

MACQUARIE PEN ANTHOLOGY *of* AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

TEACHING GUIDE

Unit 10: Writers at Play

for Upper Secondary English

www.macquariepenanthology.com.au



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Writers at Play

FOCUS	Exploring ways that experimentation and play with word, image and ideas allow writers to make their mark on the literary landscape.
LEVEL	Upper Secondary
LENGTH	<p>Approximately 12 –18 lessons</p> <p>Teachers are encouraged to make choices of texts they think will suit their groups and similarly choose the most appropriate activities. The listed additional texts are examples of other innovative and exploratory texts that could be adapted to the format of these lessons. The length of time spent on this unit will change according to how many texts are selected for study and which of the activities are chosen.</p>
KEY TEXTS	<p>From the <i>Anthology</i>:</p> <p>Beveridge, Judith: ‘Yachts’ Farmer, Beverley: ‘Ismini’ Hewett, Dorothy: <i>Wild Card</i> Jolley, Elizabeth: ‘Night Runner’ Rankin, Jennifer: ‘Cliffs’ Vu, Chi: <i>Vietnam: A psychic guide</i></p> <p>Supplementary resources:</p> <p><i>Anthology</i> film clips from www.macquariepenanthology.com.au ‘ “Yachts”: a reading’ – Judith Beveridge ‘ “Halong Bay”: extract from a performance of <i>Vietnam: A psychic guide</i>’ ‘ “Xe Om”: extract from a performance of <i>Vietnam: A psychic guide</i>’ ‘Dorothy Hewitt’s life and writing in <i>Wild Card</i>’ – Nicole Moore</p>

<p>ADDITIONAL TEXTS</p>	<p>Additional examples of texts from the <i>Anthology</i> that teachers could use for this unit include:</p> <p>Al-Samawy, Yahia: ‘Your Voice is My Flute’ Cambridge, Ada: ‘An Answer’ Dawe, Bruce: ‘And a Good Friday Was Had By All’ Hartford, Lesbia: ‘My Heart is a Pomegranate’ Jones, Gail: ‘Modernity’ Johnson, Martin: ‘The Typewriter Considered as a Bee-Trap’ Neilson, Shaw: ‘The Girl with the Black Hair’; ‘The Orange Tree’</p>
<p>LEARNING & TEACHING ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Introduction</p>	<p>This unit requires students to read or view a variety of texts with differing forms and to discover how the authors of these texts use words, images, forms, ideas and conventional boundaries in fresh and surprising ways. The diverse and multicultural texts set for study require students to be textual detectives, exploring the nature and scope of experiment within them and assessing what writers achieve through their inventiveness.</p> <p>Students will be encouraged to use some metalanguage (eg: ‘metafiction’, ‘discourse’) where appropriate to describe the techniques they uncover.</p> <p>Students will be expected to demonstrate their understanding of how the writers of the texts have made their mark on the literary/filmic landscape and to develop a range of imaginative, interpretive and analytical compositions of their own.</p>
<p>1. Close study of ‘Ismini’ by Beverley Farmer</p> <p>(3-4 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 1(a) The class will read and discuss together Beverley Farmer’s short story ‘Ismini’. See Teacher Resource 1(a) for suggested questions.</p> <p>Activity 1(b) Ask students to write their own pen-portrait of someone well known to them by following the same instructions given to Ismini in the story. Encourage students to draw on some of Beverley Farmer’s visual techniques to give the images in their portrait resonance and liveliness.</p> <p>Ask them to exchange their portrait with a partner and ask each to critique the other’s images. Have they achieved a visual impact or are they a bit timid and static? How could they further experiment to make them more effective?</p>

	<p>Activity 1(c) Talk with students about keeping their own writer’s journal for the duration of this unit. Discuss the kind of things they could record: observations, ideas, reflections on others’ writing or their own writing, comments about ways of experimenting in writing etc.</p>
<p>2. Close study of Elizabeth Jolley’s story ‘Night Runner’ (2-3 lessons)</p>	<p>Elizabeth Jolley’s story ‘Night Runner’ with its black humour and wry observation makes an excellent introduction to the work of this Australian author and displays ways an author can challenge conventional thinking through fiction.</p> <p>Activity 2(a) Read Elizabeth Jolley’s story ‘Night Runner’ with the class. Provide them with Student Handout 2(a) asking them to read the questions before re-reading the story for themselves. They should make their own notes in response to the questions. Conclude with a whole class discussion.</p> <p>Activity 2(b) Ferguson and Sharpe think they have Nurse Wright’s measure but they have miscalculated very seriously. In pairs have students write short pieces from the point of view of Sharpe, Ferguson, Sister Bean, Matron and Ramsden beginning with their initial estimate of the narrator and then shifting to how they might view her at the end of the story.</p> <p>Activity 2(c) Tell students they are to create a montage of images in black and white that reveals their understanding and interpretation of the story ‘Night Runner’.</p> <p>Display the montages in the classroom and give each student one minute to describe the mood they wanted to convey through their montage and to justify the choice of images they selected.</p> <p>Activity 2(d) Allow time for students to reflect on their learning in their journals.</p> <p>Suggest to students that they might begin to look out for types of idiosyncratic behaviour in their everyday lives. As a personal experiment they could add observations about this in their journals or use it as a basis for their own experimental writing.</p>

<p>3. A reading of the poem 'Yachts' by Judith Beveridge</p> <p>(1-2 lessons)</p>	<p>The poem, 'Yachts', may be initially puzzling for some students because it has as its title an object, which is only alluded to in the last word of the poem (masts suggesting yachts).</p> <p>As it is a poem which lends itself to being read in subtle and expressive ways it would be helpful to ask two or three class members to prepare a reading they then perform for the class. Students should then be given the chance to read the poem more closely for themselves.</p> <p>After students have read the poem aloud, watch the film clip of Judith Beveridge reading 'Yachts' at www.macquariepenanthology.com.au. Ask the students whether they think this reading has enhanced their understanding or enjoyment of the poem.</p> <p>Activity 3(a) Provide the students with Student Handout 3(a) asking them to consider whether the author's comments illuminate her poem in any way. Discuss as a class whether they find Beveridge's technique in this poem exciting, frustrating, piquant, cryptic, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, some shade in between, or something else altogether.</p> <p>Activity 3(b) Ask students to write their own poem about an object using Beveridge's highly sensual way of defining it through metaphors and associative memories. Display these poems around the classroom.</p> <p>Activity 3(c) Allow time for students to reflect on their learning in their journals.</p>
<p>4. A reading of the poem 'Cliffs' by Jennifer Rankin</p> <p>(1-2 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 4(a) Ask students to read Jennifer Rankin's poem 'Cliffs' to themselves several times to prepare for creating a visual response in the form of a story board for a video to be made of the poem.</p> <p>Provide them with Student Handout 4(a) which gives them instructions about this task.</p> <p>Activity 4(b) Consider in pairs the critic Bonny Cassidy's comment that 'Cliffs' offers 'the multi-sensory poetic experience'. Does this throw light on your understanding of Rankin's poem?</p>

<p>5. Reading of an extract from Dorothy Hewett's autobiography <i>Wild Card</i> (2-3 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 5(a) Have students briefly research aspects of Hewett's life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • childhood and family life • values and beliefs • career as an awarded poet, playwright and prose writer. <p>Provide students with the extract from Hewett's autobiography from the <i>Anthology</i> to read in class. Then ask the students to pair up and answer the questions on Student Handout 5(a).</p> <p>Activity 5(b) Provide students with a choice of a creative task. See Student Handout 5(b).</p> <p>Activity 5(c) View the film clip 'Dorothy Hewett's life and writing in <i>Wild Card</i>' at www.macquariepenanthology.com.au, in which contributing editor to the <i>Anthology</i>, Nicole Moore, discusses Hewett's. Encourage students to consider Moore's discussion of Hewett when reflecting in their journals.</p> <p>Activity 5(d) Allow time for students to reflect on their learning in their journals. Encourage them to reflect on what they have learnt about autobiographical writing by exploring Hewett's extraordinarily detailed and musically expressed piece.</p>
<p>6. Reading an extract from Chi Vu's play <i>Vietnam: A psychic guide</i> (3-4 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 6(a) (Warm up activity) Ask the students to each recall a place they have visited which has strongly influenced their thoughts and feelings. Write a postcard which reflects their memories of this experience. Have them read it out to their small group. Did they express their memory vividly? Group to give each other feedback on the effectiveness of their cards.</p> <p>Explain that the spoken text of Chi Vu's play is written on postcards from Vietnam sent by Michelle to Tam Pha, her father, and Kim, her Australian friend. The production is delivered in multimedia format with the psychic dimension performed in dance and mime on screens behind the characters.</p> <p>Activity 6(b) To provide some context for the play, help students to revisit their knowledge of the circumstances, duration and outcome of the Vietnam War. Talk with them about the plight of refugees after wars</p>

of this kind. (Be aware that students who have experiences of conflicts, especially refugees, may find this subject distressing.)

Follow this with a discussion of the author's background as one of the courageous Vietnamese refugees who left Vietnam by boat at the age of five, eventually reaching Australia with her family a year later. Her own and her family's experiences of the war may explain some of the darker images in the play.

Explain that the play can be adapted for bi-lingual performance with both English and Vietnamese voices sometimes delivered in simultaneous voice-over translation, and sometimes in parallel repetitions. This relates to the notion of the hybridised identity of the main character that Chi Vu is exploring in her play: someone who is not fully assimilated into either Vietnamese or English culture.

Activity 6(c)

Discuss with the students these words from early in the play:

THE JOURNEY OF IMPORTANCE IS NOT
THE PHYSICAL ONE. THE REAL JOURNEY
IS IN THE HEART AND THE MIND. THIS IS
A GUIDEBOOK OF A DIFFERENT KIND.

Students to do a preliminary reading of the extracts from the play from the *Anthology* and think about and discuss how these words apply to the text.

Activity 6(d)

Students to experiment with creating their own performance or dramatic reading of parts of sections of the text (eg Halong Bay, City of Face).

Students may wish to experiment with adapting the text to include bi-lingual voices in their performance. If your class is without Vietnamese speakers, students could perhaps use English on English but staggered, like round singing, to give a sense of two separate voices to emulate the bi-lingual nature of the presentation.

You could give individuals or groups within the class different responsibilities such as:

- writing out the postcard messages on pieces of cardboard
- devising ways to mime and dance the actions

- choosing the kind of backdrop and technology that could be used to illustrate the subject matter of the cards
- designing costumes and props
- acting in a scene
- directing the performance as a whole.

Students to perform or give a dramatised reading to another group or class. Allow time at the end of the performance for students to answer questions.

Activity 6(e)

Students to divide into small groups and discuss what they have learnt from this hands-on experience of Chi Vu’s play, about Vietnam, being Vietnamese, Vietnamese culture, the idea of having a hybrid identity and why they think she chose to experiment so radically with dramatic form to present her ideas. Report findings back to the class.

Activity 6(f)

Students to watch the film clips of the performance of sections of *Vietnam: A psychic guide* at www.macquariepenanthology.com.au.

Have a class discussion about the differences in the students’ approach to performing the text and that of the filmed version of the scenes from the play. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

Activity 6(g)

Provide the students with the questions listed in **Student Handout 6(g)**.

These could be answered in pairs or in groups that report back their views to the class, or as a written assignment.

Activity 6(h)

Allow time for students to reflect on their learning in their journals.

Writers at Play

Teacher Resource 1(a)

- What are your initial impressions of the story's effectiveness as a portrait of a young girl caught between two conflicting parents and their differing cultures?
- What do you think Farmer's purpose was in writing this story? Does this story lead you to a new awareness and empathy for those striving to belong?
- Farmer says she likes 'interweaving visual images' in her writing. What visual images of Ismini are there that show rather than tell of her concerns as a character? Do readers empathise with her impulse towards fantasy at the end of the story? If you do not empathise with her, why not?
- Farmer reveals that a vital part of the experimental aspect of her writing comes from combining autobiographical insights from her writer's diary with her completed stories. To what extent does this give her story its immediacy, dramatic impact and sense of authenticity?
- Discuss how Farmer's spirit of experiment and autobiographical method is demonstrated in the story through strategies such as the use of:
 - (a) metafictional play
 - (b) contrasting discourses
 - (c) vivid flashbacks
 - (d) unconventional punctuation
 - (e) metonymy.

Suggestions about ways of answering this last question are provided below. Some of the terms used will be new to students and they may need help with coming to understand the nature of the devices mentioned.

- (a) **Metafiction** is fiction about fiction: novels and stories that call attention to their fictional status and their own compositional procedures. Authors use metafictional strategies when they draw attention to the constructedness of their own stories.

When Ismini has to write a 'pen-portrait of a person you know well' she scribbles quick notes including a number of images: 'red eggs for Easter, the lamb on the iron spit, the awful offal soup'. Later she incorporates these scribbled remembered images into an accomplished and effective portrait of her powerful but somewhat dreaded Greek grandmother. It is possible to see that Farmer is revealing that she herself has initially combined a number of vivid images into her own 'pen-portrait' of Ismini and then incorporated them into the wider concerns of her extended story. She is showing her reader that she draws on memories and previously

recorded images in her journal to form a sequence of revealing scenes which capture character in body language and through observations which have the clarity of lived experiences.

Farmer goes further than this though. At the end of the story, in her despair at being cut off at the age of sixteen from her mother, and her mother's defeatist acceptance of this, Ismini turns to the turgid clichéd world of the romance comic and escapes into it (helped by some gulps of retsina). This type of writing is an example of a static genre sustained by contrived and idealised images and absurdly stylised dialogue. By contrasting Ismini's excellent and moving description of her grandmother (at the same time revealing her own relationship with her) with this unrealistic romantic nonsense, Farmer both highlights Ismini's despair, emphasises the vitality and fascination of non-idealised human behaviour and stresses that happy endings and neat closures are rarely possible in life, implying that Ismini will have to work through her present dilemma.

- (b) In its broadest sense, **discourse** refers to the entire process of communication: not just the text itself, but addresser/addressee functions, the context of their situation, and intertextual relationships. The discipline of discourse analysis analyses this process, both in oral and written forms. In narrative theory this broad sense of discourse is focused through discourse analysis towards the means by which a story and its significance are communicated (this can include examining orientation of narrative voice to content and to audience; structure and order; choices of vocabulary and syntax; intertextuality).

Use of contrasting discourses: The story's standard English narrative voice (reflecting Ismini's own conversational discourse) is contrasted with the formality of the language of the school task, and the colloquial and English-as-a-second language discourse of Theia Frosso and Ismini's father (interspersed with Greek words). All three are further contrasted with the comic romantic doggerel of the story's conclusion when Ismini, overcome by the bleakness of her present life and her feelings of desertion by her mother, and starved for affection, fantasises about an 'ideal' adoring male lover who would treat her as a highly desirable goddess whom he would carry 'limp and golden to her bed'. The language of these four discourses represents Ismini's conflicting feelings and her identity dilemma. The school task and its connection with her English teacher, Mrs Brown, who has encouraged her, told her she is clever and that she has an academic future, is used in a particularly poignant way by Farmer when she has Ismini say to her mother, in a desperate moment, that if she fails the HSC she hopes her mother will get her a job at the hotel with her.

- (c) The use of **vivid flashbacks** is almost like filmic editing and cutting in this story so that the memories appear to invade the present, showing how powerfully the past affects the present, and how Ismini's memories haunt her.

- (d) The **punctuation** is as spare as possible and indentation is used to indicate direct speech.
- (e) **Metonymy** is a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of ‘Washington’ for ‘the United States government’ or of ‘the sword’ for ‘military power’.

The use of the metonymical mode is used to economically convey Ismini’s attitude to people. For example, Theia Frosso’s mundane appearance, so repellent to Ismini in her depressed state of mind, is compressed into the description of her as someone who ‘encased her flab in pantsuits’. This can be juxtaposed against her far more mysterious perception of ‘Mummy...waiting among furled glittering lamps and skeletons of trees for the first golden tram to trundle up wrapped in fog like a caterpillar in a cocoon’, suggesting her mother’s remoteness and inaccessibility as opposed to Theia Frosso’s unwelcome availability.

Writers at Play

Student Handout 2(a)

- How do you interpret the title of the story ‘Night Runner’?
- At which moment in the story does Nurse Wright stop being a victim and start being a powerful instigator of action and revenge?
- Do you agree that Jolley has created a character who, though she pilfers, forges, frames and entraps others, is a sympathetic character whose final reward of a long Christmas break we applaud? If so, how does she shift the conventional thinking that revenge seeking is base, to thinking that Nurse Wright (who acts in unethical ways) shows initiative and wit and has a justifiable triumph?
- What role does setting play in ‘Night Runner’?
- What role does the characterisation of Sister Bean play in ‘Night Runner’?
- Would you agree that this story specialises in worlds hinted at beneath the surface of the narrative?

Writers at Play

Student Handout 3(a)

Beveridge comments on her poetry in the following terms:

- a. At <http://www.poetrykit.org/pkmag/pkmag11/028.htm>, Beveridge says, ‘Objects are sensual things. And I love the physical world. I think it is wonderful and I do try and get that into poetry.’
- b. At www.abc.net.au/rn/encounter/stories/2006/1569464.htm, Beveridge says of ‘Yachts’, ‘It is a poem which I hope demonstrates through its latticework of metaphors how the qualities and properties of things can interpenetrate each other’.

Writers at Play

Student Handout 4(a)

Visit Acting with a Pencil at www.cibacs.org/teacherpages/mwhitmore/downloads/pdf/-sb/Storyboarding.pdf to research the function of storyboards in film, television or dramatic productions and look at the examples given of how to approach creating a storyboard.

A storyboard gives an indication of what images might be used, any voiceover, and any music or other sound effects. The storyboard can be set out like this:

Image	V/O	FX

You are asked to produce a storyboard that could be used in the making of a video of Jennifer Rankin's poem 'Cliffs'. Begin with the title frame, try to use between ten and fifteen frames, and indicate camera angles, close-ups, medium and long shots. Don't bother about producing beautiful drawings. What matters is that your image should show what you think is most important. You may wish to choose music that relates to your perception of the tone and meaning of the poem as an accompaniment.

Gather in small groups and show each other your storyboards explaining whether or not the storyboard process has helped you to better understand the poem.

Writers at Play

Student Handout 5(a)

- Find three examples of highly colourful, vivid images in this extract. How has Hewett made them memorable? Is it related to her being a poet as well as a prose writer?
- Find examples of each of the senses being addressed. Why does sensuous prose engage the responder in a very immediate way?
- Find three examples of sound devices like alliteration, onomatopoeia and assonance. How does the use of such devices create such musical prose?
- Find examples of strong verbs which give the developing description liveliness and colour.
- On two occasions Hewett gives precise accounts of the number of objects present in a room. Find those occasions and explain the effect of her including detail of this kind.
- Hewett was a dramatist as well as writer of poetry and prose. Find images which suggest her dramatist's sense of the energy of the world.

Writers at Play

Student Handout 5(b)

Write a description of one of the houses you lived in during your own childhood. Try to make it highly sensuous and animated by appropriating some of Hewett's techniques.

Or

Create a backdrop in a form and medium of your own choice for a set in front of which a reader could stand to read aloud Hewett's account of the sensual memories of childhood. Justify the images or backdrop you devise.

Writers at Play

Student Handout 6(g)

- The play is part meditation, part travelogue. How do the insights into Vietnamese society, its people and culture stem from the travel experiences described in the postcards?
- How has Chi Vu been able to make what is essentially a monologue into something lyrical, suggestive and incantatory? Consider especially her description of the sound of spoken Vietnamese: ‘the slippery, rounded, sing-song stone marbles of the Hanoian language’.
- What are the differing tones of the cards, for example between ‘City of Face’ and the last ‘Dear all’ card? How did your presentation and the film version register the changes of tone in the cards?
- Are there any images or comments in the extracts from the play that challenge your previous thoughts, ideas or feelings?
- One of the great functions of drama is said to be its ability to promote healing. Does Chi Vu’s play function in this way? If so, what is being healed?