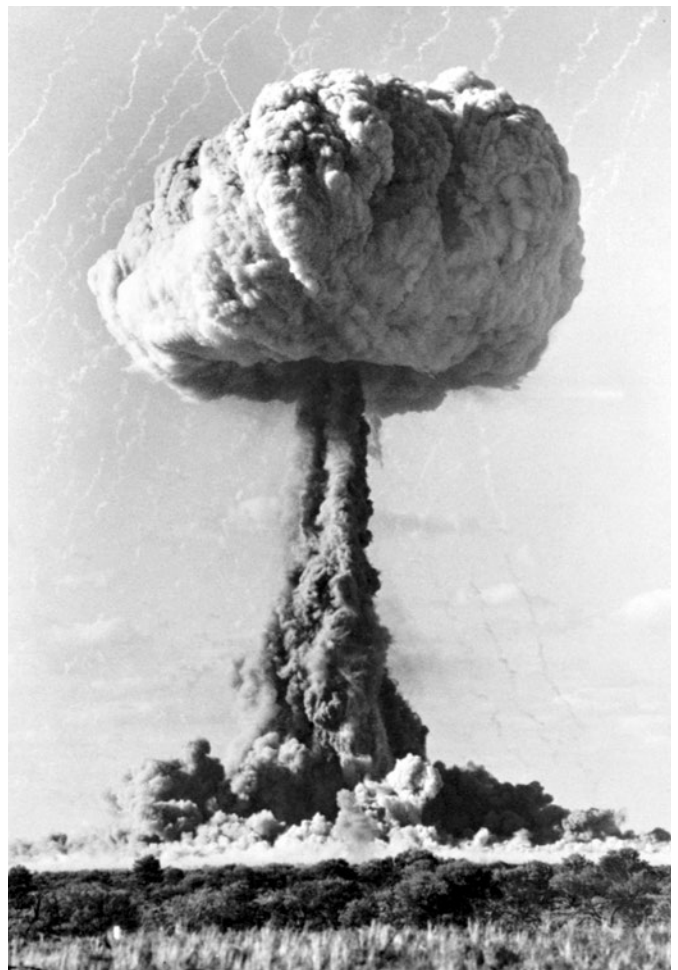
THE MCLELLEND ROYAL COMMISSION

When Maralinga closed in 1967, the British began cleaning up the site by burying contaminated material in trenches and pouring concrete on top of it. Plutonium contaminated soil was simply ploughed into the ground. In 1968 the Australian Government claimed that Britain had fulfilled its obligations to decontaminate the site. However, in 1984, Australian scientists conducted radiation surveys in the lead up to returning Maralinga to its traditional owners, the Tjarutja, and they found a significant amount of plutonium remaining. A Royal Commission was called for, and in 1985 Chief Justice James 'Jim' McLellend was assigned the task to lead the inquiry.

The McLellend Royal Commission strongly criticised Britain's treatment of Australia, as well as the Australian Government agencies tasked with managing the safety of the site. It also specifically condemned the lack of care and responsibility for Aboriginal people and their Land, and it recommended that the cost of remediation be served on the British government.

Eight years later, in December 1993, Britain agreed to make a £GBP20 million ex gratia payment towards the estimated \$AUD101 million cost of cleaning up Maralinga. In 1994 the Australian Government paid \$AUD13.5 million to the Indigenous people of Maralinga as compensation for contamination of the land.

Meanwhile, the Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984 was passed, naming the community as the traditional owners of the Maralinga area. (The name was retained by the community, recognising that it constituted as significant time in their Story), yet people only started to return to the land after the year 2000.



Atomic tests - Atomic blast during Operation Buffalo nuclear tests, Maralinga, South Australia with permission from National Archives of Australia.

THE RIGHT TO OCCUPY & LEGAL PLURALISM

No European nation has a right to occupy any part of their country, or settle among them without their voluntary consent. Conquest over such people can give no just title; because they could never be the Aggressor'. They are the natural, and in the truest sense of the word, the legal possessors of the several regions they inhabit.

James Douglas, Earl of Morton, in advice to Captain James Cook prior to the Endeavour expedition in the late 1760s.

This expression about the 'right to occupy', voiced in the late 1700s prior to any active settlement of Australia by the British realm, stands in stark contrast to the legal principle of *Terra Nullius* (land belonging to no-one) that would be used to justify the settlement of this Country. Yet *Terra Nullius* would remain an accepted doctrine of Australia's settlement history for over two hundred years until the High Court's ruling in the *Mabo v. Queensland* decision in 1992.

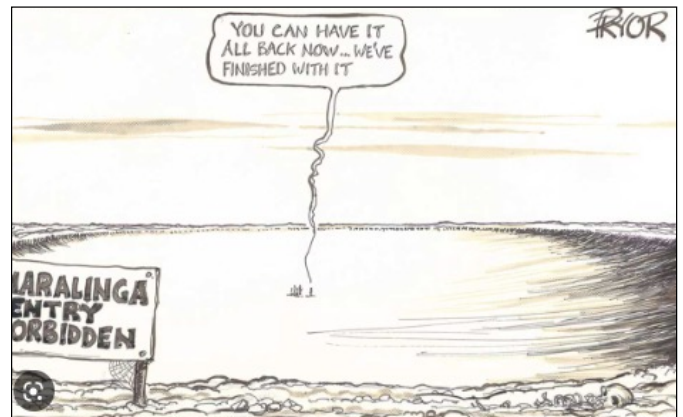
Following the *Mabo* decision, the Native Title Act 1993 was passed into legislation by the Keating Government, Native Title being the name given to the common law recognition of inherent entitlements that Australia's Indigenous peoples are said to have, under their own laws and customs, to the lands they occupied when Britain first claimed sovereignty*.

In order to achieve Native Title, claimants must provide evidence that a continuous system of law and custom has been maintained and handed down from before settlement - a task that can be incredibly difficult in a post-colonial Australia. When an application is successful, Traditional Owners can negotiate with developers about proposed works on the land (including mining and other development), however if the right of private land ownership is in conflict it supersedes native title.



Discussion Starter:

Legal pluralism is the concept of a nation's common law operating in the same space as customary law, but the ongoing challenge for First Nations people is that the power still lies in common law. Discuss the benefits and challenges for Native Title land claims.



Geoff Pryor, *Canberra Times*, 1984.

THE 1991 'HAND BACK' AT OOLDEA

The concept of 'hand back' is understood as something along the lines of, 'to return something to the person who owns it after the person has given it to you.'^{xi}

When the term 'hand back' is used to describe First Nations' land being handed back to Traditional Owners, it is most often after a period of time that the land has been settled and exploited by government or private interests without any agreement or consideration of the owners.

In 1991, at Ooldea, as minister of Aboriginal affairs, I had the privilege of handing over the title of the Ooldea lands to Maralinga elders who had confronted everything, even the testing of nuclear weapons on their lands and the poison left behind. We had a ceremony in the desert and elders cooked a dinner for us at our campsite the night before. Trucks and cars arrived from all directions and Aboriginal people both young and old walked with us to a place where, for thousands of years, Aboriginal people had lived and gathered next to a precious water source.

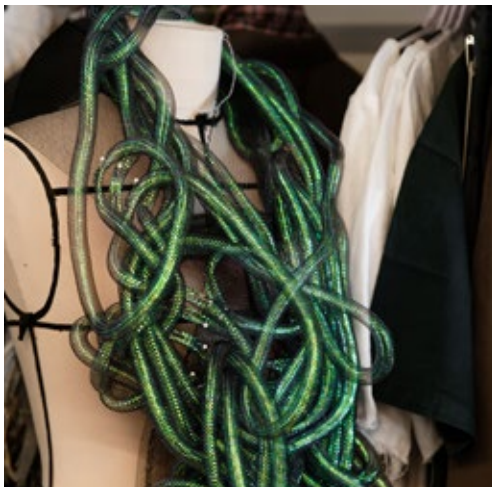
Speech to the SA Parliament on 13 February 2008 by Premier M. D Rann.



Discussion starter:

Reflecting on the events that the people of the Nullabor and Great Western Desert have experienced since colonisation, think about what has been lost and what has been gained.

CREATIVE PROCESS



Cultural Consultants and creative team responsible for the making of *Yuldea*.

- Aunty Maureen Smart
Yalata Cultural Consultant
- Uncle Clem Lawrie
Mirning Cultural Consultant
- Cultural Authority
Representatives from the Yalata Anangu Aboriginal Community Council
- Frances Rings
Choreographer
- Leon Rogers
Composer
- Electric Fields
Guest composers
- Elisabeth Gadsby
Set Designer
- Jennifer Irwin
Costume designer
- Karen Norris
Lighting designer
- Karlie Noon
Cultural Astronomy Consultant
- Joshua Thomson
Aerial and Acrobatic Creative Consultant

The making of *Yuldea* involved thousands of hours over many months of dedicated time and effort by close to 100 individuals and many more in support, to bring the production to its realisation - Cultural consultation and conversations including two trips On Country and much time on the phone, dreaming up ideas, meetings and more meetings, endless research and conversations about the findings, sketching, sourcing of fabrics, finding the right rope then cutting, painting and treating the nine kilometres of it, making costumes and props and then testing them, set construction, lighting imagining and design, and most importantly, about 260 hours in the studio creating the choreography, the powerful language that brings the Story to life, ready to be shared with audiences.

In the meantime we would like to share some images of the sketches that represent early develop of set and costume.

For more information on all of Bangarra works, and the journey of their creation, we recommend that you explore our digital platform <https://bangarra-knowledgeground.com.au/>

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING



LINKS

The Sands of Ooldea, ABC Radio National podcast in four parts.
<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/the-history-listen/the-sands-of-ooldea-part-1/11802466>

World of Molecules
<https://www.worldofmolecules.com/solvents/water.htm>

How did Aboriginal people find water?
Waterwise QLD, Resources QLD
https://www.resources.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1408282/aboriginal-peoples-manage-water-resources.pdf

Bitter Springs trailer (1950)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vpq7flzLqAs>

Bitter Springs, curators notes and links to video – the Australian Screen
<https://aso.gov.au/titles/features/bitter-springs/notes/>

History Trust of South Australia
<https://education.history.sa.gov.au/resource/the-letters-patent/>

Haughten, J., Kohen, A., Australian Parliament House, Social Policy Section.
https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp2122/Chronologies/IndigenousChronology#Toc97633286



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Maggie Brady, 'The Politics of Space and Mobility: controlling the Ooldea/Yalata Aborigines, 1952-1982, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 23, 1999, pp. 1-14.

Macfarlane, I., McConnell A., 'The Waters of the Australian Desert' Cultural Heritage Study, A report to the Department of Environment and Energy and the Heritage Council, 2017.

Justine Philip, 'Waterfinders: A cultural history of the Australian dingo', *Australian Zoologist*, 2020.

Ray Acaster, 'Worlds Apart: Atom Bombs and traditional land use in South Australia. *Limina, Journal of Cultural and Historical Studies*, UWA, Vol 1, 1995.

Stephen Gaunson, 'Key Moments in Australian Cinema', *Issue 62*, 2012.



BOOKS

Karlie Noon & Krystal De Napoli, *Sky Country*, 2022.

Yalta and Oak Valley Communities, with Christobel Mattingly, *Maralinga: The Anangu Story*, Allen & Unwin, 2009.

Frank Walker, *Maralinga: the chilling expose of our secret nuclear shame and the betrayal of our troops and country*, Hachette Australia, 2014.

ENDNOTES

- i Dr Maggie Brady, ANU, for Maralinga Tjarutja Community Inc.
- ii Bawaka Country, 'Dukarr lakarama: Listening to Guwak, Talking back to Space Colonisation', *Political Geography*, 81, 2020, p.2 in Noon, K., De Napoli, K., *Sky Country*, 2022.
- iii World of Molecules website.
- iv Wiradjuri language
- v Yorta Yorta language
- vi Ngarrindjeri language
- vii Oak Valley Community, Mattingly, *Maralinga*, 2009.
- viii Ibid.
- ix Oak Valley Community, Mattingly, Op cit, 2009.
- x Kirsten Anker, 'The law of the Other: Exploring the paradox of legal pluralism in Australian Native Title, *Dealing with the Other: Australia's Faces and Interfaces*, Sorbonne University Press, Paris, 2008.
- xi Cambridge Dictionary

bangarra


DANCE THEATRE


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