

VCE

THEATRE

STUDIES

BLACK LIGHT

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED
BY JADA ALBERTS

PROMPT PACK A



MALTHOUSE EDUCATION

**MALTHOUSE THEATRE
ACKNOWLEDGES THE
UNCEDDED LANDS OF
THE KULIN NATION. WE
ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR
SOVEREIGNTY AND
THEIR SONGLINES. WE
PAY RESPECT TO THEIR
ELDERS AND THEIR
CHILDREN. WE EMBRACE
AND CELEBRATE THE
OLDEST CULTURE IN
THE WORLD.**

MALTHOUSE THEATRE PRESENTS *BLACK LIGHT*.

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**Prompt Pack written and compiled by Lyall Brooks,
Malthouse Education Coordinator**

BLACK LIGHT

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WELCOME

Welcome to Malthouse Theatre.

This **Prompt Pack A** has been designed to support you and your students as they encounter *Black Light* as a playtext – before it becomes a production on stage. Think of it as a dramaturgy pack: a place to question, explore, imagine and, of course, be provoked and prompted – hence the name!

Rather than offering definitive explanations or ‘answers’, my prompts and activities invite students to begin pulling those dramaturgical threads. They are not expected to reach a single conclusion, but to explore ideas, justify choices and remain open to change. This mirrors the early stages of a production process, where meaning is negotiated, tested, and reshaped through discussion and experimentation.

The **Contexts** chapter explores the world of the play – its place, time, society, language, and theatre style – offering entry points for research and interpretation.

Themes identifies key ideas the playwright explores across the play, supported by patterns, repetition, and development within the script.

Then **The Production** chapter invites students to imagine how *Black Light* might be interpreted on stage, through a series of provocations and questions that encourage production-thinking and creative decision-making.

Together, these chapters support students in developing dramaturgical insight and preparing for interpretive analysis. Again, these resources are intended as inroads, not endpoints. Students will need to engage in their own discussion, research, and reflection to deepen their understanding.

This Prompt Pack focuses on the playtext itself, rather than the production or even development history. **Prompt Pack B** (released during the season) will include behind-the-scenes material, production imagery, interviews, and performance memory-joggers once students have seen the show and are ready to analyse and evaluate the work in performance.

Rounding out our award-winning education resources will be the digital workshop **Revisit the Play** (booked separately, released in September), to recap and synthesise students’ knowledge and skills as they journey towards their final VCE Theatre Studies exams.

If you have any questions about this material, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with me at lbrooks@malthousetheatre.com.au.

I look forward to welcoming you and your students to the theatre.

See you there!



Lyall Brooks
Malthouse Theatre Education Coordinator

WARNINGS & SUPPORT

THIS PRODUCTION CONTAINS DEPICTIONS OR MENTIONS OF, OR REFERENCES TO:

- grief and loss
- mental health issues
- queerphobia
- addiction
- natural disasters
- frequent coarse language

Malthouse Theatre is a new work company, and things can change along the journey from concept to production as scripts are redrafted, actors make discoveries, designers bring in new elements, and directors make changes right up to opening night. We update content information throughout rehearsals and publish this on our dedicated Content Warnings page on the Malthouse website, malthousetheatre.com.au/content-warnings.

Extra care must always be taken when working with First Nations content in the classroom. Even when the focus is on the analysis and evaluation of the theatre piece itself, students must still engage with historical and contemporary Indigenous issues as the inextricable themes and contexts of the work.

I thoroughly recommend the free resource *Teaching First Nations Content* and *Concepts in the Drama Classroom* by Kamarra Bell-Wykes, Rachel Forgasz and Danielle Hradsky. Head to the **RESOURCES** chapter for a link.

I further urge you to take special care with any First Nations students in your classroom. Be aware that the danger of talking about one's lived experience or culture 'in the abstract' can be just as confronting and damaging as talking insensitively about specifics.

You are encouraged to read any content information we provide, explore this Prompt Pack in advance, use your best judgement when disseminating or discussing information, get in touch if you have any questions, and make yourself and your students aware of the support offered by the organisations below.

Please contact Education Coordinator Lyall Brooks at lbrooks@malthousetheatre.com.au if you have any questions.

YARNING SAFENSTRONG
vahs.org.au/yarning-safenstrong

13YARN
13yarn.org.au

KIDS HELPLINE
1800 55 1800
kidshelpline.com.au

BEYONDBLUE
1300 224 636
beyondblue.org.au

HEADSPACE
headspace.org.au

REACHOUT
au.reachout.com

SUICIDE CALLBACK SERVICE
1300 659 467
suicidecallbackservice.org.au

CONTEXTS





PLACE

In Theatre Studies, the concept of place is not just where a play is set, it is why that place matters and how it shapes characters, action, meaning and interpretation.

In *Black Light*, the entire play unfolds 'on the porch of an old house near the sea, on Larrakia land, far from town'. Although this may seem simple, this single location has been carefully chosen and deliberately limited to carry significant dramatic weight and offer multiple levels of meaning.

THE PORCH

A porch is a threshold. It sits between inside and outside, shelter and exposure, rest and alertness. It is a place where people sit, wait, talk, watch and listen, rather than act quickly or decisively.

As you read the script, consider:

- What does it mean that the characters spend so much time on the porch, rather than inside the house or out in the open?
- What kinds of conversations and emotional states does this setting invite?
- What kinds of actions or events does it prevent or delay?

You might notice that the porch encourages stillness, reflection and proximity. It allows characters to gather together while remaining alert to what lies beyond them: weather, sound, darkness and threat.



DOMESTICITY

Although the porch is a domestic space, it is not neutral. Different interpretations of this place could lead to very different productions.

As a dramaturg, you might ask: How else could this domestic setting be understood?

- As a place of safety and refuge?
- As a place of stasis or being 'stuck'?
- As a site of intergenerational gathering and care?
- As a lookout point onto an uncertain or dangerous world?

None of these interpretations is 'correct' on its own. Each highlights different aspects of the play and shapes how an audience might experience it.

LARRAKIA COUNTRY

Black Light is explicitly set on Larrakia land and this is a crucial contextual consideration. The play does not provide detailed explanations of Larrakia history or culture. Instead, it assumes a worldview in which Country is living, relational and enduring.

As you read, discuss:

- What cultural knowledge does the play seem to assume rather than explain?
- How might Country be felt on stage even when it is not spoken about directly?
- In what ways might place hold memory, authority or continuity beyond individual characters?

A production might choose to evoke Country through sound, rhythm, stillness, weather or atmosphere, rather than through literal representation.

DISTANCE AND SYSTEMS

The house is located far from town, and this distance matters. Town is often associated with systems, institutions, surveillance and instability, while the house on Country operates according to different rhythms and values.

As you consider this distance, ask:

- Does being far from town suggest protection, vulnerability, resistance or isolation?
- Is this place a chosen refuge or a last remaining option?
- How might a production emphasise or downplay the sense of distance from systems of power and control?

Different interpretations may frame this distance as hopeful, precarious, or both at the same time.

A lock is a psychological threshold.

GASTON BACHELARD

The Poetics of Space

INVESTIGATE

As you read *Black Light*, notice which ideas about place capture your attention. You do not need to account for everything at once. Begin by following a single line of curiosity.

Choose one way of interpreting the porch and its location, for example:

- a place of safety
- a place of stasis
- a site of gathering
- a lookout point
- a place shaped by Country
- a place positioned in resistance to systems and institutions

Working individually, in pairs or small groups, identify moments in the script that support this interpretation of place. Consider how this reading might influence:

- the actors' physicality and presence
- the pacing and rhythm of scenes
- design choices such as set, lighting or sound
- the audience's relationship to the characters and the world of the play

Be prepared to articulate your thinking using a sentence such as '*If the porch is interpreted as..., then this might shape the audience's experience by...*'. There is no single correct answer and the strength of your work lies in how clearly and thoughtfully you justify your choices.

As you move forward, you may choose to follow this thread further, allow it to shift or evolve, or notice where your interpretation overlaps or contrasts with others.





TIME

The context of time not only refers to when a play is set, but about how time operates within the world of the play. Time can move forward, loop back, pause, fracture or refuse to settle. Playwrights often shape time to influence tension, meaning, and how an audience experiences events.

In *Black Light*, time is deliberately unstable. The play resists clear chronological sequencing and instead invites audiences to experience time as shifting, relational, and sometimes unmeasurable. From the outset, the script signals that we are not entering a conventional timeline.

We're caught in this idea that time is linear, whereas it's actually not a linear thing. We are products of our past. We're all spiritual creatures here on this earth having this physical experience, and so the way we all sit in this place, the way we move through it, isn't affected by the time that have on our watch or our phone. They're just kind of arbitrary things that are made up.

And from an Indigenous perspective: people have a process, from this world to the next, and we have a responsibility and obligation to guide people thorough that – as family and as community – and I think this story speaks to that obligation. And it's a broader story as well; this happens in many different cultures and many different societies.

JOHN HARVEY

Playwright



ONTOLOGY

Ontology a branch of metaphysics that deals with the 'nature of being'. In this Prompt Pack, the term is used to describe the *ontological* state that playwright Jada Alberts has attributed to each scene:

- Reality
- The Dream
- In-Between

These labels don't simply describe mood. They invite readers and theatre-makers to consider *how* a scene should be experienced and what kind of truth it may be operating in. A scene in The Dream may not behave like everyday realism; a scene in Reality may still contain memory, grief or symbolic resonance; and a scene in the In-Between may blur the boundary between what is happening, what is remembered and what is felt.

As you read, consider:

- What changes when you know the playwright has placed a scene in Reality, The Dream or In-Between?
- How might performance choices shift across these states: in vocal tone, pace, stillness, physicality or use of silence?
- Do any scenes resist their label – or deliberately complicate it?
- How do these shifting states affect your experience of time in the play? Does time move forward, loop, pause or fracture depending on the state?

The use of explicit ontological states is one way *Black Light* resists a single, linear timeline, and instead invites the audience to experience the story through multiple modes of being.

DISRUPTED BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

The first two scenes of *Black Light* are titled THE END and THE BEGINNING respectively. This reversal immediately unsettles expectations of linear progression.

The 'end' is also explicitly framed as 'just another beginning' later in the play, and Nan reflects on there being 'so many' beginnings. This invites us to experience time less as a straight line, and more as something that loops, returns, re-frames and accumulates.

As you read, consider:

- What might it mean to begin with an ending?
- Is the play suggesting the end of a particular way of living, thinking or being?
- What kind of 'beginning' follows, and for whom?
- What is gained when 'the end' and 'the beginning' become ideas, not timestamps?
- Where does the play feel like it is moving forward – and where does it feel like it is circling?

Rather than marking a clear sequence of events, these provocations invite audiences to think about time as conceptual rather than chronological; shaped by upheaval, transition and uncertainty rather than cause and effect.

ELAPSED TIME WITHOUT MEASUREMENT

Throughout the script, time rarely passes in ways that are clearly measured or announced. Occasional stage directions (such as references to light shifting or the sun setting) suggest change, yet the script avoids consistent markers like 'later', 'the next day' or 'weeks pass'.

As you read the script, identify and discuss:

- Where do you sense that time has passed, even if it is not specified?
- How does the absence of clear markers affect your understanding of duration?
- Does the play feel compressed, stretched or suspended in places?

Time in *Black Light* is not governed by clocks. It is instead shaped by experience, mood and circumstance.

WAITING AS A TEMPORAL STATE

Much of the play is structured around waiting: for power to return, for information, for danger or for change.

As a dramaturg, you might ask:

- What does it mean that so much of the play is spent waiting rather than doing?
- How does waiting affect the characters' relationships with one another?
- Is waiting passive, or does it become an active form of endurance or resistance?

In this way, time is experienced subjectively. Minutes, hours and memories blur together, creating a sense that time is being felt rather than measured.

TIME, MEMORY & SPEECH

Characters in *Black Light* frequently move in and out of moments that feel anchored in the present. At times, characters step into extended speeches or soliloquy-like moments that seem to pause the surrounding action. These moments may feel reflective, interior or unbound from the immediate world of the porch.

At one point, Bub articulates an embodied experience of time that loops, returns and refuses linear progression, reinforcing the play's broader approach to time as lived and felt rather than measured.

As you read, consider:

- When does the present moment appear to pause or dissolve?
- How do memories, stories or repeated phrases interrupt linear flow?
- By the end of a speech, has the character returned fully to the present – or has something shifted?

These moments suggest a sense of time that is layered, where past and present coexist rather than remain separate. Rather than progressing steadily forward, time loops, resurfaces and accumulates meaning.





AN UNCERTAIN PRESENT

Although much of the play is grounded in the present moment, there is a recurring sense of anticipation. Something feels close, even if it is never fully shown or resolved.

As you read, consider:

- How does the script create tension without depicting events directly?
- What role does anticipation play in shaping the audience's experience of time?
- Does the future feel imminent, delayed or unknowable?

Time in *Black Light* is therefore charged. The present feels fragile, and the future presses in without arriving in any clear or measurable way.

*Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all around us and within.
Haunted by tribal memories. I know
This little now, this accidental present
Is not the all of me. Whose long making
Is so much of the past.*

AUNTY OODGEROO NOONUCCAL



SOCIETY, POLITICS & CULTURE

The multi-layered context of society, politics and culture refers to the conditions in which a play is written and set, including how people live together, how power operates, and what values, relationships and responsibilities shape everyday life. These contexts influence what characters expect of one another, what pressures they face and what feels possible or impossible within the world of the play.

In *Black Light*, society, politics and culture are experienced intimately rather than abstractly. Large systems and institutions exist, but may feel distant, unreliable or absent. What comes into focus instead are relationships, responsibilities and acts of care – particularly within family and community – as people navigate uncertainty, crisis and change.

CARE, KINSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

Care is a central organising force in the world of *Black Light*. Characters are bound together through family, kinship and long-standing relationships, and much of the action revolves around who takes responsibility when circumstances become difficult.

As you read the script, consider:

- Who is responsible for caring for whom?
- How is care shown through listening, waiting, humour, conflict or silence?
- Is care presented as a choice, an obligation, or both?

Care in *Black Light* is not idealised. It can be exhausting, frustrating and unevenly distributed. Some characters carry more emotional and practical weight than others, and these imbalances shape how relationships function under pressure.

This emphasis on care also highlights the limits of formal systems. When external support falters or disappears, responsibility falls back onto individuals and families. In this context, care becomes both a personal and social act; a way of holding things together when larger structures fail to do so.

NAN: 70s. In the early stages of a degenerative brain disease.

AUNTY: Late 50s. Nan's eldest daughter and carer.

MUM: Early 50s. Nan's second daughter.

BUB: Mid 30s. Everyone's child. Parent. Queer.

All characters are Larrakia mothers.

BLACK LIGHT

As a dramaturg, you might ask:

- How does care shape the power dynamics between characters?
- What tensions arise when care is expected but not reciprocated?
- How might these responsibilities influence performance choices such as physical proximity, pacing or tone?

In *Black Light*, kinship is not simply a backdrop to the action. It is one of the primary forces driving how the characters endure uncertainty and respond to crisis.

SYSTEMS, POWER & ABSENCE

While systems and institutions exist in the world of *Black Light*, they are rarely experienced as stable or reliable. Power, communication and authority often feel distant, delayed or unavailable, leaving characters to navigate uncertainty without clear guidance or support.

As you read, identify and discuss:

- What systems are relied upon, even when they are not present onstage?
- How do characters respond when information is limited or unreliable?
- Who holds power in moments where formal authority is absent?

Rather than depicting political systems directly, the play reveals their influence through absence and failure. Decisions are deferred. Information is incomplete. External forces shape events without ever fully entering the space of the porch. This creates a sense that power operates elsewhere, while its consequences are felt locally and immediately.

In this context, politics is not experienced through debate or policy, but through:

- waiting for responses
- managing uncertainty
- absorbing the emotional impact of decisions made beyond the characters' control

This distance between systems and people heightens pressure within relationships. Responsibility shifts inward, reinforcing the importance of care, kinship and shared endurance as substitutes for institutional support.



CULTURE IN THE PRESENT TENSE

Black Light is grounded in contemporary First Nations experience, presenting culture as living, present and ongoing, rather than historical or symbolic. Cultural identity is not explained or foregrounded as an issue to be resolved. Instead, it exists as part of the everyday fabric of the characters' lives.

As you read, consider:

- How culture is expressed through language, humour, relationships and shared history.
- What is treated as ordinary rather than extraordinary.
- What is not explained to the audience, and why that might matter.

The character of Bub exists within this world without their identity being framed as a problem or a point of conflict. Bub's queerness and Indigeneity are not isolated or exceptionalised, but understood as part of a contemporary social reality in which identities are complex, intersecting, and lived day to day.

This reflects a broader cultural context in which First Nations stories are told from within community rather than for explanation or validation. The play does not pause to interpret culture for the audience. Instead, it invites audiences to meet the world on its own terms.

Understanding this context helps frame how *Black Light* positions identity, belonging and responsibility; not as themes to be debated, but as conditions that shape how people live, relate and endure together.

We do not have enough time to subscribe to the framework of a foreign political structure. We should be building our own protective structures only known to our families and communities.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Bundjalung Artist





LANGUAGE

The context of Language includes dialogue, storytelling, repetition, silence and the rhythms of speech – or, broadly, how words are used within a play. Language shapes character relationships, creates tone, and guides how audiences receive and interpret a world onstage.

In *Black Light*, language is everyday, conversational and deeply purposeful. Meaning is not driven by elaborate speeches or rhetorical flourish, but through listening, interruption, repetition, humour, and what is left unsaid. Language functions as a social and relational tool, rather than a display of authority or persuasion.

EVERYDAY SPEECH AND NATURALISM

The dialogue in *Black Light*, regardless of its placement in scenes of Reality, The Dream or In-Between, often closely resembles everyday conversation. Characters speak casually, interrupt one another, change direction mid-thought, and use humour as a way of navigating discomfort.

As you read, consider:

- How closely does the dialogue resemble natural speech?
- What does this conversational quality suggest about the relationships between characters?
- How does informal language affect the audience's sense of intimacy or realism?

This use of naturalistic language helps ground the play in recognisable experience. It invites audiences to listen closely, rather than wait for moments of heightened theatricality or exposition.

NAN'S COGNITIVE DECLINE

Notice in the script how Nan's language shifts between lucidity (storytelling or teaching mode) and disorientation (confused, looping or distressed states). It is also interesting to note how those disorientations often orbit the character of Evelyn, the lost daughter and sister (and source of ongoing residual trauma for all characters, regardless of how much they face it or let it show).

These linguistic shifts can be observed across all scenes, regardless of ontology – there is no state to retreat to that can provide respite from her 'degenerative brain disease' – and could be read as both neurological and symbolic: reflecting grief, memory and the porous boundary between past and present.

STORYTELLING AND SHARED MEMORY

Much of the language in *Black Light* is shaped by storytelling. Characters recount memories, repeat anecdotes, or return to shared references.

Investigate the text and identify:

- When do characters tell stories rather than advance action?
- What role do these stories play within relationships?
- Who listens, who responds, and who remains silent?

Storytelling becomes a way of holding time, preserving connection, and making sense of uncertainty. Language here is not only communicative but connective, reinforcing bonds between characters even as circumstances shift around them.

SPEAKING, LISTENING & POWER

Who speaks – and who is listened to – matters in *Black Light*. Language reflects shifting power dynamics between characters, particularly in moments of care, conflict or vulnerability.

As you read, consider:

- Whose voices carry weight within the group?
- When are characters spoken over, ignored or deferred to?
- How does listening function as an action in itself?

In this way, language becomes a site of negotiation. Power is not asserted through dominance or command, but through attention, withholding, humour and shared understanding.

NAN:

*Don't let them get you down in their ways
darling, you must remember
there are always other ways*

BUB:

What do you mean

NAN:

It's out there look

BUB:

Where

NAN:

*In the belly of that fish
In the roots of the bloodwood
In the bend in the pandanus*

The shell of the longbum

The breast of the goldfinch

The eagles talons

You'll find it out there first

Then in the faces of your children

Your neighbours

The song you sing with them

Off key usually

Aim for unison, that's all

That's where it is

In the togetherness

BUB:

Okay

SCENE 12





THEATRE STYLES

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS THEATRE

Black Light is written by a First Nations playwright, set explicitly on Larrakia land, and anchored in Larrakia family, language, responsibility and Country. Contemporary Indigenous Theatre (or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre) may therefore be a useful primary stylistic lens – not as a limiting label, but as a way of noticing how the play’s structure and conventions may be shaped by Indigenous ways of knowing, being and storytelling

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drama holds an important place in Australian literature. As a body of work, these texts express unique and specific cultural heritages. Contemporary Indigenous theatre is produced for multiple and various audiences; sometimes for specific or general Indigenous communities, and sometimes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

MARYROSE CASEY AND CATHY CRAIGIE

A Brief History of Indigenous Australian Contemporary Theatre

STORYTELLING

In *Black Light*, storytelling isn’t just decoration or backstory. It is part of how characters relate, remember, teach, warn and care for one another.

For example, Nan frequently moves into language that feels storied – rhythmic, image-driven, and instructional – offering Bub a worldview that is felt through Country, not explained as information. This kind of speech can operate like an onstage transfer of knowledge; not a ‘speech to the audience’, but something that changes the atmosphere of the room.

As you read, consider:

- When does storytelling function as action (something that shifts the room, changes a relationship or reframes what matters)?
- When does it feel like ‘story’ is being used to carry the characters through fear, instability or grief?



FLUID TIME

In a conventional realist structure, time often progresses cleanly: one scene follows the next, and the audience tracks a clear sequence. But the non-linear approach to time in *Black Light* aligns with conventions often found in Contemporary Indigenous Theatre, where time is not always treated as linear or progressive. Instead, time may be:

- cyclical
- ancestral
- relational
- shaped by responsibility, memory and connection

In this context, time is not simply something that passes, but something that is held, shared and felt within family and community. While *Black Light* does not explain this worldview directly, its structure and use of non-linear time invite audiences to experience time differently.

THE 'UPLIFT'

Take a look at the below quote from celebrated First Nations theatre-maker, Wesley Enoch.

Black Light may not offer an overt celebration or shared invitation for non-Indigenous audiences, but a returning to what endures: Country, kinship, knowledge, and 'other ways'. You can hear that potential in Nan's late-play language to Bub: 'Put your body back where it belongs... There's a light. It's never gone out.'

As you read (and later, when you see the production), keep asking:

- Do you experience an uplift in *Black Light*? If so, what kind?

What is being offered: hope, reassurance, endurance, responsibility, quiet strength, or something else?

How do you – in the Greek sense of 'catharsis' – take the souls of those in the audience on a journey, through things that can be incredibly harrowing and confronting and powerful, and return those souls back to their bodies, stretched and invigorated and exercised around an idea?

Whereas I find a lot of non-Indigenous writers love the sense of 'keeping in the wallow' of it – you know – I think that a lot of Indigenous writers find a way of having some kind of 'uplift' in their work – a greater responsibility for an Indigenous theatremaker to go 'how do I LIFT people up at the end, so that they can go out, into life, with a sense of feeling empowered?

Because you feel a sense of responsibility for every single Aboriginal person who's in the audience – to feel like their story had been told, and told with care, and that they had been given something that was a gift to take home with them. Then, regardless if there were Aboriginal people in the audience at all, it would give everyone that sense of lift.

WESLEY ENOCH

Drama Victoria Jumpstart Conference, 2019



LANGUAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS

In many plays, characters explain the world for the audience. In *Black Light*, the script often does the opposite. Characters speak from within shared experience – using humour, shorthand, interruptions, repeated phrases, pauses and story – so that meaning is carried through relationship and listening.

This can align with Contemporary Indigenous Theatre conventions, where dialogue may prioritise connection, lived experience and responsibility, rather than translating everything into neat exposition.

Ask yourself:

- What do we understand because the characters know each other – not because they ‘tell’ the audience?
- When does listening function as an action in itself?

OTHER STYLES

While (I would argue) Contemporary Indigenous Theatre is the strongest overarching lens, you may wish to apply your growing knowledge of other theatre movements and their conventions to identify how *Black Light* might simultaneously demonstrate these.

If you choose to explore this ‘Eclectic Theatre’ extension, here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Speculative Fiction:** While *Black Light* is grounded in lived domestic realism, it also draws on conventions of speculative fiction – particularly Black speculative storytelling – where past, present and future coexist (see also, but do not conflate with, AfroFuturism). In this tradition, history is not left behind, but carried forward, shaping imagined futures and alternate possibilities. Rather than offering escapism, speculative fiction is often used to interrogate systems of power, survival and belonging – asking how communities endure – and to imagine themselves beyond oppression.
- **Naturalism/Realism:** The family dynamic, conversational humour and domestic rhythms ground the play in recognisable human behaviour (and support a realistic acting style), even as the world outside becomes unstable.
- **Non-Naturalism:** While much of *Black Light* is grounded in everyday domestic realism, the script also departs from naturalism through its explicit use of ontological states (Reality, The Dream, In-Between). These states invite performance choices that prioritise memory, symbolism and felt experience over literal representation, allowing scenes to operate beyond a single, linear reality.
- **Eco-Horror / Climate Horror:** A contemporary form of horror theatre exploring the fear of nature’s revenge and the consequences of environmental destruction.
- **Epic Theatre:** Early in the play, Nan’s language has a narrated, story-framing quality: ‘Here is a house. An old woman before you...’. There’s very little stopping a stage interpretation from leaning into this type of direct address, framing device or heightened theatrical narration.

None of these are right answers; they are lenses, and different productions (including Malthouse’s) may emphasise different ones.

EXPLORE

Read the short article, *A Brief History of Indigenous Australian Contemporary Theatre* by Maryrose Casey and Cathy Craigie, linked in the **RESOURCES** section, or freely available online through Australian Plays Transform.

Working individually or in small groups, choose one play, theatre company or artist mentioned in the article and do a little further research.

Prepare a short informal presentation (2–3 minutes) for the class that answers:

- Who created this work?
- When was it made, and in what social or political moment?
- What theatrical style(s) or storytelling approaches does it use?

As a class, place the works you've researched along a shared timeline (chronological, thematic or stylistic), then discuss together:

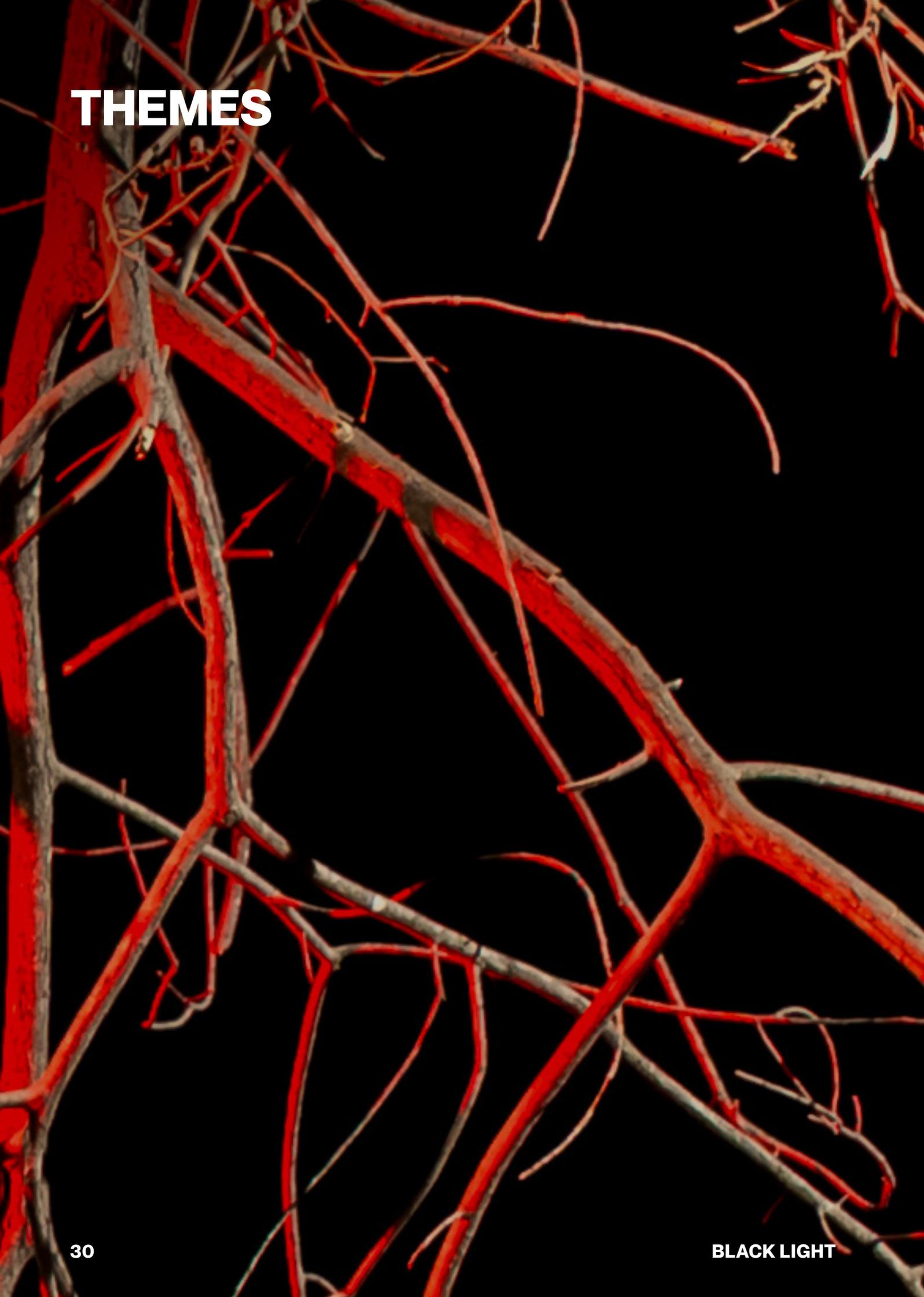
- Can you see an evolution in theatrical styles or forms over time?
- How do the issues, voices or perspectives shift across decades?
- Where might *Black Light* sit within this broader lineage?

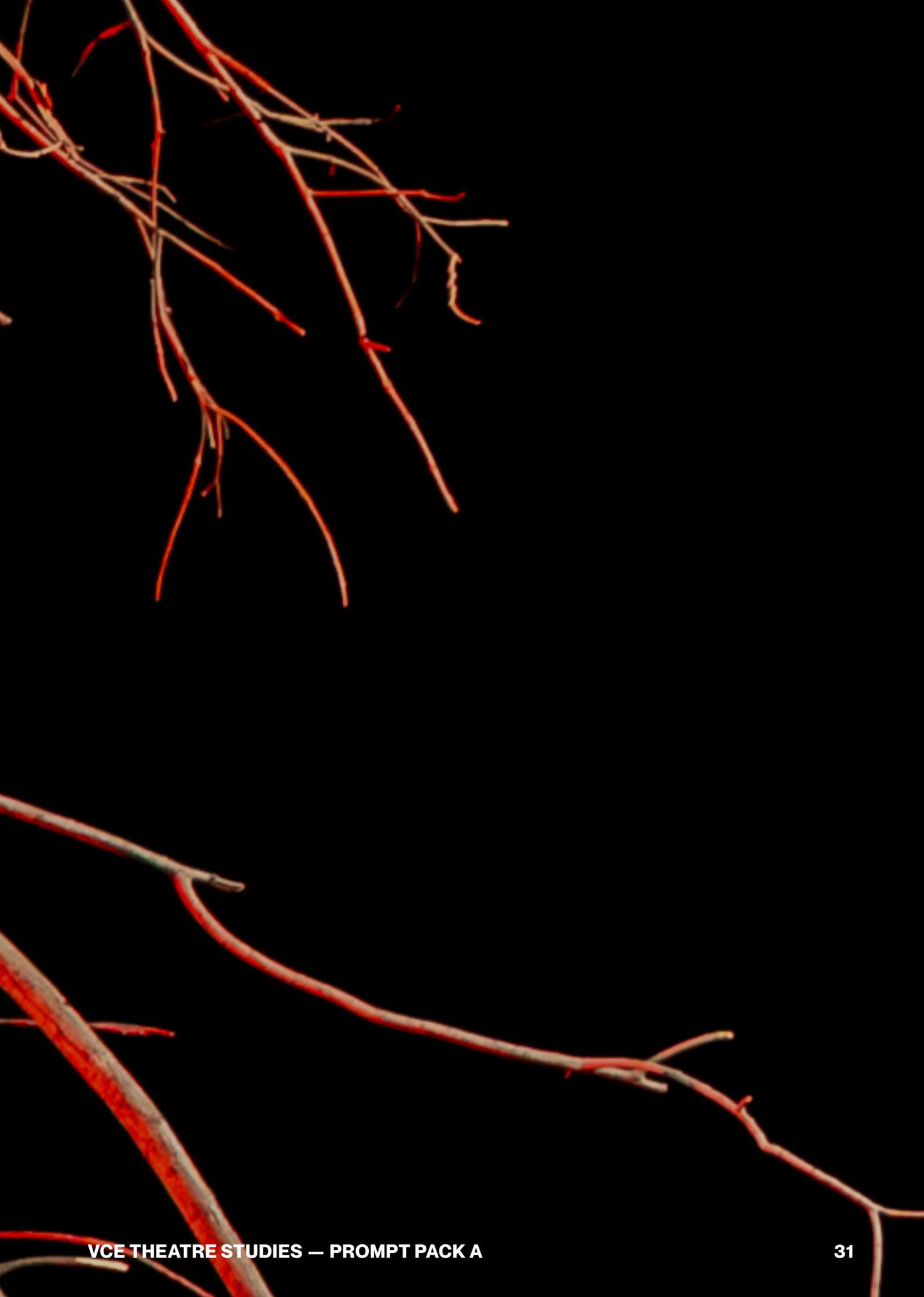
You don't need to find 'right answers' here. The goal is to begin recognising Contemporary Indigenous Theatre as a diverse, evolving practice – shaped by history, community and changing cultural conversations.





THEMES

A dense, intricate network of thin, reddish-orange branches, possibly from a plant like a coral tree, is shown against a solid black background. The branches are illuminated by black light, causing them to glow with a vibrant, almost neon red-orange hue. The lighting highlights the texture and structure of the branches, creating a complex, web-like pattern. The overall effect is one of stark contrast and dramatic lighting.



CARE AS RESPONSIBILITY, BURDEN AND LOVE

At its heart, *Black Light* is a play about care.

The play explores what it means to care for others when circumstances are difficult, resources are limited, and certainty is slipping away. Care in *Black Light* is not presented as a simple act of kindness or generosity, but as an ongoing responsibility that is deeply entwined with love, obligation, frustration, humour, exhaustion and endurance.

Care operates on multiple levels throughout the play:

- caring for an elder
- caring for a younger person
- caring for family
- caring for culture and Country
- caring when there are no systems left to rely on

Rather than idealising care, the play shows it as something unevenly distributed. Some characters carry more responsibility than others, and that imbalance shapes relationships, conflict and power within the family.

Care in *Black Light* often appears repetitive and unresolvable. It doesn't 'fix' the situation or lead to a clear outcome. Instead, it must be performed again and again – through waiting, listening, arguing, joking, reassuring, and simply staying present.

I'm the eldest child, in this sprawling family. A legacy passed on from my mother. This is precious earth, Gulumerrgin, Larrakia, Belyuen, of which I was given the keys. That is to say, the responsibility. It is shared. Not mine alone...

...This is loud Country. My Country. Which is to say, I belong to it.

SCENE 2

PATTERNS OF CARE IN THE PLAY

Across the script, care appears in recurring ways:

→ **Intergenerational care**

Older and younger characters are bound together through responsibility and knowledge-sharing. Care flows both ways – through physical support, emotional reassurance and the passing on of understanding.

→ **Care as labour**

Caring is shown as work. It takes time, energy, patience and emotional resilience. This labour is often invisible, but its weight is felt throughout the play.

→ **Care and conflict**

Moments of tension, irritation or sharp humour often arise from care rather than a lack of it. Frustration is frequently a by-product of responsibility, not indifference.

→ **Care beyond systems**

As external supports become unreliable or unavailable, care becomes something the characters must provide themselves. Responsibility shifts inward, increasing pressure on relationships.

→ **Care beyond presence**

Care in *Black Light* is not only focused on the people physically present onstage. Several absent figures – including Evelyn, Cassie, and Bub’s children – exert ongoing pressure on the characters’ decisions, emotions and responsibilities. These offstage relationships shape how care is distributed, even when the people being cared for cannot respond, reciprocate or be reassured. In this way, absence becomes dramaturgically active. Responsibility does not disappear when someone is gone; it often intensifies.

These patterns suggest that care in *Black Light* is not optional. It is something the characters inherit, carry and negotiate, whether they want to or not.

THE PLAY ASKS:

- What does it mean to care for someone over a long period of time?
- When does care feel like love, and when does it feel like burden?
- Who is expected to care, and who is allowed to step away?
- How does care shape power dynamics within a family?
- What happens when care is all that is left?

Rather than offering clear answers, *Black Light* invites the audience to sit inside these questions, recognising care as something that is both sustaining and exhausting.

INVESTIGATE

Choose one relationship in the play and track how care operates within it.

As you read, identify:

- moments where care is expressed through action, language or silence
- moments where care leads to tension or conflict
- who carries the greatest responsibility in this relationship, and how that affects them

Then consider:

- Is care in this relationship freely given, expected or inherited?
- How does this shape the characters’ behaviour and choices?
- What might an audience come to understand about care by watching this relationship unfold on stage?

Be prepared to support your interpretation with specific moments from the script.

ENDURANCE

While *Black Light* is grounded in the everyday life of a family, it is also a play about living within a state of ongoing crisis. Rather than depicting a single catastrophic event, the play explores what it means to endure when instability becomes normal and uncertainty stretches on without resolution.

The crisis in *Black Light* is never fully contained or explained. It arrives gradually, presses in from the edges of the world, and remains unresolved. As a result, the characters' primary action is not escape, resistance or triumph – it is endurance.

Survival in this play is not dramatic or heroic. It is quiet, repetitive and relational. It is made up of waiting, listening, holding space, caring for one another and continuing on even when answers are unavailable.

THE CRISIS

At the heart of *Black Light* is an unfolding crisis that remains largely offstage, unnamed and unresolved. While its exact nature is never fully explained, the script offers fragments: power outages, restricted movement, military presence, missing people, environmental disturbance, and the steady erosion of safety and certainty.

Importantly, this crisis is not experienced equally. It is encountered through waiting, partial information, and decisions made elsewhere – shaping the characters' lives without inviting their participation or consent. The audience, like the characters, is asked to endure uncertainty rather than receive clarity.

As you read, consider:

- What information about the crisis is shared, and what holes are left in our knowledge (or what might be withheld)?
- How does the absence of explanation affect tension and meaning?
- Does the crisis feel natural, human-made, political or systemic – or deliberately ambiguous?
- How does living with crisis differ from responding to a single catastrophic event?

Rather than driving the play through action, the crisis in *Black Light* creates the conditions under which endurance is tested: emotionally, relationally and ethically.



THIS ISN'T
POLITICS.
THIS IS
SURVIVAL

LIVING INSIDE CRISIS

Across the play, crisis is experienced as a condition rather than an event.

→ **Uncertainty replaces clarity**

Information is partial, delayed or unreliable. Characters are often responding to what they don't know, rather than what they do.

→ **Waiting becomes an action**

Much of the play is structured around waiting: for power to return, for updates, for danger, for reassurance, for change. This waiting is not passive; it shapes behaviour, relationships and emotional states.

→ **The outside world presses in**

Although much of the action takes place on the porch, the sense of threat or instability beyond it is constant. What happens elsewhere affects what happens here.

→ **The First Nations lens**

Enduring oppressive systems can also interrupt relationships to place and belonging, making survival feel incompatible with listening, staying or returning.

Rather than moving toward a clear resolution, the play asks the audience to sit with the discomfort of not knowing when, or if, things will improve.

ENDURANCE AS A RELATIONAL ACT

In *Black Light*, survival is not something characters achieve alone. Endurance is shared.

→ Characters rely on one another to make it through uncertainty.

→ Emotional support, humour and shared memory become survival tools.

→ Moments of connection coexist with fear, frustration and fatigue.

Endurance here is not framed as resilience in the motivational sense. It is not about overcoming adversity, but about remaining present within it.

This focus shifts attention away from solutions and toward relationships – asking what sustains people when systems fail and futures feel fragile.

THE PLAY ASKS:

→ What does it mean to live inside a crisis rather than respond to a single event?

→ How do people adapt when instability becomes ongoing?

→ What forms of endurance are quiet, unseen or uncelebrated?

→ Who gets to endure, and at what cost?

→ What helps people keep going when there are no clear answers?

Rather than offering reassurance, *Black Light* allows these questions to remain open, asking audiences to recognise endurance as both necessary and deeply taxing.

The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance.

VIKTOR E. FRANKL

Man's Search for Meaning

ACTIVITY: ENDURING UNCERTAINTY

Black Light explores what it means to live within a prolonged state of uncertainty, where instability is ongoing and there are no clear answers or timelines for resolution.

Step outside the world of the play and think about other situations where people are required to endure uncertainty over long periods of time.

This might include (but is not limited to):

- environmental or ecological change
- war or geopolitical conflict
- health or medical uncertainty
- economic instability
- political or social upheaval
- displacement or loss
- any other external threat or crisis

You may draw on:

- current events
- recent history
- community experiences
- stories you've heard or observed
- personal or generational experience (only if you feel comfortable)

PART 1: IDENTIFYING A CRISIS

Individually or in small groups:

- Identify one ongoing crisis (local, national or global).
- Briefly describe what makes this crisis ongoing rather than a single event.
- Consider who is most affected by the uncertainty it creates.

PART 2: ENDURANCE, NOT SOLUTIONS

Now shift your focus away from 'fixing' the crisis. Instead, discuss:

- What forms of endurance are required in this situation?
- How do people keep going when outcomes are unclear?
- What everyday actions, relationships or routines help people survive uncertainty?

Try to avoid dramatic or heroic responses. Focus instead on ordinary endurance.

PART 3: RETURN TO THE PLAY

Discuss as a class:

- How does *Black Light* reflect similar patterns of endurance?
- What does the play help you understand about living with uncertainty?
- Does seeing the play alongside real-world examples deepen your understanding of the characters' experience?

You are not looking for direct parallels or allegories. Instead, think about shared human responses to prolonged crisis: waiting, adapting, caring, humour, fatigue and persistence.

This activity asks you to recognise *Black Light* not as a story about one specific crisis, but as a play about how people live when certainty disappears. By stepping outside the play, you may return to it with a deeper understanding of what endurance looks like onstage – and off.

Emergency

PHONE
OUT
OF
ORDER

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY AND CONTINUITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Throughout *Black Light*, the playwright returns to the idea that knowledge, identity and survival are carried through Country and people, rather than through institutions, systems or technologies. Country is not presented as a passive backdrop or symbolic setting; it is a living presence that requires relationship, listening and care in return.

This theme becomes especially clear through Nan, whose language and presence repeatedly position the present moment within a much longer continuum. Her stories, reassurances and teachings draw on knowledge that has been passed down over generations, grounding the family in a sense of continuity that exists beyond the immediate instability of the world around them.

Also through the character of Nan, we come to understand that connection to Country is inseparable from belonging. This belonging is reciprocal; Country holds people, but people must also listen, stay and return. Throughout the play, Nan guides the others toward this relationship – not as comfort, but as responsibility. However, the other characters struggle to accept this guidance. Their endurance under crisis, loss and oppressive systems makes belonging difficult to access. Listening becomes hard when survival feels urgent.

Rather than offering solutions, *Black Light* suggests that survival is sustained through connection: to Country, to kin, and to ways of knowing that have endured for thousands of years.

KNOWLEDGE AS SOMETHING PASSED ON

In *Black Light*, knowledge is not discovered or acquired; it is passed down.

- Elders carry understanding shaped by lived experience and memory.
- Younger characters receive knowledge through listening, presence and reassurance.
- Teaching occurs through story, repetition and shared language, rather than instruction.

These exchanges are not framed as lessons in the conventional sense. Instead, they are woven into everyday interaction, reinforcing the idea that knowledge is relational and cumulative rather than individual.

As you read, consider:

- Who holds knowledge in the play?
- How is that knowledge shared?
- What responsibility comes with carrying and passing it on?

COUNTRY AS ENDURING PRESENCE

Country in *Black Light* is not a backdrop. It is a constant presence that shapes how characters understand themselves, their history and their future.

The setting – ‘...on the porch of an old house near the sea. On Larrakia land.’ – places the family

within a specific, named Country. Nan's language repeatedly situates human experience within the natural world, drawing connections between people, land, animals and ancestral presence.

This framing suggests that while systems may fail and futures may feel uncertain, Country endures. It holds memory, knowledge and continuity beyond the lifespan of individuals or the collapse of institutions.

CONTINUITY BEYOND CRISIS

By the final movement of the play, *Black Light* gestures toward continuity rather than resolution.

Endings are not presented as final or absolute. Instead, they are framed as part of an ongoing cycle where loss, change and survival coexist. Knowledge continues. Roles continue. Connection continues.

This does not erase the difficulty or pain experienced by the characters. Rather, it places those experiences within a longer arc, reminding the audience that crisis is not the beginning of the story, nor is it the end.

In this way, the play suggests a form of endurance grounded not just in care or survival, but in cultural continuity.

If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

AUNTY LILLA WATSON

Murri Artist



THE PLAY ASKS:

- Where does knowledge come from, and who carries it?
- What responsibility do elders have to pass knowledge on?
- What responsibility do younger people have to receive it?
- How does connection to Country shape identity and belonging?
- What continues when systems fail and certainty disappears?

Rather than answering these questions directly, *Black Light* allows them to emerge through language, relationship and presence. The play invites audiences to recognise Continuity of Knowledge as something lived rather than declared, and Connection to Country as an ongoing relationship – one that must be actively practiced, and which may be resisted, delayed or deferred under the weight of endurance.

INVESTIGATE

Focus on one moment in the play where knowledge is shared or reinforced.

As you read, identify:

- who is speaking and who is listening
- what kind of knowledge is being offered (practical, cultural, emotional, spiritual)
- how this moment shapes the relationship between characters

Then consider:

- Why is this moment important now in the world of the play?
- How does it contribute to a sense of continuity beyond the immediate crisis?
- What might an audience carry with them after witnessing this exchange?

Support your interpretation with specific references to the script.



THE PRODUCTION





The following is a series of questions to ignite students' imaginations about how the playtext might be interpreted on stage. A long list (but certainly not exhaustive!), these prompts and provocations are based on many of the contexts and themes already explored in this Prompt Pack.

This could be delivered as an open class discussion, workshop activity in groups, or individual writing task. Remember: strong interpretations are not about explaining everything. They are about making clear, intentional choices that shape how an audience experiences the play.

Keep pulling threads.

HOW DOES PLACE SHAPE YOUR INTERPRETATION?

- Should the porch be staged realistically, grounding the play in everyday domestic life and making the characters feel familiar and recognisable?
- Could the porch be staged symbolically, as a sculptural or abstract space that frames the play's ideas rather than locating it literally?
- Might a minimal approach allow language, sound, light and presence to carry most of the meaning?
- Or could a maximal design saturate the audience with detail (objects, textures, traces of history) offering many entry points for interpretation?
- How clearly should the audience understand where this porch is?
- Should the world beyond the porch feel close, distant, threatening, or unknowable?
- Does the porch function as a place of refuge, responsibility, stasis, exposure, or something else entirely?

HOW DOES THE TREATMENT OF TIME AFFECT YOUR INTERPRETATION?

- Should time feel continuous, fractured, cyclical, or suspended?
- How might lighting, sound or pacing suggest time passing without clearly marking it?
- Do beginnings and endings feel distinct, or do they blur into one another?
- How might the audience experience time during the performance?
- Does waiting feel tense, monotonous, exhausting, or quietly resilient?
- Might moments of memory or storytelling be grounded in the present, or do they rupture it?

HOW MIGHT SCENES' DIFFERENT ONTOLOGICAL STATES BE TREATED?

- Do some scenes sit in lived reality, while others move through memory, dreaming or something in between?
- How might these shifts be signalled through light, sound, stillness or performance style rather than text?
- Should transitions between states be clear, or deliberately ambiguous?

HOW DO RELATIONSHIPS AND CARE FUNCTION ON STAGE?

- How physically close are the characters to one another?
- When could touch be offered, withheld, resisted, or required?
- How is care shown through action rather than dialogue?
- Who should appear to carry the greatest responsibility onstage?
- How are imbalances of care made visible to an audience?
- Can care feel tender, habitual, burdensome, or all at once?

HOW MIGHT SOUND, SILENCE AND STILLNESS BE USED?

- Should the world beyond the porch be heard?
- How important are silence and listening as theatrical actions?
- When could quiet feel safe, and when could it feel threatening?
- How long can the audience be allowed to sit in stillness?
- What happens when nothing is said?
- How could silence shift power between characters?

HOW DOES ENSEMBLE PRESENCE SHAPE YOUR INTERPRETATION?

- Should all characters remain visible at all times?
- Will characters always be watching one another, even when not speaking?
- Does visibility create a sense of shared responsibility, support or pressure?
- How might stillness and attention function when a character is not the focus of a scene?
- What would it mean for an audience to witness everyone at once?

HOW IS COUNTRY EXPERIENCED ON STAGE?

- Will Country be made visible through design, sound, language or presence?
- Will it be explicitly acknowledged, or quietly felt?
- Will your interpretation foreground continuity, survival or endurance?
- What do you hope lingers for the audience at the end of the play?
- Is there a sense of 'uplift' and, if so, what kind?

WHAT IS YOUR INTERPRETATION?

- Which ideas, relationships or images would you prioritise in your interpretation?
- Which contexts or themes would you bring to the foreground?
- What might you choose to leave understated, unresolved or ambiguous?
- How might you theatrically acknowledge the poems in the script's epigraph (*Hymn to Time* by Ursula K. Le Guin, and *breaklight* by Lucille Clifton)? Would you draw on their dramaturgical influence in your design and direction, or leave them deliberately unmarked?

RESOURCES

A photograph of a woman in a colorful patterned dress standing behind a white table with a floral mug. A person's legs in shorts are visible in the foreground.



These resources are divided up into the chapters and sections for which they were used as references or sources.

Note that all resources are hyperlinked to their source for those clicking on a digital version of this Prompt Pack but, for those holding a paper version, shorter bitly links have been provided to copy into your browser (note these are case sensitive).

In addition to the references and links below, you can also find a general **Resources Dropbox** for Malthouse Theatre's production of Black Light that will be gradually populated with things like set and costume design files, recorded Q&As, extra reading, reviews and other material as it becomes available – so keep checking back there throughout the year.

CONTEXTS: PLACE

- ***The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard***
Book | Penguin Random House | 2014 | bit.ly/BLContexts01
- **Larrakia Nation**
Peak body for Larrakia people | bit.ly/BLContexts02
- **Austlang: Larrakia**
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies | bit.ly/BLContexts03
- ***Bristol returns cultural artefacts taken from Larrakia people in Australia***
Article | The Guardian | 2025 | bit.ly/BLContexts04

CONTEXTS: TIME

- ***'Let no one say the past is dead': History wars and the poetry of Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Sonia Sanchez***
Article | Queensland Review | 2018 | bit.ly/BLContexts05
- **Nonlinear Narrative**
Wikipedia entry | bit.ly/BLContexts06

CONTEXTS: SOCIETY, POLITICS & CULTURE

- ***Who You Callin' Urban?***
Panel Transcript | National Museum of Australia | 2007 | bit.ly/BLContexts07
- ***The Personal is Political by Carol Hanisch***
Seminal Feminist Paper | 1969 | bit.ly/BLContexts08
- ***The Power of Culture***
Podcast + Transcript | Griffith University | 2025 | bit.ly/BLContexts09
- ***'An Act of Bastardry': NT overruled Aboriginal authority to allow hotel on sacred site, advocates say***
Article | The Guardian | 2025 | bit.ly/BLContexts10

CONTEXTS: LANGUAGE

- ***Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Still Awareness by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann***
Article | 2002 | bit.ly/BLContexts11

- ***The Viewpoints Book by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau***
Book (PDF) | 2005 | bit.ly/BLContexts12
- ***Making Decisions Together by Anne Bogart***
Article | SITI | 2018 | bit.ly/BLContexts13
- ***Harold Pinter: Art, Truth & Politics***
Lecture | The Nobel Foundation | 2005 | bit.ly/BLContexts14
- ***Notes: Respect for Acting by Uta Hagen***
Blog | 2006 | bit.ly/BLContexts15

CONTEXTS: THEATRE STYLE

- ***A Brief History of Indigenous Australian Contemporary Theatre***
Essay | Australian Plays Transform | 2011 | bit.ly/BLContexts16
- **BlakStage Collection**
Directory of First Nations Plays | Australian Plays Transform | bit.ly/BLContexts17
- ***Blak in the Room: A Response by Wesley Enoch***
Essay | Melbourne Theatre Company | 2025 | bit.ly/BLContexts18
- ***Wesley Enoch on Contemporary Indigenous Arts Practice***
Article | Real Time | 1994 | bit.ly/BLContexts19
- ***The Challenges of Benevolence: The Role of Indigenous Actors***
Article | ResearchGate | 2005 | bit.ly/BLContexts20
- ***Encyclopedia of Theatre Styles and Genres***
The Drama Teacher | bit.ly/BLContexts21
- ***The Empty Space by Peter Brook***
Book | Simon & Schuster | 1968 | bit.ly/BLContexts22

THEMES: CARE AS RESPONSIBILITY, BURDEN AND LOVE

- ***Nel Noddings: the Ethics of Care and Education***
Essay | infed.org | 2024 | bit.ly/BLThemes01
- **Interview: Joan Tronto**
Ethics of Care | 2009 | bit.ly/BLThemes02
- ***Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice by Joan Tronto***
Book (PDF) | NYU Press | 2013 | bit.ly/BLThemes03

THEMES: ENDURANCE

- ***How to live under rising authoritarianism, according to a philosopher who did it bravely***
Article | Vox | 2024 | bit.ly/BLThemes04
- ***'Hope is an Embrace of the Unknown': Rebecca Solnit on living in dark times***
Article | The Guardian | 2016 | bit.ly/BLThemes05
- ***Recovering Emotionally from Disaster***
Article | American Psychological Association | 2013 | bit.ly/BLThemes06
- ***Surviving in the Age of Disaster***
Podcast | To The Best of Our Knowledge | 2025 | bit.ly/BLThemes07

THEMES: CONNECTION TO COUNTRY AND CONTINUITY OF KNOWLEDGE

- ***Common Ground***
First Nations Storytelling Collective | bit.ly/BLThemes08
- ***Map of Indigenous Australia***
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies | bit.ly/BLThemes09
- ***Australian history is much larger and more varied than the one told in classrooms***
Article | The Guardian | 2020 | bit.ly/BLThemes10
- ***30 Aboriginal apps you probably didn't know about***
Article + Directory | Creative Spirits | 2023 | bit.ly/BLThemes11

OTHER RESOURCES

- ***Teaching First Nations Content and Concepts in the Drama Classroom by Kamarra Bell-Wykes, Rachel Forgasz and Danielle Hradsky***
Drama Victoria | 2020 | bit.ly/BLResources01
- ***Black Light Resources Dropbox***
bit.ly/BLPromptPack
- ***Black Light Malthouse show page***
bit.ly/BLResources02
- ***Malthouse Education***
bit.ly/MalthouseEdu



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