

***Namatjira*, by Scott Rankin
with Trevor Jamieson and Derik Lynch
Education Pack**

THEMES:

FAMILY & COMMUNITY IDENTITY

MULTILINGUALISM

POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY

GENRE: Indigenous Devised Performance/ Mix-media

AGE RESTRICTION: 13+ (depiction of violent acts)

NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 5M, 2F + over 25 minor characters.

CHARACTER LIST:

JONATHAN NAMATJIRA (Western Aranda name: **NAMATJIRITJA**) – Albert’s Father. (M)

EMELIE (Luritja name: **LJUKUTA**) – Albert’s Mother. (F)

ALBERT NAMATJIRA (Western Aranda name: **ELEA**), indigenous artist. (M)

REGINALD “REX” BATTARBEE (later named **UNTJWAARA** by Western Aranda men) – whitefella landscape artist. (M)

WILMOT – old blackfella living in the Warrnambool Forest. (M)

PASTOR – at a Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission, speaks a blend of German and English. (M)

RUBINA (Western Aranda name: **ILKALITA**) – Albert’s Wife. (F)

Other Characters:

ARMY SERGEANT, ARMY MEDIC, BAKERY EMPLOYEE, MISSION MEN, AUSIE BLOKES (2 tourists), KID, MELBOURNE SOCIETY WOMAN, CHARLES MCCUBBIN, LADY HUNTINGFIELD, MR. T.H. GILL, CUZ (3), WHITEFELLA (2), OLD ARANDA MAN, GOVERNMENT MEMBER, OPPOSITION MEMBER, GOVERNMENT MAN, MAURICE, MAISE (Albert's and Rubina's children), SYDNEY SOCIALITE, QUEEN ELIZABETH II, NEWSPAPERS REPORTERS, MAGISTRATE (Mr. Dodds)

The flow of the narrative is chaotic as it mixes both indigenous and “western” performance traditions. **Trevor Jamieson** and **Derik Lynch**, artists involved in the devising of the play and its visual elements, are treated as characters and interact directly with the audience.

SYNOPSIS:

This two-act play tells the true story of Albert Namatjira's life in linked, chronological vignettes with interspersed reflections commenting on contemporary Australia.

Albert Namatjira was a man of firsts: the first successful indigenous artist and the first indigenous man to be made an Australian citizen. At the height of his fame in the 1950s, Albert Namatjira's shows sold out within minutes. If you didn't own one of his paintings you probably had a print in your lounge. He also supported over six hundred members of his community, lost two of his ten children to malnutrition, was forbidden to own land, imprisoned for having a drink with his friends, and died a broken man. Namatjira is a whole-hearted tribute to a great man.

The play begins with Namatjira's birth in the central Australian desert and his subsequent upbringing on the Lutheran mission of Hermannsburg in the Northern Territory. We see his elopement with his wife Rubina and the struggle to feed his family. Cultural differences between the Aboriginal Aranda and the Christian missionaries are playfully touched upon in scenes of Albert's early years and eventually crystallise around concepts of art, culture and economy as Albert meets painter and crippled war veteran Rex Battarbee, whose biography is woven into the presentation of Albert's story. As their friendship evolves from a teacher-student relationship to one of equal engagement and artistic exchange, questions are raised regarding the state of contemporary Australian social relations.

Act Two relates Namatjira's continued struggle for economic sustenance and his rise to fame as an artist in Australia and internationally. The story of achievement and professional recognition is expressed through the infatuation of the White Australian arts world and high society (including the young Queen Elizabeth). The persona, cultural background and art of Namatjira and his financial benefits stemming from his elevated profile. This story, however, is counterbalanced with that of racism and exploitation which is presented as endemic to the entire Australian social fabric, be it in the form of taxation without equal rights, his framing as anthropological curiosity in the minds of his admirers or the humbugging by his extended family. Namatjira is presented as caught between two conflicting systems of value which in the play ultimately lead to his demise - he is jailed for supplying liquor to fellow community members and dies a broken man shortly after his release. The performance of the play concludes with members of Namatjira's family building a picture and talking about the project's beginnings, structure and benefits for the community.

This play was written/devised originally in English by Scott Rankin in close consultation and collaboration with the family, as part of the Big hART Project (2010): <http://www.namatjira.bighart.org>

KEY MOMENTS:

Act 2 Scene 5, pp. 100-103 (1F, 1M + Narrator)

Albert and Lady H (with narration by Trevor) discuss his new artistic name based on the name of his father.

Act 1 Scene 1 (1F/M)

Narrator/Trevor introduces himself to the audience and explains the modus operandi of the performance they are about to witness. Trevor is and is not a character at the same time, narration would have to assume name and gender of the performer.

Act 2 Scene 15, pp. 134,135 (1M)

Albert is being arrested by the police for providing alcohol to members of his community which had tragic consequences.

STEP ONE: ASK

What questions come to the students' minds when they read these key moments? In groups, ask them to come up with questions based on the play which have no easy answers. Think about the themes raised above and try to combine more than one concept in each question. Here are some examples:

- What does it mean to belong to a tribe? Have you ever felt you've belonged to one? What makes a tribe?
- Do communities of "aboriginal" or indigenous people still have a place in today's society? How can we assure those communities are not made invisible by the erasure of their traditions?
- Can we think of any traditions or artistic expressions that have been co-opted by our society (Britain) that have not originated here? (e.g. in our cuisine, kebabs and curries; in our community events, such as Notting Hill Carnival; etc...)

Consider these questions across familial bonds and artistic contributions towards building a community identity, multilingual communities and strangeness towards non-recognisable words, ethnic identity issues within post-colonial societies and explore if students can relate to the issues portrayed in this text.

STEP TWO: EXPLORE

Exercise 1:

Human Naughts and Crosses – split the group into two (naughts and crosses) and assign them numbers (there should be an equal number either group so there are the same number represented in both groups). Set up nine chairs in three rows of three. As the facilitator calls a number the first group to take a seat starts and the game goes on until one team is victorious or they draw. To increase the competitiveness and the physicality, call out numbers for both teams until the end and whoever sits first, takes the place. This is a good bonding exercise and brings

the group together towards a goal before starting with text. It can also exacerbate the tribal sense amongst them by defending their own group towards the victory.

Exercise 2:

At the end of Act 1 scene fourteen (pp. 70 - 71) we are introduced to the ILKALITA, who will later become ALBERT's wife. Their 'meet-cute' scene is played up using elements of indigenous performance, Shakespearean language and a Barry White soundtrack. The mix-match of elements in this scene summarise the chaotic approach the author and the performers took on devising the piece.

Colombian Hypnosis Variation – This exercise is depicted by Boal in his *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, and it should work the ensemble's ability to follow instinct and embrace chaos. In this variation, an actor goes into the middle of a circle and begins to move with their whole body, but always in one direction only and staying in the same spot. The rest of the group form a circle around this actor. A first volunteer comes forward and lets themselves be hypnotised by a part of the central actor's body; they must then follow all the movements of that part of the body – ear, nose, back, bottom, foot, whatever it is. Then a second actor comes forward and does the same, choosing any part of either of the two bodies in the middle. A third actor joins, with a choice of three bodies, until all the actors have let themselves be hypnotised by a part of one of the others' bodies. At that point, the first actor can execute one or more full turns with his body – slowly, as these movements will be greatly exaggerated by the others because of their distance from the centre of the circle. Then, if the space is sufficiently large, you can ask everybody to move further away from the part of the body which has hypnotised them. Or to get closer to it.

Exercise 3:

At Act 2 scene 2 (pp. 135,136), we see the MAGISTRATE condemn ALBERT for the supply of alcohol to a Ward present amongst members of his community, which is believed to have led to the vicious rape and murder of a girl. As the climax of the play touches upon the concepts of accountability and framing of a POC of a crime committed by a non-minority individual, an exercise that can be played to demonstrate that is -

Cadavre exquis - This game takes its French title (meaning 'exquisite corpse') from the Surrealist poets. It can be done as a drawing game or as a verbal game, which fits with the chaotic approach of the devising of this piece.

For the drawing version, each person draws something on the top 20cm or so of a sheet of paper and folds it over, leaving only a couple of lines at the edge visible to the next person. That person then draws something joining onto the few visible lines, whatever these fragments suggest to them; he then folds it over, again leaving only a few marks or lines visible to the next person – and so on, till all the sheets of paper are full. Then they are unfolded and revealed.

In the verbal version, one actor starts telling a story, which is continued by a second actor, and so on till the whole group has contributed a part of it. This can be done in the same way as the drawn version, with half the group as an audience, half playing: one actor at a time comes into the room, speaks a couple of lines, and repeats only the last few words when the next actor comes in. Or with a tape recorder, the whole group can play at once, with the product being recorded to be played back at the end.

At the analysis of the final product of either version, ask the group – who is the author of this work? Who is responsible for it?

STEP THREE: FEEDBACK

Discuss what came up for the students. Can they relate with the characters' plight? What was the most interesting thing they learned? Bring students to return to the text and analyse what they are taking away from the exercises for their character study- if they have been assigned their characters already. Once the text is read in its entirety, perhaps pose the further questions:

- How different does one experience the world because of the colour of their skin, the way they speak a language or their ethnicity? How does that reflect in today's society?

- Who is responsible for what happened to Albert? What is this piece proposing as reparation?