

Company B Belvoir
LOVE ME TENDER



Photo: Michael Corridore

Written by **Tom Holloway**

Directed by **Matthew Lutton**

A co-production with **Griffin Theatre Company** and **ThinIce**

Teacher's Notes

Freehills

Company B Belvoir

Company B Belvoir sprang into being out of the unique action taken to save the Nimrod Theatre building from demolition in 1984. Rather than lose a

performance space in inner city Sydney, more than 600 arts, entertainment and media professionals as well as ardent theatre lovers, formed a syndicate to buy the building. The syndicate included nearly every successful person in Australian theatre.



Company B Belvoir is one of Australia's most celebrated theatre companies. Under the artistic leadership of Neil Armfield, the company performs at its home at Belvoir St Theatre in Surry Hills, Sydney, and from there tours to major arts centres and festivals both nationally and internationally. Company B Belvoir engages Australia's most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to present an annual artistic program that is razor-sharp, popular and challenging.

Belvoir St Theatre's greatly loved Upstairs and Downstairs stages have been the artistic watering holes of many of Australia's great performing artists such as Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, Susie Porter, Richard Roxburgh, Max Cullen, Bille Brown, David Wenham, Deborah Mailman and Catherine McClements.

Landmark productions like *Cloudstreet*, *The Diary of a Madman*, *The Alchemist*, *Hamlet*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Gulpilil*, *The Sapphires*, *Stuff Happens*, *Keating!*, *Parramatta Girls*, *Exit the King*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Toy Symphony* have consolidated Company B Belvoir's position as one of Australia's most innovative and acclaimed theatre companies. Company B also supports outstanding independent theatre companies through its annual B Sharp season.

In 2010 we welcome respected theatre maker Ralph Myers (set designer for *Peter Grimes*, *Toy Symphony* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*) as Associate Artist. He will spend 2010 programming the Company's 2011 season, before taking over as Artistic Director in 2011.

For more information visit www.belvoir.com.au

NEXT IN THE UPSTAIRS THEATRE –

THE POWER OF YES

Written by David Hare
Directed by Sam Strong

SCHOOLS PERFORMANCES at 11.30am: -

Wednesday 28 April
Thursday 6 May
Wednesday 12 May

Each schools performance is followed by a Q&A session with the cast

Why did Capitalism grind to a halt in late 2008? How did things get so bad that governments ended up bailing out big banks? In seeking the answers to these questions, Hare (in the character of 'The Author' played by Brian Lipson) goes on a frightening and funny journey through the unbelievable true story of what happened when credit suddenly crunched.

Ideal for students of Verbatim Theatre, urgent and immediate - *The Power of Yes* is an almost Shakespearean investigation of the way human beings work and the fatal character flaws we keep being betrayed by, against all the promptings of our collective common sense.



Photo: Michael Corridore

LOVE ME TENDER

Written by **TOM HOLLOWAY**
Directed by **MATTHEW LUTTON**

Set & Costume Designer **ADAM GARDNIR**
Lighting Designer **KAREN NORRIS**
Composer & Sound Designer **KELLY RYALL**
Production Manager **SHARON CUSTERS**
Stage Manager **NELL RANNEY**
Assistant Stage Manager **LYDIA SARKS**

With

LUKE HEWITT Cop/Chorus
BELINDA McCLORY Mother
KRIS McQUADE Ensemble
ARKY MICHAEL Ensemble
COLIN MOODY Father

The Company B Belvoir, Griffin Theatre Company and ThinIce production of Love Me Tender opened at Belvoir St Theatre on 20 March 2010.



Kris McQuade, Colin Moody, Belinda McClory, Luke Hewitt, Arky Michael

LOVE ME TENDER AT PICA

Photo: Jon Green

Love Me Tender was commissioned by Griffin Theatre Company and first produced as a co-production by Company B Belvoir, Griffin Theatre Company and ThinIce on 24 February 2010 at PICA for the 2010 Perth International Arts Festival. The play was developed with the support of the Malcolm Robertson Foundation.

LOVE ME TENDER: Speakers in this production

Ensemble – Commentators, members of the community, like gods in disguise

Father – a fire-fighter, very close to his daughter

Mother – concerned about the closeness between father and their daughter

Cop/Chorus – Observer of the action as well as participant in it



Kris McQuade, Luke Hewitt, Belinda McClory, Colin Friels

LOVE ME TENDER AT PICA

Photo: Jon Green

LOVE ME TENDER: Sections of the Text

1. Sorrow And Joy
 2. Saviour/Sacrifice
 3. A Moment of Tenderness/Lullaby to his baby
 - CHORUS** - Next I Saw The Countless Fleet
 4. The father defends himself
 5. She tries to talk to him/She is alone
 6. The Story
 - CHORUS** - The Fiend of Strife
 7. Welcome to the wide world
 8. Party time!
 9. War.
 10. The Mother.
 - CHORUS** Dragging men's heads backwards to cut their throats
 11. The Storm That Violently Sweeps.
 12. Sacrifice #1
 - CHORUS** – Behold the maiden on her way
 13. Sacrifice #2
 14. Sacrifice #3
- Epilogue:** Iphegenia replies

LOVE ME TENDER: Narrative threads

1. Sorrow And Joy

The two actors who make up the ensemble describe in urgent poetic language a man running in to a building, the morning sun is shining and he can hear screams inside a room where his wife is. The screams are hers. A man is inside the room with her and the first man, the husband bursts into the room to see his naked wife on the bed, writhing and in need of help. The husband rushes to her and holds her hand. She pushes. The other man is encouraging her to push and she is still screaming, it is chaos and the other man calls out that he can see the baby coming. Suddenly she is born, the cord is cut and when the man, the husband sees his daughter for the first time he is filled with overwhelming love. He is also filled with overwhelming dread.

They describe her trying to stand up as if she's a newborn creature with wobbly legs, hooves and a wet furry body. They describe the man seeing his wife and his daughter in his wife's arms and suddenly feeling unprecedented joy. At the same time, the other speaker says, there's overwhelming crippling horror and fear based on knowledge of what one day he's going to do. His daughter looks up at him with huge eyes and he experiences in bursts, both joy and sorrow, love and horror.

2. Saviour/Sacrifice

Now the two actors who together are the ensemble discuss the birth, the miracle of life. They are conversational, colloquial and bat ideas back and forth, about it being the best time ever to have a daughter, to bring a little girl into the world. They argue that never before has there been such a sense of equality, of possibility, that it's a woman's world. (We are not necessarily meant to take all these statements at face value.) They list the opportunities available – they include running a bank, leading a country, heading up a church or a multi-national corporation, running an underground movement, even fighting for animal rights through terrorist attacks, being a martyr for some important cause, running a marathon over a world landmark. They start to list all the places she can go without fear, all over the world. Places they name include police stations and strip joints (as a customer). The audience starts to get an uneasy sense that all their emphatic statements cannot completely be believed. The more they talk about hope and the world being there to conquer for this newborn girl, the less we believe them. Their focus and the thrust of the argument shifts, from conquering to protection.

Because this is the best time for thousands of years for a girl to be born, protection is necessary. Girls must be kept safe, taught and protected from all the threats out there. They start to list all the places where a young girl isn't safe – in the church, in the workplace, in the park, in the home. They say there's nowhere a young girl can be safe to grow up. Not these days. They make comparisons between the simple old days and the complicated present day. They start to talk about predators, everywhere, wanting to pounce on young girls. The ensemble become menacing as they start to describe the dangers that can come. They start to talk about young girls as if they are young vulnerable animals at risk of being preyed upon. They start to talk about the tastiness of young girls, how juicy they are. There's again a blurring of the lines – are they talking about meat and how tasty it is or about young girls. They keep talking about food but are describing the food as coming from 'the parks and the homes and churches and schools' and onto the plate. The effect is disquieting and funny too, but thought-provoking.

3. A Moment of Tenderness/Lullaby to his baby

A song, adapted from the traditional Bluegrass gospel song 'A Beautiful Life'

CHORUS - Next I Saw The Countless Fleet

The Chorus who is also the cop speaks. He sits there in his patrol car night after night, he drives through the streets of the town because it's his job to do it and while he's doing it he sees things, everything. Good and bad. He sees the incredible things that people do and also the worst things, worse than animals. And throughout all he sees he keeps asking, how do we cope with all that we do, all that he sees?

4. The father defends himself

This scene is played between the actor who is the father and one of the actors from the ensemble. It seems like a scene between two friends, one with a daughter. The father is describing a time when his daughter was incredibly close to him, he's lying on her bed and she's sitting on top of him and leaning on his chest and he's filled with immense love. She's very close to him and looking right into his eyes and he experiences that utter need and love between him and his daughter. She kisses him on the mouth and he kisses her too. Throughout this speech the friend is becoming uncomfortable. He keeps justifying the story. The father keeps talking, saying that he wants the special connection between him and his daughter to last forever. The daughter is, we discover, 3 years old.

Suddenly the father turns and begins to interrogate his friend about what he thinks of this story, especially about him being on his daughter's bed with her. The friend denies thinking anything. But he clearly did have some misgivings. The father says he just wants to be able to talk about how he loves his daughter, but he can't. Peoples' minds go to the worst possibilities, sexual possibilities. This makes the father furious. He blames his friend for thinking along these lines and declares that this is what is so wrong with the world.

5. She tries to talk to him/She is alone

Another song, adapted slightly from the traditional country-gospel song 'Drifting too Far from The Shore'

6. The Story

Another conversation but this time between the actor playing the mother and another of the cast. They talk about how the little girl loves stories, not the actual story but more the experience of being told a story. She enjoys the attention, she doesn't need a traditional narrative structure, she does like a few characters thrown in every now and then. The types of characters listed are: Princesses, Princes, Kings, Queens, War. She also likes the idea of being a heroine, of sacrificing herself and saving everyone from war. She also likes stories about love and sacrifice, and about animals. They talk back and forth about traditional stories and it being different now, for young ones, being exposed to so much information and not needing story in the traditional sense. There's the idea that all the old stories are already in us, deep down. The discussion switches and they start talking about the father and the daughter, how the father makes her laugh and how everyone says how close they are, people are jealous of the closeness and their love. The mother says that the father has dark thoughts, he can't say what they are, but she repeats it.

CHORUS - The Fiend of Strife

The cop rushes in his patrol car to a field where a man is shooting cattle with a gun in his hand. It's a ferociously hot day but the man doesn't seem to feel it. The cop isn't scared, he knows the man won't shoot him, he's just forgotten the difference between right and wrong. The man gets easily into the police car. The cop takes the man to the station and he walks in to a cell, it's what he wanted all along He wants to be shown clearly what is right and what is wrong, to be looked after.

7. Welcome to the wide world

The mother describes watching the father take the daughter (now 6 years old) to school on her first day. The daughter was scared and had been crying but the father whispered into her ear that the world is an amazing place and it will give you amazing things. The mother says he really means it and that also he wants to be the only one to help her out into the world. The mother is standing at the window and she is looking out and she says she sees things – the things she sees are:

8. Party time!

The Kids R Kool Dance Team perform the 'Princess Dance' as if on television, simulated adult entertainment pitched at pre-teens. This dance is performed by the mother, as if she is on tv engaging the child viewers through the screen. It is focused on encouraging the viewers, the children, to imitate an adult version of what is physically (sexually) desirable with lipstick, fishnet stockings, g-strings and mini skirts. It seems like a mixture of pole-dancing and children's contemporary television shows.

9. War.

We hear that the girl is wandering through the forest on her own. She is caught amidst pillars of sunlight in mid-afternoon. Suddenly there is ash and charcoal on her fur, there are the sounds of firemen in the distance. Ash billows around her and the trees and earth are black. She hears the sounds in memory of the fire, she is alone and there is no one to care for her, to feed her or keep her safe until she's old enough to look after herself. She has been given nothing by this world, that should have provided her nourishment.

10. The Mother.

The mother is in a bar, she is speaking to a stranger about her misgivings and her fears about her husband. He hasn't done anything but she is worried about his looks, about what he says. He has to go away, he's a fire-fighter and there are huge fires raging. Everyone in the community looks up to him. She tells this stranger that since her husband found out he has to go away to fight these fires, he's changed. They have three kids and he dotes on the youngest and between father and daughter there is a very deep bond.

The mother admits to some jealousy of their loving closeness. She says there's a distance, that she suspects he wants to confess some thoughts to her but that something keeps stopping him. She has a terrible feeling that something bad will come of all this. The mother apologises to the stranger for offloading her anxieties, and she keeps saying that she's probably crazy, she's even wondered about speaking to the police, that it's probably just her fears that he has to go and fight the fires. She says she'll give the stranger more money so they can have a few more drinks. She excuses herself and goes.

CHORUS Dragging men's heads backwards to cut their throats

The cop describes the woman screaming at him to leave the house, falling down drunk. He steps over her and enters the house, this home feels empty, There are photos of a man or a 7 or 8 year old girl, but it seems like the woman, the wife and mother is all that remains, without her family. The cop experiences a surging sense of his own hopelessness, of the loneliness in the world and within him. How could we have let this happen? he asks.

11. The Storm That Violently Sweeps.

The ensemble describe a baking-hot late afternoon at the pool, which is packed with people. Everyone is waiting for relief from the heat but there is no breeze whatsoever, (just as there was none for the Greeks waiting to sail to Troy to recover Helen). The father wanted the mother and daughter to come to the pool but there's no relief to be found there for either of them. The air is stagnant and so hot that it could cause whole forests to instantly turn into ash like snow. The daughter is older now, she's with a friend who is a boy, though not quite a boyfriend. She is now 10, 11 or 12 years old and she feels dread. The father isn't at the fires, where he's needed, and the daughter perceives doubt in his eyes. The father looks at the daughter, who is approaching puberty.

The ensemble digress talking about why the age of puberty keeps getting younger and younger, is it due to sexual signifiers everywhere in society – cultural interference, chocolate bar ads that reference sexual acts? They start shouting out reference after reference, sexual allusion after sexual allusion. They speculate about a father looking at internet porn of teenage girls a few years older than his own daughter and how the girl would react if she found him there in front of the computer. All this, they say, is in the father's doubtful eyes when he looks at his daughter, almost about to hit puberty. He wanted a moment with them before he went off to fight the fires but now he's worrying about the boy specifically, and about all the boys at the pool, the predators, men who are suddenly everywhere he looks. Suddenly the father wants the fire to burn up the whole world, which he believes is irreparably wrong. He's afraid that if he goes off to fight the fires something terrible will happen to his little girl. He thinks about the state of the world and he picks her up, runs towards her.

12. Sacrifice #1

A dialogue in which the father describes in detail how to sacrifice a lamb from behind, with a knife.

CHORUS – Behold the maiden on her way

The cop describes seeing something lying on the road and going to see what it is, it's a deer with broken back legs that probably tried running away from the fires. Meanwhile there's an evacuation going on. The cop takes his gun out and points it at the deer and shoots. Another police car pulls up and he explains that he had to shoot it. Then looking back at the deer he sees a 13 year old girl on the road. If he hadn't shot her, the cop says, the way she was going, who knows what could have happened?

13. Sacrifice #2

A description of the chaos and heat of a bushfire. The father sees his daughter inside the burning car. She is screaming in fear. His radio is blaring at him about other people who need his help, hundreds of people stuck on the town oval and surrounded by fire. His daughter ran to the car to try to escape but she now is trapped. He tries to find a way to get to her but the flames surrounding the car are too fierce. He can't save her and she sees it through the window, sees him stop trying. She's like a trapped wild animal inside the car. He sees her die. He runs to go to the oval and hears the car explode. He is filled with chaos. It's not just outside, it's inside him.

14. Sacrifice #3

We hear the lamb being killed, it corresponds to the description in Sacrifice #1

Epilogue: Iphigenia replies

A song, slightly adapted from a gospel song 'He Will Set your Fields on Fire' by Ballaw-Brackett

CLASSICAL/MYTHICAL BACKGROUND – THE MYTH OF IPHEGENIA –

FIRST KNOWN MENTION are EURIPIDES' PLAYS *Iphigenia in Aulis* & *Iphigenia in Tauris*

Iphigenia was the oldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. When Agamemnon's ships were held back from sailing to the Trojan wars by a strange calm he consulted Calchas, a seer who informed him that the ships were stopped because of Agamemnon's own action in having killed a deer, sacred to Artemis, goddess of the hunt, in a grove sacred to herself. According to Calchas, Artemis demands the sacrifice of Iphigenia in recompense, before she will be appeased and send winds to send the fleet on their way to Troy.

Agamemnon, faced with troops who may rebel if they cannot sail, sends word to his wife Clytemnestra to bring their teenage daughter Iphigenia to Aulis, under the pretext that she is to be married to Achilles, the great warrior. However he then changes his mind and sends a second message to Clytemnestra not to come. Clytemnestra never receives the second message as Agamemnon's brother Menelaus intercepts it. Menelaus needs the ships to sail to Troy, the main object of the war being to retrieve his wife Helen who has run off with the Trojan prince Paris. Both brothers conceal the prediction of the seer from the soldiers who could possibly mutiny if they realised that their General had it in his power to set them on their way and was hesitating.

Menelaus and Agamemnon discuss the situation, each apparently convincing the other so that Agamemnon is now ready to sacrifice his daughter just as Menelaus is willing to disperse the army rather than have Iphigenia killed. But Agamemnon threatens that he will kill all Menelaus' family if he interrupts the sacrifice. Meanwhile, an excited Iphigenia is being brought to Aulis by her mother, who also brings her son Orestes with them. When Clytemnestra and Iphigenia discover the truth about Agamemnon's intentions in having her come to Aulis, Achilles declares he will protect Iphigenia, even if merely to prevent that blot on his honour. He tries to win popular support against the sacrificing of the girl, but all the Greeks, including his own personal army, the Myrmidons, are in favour of carrying out the sacrifice and he just escapes death by stoning himself.

Iphegenia and her mother urgently try to persuade Agamemnon to relent, but he maintains that he has no choice. Achilles is ready to defend her life by force but at the last minute Iphegenia decides that she will give herself willingly to the cause of saving Greece through her death. She is led off, to Clytemnestra's great distress.

A messenger brings back news that when they reached the meadow of Artemis, Agamemnon groaned and turned away from his daughter and that just as the knife was taken up for her sacrifice, a sound was heard and the girl vanished. Instead, a deer lay on the altar, blood bubbling out of its throat. It was commonly believed that Iphegenia had been taken to be with the gods and that not wanting the girl's blood shed, Artemis had sent the deer to take her place.



- ❖ *Iphegenia in Aulis* won the first prize in the dramatic competition when it was produced after Euripides' death in 405 BC by a relation (a son or a nephew).

Euripides had already written *Iphegenia in Tauris* 5-7 years previously, based on the premise that Iphegenia had been spirited away to a shrine of Artemis on the distant Taurian shore, on the Black Sea. Orestes, her brother, kills their mother Clytemnestra in vengeance for her murder of their father, Agamemnon and is then reunited with Iphegenia when he is imprisoned in his attempt to carry off a statue of Artemis.

Depicting the sacrifice of Iphegenia in artwork has been a favourite study for artists since classical times. Many playwrights, including Racine, have written versions of the story. Gluck used it as the basis for an opera.

LOVE ME TENDER: SOME IDEAS OF THE PLAY –

WHAT SORT OF WORLD IS THIS FOR GIRLS? – READ THE FOLLOWING QUOTES & CONSIDER

“I think it is the best time to bring a little girl into the world”

“She can go anywhere. Anywhere in the world. The east. The south. The west. The north. Police stations. Strip joints. Can happily walk into a strip joint as a customer without anyone batting an eyelid. That is how good it is today for a woman to be born. There is real.... what’s the word? Hope! Yes! There is real hope for a girl entering this world now!”

“I mean you can’t turn. Can’t turn your head without seeing a whole array of wild and dangerous threats. And to a girl? For a young girl? The threats are ten fold for a young girl these days.”

“Traps and guns and poachers and other animals. Getting their little hoof caught in some long forgotten, rusted, metal trap. Getting shot. Shot for some illegal black market poacher that wants to skin her and gut her and sell her at a local market. Other animals. Scary animals that might attack her to feed their young. Kill something young to keep something else young alive. You know what I mean? And with that... With all that...You never know what will happen to them.”

Tom Holloway, *Love Me Tender* (Section 2. Saviour/Sacrifice)

STORIES ARE IN US ALREADY – DO WE STILL NEED THE TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURES?

- No. It’s not that she loves the actual stories. It’s not that at all. It’s just she likes sitting there while someone tells her a story...
- Yes. It’s definitely not the story. I mean half the time there might as well not be any real story at all, you know?
- Right!
- I mean half the time you might as well just be there, talking... basically talking nonsense with her. Talking rubbish. You know? There’s no need to follow strictly to traditional ideas of story because she’s really not interested in it, you know? Narrative structure and all that.
- Right
- I mean throw in a few characters here and there...
- Traditional ideas of story probably seem a little old or something.
- Maybe.
- You know? Like just a reference to something. Just some hint of story is enough of a reference because generally stories are so in us, it’s like we know the famous ones well before we are ever directly exposed to them, you know?
- Right.
- It’s kind of like they’re deep inside us already, you know?

Tom Holloway, *Love Me Tender* (Section 6. The Story)

CHAOS THREATENS US – WHAT ABOUT FORCES IN THE WORLD WHICH WE CAN’T CONTROL?

“A sea of people in swimming costumes waiting desperately for someone to appease the angry gods..”

Tom Holloway, *Love Me Tender* (Section 11. The Storm That Violently Sweeps.)

“As he runs from his dead daughter and hears the explosion from the car and knows she is now nothing but fire, the chaos that has been billowing around him, enters him. Enters his lungs. Enters his skin. Makes its way deep in to his blood until there is nothing of him left. Nothing of the hero. Of the father. Of the husband. There is nothing left but the chaos. He is nothing but chaos. Everything is chaos.”

Tom Holloway, *Love Me Tender* (Section 13. Sacrifice #2)

Rehearsing *LOVE ME TENDER*

Love Me Tender rehearsed for 5 weeks in the rehearsal room at Company B Belvoir's Administration and Production Warehouse at 18 Belvoir Street in Surry Hills. Rehearsals took place from 10am to 6pm Monday to Friday. A sixth week was spent prior to the Sydney Opening in technical production rehearsals, on stage in the Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir St Theatre. *Love Me Tender* is a professional theatre production and the actors, director and crew are paid for the rehearsal period.

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHY: Heidrun Löhrr

Luke Hewitt, Kris McQuade, Belinda McClory & Colin Moody

Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

Love Me Tender's rehearsal room had a piece of astro-turf for the actors to use in rehearsals which approximated to the final set they would perform on.



What would be the reason for this?

Arky Michael

Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

Look at the face of the actor in the photo opposite >>>



What does his expression, in particular his eyes and the way he is holding his arms out, suggest he is seeing?

Is he fearful of whatever he sees?

What effect does it have to see the other actor sitting so motionless behind him with no distinct expression on his face?

TO CONSIDER & DISCUSS – BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

CONTEMPORARY RAUNCH CULTURE & ITS EFFECT ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN

Ask students to read the following Sydney Morning Herald article which appeared on SMH Online and in the News Review section, page 4 in the Weekend Edition of February 6-7, 2010

This minx is child's play

KIM MACDONALD

February 6, 2010

Sex workers, contraceptives and lingerie are part of a new website for tweens, writes Kim MacDonald.

Kama Booty enters the cocktail bar, her breasts partly concealed by burlesque nipple pasties and a red leather jacket. Four young men who looked like they've stepped out of boy band line up at the bar. She tries her hand. "No business for you tonight," she is told.

She ducks off to a plastic surgeon for a breast enhancement, downs a gin and tonic, adopts a couple of trophy orphans from Cambodia and sells the photo rights to a newspaper. This time "Cameron" takes her home. She'll buy a morning-after pill tomorrow.

Kasma Booty is a cartoon avatar in an online game aimed at tweens called My Minx, which its creator originally billed as "Barbie meets Chanel".

The Barbie-esque figurines on the lolly pink home page were replaced this week with a more adult theme after controversy in Britain and questions locally over its brazen bid for the tween market.

But the content remains the same, and with web links to other tween games such as Hannah Montana, Bratz and Scooby Doo, the site has attracted the attention of children as young as seven.

Tweens are using Twitter and MySpace to spread the word about this tawdry virtual world where players dress their avatars in sexy lingerie, buy contraception and attempt to hook up in "Style City".

Far from the innocent online dress-up games on other websites, parent groups and child psychologists fear My Minx is pressuring children to grow up too quickly.

The website does not have any age restrictions, and even this technologically challenged journalist was able to figure out the pay-by-text system.

Players can set up a basic account for free, but for more interesting fashion and lifestyle options, they must buy "pink pounds" by sending a text message to an eight-digit number, no area codes necessary.

Four dollars and four seconds later, my account was credited with 6000 pink pounds, almost enough for Kasma to get a virtual orphan or a red tracy dress.

Kasma, created purely for research purposes, started her journey as an androgynous dummy. From there, I chose her pink curly hair from a range of styles and colours. The more outrageous options cost money.

Kasma then went to a lingerie store, specialising in burlesque underwear, a vintage clothing store and a glam rock store.

Her trip to the plastic surgeon saw an upgraded chest and poutier lips. The happiness level on her profile page automatically adjusted from 86 per cent to 100 per cent with surgery.

The job centre offered her a choice between training to become a stripper or dog handler, and the adoption centre offered a range choice of Third World orphans.

Then she entered the cocktail bar, where she approached four young men by clicking on their photos.

When she is rejected with comments such as "No business for you tonight", and "No clients", I realise that my avatar is actually a prostitute. But in the My Minx world, rejection is nothing that money won't address.

Advanced players - probably those who pour in more than the \$30 I spent - get press opportunities and can earn "pink pounds" by finding a "generous lover".

The more often avatars buy and use condoms and morning-after pills, the higher their IQ is rated. One "consumed" condom can add as much as 50 points to the IQ rating.

Kasma's IQ is 53. So my avatar is a dunce too. Great.

An Edith Cowan University child psychologist and cyber expert, Julian Dooley, said websites such as these were bad for children's self-esteem, and created negative impressions about women.

"This sort of site sexualises women, which can create negative body images, low self-esteem and unhealthy ideas about women's roles in society in terms of sexual behaviour," said Dr Dooley, the scientific director of ECU's Cyber-bullying and Child Health Promotion Research Centre.

"Some older children can assess such sites critically, while younger ones can just take it on board and normalise these ideals as their own. Older children are likely to grasp the irony and social commentary aspect but younger children are unlikely to do that.

"If they are involved in it, they are more likely to be involved in it in a real sense - not that they think the characters are real but that this sort of behaviour is normal.

"The extent to which exposure to this sort of content affects their offline behaviour remains to be seen, but what is clear from other areas of research is that this sort of highly sexualised content creates unhealthy attitudes about sexual behaviour and intimate relationships. For example, it may lead to expectations that you need to be well-endowed or wear skimpy clothes to be popular.

"If I had a daughter, she would not be allowed anywhere near My Minx."

Dr Dooley said the site took to a new extreme a trend which had been happening since Barbie got her first corvette.

The Bratz doll brand were found in a 2007 review by the American Psychological Association to have an objectified adult sexuality, with their busty bodies, short skirts and highly sexualised behaviour.

Dr Dooley said the social impact was likely to go beyond body image and sexualisation by affecting general opinions.

He said the My Minx adoption centre, for example, trivialised the responsibilities of parenthood by portraying orphans as little more than fashion accessories.

And the 7000 pink pound adoption fee - less than the cost of some of the virtual dresses - devalued orphans as human beings.

The game's creator, the Blighty Arts director Christopher Evans, insisted that the My Minx game was "harmless, tongue-in-cheek entertainment".

Evans said the website was targeted at late teen users.

"We find it insulting to our 30,000 regular users to suggest they cannot make their own distinction between a game and real life," he said.

Evans told a British newspaper that children should be allowed to grow up making their own decisions about games.

"We try to protect children too much from the real world for too long in this day and age. They cannot be wrapped up in cotton wool.

"The contraceptives and morning-after pills are only one part of the game and we are not encouraging young girls to take them, just reflecting real life."

Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, author of *Real Wired Child*, said parents need to develop a "digital spine" by putting an end to inappropriate online activities.

Carr-Gregg is counselling a growing number of children with what he calls "problematic net behaviour".

"I am from the generation everyone said would be destroyed by television. That didn't happen, and computer games won't destroy this generation. But like all things, it has to be monitored."

SOURCE: <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/this-minx-is-childs-play-20100205-niqj.html>

ASK STUDENTS TO READ THE ABOVE SMH ARTICLE by Kim MacDonald "This minx is child's play" then answer the questions on the following page -

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS about “This minx is child’s play”

ASK STUDENTS TO ANSWER THEN USE AS A BASIS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION PRIOR TO SEEING THE PLAY.

1. Who is ‘Kasma Booty’?
2. What is ‘My Minx’?
3. What age range was this website originally aimed at?
4. How young are some of the children who have been accessing the site?
5. List at least 7 activities that player’s avatars can perform on ‘My Minx’.
6. What do players need to do if they want more interesting or outrageous fashion and lifestyle choices on the site?
7. What caused ‘Kasma Booty’s’ happiness levels to rise to 100%?
8. What activities cause avatar’s IQ (intelligence quotient) levels to rise?
9. How have parent groups and child psychologists been reacting to this new website?
10. What are the dangers associated with it, in particular to do with the way it shows women?
11. How is it thought that younger children might be affected by using sites like this one?
12. What do older children have that could protect them from this sort of site’s worst effects?
13. How does ‘My Minx’ portray the adoption of orphans?
14. What is the fee charged for adopting an orphan?
15. How did the creator, Christopher Evans respond to the criticism of his website?
16. What age group did Evans say he was deliberately targeting?
17. How many people regularly use the site?
18. How does the site’s creator defend the use of contraceptives and morning-after pills on his website?
19. Do you agree that people try to protect children from the real world for too long?
20. Do you think that this kind of game, as described in the article, could affect the way young people and children think about real life and real people?
21. Would you support putting an age limit on a game like this? If so, at what age do you think it would be safe for someone to use without it becoming damaging?
22. Do you think the way dolls and online avatars are shown has an impact on the way children growing up start to think about adult women?
23. Do you think the images of women as shown in games like this and through dolls like Bratz help present children with a sexualised view of adult women as objects?
24. What advantages can you see in young people using a game like this? Why do you think it would be popular?
25. What are the disadvantages associated with it?
26. If you were responsible for filtering the internet, would you choose to regulate/ban/ or allow open access to My Minx?

TO DISCUSS –

- Do you think young people are forced to learn about sex too early on in life?
- Has the internet played a part in young people’s being exposed to content they aren’t ready to deal with or can’t understand?

9. War

- We see her. In the forest. She's on her own. Wandering. Wandering? Yes. Wandering alone through the forest. She sees the sun shine down from above like pillars? Yes, like pillars through the trees. It is quiet. Deeply quiet. It is the deep quiet of nature in the timeless moment of the mid afternoon. Yes. She is in the forest wandering and surrounding her are pillars of golden sunlight and the deep quiet of nature in the timeless moment of mid afternoon. We see her through the trees. Rummaging. Skipping and rummaging on the forest floor. Her big doe-y eyes. Her long lacey eye lashes. Yes? Yes? Yes. The ash stains her fur. The ash and charcoal stains her fur as she struggles. No. Staggered against the burnt dead trees. She is rummaging on the forest floor desperate to find anything to eat. Desperate to be free of the ash. Of the charcoal. The alien calls of firemen in the distance. Her legs collapse. As we see her wandering through the dead forest we see her legs collapse under her and the ash billow. Billow? Yes. Billow around her like floating flakes of snow. The trees are black. The earth is black and the light of the sun is dull with the ash that billows like fine flakes of snow. She is scared. We see her big, black eyes and she is alone in the dead forest and she is scared. The memory of the fire still filling her nightmares. The strange and alien sound of firemen and search and rescue teams echoing through the remains of her home. There is no one to keep her safe. No one to feed her. To protect her. No one to guide her until she can reach an age where she can look after herself. We see her collapse in the ash and not get up. She can't move. She lies there. Starving. Scared. Desperate. Unable even to stand up because this world. This world that should be her world. That should give her what she needs. That should provide. Now suddenly offers her nothing. Gives her nothing.

PERFORMANCE BASED ACTIVITY – Before seeing the production

- Softly play a suitably atmospheric piece of music (without any words). Dim the lights. Have your class lie on the floor of the drama room or put their heads on their desks. Read the above extract out or have a student read the extract out over the music. Tell students to let their minds wander according to the words they hear and the associated images that come into their minds.
- Ask students to write or draw for three minutes about the piece of writing they just heard and the images it suggested to them. The drawings can be abstract and the words they write can be free-form
- Put students into groups of four or five. Each group must have a director. Give the above script extract from *Love Me Tender to your students*. Ask them to share the ideas that came out of the first part of the process with the other members of their group. Tell them they will need to use these ideas and the script excerpt itself to create a five minute piece of theatre.
- Each group can choose; whether the extract is spoken by just one actor or broken up to be spoken by more than one person, whether the piece uses this script extract at all, or is silent, how to interpret the ideas of the group and create a piece of theatre that is true to what most members initially felt.
- At the end of the class perform the rough five minute pieces for the other groups.
- Discuss – what worked? What didn't? What was similar between all the pieces? Why were particular choices more dramatically effective than others? How did different groups sustain the tension throughout their pieces?

Director: Matthew Lutton



Matthew is a Perth-based theatre-maker and director, and currently the Artistic Director of ThinIce. He directed *Don't Say the Words* for Griffin Theatre Company, *The Duel* for Sydney Theatre Company and ThinIce, *Tartuffe* for Malthouse Melbourne and Black Swan State Theatre Company's *The Lady Aoi* for the 2007 Perth International Arts Festival. With ThinIce he has directed *Antigone* (adapted by Eamon Flack) for the 2009 Perth International Arts Festival and *Red Shoes* (adapted by Humphrey Bower) for the 2008 Artrage Festival. From 2003 to 2006 Matthew was Artistic Director of Black Swan State Theatre Company's BSX-Theatre program where he directed productions of *Woyzeck*, *The Visit* and *Mountain Language*. Matthew received a Young People and the Arts Fellowship from ArtsWA in 2007, and was awarded Young West Australian of the Year for Arts in 2005. He is currently on the Theatre Board for the Australia Council for the Arts. *Love Me Tender* is Matthew's first production with Company B Belvoir.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Five people gather on a patch of grass. The location is familiar, domestic, but framed in a way that suggests that this particular location requires protection or conservation. They are fathers and mothers who begin to tell their story and as they do so there is a sense that there is a unifying connection between them and the sacred site on which they are standing. The ground is healthy, but it has re-grown out of muck, and this past must not be forgotten.

Love Me Tender was inspired by the myth of Iphigenia, and Euripides' Greek tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The myth is centred upon Agamemnon and the relationship he has with his daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon needs to lead the fleet to the Trojan War yet the Gods have removed the wind from their sails. The community requires Agamemnon to make a sacrifice, to sacrifice his daughter, to appease the Gods, so that they can make the successful voyage to Troy.

Love Me Tender is not a re-telling of this story, but rather uses some of the central questions of the myth as a springboard. Iphigenia never appears onstage in this production, as the focus is on those who make the decisions about her life, and about those who witness, experience, and/or contribute to the sacrifices that occur within our world on a daily basis. It is about how love can rapidly mutate into fear, how within us all there is the potential to be both human and animal simultaneously, and asks how is it that we keep on going when we can see that there is a possibility for our entire world to go up in flames at any moment.

Tom Holloway's writing uses simple words to articulate extraordinary events. Many of the scenes in the play are like images that are pieced together pixel by pixel. It is only through the process of understanding each of the fragments, through repeating and collecting the fragments, that we begin to understand and articulate the whole. In some ways, many of the scenes are about individuals struggling to find a language, struggling to find words to describe an intangible.

For me, this is also a play that questions love, and how what we call love can be misinterpreted, mistrusted and can turn people inside out. What do we do when love can create great joy and great pain simultaneously? How is it that when we think we are holding onto love we can find ourselves acting in ways beyond our comprehension?

Matthew Lutton

Writer: Tom Holloway

Tom is an award-winning Tasmanian playwright. His play *Beyond the Neck* was featured at the Royal Court Theatre International Young Playwrights' Festival in London and had a sell-out season in Tasmania in 2007. The play's Sydney season was presented in 2009 by B Sharp and Bambina Borracha Productions and was developed into a radio play for ABC Radio National. *Beyond the Neck* won the 2008 Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE Award for Best Stage Play, received two nominations at the 2009 Sydney Theatre Awards for Best Independent Production and Best New Australian Work, and was published by Playlab Press in 2008.

Tom's play *Don't Say the Words*, directed by Matthew Lutton, was co-produced in 2008 by the Tasmanian Theatre Company and Griffin Theatre Company. It was shortlisted for the 2009 NSW Premier's Play Award, the 2009 Young Vic/Theatre503 Season Award in London and was published by Currency Press in 2008. *Red Sky Morning* won the 2007 R. E. Ross Trust Development Award and was commissioned and produced by Red Stitch Actors Theatre. It was described as "play of the year" by *The Sunday Age*, won the 2008 Green Room Award for Best New Writing for the Australian Stage and received a nomination for Best Production. *Red Sky Morning* was re-staged in 2009 by Full Tilt Theatre and The Victorian Arts Centre and will tour nationally later this year.

Tom is currently working on commissions for Melbourne Theatre Company and Bell Shakespeare under their development arm Mind's Eye. He is a Contributing Artist to *Gambling* being produced at Soho Writer's Theatre, London in March 2010 and will be a resident writer with the company later this year. Tom has written the libretto for an operatic adaptation of the film *The Secret Life of Words* that will be produced by the Bavarian State Opera at the 2011 Munich Opera Festival, directed by Matthew Lutton and with music composed by Miroslav Srnka. Tom's will also be collaborating with Matthew on a theatrical staging of Schubert's *Winterreise*.

Read the column opposite which appeared in the March edition of >>>>> Time Out Sydney magazine and answer the questions below: -

1. Which other play inspired this play?
2. What does the playwright (Tom Holloway) say that ancient play is about?
3. Can you work out what Tom Holloway says he got interested in thinking about in relation to children growing up now?
4. What was happening at the same time the playwright was writing this play?
5. How many characters are there in the script of *Love Me Tender*?
6. Why did Tom Holloway do this in his latest play? What did he want to find?
7. If a play was described as 'post-dramatic' theatre, what sort of play would you expect it to be?
8. How is *Love Me Tender* different from those sorts of plays? What does it have in it that they don't?
9. Where did Tom Holloway grow up?
10. Who introduced him to playwrights like Sam Shepherd?
11. What did Tom think he was going to be when he left school?
12. How did he end up becoming a playwright?

TEACHER'S NOTES – *LOVE ME TENDER* by Tom Holloway, directed by Matthew Lutton, Company B Belvoir, Thince & Griffin p 17

Meet the playwright

Tom Holloway



Who needs characters? Not Holloway

The 31-year-old author of *Love Me Tender* talks sex, bushfires and 'post-dramatic' theatre

What is *Love Me Tender* about?

How sexuality is infiltrating childhood.

We hear you were inspired by the Euripides play *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which is about a father who sacrifices his daughter to the gods.

The Euripides play is about a father and daughter relationship that is challenged by a father's responsibility to his wider community. I got interested in [whether] today we are 'sacrificing' a child's ability to grow up normally by putting a lot of pressure on them in terms of sexuality – dolls that wear heels and miniskirts, etc. And how we deal with our children exploring sexuality and how difficult it is to let that happen naturally.

Bushfires also feature prominently...

I was writing in Melbourne at the time but this play is not about the Black Saturday bushfires. I did not go out to the community and talk to them like I did for the Port Arthur Massacre in [my play] *Beyond the Neck*.

The script is exciting but has no actual characters and can be performed by "any number of actors".

Please explain. It's about finding a new way to tell stories. There's been a big push away from story the last ten years in this movement called 'post-dramatic theatre'. They're very fragmented and experimental, these plays. And in *Love Me Tender* I'm taking what I love about those plays and feeding narrative back into it.

How did you become a playwright?

I grew up in Tasmania. I had a great, crazy drama teacher in school who introduced us to playwrights like Sam Shepard. I did the usual thing of thinking I was going to be some great actor and then realised I was totally shit at acting. At that stage there was no professional theatre company in Hobart, it had gone bust, so there were theatres available. A friend wanted to put something on, so I wrote something, and it just kind of snowballed from there. *Nick Dent*

Love Me Tender is a Griffin Theatre co-production with Company B at Belvoir St Theatre. 18 Mar–11 Apr

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PRODUCTION ELEMENTS – SET DESIGN in *LOVE ME TENDER*

MATERIALS, FINISHES & INSPIRATIONS: A designer might use a variety of different materials to make a model box which depicts their vision of the finished set. The model's purpose is to give practical and creative information, about the designers' intention for the finished set.

LOVE ME TENDER MODEL BOX: Adam Gardnir

PRE-PRODUCTION

ACTIVITY

- What does it remind you of?
- Does this model give you an idea of what the play will be like?
- How does this image suggest that? (Be specific)
- Do you think the play will be a traditional play (like Shakespeare) or a modern one?
- Have you ever seen a set that looked like this before?
- What materials do you imagine the final set will be made of?



WRITE DOWN YOUR ANSWERS - AFTER SEEING THE PLAY COMPARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS WITH REALITY



SHOW STUDENTS THIS IMAGE OF THE MODEL BOX ABOVE ^^^^^^^^^^^

- Write down three words that sum up the look of the set as shown here.
- What does it remind you of or suggest?
- Which real life places have the same or a similar feeling?

- What kind of events do you imagine will be played out in the space?
- Compare the model box with the photo of the finished set below – how is it similar or different?
- Did the model box give you the same feeling as the finished set in production?



Kris McQuade, Luke Hewitt, Colin Moody, Belinda McClory, Arky Michael

LOVE ME TENDER (at PICA) SET DESIGN: Adam Gardnir

Photo: Jon Green

THINKING ABOUT DESIGNING FOR THEATRE - *LOVE ME TENDER*

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER Adam Gardnir speaks with Cathy Hunt about design concepts in *Love Me Tender* - Friday 12 February, 2010

Adam: The reason why - one of the things about coming to the theatre is that we're seeing, but if you look at society and the sort of brackets we all fit into: we as artists fit into the ones that are supposed to be finding the new ideas and examining the histories of what we've done and reflecting on what we've, you know really showing to society what we're on about... being honest and being creative.

And a lot of the time, to be honest and to be creative we have to be quite interesting and pretty out there to do it, you know, so with *Love Me Tender* we're charged with presenting a pretty normal circumstance but in a pretty awesome way so that it gets across to an audience beyond what they already know.

What I'm getting at is; in doing that we need to make some pretty brazen, big decisions of what we're going to present, take some leaps of faith, and do some things that are risky and have not been, maybe, done before or that are a little bit 'out of the box' so that we can capture the attention in order to get a point across. So when you see a production, like we were saying, it sort of gets watered down a little bit.

You go, hmm, okay so all those decisions we were supposed to make got made to the softest possible points and that hasn't helped.

Cathy: And the power's lost?

Adam: That's right. Our job is to make the hard decisions, make the interesting ones and the creative ones and the unique things that people haven't yet seen, and people wouldn't see in their daily jobs - that's why they've chosen to come to the theatre, and let their imagination go wild and let their creativity sort of kick in. Because they know they're going to be seeing stuff that's not what they expect.

So it *is* our job actually to make decisions about things that don't make sense, or aren't rational, or are too much or whatever. So that's kind of my defence for that particular design. I mean it's the same for *Love Me Tender* too; where you go, yes it's weird, it's a big risk, that's the point. If we didn't take a risk, if we just got this room and put it up there, whatever, you'd just be like, well why go to the theatre? Why leave your house, why leave *Home & Away*, and come and watch this, you know what I mean?

Cathy: 'Cause you want everything to kind of be heightened?

Adam: Yeah. It's supposed to be heightened, it's supposed to be tricky and weird... It's absolutely gotta be accessible, but in a unique curious way, but not in a familiarity. In an interesting....

Cathy: Completely. Can you just talk a tiny bit about what your design for *Love Me Tender* looks like?

Adam: Yeah, so, for *Love Me Tender*, it's gonna go to the PICA space in Perth and the Belvoir space in Sydney... And they're both black corners of rooms, basically. So we've taken the concept of a black empty studio and in it, there will be our stage that floats like an island, alien to the existing space.

So on that island we've got a big, basically a big glass tank and it's about 50cm high and it sits up off the deck, it floats up above the deck and that acts as a big water tank and it holds a lot of black water at the very start of the show. And that kind of works as a symbolic void... Or a symbolic blank canvas for the start of our show. It also hints about the symbolisms involved in the Greek story; they're waiting for the oceans to clear.

And water's a very essential part of a lot Greek stories and it's one of the basic elements; earth, light, water, wind, all those things.

So, the water's there at the start of the show, underlining everything that we've got. And in that tank, the water leaks out eventually and it disappears and what grows up through the water is grass; so I guess we've got a symbolic grass growing on stage that we see – you know in like those high-speed animations when they show plants growing over three days in ten seconds. So we've kinda got that happening on stage.

Cathy: How long does it take?

Adam: We're yet to work it out, but we can get it between 1 minute and 15 minutes, so in the technical rehearsal we'll work out exactly how long we want it to take. And that will depend on, you know, Matt's direction and how long he wants to cue it in with the actors and the performances. And at our end we work out which valves to use and which taps to use and all the infrastructure that you don't see on stage that makes that happen.

And so then the grass will grow and the grass is the second big image of the show, and that's kind of working in line with the script where we have the bird from the script and we have the youth of our protagonist and then in the third part we have this mist that comes in. So water's come in from the deck and it's gone out to the bottom, grass has grown up, mist will come in from the top, so it'll be like a sort of misty rain and again that talks about the atmosphere and the symbolisms there are pretty universal, but also it will act really suffocating and suppressive for the performers. There'll be this mist for about 15 minutes - just this constant mist. Like the mist you get in the fruit section at Coles, you know the same sort of mist they put on the vegetables?

Cathy: Yep, that squirty mist.

Adam: Yes, that's right. So it's really quite moist, it's a lot of water. But it's soft and it's got that nice kind of sound to it, a real soft sound. That's the third image of the show and that will just oppress everything, and will make everyone who wasn't already wet, really wet.

And then the fourth image is, we have a real live baby lamb that comes out on stage. So she'll mix in with the five human performers and they'll talk about – oh you'll see what happens in the play when it comes. So the lamb comes out, and she eats on stage and they'll look after her; they'll hold her, they hug her, they'll probably feed her from the bottle. And we show a lot of nurturing and a lot of caring scenes there, and again, symbolically it works with the raising of a child and youth and the care one takes. And then towards the end – am I allowed to say what happens at the end of the play?

Cathy: Yes - and the vulnerability of the creature...

Adam: Yes - and the innocence of it...

Cathy: Yes, you can, they'll know the myth.

Adam: and then the lambie goes off stage, and then the lambie gets killed. We don't actually kill our lamb every night. Although in one point in the creative development of the show, Matt and I were talking about that but we got told by the RSPCA that we couldn't do that...

Cathy: Oh my gosh. No.

Adam: And then lambie goes offstage and we come back on stage with a whole lot of blood and a whole lot of sound effects to demonstrate that we've essentially killed the lamb. And then the play hurdles towards its final moments.

So that's the play. It's sort of four big images, I guess. There's the big black water, the grass growing, the mist coming down and the lamb. And in those images they mark out the segments of the life that we're talking about.

And really as a design, it's a design that... I mean in some senses it's static, 'cause nothing actually; there's no moving parts of the set in a traditional sense but as a piece of sculpture in the space it's constantly evolving, you know, it's changing its form and its density. It's really a shape shifting kind of area which is just what we want it to have.

Cathy: And you're trying to bring the elements... It sounds like you're trying to bring weather; and the elements into the set, which is extraordinary.

Adam: That's exactly right.

The first response I had to the play, to Matt, in a design sense was - I said 'it's atmospheric'. That was the word I had for it. And what I meant was that it's absolutely about the air *between* objects, not so much the objects themselves.

Cathy: So like about the relations between them?

Adam: Absolutely. So maybe out of that line of thought came the concept of mist... And we for a long time talked about smokes and of course we've now got a flooding in the stage. So, there's a lot of weather type patterns happening, a lot of climate change is happening.

And I don't mean in the contemporary sense of climate change, I mean that as I said, the world will start out in the show in the big tank and it will drain, so we'll have the flooding and then a drought and then a rain storm... All these elements - normally with set design our job is to just make the objects that are fixed like, the walls or the floor. In this case it's been much more about the atmosphere of the show and then out of that...

Cathy: So you're trying to embody some of the ideas of the play?

Adam: It's an environment. It's a whole environmental shift; it's about the air between the people, not so much the objects that are around them. So the only objects we have in this space really is the floating deck and the black space and the grass that they're on and then there's the little glass wall around that. And that's just to frame the space really; that glass wall is all about framing the space and making it clear that we're examining the people inside it, almost in a sort of lab rat sense. Like they're in a little pit of argument that we're watching over as the voyeurs... And the grass is about a sort of freshly cropped batch of grass from a nice little suburban backyard. It's about a sort of perfection of home life, and the possible beauty of raising children and nurturing a family. And of course the play starts off like that and it's all about how it comes unstuck in this particular instance.

Cathy: So did you look at actual backyards?

Adam: A lot. We looked at real backyards, we downloaded a stack of images of backyards, we looked at artwork about backyards; so some Howard Arkley became very important to us, the painter, the Australian painter. He's done a lot of really, hypercolour, almost fluorescent backyards..

Cathy: Are they those houses?

Adam: Yeah, with the blurred lines. And it's sort of, it's quite a dreamscape. It's sort of both enjoyable but also nightmarish.

Cathy: That red brick with that blue paint..

Adam: That sort of stuff, yeah yeah, that's right.. And the lemon yellow walls and that sort of thing. That was really influential to us, in terms of other references... Howard Arkley's houses were probably the only particular artist we really spent a lot of time on, but a lot of what we looked at were sort of, I guess, ways that you could hypercolour and hypertension the normality. So we spoke about backyards that were fluorescent in their colour and make up artists that use lots of glitter and lots of full-on things.. So you could still see faces but they were...

Cathy: I love that idea.. Hypertension

Adam: Yeah, like really, just extreme. 'Cause the show's an hour and a half long, without stopping and so we've got the audience kind of trapped into this space for that amount of time; so we want it to be really full on then just let you out afterwards. So it's not like we're about having a soft part and then a climax; it just sort of starts out heavy and sort of stays there.

Cathy: And it seems like it's an extraordinary job to design for this show because what you're doing is making concrete, a whole lot of inter-connecting fragments, and the disparate voices. And there is that narrative thread, but it isn't necessarily going to make sense, but you get to put some concrete images up there.

Adam: Yeah. It's funny with Tom's work, 'cause the last show that Tom, Matt and I did was called *Don't Say The Words*. Did you see it?

Cathy: I saw it.

Adam: So you remember from that text, it's a very similar text in the sense that Tom doesn't navigate for us a space to put a play in. He doesn't navigate us to a particular geography, he doesn't say this has to be in a kitchen or has to be in a lounge room or has to be in Australia even.

Cathy: Cause there's no setting descriptions in his work at all, are there?

Adam: No, there's connotations in some of the text about what the characters are saying, but essentially Tom hasn't set it *anywhere*.

So in *Don't Say the Words*, we were all a bit afraid of that action, we thought well, someone's going to need to balance that out, someone's going to need to land the play in some sort of reality, so as designers we made the show in the bathroom, so in a really clear black bathroom

Cathy: It was amazing, it looked like a film set, shiny, incredible.

Adam: So the job there was to: - we decided that opposite to Tom's script, we would set the show in a clear location, out of which all the unique stuff that was happening with all the characters would have its own life. In this one we've lined up ourselves a bit more with Tom in the sense in that, yes there is a bit of grass in the backyard but it's not real grass and it's surrounded by a glass fence, which is completely weird. There's elements there of accessibility.

And certainly the costume designs are particularly accessible; we understand it to be very much, Sunday afternoon backyard barbeque sort of costume and my parents wear these costumes all the time, it's very clear in that sense. We have a sense of context there, but when lamb turns up and when the mist comes in and when the water goes out and the black water itself. Those kind of elements are in the same sort of family as Tom's unique ideas where it's not necessarily something you understand already...

Cathy: What, you don't understand it with the logical bit of your mind?

Adam: That's right. So with *Don't Say The Words* Matt and I designed the show into a placement from which it leapt into its own crazy space, so to speak. In *Love Me Tender* we have actually done a bit of that leaping as well, so it's all a little bit crazy. The risk here is in that we've ventured away from doing strict realism for Tom but hyper...

Cathy: So in *Don't Say The Words* you anchored his text into a really strong, familiar bathroom kind of location.

Adam: We anchored the start of the show there and then the text leapt off on its own.

Cathy: But it felt like they were in a pub bathroom and there are bathrooms like that all over Australia.

Adam: Yeah, there was still that fluidity... I mean if you remember specifically, all the items in that bathroom they were already scenically broken down into details, but the bathroom itself was really schmick and black and neat. So it sort of still sat like a bit of a nightmarish vision and things didn't make absolute sense, you know. And the bathroom had tiles on the floor, ceiling, walls; all things that were saying look! So yes, it still was a little bit Tom.

But in *Love Me Tender* we've gone a lot further down that path, where we haven't even started the play in a particular place, we've started it in the same kind of void that Tom writes it for. So the risk here is for us is that we're not planting the show, we're not planting the seeds of the show in a very full garden. I think we're on the right path, obviously, but to me that's the one that when you sit back and watch the show with the full set with the text and with the actors, that's the sort of question that is still unanswered for me. Whether that's sort of decision was the right one to go with.

Cathy: That's the risk, you're designing for a non-linear piece of theatre and if you want the form to match the content, if you really want to allow the audience and actors to fly a little bit... It sounds like you've given them an island and a backyard.

Adam: So, there's enough of a backyard there, and the sprinkler that we have is very particular to Australian backyards. The little bits of information we give away, are exactly... they're located.

Cathy: They're precise details, yep.

Adam: But there's far less of it than in *Don't Say The Words*. So this one's a lot more, as I said, about the atmosphere and the actors' journey rather than us placing it. So we're sort of, I think we're waiting to see how that works. Maybe for the third piece we'll go further again or somewhere back in between.

Cathy: I just wanted to ask you a tiny thing. Did you do any research on bushfires? And how did that kind of research inform the design?

Adam: I kept crying. I'm from Melbourne, and I know people who were killed in the fires in Melbourne last year, the big ones, a year ago...

And I know a lot of people who lost homes and that sort of stuff, so it's really... particularly for Melburnians, but I guess for every Australian. At some point in our lives, we're going to live near a bushfire in Australia, even in the city.. So there's always a link there. I've found it hard to look at a lot of the pictures that we looked at because it's...

One particular family that I know who lost their home, they're all still fine, but their house was covered a lot in the papers... Theirs was the house where the tyre had melted on the car and the metal of the tyre also melted. So there had been such an inferno that the ring of the metal hubcap had melted as well. They showed that on the news a lot... Cause it ran down the hill in the form of the sand, the dirt.

I kept seeing that image, you look up the bushfires of Victoria and that's probably in the first ten images you get. So that was tricky on a personal level, but also I think, as an Australian you sort of.. Bushfires are such a part of our lives... And every bit of bush is going to burn every 20 years, so it's going to happen somewhere every summer. So that was tricky.

But yes, we did look at a lot of pictures of bushfire burnt out areas and a lot of survivors. And for a long time I kept presenting them to Matt, ideas of using some of those images in the show. So using burnt out grass rather than fresh grass. And we talked a lot about that and we decided to go with the more hypercolour and the more fantastical kind of version of the show that we've got, probably so that the horror of that is more imagined than presented and we both think that that actually probably makes it even scarier again...

Cathy: 'Cause the bushfire is always the threat of destroying the bright fresh painted house with the perfect lawn. So what you start with - the grass is more like before the bushfire comes, before the threat that it's really burning.

But I also wondered, with the dirty water? 'Cause you know when a house burns and the condensation makes black streaks go all down the walls...that's what it evoked to me.

Adam: Yeah, that's good. The thing about this design is that there are so many things in it that I find quite universal. So that's a really good response. The black water could come directly from a bushfire reference, and that's totally in there. Could also come from the Greek reference of them needing to sail and the devilishness of the ocean...

Cathy: The black waters of the Styx.

Adam: That's right. It could also just be a sign of death. Anything black.

Cathy: Or putrefaction.

Adam: That's right. Or it could be a sense of avoidance - you know the black canvas, the empty space kind of thing. And then there's the grass, you know, freshly mowed grass is so virile as an idea... It could be all sorts of things.

Cathy: It could be chaos before destruction comes.

Adam: That's right, it's an international concept. And the mist - all these things... I guess what I mean is, we've put a few things in that are particular to Australia; the sprinkler, the clothing, but essentially there's a lot of symbolism in this piece and it's meant to be universal so that it can take on being this... like Tom's script does.

I mean you could look at Tom's play and go, it's just about Victorian bushfires. Or if you know nothing about Victorian bushfires and you knew a lot about Greek mythology you could be like, it's entirely about Greek mythology. Or if you knew nothing about either of those things, you could think, wow it's a great drama.

Cathy: And it's about family.

Adam: Yeah, it's about a family. A family's destruction and you could link it to Arthur Millar and all these other things. But it sort of, the universality of the idea has had to be pretty strong. So it's perfect I think for us, that you've got the response that's so particular. And others will have the same response and the opposite response.

Cathy: Yeah, for sure. What's it like to kind of, confine your actors that much? I mean, you talked about the lab rat thing..

Adam: I love it. I love watching actors in a tight space. I think it's just so exciting to sit and watch extraordinary performers trying to negotiate smaller spaces than they normally would. It's so easy to use a lot of space in the theatre and to spread people out and it's so forgiving actually.

Cathy: They can hide?

Adam: They can hide with the space, and they can hide in different lighting states and it's just so much more intense to cram them in together, you know?

Cathy: You're bringing the tension up in some way

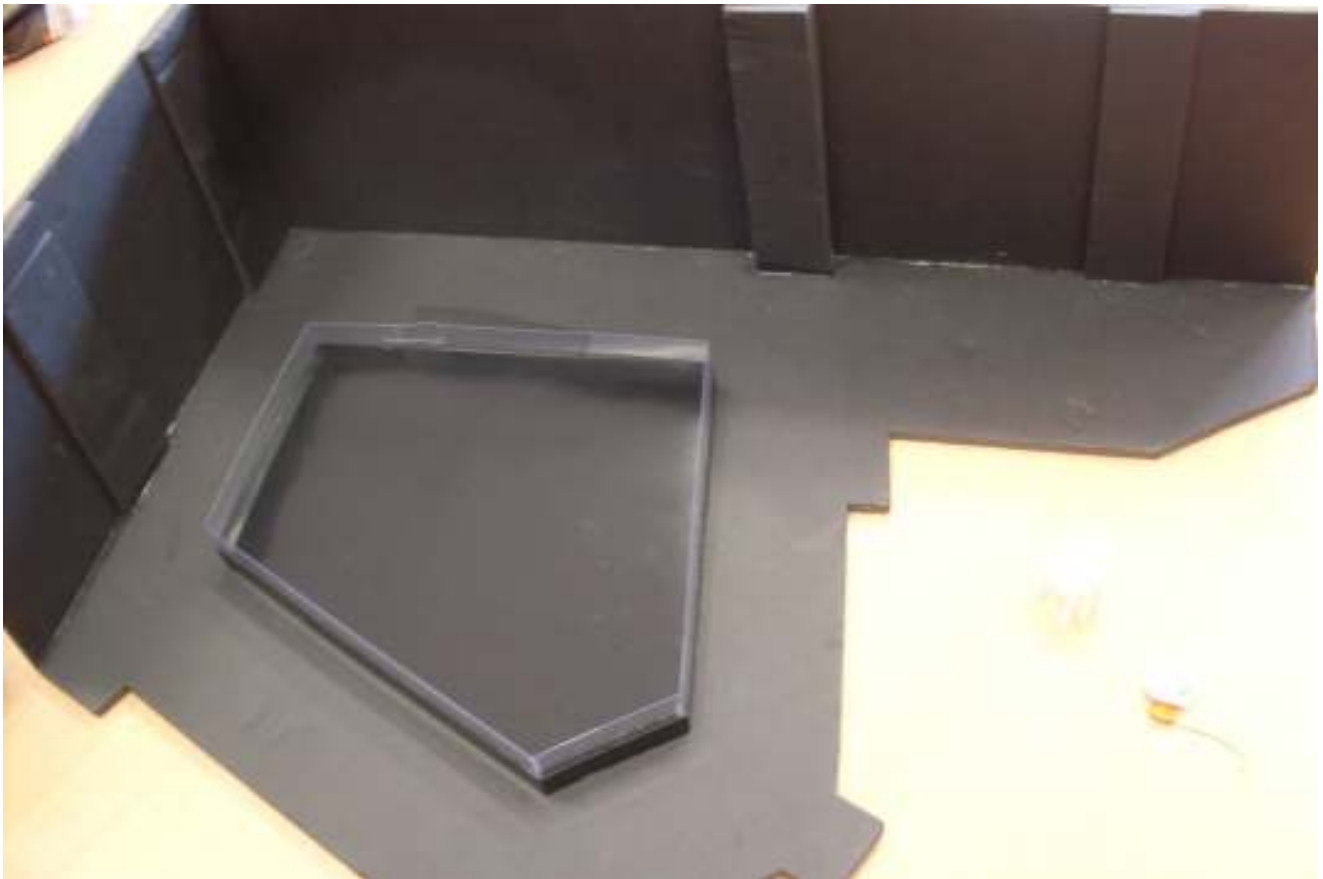
Adam: We've only used about half of the floor space of the Belvoir stage. A lot of people get into Belvoir and go, oh it's so small, they use everything they can and we've done the opposite – we've gone oh it's so big, we need to scale it down.

That's for two reasons, one is that we want this little world that they're in to float alien to the Belvoir space, so that there's a big black border around it, you know, so that it's an isolated really focused area. And the second part is, to restrict them to have to deal with each other, you know? And maybe I'm a sucker for punishment but I just love watching actors having to negotiate space together like that, it's just something – maybe that's a flavour that'll change over the years but right now I'm really keen.

I have this kind of thought, one metre per actor, so if you've got a stage with five actors the stage should be five metres long and five metres deep, so 5 by 5 metres which is pretty much what we've got here. *The Eisteddfod* that I did Downstairs, that was two actors and it was 2 metres and it worked really well because it was so tight, and I've done that now a few times. *Don't Say the Words* was three actors and it was 3 by 3 metres.

Cathy: Actors sometimes act better in smaller spaces. Like the Downstairs theatre.

Adam: And they have to, they can't avoid each other, so there's this incubator kind of pressure that you put on the actors, by forcing them to be together, and it's really exciting to watch and especially for a show like that, it's only an hour and half long - if it was a three hour show I think it would be too small because we'd want more options to play with. But for essentially a short show like this, it's just long enough to cope with the intensity, but we'll see how we go!



LOVE ME TENDER MODEL BOX: Adam Gardnir

AFTER SEEING *LOVE ME TENDER* –

- Discuss – how well did the set succeed in creating a heightened space and increased focus through restricting the actors movements?
- What effect did the water draining away have on you as a member of the audience?
- How did Karen Norris' lighting design complement the set and bring the colours up?
- How did the costumes the actors wore work with the set to direct the audience's focus?
- What did you spend most of your time looking at and responding to on stage?

THINKING OF OTHER POSSIBILITIES –

- Think of 3 other ways that this play could this play be staged differently. Write them down.
- If you were the set designer/director how would you choose to do it?
- What would be better/harder/easier about staging the play on your imagined set?
- What advantages would there be in choosing to do it this way?
- Which aspects of the production you saw would be lost when you changed the design completely?
- What new ideas about the world of this play would your proposed staging convey more effectively?

FOR STUDENTS TO CONSIDER - AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

- What is your idea of what a play should do? Can you put it into a clear sentence?
- Did *LOVE ME TENDER* do this?
- Is it a worthwhile play, would you tell someone else to see it?
- Why/why not?
- Write a text message (240 characters) to give a friend a sense of what the experience of seeing the play was like. (Your purpose is to explain why they HAVE to see this play or why they HAVE to avoid ever seeing this play, depending on how you reacted to it.)

YOUR RESPONSE TO *LOVE ME TENDER* –

- Write an extended response in the form of a theatre blog entry to explain why your readers should/shouldn't go see it. Back up your argument with specific details of the production you saw.
-

THINKING ABOUT PERFORMANCE: -

- WHAT IMPACT DID THE ACTORS PERFORMANCES HAVE ON YOU AS A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE?
- WHAT OVERALL FEEL DID THE PERFORMANCE HAVE?
- WAS IT WHAT YOU EXPECTED? WHY/ WHY NOT?
- DID ANYTHING REALLY MOVE YOU?
- DID YOU FIND ANYTHING REALLY HARD TO UNDERSTAND?
- WHICH SECTIONS ENGAGED YOU THE MOST? WHY?
- WHICH SECTIONS ENGAGED YOU THE LEAST? WHY?

HOW DID YOU RESPOND TO THE: -

- Mixture of performance styles; from semi-naturalistic, to heightened storytelling, to extremely abstract style and performance to conversationally performed dialogue with abstract text?
- Way the live lamb featured?
- Fact that we heard throughout about the daughter who never appeared?
- Set elements like the mist and the water?
- Intrusive sexual language at points – what purpose was this meant to serve? Did it work?
- Difficulty in working what had 'really' happened – what do you think the playwright was exploring through the use of this technique?
- Tension between those aspects of the story which seemed to have 'really' happened as opposed to those that seemed imagined. Could you always tell which were which?
- Different narrative threads – about the family, about the bushfires and then the traces of the Iphigenia myth?
- Changing age of the girl, the daughter, from birth to 3 to 6 to 7-8, to 10-11-12, to 13

DID THE PLAY REMIND YOU OF ANY OTHER STORIES YOU KNOW? WHICH ONES?

FROM 'ABOUT BONES' by Inga Clendennen

Anthropologists would recognise these backyard affairs [burying the family pet] as similar in outline to traditional ways of managing death in most communities in most places and in most times. Human funerals are necessarily more complicated ... Private grief must be sufficiently assuaged for people to be able to get about their ordinary business again. The social group must begin to heal the rift caused by the loss of one of its members. It will also need to mark that loss (these matters are at once huge and misty) by summing up or categorising the meaning of the life just ended.

... I was not at her [my sister's] funeral ... Night after night, for months after she was dead, I dreamed of her ... There was a terrible urgency about that endlessly recurring dream. The hidden rule of the desperate game into which I had been plunged was that if I could hit on just the right combination of words she would be restored, not to life, but to herself ... I never found the words. I always failed.

We have all had experience of the one-off collective effort that suddenly generates a miracle ... I have seen it happen once at a funeral, when mourning suddenly transmuted into celebration. Once. We cannot expect magic to strike in funeral circumstances. There is too much raw and unpredictable emotion about, and energies are too depleted by grief.

There are also problems about performance. Ritual – effective ritual – is theatre. Acting newly invented ritual is a taxing business, even for professionals. For amateurs it can be anguish. The requirement of effective performance, in face of the recognition of the importance of the occasion, and coupled with the disabling effects of grief, is a heavy burden to place on people already sufficiently burdened...

... Each mourner is interrogating their own relationship with the dead; each mourner is inhabiting their own universe of grief. Too much emphasis on others' loss can distract from the urgent psychological work each individual must begin to do to save themselves.

It can also (this is harder to admit) further wound the already wounded...

... What I have come to think (to my surprise) is that we need to invent a ritual: to devise a prescribed ceremonial form acceptable to rank-and-file secular humanists, and designed to meet, or at least to touch, the multiple social and psychological requirements I have been outlining.

... What matters, and what will be difficult to accept, given our identification of the spontaneous with the authentic and our passion to celebrate the individual, is that we cannot rely on spontaneity; that we must have a formal script, and that this script must be unspecific, pointing towards the commonality of death, away from individual desolation.

... We will not find it easy to concoct a script. Nonetheless ... we must have ritual, because, as a wise friend of mine has said, "ritual makes real." Ritual defines what matters about what happens, and however devotedly secular our thinking, we cannot do without it.

Excerpts from "About Bones" from *Agamemnon's Kiss* by Inga Clendennen, reprinted with the kind permission of Text Publishing.



Luke Hewitt, Colin Moody, lamb LMT at PICA Photo: Jon Green

In the story of Iphigenia, Agamemnon has to sacrifice his daughter to appease the angry gods. In *Love Me Tender*, the father must watch his own daughter's death in a fire, unable to save her. On stage we see a sacrificial victim – the lamb – and we hear the sounds of its death.

- ❖ Why would the choice have been to have a lamb represent or stand in for a daughter?
- ❖ Which other animals are mentioned in the text in connection with the daughter?
- ❖ Why do you think there is this ongoing idea of animals, whether deer or predators, throughout the piece?

Exploring the world of *LOVE ME TENDER* further: -

BOOKS TO READ OR REFER TO: -

NON-FICTION :

Inga Clendinnen, *Agamemnon's Kiss: Selected Essays*, Text Publishing: Melbourne, 2006.
Eric Dugdale, *Greek Theatre in Context*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2008.
Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, Routledge: London & New York, 1992 rpr 1994.
Alan H. Sommerstein, *Greek Drama and Dramatists*, Routledge: London & New York, 2002.

OTHER PLAYS by Tom Holloway

Don't Say the Words, Currency Press: Strawberry Hills, 2008

Script extract from *Don't Say the Words* <http://australianplays.org/script/CP-1769>

Beyond the Neck – Verbatim piece about the Port Arthur massacre produced in the 2009 B Sharp season

Script extract from *Beyond The Neck* - <http://australianplays.org/script/PL-30>

Red Sky Morning – Three hander about depression over the course of a day produced by Red Stitch in 2008

Script extract from *Red Sky Morning* <http://australianplays.org/script/ASC-1070>

Resources to download:

Translated version of Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Aulis* available to download

http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/e/euripides/ip_aulis/

TOM HOLLOWAY links

2009 Diary entries by Tom Holloway from Norway <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/artworks/features/holloway/>

Matt Lutton & Tom Holloway - LOVE ME TENDER publicity

<http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/entertainment/a/-/arts/6774582/a-pair-of-aces/>

<http://www.watoday.com.au/entertainment/directing-dream-for-matthew-lutton-20100120-mkw2.html>

<http://www.watoday.com.au/entertainment/love-me-tender-premieres-in-perth-20100225-p5qq.html>

Video clips to watch:

Publicity clip for Love Me Tender - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fgVdPusorU>

Nick Marchand of Griffin on Love Me Tender - <http://australiacouncil.placestories.com/story?id=7400327>

Websites to visit: -

Australian ARTIST - HOWARD ARKLEY - used as design inspiration for his bright images of suburbia

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/arkley/education/essays01.html>

Australian plays and playwrights

Database of Australian playwrights and plays - <http://australianplays.org/>

PLAYWRITING AUSTRALIA - <http://www.pwa.org.au/>

One year on BLACK SATURDAY BUSHFIRE article links:

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/recovery-in-a-land-built-to-burn-20100205-niqo.html>

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/kindling-faith-from-the-embers-20100205-niqp.html>

<http://www.smh.com.au/text/articles/2010/01/29/1264268082443.html>

CONTEMPORARY RAUNCH CULTURE article links:

<http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/this-minx-is-childs-play-20100205-niqj.html>

After the Show: MAKING THE MOST OF THE Q & A

After each school matinee performance at Company B there is a Q & A session with the actors. In order to make the most of this experience, you might like to think about the *sorts* of questions you might ask before seeing the show.

School Matinee Q & A sessions: A Guide

- Ask questions about the production you have just seen, rather than other plays, film or television programs in which you have seen the same actors.
- Think of the Q & A session as an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the production you have just seen, rather than just an opportunity to learn about the actors' careers or the profession of acting.

Class Activity

Use a play you have seen recently when composing questions for this activity, or think of some general questions which can acquire more detail once you have seen the play.

1. Students list 3 questions that an actor might be asked by a student audience after a performance.
2. Students rank these questions from most (1) to least (3) according to:
 - Level of sophistication
 - Interest to the student
 - Cliché or what an actor would always be asked
3. Students then share their best questions with the class – most sophisticated, of most interest and the one they won't ask because it is very clichéd.
4. Ask students to think about the idea that the Q & A session is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the production
5. List the areas in which students could deepen their understanding of the production such as: themes and ideas, message, the setting, costume and set design, characters, acting style.
6. Choose a play the whole class has seen.

In pairs, students should choose 2 areas of the production they would have liked to have known more about and compose 2 specific questions for each one.

7. One pair swaps questions with another pair and writes down answers for the other pair's questions.
8. Share question and answers with the class.