



Education Resources

STC Ed presents

Theatre In Practice Workshop

STOLEN

By Jane Harrison

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Education Resource written by Kerreen Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy

KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

STOLEN

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www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

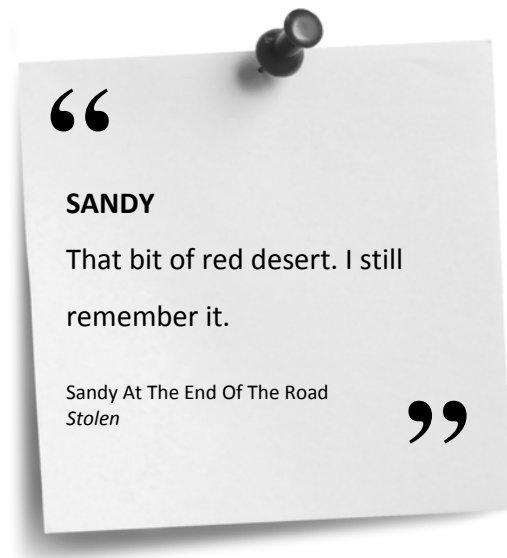
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CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Leah Purcell

CAST

tba



THEMES

The Stolen Generations

Memory

Family

Aboriginal Experience

Oral History

The *Stolen* characters tell and enact their individual stories from childhood to adulthood. They are linked by having been stolen from their families and placed in the same children's home at different times between the 1940s and 1960s.

Jimmy wants to be returned to his mother who he's been told is dead. He is eager to be 'a real good boy' so he can get out of the children's home but his attempts to please make no difference to his situation. Soon he's running amuck and in trouble with the law. Jimmy grows up into an angry and lost soul. When he is about to be reunited with his mother who he has managed to trace he again finds himself in a prison lock up and gives up the fight to live.

Shirley was stolen from her mother as a child and she too has had her own children taken from her. An elder she carries wisdom and fortitude and does not give up in the fight to be reunited with her children and find her 'who knows how many' grandchildren.

Ruby is a vulnerable and obliging child. She believes her mum will be coming to get her anytime soon. Not wanting to cause 'no trouble' she becomes the victim of systematic sexual, physical and emotional abuse while in institutional care. Although reunited with her family later in life she suffers from mental illness as a result of her childhood trauma.

Sandy a child of the red desert remembers his grandfather and mother's stories. He tried to escape when the welfare agents came to steal him. Even though they caught him Sandy feels he is 'always on the run'. Retaining a strong connection to country through his storytelling he eventually returns home.

Anne is adopted by a middle-class white family. As a teenager her parents tell her that her aboriginal birth mother is dying and wants to see her. Anne becomes confused and angry at having been lied to about her aboriginality. When she meets her real family she becomes even more disillusioned at their different economic status and lifestyle. Although unresolved about which family to choose she manages by deciding to remain between cultures, declaring she loves both her mothers.

STOLEN

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

***Stolen* as Theatre**

Stolen was commissioned by Ilbjerri Theatre Company in 1992 in response to the growing amount of oral and written testimony given by aboriginal people (see Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report 1990) who had had their children taken away from them or had been separated from their families as children and put into institutional care or adopted without their consent.

Stolen is based on the real life testimonies of members of the Stolen Generations. Structured as a series of short vignettes, the scenes move between the past, present and future as the characters shift between their adult and child selves. Sometimes they speak directly to the imaginary audience and at other times they speak to each other.

The language is direct and realistic and captures the individual voices of the characters as they move from adult to child speak and reflects their different circumstances after they leave the home. For example, Anne's speech reveals her middle-class influences while Ruby speaks the words of a damaged child well into her adulthood.

The play uses a number of theatrical devices to re-create a dark world of terror from a child's point of view without a loss of irony or reality. There is an absence of sentimentality, which is achieved through the non-linear narrative structure and inter-cutting of monologues, direct address and dialogue. The employment of non-naturalistic elements: voices off stage, chorus chants and the repetition of rituals such as the 'line-ups' and children's games; all work toward representing the fractured psyches of characters stolen from their homelands, ripped from their families and communities.

The Stolen Generations

"We took the children from their mothers"

Paul Keating 1992

Aboriginal children taken from their families are known as the 'Stolen Generations'.

The Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883 and in 1909 the *Aborigines Protection Act*.

It shall be the duty of the board ...

To exercise a general supervision and care over all matters affecting the interests and welfare of aboriginies, and to protect them against injustice, imposition and fraud.

Item 7 (e)
Aborigines Protection Act 1909

Between 1915 and 1940 the Board could legally remove Aboriginal children into its control without the consent of parents and without any court hearings. One record gives the reason for removing a child as 'being Aboriginal'.

Our people suffered, forced to live so far away from the lives they were familiar with, to live the white man's way, a way that was, in all respects, alien.

'Aboriginal family issues'

Yolanda Walker

Many of the problems faced by Aboriginal people have been identified as a direct reflection of past removal policies. In 1990 the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found that half of the deaths it investigated were of this group of 'Stolen Children'.

The Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) resolved at its

national conference in 1992 to demand a national enquiry.

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Literally thousands of Aboriginal adults live with the trauma caused by these removal policies. Many of the mothers and fathers who had their children taken away are guilt and grief stricken. Their children are traumatised by the thought that they were unwanted. Identity conflicts rage in these children - now adults - who have lived most of their lives as non- Aboriginal people.

Brian Butler
Chairperson of SNAICC 1992

In 1995 an enquiry was established and delivered the *Bringing Them Home: the 'Stolen Children' Report* in 1997. In the summation of the final report it stated:

Indigenous families and communities have endured gross violations of their human rights. These violations continue to affect Indigenous people's daily lives. They were an act of genocide, aimed at wiping out Indigenous families, communities and cultures, vital to the precious and inalienable heritage of Australia.

The legacy of the respective past Australian Government's racial and welfare policies continues today and will continue into the future through the memory stories of families who experienced and witnessed enforced removal.

The removal of children have had detrimental effects on our families, many of whom are still dealing with the trauma of what happened those years ago. Many suffer struggles of identity.

'Aboriginal family issues'
Yolanda Walker

Finding his identity, where he came from . . . that's a start. What he couldn't believe is that he had relatives, that when we first heard and we all came together, that all the relatives were supporting him.

Nellie Moore talking about her nephew Russell Moore

History repeating itself?

The Little Children Are Sacred Report into the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory was released in 2007. The title of the report reflected the status of children under traditional Aboriginal law of the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land.

Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle

“Little Children are Sacred”

*In our Law children are very sacred because they carry the
two spring wells of water from our country within them*

Yolngu Male Elder

In response to the report the Federal Government implemented *The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill* (the ‘Intervention Act’), which enabled the Government to bypass existing laws protecting the sovereignty of aboriginal lands giving emergency powers to law enforcement agencies and the defense forces. The measures included alcohol and pornography bans, suspension of land permits, withdrawal of welfare payments to those people who were seen to be neglecting their children.

For many aboriginal people it was history repeating itself fearing the return of old draconian racially based welfare laws. There were others within the communities (particularly women elders) who welcomed the intervention as a way of bringing in much needed resources for the protection and welfare of children in dysfunctional communities with high levels of alcohol and drug abuse.

In 2007 with the change of Government under Kevin Rudd’s Labour leadership the Emergency Response was revised and has since lapsed.

The Reconciliation Movement began in the late 1960’s to raise public awareness and support for improving and reconciling differences between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. The sustained efforts of the movement to bring about symbolic reconciliation came with the long awaited ‘Sorry’ public apology by the Australian Government on February 13th, 2008 at the opening of parliament.

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For many aboriginal people from the Stolen Generations the arts has provided a vehicle for expression of their individual and family memory stories of removal and separation. Artists such as singer/songwriter Archie Roach, *Stolen* playwright Jane Harrison, actor/director Leah Purcell, novelists Ruth Hegarty and Larissa Behrendt and painters Gordon Syron and Julie Dowling.

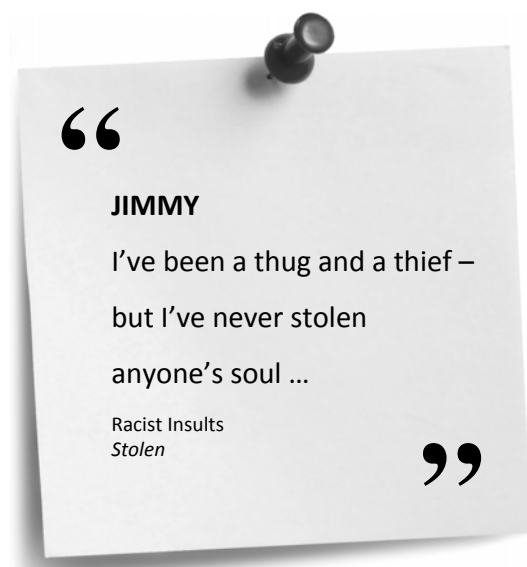
The power of the personal story has been at the hallmark of the Stolen Generations desire to remember and to mourn the sufferings of the past. The willingness of people to have their stories put on the public record continues to be testimony to the power of storytelling to challenge silences of the past and to affect change in the present-future.

References:

'Aboriginal family issues' Yolanda Walker, Social Policy/Research Worker Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

FAMILY MATTERS no.35 August 1993, pp.51-53
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm1/fm35yw.html>

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill in 2007
Overview summary by Laura Beacroft and
Melanie Poole



Additional Resources



Telling Our Story Report 1995

Report by the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia on the Removal of Aboriginal Children from their families in Western Australia. This document lay the groundwork for the 'Bringing Them Home Report', and contains confronting family case studies of child removal and abuse while under institutional care.

http://www.als.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140:telling-our-story&catid=21:books&Itemid=58

http://www.als.org.au/images/stories/publications/ALSWA_Telling_Our_Story.pdf

Bringing Them Home: the 'Stolen Children' Report 1997

Full Report available on the Australian Human Rights Commission website - <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/>

Education guide with activities, follow up resources, scene analysis of *Stolen*

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/bringing_them_home/index.html

Films, Books & Plays

Follow Rabbit Proof Fence by Doris Pilkington 1996

Rabbit Proof Fence Film adaptation directed by Phil Noyce 2002

Is that you Ruthie? by Ruth Hegarty 1989

Home by Larissa Behrendt

'Finding home amid the stolen memories' Claire Scobie May 8, 2004 The Age book review of *Home*

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/05/07/1083881471025.html?from=storyrhs>

Documentary Films



Lousy Little Sixpence directed by Alec Morgan 1983

Film clips can be seen on Screen Australia website

<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/lousy-little-sixpence/clip1/>

Land of the Little Kings Des Koutji Raymond 2000

Stolen Generations Darlene Johnson 2000

<http://www.roninfilms.com.au/feature/616.html>

Film clips can be seen on Screen Australia website

<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/stolen-generations/clip1/>

Kanyini Melanie Hogan 2006 Tells the story of Yankunytjatjara Elder and Traditional Owner of Uluru , Bob Randall

Interview with Bob Randall on Movieshow review of *Kanyini*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NODnHKOkQTA>

Music

'Singing Trauma Trails: Songs of the Stolen Generation' Katelyn Barney , Elizabeth Mackinlay
Music and Politics Number 2, Summer 2010

Comprehensive New Study of Stolen Generation Songs and Indigenous artists



'Took the Children Away ' Archie Roach

Song based on Archie Roach's personal story of being taken from his family as a small child.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLXzKYP1uCW>

'Of White lies and Stolen Lives' The Age 6/7/96 tells Archie's story.

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~aar/stolen.htm>

Baby Brown Skin (They Took Me Away) Bob Randall

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3ytJioxKzI>

Run Daisy Run by Leah Purcell

Leah sang the song live on Andrew Denton's *Enough Rope* in 2008 – video excerpt embedded in shows website.

http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/video/default_pre_2008.htm?clip=leahpurcell

From Little things Big Things Grow

GetupMob version in commemoration of 13 February 2008 Apology

Featuring Kevin Carmody, Paul Kelly, Missy Higgins, Kevin Rudd, Paul Keating, Urthboy, Mick Dodson.

Embedded in website

<http://music.ninemsn.com.au/mediapopup.aspx?mediaid=127282>



Reviews of Previous Productions

Irony 'lightens' Stolen Tales The Age April 9, 2009

<http://education.theage.com.au/cmspage.php?intid=136&intversion=65>

Stolen Generations Online Presence

Stolen Generations Stories web site – personal stories, poems, books, films, links to resources and related articles

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-stories.html>

The Stolen Generations

<http://www.stolengenerations.info/>

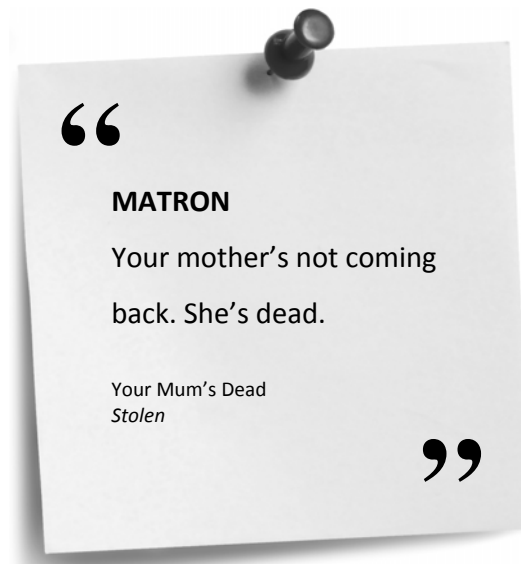
Interview with director Leah Purcell

Sounds of Cinema

<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2002/22/purcell/>

NSW Aboriginal Affairs Policy past & present

'Two Ways Together Partnerships: A New Way of Doing Business with Aboriginal People' 2003 – 2012



***They Took The Children Away* Archie Roach 1990**

This story's right, this story's true
I would not tell lies to you
Like the promises they did not keep
And how they fenced us in like sheep.
Said to us come take our hand
Sent us off to mission land.
Taught us to read, to write and pray
Then they took the children away,
Took the children away,
The children away.
Snatched from their mother's breast
Said this is for the best
Took them away.

The welfare and the policeman
Said you've got to understand
We'll give them what you can't give
Teach them how to really live.
Teach them how to live they said
Humiliated them instead
Taught them that and taught them this
And others taught them prejudice.
You took the children away
The children away
Breaking their mothers heart
Tearing us all apart
Took them away

One dark day on Framingham
Come and didn't give a damn
My mother cried go get their dad
He came running, fighting mad
Mother's tears were falling down
Dad shaped up and stood his ground.
He said 'You touch my kids and you fight
me'
And they took us from our family.

Took us away
They took us away
Snatched from our mother's breast
Said this was for the best
Took us away.

Told us what to do and say
Told us all the white man's ways
Then they split us up again
And gave us gifts to ease the pain
Sent us off to foster homes
As we grew up we felt alone
Cause we were acting white
Yet feeling black

One sweet day all the children came back
The children come back
The children come back
Back where their hearts grow strong
Back where they all belong
The children came back
Said the children come back
The children come back
Back where they understand
Back to their mother's land
The children come back

Back to their mother
Back to their father
Back to their sister
Back to their brother
Back to their people
Back to their land
All the children come back
The children come back
The children come back
Yes I came back.

***Sweet Child of Mine* June Mills 2005**

Remember your name
Remember your skin
Remember your tribal name
Sweet child of mine
'Cause you're going away
Don't know why
It has to be this way
We tried our best to hide
Sweet child of mine
Tried to hide you away



***Run Daisy Run* Leah Purcell 1998**

Run Daisy run, run Daisy run
They were the last words her mama had said
"Run to the highlands, run through the scrub,
Just run, run Daisy run, just run, just run
Because the whiteman he's ridin' high"

From Little things Big Things Grow

GetUpMob adaptation by Kevin Carmody & Paul Kelly 2008

As Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry
On behalf of the Government of Australia, I
am sorry
On behalf of the Parliament of Australia, I
am sorry
And I offer you this apology without
qualification

To say sorry means to give respect
It's long overdue
Now you failed to imagine
What if it happened to you

Now they're not only words now it's not
just a symbol
Accepting the past, well it's not always
simple
When thinking of yesterday
We live for tomorrow
We can't face the future now
Till we face the sorrow

Now under the colours, yeah
Of red, yellow, black
We say "Never again"
We say "No turning back"

From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow

Lighting up the path
With good in our heart
See the more that you look
The better for all
So he sang as he walked
And together we stand
For we're sure to stand tall

We must all play our part
[Rudd: "indigenous and non indigenous"]
Tears within our brow
Yes forward we struggle and all we've
achieved
Will be nothing if greed was the only
motivation of man
So we can love one another, and with
respect for each other
Then we move forward ["reconciled"]
together

From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow

There are moments in the lives of nations
Where hope and history rhyme
And now's one of those times
Let's close the gap and if we truly mean it
we can stare down our future and find
we can see through those eyes
And let us not stand with those who deny
It seems to me that if we can imagine the
injustice
We can imagine the opposite
And we can have justice

From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow
From little things, big things grow

All of us are one, because we are human
And if I cut you, you cut me, what comes
out?
red blood, not different colour blood, only
red blood.