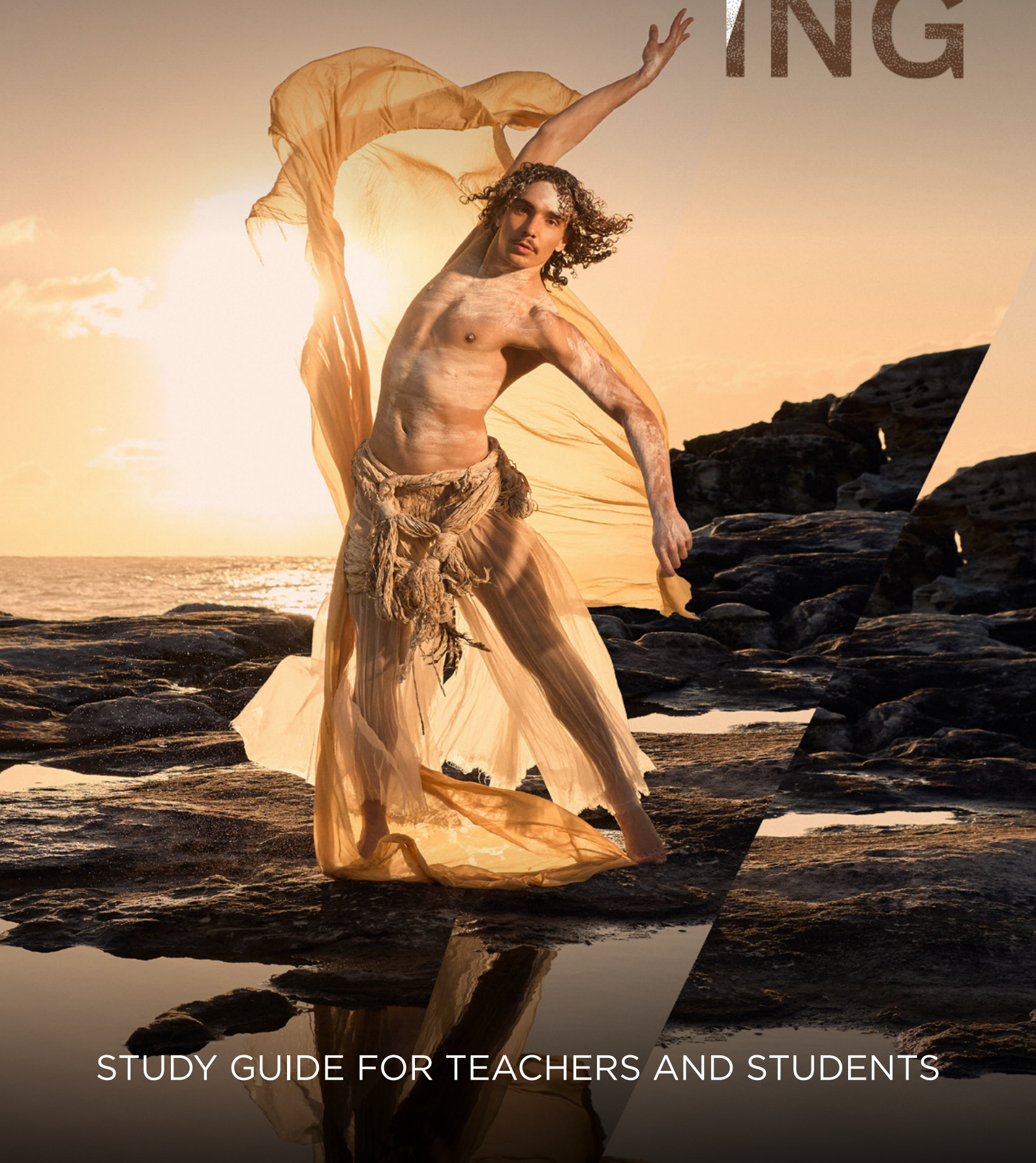


BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

SHELTER

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STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Bangarra Dance Theatre pays respect and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, create, and perform. We wish also to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose customs and cultures inspire our work.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Bangarra Dance Theatre carries Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) at the heart of its practice. ICIP shapes how we listen, how we move, how we design, and how we tell Story – grounded always in cultural authority and respect. Our ICIP policy, developed alongside Terri Janke and Company, guides every stage of our work.

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WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that the study guide contains the names and images of people who have passed away.

Cover image by Daniel Boud

INTRODUCTION



Photo: Daniel Boud

Sheltering offers a profound journey into the intricate bonds between People and Place. Rooted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, the concept of 'shelter' is reimagined as a sacred, transformative space: a haven of protection, connection, and the sharing of stories across generations.

Keeping Grounded, choreographed by Indjalandji-Dhidhanu and Alyewarre woman Glory Tuohy-Daniell is a poignant exploration of our energetic connection to the earth and ancestral land, and the challenges of staying culturally and physically grounded in a world increasingly shaped by technological advancement.

Brown Boys is a dance film directed by Daniel Mateo and Cass Mortimer Eipper delving into the experiences of young Indigenous men, exploring identity, belonging, and cultural connection. Inspired by Mateo's own

poetry, expressing his lived experience, the film portrays the intimacy of his journey as a Gomerioi and Tongan man, blending dance, narrative, and cinematic artistry.

Sheoak is choreographed by Mirning woman Frances Rings with music by Munaldjali and Nunukul man and renowned composer, David Page (dec.). *Sheoak* is a deeply affecting work exploring themes of resilience, connection to Country and Cultural identity. The work draws inspiration from the sheoak tree – a powerful symbol in Indigenous culture, honoured for its strength, adaptability, and the deep meaning it holds for First Nations people.

Together, these three works engage with vital First Nations social and cultural issues, reminding us of unique Indigenous worldviews, and the enduring connections between People, Land, and Spirit.

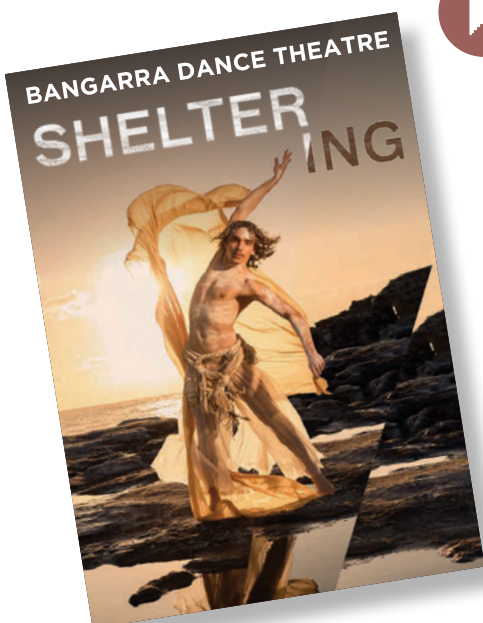
USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide provides contextual background to the stories that have inspired the creation of the three works on the *Sheltering* program.

It is important to note, the study guide is not analysis or literal explanation of the works. Instead, it aims to illustrate some of the themes, perspectives and practices that the creative teams explored in development stages.

We hope this information will support and encourage teachers and students to think critically about their experience of *Sheltering* and be inspired to consider the multiple approaches and perspectives in learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, while reflecting on their own social and cultural background and its relevance to the stories of the place we call Australia.

Further information about the works and the creative teams can be found in the *Sheltering* program.



CURRICULUM LINKS

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Intercultural understanding

Ethical understanding

Critical and creative thinking

Personal and social capability

LEARNING AREAS

Humanities and Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, Philosophy

Arts: Drama, Dance, Music, Visual Arts, Media Arts

Science: Biology, Social science, Earth science, Geology

Technologies: Design and technology, Digital technology

Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages

Health and Physical Education

TOPICS/THEMES

Indigenous knowledge systems

Cultural resilience

Identity: Personal, Cultural

First Nations perspectives

Contemporary Indigenous expression

Historical inquiry practices

Environmental health

Personal well-being

Environmental care

Cross-discipline artistic practice

FIRST NATIONS STORYTELLING: CREATION AND PRACTICE

CULTURAL CONSULTATION

Fundamental and central to First Nations creative story telling is Cultural consultation. The critical purpose for Cultural consultation is to ensure that sharing of Cultural knowledge is conducted with care, authenticity and respect. Consultation can take various forms: travelling on Country and meeting with Community and Elders; working with a Cultural Advisory Council; drawing on personal experience and reflection as First Nations people. As creative ideas are explored, Cultural protocols must be observed and implemented - from the broadest concepts to the finest details. In every Bangarra production, Cultural consultation is conducted from the earliest stages of research and throughout the creative development until the final performance.

RESEARCH

Alongside Cultural consultation, highly focused research is conducted by the creative teams over a long period of time, drawing on publications, peer reviewed articles, illustrations, film clips and documentaries.

In this stage of the process, elements of structure, design and choreographic language emerge. This is an organic process of allowing Story to awaken and the key themes and messages relevant to the work be identified and developed.

STORYTELLING

The scope for Indigenous Story telling is vast, its importance is critical, and its impact is palpable. Story carries insight, establishes connection and is one of the most transferable human communication platforms possible. In dreaming about how the production will unfold, ideas enter and inhabit the artists' imagination. It is an intuitive creative process, but it is also a highly organised and disciplined, so that ideas can be fully explored, distilled and refined. There is, of course, always room to change, to adapt, to discard, to dive deeper. Eventually focuses are tightened. A structure emerges. The dancers' roles become more articulated. The environment of movement, sound, visual poetry comes together and the Story starts to burn with its own unique energy.

COLLABORATION

Choreographers, composers, designers, researchers, and those responsible for the technical requirements that will bring the production to realisation, meet constantly over a period of months to develop and share ideas before the choreographer starts working with the dancers.

In collaboration, they develop a lexicon of terms to refer to specific sections, design elements, sounds, textures, props and movement motifs to ensure common understandings and clear communication among the artists. This also helps build a dramaturgical landscape for the production.

Having a studio environment where artists can be constantly immersed in the ideas and stories that were fed into the work is critical to maintaining focus. There is usually one wall in the studio, called the Knowledge Wall, dedicated to displaying information, images and other visual references so that the dancers are aware of the research and creative inspirations leading up to the point where they can make their own creative contributions.

PRODUCTION

Production teams are central to the work from the time the first ideas are ignited, to the final day of the final performance season. Production teams are the technical enablers. Their role is to turn what has been imagined into reality. This involves not only knowing what is technically possible within specific theatre venues, but finding ways to, in many cases, do what has never been done before. The production team has to source materials, commission construction, and test prototypes. With the current technical advancements of theatre production, textiles, and technology, including digital, the scope for the creative team is vast, but it is the production team who make it all possible. The pre-production stage for the three works on the *Sheltering* program involved important considerations such as safety, surfaces, materials, weight, and of course, cost.

FIRST NATIONS STORYTELLING: CREATION AND PRACTICE

SET

The set design for First Nations theatrical storytelling emerges from the early research and conversations before the work is created. The stage provides a large open space, while the areas behind and above the stage can hold customised structures (rigging) that enable movable set pieces, lighting and other visual effects to occur.

A scrim is a transparent gauze curtain, and is often used as part of a set design. Scrim hang from the top of the stage to the floor and cover the whole width of the stage. Scrim can be used for projection or to create a soft hazy effect. They are lowered and raised - silently - as required.

PROPS

Items physically connected to the set, or carried on and off the set, can hold both literal and symbolic meaning. For example, In *Keeping Grounded* a very large net acts as the main set piece. It's made of rope about the thickness of a pencil and has large cut-out holes with re-enforced seams. The net is activated by a system of pullies and is also manipulated by the dancers. In *Brown Boys*, a coolamon (vessel made from the outer layers of tree bark) and a large amount of dark brown soil are integrated to support specific symbolism and metaphors. In *Sheoak* there are seven long tree branches (about 2 metres long). The branches are bare of leaves and thick enough for the dancers to hold them comfortably in their hands. The poles are actually made from aluminium as in some scenes they hang from the upper stage rig and at different times are pushed around and placed by the dancers, so they need to be light and strong.

COSTUME

Costumes for any form of dance theatre, can be quite sculptural and highly textured, or very simple. In First Nations story telling the colours and textures of costumes are inspired by land, sky, flora, fauna, and Story. Texture of fabric and/or any motif painted on to the costumes carries relevant meaning. While the costume design is primarily drawn from the themes within the work, they also need to be constructed so that the dancers can perform the choreography fully and are robust enough to cope with the high levels of physicality over long seasons of multiple performances. Nearly all of Bangarra's choreography is performed in bare feet. The costumes in *Keeping Grounded* are made



from recycled garments and natural fibres. In *Brown Boys* the performer wears a skin toned form fitting shorts, enabling his body to be the canvas for the painting of ochre and the large amount of soil that falls on him. In *Sheoak* the costumes are very textured and layered, enhancing movement language that tells each section's Story.

LIGHTING

Lighting design is critical to setting the atmosphere for the production. Light levels can vary from complete darkness to high levels of brightness. Colours can be subtle and fused, or solid single shades, even fluorescent. Lighting rigs are set up to drive light onto the stage from the top, from the sides and sometimes from the back or the front. Stage lighting can be soft, or harsh - it can fade up and down, or flicker. A 'black out' means there is no light on the stage and in this state it is possible for the dancers to enter and exit without being seen, set pieces to be moved, or props to suddenly appear or disappear.

FIRST NATIONS STORYTELLING: CREATION AND PRACTICE



BODY PAINT

In First Nations storytelling, various shades of body paint are very often incorporated into the production. Body paint ('paint up') is vital in First Nations ceremonial and/or socio-cultural settings and is highly specific in regard to Story and context. The body paint is smeared on to arms, legs, chests, and sometimes forehead and hair. Traditional ochres are used in certain contexts, but in other instances synthetic colours such as gold, blue, silver are used.

DIGITAL DESIGN ELEMENTS

As well as a scrim, a backdrop or a wall, positioned vertically across the width of the stage, often serves as a screen for video projection, enhancing the set, lighting and costumes. Gobos (stencils) can be placed in front of lights pointing to the stage floor, and can be mechanically operated to move, and project shapes onto the floor surface.

FILM/DANCE ON FILM

Film enables dance, sound, design, spoken word and cinematography to come together as a multi-practice genre that provides scope for the artists' expression. The camera can lead the viewers to focus closely on fine details or take in the broader scene to enrich context. The soundtrack of the film can be engineered to breath with the movement of the camera and the live action, and enable spoken word to be seamlessly integrated. *Brown Boys* is a work of poetry, choreography, cinematography, sound, and dramaturgy where no one practice dominates.

SHELTER ING

CREATIVE TEAMS

KEEPING GROUNDED

Choreography: Glory Tuohy-Daniell and the dancers of Bangarra Dance Theatre

Music: Brendon Boney

Set design: Shana O'Brien

Costume design: Clair Parker

Lighting design: Karen Norris

Rigging consultant: Katie McDonagh

Creative mentors: Jacob Nash & Matt Cornell

BROWN BOYS

Choreographer/Poet: Daniel Mateo

Directors: Cass Mortimer Eipper & Daniel Mateo

Composer: Leon Rodgers

Set & Costume design: Elizabeth Gadsby

Director of Photography: Liam Brennan

Producer: Michaela Le

SHEOAK

Choreography: Frances Rings and the dancers of Bangarra Dance Theatre

Composer: David Page (dec.)

Set designer: Jacob Nash

Costume designer: Jennifer Irwin

Lighting design: Karen Norris

KEEPING GROUNDED

... a poignant exploration on our energetic connection to the earth and ancestral land. *Keeping Grounded* sits between past and present, exploring what it means to remain culturally and physically grounded in a world increasingly shaped by technology, and how this shift ripples through our mental and physical well-being.

Keeping Grounded asked the question: How do we stay Culturally grounded in a world that is constantly pulling us in different directions – mentally and physically? Technology, especially digital technology, has enabled unstoppable progress that tends to shape a curated reality furnished with many expectations. The tensions that result can be challenging to navigate.

In the context of Tuohy-Daniell's work, the concept of 'grounding' begins with something simple - bare feet meeting the earth. Our ancestors moved in constant connection to the earth – skin to soil, body to land – wearing natural fibres that allowed this relationship to exist without disruption. Until the 1960s, leather-soled shoes still carried this connection. With the rise of rubber, a quiet separation emerged, placing a barrier between the body and the ground beneath it.

Keeping Grounded is structured as six sections:

- Migi (ground)
- Muted contact
- Guliyapa (cheeky)
- No pull up
- Blues

More information about each section can be found on page 11 of the *Sheltering* program



“My interest lies in the body — its memory, its resilience, and its capacity to restore. Grounding is not about the earth instantly healing us, but about what happens when we return to it. In that contact, the body softens, slows, and shifts into a state where healing becomes possible.

This work is an offering — an invitation to notice. To consider how small, almost forgotten actions can create an effect through the body and mind. A step barefoot. A moment of stillness. A return.

It speaks to the body's quiet intelligence and its ability to adapt, reminding us that what was once an everyday act may hold the key to coming back into balance.”

Glory Tuohy-Daniell, 2026.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How does technology, including social media and AI, impact the way we live as a community?
- How can developments in design, innovation and manufacturing, impact our well-being positively or negatively?
- How can we develop principles and protocols to navigate the influences (positive and negative) that impact the way we live and relate to each other?
- How can technology serve our need to be connected without manipulating it?

BROWN BOYS

... visually poetic and deeply personal,
it delves into the experiences of young Indigenous men,
exploring identity, belonging, and cultural connection.



Lived experience is one of the strongest inspirations for storytelling. *Brown Boys* is not a commentary on the writer/choreographer/director's life and relationship with identity. It is a reflection.

The film's script is in poetic genre form where language can be distilled and crafted to make meaning and enrich the emotional content of what is being communicated. The film's concepts and themes explore a 'sense of home' and where that sense sits (physically and intellectually) in the self, and how perspectives on this can be shared through deep listening and reflection.

Brown Boys brings poetry, choreography, cinematography, sound, and scenography together.

The setting is revealed as the film progresses, taking in design elements such as a shelter made of grass matting and a large amount of dark brown earth that falls on the dancer's hands and body, eventually forming a large mound that covers the lower half of his body.

The shelter is called a Fale (fah-Lay, the Tongan language word for shelter), and is constructed in panels, and disassembles during the film. The performer has several tattoos on his chest. These are called tatatau (the Tongan language word for tattoo). His tatatau represent protection and guidance.

The film's cinematography is a central role in the film in the way it directs light to pour through the opening of the shelter, drawing the dancer to gaze upwards, and providing a contrast between skin tones, light, and earth.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How is identity shaped by the concept and experience of 'home'?
- How is identity shaped by signifiers of Culture, colour and ancestry?

SHEOAK

... explores themes of resilience, connection to country, and cultural identity drawing inspiration from the sheoak tree — a powerful symbol in Indigenous Australian culture known for its strength, adaptability, and deep meaning.



Sheoak tells stories within stories, brings the past and the present together and speaks to the truth of Australia's history through the concepts of Place, Body, and Spirit.

PLACE

The concept of Place is embedded as a sense of connection for Aboriginal people to know and experience the Country of their ancestors. The sheoak (L: *Allocasuarina* genus from the family L: *Casaurinaceae*) represents the significance of features in our environment such as scar trees, important landforms, and waterholes. While today's regard for these trees might be not as defined, it still represents critical connection to First Nations Ancestors and Elders.

Place can be a specific place, one that we refer to, and physically associate with as 'home'. What are the permanent markers that distinguish one place over another as the place we most identify with, in a spiritual sense? How can we live in one place, yet call another place home? First Nations people are constantly adapting practices and navigating perspectives in order to maintain a sense of connectedness to the place where their ancestors reside - in spirit, in landform and in the creatures that inhabit that Land.

BODY

The relationship of the body to Place is intrinsic. It is the body, physically, mentally and spiritually that feels the effect of cultural erosion, family breakdown, and dispossession. Likewise it is the body that feels connectedness to Culture, family and location. Community responsibility supports people's connection to land - by protection of the land, maintaining the culture of the tribe, the language, the songs, the dances and the stories.

SPIRIT

Spirit looks at the unseen realm - where there is seemingly nothing, but where there is everything. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirit is present in totemic systems, in ceremony, life and death, and passes through generations in Story. There is permanence to Spirit that has the capacity to address the impact of Culture's fragility. Spirit reflects the hope that people will return to Country and know their Culture, as individuals and as First Nations people.

More information about each section can be found on page 12 of the *Sheltering* program



THE SHEOAK



Sheoaks are endemic to Australia and are found mostly in the southern parts of the continent across South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, though some species are found as far north as the coastal areas of Queensland. Species names include the Horned, Bulloak, Scrub, Slaty, Karri, Hairy and Drooping.

The name Casaurina was given to this family of trees due to its resemblance to the feathers of the Cassowary. The needles, or branchlets support scales (which are the leaves). The male and female flowers appear at the end of the branchlets. After fertilisation the scales becomes larger and fuse together to form the woody cone shape, which holds the seeds that escape before the cone falls from the tree.

For First Nations people, the sheoak tree holds Story and Knowledge. For the Dhawawal people of the coastal areas of NSW, it is commonly known as the Grandmother tree. The sheoak, like the grandmother, has a role in family and community life that is about protection, wisdom, life's journey and the spirit of survival. Children were often left under the protective boughs of the sheoak while parents gathered food.

Since ancient times, the sheoak tree has provided Aboriginal people with wood for weapons, tools and canoes. The branches of the sheoak were used for windbreaks and shelters. The cones were soaked in water to provide flavouring for drinking water. Chewing of the needles would prevent dehydration, and hollow sheoaks would trap rainwater which could be sourced in times of drought. The bark and branchlets provided medicines for common ailments.

The sheoak represents connection, and her ties remain strong. Even though we may not live a traditional life, the sheoak remains relevant and holds a strong place in First Nations Cultures and Identity, providing a sense of strength and spiritual awakening. These ancient trees ground us and keep us connected to something that transcends our modern life and binds us to our birthright.



CLASSROOM RESOURCES - ONLINE

A collection of resources based on specific choreographies or excerpts of choreographies, includes film, contextual background, and activities for the classroom. Aligned with The Australian Curriculum.

KNOWLEDGE GROUND

Bangarra's extensive digital archive, Knowledge Ground, offers a unique opportunity where students and teachers can learn about the company's creative processes as they have evolved over the company's 30 years, and gain more understanding of Bangarra's story-telling world.

NANDHU

Nandhu is housed on the Knowledge Ground platform and takes online visitors on a journey through the bed rock of Bangarra's iconic productions. Through interviews, articles, and behind-the-scenes video content, discover the community connections, cultural stories and creative research and development underpinning these important works.

STUDY GUIDES

Study Guides for most of Bangarra's productions are available free on request.

STREAMING

Mathinna (2008); *Terrain* (2012); *Patyegarang* (2013); *Bennelong* (2017), *Yuldea* (2022) . Selected titles available on ClickView to schools and VET sector colleges with subscription.

DVDS

Mathinna (2008); *Terrain* (2012); *Patyegarang* (2013); *Bennelong* (2017); *Yuldea* (2023). Available through the Bangarra Dance Theatre shop.