



Education Resource: *Bennelong* (2017)

Recommended for years 7 to 10

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Bangarra Dance Theatre

Background

... who is Bangarra?

Bangarra is an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies. Bangarra is 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 Y. 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 has also taken 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 care 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 experience the world's oldest living culture through a contemporary experience.

Bangarra has nurtured the careers of hundreds of Indigenous professional artists, including dancers, choreographers, composers and designers. Over the last 30 years, Bangarra has produced over thirty original works for its repertoire, and in 2015 released its first feature length film, *Spear* (Brown Cab Productions). Bangarra has also collaborated on the creation of new productions with other Australian performing arts companies such as The Australian Ballet and the Sydney Theatre Company.

... who are the artists?

Bangarra's dancers and collaborating artists come from all over Australia, including the major groups in relation to location, for example: 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 (Nyoongar), Central Western Australia (Wangai) and Tasmania (Palawah). Some of the dancers are graduates of NAISDA Dance College (NSW), while others received their training at the Aboriginal College of Performing Arts (Qld), or are graduates of dance courses delivered by universities and dance training schools around Australia.

Connecting to the source

... telling the stories

Story telling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life is the means by which cultural systems, values and identity are preserved and transferred. The stories of the ancestors are passed on through song, music and dance, maintaining the connection of people to the Land, and honouring the ancient culture, traditions and knowledge of Indigenous culture as it is passed from generation to generation.

... sharing and passing on of 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 creatures 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 Bangarra's dance theatre productions are created through an artistic and collaborative process, and can express a broad range of ideas and thoughts. While some information about the works is provided in the program notes, the audience is free to interpret the work according to their individual perspectives, emotional responses and level of experience in viewing performances of dance theatre.

Creating Bennelong (2017)

... what is the inspiration for *Bennelong*?

Woollarawarre Bennelong (*Bennilong, Baneelon*) (c1764-1813), a Wangal man of the Eora nation lived in the Port Jackson area at the time of the first British settlement. Today Bennelong is one of the most celebrated and mythologized Aboriginal men of those early settlement times. There is a considerable amount of primary source material available about Bennelong, mostly through the notebooks and diaries of several first fleet officers. His story has persisted over two centuries to the point where he has become a central figure in Australia's turbulent and complex settlement history.

Bangarra's telling of Bennelong's story is imagined through the perspective of Bennelong himself. The work explores his personal character, his conflicts, his relationship, his community and his standing within that community. The production is not a literal translation of historical events. Instead, it looks between the layers of the narrative that has gathered around this one man, and beyond the common perceptions that have prevailed in regard to Bennelong's unique place in our colonial and post-colonial history.

... where does the story come from?

Bennelong was born around 1764, a member of the Wangal people who occupied the land stretching from Goat Island along the southern shore of the Parramatta River up to Parramatta itself. In 1789, Governor Arthur Phillip received orders from King George III to make every possible effort to build a dialogue with the Aboriginal people. On 25 November of the same year, Lieutenant William Bradley and a small troop of British military went to Manly Cove and captured two Aboriginal Men – Colebee, a Gadigal man, and Bennelong.

Colebee escaped shortly afterwards, but Bennelong remained for a period of about five months, learning the ways of the Europeans and ingratiating himself to the household of Governor Phillip. After Bennelong returned to his people, and to his life as a traditional man, he retained some contact with Arthur Phillip and often acted as a go-between for the Indigenous people and the British, demonstrating his own personal efforts to build a peace between the groups – however tenuous that peace would be.

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In 1792, Bennelong accompanied Phillip to London, making him the first Aboriginal person (along with his tribal partner Yemmerrawanne) to travel to England.

There is no doubt that Bennelong's story is important to the way we reflect on Australia's story of colonisation. But it is also a very personal and unique story. While the actual events are fascinating and remarkable, it is the enormous emotional, social and cultural disruptions experienced by Bennelong and his community that are at the heart of this production, and connect us as human beings with a shared history.

Presenting *Bennelong*

Bangarra's *Bennelong* is presented in seventeen sections that are woven together as a complete production. Each section offers ideas about those who experienced First Contact, and the impact and emotional bearings that colonisation brought to the Aboriginal people, while focussing on the story of one man, Woollarawarre Bennelong. The seventeen sections are:

SACRED	<i>Respecting the space</i>
BIRTH OF BENNELONG	<i>The birth of the man with five names</i>
WANGAL	<i>Eora nation people, living off the land on their Country, hunting and gathering</i>
NATIVE VACCINATE	<i>Intuition tells the clan unsettling spirits are coming and they must vaccinate and protect themselves</i>
FLEET	<i>The arrival, of which sets a course of destruction for the next two centuries.</i>
OBSERVATION SMELL	<i>First Contact, with both cultures observing mind, body and spirit</i>
REWIND 1788	<i>Spirit of the Land and Knowledge, consciously reflecting the spirit of Bennelong, the land and the people</i>
BAIT	<i>Governor Phillip sends for the capture of Bennelong</i>
RESPONDING	<i>First archetype of assimilation through the wearing of colonial clothing</i>
ONSLAUGHT	<i>Small pox wipes out a whole clan; Bennelong survives</i>
RESISTANCE	<i>Signs of resistance through the energy of Pemulwuy</i>
REJECTION	<i>Spearing of Governor Phillip at Manly Cove in a men's initiation</i>
SPIRIT OF BARANGAROO	<i>One of Bennelong's wives Barangaroo dies</i>
CROWN	<i>Bennelong and Yemmerawanye travel to London with Governor Phillip and are feted as a triumph of assimilation; Yemmerawanye dies in London</i>
REPATRIATION	<i>The ongoing battle for our bones and spirits to be returned from London</i>
WIVES	<i>Bennelong returns from London and does not belong in either world; the five strong female energies that influenced his life</i>
1813/PEOPLE OF THE LAND	<i>The year Bennelong dies questioning what he has left, and mourning his own spirit</i>

7 Excerpts from the production *Bennelong*.

1. **Sacred** - *Respecting the space*
2. **Wangal** - *Eora nation people, living off the land on their Country, hunting and gathering*
3. **Fleet** - *The arrival, of which sets a course of destruction for the next two centuries.*
4. **Rewind 1788** - *Spirit of the Land and Knowledge, consciously reflecting the spirit of Bennelong, the land and the people*
5. **Responding** - *First archetype of assimilation through the wearing of colonial clothing*
6. **Rejection** - *Spearing of Governor Phillip at Manly Cove in a men's initiation*
7. **1813 / People of the Land** - *The year Bennelong dies questioning what he has left, and mourning his own spirit*

... how do the dances tell the story

To create the choreography, the music and the design elements for *Bennelong*, the creative team worked together with the dancers to create a dance theatre 'telling', that illustrates the powerful sense of connection that Indigenous people have to land through Culture, People and Place.

It is important to be aware that as we look back to Bennelong's time and imagine the reality of those times, we do so through the filter of our contemporary consciousness. Bangarra's production of *Bennelong* is imagined through the perspective of Bennelong himself as well as other Aboriginal people of the time. The work explores his personal character. His conflicts, his relationships, his community, and his standing within that community.

Bringing the stories to the stage: the creative process

... research and preparation

There is a great deal of primary source material available about Bennelong – mostly within preserved notebooks of First Fleet officers, personal letters found in collections and various published articles dating from the 1790s. (See [Links and further reading](#) section of this resource).

There are also a number of images of Bennelong in existence, created by artists of the time, including James Neagle, Joseph Lysett and the infamous Port Jackson painter (who it is speculated was actually more than one painter).

Eleanor Dark's 1949 classic work of historical fiction, *The Timeless Land* was applauded by historians as being one of the earliest pieces of writing that brought the Indigenous voice into the history of Australian colonisation. This book was written when the White Australia policy was still in force, nearly two decades before Aboriginal people were included as citizens in the national census (referendum 1967) and W.E.H Stanner's Boyer seminal lecture *The Great Australian Silence* (1968) was presented and published. *The Timeless Land* gave voice to an

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Aboriginal perspective that was virtually silent in the mid twentieth century, was regarded as being instrumental in disrupting the conversation of Australia's colonisation history.

During the making of *Bennelong*, numerous other resources were explored as well as images from collections held at the National Library of Australia, the State Library of NSW and the National History Museum in London.

Bangarra commissioned writer, director and dramaturg Alana Valentine to work closely with the creative team, exploring historical material and other relevant artistic expressions that centred around *Bennelong* and the elements of his story that became more fascinating as the progressed. The team looked at poetry, songs, images and official documentation. As all the material was woven through the creative process, a distillation of the Bangarra's telling took hold, and the result is the production, *Bennelong*.

... dance practice

Bennelong's creative process is led by the choreographer, in close collaboration with cultural consultants, the dancers, the dramaturg, the composer of the music, and the costume, set and lighting designers. The people who take on these roles form the creative team. The creative team collaborates closely during the entire creative process to enable the dance to reflect the overall focus of the choreographer's ideas.

The choreographer, the rehearsal director and the dancers work together in the dance studio for many hours each day over several weeks to create the choreographic movement language and motifs for *Bennelong*. Together they invent movements that are inspired by the stories, developing their artistic interpretations to build dance sequences into a cohesive structure for the work.

...dance skills

Using their dance technique and performance skills, the dancers work to blend the movements and make them clear and technically achievable, before eventually settling on a final version of the choreography.

The rehearsal director is present throughout this process in order to rehearse the dance, so that the key qualities and details of the choreography as set by the choreographer are retained and remembered. As the work moves closer to its premiere date, the rehearsal director works with the dancers for many hours to make sure they can perform the dance consistently at the highest standard possible. At this point in the process, the technical elements of the designers – costume, set, and lighting – start to be incorporated.

... dance production processes

In the week of the premiere performance, the dancers, rehearsal director, creative team and production crew move from the Bangarra dance studios to the theatre where they spend many hours rigging the set, positioning and programming the lighting, checking the sound levels and making necessary adjustments to the choreography to fit the space of the stage. This is called the 'bump in' and the production crew is largely responsible for coordinating this stage of the process. There is much excitement during this bump in week because no one has actually seen the finished work. How the work looks in the theatre is always different to the way it looks in the studio.

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There is often a media call on the day of the premiere where photographers take pictures of the dancers in dress rehearsal, and journalists conduct interviews with the creative team. On premiere night reviewers will attend to write about the work for their respective newspapers, websites and blogs. These reviews are usually published as soon as possible after the premiere.

...the life of a dance

During the lengthy process of creating a new Bangarra production, ideas will change and sometimes some surprising shifts will occur. This is the normal nature of the creative process, and probably one of the most exciting things about making a new work. Importantly, the elements that do *not* change are the traditional stories and original cultural elements, which always remain respected and intact. As the dance is performed over time, the story is passed from one dancer's body to another as different dancers are taught the choreography.

Links & further reading

Online

Bangarra Dance Theatre - Bennelong Study Guide, 2017

<https://bangarra.box.com/s/mr1eqk6d5iz8xp235f13iv99g2sez31w>

Finding Bennelong. Comprehensive and culturally respectful website delivering multi-layered interpretation and education through videos, historic artworks and extensive research including links to primary sources. Produced by Art of Multimedia (Sydney) for the City of Ryde Council in consultation with Aboriginal community members and commissioned historians.

<http://findingbennelong.com/>

Dark, Eleanor. "Bennelong", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, ANU, Canberra.

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bennelong-1769>

EORA: Mapping Aboriginal Sydney: 1770 to 1850. State Library of New South Wales. E-Resource (includes information, maps, original images)

<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/eora>

Barani: Sydney's Aboriginal history. City of Sydney.

Histories of people, places and events in the City of Sydney local government area that are associated with the histories of Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

<http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/>

My Place for Teachers: Australia in the 1790s; Bennelong. Australian Children's' Television Foundation, 2011.

http://www.myplace.edu.au/decades_timeline/1790/decade_landing_21.html?tabRank=2&subTabRank=2

Books and Journals: non-fiction

Clendinnen, Inga. *Dancing with Strangers: Europeans and Australians at First Contact*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2003.

Dortins, Emma. 'The many truths of Bennelong's tragedy', *Aboriginal History*, Vol, 33, Australian National University, 2009.

Fullagar, Kate. 'Bennelong in Britain', *Aboriginal History*, Vol.33, Australian National University, 2009.

Smith, Keith Vincent. *Bennelong: the coming in of the Eora Sydney Cove 1788 – 1792*, Kangaroo Press, 2001.

Books: fiction

Dark, Eleanor. *The Timeless Land*, first published by Collins (London, Sydney) and MacMillan (UK), 1941.

For young readers

Secondary, Michael. *The Unlikely Story of Bennelong and Phillip*. Berbay Publishing, Melbourne, 2015.

Acknowledgements

Choreographer	Stephen Page
Cultural consultant	Matthew Doyle
Music/sound designer	Steve Francis
Set designer	Jacob Nash
Costume designer	Jennifer Irwin
Lighting designer	Nick Schlieper
Dramaturg	Alana Valentine

Dancers in these clips: Elma Kris, Deborah Brown, Waangenga Blanco, Tara Gower, Leonard Mickelo, Daniel Riley, Jasmin Sheppard, Tara Robertson, Kaine Sultan-Babij, Luke Currie-Richardson, Beau Dean Riley-Smith, Rikki Mason, Yolanda Lowatta, Rika Hamaguchi, Tyrel Dulvarie, Glory Tuohy-Daniell, Baden Hitchcock, Ryan Pearson.

Class Activities: Years 7 - 10 (Stages 4 & 5)

Overview

Bennelong is a dance theatre production that explores the story of Woollarawarre Bennelong, a Wangul man of the Eora nation who lived in the Port Jackson area at the time of the first British settlement in the late 1790 and early 1800s. Bennelong's notoriety is significant, and has persisted to the current day. He is celebrated for his place in history with many institutions, businesses and landmarks bearing his name. However, Bangarra's telling of Bennelong's story is told from the Aboriginal perspective, illustrating the enormous intercultural tensions and personal conflicts that have existed since settlement, and continue to impact the lives and cultures of Indigenous people today.

Summary of curriculum related links:

Cross curriculum priority:	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
General capabilities:	Creative and Critical Thinking, Intercultural Understanding, Literacy.
Learning areas:	Focus on Arts (Dance, Music, Visual Arts), History, Geography and English.

Things to Think About and Do

1) Before Viewing

Consider the range of cross-curriculum learning areas that are relevant to the work *Bennelong*, for example:

Year 7 History – Historical 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. The importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACDSEH148 - Scootle](#))

Year 7 Arts/Dance – 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 - Scootle](#))

Year 7 English – Literature and Context - Explore the interconnectedness of Country/Place, People, Identity and Culture in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors ([ACELT1806 - Scootle](#))

Year 9 History – Historical Knowledge and Understanding – 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 - Scootle](#))

Year 9 Arts/Dance - 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 - Scootle](#))

Year 10 Arts/Dance - 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 - Scootle](#))

Before the viewing, the following questions might be useful to consider:

What do students already know and what are some things that they can do?

- Encourage the students to experience the artforms of Dance, Music and Visual Arts by:
 - moving their body both individually and with others; showing awareness of their body in **space** and in relation to objects around them
 - improvising and arranging music, using **texture, dynamics and expression** to manipulate the elements of music
 - experimenting with **visual conventions** and **materials**, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork
- Check that students are aware that they can interpret meanings from viewing and listening to **artworks** and **texts**, and that all artforms can tell stories which may have a beginnings, middles and ends?
- Encourage students' recognition that people from different cultures create and perform, and may have different reasons for doing so. Discuss the importance of conserving the

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remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

- Assist students to understand that as an **audience** member or viewer of art, it is important to concentrate on experiencing by viewing and listening.

Pose questions that help them understand the ideas that *Bennelong* is based upon?

- Who are the people of the Eora nation and what are some of the clan groups of Aboriginal people within the Eora nation?
- Where in Australia is the Port Jackson area?
- Which clan group did Bennelong belong to?
- Which clan group did Colebee belong to?

Expand students understanding that contemporary Indigenous people participate in all facets of the community and as **artists** they may choose to communicate ideas based on traditional stories including those relating to landforms and creatures that represent spirits.

- Who are the dancers of Bangarra? Where do they come from?
- Where is the company Bangarra based?
- What is a cultural consultant and how do they contribute to the making of a new work?

2) As you view

Ask the students to watch and listen to the dance, be a respectful **audience** and try to remember as much as they can about what they are seeing, hearing and feeling.

3) After viewing

Pose questions that remind students of their viewing experience.

- How many sections of the full production are shown in the resource?
- How would you describe the **Elements of Dance**, **Visual Conventions**, and **Elements of Music** in the section titled 'Sacred'?
- Describe the costumes of the dancers in the section 'Responding'? How do the costumes and the movements work together in this section?
- Describe the way the male group of dancers move and are situated in the space in relation to each other, in the section 'Wangal'. How would you describe the **Elements of Dance**, **Visual Conventions**, and **Elements of Music** in this section?
- What are the characteristics/**dynamics** of the movement and/or music in the solo section of 'Rewind'?
- How are the set and the backdrop relevant to this section?
- The dance theatre production of *Bennelong* illustrates issues associated with colonisation. How is this evident in the work?
- In what way is Bennelong's story unique in the context of relationships between Aboriginal people and the British settlers?
- How does the work illustrate personal issues and conflicts that Bennelong is likely to have experienced through his interactions with Governor Phillip?

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In reference to expressing and developing ideas:

Collect, compare and categorise facts and opinions.

Movement and meaning

- Describe the way 'Responding' tells part of the story?
- Compare the movements of the dancers in sections 'Wangal' and 'Rejection'. How would you describe the different dynamics in the choreography?
- Describe the scene '1813/People of the Land'? How do you think the dancer prepares himself to perform this scene?
- What is the relationship between the dancers and the **audience**? Do any of the dancers look at the **audience**? Why/why not?

Non-movement aspects

- Describe the aesthetics of the artwork, including the colour of the background, floor, props and the lighting (colour, brightness, point/s of focus) in each section.
- Which sounds and/or instruments can you hear in the music/sound score?

4) Next steps

Transfer and apply information in one setting to enrich another.

- Write or find a story that describes loss of identity as a result of major disruption and/or displacement.
 - Use mime to describe the story through movement. Exaggerate and simplify the movements so that the gestures become easy to see.
 - Explore different **dynamics** as you vary your movements, and determine the dance motifs that are a fundamental to your story.
-

Make dance sequences and experiment with a range of options when seeking solutions and putting ideas into action.

- Select your favourite parts of your 'story' making sure that you keep a mixture of different travelling movements. Repeat this sequence so that you are able to perform it in the same way each time.
- Teach your sequence to another student or small group.
- Choose a series of different sounds or play different pieces of music to accompany the movement. Which suits the mood /ideas of your dance best?
- Experiment with facing different directions and travelling to different parts of the room whilst performing your sequence.

Explore situations using creative thinking strategies to propose a range of alternatives.

- Try performing your dance sequence at the same time as several other people. Try performing your sequence close to another person.
- Watch another group do this with their sequences. What do you see? Can you watch all of them at once or do you focus on one then another?
- Organise your sequences so that there is a point where you meet. What happens if you cross or interrupt each other's sequences? Create a new duo section you could perform together (you might drop or pass your object and the other person picks it up and/or uses it).
- How else could you link or contrast these sequences?

Explain and justify ideas and outcomes.

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- What could you call your dance? What kind of costume or set could you make or choose to go with your dance? Why have you made these choices?
- How is the movement of the body used to represent your idea/s?
- How did the dancers use **space** and energy to create the ideas/feelings in this dance?
- Which **elements of dance** were used?
- What could you learn from watching people and creating sequences based on their movements?
- What movements could you learn, and use in a dance, based on everyday activities and other cultural practices?

Based on Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Level 5 & 6 statements from the Critical and Creative Thinking learning continuum for Generating ideas, possibilities and actions; Reflecting on thinking and processes; and Analysing, synthesising and evaluating reasoning and procedures areas. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Australia (CC BY NC SA) licence. Accessed 03/06/15.