



YIRRA YAAKIN THEATRE COMPANY

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING

Written By Wesley Enoch & Deborah Mailman

LEARNING RESOURCE

Acknowledgment

Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company respects the Noongar people who remain the spiritual and cultural Boordiya of this kwobidak boodjar.

ATTENDING LIVE THEATRE

Before seeing The 7 Stages of Grieving we respectfully ask that you discuss theatre etiquette with your students. Doing so will ensure you and your students will have an enjoyable experience.

DURING THE PERFORMANCE

Please go to the toilet prior to the performance. Leaving your seat during the performance is disruptive

THINGS WE WANT TO HEAR

Live performance is energised by positive audience reactions – laugh when it's funny, cry when it's sad and applaud at the end.

THINGS WE DON'T WANT TO HEAR

Food wrappers and plastic packets make a lot of noise. It is generally expected that the audience does not eat during a performance.

Mobile phones must be switched off (not on vibrate). If your phone rings during a performance, it can be very embarrassing for you and very distracting for the performers. Even silently messaging is not cool, because the glow of the screen is off-putting for performers and audiences.

Chatting and whispering during the show is annoying for other audience members and can be very distracting for performers.

A production by Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company

Cover Image Dana Weeks

Education Pack created and designed by Jess Gatt for Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company

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INTRODUCTION



PRODUCTION NOTE

Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company first produced *The 7 Stages of Grieving* in 2025, bringing this landmark Australian play by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman back to the stage for a new generation of audiences.

While the work is traditionally performed by a single actor, the 2025 production was uniquely staged with two performers, Shahnee Hunter and Shontane Farmer. The decision to share the role of the “Everywoman” across two actors was an intentional creative choice. The play carries significant emotional and cultural weight, exploring themes of grief, resilience, history and identity through a series of powerful vignettes. By sharing the performance across two artists, the production allowed the emotional intensity of the work to be held collectively, reflecting the communal nature of storytelling within Aboriginal cultures.

Shahnee Hunter and Shontane Farmer each brought their own strength, vulnerability and perspective to the role, creating a layered interpretation of the “Everywoman.” Their performances honoured the spirit of the original work while offering audiences a dynamic exchange of voices and experiences on stage.

For the 2026 touring production, the work will be performed by Shontane Farmer as a solo performer. This approach aligns more closely with the traditional staging of *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, where a single performer carries the narrative and embodies the many voices and experiences represented throughout the play. Shontane’s powerful performance continues to honour the depth and responsibility of the role while allowing the story to travel more easily to regional venues, schools and touring locations.

Please note that this Education Resource was originally created for the 2025 production. As a result, references to Shahnee Hunter appear throughout the resource materials. These references remain as part of the documentation of the original staging, however the touring production you may see or study features Shontane Farmer in the role.

**YIRRA YAAKIN
MEANS
STAND TALL
IN THE NOONGAR LANGUAGE OF
THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF
SOUTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

YIRRA YAAKIN THEATRE COMPANY

Yirra Yaakin creates, shares and celebrates contemporary Aboriginal theatre, performance and stories.

For over 30 years, Yirra Yaakin has presented a vital and strong education program designed to provide educators and students, opportunities to learn, explore and expand their knowledge of theatre through the lens of contemporary and traditional Aboriginal culture.

Established to provide opportunities for a strong Aboriginal voice to be heard and 'standing tall', with a foot firmly placed in two cultures, Yirra Yaakin has led the way in bridging the gap between the past and the present, redefining, creating and presenting contemporary Aboriginal theatre that provides a positive role model for all.

As one of Australia's leading Aboriginal performing arts companies, Yirra Yaakin is in a position of cultural leadership, built on and maintained by close and effective working relationships with the Aboriginal community throughout WA and Australia. These close relationships allow us to more effectively deliver key messages and interact in positive participation activities with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in an authentic and culturally meaningful way.

Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company is committed to delivering a diverse and high-quality educational program of performances and activities that promote respect, pride and cultural strength, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members alike. We believe cultural empowerment is the basis of a healthy, sustainable community and provides the building blocks on which other key messages can be delivered to the community.

Our works are designed to make students and educators think, question their perceptions and expand their knowledge of theatre as well as contemporary and traditional Aboriginal culture. With a focus on the Western Australian curriculum, our program links directly to the current curriculum framework and cross curriculum priorities to meet the needs of schools, families and the wider community.

Yirra Yaakin acknowledges its relevance, its role and its place as a cultural leader with a responsibility to actively nurture, grow understanding and awareness of Aboriginal arts and culture as expressed through theatre and performance.

USING THIS LEARNING RESOURCE

This learning resource has been developed for use by teachers to enhance students' engagement with *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. The activities and resources contained in this document are designed as a starting point for teachers in developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. We understand you as teachers have greater knowledge of your students and therefore encourage you to adapt lessons accordingly and in line with your relevant state's curriculum.

The Activities offer students an opportunity to analyse, evaluate, describe and discuss the performance. It is important to note the activities are only a framework and should be adapted to meet the needs and interests of the learners.

By modifying the activities, teachers may be able to address additional learning area outcomes; or they may be able to adapt them for use by students at an earlier or later phase of development.

Note: Please consult with Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal Personnel in your school or District Education Office Aboriginal Services Team to learn correct protocols before teaching Aboriginal Culture and Language.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Sustainability

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Critical and creative thinking,
Intercultural understanding,
Ethical understanding
Personal and Social Capability
(empathy, resilience, identity)

LEARNING AREAS

The Arts (Dance, Music, Drama, Visual Arts), Humanities and Social Science (History, Civics and Citizenship), English

TOPICS

- Indigenous Perspectives
- Contemporary Theatre
- Storytelling as Cultural Transmission and Protest
- Identity, Belonging, and Community
- Australian History: Colonisation, Stolen Generations, Reconciliation
- Social Justice and Human Rights
- Memory, Grief, Healing, and Intergenerational Trauma
- Political and Personal Expression through the Arts

THEMES AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING is a profound exploration of the emotional and political experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It provides students with a vital opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions about Australia's history, identity, and the power of theatre to create empathy, understanding, and change.

Themes and Learning Opportunities include:

Grief, Loss, and Cultural Mourning: How collective and personal grief are shaped by the legacy of colonisation and ongoing injustices.

Dispossession and Land: The spiritual and cultural significance of land, and the trauma of displacement and forced removals.

Resistance and Resilience: The endurance of Aboriginal cultures through protest, survival, and the passing on of stories.

Family, Kinship and Community: The central role of intergenerational memory, relationships, and support networks.

Identity and Shame: Navigating a fractured sense of self within dominant systems of oppression.

Racism, White Privilege and Injustice: The lived reality of prejudice, systemic discrimination, and over-policing of Aboriginal people.

Reconciliation and Truth-telling: The importance of historical recognition, truth-telling and collective healing for meaningful reconciliation.

Cultural Protocols and Ceremony: How cultural practices, song, and storytelling function as tools for healing, memory, and connection.

Intersections of Politics and Performance: The role of art as protest, witness and transformation.

QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE THEMES CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 48

SYNOPSIS

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING is a powerful exploration of grief, resistance, and the ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people across Australia.

A lone Aboriginal woman stands centre stage. Through a series of monologues, movement sequences and visual metaphors, she takes the audience on a deeply personal and political journey, through loss, injustice, remembrance, and survival.

From the stolen generations to protest marches, funeral rites to silent mourning, she gives voice to the stories of her ancestors, her family, her people.

Sometimes angry, sometimes humorous, always honest, this woman becomes a vessel for collective memory. Her story is one of sorrow, but also one of incredible strength.

As she moves through the seven stages of grief, Dreaming, Invasion, Genocide, Protection, Assimilation, Self-Determination and Reconciliation, the audience is invited to witness not only what has been taken, but what remains: resilience, culture, and an unbroken connection to Country.

Written by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* is a landmark work of contemporary Australian theatre. A call for truth-telling. A celebration of survival. A chance to listen.

CREDITS

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING is the collaborative creation of esteemed Indigenous writers Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman.

Writers Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman

Director Bobbi Henry

Director Mentor Jo Pollitt

Movement Director Janine Oxenham

Set and Costume Designer Charlotte Meagher

Composer & Sound Designer Rebecca Riggs-Bennett

Lighting Designer Kristie Smith

Audio Visual Designer Emma Fishwick

Audio Visual Consultant Steve Berrick

Producer Jess Gatt

Production Manager Troy Williams

Stage Manager Shannen Moulton

Assistant Stage Manager Reese Horne

Cast Shahnee Hunter & Shontane Farmer

Songs

"Koorra Koorra Moort" by Ian Wilkes, used with permission

"Boodjar" by Maatakitj, used with permission

The 7 Stages of Grieving was first performed in 1995 and marked a groundbreaking collaboration between Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman.

Now, nearly 30 years later, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company proudly brings this seminal work back to the stage, the first Aboriginal company to do so, inviting a new generation to connect with its powerful message.

MEET THE TEAM



Wesley Enoch
Writer



Deborah Mailman
Writer



Charlotte Meagher
Set & Costume Designer



Jo Pollitt
Director Mentor



Rebecca Riggs-Bennett
Composer & Sound Designer



Shahnee Hunter
Performer



Shontane Farmer
Performer



Bobbi Henry
Director



Janine Oxenham
Movement Director



Kristie Smith
Lighting Designer



Shannen Moulton
Stage Manager



Emma Fishwick
Audio Visual Designer



Reese Horne
Assistant Stage Manager



Jess Gatt
Producer

MEET THE TEAM

WESLEY ENOCH, WRITER

WESLEY ENOCH is a writer and director from Stradbroke Island (Minjeribah) and a proud Quandamooka man. He is the Deputy Chair of Creative Australia and has held key leadership roles, including Artistic Director of Sydney Festival, Queensland Theatre Company, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, and Ilbijerri Theatre Company. He has also been an Associate Artistic Director at Belvoir Street Theatre and a Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company. A leading voice in Indigenous storytelling, Wesley has written and directed acclaimed productions that have toured nationally and internationally. His work spans theatre, major cultural events, and festivals, including serving as a creative consultant for the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. His landmark works include THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING, co-written with Deborah Mailman, THE SUNSHINE CLUB, which won the Matilda and Deadly Awards, and THE STORY OF THE MIRACLES AT COOKIE'S TABLE, which won the Patrick White Playwrights' Award. Throughout his career, Wesley has championed First Nations voices in the arts, earning multiple awards and recognitions.

DEBORAH MAILMAN, WRITER

The multi award winning Deborah Mailman AM is one of Australia's most highly respected actors on stage and screen.

Her feature credits include The New Boy, Radiance, Rabbit Proof Fence, Three Summers, Bran Nue Dae, Oddball and the internationally acclaimed The Sapphires. On television Deborah has created some of Australia's most enduring characters including the award-winning portrayals in Mystery Road, Redfern Now, Mabo and The Secret Life of Us as well as voicing 'Big Cuz' in the successful animation Little J and Big Cuz. Deborah has also been seen in the much-loved series Offspring, Cleverman and Jack Irish. Deborah plays the lead 'Alex Irving' in Total Control and received generous critical appraisal for her performance over the three seasons. She was re-cently seen in the critically acclaimed series Boy Swallows Universe, an adaptation of the best-selling novel and Last Days of the Space Age.

One of Australia's most celebrated theatre actors, and previously a company member of the Sydney Theatre Company, Deborah's stage performances include the Matilda Award winning performances in Radiance and The Seven Stages of Grieving, the Helpmann Award Best Supporting Actress role in the STC production of The Lost Echo and the Helpmann Award nominated role for Best Actress in the theatre production of The Sapphires.

In 2017 Deborah received the Order of Australia medal for Services to the Arts and as a role model for Indigenous performers. Until recently she was a Trustee of the Sydney Opera House and was appointed to the board of Screen Australia in 2019 and the First Nations Board of Creative Australia in 2024.

BOBBI HENRY, DIRECTOR

Bobbi Henry is a Whadjuk woman from the South-West of Western Australia.

Bobbi plunged into the life of an artist at an early age being cast at age fifteen in the 1987 national tour of Burrungin by Jack Davis (Perth Theatre Company) – which many credit as the beginning of the modern-day renaissance of Aboriginal theatre in Australia.

Bobbi went on to perform with Queensland Theatre Company, Black Swan State Theatre Company, Effie Crump Theatre, and many productions with Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company including Cracked, Hecate and Dating Black. Bobbi played pivotal roles on the big screen in The Life of Harry Dare, and Pilbara Pearl. On the small screen she appeared in Genie from Down Under (Series 2) and Fast Tracks. Bobbi was a dancer and cultural contributor to Song Circle by Maatakitj (Dr Clint Bracknell (Minang) & Kylie Farmer (Whadjuk)) for Ever Now Festival in Boorloo.

Bobbi is a powerful and emerging theatre director having directed three shows for Yirra Yaakin – The Ngalaka Daa Ensemble, Boodjar Kaatitjin, and Sista Girl. Most recently Bobbi directed 24 Hour Play Generator for Western Australian Youth Theatre Company.

Bobbi has recently completed her Masters in Performing Arts at Edith Cowan University which has fed into her developing writing practice.

JO POLLITT, DIRECTOR MENTOR

Jo Pollitt lives and works on Whadjuk Noongar Country as an artist scholar and Vice Chancellor's Research Fellow at Edith Cowan University (ECU) with the Centre for People, Place, & Planet and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Her research is grounded in a twenty-year practice of working with improvisation as methodology across multiple performed, choreographic, curatorial and publishing platforms. Her work in development includes 'The Simmering' with Maitland Schnaars supported by Performing Lines and PICA. She was an inaugural Forrest Creative and Performance Fellow, is convenor of Dance Research Australasia, co-lead of #FEAS: Feminist Educators Against Sexism, and author of The dancer in your hands < >. Jo is currently working on a multi-year research creation project titled 'Staging Weather' which brings together artist-led, meteorological, and First Nations weather knowledges, to develop creative responses to the increasing instability of climate change.

MEET THE TEAM

JANINE OXENHAM, MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

Janine Oxenham is a Malgana Yamatji woman, passionate about working with communities to tell Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Stories through movement & performance art.

She has choreographed and performed as an Independent contemporary Indigenous dancer for numerous festivals and projects in Regional & Metro WA. Since 2012, Janine has facilitated community dance groups and performed as part of the core crew and movement director for the travelling festival Creality and created the work 'Willy Willy' as part of the Ausdance's Future Landings project. Recently, she was Movement Director / Choreographer for Yirra Yaakin (YY) Theatre Company and Perth Festival production of Hecate (2020) and Panawathi Girl (2022). In 2023 she worked on various independent projects including stories of the Gondwana link in The Stars Descend with Annette Carmichael Projects, Jamba Nyinayi Festival in Coral Bay with The Baiyungu Aboriginal Corporation, Joshua Pether's experimental durational work The Reckoning, Song Circle an immersive ceremony of new cultural Noongar songs and dances with Boomerang and Spear, The Cowara Bird Project with Weaving Stories of Boodja. Additionally, she expanded her own work Contours, a series created for and inspired by Country of the Gascoyne region.

Currently, Janine supports various regional projects as producer, creative and performer.

CHARLOTTE MEAGHER, SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Charlotte Meagher is a multidisciplinary artist and writer with a passion for theatre, based in Boorloo. Having graduated from WAAPA design in 2022, Charlotte believes in developing high quality local work and creating opportunity for emerging talent.

With a background in both set/costume design and fine art, she is an advocate for creating alternative pathways for designers. An avid illustrator, Charlotte is always searching for ways to challenge theatre and exhibition spaces as a form, finding areas where they intersect. Above all else, she feels she is a storyteller first and foremost.

REBECCA RIGGS-BENNETT, COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Rebecca Riggs-Bennett (she/they) is an artist and composer-sound designer based in Boorloo on Whadjuk country. She works with sound as a device that transmits, transports and transforms, often through forms of live art, installation, and spoken narratives. Through what can be termed as interdisciplinary and experiential practice, Rebecca investigates entangled histories, invisible occurrences and human experience to generate immersive and participatory possibilities.

As an artist, they collaborate, write, perform and experiment. Projects include so once you were here they had you (commissioned by Fremantle Biennale 2023), Our Sandman (Cool Change Contemporary 2019) and my sandman (Crack Theatre Festival 2017).

Her composed designs have contributed to works including Punkaliyarra (BighART/Perth Festival 2023), Time Reveals The Unseen (MOD. Adelaide 2022), Nocturna (The Kabuki Drop 2021) Habitats & Homes (10 Nights In Port Festival 2021), Playthings (Black Swan State Theatre Company 2021), and Whale Fall (The Kabuki Drop/Perth Festival 2021).

KRISTIE SMITH, LIGHTING DESIGNER

Kristie Smith is a Boorloo-based lighting designer for dance, theatre and musical theatre. Since graduating from the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2017 she has lit productions for Black Swan State Theatre Co., West Australian Opera, West Australian Ballet, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, WAAPA and numerous shows at The Blue Room Theatre, most recently Same Time Next Week (2024). After touring nationally with commercial musicals (MAMMA MIA! the Musical, SIX the Musical and Mary Poppins) throughout 2022 and 2023 and filling in as the Head of Lighting and Audio Visual for WA Ballet in 2024, Kristie is thrilled to be back flexing the creative side of her brain again. The 7 Stages of Grieving marks her debut production with Yirra Yaakin, for which she is honoured to be part of the creative team for.

MEET THE TEAM

EMMA FISHWICK, AUDIO VISUAL DESIGNER

Emma Fishwick has worked extensively across Australia and abroad, lectures in Dance History, Choreography, and is an Honours supervisor at WAAPA. Emma is a graduate of the Honours (Dance) program, LINK in 2010 and in 2024, Emma completed her PhD research, Slow Choreographies, which used slow creative methodologies to interrupt everyday sexism in Australian universities. In 2024, Emma developed her work From Here, Together and performed What Came Before at PICA. In 2022, she received the award for OUTSTANDING NEW WORK with Slow Burn, Together at the Performing Arts WA Awards. Between 2018-2023 Emma was a member of the STRUT Dance Board and was a mentor for artists with a disability via disability support provider, My Place. Emma has choreographed for the International Young Choreographers Project in Taiwan 2019, has engaged in multiple projects and research residencies in Perth, Bundanon Trust and ReadyMade (NSW), Tasdance (TAS), ACT Festival (Bilbao), Dance Nucleus (Singapore), Next Wave festival (VIC).

SHANNEN MOULTON, STAGE MANAGER

Shannen is a WAAPA graduate from the Bachelor of Performing Arts, specialising in stage management. She has worked across a plethora of forms including musical theatre, plays, dance, circus and movement projects.

She has previously worked with Black Swan State Theatre Company on The Pool, Prima Facie and The Seed. She also stage managed the Blue Room Theatre 2024 Member's Choice winner: Same Time Next Week and Lazy Yarn's SHARK as part of the 2025 Summer Nights program.

REESE HORNE, ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Reese Horne is an upcoming queer and Aboriginal theatre maker/performer/director/stage manager/producer. They graduated from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts with a Bachelor of Performing Arts (Performance Making) in 2022, and the Aboriginal Performance course in 2024 of which they were the recipient of the Artist Relief Fund Student Endowment for that year. Their interest in exploring how personal and intimate stories translate to theatre experiences is ongoing as they continue to develop their skills whilst creating and supporting the making of truthful and engaging works.

SHAHNEE HUNTER, PERFORMER

Shahnee Hunter is a proud Djabugay, Mbabaram, Ewamian and Butchulla woman from Far North Queensland. She graduated from the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts with a Diploma in Acting and is the 2023 winner of Melbourne International Comedy Festival's Indigenous Stand-up competition - Deadly Funny.

As an actor and workshop facilitator, Shahnee has toured throughout regional and remote Queensland with Jute Theatre company's Dare to Dream program.

She played Leila in Playlab Theatre's 2023 remount of Face to Face by Emily Wells, as part of the Clancestry Festival. And starred in the World Premiere of Alinta McGrady's Eat Slay Zombie at QPAC. Shahnee is passionate about work written by mob, for mob and as a storyteller; believes in the healing power performance brings when we're having a good laugh and sharing yarns.

SHONTANE FARMER, PERFORMER

Shontane Farmer is a Noongar and Yamatji woman who was born and raised in Perth. The performing arts was something Shontane was always interested in but never knew this passion could become a career. In 2019 Shontane completed the Aboriginal Performance course at WAAPA. She then auditioned for the Bachelor of Arts (Acting) and was accepted into the 3 year program. After graduating she secured a spot in the graduate program at Red Stitch Theatre Company and played Julie in their 2024 production of Romeo and Julie. Later that year she was a dancer in Song Circle in the EverNow Festival. She aspires to have a long career in the Arts, be on the screens and many stages of Australia to increase Indigenous representation in the performing arts and tell Indigenous stories.



BACKGROUND



“IT’S INEVITABLE. ALL THAT ANGER, ALL THAT SHOUTING, ALL THAT GRIEF. WE’RE HERE TO PAY OUR RESPECTS, REMEMBER THE PAST, AND GRIEVE THE PRESENT. OUR MOURNING IS NEVER-ENDING. WE CRY TOGETHER, WE LAUGH TOGETHER, WE REMEMBER, AND WE KEEP GOING. WE HAVE TO. BECAUSE THIS STORY, OUR STORY, IS STILL UNFOLDING. IT’S WRITTEN IN OUR FLESH, IN OUR MEMORIES, IN OUR SPIRIT. AND IT’S TIME YOU HEARD IT.”

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING

ABOUT THE PLAY

The 7 Stages of Grieving is a powerful one-woman play that explores the grief, resilience, and cultural strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Through a blend of storytelling, monologue, movement, and multimedia, the play follows an unnamed Aboriginal woman as she moves through seven phases of grief, from Sorry Business and oppression to hope and healing.

Originally created in 1995, the work remains profoundly relevant today, giving voice to experiences that are deeply personal yet widely shared. As it shifts between moments of humour, sorrow and resistance, it invites audiences to reflect on the past and the ongoing impacts of colonisation in Australia.



OVERVIEW

Prologue

A warning is given to the audience that the performance includes depictions of deceased people, which may be distressing.

Sobbing

An Aboriginal woman grieves alone in the dark. As she cries, words reflecting the depth of sorrow and emotional loss appear, grief, despair, absence, culminating in the line: "I feel... nothing."

Purification

The woman lights eucalyptus leaves and sings in language, asking the spirits for permission to tell her story. A cleansing and respectful beginning.

Nana's Story

She shares memories of her grandmother's death, a time of mourning and togetherness. Food, music, family rituals and humour soften the pain, while revealing the generational trauma and lost stories.

Photograph Story

Photographs of the deceased are hidden in a suitcase, only brought out quietly. This scene reflects how grief and remembrance are both private and culturally complex.

Story of a Father

The woman anticipates the death of her father, honouring his resistance since the 1967 referendum. Though her grief is personal, it is linked to collective struggle.

Front and Centre

She describes an older woman who attends strangers' funerals, seeking connection and allowing herself to grieve publicly, a reminder of disrupted families and belonging.

Family Gallery

Family portraits appear. An extension of the suitcase of memory, now opened into a visual homage.

Black Skin Girl

A playful dance turns sombre as the woman is marked by society's labels. Her body becomes a canvas of identity and colonisation.

Invasion Poem

A powerful account of colonisation. The woman recounts cultural loss, stolen children, and forced assimilation.

1788

A sharp, satirical moment, an Aboriginal voice confronts the arrival of colonisers. "Get in your boat and go."

Murri Gets a Dress

A comedic monologue exposing everyday racism and surveillance experienced by Black women in modern Australia. Dark humour is used as resilience.

Aunty Grace

Aunty Grace, long estranged and "white-passing," returns for a funeral. Her emotional and literal reconnection with the land and her family is symbolised by filling her suitcase with red earth.

Mugshot

A clinical court report gradually gives way to raw grief and outrage over the death of a young man in police custody. The woman ultimately breaks her silence.

March

The community comes together in a powerful, silent protest march. The collective grief becomes a political act of resistance and remembrance.

Bargaining

"FOR SALE" is driven into the red earth. A cynical commentary on land, culture and loss being commodified.

Home Story

Using piles of red earth, the woman explains kinship systems and cultural continuity. The act of children being taken away disrupts the entire structure, a poignant metaphor for the Stolen Generations.

Story of a Brother

A personal story of a brother caught in the justice system. A small incident snowballs into a cycle of shame, poverty, and despair, mirroring many First Nations experiences.

Gallery of Sorrow

A visual timeline of Aboriginal history, from Dreaming through to Reconciliation. A reminder of the long journey of grief and survival.

Suitcase Opening

In a moment of emotional climax, the woman empties the suitcase—red earth and family photographs spill out. It is a raw release of mourning.

Wreck / Con / Silly / Nation Poem

A poetic critique of "Reconciliation" is offered through wordplay and re-framing: Wreck. Con. Silly. Nation. The words critique the tokenistic approaches to healing.

Everything Has Its Time

The woman suggests that action, not just words, brings change. She places "RECONCILIATION" into the suitcase, a symbolic act of moving forward.

Plea

She addresses the audience directly, expressing fear that her heart is hardening from so much grief. Her plea is urgent: listen, understand, act.

Walking Across Bridges

A retelling of the Walk for Reconciliation. As thousands crossed the Sydney Harbour Bridge, hope emerged. A rainbow serpent of unity. "They've written sorry across the sky."

**THE SHOW HAS ALWAYS BEEN MORE THAN MOURNING,
IT'S ABOUT SURVIVAL. ABOUT MEMORY. ABOUT STRENGTH
IT TAKES TO KEEP GOING, TO KEEP LOVING, TO KEEP
TELLING THE STORY.**

WESLEY ENOCH, WRITER

WRITERS NOTES

When Deb and I created The 7 Stages of Grieving back in the mid-90s, we didn't know it would travel the way it has, across decades, across country, across hearts. It came from a deep need to tell the truth of our experiences as First Nations people, and to do it with clarity, humour, and ceremony. We were young, bold, and ready to make something that spoke to the grief we carry, not just as individuals, but as a people. In many ways it was an act of love between us and to see it grow and mature in the hands of so many talented First Nations artists is point of pride.

The show has always been about more than mourning, it's about survival. About memory. About the strength it takes to keep going, to keep loving, to keep telling the story.

Why is it still relevant? Because the story hasn't ended. The grief continues, but so does the resilience. Each time it's performed, The 7 Stages becomes a call to listen, to feel, and to reckon—with history, with justice, with ourselves.

Wesley Enoch
Writer

THIS IS A PLAY THAT INVITES YOU TO SIT WITH DISCOMFORT, TO LAUGH, TO CRY, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, TO LISTEN.

BOBBI HENRY, DIRECTOR

DIRECTORS NOTES

The 7 Stages of Grieving is one of Australia's most enduring and powerful theatrical works. Written by two of the country's most celebrated artists, Deborah Mailman and Wesley Enoch, this seminal play continues to resonate deeply, thirty years after it was first performed.

At its heart, The 7 Stages of Grieving is a story of strength, survival, and the unyielding spirit of First Nations people. It is a deeply personal and political work, as relevant today as it was in 1995, that gives voice to the ongoing experiences of grief and resistance within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Through humour, sorrow, rage and hope, it challenges audiences to listen, reflect, and reckon with our shared history.

Told through a compelling series of 23 vignettes, the play follows the journey of the "Everywoman," a character through whom we witness stories of loss, identity, injustice, and ultimately, healing. This one-woman show is a tour de force of First Nations storytelling, filled with layered nuance and cultural truth. It serves not only as a personal journey, but also a national one, a call for recognition, understanding, and reconciliation.

This production has been an extraordinary creative journey. I have been fortunate to collaborate with a bold and passionate team whose insight and generosity have helped shape a work that honours the legacy of this play while speaking directly to the present moment. At the centre of the production are two exceptional performers, Shahnee Hunter and alternate actor Shontane Farmer, whose courage, generosity and strength of performance breathe new life into this important story.

This is a play that invites you to sit with discomfort, to laugh, to cry, and, most importantly, to listen. I hope it moves you. I hope it challenges you. And I hope it stays with you long after the final moment.

Bobbi Henry
Director

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

The 7 Stages of Grieving is a powerful and poetic theatrical work that inhabits a deeply emotional and culturally resonant world shaped by memory, mourning, survival, and resistance. The world of this solo performance is at once specific to the lived experience of Aboriginal people and universal in its exploration of grief and resilience. Created by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, the play weaves personal narrative with political history, creating a rich, symbolic, and affective landscape.

Below are the defining features of the play's world:

Cultural and Spiritual Landscape

The play is grounded in Aboriginal knowledge systems, practices, and spirituality. Ceremonial elements like the smoking of eucalyptus leaves, singing in language, and the symbolic use of red earth create a sacred performance space. Ancestral presence, rituals of mourning, and cultural kinship shape the emotional terrain. The Woman is both storyteller and conduit for collective memory, bridging past and present.

Political and Historical Memory

This is a world haunted by colonisation. Stories of dispossession, invasion, the Stolen Generations, and deaths in custody form the political backbone of the play. Historical moments like the 1967 Referendum, the Walk for Reconciliation, and contemporary protest marches are interwoven with deeply personal narratives, demonstrating that the political is personal, and grief is ongoing.

Grief as Structure

The play is organised around the seven stages of grieving, shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, and acceptance. These stages structure the dramaturgy and offer a lens through which to understand the multifaceted impacts of cultural loss and trauma. But this grieving is not linear, it loops, surges, and quiets, echoing the complexities of intergenerational pain and healing.

Shifting Temporal and Physical Space

The world of the play moves fluidly between physical settings, a funeral, a childhood home, a courtroom, a protest, and a grave, without ever needing realistic sets. These spaces are often abstract or suggested through sound, projection, or movement. Similarly, time shifts between past and present, allowing history to be relived, reclaimed, and reinterpreted.

Urban and Institutional Violence

Despite its spiritual depth, the play does not shy away from confronting the harsh realities of Aboriginal lives in contemporary Australia, police brutality, systemic racism, media stereotypes, and bureaucratic indifference. Court reports, funeral notices, and surveillance are referenced in stark, unsentimental ways.

Community and Kinship

The presence of family, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, aunts, brothers, grounds the woman's grief in love and connection. These familial ties are not always harmonious, but they provide continuity and context. Community is both comfort and tension, shaped by shared experiences of loss, resilience, and celebration.

Storytelling and Testimony

Central to the play is the act of storytelling. The world of The 7 Stages of Grieving is one where voice is reclamation. Through direct address, poetic monologue, and cultural performance, the Woman breaks silences, shares truth, and invites the audience into a shared space of witnessing. Story becomes survival.

Resistance and Reconciliation

While rooted in sorrow, the play also gestures toward healing and future possibility. It calls for action, empathy, and collective responsibility. Reconciliation is not presented as a neat resolution but as a process requiring recognition, respect, and truth-telling.

A Nation in Mourning

Ultimately, the world of The 7 Stages of Grieving is not just Aboriginal, it is Australia. The play holds a mirror to the nation, urging it to reckon with its past and present. It is a world where mourning is both an individual and national act, and where grief has the power to transform.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The Seven Stages of Grief

- Research the Kübler-Ross model of grief.
- Compare the clinical model with how grief is represented culturally in the play.
- Create a visual map linking each scene to a stage of grief.

Timeline of Indigenous Australian History

- Create a timeline of significant events impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (e.g., 1788 colonisation, 1967 Referendum, Mabo Decision, 2008 Apology).
- Include key references from the play alongside historical events

Protest and Performance

- Investigate real-world Aboriginal protests and movements referenced in the play (e.g., the 1997 Walk for Reconciliation, Black Lives Matter rallies).

Storytelling as Resistance

- Research another Aboriginal play, film, or novel and compare how grief and resilience are represented.

Character as Community

- Although the play features a solo performer, she embodies many voices.
- Create a character map that identifies the different roles and stories she shares.

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS



PERFORMANCE STYLES, & CONVENTIONS

The 7 Stages of Grieving utilises a wide range of performance styles and theatrical conventions to create a powerful and emotionally resonant experience. At its core, the play is a **monodrama**, performed by a single actor who delivers a series of **monologues** and **vignettes**. This solo performance requires the actor to undergo **transformation of character**, using expressive skills such as voice, movement, gesture, and facial expression to embody different characters and perspectives. The structure of the play is **non-linear**, composed of short scenes or **vignettes** that are thematically connected rather than narratively driven. Each vignette explores a unique aspect of grief, memory, or cultural identity, employing varied forms such as song, movement, monologue, and visual storytelling.

Direct address is a key convention in the play, with the performer frequently breaking the fourth wall to speak directly to the audience. This creates intimacy and immediacy, drawing the audience into the world of the play and evoking traditional modes of Aboriginal storytelling. Storytelling and oral tradition are central to the work, allowing the performer to act as a contemporary knowledge-keeper, sharing personal and communal truths that have often been silenced or excluded from dominant histories.

The play is also a strong example of **political theatre**. It engages with critical themes such as colonisation, intergenerational trauma, systemic injustice, and reconciliation. The stage becomes a space for protest, truth-telling, and empowerment. While the themes are often heavy, the play incorporates moments of humour and wit. **Comedy** functions as a tool of resilience, resistance, and community connection, providing relief and reflecting the lived experiences of many Aboriginal people.

Symbolism plays a significant role in the production, with set and props, such as the tea cup, suitcase, white lace cloth, sand, and museum cases, serving as layered metaphors for displacement, colonisation, and cultural survival. **Physical theatre** techniques enhance this symbolism, as the performer uses their body to express emotional and metaphorical content, creating a visceral connection between movement and meaning.

Multimedia and **audio-visual** integration further enrich the storytelling. Projections, soundscapes, and lighting design contribute to the atmosphere and emotional tone of the production, reinforcing themes of memory, identity, and resistance. These elements create an immersive and sensory experience that complements the play's narrative and performative layers.

THE EVERYWOMAN

At the heart of The 7 Stages of Grieving is a single character often referred to as The Woman or The Everywoman. She is not a single individual with a fixed identity, but rather a symbolic figure, shaped by many voices and experiences. She embodies the collective strength, sorrow, and survival of Aboriginal women across generations. In this way, she becomes more than a character, she stands in for mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and aunties who have lived through the enduring impacts of colonisation, dispossession, cultural erasure, and systemic injustice. At the same time, she reflects the resilience, humour, and deep cultural knowledge that continues to be passed down through Aboriginal communities. Her identity is fluid, constantly shifting between different roles, emotions, and stories, mirroring the lived realities of many First Nations women who carry multiple burdens and responsibilities while maintaining a strong connection to culture, family, and Country.

The character transforms across 23 vignettes, shifting between roles that include a mourner at a funeral, a protestor, a storyteller, a witness, and even a comedian. These transformations are made through changes in voice, physicality, rhythm, and energy, allowing the actor to embody a chorus of different perspectives while maintaining the emotional throughline of the play.

**POST-SHOW QUESTIONS RELATING TO PERFORMANCE STYLES & CONVENTIONS
CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 48**

SET DESIGN

A NOTE FROM CHARLOTTE MEAGHER, SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

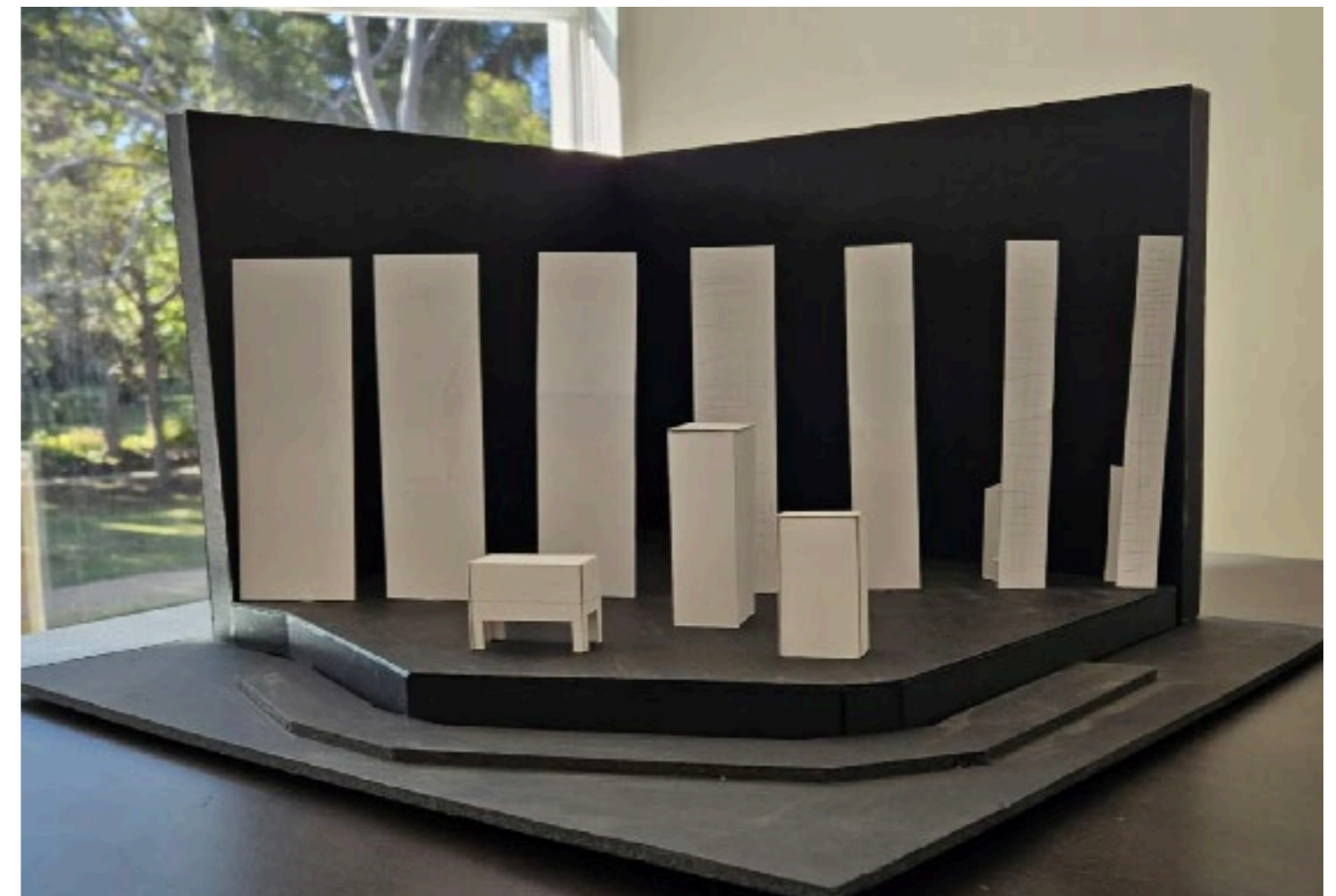
The 7 stages of grieving is a play about reclamation and reconciliation.

The creative development required a lot of research. I reference Sally Morgan's autobiography, *My Place*, heavily throughout the lace insignia and tea cup. Her autobiography explores the fractured identity of Sally and her family, who discover their Indigenous identity in adolescence after being ostracised by their community. At the centre of the story is her grandmother, Daisy, a Bailgu woman from the Pilbarra, who grew up part of the Stolen Generation. Daisy struggles to come to terms with her history, a god-fearing woman who refuses to speak her language, whilst practising bush medicine at home. It's a very beautiful and compelling book that speaks to a larger issue of Australia rewriting our past.

I also referenced Alexis Wright's book, *Praiseworthy*, in her use of a menacing fog that hangs over a small town.

The empty museum cabinets are a proposition to the audience. Why are they empty? What has been taken? Who does history belong to?

For my design, I considered the stage and how the audience are positioned in the venue. A thrust stage usually creates problems and opportunities- it is both intimate and limiting. By placing objects downstage creates sight lines- areas that obscure the performer from the audience. I decided to cut the stage in half with the fabric panels, as the performance only requires one performer. Having less space heightens the emotions- there is less movement for the actor to move, which can be claustrophobic and uncomfortable (a good thing when discussing colonialism!) The fabric panels are sheer and create beautiful colours under the projector, and required a lot of tests to get it right.



SET DESIGN

The design of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* plays a crucial role in deepening the audience's engagement with its themes of loss, survival, identity, and truth-telling. As a work centred on reclamation and reconciliation, the visual and material language of the production has been carefully constructed by set designer Charlotte Meagher, to evoke memory, challenge dominant narratives, and reflect the emotional landscape of the play. The set and props are rich with symbolism, each item carefully chosen not just for its aesthetic or functional value, but for its capacity to carry cultural, historical, and political weight, inviting audiences to reflect on what has been taken, what remains, and what must be remembered.

Tea Cup

The tea cup is a powerful symbol that bridges the intimate and the political. On one hand, it evokes warmth, routine, and familial connection, objects of everyday comfort. On the other, it carries the weight of colonial influence, referencing British customs that were introduced and often imposed during colonisation. Within *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the tea cup becomes a quiet emblem of cultural tension, a fragile object reflecting the vulnerability of Aboriginal traditions under the pressure of dominant Western ideals. It can also be seen as a subtle nod to the stolen generations, where family life was fractured and familiar objects came to hold echoes of what was lost, rather than what was present.

White Lace Cloth

White lace, often associated with European refinement, order, and femininity, stands as a symbol of colonial ideals of "civilisation" and propriety. Draped in the performance space, it suggests the imposition of Western values over Aboriginal culture, covering or concealing something raw, sacred, or natural beneath. It subtly gestures to how colonisation has dressed over a complex and ancient culture with its own systems and traditions.

Suitcase

The suitcase is a powerful symbol of displacement and movement. It conjures images of removal, escape, exile, and survival. For Aboriginal people, it can represent forced removals, missions, and policies that tore families apart. Within the play, it also becomes a vessel of memory, carrying the emotional and historical weight of intergenerational trauma, but also stories, resilience, and continuity.

Sand

Sand is a direct connection to Country. It embodies grounding, identity, and ancestry, a tactile reminder of place, belonging, and deep time. In the play, the sand may be used as both a literal and spiritual space: a place of burial, ceremony, storytelling, and resistance. Its presence asserts the unbroken relationship between First Nations peoples and their land, despite ongoing attempts at erasure.

Museum Cases

The perspex museum cases evoke the sterile, institutional spaces where Aboriginal artefacts, bodies, and histories have been kept, often without consent. These cases are a striking visual reminder of how Indigenous culture has been collected, displayed, and preserved as if it were a relic of the past, rather than a living, dynamic presence. Their transparency may also serve to critique the way Aboriginal history has been made visible on colonial terms, while hiding or excluding lived truths and voices.

Condensation

The condensation that gradually builds within one of the perspex cases acts as a quiet yet powerful metaphor. It reflects the emotional pressure, suffocation, and unresolved grief that has accumulated across generations of First Nations people. The trapped moisture distorts the view inside, symbolising the way truth is often obscured or suppressed. Over time, the condensation builds, just as grief, trauma, and resistance do, until it inevitably seeks release. This visual moment mirrors the journey of the play itself, culminating in an emotional and cathartic letting go, a reclaiming of space, and the start of healing.

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS RELATING TO SET DESIGN CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 50

AUDIO VISUAL DESIGN

The Audio-visual design by Emma Fishwick, plays a powerful role in *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, enriching the storytelling with emotional depth and striking visual poetry.

Projections are used throughout the work to evoke memory, history, and the passage of time, layering imagery of land, archival footage, and cultural symbols to support the solo performer's journey.

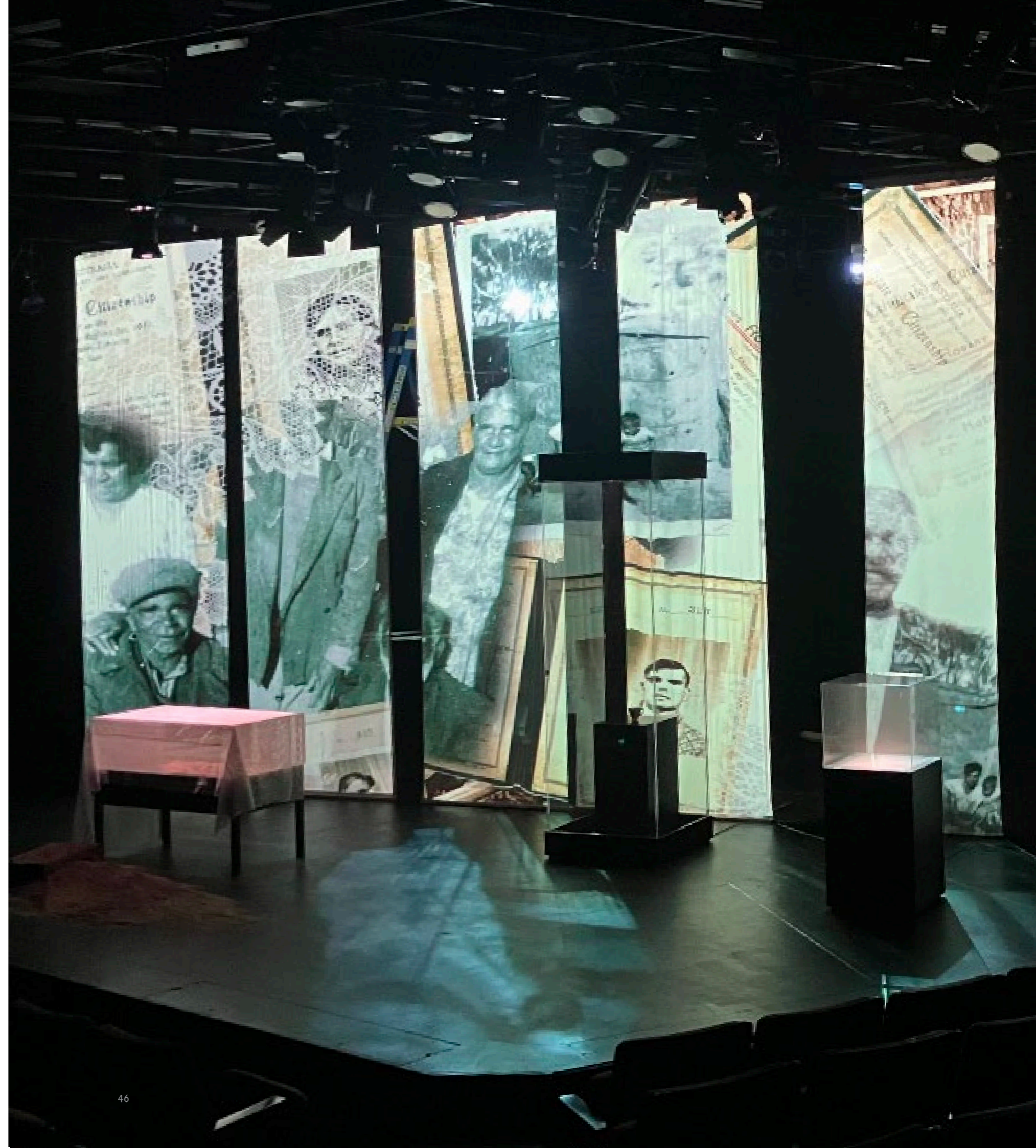
These visual elements create a dynamic landscape that shifts with each vignette, grounding the audience in both place and emotion.

The sound, designed and composed by Rebecca Riggs-Bennett, further amplifies the experience, blending atmospheric textures with music and voice to underscore key moments of grief, resistance, and resilience.

Together, the audio-visual elements act as a bridge between the personal and political, past and present, inviting audiences to feel as well as understand the stories being shared.

CREDITS

All audio and visual sources used in Yirra Yaakin's 2025 production of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* have been thoughtfully selected to support and enhance the storytelling, cultural context, and thematic depth of the production. We gratefully recognise the contributions of the original creators, artists, and archives whose work features in this staging. Every effort has been made to ensure appropriate permissions and attributions are in place, reflecting our commitment to cultural respect and artistic integrity.



POST SHOW



POST PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION

Now that you have watched the performance discuss the following questions:

THEMES - (Page 11)

- In what ways does the performance reflect the ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- How is resilience shown throughout the vignettes? What moments or characters stood out to you as symbols of strength?
- What does the play say about identity, both cultural and personal? How does the performer convey the complexity of identity through their performance?
- How does The 7 Stages of Grieving balance pain and hope? Are there moments that felt particularly uplifting or healing?
- How is Country represented in the play? What is its significance to the stories being told?
- How might this play challenge non-Indigenous audiences to reflect on their own understanding of Australian history and truth-telling? How is the concept of reconciliation portrayed in the play? Do you think it offers hope, challenge, or critique?
- What parallels can you draw between the issues in the play and current events in Australia?
- What role can young people play in continuing the conversation about truth-telling and reconciliation?

PERFORMANCE STYLES & CONVENTIONS (Page 38)

Vignette Structure

- How does the non-linear structure of The 7 Stages of Grieving affect your understanding of the narrative?
- Why do you think the playwrights chose to present the story through a series of disconnected (yet thematically linked) vignettes rather than a traditional beginning–middle–end structure?
- In what ways does the non-linear format reflect the process of grief or cultural memory?
- Did the shifting timeframes and scenes help or hinder your emotional engagement with the work? Why?

Political Theatre

- In what ways does the play function as a piece of political theatre?
- What messages or calls to action are communicated through performance?

Comedy and Humour

- How is comedy used in the play?
- What role does humour play in the context of heavy themes like grief, colonisation, and cultural survival?

THE EVERYWOMAN (Page 39)

Symbolic Representation

- In what ways does the Woman represent more than one individual?
- How does the play use her character to reflect the experiences of many Aboriginal women?

Shifting Identity

- Why do you think the character takes on different voices, emotions, and stories throughout the play?
- What does this shifting identity tell us about the complexity of Aboriginal identity and history?

Emotional Range and Performance

- How does the performer use expressive skills (such as voice, movement, and facial expression) to portray different characters and emotions within the one role?
- What impact does this have on your understanding of the character and her journey?

Connection to Culture and Community

- How is the Woman's connection to Country, culture, and family shown in the play?
- In what ways does she become a storyteller or knowledge-keeper?

Resilience and Resistance

- How is the Woman's resilience portrayed throughout the play?
- Can you identify moments where she resists the dominant narrative or reclaims power?

Personal Reflection

- What emotions did her performance evoke in you, and how did they shift across different scenes?

POST PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION

SET DESIGN (Page 40)

- What symbolic meanings can you identify in the objects used on stage, such as the tea cup, lace cloth, suitcase, sand, and museum cases?
- How does the use of sand (earth) connect to Aboriginal concepts of Country, identity, and ancestry?
- Why do you think the set includes perspex museum cases? What message might this send about how Indigenous culture has been treated historically?
- What do you think the condensation inside one of the perspex cases represents? How does it connect to the themes of grief, pressure, and emotional release?
- How does the restricted space on the thrust stage contribute to the overall emotional tone and meaning of the play?

AUDIO VISUAL DESIGN (Page 44)

- In what ways do the audio-visual elements (projections, soundscape, lighting) enhance or deepen the storytelling in the performance?
- How do projected images and archival footage help communicate ideas about memory, history, and cultural identity?
- Discuss how sound and music are used to build atmosphere. How do they support the emotional journey of the performer?
- Can you identify a moment where the AV design had a strong emotional impact on you? Why was it effective?

ACTIVITY REVIEWING LIVE PERFORMANCE

ACTIVITY

Write a review of *The 7 Stages of Grieving*

There are many different ways to write a review, as reviews express an individual's thoughts and feelings about a show. Traditional reviews will often give the reader brief background information about a production including:

Title of show (mention playwright or choreographer if relevant)

- Is it an adaptation of another text? An original work?
- Identify the company presenting or performing the show
- Where is this show being performed?

Briefly outline plot and themes

- Make sure not to include any spoilers
- Were the themes/issues effectively conveyed to the audience?
- How do the characters and relationships communicate these?
- Does the design (e.g. set, costumes, lighting, sound and audio visual) contribute to the conveyance of themes/issues?
- Consider symbols and metaphors.
- How do style and form play a part in communicating these?

Provide an idea of what the design elements are

- Think about set, lighting, costume, elements and sound
- How did the design choices convey place, time and situation (dramatic meaning or context)?
- What atmosphere and mood were the creative team aiming for?
- How successful were they in achieving their goals?

Evaluate the writing, production and performances

- You might consider things like: Were there any stand out performances or design elements? Why? What were the technical aspects of the production that stood out?

In the digital age, the act of reviewing has changed immensely. It has enabled platforms for a broad range of voices to participate in the reviewing process that previously would not have been heard. Have a go at writing a 140-character Twitter review of the work.



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