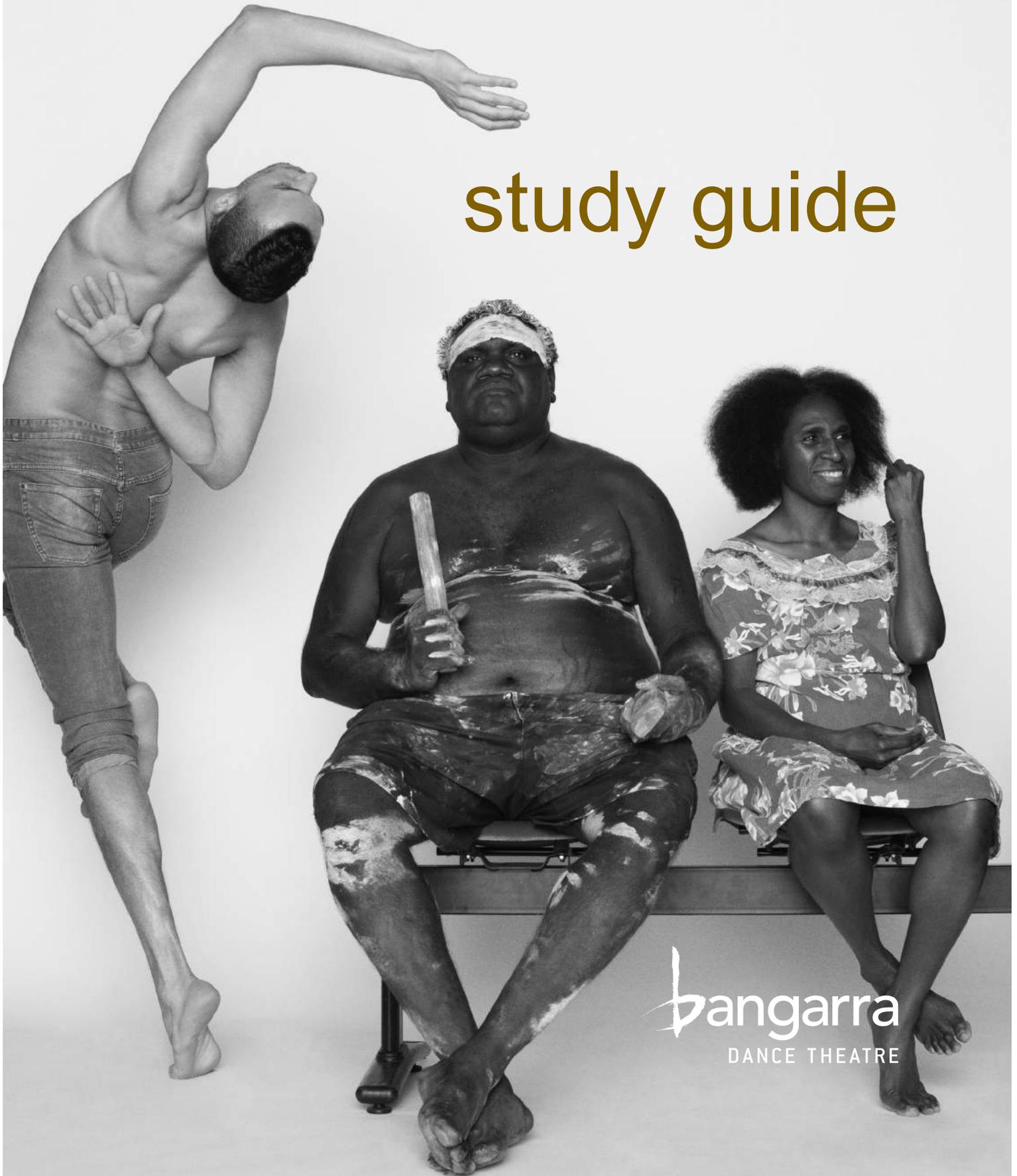


ones country

study guide



bangarra
DANCE THEATRE

Dear Teacher,

The information in this study guide provides contextual background and details for the three dance works, ***Dathu, Place and Whistler***, which make up the program, ***ONES COUNTRY***.

We hope this resource will be useful in preparing your students to experience the work of Bangarra fully, and provide guidance for your focus on any curriculum material you wish to incorporate into the excursion.

The study guide is not prescriptive in terms of intent or meaning, and allows for individual responses to the works.

THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Cross-curricula priority:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories & Cultures;

General Capabilities:

Critical and Creative Thinking, Intercultural Understanding and Literacy.

Learning areas:

The Arts, (Dance, Music, Visual Arts)

NSW SYLLABUS:

Creative arts: Dance, Drama, Visual Arts, Music.

HSIE: Aboriginal Studies, History, Aboriginal Languages

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Bangarra Dance Theatre - introduction

... WHO IS BANGARRA?

Bangarra is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for its powerful dancing, distinctive theatrical voice and utterly unique soundscapes, music, and design.

Bangarra was founded in 1989 by American dancer and choreographer, Carole Johnson. Since 1991 Bangarra has been led by Artistic Director and choreographer, Stephen Page. The company is based at Walsh Bay in Sydney and presents performance seasons in Australian capital cities, regional towns, and remote areas. Bangarra also takes its productions to many places around the world including Europe, Asia and USA.

... WHY IS THE WORK OF BANGARRA IMPORTANT?

Bangarra exists to create a foundation for the preservation and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural life. Through its performance seasons and touring of dance theatre productions, Bangarra provides the opportunity for people of all cultural backgrounds to be able to have a contemporary experience of the world's oldest living culture. Over the past three decades, Bangarra has nurtured the careers of hundreds of Indigenous professional artists, including dancers, choreographers, composers and designers and produced over thirty original works for its repertoire. Bangarra has also collaborated on the creation of new productions with other Australian performing arts companies such as The Australian Ballet and Sydney Theatre Company. In 2016, in partnership with Brown Cab Productions and Arenamedia, Bangarra produced its first feature film, *Spear*.

... WHO ARE THE ARTISTS?

Bangarra's dancers and collaborating artists come from all over Australia, including the major indigenous groups in relation to location, which are: Torres Strait Islanders, Queensland (Murri), New South Wales (Koori), Victoria (Koorie), South Australia (Anangu), Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Yolngu), Coast and Midwest Western Australia (Yamatji), Southern Western Australia (Noongar), Central Western Australia (Wangai) and Tasmania (Palawah). Some of the dancers are graduates of The National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College (NSW), while others received their training at the Aboriginal College of Performing Arts (Qld), and others are graduates of dance courses delivered by universities around Australia.

Connecting to the source

... TELLING THE STORIES

Story telling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is the basis for transferring traditional knowledge and keeping cultural identity strong. Stories can be told through song, music, dance, and art, connecting people to land and language. Stories are critical to cultural maintenance and the contemporary interface with tradition.

... SHARING AND TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE

Each year Bangarra spends time in specific Indigenous communities, meeting with elders and traditional owners and living with the people of that community - learning about stories that connect the people and the natural life to the land. Everyone who works at Bangarra feels very strongly about their role in the company's work. They make sure that the stories they tell are true to the traditional owners of those stories and uphold the integrity of the stories' meanings.

... EXPERIENCING DANCE IN A THEATRICAL CONTEXT

It is important to note that dance theatre works are essentially the creation of artistic invention to express a broad range of ideas and thoughts. While some information is provided in the program notes and study guides the audience is free to interpret the work according to their individual perspectives and emotional responses.



Above: Nicola Sabatino, Daniel Riley, Tara Gower, Waangenga Blanco in rehearsal for *Whistler*.
Photo: Tiffany Parker

Background to the works

DATHU (*Ngathu*). Choreography: Djakapurra Munyarryun. Direction: Stephen Page

Sisters

Travelling slow / long

Picking – traditional

Picking – Contemporary

Travelling fast / short

Hitting – Traditional

Hitting – Contemporary

Travelling slow / short

White Cockatoo slow / fast / slow

Fire

Travelling fast / long

Wind

Sisters

PLACE. Choreography: Kaine Sultan-Babij

The concept of Place signifies attachment. This can be to a community, a value system, a Land, an environment, a history, a lived experience, a future, an identity or multiple identities. Connecting to culture provides purposeful and positive ways of claiming – or reclaiming one's place in the modern world.

A sense of Place orientates us to knowing who we are and how we live in a space that is related to the natural world, as well as the society we live in. Feeling out-of-place, being *displaced*, seeking a different place or fearing the disruption of our known place in the world is something we navigate our entire lives. In the lives of Indigenous people these layers of Place are complex, often challenging, but also something to be celebrated.



A fence – from the word 'defence' - provides a means to defend and protect a place, but a fence also serves to exclude.

A fence determines where the barriers are and invokes a feeling of 'inside' and 'outside'.

Fences are statements of demarcation, and moderators of freedom.

Fences can be physical structures, social constructs and emotional obstacles. They are often contestable and can involve forced negotiation, but they can also be useful and protective.

Our sense of 'place' is often shaped by the 'fences' or barriers we encounter in life and the effort we apply to finding our way around them. As our society imposes rules and limitations, that same society works to enable freedom, choice and equality.

Pushing beyond the social constructs that are imposed upon us can present tough challenges, however the embracing of fundamental truth through connection to culture can empower people and make our society strong.

Kaine Sultan-Babij's work *Place* began its creative development with the dancers responding to concepts and ideas that were offered as tasks. For example, the dancers were asked to imagine themselves coming face to face with an oppressor. How would they respond? How would they negotiate the imposition of a barrier, and express that through movement? They were also asked to imagine themselves as the Caterpillar, the creator of the landscape. How would they shape that landscape? How would they shape the 'home' from below the surface? For Duo, they explored the value of positive relationships. The discovery of free expression, and the inner strength that builds and grows when the barriers no longer apply, because they serve no purpose, is illustrated in the final solo, Sara Moany.

Place is structured in four sections:

1. **Dark**
2. **Caterpillar**
3. **Duo**
4. **Sara Moany**



Tyrel Dulvarie, Yolanda Lowatta and Kaine Sultan-Babij in rehearsal for *Place*.
Photo: Tiffany Parker

WHISTLER. Choreography: Elma Kris & Nicola Sabatino

Elma Kris' and Nicola Sabatino's work *Whistler* draws on the writings and research of Torres Strait linguist and community elder, Mr Ephraim Bani, who was born on Mabuiag Island, in the Torres Strait. Bani's writing about the dugong, *Warupau: Echo of the Drum* (1992) was a particular inspiration. The work is also inspired by the choreographers own lived experience as Torres Strait women.

Dugongs are found in a number of tropical and subtropical sea and coastal environments around the world, concentrated around the northern Australia and SE Asia, parts of the west coast of India and the East coast of Africa, and right up to the Red Sea. Dugongs are travelers, covering many hundreds, sometimes thousands of kilometers. The reasons for their travel is largely to do with the location of feeding grounds, changing habitats, and the interference of sea traffic on their traditional travel routes.

Dugongs are herbivores. They feed on the sea grasses of the ocean beds, consuming up to 40 kilos of grass per day. Male dugongs can grow to over 2.5 meters and will weigh about 300 kilos on average. While they are not classified as endangered they are regarded vulnerable to abandoned fishing nets, loss of habitat and boats. Their natural predators are sharks, whales, stone fish and crocodiles.

The feeding habits of the dugong are very specific and change depending on the current and the depth of the sea bed grasses. Hunters learn to observe the trail of eaten grasses to know where the dugong are travelling, and once a dugong is caught, every part of the animal is used – for food, food preservation, ornaments and tools.



Above: Linocut - *Kaidaral, Dhangal Um Araik*. Artist: Billy Missi, Torres Strait Islands. Studio: Moalgau Minneral Art Centre Moa Island (TSI)

There are many traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories related to the dugong. Many Torres Strait Islanders have dugong as their totem and the animal is also an important food resource for communities.

Kris' and Sabatino's work *Whistler* explores some of the many fascinating behaviours of this unique and extraordinary sea creature and the special relationship that the people of the Torres Strait have developed over hundreds of years with dugongs. In the dugong cycle of life, females are given different names. When they are pregnant they are called Kazil Ay, when they give birth, Nanayg, when they are teaching their calves to feed and fend for themselves they are called Apukaz.

The male dugong protects the new mother and calf (or calves as sometimes Dugongs give birth to twins) until the calf is ready to survive on its own. The male dugongs are known as Barakuthaw Garka (husband). Dugong society is also hierarchical and there is always one dugong who steps up as the leader (Thuawlayg). When the leader dugong is caught either by harpoon or fish net, they will put up a fight – in some instances trying to drag their hunters to the depths of the ocean. In this instance, the hunter is forced to cut the line to save himself. The sound of the leader dugong blowing air on the surface of the sea has earned him the title *Whistler*. He is to be both feared and respected.

There are six sections in the work *Whistler*:

1. **Talking Grass**
2. **Pregnant Dugong,**
3. **New born Calves**
4. **Ghost nets,**
5. **Mating**
6. **Whistler.**



Elma Kris, Nicola Sabatino and Peggy Misi on location in Torres Strait.
Photo: Tiffany Parker

Creative team

Artistic Director: Stephen Page

Cultural consultants: Djakapurra Munyarryun, Peggy Misi

Choreographers: Djakapurra Munyarryun, Stephen Page, Elma Kris, Nicola Sabatino, Kaine Sultan-Babij

Composer: Steve Francis

Costume Designs: Jennifer Irwin

Set Designs: Jacob Nash

Lighting Designs: Matt Cox



Djakapurra Munyarryun, Elma Kris, Kaine Sultan-Babij.

Photo:

Edward Mulvihill

Pre-show activities

Explore this Study Guide, noting the background to the works and images on pages 6 to 9.

Initiate discussion either as a class or in small focus groups, noting that works produced by Bangarra Dance Theatre use the creative medium of dance, music and design to tell stories and provoke thinking about culture, people and the lands and environments we share.

Suggested broad themes might be First Contact, colonisation, cultural identities, traditional practices, Indigenous perspectives, environmental care, social constructs.

More specifically, you may wish to initiate and discuss contemporary social-cultural perspectives, for examples locating and navigating personal identity, cross-cultural identities and/or the importance and intersections of place, habitat and story.

Build the discussion to incorporate **a range of perspectives** and encourage students to investigate the importance of being aware of the stories *within* the stories. You may like to discuss historiographic practices, the validity of oral history and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

A further reading list has been provided to support the above activities on page 12.

Post-show activities

After attending the performance, there are a number of ways for students to process what they have experienced. Here are a few suggestions.

- Reflecting on what they were already aware of in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, how did the dance works in the program develop or shift any of their perspectives?
- Ask students to write a critical analysis of one of the works.
- Respond to one of the works through illustration / story board / collage or other visual art making.
- Take one scene and identify and describe the elements of dance, music and design, and how they work together to consolidate the strength of the work.

Further resources & links

ONLINE

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Queensland Government.
<https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/wildlife/animals-az/dugong.html>

The Story of Gelam, the creator of the dugong.
 Picture this series. State Library of Queensland.
<https://vimeo.com/28195207>

Hear what the Dugong sounds like.
 Click the loud speaker icon



'The Art of seeing Aboriginal Australia's queer potential'. The Conversation, April 2014.
<http://theconversation.com/the-art-of-seeing-aboriginal-australias-queer-potential-25588>

BOOKS & JOURNALS: non-fiction

Ecology and Conservation of the Sirenia: Dugongs and Manatees.
 Issue 18 of Conservation Biology
 March, H; O'Shea, T.J; Reynolds, J.E; Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Woven histories, dancing lives: Torres Strait Islander identity, culture and history.
 Ed. Richard Davies. AIATSIS, ACT, 2003, 2004, 2012.

BOOKS: fiction

Wandihnu and the Old Dugong. Wymarra, Elizabeth & Wymarra, Wandihnu; Magabala, 2007.

YEAR 7

... History (Humanities and Social Sciences)

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- Students build on and consolidate their **understanding of historical inquiry** from previous years in depth, using a range of sources for the study of the ancient past ([ACDSEH001](#))
- The range of sources that can be used in an **historical investigation**, including archaeological and written sources ([ACDSEH029](#))
- **The nature of sources** for [ancient](#) Australia and what they reveal about Australia's past in the [ancient](#) period, such as the use of resources ([ACDSEH031](#))
- **The importance of conserving the remains of the [ancient](#) past**, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACDSEH148](#))

HISTORICAL SKILLS

- Sequence **historical events**, developments and periods ([ACHHS205](#))
- Identify a range of questions about the past to inform a **historical inquiry** ([ACHHS207](#))
- Identify the **origin and purpose of primary and [secondary sources](#)** ([ACHHS209](#))
- Locate, compare, select and **use information** from a range of sources as [evidence](#) ([ACHHS210](#))
- **Draw conclusions** about the usefulness of sources ([ACHHS211](#))

...The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse how choreographers use [elements of dance](#) and production elements to communicate intent ([ACADAR018](#))

- Identify and connect **specific features and purposes of dance** from contemporary and past times to explore [viewpoints](#) and enrich their dance-making, starting with dance in Australia and including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACADAR019](#))
-

... The Arts

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse composers' use of the [elements of music](#) and stylistic features when listening to and interpreting music ([ACAMUR097](#))
 - Identify and connect **specific features and purposes of music** from different eras to explore [viewpoints](#) and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
-

YEAR 8

...English

LITERATURE

- Explore the ways that **ideas and viewpoints in literary texts** drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups ([ACELT1626](#))
- Explore the **interconnectedness of Country/Place, People, Identity and Culture** in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors ([ACELT1806](#))

RESPONDING TO LITERATURE

- Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate **opinions and arguments** about aspects of literary texts ([ACELT1627](#))

...The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse how choreographers use [elements of dance](#) and production elements to communicate intent ([ACADAR018](#))
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of dance from contemporary and past times to explore [viewpoints](#) and enrich their dance-making, starting with dance in Australia and including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACADAR019](#))

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse composers' use of the [elements of music](#) and stylistic features when listening to and interpreting music ([ACAMUR097](#))
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of music from different eras to explore [viewpoints](#) and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACAMUR098](#))

YEAR 9

... English

LITERATURE

- Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1633](#))
- Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts ([ACELT1635](#))

CREATING TEXTS

- [Create](#) imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that present a [point of view](#) and advance or illustrate arguments, including texts that integrate visual, print and/or audio features ([ACELY1746](#))

... History

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- The nature and extent of the movement of peoples in the period (slaves, convicts and settlers) ([ACOKFH015](#))
- The extent of European imperial expansion and different responses, including in the Asian region ([ACOKFH017](#))

MOVEMENT OF PEOPLES (1750 – 1901)

- Experiences of slaves, convicts and free settlers upon departure, their journey abroad, and their reactions on arrival, including the Australian experience ([ACDSEH083](#))
- The short and long-term impacts of the movement of peoples during this period ([ACDSEH085](#))

MAKING A NATION

- The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACDSEH020](#))

... The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse a range of dance from contemporary and past times to explore differing [viewpoints](#) and enrich their dance making, starting with dance from Australia and including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider dance in international contexts ([ACADAR026](#))

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse a range of music from contemporary and past times to explore differing [viewpoints](#) and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider music in international contexts ([ACAMUR105](#))
-

YEAR 10

... English

LANGUAGE

- Evaluate the impact on audiences of different choices in the representation of still and moving images ([ACELA1572](#))

LITERATURE AND CONTEXT

- Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1639](#))
- Analyse and explain how [text](#) structures, [language features](#) and [visual features](#) of texts and the [context](#) in which texts are experienced may influence [audience](#) response ([ACELT1641](#))

INTERPRETING, ANALYSING, EVALUATING

- Identify and analyse implicit or explicit values, beliefs and assumptions in texts and how these are influenced by purposes and likely audiences ([ACELY1752](#))

... The Arts

DANCE CONTENT

- Analyse a range of dance from contemporary and past times to explore differing [viewpoints](#) and enrich their dance making, starting with dance from Australia and including dance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider dance in international contexts ([ACADAR026](#))

MUSIC CONTENT

- Analyse a range of music from contemporary and past times to explore differing [viewpoints](#) and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider music in international contexts ([ACAMUR105](#))

