

Company B Presents



Parramatta Girls

Written by Alana Valentine
Directed by Wesley Enoch

Teacher's Notes

Freehills

EDUCATION PARTNER

Company B

Company B 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 show business.

Company B 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 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, Jacqueline McKenzie, Noah Taylor, Richard Roxburgh, Max Cullen, Bille Brown, David Wenham, Deborah Mailman and Catherine McClements.

Sellout productions like *Cloudstreet*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Alchemist*, *Hamlet*, *The Small Poppies*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Underpants*, *Gulpilil*, *The Sapphires* and *Stuff Happens* have consolidated Company B'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.

Belvoir St Theatre has recently undergone a major renovation to provide Company B with a state of the art home for the future whilst retaining the charm of the original building.

For more information visit www.belvoir.com.au

Company B
Presents

Parramatta Girls

Written By Alana Valentine
Directed by Wesley Enoch

With

Valerie Bader
Annie Byron
Jeanette Cronin
Lisa Flanagan
Genevieve Hegney
Roxanne McDonald
Leah Purcell
Carole Skinner

Lynette/Mother
Gayle
Melanie
Kerry
Maree
Coral
Marlene
Judi

Ralph Myers
Alice Babidge
Rachel Burke
Steve Francis
Michael McGlynn
Kyle Rowlands
Luke Woodham
Nell Ranney
Sophie Doubleday

Set Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Composer/Sound Designer
Musical Director
Fight Director
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
NIDA Secondment

*The Company B production of **Parramatta Girls** opened at Belvoir St Theatre on 21 March 2007.*

***Parramatta Girls** will be published by Currency Press in July. If you are interested in purchasing a copy of the script please check the Currency Press website <http://www.currency.com.au/> in July 2007.*

Thinking about the World of the Play

Parramatta Girls is a dramatised account of the real life stories of ex-inmates of the Girls Training School (GTS), Parramatta. Operating since 1887 as a home for abandoned, at risk, and 'criminal' girls under the age of 18, it was renamed GTS in 1947 and did not close until 1974. During those years and since, a picture has emerged of thousands of women being brutalized, drugged, and confined in solitary for more than a week at a time during their incarceration. Girls could be committed to the GTS by magistrates who deemed them to be 'at risk' of 'moral danger'. These girls may have been abused, neglected or even orphaned, yet were placed in a punitive institution. Despite several government enquiries sparked by riots inside the GTS and calls for the institution to be closed down, it remained in operation until 1974. Today, a periodic detention centre for women (not juveniles), the Norma Parker Detention Centre for Women, exists on the site.

You can read more about the history of the Girls Training Home and other institutions for girls online at <http://www.parragirls.org.au/>

The Playwright: Alana Valentine

Playwright Alana Valentine first heard about the Girls Training School during a broadcast on Stateline (ABC television) in May 2003. Here she talks about the journey from that night to the realization of the current production of *Parramatta Girls*.

Where did the idea for the play *Parramatta Girls* come from?

I saw a report on ABC TV's Stateline in 2003. It was about three indigenous women who had returned to the home and were talking about their treatment there. Their names were Coral, Marlene, and Marjorie, and I subsequently interviewed all three of them. In the weeks following their first broadcast, Stateline did follow-up programmes about non-indigenous girls and their experience. I thought that this was a story that needed to be understood in more detail than 15 minutes on a current affairs programme would allow. I wanted to hear and understand the human story....not just of the trauma of the girls when they were teenagers but the ongoing legacy of their institutionalization throughout their lives. And as I met and spoke to more and more women, I began to understand that this could be a drama about triumph over great hardship, and also about the relationship of all of us, all Australians and all human beings, to our own personal memories and our collective history.

Did it immediately strike you as good material for a play?

It immediately struck me as the voices of people who had not been heard on the Australian mainstage. It immediately struck me that surviving such an institution must involve an incredible story of triumph and courage. These were women with guts, attitude and humour and they were crying out to have their story heard. Both my mother and my grandmother have passed away and I think I just wanted to hang out for a few years with some feisty, tough and bloody funny older women.

When did you start working on the play and what did your research involve?

I began working on it in 2003 and my research has involved talking to more than 35 women. Some of these were in-depth, face to face interviews which I recorded and then transcribed; some were conversations while waiting to go into the reunion that was held at the Parramatta Girls Training School site on November 3, 2003. Some were phone conversations. I also attended hearings as part of the Senate enquiry about 'children in care'. Their findings were published as 'Forgotten Australians' in August 2004. I also spoke to men about their experience of childhood in care, to women who were in other institutions. I did a phone interview with an ex-Parramatta Girl who now lives in London. I read novels and non-fiction works about 'children in

care' and I had to dig deep into my own experiences of loss, pain, and regret. I had to think about my own relationship to my own memories - the ways in which time concentrates and distorts and repeats them. I had to try to understand what it might be like to have something happen to you that no-one would believe, something that was too painful even to admit to yourself for 30 years, something which you told no-one about, not even your own family. There was a lot of 'imaginative' research, if I can put it that way, as well as the pure fact-finding and interviewing.

What are the particular challenges involved in writing a fictionalised account of true stories?

As a writer you still have to work out what the drama is going to be about. At the heart of many plays is a 'premise' and plays drawn from real life are no different. The 'premise' of this play is something like, 'What would happen if you tried to meet your childhood self?' In the case of these women, the child that they were seeking had been damaged and very traumatized so it was going to take a lot of courage to meet that part of themselves. What effect would it have on their adult selves to try to relive and remember what that part of themselves had been, all those years ago? Would it be a healing experience or would it make everything worse for them? How would you now relate to women you had known as a child and were now meeting as adults? As a writer you have to be clearly focused on what you're continuing research is about - otherwise it can all become a bit of a jumble. A drama is not simply about creating a plot or telling a story - you always need to be using the story in the service of a bigger theme or premise or question about human nature. I like to say that I think that at the heart of all great plays is an impossible truth, or an unanswerable question. What I mean by that is that I think that plays need to be about more than the facts - they need to be about how human beings are - and how human beings are is often complex and contradictory and unpredictable. In 'Parramatta Girls' I had to find a drama which was about what the women said about themselves and their horrific experiences, but also about the ways they coped - the ways they laugh at things, the love and compassion they still have an ability to give to each other, the remarkable ways in which they have forgiven their tormentors. The particular challenge of writing fiction based on real life, as I have done in both 'Run Rabbit Run' and 'Parramatta Girls', is to resist being seduced by the endless stream of research and struggle to find in among all the 'facts' the play that means something to you, individually, and which you think you can communicate to an audience.

Did you have to keep a deliberate detachment from the lives of the real people while writing *Parramatta Girls* or was emotional involvement critical to the writing process?

I think a writer does a kind of balancing act. It is impossible not to be emotionally involved with these stories. It is essential to imagine yourself in their shoes and find things that have happened in your own life that resonate with what you are being told. But you do, always, have to look at every story, every encounter with the real people and think about how it can be communicated to an audience in the most effective way. Ultimately, my job as a writer is not simply to support and comfort these women - apart from the fact that I don't have the skills to do that, as a counsellor or a psychologist. Of course I am a sympathetic listening ear, but my equal, if not greater obligation, is to the audience who I am writing the play for. I don't think that my obligation to keep the work authentic for the women, and my obligation to make it comprehensible to an audience are mutually exclusive. I think that you can be both involved and detached at the same time - that's what being a dramatist is all about.

Why do you believe it is important for this story to be told?

As Tony Kushner, the American playwright, would have it, 'Life is full of horror. Nobody escapes. Nobody.' Many people's lives are touched by tragedy and mistreatment. These women's lives have been affected in ways that are particularly tragic. And yet they have survived. And yet they have found comfort in kindness and friendship and a sense of community. It is important for this story to be told because, as the women themselves say, this must never be done to children again. This was not something that was done overseas to nameless people. The woman who you sit next to on the bus tomorrow might, on her leg or her arm, have a scar that you cannot see which was given to them at a childhood institution. The man who tends you at the post office or drives your school bus might have experienced life in a childhood institution. The Senate

Committee Report estimated that some 500,000 Australians experienced life in 'care' in the last century. These people deserve to have their story told on the public stage and have the truth of their lives acknowledged.

What would you like young people seeing this production of *Parramatta Girls* to take away from the experience?

All the young adults who see this show will take away different experiences, according to what they have experienced in their own lives. Some of them will have parents or uncles or aunts or neighbours who have experienced life in a childhood institution and it will, hopefully, help them to understand something that they didn't understand before. Some young adults may struggle with their own issues around anger, or not being listened to, or not being heard - and I hope this play might help them to seek the kind of counselling and support that is now offered to young people. I hope all of the young people who see this play will be inspired by the resilience of these women, to think about what they, as young adults, are going through in their own lives and have faith and joy about the potential of their own futures. I hope they will never allow such a thing to happen to their fellow young adults or their own children of the future.

As a contemporary Australian playwright what issues concern you? How does a playwright survive in Australia while working on a play?

I am particularly keen on getting onto the Australian mainstage voices in the Australian community which are not often heard. It is because of the vision of Neil Armfield, and those he works with at Company B, that audiences have heard the voices of South Sydney supporters and now Parramatta Girls, and I am grateful that he has the trust and faith to give the Belvoir stage over to the voices of such people. A playwright survives as much on the vision and support of companies like Company B, on being believed in and being empowered to create good work, as they do on take-away falafel rolls and chilli fish with rice.

Will *Parramatta Girls* be published?

Yes, in July 2007 by Currency Press.



Lisa Flanagan and Leah Purcell in rehearsal (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

Imagining the World of Play

Here are some images of the Girls' Training School, reproduced with kind permission of State Records NSW and NSW Department of Community Services.

- What clues are there in the photos to date the photos?
- Why might there photos of the GTS been taken?
- What do you notice about the floors in each of the photos?
- What do you notice about the hairstyles of the girls?
- What do you notice about the girl at the window? What sort of day is it outside? Why might the curtains be closed?



Parramatta Girls' Training School
(Reproduced with kind permission of State Records NSW and NSW Department of Community Services.)

Imagining the World of Play

- Do you go to a boarding school? If so, how does this photo compare to the dormitories at your school?
- Does anything strike you as unusual in this photo?



Parramatta Girls' Training School
(Reproduced with kind permission of State Records NSW and NSW Department of Community Services.)

Reading About the World of the Play

Read the enclosed articles which appeared in Sydney newspapers in 1961 and answer the following questions.

Table Knives In Third Riot Bid At Girls' School, The Sydney Morning Herald, 1st March 1961.

1. What do the following paragraphs reveal:
 - a. Society's attitude to women in the 1960s.
 - b. The Minister for Child Welfare's attitude to the girls in the home
 - c. Society's attitude to authority in the 1960s.

"He said the girls probably took the knives to intimidate the female staff. When they saw the male officers waiting for them they quietened and almost all immediately surrendered their knives."

2. How would you describe the tone of this article?
3. What reasons are given for the riots in the article? Why might the Minister for Child Welfare, Mr F.H Hawkins use the word 'demonstrations' and the newspaper use the word 'riots'?
4. What do you learn from the last paragraph of the article? What is your response to this information?

Rooftop Riot by Girls, The Sun-Herald, March 19th, 1961.

1. When, according to the article, did the 'trouble' begin?
2. How was the 'trouble' resolved?
3. List three details which date this article to the 1960s.
4. Does the article address the reason for the riots? Why do you think this might be?

Girls' Home Senior Officer Suspended, The Sydney Morning Herald, March 27th, 1961.

1. What information is contained in the article about the senior staff officer's alleged misconduct?
2. What information is contained in the article about the girl's misconduct?

Read the two further articles *Girls' Two Reasons: Freedom and Cigarettes* and *Two Stay Free After Escape from Girls' Home*

How would you sum up, generally, the attitude towards the girls and their reasons for rioting as reported in the newspapers at the time?

Do you notice a difference between the articles which appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald and the articles which appeared in The Sun-Herald?

Thinking about the Production

Below is the main marketing image for *Parramatta Girls*. Does it grab your attention, why or why not?



This image appears on the front of an Avant Card.

- What is an Avant Card?
- What is the purpose of an Avant Card?
- Where might you find this Avant Card? Who might it be trying to reach?

The information on the following page appears on the back of the Avant Card. Read the information carefully and answer the following questions.

- Who designed the costumes for the play?
- Who is Wesley Enoch?
- Name two members of the cast.
- I am 25 years old and want to be the cheapest ticket I can to a performance of *Parramatta Girls*. What is the cheapest ticket I can purchase? Are there any conditions attached?
- Name another play written by Alana Valentine.
- What is the date of the final performance of *Parramatta Girls* at Belvoir St Theatre?

PARRAMATTA GIRLS

WRITTEN BY
Alana Valentine

DIRECTED BY
Wesley Enoch

SET DESIGNER
Ralph Myers

COSTUME DESIGNER
Alice Babidge

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Rachel Burke

MUSIC & SOUND
Steve Francis
Michael McGlynn

WITH
Valerie Bader
Annie Byron
Jeanette Cronin
Lisa Flanagan
Genevieve Hegney
Roxanne McDonald
Leah Purcell
Carole Skinner

17 March – 22 April, 2007
Belvoir St Theatre

The inmates of Girls Training School, Parramatta had about as hard an upbringing as you can get in Australia. But theirs is also one of the great untold stories of making good in tough times.

Based on the testimony of dozens of GTS old-girls, this vibrant new play from Alana Valentine (*Run Rabbit Run*) is a stirring dramatisation of the experiences of eight inmates and their reunion forty years later. Interspersed with song and storytelling, this is a joyous tribute to mischief and humour in the face of hardship and inequality.

Under the direction of Wesley Enoch, eight terrific Australian actresses will take over the Belvoir St stage in a moving and riotous act of letting the cat out of the bag and setting it smack bang amongst the pigeons!



PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ALEX CRAIG

COMPANY B 'yes'
BELVOIR ST THEATRE
CORPORATE PARTNER
OPTUS

PREVIEWS: SATURDAY 17 MARCH 8PM, SUNDAY 18 MARCH 5PM
PERFORMANCE TIMES: TUESDAY 6.30PM, WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY 8PM, SATURDAY 2PM & 8PM, SUNDAY 5PM
TICKET PRICES: ADULTS \$52, SENIORS (65+ FRIDAY EVENINGS) & GROUPS OF 10 \$44, CONCESSIONS \$32, PREVIEWS \$32
UNDER 27: \$32 TICKETS FOR TUESDAY 6.30PM. AVAILABLE FROM 10AM ON THE DAY (SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY)

BOOKINGS (02) 9699 3444 OR WWW.BELVOIR.COM.AU

Thinking About the Ideas of the Play

Following are some of the ideas or 'themes' explored in *Parramatta Girls*.

Students could start thinking about some of their associations with these ideas before they see the play.

Survival

Abuse

History

Truth

Speaking for those Who Cannot Speak for Themselves

Trust and Mistrust

- Collect images and media which represent or deal with one or more of these ideas.
- Make a list of books, films or plays you have studied that explore one or more of these ideas.
- In groups of 3, 4 or 5 work together to make still images (frozen tableaux with their bodies) which represent or comment on one of these ideas. Each group shows their still image to the class. Ask the class questions about what they see. What does this image represent to you? Who might the people in this tableau be? What is happening to them? Where are they? What comment is the presenting groups making about the theme?
- Write conclusions to the following lines.

Survival is

Abuse means

The truth is

When I think of history I think about

These are some of the people who can't speak for themselves ...

Trust means

"Its theme is that the incarceration of children in Australia has a long and sobering history. That Australia is not the lucky country if you are poor, black or a young 'uncontrollable girl'." Alana Valentine, Playwright

Writing Activities for English Students

Read the following newspaper article which appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 14th October, 2003 and answer the following questions.

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/10/13/1065917344283.html?from=storyrhs>

(a hard copy of this article can be found on the following pages)

1. What does the word 'notorious' mean?
2. Why do you think the words "wayward" and "delinquent" are printed in inverted commas?
3. Explain in your own words what is meant by the following sentence, "In terms of seeking justice for the crimes committed on them, Pumbo is less driven, perhaps fuelled by disbelief that justice is there to be had."
4. Why do you think Coral Pumbo finds a 'certain measure of peace' in having this play written?

Writing Activity

Write an example of an ad that may have been placed in a newspaper asking survivors of the Girls Training Home, Parramatta to contact Coral.

The *Community RSVP*, from the Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday 3rd March, 2007 is included on the next page as an example.

Family matters

Hall: calling descendants of John and Mary Hall (nee Chilvers), who were married at Liverpool in 1839. A reunion will be held at St Luke's Church, Liverpool, from 11.45am on Saturday, March 10. Contact Sue Hawick, 4861 3617, or Arthur Hall, 9331 7424.

McCulloch: Thomas Ross McCulloch (b.1866, Ross and Cromarty, Scotland) migrated to Australia at the turn of the century. He died in 1943 in Sydney. His son, also Thomas Ross "Tom" (b.c.1896) married Jeanie Cuthbertson Bishop in 1921 at Canterbury. Their children were Ross Bishop McCulloch and another son (name unknown). Jeanie's parents were Robert Bishop and Margaret Henderson. My grandmother, Ena McCulloch, was the daughter of Andrew Thomas McCulloch (brother of Thomas Ross McCulloch) and Mary Ann McCulloch. Ross McCulloch married Heather Jean Cash in 1949 at Kogarah. He died in 1971 and Jeanie died in 1967, both at Kogarah. Seeking any descendants. Contact Richard Goms, richardandann@netzero.net or 320 Gordon Lane, Apt. E11, Salt Lake City, UT 84104, USA.

Thomas/Paton: I would like to contact descendants of John Thomas and Mary Jane Paton. John Thomas was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, and married Mary Jane Paton, who was born in NSW, on March 19, 1884. They lived in Surry Hills. Their children were: Mary (married Arthur Levi, lived in West Ryde), Ethel, John Harold Leslie (married Violet Gilberd, lived in Newcastle), Vera (lived in Arncliffe) and Alma. John Thomas died in Sydney on December 27, 1939. Contact Wendy Rutherford, nru08121@bigpond.net.au or 4950 4557.

Roll up, roll up

Family Law Reform Association: the association is holding two free information nights. Speakers will discuss child support, shared parenting and Family Law Act amendments. The first session will be held at Cronulla RSL, 38 Gerrale Street, Cronulla, from 7.30pm on Tuesday. A second session will be held at Sutherland United Services Club, 7 East

Parade, Sutherland, on Tuesday, March 13. Contact the association on 9542 2459.

Annandale 1907-2007: the actor, writer, historian and Annandale resident Mary Haire will give a talk on the history of Annandale as part of the NSW Heritage Festival. The one-hour presentation can be heard on Friday evening and on Tuesday, March 13. Contact Leichhardt Council, 9367 9223.

Penrith City Library history conference: the library's sixth annual history conference, "River, Roads and Rail", will be held from 9am to 5pm on Saturday, March 17. The venue is the Nepean Room, Civic Centre, 601 High Street, Penrith. Cost is \$30 per person. Contact Lorraine Stacker, lstack@penrithcity.nsw.gov.au or 4732 7886.

Reunions

Queanbeyan High School: a reunion for those who were at the school from year 7 in 1977 until year 12 in 1982 will be held on Saturday, March 31. For further information contact Leanne, leanne@ruralhealth.org.au or 0407 991 854.

Kempsey reunion: the annual Kempsey District Ladies' reunion lunch will be held at the Bowlers' Club of NSW, Sydney, on Friday, March 30. Contact Gwen Smith,

bsmith@acay.com.au or 4353 9812. The men's reunion is at the same venue. Contact Ben Thornton, 9796 8434.

North Sydney Girls High School: a 50-year reunion lunch for old girls who did the Leaving Certificate in 1957 will be held at the new school on Saturday, March 31. The annual Old Girls' Union dinner will be held at North Ryde RSL Club on March 28. Contact: Pam Clifford, pamc@cliffordmarine.com.au or 9958 0529.

Macquarie Graduate School of Environment: past students of the graduate school are invited to a reunion at the new Sydney Harbour Institute of Marine Science at Chowder Bay on Saturday, March 17, from 2.30pm. Marine-themed talks and discussion will be followed by refreshments. Visit the school website, www.gse.mq.edu.au/invite.html, or contact Gunnella, 9850 7988.

CONTACT US

RSVP submissions:

rsvp@smh.com.au
Fax: 9282 3492
GPO Box 3771, Sydney 2001

RSVP also appears Monday to Friday on the Timelines page of the *Herald*.

Play about girls' home a voice for the survivors

By Sharon Vershi

October 14, 2003

Coral Pumbo was 12 when she was sent to the Parramatta Girls' Home, and 13 when, in the institution's old shower blocks, she was sexually assaulted by one of the guards.

She recites her memories in a calm, measured monotone: "I can still remember his long, white hands. I can remember his face, me crouching in a corner, and being told I was a good girl.

"I remember those showers, my number, the uniform, the knee-length socks. I remember the faces of the guards, every meal of every day I was there."

Pumbo - a gracious, dignified woman from Redfern, begins a lot of sentences with the words "I remember". When she haltingly tells her story, the reason for this almost compulsive mingling of past and present, becomes clear. In one part of Pumbo's mind, it is always the terrible day in 1962 when she was branded "uncontrollable" by the NSW Children's Court for a series of misdemeanours - wagging school, running away from home - and sent away.

"I've spent 40 years pushing those memories to the back of my mind," she says. "But now, they've all come back."

This has been because, after decades of denial and silence, Pumbo decided to confront the past. Last year, she visited the home for the first time in 40 years. This year, she placed a small ad in the *Koori Mail* calling for survivors to come forward. She was deluged by responses, so much so the story was picked up by the ABC's *Stateline*, prompting another avalanche of responses. Then late last week, Sydney playwright Alana Valentine stepped in with a proposal to write a play about the Parramatta survivors, funded by the \$20,000 cheque she received last week as winner of the 2003 NSW Ministry for the Arts' Writer's Fellowship.

Pumbo is amazed and grateful that there are those willing to hear and act.

From Valentine's perspective, Pumbo's past is a story with a multi-layered resonance - of the treatment of "wayward" women and the sexual politics that have underwritten it, of the system of juvenile justice and detention, and so on. "I've also been attracted to stories of survival against impossible odds," says Valentine. "It seems to me that this story is all about that."

She will meet the survivors, who will gather for a reunion early next month at the site of the home, which closed in 1980 after almost a century of existence as a corrective and educational facility for "delinquent" girls. Their stories will be gathered and woven into a play.

For Pumbo, there will be a certain measure of peace to be had with the staging of Valentine's play - here at last will be a permanent record of her story and the stories of so many others: the 80-year-old grandmother in Bega who wept out her stories of the home dating back to the 1930s; the middle-aged women, black and white, who have called Pumbo out of the blue, desperate to talk.



Telling the girls' stories ... playwright Alana Valentine outside the grounds of the old Parramatta institution. Photo: Robert Pearce

In terms of seeking justice for the crimes committed on them, Pumbo is less driven, perhaps fuelled by disbelief that justice is there to be had.

The women know the names and faces of the officers involved - perhaps they will be revealed, under cover of parliamentary privilege, when the current Senate inquiry into the abuse of children in institutions reveals its findings in December.

"We were told we were too bad to be truthful, that no one would believe our stories," Pumbo says. "I hope that now people will hear these stories and get to know what horrible things happened there."

The Sydney Morning Herald, October 14th, 2003

After the Show: Questions for Discussion

What do you notice about the women in the opening scene of the play?
What do you notice about their language?

At the beginning of the play the following exchange takes place between two of the women at the reunion.

“How long do we have to stand out here do you think?”
“Oh, they’ll keep us waiting ... Just to remind us.”

Explain in your own words what the women are alluding to in this exchange. Who do you think the women are referring to when they say “they”? What is revealed in this exchange about the women’s relationship to power?

What is the effect of the girls acting out ‘mock trials’ during the production?
Consider, in particular, the following exchange:

One of the girls has a judge’s gavel and she bangs it on something hard.

PLAYER: Children’s Court, Darlinghurst is in session.
PLAYER: The court will come to order

Two of the girls grab Marlene and hold her. The judge is sitting on a chair.

PLAYER: You are charged with being uncontrollable. And there’s only one place to send you to make you properly disciplined.

Two girls holding her call out.

PLAYERS: Send her to Parramatta.

MARLENE: No. I haven’t done anything wrong. They took away my brothers and sister they told me I would have to be charged.

PLAYERS: With neglect.

MARLENE: Who did I neglect?

JUDGE: You are charged with being neglected.

MARLENE: But how can you charge me with neglect?

PLAYER: I think you can see, your Honour, that this girl’s mental capacity is one of the impediments to her understanding simple moral concepts.

JUDGE: Yes, I see that.

PLAYER: She is, and I quote from her official file, “She is somewhat mentally retarded.”

MARLENE: I am not mentally retarded.

JUDGE: Silence.

How does the acting out of the ‘mock trials’ change as the play goes on. What do the props used in these scenes represent?

What is Kerry referring to in the following exchange? What issues are highlighted by Marlene's responses?

KERRY: Boongs can't vote.

MARLENE: What's that?

KERRY: Like, for the government.

MARLENE: That's not true.

KERRY: Yeah. We part of the flora and fauna girl.

MARLENE: Don't say we.

KERRY: OK

MARLENE: 'Cause I'm not a boong.

KERRY: How come?

MARLENE: Boongs are drunks and they don't work and they're real dirty.

Consider the scene in which the girls are singing a hymn in a chapel. What is the effect of their singing while Gayle is beaten for refusing to kneel. Why might the director have chosen to direct the scene this way? What changes in this scene when other girls stand up?

Describe in your own words what Judi means when she says to Lynette, "But the suffering here isn't your whole story is it?" Is it fair to suggest that people can 'get a thrill from dwelling on the past'?

What events, stories and/or lines from the play celebrate the women's survival?

What is the effect of having the first act end with Kerry's escape? Why might the playwright have chosen to end Act One at this point?

In your opinion, what finally makes the girls climb on the roof and start throwing the tiles at the guard? What do the girls realize after the episode on the roof?

Explain in your own words the sentiment expressed in the following line, spoken by Marlene in the present day, "And who's going to say sorry to me? Who's going to say sorry for all the things that were done to me and can't be undone?"

Describe the ritual is conducted at the end of the play. Why do you think Coral sets up this event? Have you ever participated in a similar ritual? Do any similar rituals exist in our society?

Do you remember what you were thinking as you left the theatre at the end of the play?

In the days following the production, what images from the play stayed most strongly in your mind?

After the show: Writing and Listening Activities

Reading and Writing

Read the article *'Rooftop Riot by Girls'*, the Sun-Herald, March 19th 1961.

Now having seen the play, consider the 'riot' from the point of view of the girls.

Write a letter from the point of view of one of the girls. The letter is being written to a friend outside of the Girls Training School, Parramatta. The purpose of the letter is to tell the friend how the 'riot' started and what happened afterwards.

After you have written your letter, get into pairs and exchange letters. Play the role of the school superintendent with each other's letter. Imagine that the school superintendent is censoring the letters sent by the girls. Remember the superintendent may not allow certain information out of the home. How does the censored letter compare to the original letter?

Listening

Listen to stories of former residents of the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls which operated between 1912 and 1969.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/awaye/stories/2006/1788284.htm>

Write a list of questions you would like to ask Frances Ryan about her experience if you had a chance to interview her yourself.

Further reading

Transcript from Stateline program (ABC television) about the Hay Institution for Girls

<http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/act/content/2003/s1125764.htm>

Report on the *Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care (2004)*

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/inst_care/index.htm