

CREATIVE LEARNING RESOURCE PART B

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

BY TRACY LETTS

27 FEBRUARY – 16 MARCH
HEATH LEDGER THEATRE



 **BLACK SWAN**
STATE THEATRE COMPANY

A CO-PRODUCTION
WITH
 **BELVOIR ST**
THEATRE

PRESENTED IN
ASSOCIATION WITH
PERTH
FESTIVAL

 Australian Government

 Creative
Australia

 Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries

 lollapalooza

PRINCIPAL
PARTNER
 **Fortescue**



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

BLACK SWAN'S CREATIVE LEARNING RESOURCES ARE ALIGNED WITH THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM FOR DRAMA, ENGLISH AND LITERATURE. THESE RESOURCES ARE OFFERED IN TWO PARTS, DESIGNED TO ENHANCE THE VIEWING EXPERIENCE AND TO SUPPORT FURTHER EXPLORATION POST-SHOW.

Part A is to assist your excursion to the theatre by providing background information about the play, pre-show activities and research opportunities.

Part B includes production images, behind-the-scenes footage, and post-show analysis activities.

Icons to look out for within each pack include:



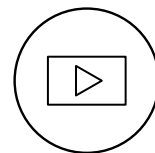
ACTIVITY



DISCUSSION



READING



VIDEO

Black Swan State Theatre Company of WA produced this Creative Learning Resource.

Compiled by Christie Sistrunk (Creative Learning Manager).

Cover images by Brett Boardman and Joel Barbitta.

Design by Troy Barbitta.

Black Swan State Theatre Company of WA acknowledges the Whadjuk Nyoongar people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We pay respects to all Aboriginal Elders and people and stand united towards a shared future.



Image by Brett Broadman: Bert LaBonté (as Bill Fordham) and Esther Williams (as Jean Fordham).

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CONTENT WARNINGS & CURRICULUM LINKS

Image by Brett Broadman: Amy Matthews (as Ivy Weston) and Will O'Mahony (as Little Charles Aiken)

CONTENT WARNINGS

- **Language:** Use of strong language and mature themes.
- **Mental Health/Substance Abuse:** Depression, emotional instability, death, loss, drug addiction including opiate dependency.
- **Family Conflict/Violence:** Intense familial conflict, dysfunctional relationships, harsh language, verbal aggression, and emotional violence.
- **Sexual Content/Abuse:** References to infidelity, sexual situations, and incest.

CURRICULUM LINKS (ATAR)

Literature

Unit 3: Texts in Context

Analysis of the American Dream, family structures, societal expectations, and the examination of cultural and historical issues.

Unit 4: Interpreting Texts

Exploration of literary devices, themes, and character dynamics. Comparative studies with the 2013 film adaptation or plays like Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Drama

Unit 3: Representational, Realist Drama

A prime example of modern American realism, focusing on intricate characters, subtext, and emotional and psychological motivations.



ABOUT BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF WA

BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA CREATES HIGH QUALITY THEATRICAL EXPERIENCES THAT CELEBRATE, CHALLENGE, AND INSPIRE OUR COLLECTIVE HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

Founded in 1991, the Company has earned both critical and popular acclaim for its world premiere productions and highly distinctive reinterpretations of international theatre classics – all of which are infused with the unique culture of Western Australia. The Company is led by a Board of Directors, chaired by Francois Witbooi. Artistic Director is Kate Champion and Chief Executive Officer is Ian Booth.

State Theatre Centre Excursion Management Plan can be downloaded here.

[CLICK HERE](#)

OUR VISION

Connecting artists and audiences through the power of theatre to entertain, challenge and inspire.

OUR PURPOSE

To create exceptional, high-quality theatre that speaks to the world from our unique WA culture, landscape and moment in time.

OUR VALUES

Creativity. Creativity is essential to everything we do.

Connection. We collaborate to tell stories, nurture relationships and share knowledge, to maximise the impact and reach of our company.

Innovation. We are forward-thinking and responsive to the changing world around us, balancing responsibility with courage to make meaningful choices.

Quality. We engage a skilled and trusted team, prioritising diversity and respect, to deliver exceptional outcomes for our company and community.



ABOUT BELVOIR ST THEATRE

FOUNDED IN 1984 IN SYDNEY'S SURRY HILLS, BELVOIR ST THEATRE GREW FROM THE NIMROD THEATRE COMPANY.

Known for bold programming, new Australian works, innovative classics, and plays that challenge social norms, Belvoir's productions have toured internationally and won numerous prestigious awards.



Take your students on a virtual tour of Belvoir St stage, warehouse and workshop.



THE ARTISTS CAST



CAROLINE BRAZIER
MATTIE FAE AIKEN



BEE CRUSE
JOHNNA MONEVATA



GEOFF KELSO
BEVERLY WESTON



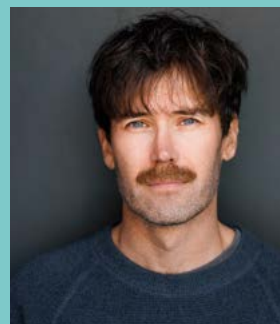
BERT LABONTÉ
BILL FORDHAM



AMY MATHEWS
IVY WESTON



HAYLEY MCELHINNEY
BARBARA FORDHAM



WILL O'MAHONY
LITTLE CHARLES AIKEN



BEN MORTLEY
SHERIFF DEON GILBEAU



ROHAN NICHOL
STEVE HEIDEBRECHT



PAMELA RABE
VIOLET WESTON



ANNA SAMSON
KAREN WESTON



GREG STONE
CHARLIE AIKEN



ESTHER WILLIAMS
JEAN FORDHAM



THE ARTISTS CREATIVES



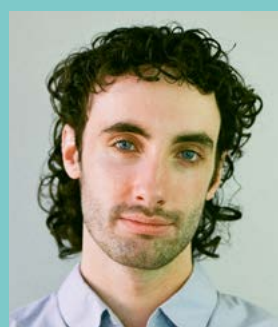
TRACY LETTS
WRITER



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DIRECTOR



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SET DESIGNER



MORGAN MORONEY
LIGHTING DESIGNER



RACHAEL DEASE
COMPOSER & SOUND
DESIGNER



ELLA BUTLER
COSTUME DESIGNER



KATE CHAMPION
PERTH REMOUNT
ASSOCIATE



GUY SIMON
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



MARGARET THANOS
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



LAURA FARRELL
VOCAL COACH



NIGEL POULTON
FIGHT & MOVEMENT
DIRECTOR



DESIGN

IN TRACY LETTS' *AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY*, THE WESTON FAMILY HOME SERVES AS BOTH THE CENTRAL SETTING AND A POWERFUL METAPHOR FOR THE FAMILY'S DYSFUNCTION.

In the script, Letts describes a multi-story home enabling simultaneous, overlapping action to highlight fractured yet interconnected family dynamics. In this production, designer Bob Cousins reimagines the setting as a single-level space with distinct playing areas inside and out, highlighting theatre's remarkable elasticity in portraying time and place.



After viewing the production, discuss the reimagined set design with students.

- Does the shift from a multi-story to a single-story set change how you interpret their connections or disconnections?
- In what ways do the distinct playing areas on the single-level set create opportunities for overlapping action and simultaneous storytelling?



Read the Prologue and explore how the setting connects to the play's themes, character motivations, and emotional tone.



Read "The unexpected pleasure of making impossible stage directions work."



Image: Model Set by Bob Cousins



ACT ONE.

PROLOGUE.

SCENE - A rambling country house outside Pawhuska, Oklahoma, sixty miles northwest of Tulsa. More than a century old, the house was probably built by a clan of successful Irish homesteaders. Additions, renovations, and repairs have essentially modernised the house until 1972 or so, when all structural care ceased.

The first floor:

At RIGHT, the kitchen. Country cooks have served their duty here, and amidst the clutter and grease, their ghosts perhaps still patrol. But the copper cookware hanging from the pot rack above the stove is cold and dusty, and the room is little more than storage space now, for a few kitchen essentials, for the boxy thrumming refrigerator, and for the decades-old cases of empty red and green pop bottles. A darkly tinted sliding glass door and crummy screen lead to the overgrown backyard, FAR RIGHT.

An archway opens onto the dining room, RIGHT CENTRE. The Mission-style table seats eight; the matching mirrored sideboard holds the fine China. A tatty crystal-tiered chandelier hangs too low over the table and casts a gloomy yellow light. A rotary-dial telephone rests on a small side table.

French doors separate the dining room and living room, LEFT. Sunken, darkly panelled, carpeted in a red and black shag, and lit by saloon-style amber globes, the living room has been fashioned into a "den." A hi-fi turntable, cabinet style TV, wet bar and Wurlitzer electric piano seemed sophisticated in 1970, but the beanbag chairs are now long gone, replaced with a sensible hide-a-bed and love seat. Black metal tree lamps now provide the room with actual light.

UPSTAGE of the den: a landing and a solid oak front door. Beyond it, FAR LEFT: a concrete front porch strewn with dead grass and a few rolled-up small town newspapers. UPSTAGE of the landing, a door opens on stairs leading to the basement and laundry room. Above that, a stairway leads to:

The second floor:

At LEFT, the master bedroom, with queen-sized bed, dresser, and a door leading to a small bathroom. The accoutrements are decidedly feminine – pink and white, lacy, and powdered. An UPSTAGE door leads to the stairs landing and hallway.

At RIGHT, the guest bedroom, also with queen-sized bed, dresser, etc. teenagers last lived here, and though more than twenty years have now passed, the door still betrays the longing of small-town girls.

CENTRE, the study. Overflowing floor-to-ceiling bookcases line the walls. DOWNSTAGE, a medium-sized desk, is piled with books, legal pads, manila folders, note paper. A wrinkled bedsheet and a pillow lie on a chaise lounge against the LEFT wall. UPSTAGE, a spiral staircase leads to...

The attic:

A single small chamber, CENTRE, with peaked roof and planted beige plasterboard walls, has been inexpensively modelled into an ascetic third bedroom. A blood red Pendleton blanket provides the only colour in the room. A ceramic wash basin sits atop a small antique dresser.

All the windows in the house have been covered with cheap plastic shades. Black duct tape seals the edge of the shades, effecting a complete absence of outside light.

At rise:

Lit dimly by his desk lamp, BEVERLY WESTON, drunk, nurse a glass of whiskey as he "interviews" JOHNNA MONEVATA.



SYMBOLISM, ATMOSPHERE AND MOOD

- How do the contrasting elements in the house (e.g., the fine China in the dining room vs. the clutter and grease in the kitchen) symbolise the family's dualities or contradictions?
- The house is described as having windows sealed with black duct tape, blocking out natural light. How might this detail serve as a metaphor for the family's outlook or internal struggles?
- How does the dim lighting and specific props (e.g., the glass of whiskey, the ceramic wash basin, the red Pendleton blanket) contribute to the atmosphere of the Prologue?
- What role does the mix of modern and outdated features (e.g., 1970s furnishings, rotary telephone) play in creating a sense of time and place?



COSTUME DESIGNER'S NOTE

ELLA BUTLER

We looked at a range of source material for the costumes of *August: Osage County*. Along with the usual points of reference, we looked at community pages of Pawhuska, Oklahoma, contacted their local police and observed family moments shared in obituaries. Eamon and I wanted to authentically craft these characters to be of America in 2007, whilst responding to the theatrical concepts of this Belvoir production.

Bob Cousins presents in the set design an artefact of a house, as the family home. To complement this concept, we refined detail of costume: an Overstocked shirt pocket, faded seam lines in a dress that only now comes out for a funeral and dust worn boots that have travelled the plains. Most of the pieces are second hand / found pieces, few are store-bought firsthand. My hope is that each piece feels it has belonged to the characters for a lifetime, embedded in their past and how they are embodied on stage.



"MY WIFE TAKES PILLS."



ACT 1

"IS ANYONE
SUPPORTING TO
SMOKE?"



"MY MOM IS DEAD
BUT NOT YET
IN THE AFTER-
PHYSICAL STATE."

ACT 2



BLACK/RED BLOUSE
DARK/BLACK DRESS

"DO YOU THINK I'M FAT?"

VIOLET WESTON.

"IT'S A CHEYENNE TRADITION"



MONTEVISTA "YOUNG BIRD"



COMMUNITY
COLLEGE
NURSING



"I NEED THE WORK"

TWENTY SIX YEARS OLD

"WE WORTH IT FOR THE
REST OF OUR LIVES"

JOHNNA MONTEVISTA

ACT 1

"I'M NOT GOING TO GET MARRIED
AND THEN LATELY OF THAT
KIND OF LOVE"



ACT 2



"THE CHAIRS A LOT OF
GENTS"



CHARLIE AIKEN



After viewing the production, discuss the use of costume in relationship to representing status, or how they serve as symbols to deeper aspects of the character's backstory or themes of the play (e.g. Johnna's necklace).



Design an accessory, piece of jewellery, or item of clothing for a character of your choice, focusing on how it symbolises their personality, status, or role in the story.



CHARACTER MONOLOGUES



Select a character from the play and write a short monologue which expresses their point of view, inner thoughts, or motivations around a pivotal moment within the play.

POST SHOW ANALYSIS

Performance and Directing

- Which scenes had the strongest emotional impact on you, and why? Was it due to the acting, dialogue, or staging?
- Were there any key scenes that were particularly impactful due to the director's choices? What staging, lighting, or sound elements contributed to this?
- How did the pacing of the production affect your experience? Were some moments drawn out for dramatic effect or sped up for humour?
- Did the tone shift effectively between humour and tragedy? How was this balance achieved?

Lighting and Sound:

- How did lighting choices enhance specific scenes or character emotions? Were there moments of darkness or shadows that stood out?
- How did sound (e.g., music, ambient noises) contribute to the mood of the production?

Audience Reaction

- How did the audience react to different moments in the play (e.g., laughter, silence, gasps)? Did this affect your own experience of the story?
- Did the production make you feel like an observer of the Weston family's struggles, or did it draw you into their world?
- After seeing the play, what message or theme resonated with you the most?



AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY & BLACK SWAN'S CREATIVE LEARNING PROGRAM IS PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY

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CLAYTON UTZ



SUPPORTING PARTNERS

ALEX HOTEL



BLACK SWAN FUTURE FUND

Supported by Minderoo Foundation, generous philanthropists, and legacy gifts, Black Swan's Future Fund was established in 2017 to build a strong financial foundation to support growth and sustainability. The investment fund enables the delivery of works of exceptional quality, scale, and ambition. We thank those who have supported the Future Fund, in particular, we acknowledge the extraordinary generosity of Nicola and Andrew Forrest, and look forward to creating many more opportunities for our artists and audiences.

FUTURE FUND FOUNDING PARTNER



