



SONG OF FIRST DESIRE

By **Andrew Bovell**

Directed by **Eamon Flack**

13 FEB - 23 MAR

SONG OF FIRST DESIRE

BY ANDREW BOVELL | 13 FEB-23 MAR 2025

We are thrilled to introduce to you ***Song of First Desire***, a new play by Andrew Bovell, directed by Belvoir's Artistic Director, Eamon Flack:

Camelia is losing her grip, dwelling in that space between the past and the present, rattling around her moody Madrid home. Her children employ Alejandro, a Colombian migrant, to look after her. But this house isn't what it seems, keeping secrets in its stones. This family has strange desires too, hidden in every breath. And Alejandro does more than care for Camelia; his presence unlocks truths, shaking a family that has buried pain for too long.

These Learning Resources feature **5x 1hr lesson sequences** tailored for students and teachers studying Drama in NSW. Designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to enrich their experience of watching *Song of First Desire* in 2025, these materials also help students hone their improvisation, playbuilding, and acting skills, aligning with the NSW syllabus requirements.

NSW DRAMA CURRICULUM LINKS

Belvoir St Theatre's production of *Song of First Desire* is suitable for students in Years 11 and 12 undertaking **Stage 6 Drama**.

These resources aid teachers in their teaching of: **8.1 Improvisation, Playbuilding and Acting**.

Making: *The practice of making in Drama is characterised by learning that involves workshopping concepts, ideas and experiences through enquiry, research, analysis and experimentation.*

- P1.2 explores ideas and situations, expressing them imaginatively in dramatic form
- P1.3 demonstrates performance skills appropriate to a variety of styles and media
- P1.6 demonstrates directorial and acting skills to communicate meaning through dramatic action
- P1.7 understands the collaborative nature of drama and theatre and demonstrates the self-discipline needed in the process of collaboration
- P2.3 demonstrates directorial and acting skills to communicate meaning through dramatic action
- P2.6 appreciates the variety of styles, structures and techniques that can be used in making and shaping a performance



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LEARNING SEQUENCE 1: MEMORY

A) WARM UP: WORKING AS AN ENSEMBLE (15 MINUTES)

Flocking: This activity emphasizes synchronised group movement and improvisation, laying a solid foundation for group devising/ensemble performance. An example of 'Flocking' in action can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0leUlr9H_M

1. Form groups of four and arrange yourselves in a diamond shape, ensuring everyone is facing the same direction with ample space around them.
2. The student at the front of the diamond will start by performing an action, setting the pace and direction for the group.
3. The rest of the group will follow the leader's movements, mirroring their actions. It is helpful to keep actions slow, simple and achievable.
4. When the leader changes direction, the new front person takes over and leads the group.
5. Aim for seamless and fluid transitions between leaders to maintain the group's unity in movement.
6. Once the groups have the hang of the exercise, you may choose to underscore their diamond with these two pieces of music: 'Running to the Loop' and 'The Robot'.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtS_aqJl8Pk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VARkRTNEx6s>

Reflect: How did the music's atmosphere influence the gestures you made as a group?

B) GROUP DISCUSSION (10 MINUTES)

Start a group discussion with your class on the importance of memory within the contexts of family, community, and nation. Consider the value of fostering remembrance and reflect on the potential consequences—both positive and negative—of forgetting.

- Why is remembering important for a country?
- How is memory an important part of family and individual identity?
- In what ways can forgetting be both a protective mechanism and a hindrance to personal growth?



C) CREATING AND PERFORMING TEXT

PRINT WORKSHEET 1.1

1. In groups of 3-5, ask students to create 6-10 statements that explore the themes of remembering and forgetting. They can begin with phrases like:

I remember so that...

We forget to...

I remember to ensure that...

We remember so that the past...

Forgetting helps us...

Some examples could be:

I remember so that the lessons of the past are not lost.

We forget to move forward and heal from painful experiences.

I remember to ensure that the sacrifices of others are honored.

We remember so that the past guides our decisions for the future.

I forget to let go of grudges and embrace new beginnings.

2. Use these statements as the foundation for creating ensemble text. Each member of the group should select one statement to deliver individually, and together, choose two statements to speak in unison as a group.

3. Next, determine the sequence in which these lines will be delivered.

4. Once you have the order, stand together in a diamond formation - the 'flocking shape' you worked on in the previous exercise. As an ensemble, create simple movements to accompany the delivery of your text. This could involve something as straightforward as walking slowly in unison, or incorporating gestures that reflect the meaning of your lines. Keep them slow, simple and achievable.

5. Take time to coordinate both your speech and movements, ensuring that they complement each other to create a cohesive and expressive performance. Students should be given approximately 20 minutes to rehearse their performance.

6. Perform in front of the class. You may choose to play some simple music underneath these performances to create atmosphere.

[Suggestion: 'Then' by Alaskan Tapes \(Spotify or YouTube\)](#)

LEARNING SEQUENCE 2: PACT OF FORGETTING

PRINT COPIES OF WORKSHEET 2.1 - 'A SHORT HISTORY'

A) THE CONTEXT OF 'SONG OF FIRST DESIRE' - (20 MINS)

1. Working in pairs or small groups, ask students to read through the contextual information about the Spanish Civil War and 'Pacto Del Olvido'.

[For lower literacy groups you may wish to read this information out loud.]

2. Once students finish reading, you may wish to have a short trivia competition between the groups using these questions:

In what year did the Spanish Civil War break out?

Who were the opposing sides in the war?

Which other countries supported Franco's Nationalists during the war?

Who emerged victorious from the Spanish Civil War?

Was Franco's leadership characterized more as a democracy or a dictatorship?

In which decade did Franco's leadership come to an end?

What was the Amnesty Law, and what did it entail?

What is the Pact of Forgetting, and what was its purpose?



Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez (right) and his government after the Amnesty law was approved (1977)

Source: <https://www.rtve.es>

B) CLASS DISCUSSION (5 MINUTES)

What are your thoughts on the government's choice to offer amnesty to both victims and perpetrators following Franco's death?

How might the act of forgetting painful, distressing memories have impacted the people of Spain?



PRINT COPIES OF WORKSHEET 2.2 - CHORAL TEXT

C) CREATING A CHORUS (30 MINS)

Group Setup: Work in small ensembles of 4-6 members.

Performance Objective: Create a chorus performance using one of the provided texts. You have two options: a political speech by former Prime Minister of Spain, Felipe González, or a speech by Spanish author Irene Vallejo. You may use the text in its entirety or edit the text to suit your performance.

Techniques: Incorporate five or more of the following techniques within your performance:

UNISON: All group members speak together in harmony.

SOLO LINES: Each member speaks individually at different points.

CANON: Speak the same lines at staggered times to create a dramatic effect.

OVERLAPPING DIALOGUE: Have members speak simultaneously to create layers of dialogue.

REPETITION: Delivering the same line more than once.

PACE: Vary the speed at which lines are delivered for dramatic emphasis.

VOLUME: Adjust vocal dynamics to emphasize certain passages or create contrast.

SOUND EFFECTS: May utilize body percussion, claps, clicks, stomping, etc.

BODILY MOVEMENT: Integrate gestures and choreography to enhance expression.

TEXT FOR CHORAL EXERCISE

OPTION 1:

"We had the courage and the wisdom to understand that the only way to ensure the future was to look forward, not backward. The transition was a collective effort, a pact between Spaniards of all ideologies and backgrounds. We agreed to leave behind our history of confrontation, to build a democracy where all could live in peace. This was not an act of forgetting, but an act of prioritizing the future over the past."

Felipe González speech during the 10th anniversary of the Spanish Constitution in 1988

OPTION 2:

"After the Spanish Civil War, there was a tacit agreement, a 'pact of forgetting,' where the pain and trauma of the past were buried in silence. This silence was seen as necessary for coexistence and the building of a new democracy. But what we have come to understand is that forgetting does not heal wounds; it hides them. The scars of that period remained, unspoken but present, shaping the undercurrents of our society."

Irene Vallejo's speech at the 2022 Frankfurt Book Fair



LEARNING SEQUENCE 3: INSPIRED BY ART

PRINT COPIES OF WORKSHEET 3.1 - 3.3



Pablo Picasso, Guernica, (1937)



Salvador Dalí, Soft Construction with Boiled Beans [Premonition of Civil War], (1936)



Frank Brangwyn, 'For the Relief of Women and Children in Spain' (1936)

8 | Created by Belvoir Education 2025



**BELVOIR ST
THEATRE**

A) TABLEAUX (1 HR)

These three artworks capture emotions, experiences, and perspectives related to the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s.

Use these images as inspiration to **create three physical tableaux**—frozen images—that represent the experience of the Spanish Civil War. You may choose to recreate these images literally or interpret them in a more abstract manner.

1. In small groups of 5-6, select one of the three images.
2. Begin by sitting in a circle with your group. Discuss each artwork and ask each other, “What do you see in this image?” Share your different interpretations and observations.
3. Now getting up on your feet, develop three powerful frozen tableaux based on your discussions. Pay close attention to the use of space and levels in your tableaux. Consider what you want your audience to see and feel as they observe each image.
4. Rehearse the transitions between your tableaux. Ensure that the movement from one tableau to the next is smooth and meaningful, guiding the audience through the narrative or emotional journey you wish to convey.

Students may wish to perform their tableaux to the first 30 seconds of **Pablo Casals’ “El Cant dels Ocells” (Song of the Birds)**. This piece of music can be found on Spotify or YouTube.

Pablo Casals, a Spanish cellist and conductor, was a staunch opponent of Francisco Franco’s fascist regime. After the war, Casals went into exile in France and refused to return to Spain or perform in countries that recognized Franco’s government. “El Cant dels Ocells” became his musical protest against Franco’s dictatorship and a lament for the suffering of his homeland.



Pablo Casals (1955)
Source: <https://fineartamerica.com>

DISCUSSION: What made these frozen images impactful for the audience? How did the music influence your emotions while watching the performance? Did it help you while you were on stage?

LEARNING SEQUENCE 4: SCENE WORK

PRINT COPIES OF WORKSHEET 4.1 - SCENE WORK

1. As a class, choose two actors to read the scene aloud.
 2. Discuss with the students:
 - **Objectives:** What does each character want in this scene?
 - **Stakes:** What does each character have to win, and to lose?
 - **Clues for Staging:** Analyze the text for clues about the scene's setting. Are the characters indoors? If so, where exactly? Is there a door or window mentioned? Any essential props?
 - What do the **stage directions** "he is silent" and "she is silent" indicate to the actors?
 - What **questions** do you have about these characters and the narrative?
 3. Group students into pairs, and ask them to block and rehearse this scene for performance.
 4. Each pairing should perform their scene in front of the class. Provide direction and suggestions for improvement. After receiving feedback, offer the opportunity for students to perform the scene again incorporating the notes.
-



Scene Eight. 1968

Margarita's House. She waits. In stillness. A study in grief. There are papers on the table and a suitcase beside it...Juan enters. His face bears the bruises of his beating.

MARGARITA What do they want?

He is silent.

MARGARITA Juan, you stand before me. There is still breath in your lungs. They have let you go. It is not without a reason. What are they demanding of you?

JUAN That I listen. And watch. And tell them what I see at the university. In meetings. And lectures.

MARGARITA Are you prepared to do it?

JUAN To betray my comrades? No.

MARGARITA Then there's your passport. There's your suitcase. I have withdrawn what money I have. It's yours.

JUAN Mama.

MARGARITA You must go.

JUAN The man who interrogated me said he knew my father. He said he respected him.

MARGARITA Torres made this offer to you, himself?

JUAN Yes.

MARGARITA You must go. You must get as far from here as you can.

JUAN If I leave they have won.

MARGARITA If you do not give him what he wants he will take you from your bed in the middle of the night and this time you won't return. That is not a victory.

JUAN If we all leave who will be left to build a different Spain?

MARGARITA Come back when Spain deserves you. And if not you, then your children. Because this Spain will destroy you. I'm begging you, go.

JUAN And you?

MARGARITA He will not touch me.

JUAN You know him? This man?

She is silent.

JUAN Why don't I have my father's name?

MARGARITA A name? Such things are not important.

JUAN Why don't you ever talk of the past?

MARGARITA To free you from it.

JUAN But you've only left me with silence.

MARGARITA The victors get to tell the story. The vanquished must shut up and listen to them tell it.

LEARNING SEQUENCE 5: MONOLOGUE

PRINT COPIES OF WORKSHEET 5.1 - MONOLOGUE WORK

This learning sequence provides students with the opportunity to rehearse a monologue from *Song of First Desire*.

1. Read the monologue through as a class.

2. Discuss the following questions:

- Where is this character from?
- What do you think he is doing in Madrid?
- What do you think happened to Alejandro's family?
- What does this character want or need in this moment?
- What is the turning point in this monologue?
- How does the character evolve throughout the piece?

3. Monologues gain their greatest power when an actor approaches them as a series of interconnected, yet distinct, thoughts. This method allows for greater nuance and specificity in the performance. Encourage students to dissect the monologue by marking each individual thought with a “/”. For instance:

I walk through the streets of Madrid./ I don't know who I am. /I don't know where I belong./

4. Once students have marked up their 'thoughts' ask them to break down the speech into “units”. A unit in acting is a distinct segment of a scene/monologue. It can be thought of like a “wavelength”. It begins when the character's intention shifts and ends when a new objective emerges. Have students separate the units by drawing a horizontal line, then assign each unit a name. The names will vary from actor to actor, reflecting their unique interpretation of the essential meaning within each section. For instance, the unit from '*I walk through the streets*' down to '*Simplicity*' might be titled 'Discovering Madrid'.

5. Allow students time to rehearse the monologue, potentially dividing this task across two lessons: one for rehearsal and the other for performing in front of the class.

ALEJANDRO I walk through the streets of Madrid. I don't know who I am. I don't know where I belong.

I look up at the statues and buildings that line the grand boulevards. They tell a story of wealth and power, about Kings and conquests. And I think of home. Colombia. The poverty. The violence. The struggle. The life. I want to blame Spain, for all that it has taken from us to make itself rich. But when I turn off the boulevards and walk the back streets, I find a different story. Here there is humility. Simplicity.

Margarita wanted me to return. To belong. To claim back what was taken from my father, from her. She would say when you go back don't eat at the fine restaurants with white table clothes. Stand shoulder to shoulder in the tapas bars of Lavapiés where you must learn to shout if you want to eat. Go out and have a drink with your friends in the evening. Scream at them when you disagree but always embrace them as you leave. Drink a small wine for breakfast. Everyday. It will make you strong. Walk through El Retiro on summer evenings, listen to the music and the talk of the people. Then stand before Goya at the Prado and weep.

Be hungry for love. Love like you eat. With an appetite. Don't pick at love. Don't put it aside. Leave your plate empty. And resist. Resist! No matter what the price. Don't be cowed by power, even if the consequence is death. Better to die proud, she said. And listen, listen to the beast stir. Be ready for it to awaken and roar. Be ready to fight.

WORKSHEETS



Create 6-10 statements that explore the themes of **remembering and forgetting**.

1. I remember so that...

2. We forget to...

3. I remember to ensure that...

4. We remember so that the past...

5. Forgetting helps us...

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

A SHORT HISTORY

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND FRANCO DICTATORSHIP

WORKSHEET 2.1

The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) was a brutal and complex conflict between two deeply divided factions: **Republicans, a coalition of left-wing forces**, and the **Nationalists**, led by **dictator General Francisco Franco**. Long-standing political, social, and economic tensions had been brewing in Spain, with the Republicans advocating for democratic reforms and social justice, supported by anarchists, communists, and workers. In contrast, the Nationalists, backed by conservatives, the military, and the Catholic Church, sought to maintain traditional power structures.

The conflict erupted in July **1936** and quickly escalated into a **full-scale civil war** that captured international attention. **The Republicans received aid from the Soviet Union** and international brigades of volunteers, while **Franco's Nationalists were supported**

by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, which provided crucial military resources. Despite fierce resistance, by **1939**, Franco's forces had captured key cities, leading to the collapse of the Republican resistance. **Franco's victory** marked the beginning of a **dictatorship that would last until his death in 1975**. His regime was characterized by **repression, censorship, and the persecution of political dissidents**, with tens of thousands imprisoned or killed.

Franco's death in 1975 paved the way for **Spain's transition to democracy**. King Juan Carlos I, whom Franco had groomed as his successor, was pivotal in steering the country toward democratic reforms. This transition led to the establishment of a **constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy**, guiding Spain into the modern era and ending decades of authoritarian rule.



Franco's victory parade in 1939 (Source: AFP)



Republicans fight against Franco's forces on the streets (Source: AFP)

SPANISH CIVIL WAR (1936–1939)

1936: The war begins with a military coup led by General Francisco Franco.

1937: The conflict intensifies with international support; Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy back Franco, while the Soviet Union supports the Republicans.

1939: Franco's forces capture Barcelona and Madrid, ending the war with a Nationalist victory.

FRANCISCO FRANCO'S LEADERSHIP (1939–1975)

1939–1945: Franco establishes an authoritarian regime characterized by repression and censorship.

1947: Spain is declared a monarchy, with Franco as the head of state.

1950s–1960s: The economy experiences rapid growth after the 1959 Stabilization Plan, a period known as the "Spanish Miracle."

1975: Franco dies, and Juan Carlos becomes king, leading to Spain's transition to democracy.

AMNESTY AGREEMENT (1977)

1976–1977: Spain transitions to democracy.

1977: The Spanish parliament passes the Amnesty Law, providing amnesty for political crimes from the Franco era to ensure a smooth transition to democracy. An informal political agreement known as the "Pact of Forgetting" was established, which avoided addressing the atrocities of the Franco regime to maintain stability during the transition.

'PACTO DEL OLVIDO'

THE PACT OF FORGETTING

The "Pact of Forgetting" emerged alongside the Amnesty Law of 1977 as an unofficial strategy to navigate the aftermath of the Franco era. This approach aimed to ease the transition to democracy by effectively **erasing the traumatic events of the past from public discussion**. Those in favour saw it as a necessary measure for moving forward, allowing Spain to break free from the shadows of its dictatorship and focus on rebuilding.

However, for many, this silence meant that **serious crimes went unaddressed, grief remained unacknowledged, and deep-seated wounds were left unresolved**.

The pact thus represented a complex tension between the desire to **move forward** and the need to **confront the painful legacy of the Franco regime**.

OPTION 1:

“We had the courage and the wisdom to understand that the only way to ensure the future was to look forward, not backward. The transition was a collective effort, a pact between Spaniards of all ideologies and backgrounds. We agreed to leave behind our history of confrontation, to build a democracy where all could live in peace. This was not an act of forgetting, but an act of prioritizing the future over the past.”

FELIPE GONZÁLEZ SPEECH DURING THE 10TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE SPANISH CONSTITUTION IN 1988

OPTION 2:

“After the Spanish Civil War, there was a tacit agreement, a ‘pact of forgetting,’ where the pain and trauma of the past were buried in silence. This silence was seen as necessary for coexistence and the building of a new democracy. But what we have come to understand is that forgetting does not heal wounds; it hides them. The scars of that period remained, unspoken but present, shaping the undercurrents of our society.”

IRENE VALLEJO'S SPEECH AT THE 2022
FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR



Pablo Picasso, Guernica, (1937)

WORKSHEET 3.2



Salvador Dalí, Soft Construction with Boiled Beans [Premonition of Civil War], (1936)

WORKSHEET 3.3



Frank Brangwyn, 'For the Relief of Women and Children in Spain' (1936)

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Our Education Program offers students and teachers an in-depth look into the work of Belvoir and the theatre-making process.

Belvoir Education provides a range of opportunities, including student workshops, the Young Belvoir Theatre Club for young theatre enthusiasts, First Class – a professional learning program for teachers, work experience, VET placements, archival viewings, and a variety of online resources to support drama classrooms. Our access programs also help schools in Regional NSW and Western Sydney engage with the company's work.

Explore more at: <https://belvoir.com.au/education/>



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