

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



BENNELONG

STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Bangarra acknowledges the industry standards and protocols set by the Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Working with Indigenous Artists (2007). Those protocols have been widely adopted in the Australian arts to respect ICIP and to develop practices and processes for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultural heritage. Bangarra incorporates ICIP into the very heart of our projects, from storytelling, to dance, to set design, language and music.

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Currie-Richardson, photo by Edward Mulvihill

INTRODUCTION

Bennelong is a dance theatre production that explores the story of Woollarawarre Bennelong (*Bennilong, Baneelon*) (c. 1764-1813), a Wangul man of the Eora nation who lived in the Port Jackson area at the time of British settlement. Today, Bennelong is one of the most celebrated and mythologised Aboriginal individuals from the days of early settlement. His wide notoriety is remarkable — not only for the stories about his interactions and relationships with the British, but for the amount of primary source material that refers to him in notebooks and diaries of several First Fleet officers, as well as Governor Arthur Phillip.

Bennelong's story has been told and re-told many times over by historians, novelists and screenwriters, and his image has been depicted by artists from early times to the present, in paintings, drawings and other media. Numerous geographical locations around Australia are named in his honour. Perhaps the most well-known place name is Bennelong Point, where the iconic Sydney Opera House stands today.

Many of Australia's businesses and institutions also bear his name including financial services companies, law firms, and publishing companies, as well as a federal electorate and an award-winning restaurant.

Bangarra Dance Theatre's unique telling of Bennelong's story 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.

Bangarra's production of Bennelong is not a historical recount, nor is it a literal translation of events. The work looks between the lines and layers of the narrative that has gathered around this one man, and beyond the common perceptions that have prevailed in regard to Bennelong the man and his unique place in our post-settlement history.

We are mindful that we look back to Bennelong's time through the filter of our contemporary consciousness - what we know now is always superimposed over what we read about First Contact times and how we imagine the reality of those times.

We hope to ignite audiences' imaginations and focus their thoughts on the enormous impact brought to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through European settlement.

USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

Bangarra Dance Theatre's production of *Bennelong* offers teachers and students the opportunity to explore a broad range of cross curricula topics and themes. We strongly recommend that teachers familiarise their students with the contextual background and historical relevance of the work, using the information in this Study Guide and the additional references listed on page 12.

The evolution of Indigenous contemporary dance can be explored as a continuum – a shifting and growing field of cultural exchange, art, storytelling, and shared experiences. Bearing witness to the physical expression of traditional and contemporary modes of storytelling can both challenge and unite us, but fundamentally these experiences illustrate the immutable importance of identity, belonging and connectedness in all societies and cultures. Learning by experiencing either a live performance, or a video recording of a live performance, and being free to offer personal responses, enables students to be participants in the creative process as they engage with the work through discussions that encourage both critical and creative thinking.

Students can and should feel free to explore different perspectives through artistic and emotional landscapes of movement, sound, light and shape. This freedom can inspire an appreciation of the ongoing impact of historical events, as well as the role of the Arts in shaping our understandings of the world around us.

We urge our audiences, including students and teachers, to be curious about the works they see on stage, and the creative processes that lie behind these performances. This Study Guide provides detailed background about all aspects of the production *Bennelong*, and the artists who collaborated in its creation.

We hope you enjoy Bangarra Dance Theatre's production of *Bennelong*.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Critical and creative thinking
Ethical understanding
Intercultural understanding

LEARNING AREAS

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

TOPICS/THEMES

Indigenous Perspectives
Australian cultures
Australian society
Colonisation
History
Human Rights
Dance
Music
Design
Storytelling





Bangarra ensemble in *Bennelong* (2017),
photo by Daniel Boud

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BACKGROUND

When examining the life and times of Wollarawarre Bennelong, there is a great deal of primary resource material available, mostly within preserved notebooks of First Fleet officers, personal letters found in collections, and various published articles dating from the 1790s. There are also a number of images of Bennelong created by artists of the time, including James Neagle, Joseph Lysett and the infamous Port Jackson Painter.



Bangarra Ensemble during *Bennelong* rehearsals (2017), photo by Tiffany Parker

Published writings about Bennelong include:

- Lieutenant Watkin Tench's (1758-1833) books about the events of the first settlement, including *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay: With an Account of New South Wales, its Productions, Inhabitants, & c.* (London, 1789), which was republished in 1961 as *Sydney's First Four Years*
- David Collins' *An Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales* (London, 1793)
- John Hunter's *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* (London, 1793)

Bennelong features significantly in these reports, along with several other prominent Aboriginal people of the time, including Colebee, Bungaree, Arabanoo, Pemelwuy, Barangaroo, Gnung-a Gnung-a and Bidgee Bidgee.

While Bennelong's story has been extensively researched and written about by historians, accounts of his life have also been heavily infused with legend and conjecture with some describing Bennelong as a rascal and opportunist, and others viewing him as

a victim of exploitation who lost a great deal more than he gained through his dealings with Governor Arthur Phillip and the British colonists.

Eleanor Dark's 1949 classic work of historical fiction, *The Timeless Land*, presents a deeply considered perspective about European settlement, focusing on Bennelong's personal 'story within the story'. Dark's seminal novel was applauded by historians as bringing the Indigenous voice to the history of Australian colonisation, illustrating the Aboriginal point of view regarding the impact of, and response to, the disruptions that were occurring so rapidly. Dark was later commissioned to write Bennelong's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1966).

Bennelong was born around 1764 on Wangul country, which stretches from Goat Island along the southern shore of the Parramatta River up to Parramatta itself. The Wangul clan is part of the Eora nation, which extends from the Hawksebury River in the North through to Botany Bay in the South, and as far west as Parramatta.

In 1789, Governor Arthur Phillip received orders from King George III to make every possible effort to build a dialogue with the Aboriginal people. Up until

that point, no Aboriginal people had proactively sought to enter the British camp; so on 25 November, 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 about three weeks later, but Bennelong remained for a period of five months, learning the ways of the Europeans and ingratiating himself to the household of the Governor Phillip. It was in May 1790, that Bennelong took it upon himself to return to his people, and to his life as a traditional man. However, this was not the end of his association with the white settlers – far from it. He retained his contact with Arthur Phillip in particular. One day Bennelong invited Phillip to share a meal of whale at a beach in Manly Cove. During the course of this interaction, another man took up a spear and threw it at Phillip. The spear struck Phillip in the shoulder and the event was recorded in the journals of the officers. Whether or not the incident was premeditated remains open to conjecture, however Bennelong's actions after this event showed his character as a peacekeeper – however illusive, and inevitably tenuous that peace would be.



Stephen Page during *Bennelong* rehearsals (2017),
photo by Tiffany Parker



In 1792, after establishing a settlement in Sydney, Governor Arthur Phillip returned to London. Bennelong, and his tribal partner Yemmerawanye, accompanied him, making them the first Aboriginal people to travel to England.

There is little information available as to what Bennelong lived through during his three-year stay, however legend has it that Bennelong met with King George III in May 1793; there is little evidence that provides additional context for this meeting, or information about how it occurred.

Regardless of the subtle inconsistencies and variations in historiographical practices and source materials, there is no doubt that Bennelong's story is important as well as unique. While the actual events are fascinating and remarkable, it is the emotional, social, and cultural disruptions felt by Bennelong and his community that are at the heart of this production.

Please refer to page 12 for further reading and resources regarding Bennelong and the people and events related to his story.

CREATING BENNELONG



Beau Dean Riley Smith and Stephen Page,
photo by Tiffany Parker



Stephen Page and Alana Valentine
speaking with Bangarra Dancers in studio,
photo by Tiffany Parker

The Creative Team for *Bennelong* started their creative process with a number of questions to consider. What do we know about Bennelong? Where do reality and mythology intersect? How can we imagine Bennelong as an individual, and as a man of his community? How can we imagine the behaviours and responses of those men who were charged with executing the objectives of colonisation?

The team set about exploring these questions, testing their ideas, creating shape and texture to those ideas, and gradually allowing the 'spirit' of the work to emerge.

With so much historical material about Bennelong available, the Creative Team became more interested in the history that was not written. How could they look at aspects of Bennelong's life that have not been recorded? How could they explore what has been written into mythology, challenge elements of that, and present it in a way that would inspire the audience to work on their own ideas and perspectives about Bennelong and the times of First Contact?

The Creative Team sourced a large number of images (mostly from visual artists who came to Australia on the First Fleet) and created a visual landscape to display in the studio to assist the Choreographer and the Dancers in igniting ideas that would inspire and guide the creative journey.

While the chronological history and the recorded events were very present in the early stages, the Creative Team and the Dancers wanted to look past the known history, through the list of events, to find a story that lived on the ground to get a

sense of Bennelong's world, his country, and his place among his People. They wanted to know who Bennelong was – as a living, breathing person – not just as a historical figure.

As the process developed, many aspects of the story became ever more fascinating and the aim to create meaning beyond the commonly known narrative became more of an imperative. For example, the number '1788' is used as a featured motif in the set design. It is a number to which great significance has been attributed – a marker on which Australian history has pivoted – but this number is actually little more than a figment of the western calendrical system, an immaterial and ultimately manufactured construct. At the same time, 1788 is part of a much larger picture, which encompasses perspectives on power, sovereignty, and human and cultural rights.

Another important thread in the work was the question, 'Who are the contemporary Bennelongs?' and where does that lead us when thinking about colonial issues then, and contemporary Indigenous issues today.

The remarkable story of Woollarawarre Bennelong is one that resonates deeply. He was a traditional man who was, against his initial will, shown a European way of life, and became an intermediary between his clan and the colonists. It was a duality that cost him dearly, on both sides. Never quite belonging to his new tribe, and earning suspicion from the old, Bennelong paid the price of First Contact by being exiled from both communities.

**STEPHEN PAGE,
CHOREOGRAPHER**

When Stephen and I had our first meeting, he told me he was interested in creating a work that only honoured the amazing story of the man himself and those around him; but also, one that spoke to the past and the present. A work that was both narrative and yet operatic one moment, and intimate the next.

**STEVE FRANCIS,
COMPOSER**

As a traditional man, Bennelong's life changed forever through the arrival of the First Fleet, he faced challenges that no Aboriginal man had encountered before. For me, his legacy and spirit are ever-present on this Country and I hope the design for *Bennelong* begins to reflect these ideas; sacred, contemporary and strong.

**JAKE NASH,
SET DESIGNER**

As dramaturg on *Bennelong*, it has been my role to funnel both information and inspiration into Stephen's already vital flow of unique insights and creative energy. Stephen's genius as a theatre maker is to understand and acknowledge and draw from the historical record, but as with so many Bangarra productions, to use it as a point of departure from which to take off into his own experience and that of his remarkable Dancers. To ask questions about the frustrations, joys, compromises, griefs and survival dimensions of contemporary life for First Nations people.

**ALANA VALENTINE,
DRAMATURG**

Bangarra costumes are designed knowing they will be layered with ochre night after night - they transform into living, moving, works of art. Every Dancer is so individual that their costumes can look completely different to how they started. I love this process as I'm inspired by texture and fabrics and seeing them evolve throughout the season, and it means each costume tells its own story.

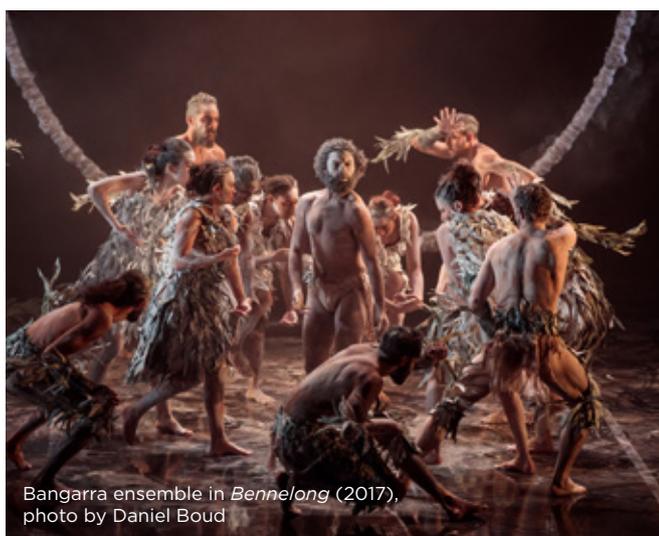
**JENNIFER IRWIN,
COSTUME DESIGNER**

Bennelong may be a far better known figure than Patyegarang, but it's amazing how much we don't know about him, yet he played such a central role in the first relations between black and white people in the country. Once again, it's left to Bangarra to do what they do so well - imaginatively fill the gaps in their unique style of dance theatre.

**NICK SCHLIEPER,
LIGHTING DESIGNER**

PERFORMING BENNELONG

The production of *Bennelong* is crafted as seventeen sections that are woven together as a complete production. Each section offers ideas about the time of First Contact, and the impact and emotional bearings that colonisation brought to the Aboriginal people, while focusing on the story of one man - Woollarawarre Bennelong.



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



Tyrel Dulvarie backstage,
photo by Tiffany Parker



Bangarra Dancers at curtain call for *Bennelong*,
photo by Tiffany Parker

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Before experiencing the work, explore the list of discussion starting points (page 13), and images (pages 14-15), drawing on one or two to initiate reflective discussion, either as a class or in small groups.

You may wish to incorporate contemporary socio-cultural perspectives, geo-political points in time and/or issues of human rights and sovereignty as they are regarded today, for example:

- Are there continuing tensions between western capitalist society and respect for First Nations communities and cultures (economically, culturally, socially, and or politically)? If so, how to these tensions manifest?

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', and how history is often a contested practice that requires thorough research as well as a level of objectivity and sensitivity.

Some broad theme questions might be:

- How can we investigate and re-investigate our history from multiple perspectives?
- What are some ways Indigenous issues that stem from our particular colonial past, are resonating in our society today?

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

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

After watching *Bennelong*, there are a number of ways for students to process what they have experienced.

- Discuss how *Bennelong* depicts colonisation scenarios in the later 18th century.
- Write a critical analysis of the work.
- Respond to the work through illustration, storyboards, collage, or other visual art making.
- Take one scene and identify and describe the elements of dance, music and design.

RESOURCES



ONLINE

Finding Bennelong

A 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/>

Bennelong - Australian Dictionary of Biography

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

This eResource, created by the State Library of New South Wales includes a wealth of information including maps, drawing, and original texts from Sydney life in the 18th and 19th Centuries.
<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/eora>

Barani: Sydney's Aboriginal History

Created by the City of Sydney, the Barani website provides histories of people, places and events in the Sydney 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

Produced by the Australian Children's Television Foundation, My Place for Teachers offers multimedia resources designed to support primary and lower secondary teaching.
http://www.myplace.edu.au/decades_timeline/1790/decade_landing_21.html?tabRank=2&subTabRank=2



BOOKS & JOURNALS

NONFICTION

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.

FICTION

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

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

STARTING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION



THEMES: Indigenous Perspectives, Language, Place, Identity, Ownership

No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word 'home', warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean 'camp' 'spirit centre' and much else all in one. Our word 'land' is too spare and meagre. We can now scarcely use it except with economic overtones unless we happen to be poets.

WEH Stanner, *After the Dreaming*, 1968

THEMES: Indigenous Perspectives, Cultural Studies, Australian Poetry, Values, Pre-Colonial and Post-Settlement History

No more woomera, no more Boomerang
No more playabout, no more the old ways.
Children of nature we were then, No clocks
hurrying crowds to toil.
Now I am civilised and work in the white way,
Now I have a dress, now I have shoes;
'Isn't she lucky to have a good job!'
Better when I had only a dillybag.
Better when I had nothing but happiness.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal, *Then and Now*, 1970

THEMES: Indigenous Perspectives, Pre-Colonial and Post-Settlement Australian History, Australian Literature

All his life he had been tormented by these two allegiances – to the old tribal life, governed by its ancient Law ... and to some adventurousness of the blood and spirit which ardently sought and welcomed change. He looked at his friends resentfully, dimly aware that the quality in himself which they applauded when it expressed itself in the making of corroborees was the same which they mistrusted when it drew him irresistibly into the new exciting life of the white invaders.

Eleanor Dark, *The Timeless Land*, 1941

THEMES: Indigenous Perspectives, Australian History, Values, Language

Sir, I am very well. I hope you are very well. I live at the governor's. I have every day dinner there. I have not my wife; another black man took her away. We have had muzzy doings; he speared me in the back, but I better now; his name is Carroway. All my friends alive and well. Not me go to England no more. I am at home now. I hope Mrs Philips is very well. You nurse me madam when I sick. You very good madam; thank you madam, and hope you remember me madam, not forget. I know you very well madam. Madam I want stockings, thank you madam. Send me two pair of stockings. You my good madam. Thank you Madam. Sir, you give my duty to Lard Sidney. Thank you very good my lord, very good. Hope very well all Family, very well. Sir send me you please some handkerchiefs of pocket. You please Sir send me some shoes. Two pair you please. Bannelong.

Wollarawarre Bennelong, *Letter to Mr Phillips, Steward to Lord Sidney* (Historians speculate the letter written by Bennelong to Governor Arthur Phillip), 1796

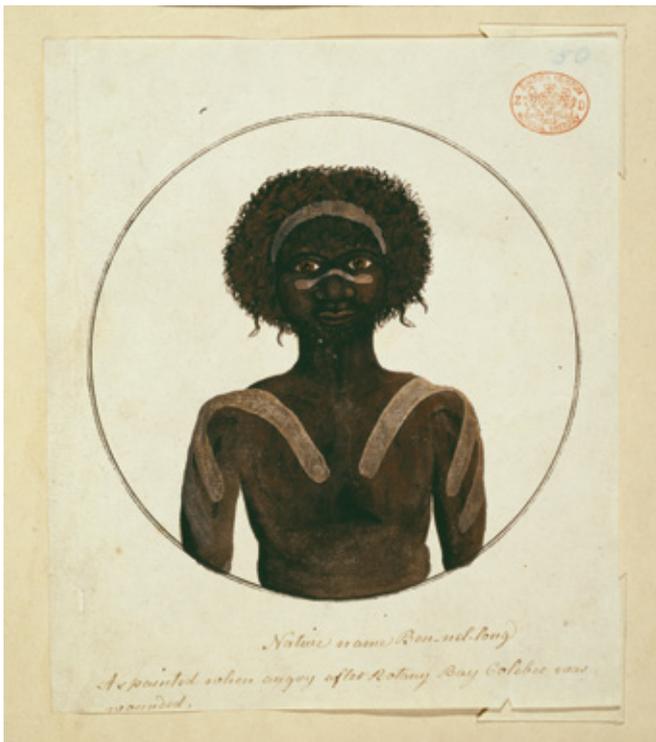
VISUAL STIMULI



Neagle, James (1798). **Ben-nil-long** (engraving). Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Bennelong dressed in style of English gentleman, frock coat, ruffled shirt. Background shows traditional hunting items; spears, shields and the head of a woomera (spear). This engraving was produced in Britain after Bennelong had returned to Australia.

Reproduced courtesy of National Library of Australia



Port Jackson Painter
 (c. 1790). **Native name Ben-nel-long, as pointed when angry after Botany Bay Colebee was wounded**
 (watercolour on paper, annotated with brown ink).
 Watlin Collection, Natural History Museum, London UK.

The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London ©



Lycett, Joseph (1817). **Aborigines spearing fish, others diving for crayfish, a party seated beside a fire cooking fish** (watercolour and gouache on paper). National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Reproduced courtesy of National Library of Australia

bangarra

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