

# Blackrock

## INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

### Explore gender stereotyping in Australian teens:

- Brainstorm Australian colloquial terms used to describe males and females. Explain that this activity requires students to be honest and uncensored, even though some of the language this discussion generates might normally be considered inappropriate for the classroom.
  - Note any similarities and differences.
  - Explore connotative patterns, particularly in terms used by one gender to describe the other.
  - Hone in on terms that are used to describe sexually active males and females. Again consider the implications of this terminology, exploring any gender bias.

### Explore concepts of peer pressure among friendship groups:

- Have students complete [this survey](#) (PDF, 122KB), or design your own. Tell students this is to be done completely individually. Ask students to stand. Designate one corner of the classroom 'Strongly agree' and another 'Strongly disagree'. Ask the same questions from the survey and have students place themselves along the continuum according to their beliefs. Compare students' written responses to their publicly visible ones and lead into a discussion of who felt pressured to 'go along' with certain answers to be seen as agreeing with particular friends, groups or the class majority. Note and explore any gender bias evident, i.e. were girls or boys more likely to conform to friends' answers?
- Ask students to write about a time where they experienced peer pressure, either spoken or unspoken. Describe the situation, what their feelings were, why they did or did not conform to the pressure and what the outcomes or consequences were of their choice.

### Introduce the context of the play:

- Read the transcript or listen to the [ABC Radio National](#) report into Leigh Leigh's assault and murder.
  - Note salient facts about the case for comparison and after reading the play.
- Read the [Ministerial Statement](#) made by Paul Whelan in 1996.
- Read this article from [the Age](#), or locate others referred to on the [AustLit website](#) for *Blackrock*. [Wikipedia](#) also has a page.
- This could be extended to have students critically examine the representation of this event in various texts, analysing the various writers' arguments, use of textual features and audience positioning.
- You might like to begin by watching the opening scenes of the [1997 film adaptation](#) as a way of engaging passive or reluctant students ([accessible with a ClickView subscription](#)).

## PERSONAL RESPONSE ON READING THE TEXT

- Create a class wiki where students can share thoughts, respond to prompts and ask questions. See [here for suggestions](#) of reputable (and often free for educators) wiki sites. Alternatively, each student can keep a reading journal.
  - See [here for suggested prompts](#).

- Conduct a class discussion or debate over the attribution of responsibility for Tracy's assault and murder: was it the boys' fault; should Tracy bear any responsibility; was it the whole culture of the town?
- Students should nominate the character with whom they most identify, particularly in regards to the dilemmas of 'mateship' and peer pressure and present a short verbal reflection on why they nominated this character.
- One point of controversy with *Blackrock* is with a playwright so closely using real life events, particularly something as tragic as the death of a fourteen-year-old girl, as the subject matter for a fictional work. Use this idea for the basis of a discussion on the moral implications for Enright's decision to do so. It is important to remember that this was a suggestion put to him, which initially led to the writing of *A Property of the Clan*. To follow this discussion, read '[Based on a True Story': The problem of the perception of biographical truth in narratives based on real lives](#)'. Have the students analyse Donna Lee Brian's argument. What does she see as the problems with a work like *Blackrock*?

## OUTLINE OF KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TEXT

The class wiki or students' individual journals could be used for the completion of many of these tasks. See [here for general notes on plot, characters and themes](#).

### Plot

- Ask each student to maintain a running sheet, identifying each scene, the characters involved and the events that take place. Include space for students to note any significant dramatic conventions that they identify. [Download a template here](#) (PDF, 118KB).
- Assign each student a different character. Have them recount the events of the play as a series of Facebook status updates or tweets. Focus on conveying the events accurately within the typical 160 character limit and in the voice and from the perspective of their assigned character.
- Rather than act out the entire play, develop a sense of both the events and visual impact of the play through a series of tableaux or freeze-frames. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group three or so scenes from the play. Each group should devise an emblematic representation of each scene in the form of a tableau. A nominated student can explain their group's representation of the scene if necessary. Present these in sequence. Photograph each scene to display on a pin up board or as a slideshow.
- As a quick revision quiz, provide students with the events of each scene but in the incorrect order. Have them rearrange the scenes in the correct order. Alternatively, have them plot each event on a plot graph, indicating the level of tension within each scene and the relative time lapse between each scene.

### Character

- Ask students to create a mock social networking page for a particular major character. Have them carefully choose appropriate elements for the page that accurately reflect the character, such as favourite music, location, likes etc. Indicate the character's relationships with others through appropriate friends, family and relationships lists. Students could form small groups to present their social network pages and justify their choices with reference to the play.
- Have students imagine they are casting for a new film or stage production of *Blackrock*. Have them identify the real life actors whom they would cast in the major roles. Students should create a presentation where they explain why they chose each particular actor to play a character with reference to the characterisation evident in the text.

### Theme

- Set theme summary charts for students to complete. They should draw up a table (or [download a template](#) (PDF, 96KB)) with columns headed 'Theme', 'Elaboration of theme',

'Revealed through' and 'Textual evidence'. Students can use colour-coded 'post-it' tabs to highlight evidence for each theme in their text.

- Provide students with a key quote of three to four lines. Have them write a 250-word close analysis explaining how this single quote reveals a particular theme from within the play.

## Genre

- This may be a good time to revise the conventions of drama texts. Examine the opening pages, noting conventions such as character lists, setting, dialogue, stage directions, set descriptions, scene length etc. It is important that students understand that drama texts are written to be viewed, rather than read. Explore the implications for the development of character, for example actions, speech, costume, interactions with others etc are as important as the written word. View the opening few minutes of the film to highlight the impact of the visual. This could lead into a discussion of the role of the director in 'bringing the script to life', setting the scene for a task later where students consider how they might stage a scene from the play.
- Introduce the concepts of realism and naturalism as genre within theatre. This will require some background research by students or the provision of notes by the teacher. Again, this sets the contextual groundwork for later reading and tasks.

## SYNTHESISING TASK/ACTIVITY

Prior to reading the play, have students write a prediction about Enright's *purpose* in writing this play. Consider the *context* of the production: it is written for Australian audiences who would have some familiarity with, if not the actual Leigh Leigh case, other crimes perpetuated against women. What might Enright try to do in his play? For Unit 2, extend this discussion to include why it may then have been turned into a film, particularly in regards to reaching a wider or particular audience.

Download a [sample assessment rubric](#) (PDF, 144KB).

## PLOT, CHARACTERS AND THEMES

### Plot

- *Blackrock* explores the aftermath of a beach party at which a 15 year old girl is violently assaulted and murdered. The play begins with the return of Ricko to the town of Blackrock. He reconnects with his mates, Jared, Davo and Scott and finds that a newcomer, Toby, is hosting his 18th birthday party at the Surf Club. The night turns into one filled with alcohol-fuelled revelry and once a group of younger girls arrive at the party it takes on a dangerous sexual tone.
- The aftermath of the party evolves as the various characters turn on each other in their grief and apportioning of blame. Tracey's character is called into question and relationships crumble as the culprits are sought. It transpires that Toby, Davo and Scott all raped Tracey, but it was Ricko who killed her. He had found her on the beach after her assault and, attempting to assault her too, kills her when she resists. He begs Jared to give him an alibi, straining the bounds of their mateship. Jared struggles with this pressure, fracturing his relationships with his own girlfriend, his mates and his mother in the process. Ultimately, he refuses to lie and so Ricko is arrested.
- In custody, Ricko is found hanged in his cell. Jared inherits Ricko's van and isolates himself from the town. In the final scene, he opens up about his guilt as a bystander to Tracey's assault. He discards the keys to Ricko's van and returns to his mother.

### Characters

- Diane Kirby, 39: Diane has a fractured relationship with her son. She is separated from Len. She is also suffering from breast cancer but has yet to tell Jared this.
- Jared Kirby, her son, 17: Jared is the focalising character. He is the most sympathetic of the male characters. He is mates with those who end up accused and experiences a strong internal conflict over what is morally right.
- Len Kirby, his father: Len is a boxing training who has little to do with his son.
- Stewart Ackland: a film maker, Stewart supports his son's request to have the beach party and defends his son after the assault.
- Marian Ackland, his wife: Marian, too, defends Toby after the assault, concerned about the impact of a criminal record on her son's future
- Rachel Ackland, their daughter, 16: Rachel finds Tracey's body after her murder. Understandably scarred, she finds herself at odds with both her family and her boyfriend Jared who seem dismissive of Tracey.
- Toby Ackland, their son, 18: The instigator of the party. Toby is from a wealthier background than the other teenaged males. Both the party itself and his participation in the rape of Tracey seem, in part, to be from his desire to be part of the group.
- Brett (Ricko) Ricketson, 22: Ricko is Jared's recently returned mate. He treats Tiffany poorly but can turn on the charm with Diane when looking for a place to stay. He puts pressure on Jared to cover for him when he comes under police suspicion, eventually confessing to the murder of Tracy. He attempts to manipulate Jared by pleading their mateship.
- Tiffany, his girlfriend, 21: Abused by Ricko, Tiffany seems unable to assert herself.
- Scott Abbey, 15/16: a young friend of Ricko's who participates in the gang rape.
- Craig (Davo) Davidson, 17: a friend of Ricko's, who participates in the gang rape.
- Glenys Milenko, Diane's sister: Glenys struggles to parent her daughter and support her sister.
- Cherie, her daughter, 15: a friend of Tracey's.
- George and Donny, two young boxers: trained by Len.
- Shana, 16: a party-goer.
- Gary, 17: a party-goer.
- Roy: a friend of Glenys.
- Male strippers: appear at Diane's birthday.
- Police officers
- Women, friends of Diane

## Themes

- Masculinity
  - What it means to be a man in Australian society
  - Emotional repression in males
  - Physical violence as an expression of masculinity
  - Views regarding women, including sexual objectification and low status
  - Gender division.
- Mateship
  - The desire to belong
  - Strong homosocial bonds
  - Solidarity
  - Connections between mateship and responsibility
  - Code of conduct
- Sexual violence
  - As a form of power
  - As an everyday part of Australian culture
  - A belief in female culpability in violence enacted upon them
  - Group sex and sexual violence as a homosocial bonding experience
- Responsibility and guilt
  - Moral dilemma of responsibility to mates, the law and the moral good
  - Responsibility in acts of sexual violence
  - The guilt of the bystander
- A culture of misogyny

- The enculturation of young men into a system that promotes patriarchy, and sees violence as acceptable and objectifies women
- The fragility of women that results from such a culture
- The role of both women and men in reinforcing this culture
- Class
  - The implications of class difference and interaction

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## THE WRITER'S CRAFT INCLUDING SUCH ELEMENTS

### Structure

#### Exposition

- Conduct a close analysis of scene 1. Annotate the text, exploring the characters, setting, conflicts and staging. Foreground ideas that might develop into themes of the play. Consider the impact upon the audience of character movement on and off stage.
- Note how the conflicts between different groups (class and gender) foreshadow later conflicts that develop. Even the tussle between Jared and Ricko foreshadows their later fight.
- See here for suggested notes.

#### Narrative arc

- Have students plot the development of the narrative through the various conflicts that take place. After the party in particular, note how the conflicts shift from being between different groups to within individual groups.
- Draw attention to the circular nature of the plot structure, with it starting and ending on the beach with Cherie and Jared and with the giving of gifts in the second and penultimate scenes. What might Enright be alluding to with this circular structure? How does this relate to the themes and issues with which the play deals? What is significant about the fact that Cherie is allowed to use Jared's board in the final scene?
- Explore how tension is built in the play's structure. For instance, consider the sequence of short scenes from scene 7 to 9. How might this work to prepare audiences for the shocking scene 10?

#### Climax

- Have students write a justification for the scene they believe to be the climax of the play. In it they need to explain why they believe this scene represents the highest point of tension and a culmination of the developing conflicts.

#### Intermission

- Although this is a one act play, most productions would probably include an intermission. Have students determine when might be an appropriate place to break the play into two sections. It is important to consider audience impact here. Students need to consider when the play develops a significant point of tension, a 'cliff-hanger' so to speak, so that the audience is kept in suspense and encouraged to return. The end of scene 10 might be such a point.

### Approach to characterisation

- Jared's passivity is an interesting character device for a main character. Indeed, the director of the film version of *Blackrock* has suggested it was a significant reason for the film's failure

with US audiences. Have students find evidence of Jared's passive nature. Discuss the possible reasons for such a choice by Enright and the implications on audience identification. For instance, the audience is usually aligned with the central character, so what is Enright suggesting by having the audience aligned with a passive character?

- Have students explain why this play is as much (or more?) about Jared as it is Tracy.
- Consider whether Jared represents a conflict of values. To what extent is his experience representative of his generation of Australian males? Do any other characters act as representations of whole groups?
- In small groups, students can create a character profile chart that maps each major character's construction, identifying key examples of action, dialogue, interaction with others etc that reveal aspects of character. Include page references in the chart for later reference. Alternatively, use a template with the outline of a person. Draw a line down the centre, splitting the outline to represent before and after the party. Students can make notes on the character indicating the change in characterisation as a result of the death of Tracy.

## Setting

- Individually or in pairs, students should create a set design for the play. They need to draw on details provided in the text. In particular, they need to design a set that will reflect the tone of the events that take place. This could be completed as a series of drawings, written description or a model. This could be extended to include particular aspects of staging not really evident in the text, such as lighting and sound. This could be followed with a written reflection justifying their choices.

## Use of parallels and contrasts

- Although Tracy's rape and murder are never shown on stage, the violence and sense of fear is constructed in other emblematic ways. Diane, in particular, is constructed as an interesting parallel to Tracy. The scene where she flees the sexually charged strippers, who are encouraged by the other women present, represents Tracy's attempts to flee her attackers, and her breast cancer can be read as symbolic of the fragility of women and its connection to female sexuality. Have students look for other parallels or symbolic representations of the violence enacted upon Tracy. In **his essay**, David Berthold reveals other ways a director can highlight these parallels when, in scene 17, he has the doughnuts Ricko throws at Tiffany leave her covered in red jam to symbolise blood.
- Conduct a close analysis of scene 19. Explore the construction of the boxing scene and the references to the taste of blood, the implication that ideas of mateship and violence are inculcated intergenerationally, the absence of positive role models from which to 'learn' manhood and the growing inner conflict of Jared over whether to provide an alibi for Ricko or not.

## Dramatic conventions

### Symbolism

- There are numbers of symbols throughout the play: the rock overlooking the beach, the river that separates the Hill from Blackrock, the cup and saucer Rachel gives Jared (including his smashing of it), Diane's breast cancer, Stewart's award for his advertising campaign, the boxing match, Ricko's keys. Have students compare their interpretations of such symbols and comment on the reasons for differing interpretations.

### Stage directions

- Students should identify a key moment or idea revealed through stage directions in each scene, such as the exits of female characters in Scene 1, the fight between Ricko and Jared in Scene 21 or when Diane raises Jared's hand to her breast in Scene 24. Have students write an essay on the importance of stage directions as a meaning making device.
- Individually, students could annotate a particular scene to explain how they would stage it. Their notes should reflect a range of staging conventions, such as lighting, music, sound

effects, blocking (character movement), vocal expression and so forth.

## Seeing it in action

- In 2011, the Campbelltown Theatre Company performed *Blackrock*. [Watch the preview](#) for the production on YouTube, and use it as a starting point to discuss dramatic conventions such as costuming and set design. This discussion could be extended further to include paratextual elements, including font and film editing, as a way of suggesting meaning. Use this as a prompt for students to create a poster or film preview of their own version of the play, whereby they design and justify their own costume and set design.

## Close study of dramatic conventions

- In order to highlight the impact of particular dramatic conventions, it can be useful to conduct a close study of key passages from the text. [Attached here are suggested scenes and close reading questions](#) (PDF, 161KB) that may be used for either group discussion or for independent analysis.

## Language and style

### The use of irony and pun

- Set 'races' for students to search the text for examples of irony, evident in puns and double entendres, such as when Ricko says, 'I'm not going nowhere' in Scene 1 or when Jared pressures Rachel to come to the party at the end of Scene 4, saying, 'It's going to be wicked.' Students need to explain their selection.

### Colloquialism and profanity

- Set a topic for discussion on the wiki or in their journals, asking students to reflect on the authenticity of the teenage 'voice' created through such devices as colloquialism, profanity, incorrect grammar etc. Ask them to compare this to their own conversations with friends. They might even like to use their mobile phones to record a conversation one lunchtime and transcribe this to compare their own speech patterns with those of the characters in *Blackrock*.
- Debate the necessity for the profanity throughout the play. Consider its role in characterisation, context setting, thematic development and audience positioning.

## TEXT AND MEANING

### Exploration of themes and ideas

- Assign a small group of students a particular theme. Have them present a panel discussion exploring the aspects of their theme for the benefit of the whole class. Alternatively, have them prepare a set of notes or wall chart that can be distributed to other groups or displayed in the classroom. This can be conducted as a jigsaw activity where each group then splits and reforms new groups to teach others about their particular theme. See [here for notes](#) on themes, and [download a template](#) (PDF, 96KB) here.
- The original play that preceded *Blackrock* was titled: *A Property of the Clan*. Encourage students to debate the relative merits of each title and what the thematic implications are of each.

### Meaning in context

- Explore in detail what *Blackrock* reveals about Australian culture. The text highlights many issues that are of relevance to students, including class difference, gender equity and the construction of masculinity (particularly in its relation to violence). Students should be

encouraged to reflect on the relevance of these themes to their own lives through participation in small and whole-class discussions.

- Out-of-control parties and violence against women at events like 'Schoolies' Week' are frequent media fodder. Have students collate a media portfolio or a collage of headlines that relate to the themes of *Blackrock*. Use this as the basis of discussion of the 'accuracy' of the representation of Australian society in *Blackrock*.
- Have students create a mindmap of the values represented by each character. Colour code these to link them to particular themes within *Blackrock*.

## SYNTHESISING TASK/ACTIVITY

- Students could construct a monologue reflecting on the events of the play from a particular character's viewpoint. This should be more thoughtful than a mere recount; emphasis should be placed on recreating the voice of the character, mimicking the language used by Enright, showing insight into that character's particular perspective of the tragedy, a considered understanding of a theme(s) explored in *Blackrock* and with a consideration for audience response. Students should be encouraged to undertake an extensive process of planning, drafting and revising.
- The monologue should be performed, enabling students to demonstrate an awareness of non-verbal as well as verbal elements of drama. Elements such as costuming and props could be incorporated metonymically. Prior to delivery to the audience, students should rehearse, recording themselves to preview and refine their performance.
- Incorporate peer review and self-reflection as part of the task for evaluative purposes. Emphasis should be placed upon considering how the student used a range of language and dramatic conventions to position audiences in response to a particular theme(s).

Download a [sample assessment rubric](#) (PDF, 149KB).

## CLOSE ANALYSIS OF SCENE 1

### Opening image

- Jared standing alone staring out to sea highlights his difference. It foreshadows his later break from the group when he refuses to lie for his mates. He is part of the group but simultaneously isolated by his guilt and shame.

### Context/setting established

- Obvious coastal location revealed through set and costuming ('looks out to sea. He's in a wetsuit').
- Recent past/1990s setting established through the colloquial terminology used.
- Low-socio economic status implied through Ricko's 'old shit-heap' of a car and Jared working as a 'bagboy' in a supermarket.
- Lack of aspiration implied when Ricko calls Jared a 'wanker' for staying on at school. When Jared asks Ricko 'Where you're going' Ricko misinterprets the question, but ironically reveals through unintended pun his lack of aspiration in his reply: 'Not going nowhere'.
- The suicide of Jason ('Jason topped himself?') highlights a culture of young men in crisis.
- In particular, the interaction between Ricko and Toby reveals class divide ('On the Hill? . . . Old man's a doctor is he? Lawyer?' and later Ricko: 'Toby going to follow Daddy into the business?' Toby: 'You going to follow Daddy into Long Bay?').
- Tiffany's comments also reveal the importance of having a job ('no getting off early no more because they'll sack you as soon as look at you'). Class could also be revealed through the

language of the characters, such as frequent profanity, poor grammar, colloquialism and shortening of names.

- The beach and the rock overlooking it are established as important sites in the play, particularly for male bonding. Both female characters are excluded from the rock and it is the place where the boys go to drink and party. This foreshadows the homosocial nature of the rape that occurs there later.

### Character: Jared

- Beginning with Jared alone on stage singles him out and foreshadows his role as the focalising character for the narrative. It also reveals his role as an observer, made significant when he witnesses Tracey's assault.
- His discussion of the whales suggests a sensitive character. Despite this, his dialogue with Cherie still reveals the cultural belief of the inferiority of females ('Girls can't do it [surf]') and implicit violence ('Cause any other guy'd smack you in the mouth').
- His aspiration, especially in contrast to the other males, is revealed in his staying on at school and tentative questioning of Ricko and his goals ('where you're going?').
- His change in character once other males are around is evident in his rejection of Cherie. Note parallels with Scenes 3 and 4 where Jared does the same with Rachel and his mother, Diane.

### Character: Ricko

- His importance as a focal figure for the boys in Blackrock is revealed through the fact that Tiffany, Davo and Scott come down to the beach to see him once they hear of his return, and also Jared's comment to Toby ('You want a big turn-out, put the word round that Ricko's back').
- Sees women, his girlfriend Tiffany in particular, as disposable ('Eleven months, Ricko, and . . . Not even a postcard'). Despite this, Ricko 'uses' them ('Tiff, I need petrol, lend us twenty bucks' and later 'Shoot down the road and get us some beers . . . we'll be up the rock').
- Suspicious of Toby because of his different status. Even after acknowledging, 'He's [Toby] alright this prick,' Ricko still gives him grief ('Cross the river before it gets dark' and later 'My car. Daddy's spare Mazda').

### Theme: status of women

- Jared's belief that girls can't surf reveals a cultural belief of the inferiority of women.
- Note Jared's change in tone and rejection of Cherie once Ricko arrives ('Piss off, Cherie').
- Tiffany's comment noting that Ricko would come straight to his mates rather than her, his girlfriend, show her inferiority and 'disposable' status ('I knew you'd come straight down here. Wouldn't stop in or ring up or nothing . . . it'll be like it always was. Guys together. Eleven months, Ricko and . . . Not even a postcard'). Note also Ricko's response ('Tiffany, shut up').
- Tiffany's acceptance of her status and complicity in it is revealed by the stage direction that '*She goes*' to get Ricko's beer despite her complaints with him for abandoning her without saying goodbye.

### Theme: group/class identification

- Ricko's membership of the group is revealed through Jared ('He's a Blacko boy') and Ricko's later rejection of Toby ('Blackrock for the Blackos').
- That such social/cultural identity is inescapable is revealed by both this comment and Ricko's return ('I got in the van one morning and it seemed to point this way, back to the rock').
- The interaction between Ricko and Toby reveals the class divide ('On the Hill? . . . Old man's a doctor is he? Lawyer?' and later Toby: 'I've got to get home' Ricko: 'Cross the river before it gets dark').
- The transition of the party from being for Toby to really being for Ricko highlights Toby's status as an outsider (Jared: 'We'll make it a welcome home for Ricko' and later Toby [to Ricko]: 'See you there.' Jared: 'He [Ricko] won't miss his own keg-show.' Toby: 'It's mine!').

## Theme: masculinity

- Note the language used in the interaction between the four males: lots of colloquialisms, shortening of names (Ricko, Davo, Gordo) and profanity.
- Homosocial bonds established through shared society (low socio-economic Blackrock), culture (surfing) and language.
- Emotional repression evident in the way friendship is marked via insult and derogatory comments. Note contrast when Jared makes a genuinely emotional comment (Jared: 'I'm glad you're back, mate. I've missed you.' Ricko: 'What are you, a queer dog?'). 'Safe' boundaries are re-established when Jared replies ('Get fucked!') and they spar.
- Normalisation of violence implied through boys' sparring revealed in the stage directions.
- Importance of alcohol revealed through various discussion of alcohol as an essential part of social gatherings: the 'keg-show' on Saturday and 'a session' that night.

## Stage directions:

- The opening image as discussed above: Jared's solitude.
- The removal of female characters from the stage reveals their exclusion from male social activities and status as servants to males.
- The entrance of characters gradually suggests a building of momentum, the group growing larger and more threatening, particular with a single female character onstage at this point.
- Closing the scene with just Jared and Ricko implies their significance in the narrative.
- Having the two characters leave the stage, leaving it empty, creates a tone of emptiness that could be seen as symbolic of many things, such as:
  - the absence of morality or humanity
  - the lack of opportunity or guidance in the boys' lives
  - foreshadowing the desolate nature of the play.

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## WAYS OF READING THE TEXT

Consider a range of critical literacy approaches to the text, as suggested below. If necessary, provide students with some grounding in basic tenets of gender and class reading theory as a way of examining ideological imperatives within texts.

### Consider a gender reading of the text.

- Have students identify the broad representation of males and females in the play, considering whether adult characters of any particular gender differ from their younger counterparts. Find examples in the text of stereotypical masculine and feminine behaviours. Look carefully at the intergenerational interplay. Do younger characters seem to be learning certain ways of behaving from the adult characters? Do any individual characters resist the dominant gender stereotypes?
- Examine the language used by males about females in the play. How does this suggest particular ideas about power? What is implied about the status of women in Australia? There are two classes included in *Blackrock*, represented by the 'Blackies' and the Ackland family. Are there differences in the status of women between these two classes? What does Enright seem to be suggesting about the interplay of gender and class in Australia?
- Explore audience response to these characters. Survey the class asking for whether students like/dislike each character. Ask for reasons why. What does this suggest about which characters (and their ways of behaving) we are supposed to support and/or criticise? Overall, is *Blackrock* reinforcing, challenging, subverting or critiquing these gender representations?
- Reading resistantly: Tracy never actually appears in the play and the central character, who arguably undergoes the most change, is male. Does Enright perpetuate the idea that males are more important than females? Is Rachel a strong enough presence in the text to challenge stereotypical ideas about females?

### Consider a class reading.

- What evidence can students find for Toby and Rachel coming from a more privileged background than the rest of the characters?
- How does the Ackland family differ from the other characters? How is a power hierarchy established between the Acklands and other families in *Blackrock*? What empowers the Acklands and what privileges does this empowerment provide?
- Have students explore how the two classes diverge in the aftermath of the party. Toby gets a lawyer while the other boys consider running away to Queensland. Is Toby ever 'part of the group' that the other boys belong to? Look particularly at the Acklands' behaviour towards Toby and the Kirby's, in relation to Jared (after the party). How do the parents react differently and what are their 'solutions'?
- Reading resistantly: consider the position that Ricko is as much a victim in *Blackrock* as Tracy, particularly in light of the construction of his class.

### COMPARISON WITH OTHER TEXTS

- Compare the film version to the stage play of *Blackrock*.
  - Have students construct a table to note the similarities and differences between the film and stage play versions.
  - One of the most significant differences is the presence of Tracy in the film version. In particular, the repeated inclusion of her rape foregrounds this violence more than the play does. Does this create a greater impact on the audience? In what way does it alter the audience's response to Jared?
  - Select a scene for close analysis and comparison such as Ricko's confession to Jared. Compare the use of staging techniques to film techniques to construct two quite different representations of this scene. Have students consider how the mode of production, and in particular the greater flexibility that film provides, can influence audience response by comparing their responses to both Ricko and Jared in the two versions of this scene.
- Students might also like to read the original script, *A Property of the Clan*. There are significant differences in the narrative between *A Property of the Clan* and *Blackrock*. You might like to explore the effects of Enright's process of revision and what it implies about the purpose of *Blackrock*, by considering how such changes have shifted the audience's focus and sympathies.
- Consider how *Blackrock* fits within a wider tradition of Australian social commentary drama. Compare *Blackrock* with plays by other Australian playwrights such as David Williamson, Reg Cribb or Dorothy Hewitt.

### Evaluation of the text

- *Blackrock* has proved controversial, particularly as a text for school study. Conduct a series of panel discussions in small groups where they discuss the appropriateness of its inclusion in a high school syllabus. Their discussion should range over ideas including subject matter of the play, the language used, its representation of Australian culture, its purpose and students' view of its effectiveness.
- Students could undertake research into a related topic, such as masculinity in Australia, misogyny in Australia, rites of passage in Australia, 'out-of-control' teen parties, underage drinking, violence against women and so forth. Students should look at media reports as well as academic research. Using their findings, students should present either a written or oral response to whether Enright's representation of Australian culture in *Blackrock* is justifiable or not.
- Have students provide a personal evaluation of the text, particularly in light of its impact on themselves. This can be posted to the wiki or entered into their journal.

## Identifying and justifying language/stylistic techniques for specific narrative or dramatic purposes

- Have students research realism and naturalism as forms of drama. Realism and naturalism tend to diverge with regards to the degree of subjective agency characters have within the events that unfold. Ask students to write a response explaining whether they would classify *Blackrock* as an example of realism or naturalism and consider the implications for audiences and the text's role as social commentary.

### Wiki/journal prompts

Some suggestions:

**Scene 1:** Look at Ricko's interactions with Toby, ending with, 'He's alright, this prick'; Tiffany, ending with, 'lend us twenty dollars'; Jared, ending with, 'What are ya, a queer dog?'. What do these suggest about males and their emotional interactions with others?

**Scene 2:** Is it fair that Toby is allowed in Blackrock by his parents but Rachel isn't?

**Scene 3:** Consider Jared's interactions with his mother, Diane. Compare to your own relationship with your parent(s).

**Scene 6:** Is this an accurate representation of teenage parties?

**Scene 6:** What is your response to the way the males treat the females at the party? Consider the age differences. Why are the girls there? What sort of language is used by the males when referring to the girls?

**Scene 8:** Is Toby really a 'mate' to Scott and Davo? Explain.

**Scene 9:** Stewart is an educated, professional adult male. Is his view of women any different to the other males in the play?

**Scene 10:** This scene is one of high tension for the audience. Explain how devices such as the headlights sweeping the stage, Rachel's actions and the arrival of adult characters might affect the audience.

**Scene 11:** Comment on Jared's reaction to Tracey's death.

**Scene 14:** Personal reflection: How far would you go to 'stick up for your mates'?

**Scene 15:** Imagine you are the parent. What would you do in Marian and Stewart's position if your son was charged with rape? Comment on the conflict between Rachel and her parents over their defence of Toby.

**Scene 16:** What does Glenys mean when she says Cherie needs to learn 'the way the world works'? How does the world work in Blackrock?

**Scene 17:** Define the difference between a friend, a mate and a bro in Ricko's eyes.

**Scene 19:** Why is this scene important? What important revelation is made in this scene?

**Scene 19–21:** What is happening to Jared?

**Scene 21:** Many people see this scene as the climax of the play. In what ways is it climactic?

**Scene 23:** Compare Jared's reactions to Ricko and Tracey's deaths. Comment on the line 'Someone just died, bitch . . . say you're sorry.'

**Scene 23:** What is your response to Jared's belief that 'Ricko died because some moll didn't know the limits'? Whose fault was Tracey's death?

**Scene 24:** Why does Jared throw away the van keys?

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## SYNTHESISING CORE IDEAS

- Students might write a review of the play, commenting on the relevance of its themes and ideas and their personal response to the text. In their reviews, students should address how their final response differed from their initial expectations of the play. See [here](#) and [here](#) for examples of reviews.
- Stage an interview with the playwright. Pair students and have them script and perform an interview with Nick Enright. In the interview, the students should interrogate the ideas evident within the play and explore how Enright has shaped his text to present these ideas. Alternatively, the interview might be between Enright and a director of a new production of *Blackrock*, in which Enright discusses his vision and the director explores how he might translate the script to the stage.
- Students should write a final journal/wiki entry in which they reflect on their experience of studying *Blackrock*. In it they should ensure they explore their personal responses in detail, considering the textual and contextual factors that influenced this response.
- Set an essay on one of the following topics:
  - 'Tracy is not the only victim in *Blackrock*.' Discuss the extent to which you agree with this statement.
  - With reference to *Blackrock*, discuss Enright's perspective on gender and violence.
  - Explain how dramatic conventions have been used to position audiences to respond in particular ways within *Blackrock*.
  - '*Blackrock* should be essential reading for every Australian teen.' Argue for or against this statement.
  - Explain how *Blackrock* and another text you have studied represent the process of coming-of-age.
  - 'The true horror of *Blackrock* lies not in what we don't see – the assault on Tracy– but in what we do see.' Comment on this idea.
  - Explain your response to the ideas within *Blackrock* and why this might be different to another audience's response.
  - Discuss the effect of using the character of Jared as a focaliser through which the events in *Blackrock* are connected.
  - Martin Ball, reviewer at *The Age*, states 'what makes [*Blackrock*] such a powerful play is the way writer Nick Enright builds interlocking themes, first of sexual violence, but also of class and generational conflict, and the difference between a friend and a mate.' With close reference to the text, demonstrate how this could be considered to be the case.
  - While a narrative of a play is constructed through a whole play, there can often be a key scene that captures the most significant ideas. Discuss a scene from *Blackrock* that you feel captures the play's most significant ideas.
- Importantly, students need to consider the impact of *Blackrock*, personally, socially and culturally. Important questions to ask of students concern whether this text reinforces, challenges or subverts both their own and socially dominant ways of viewing Australian society. This is essential in consolidating their critical understanding of the text. Students should draw on the understandings developed through explorations of theme, gender and class and how such ideas are constructed and represented. Questions to ask in developing this understanding include:
  - Which particular understandings of Australian society, class, gender etc are reinforced by *Blackrock*? Which are critiqued or subverted?
  - What is represented as 'normal' in the text? (It is important to differentiate what the text holds up as 'normal' in order to establish and interrogate what is actually normalised by

the text.)

- Who is privileged within the text and who is marginalised or even silenced?
- Does *Blackrock* reinforce dominant ways of thinking or is it designed to challenge these?
- How does *Blackrock* interact with my own ways of thinking? That is, do I agree with or do I feel challenged by the representation of ideas in the text?

## RICH ASSESSMENT TASK

- Students are to write an extended feature article exploring the issues in *Blackrock*. They are to imagine that the events as constructed by Enright are real, rather than fictionalised. In constructing their feature article, students will need to develop some argument in regards to one or more of the themes and issues from the text. Their article should incorporate interviews or quotes from the characters, reveal an understanding of the wider context and demonstrate thorough knowledge of the text (Unit 1 level).
- Alternatively, their feature article could focus on the role of *Blackrock* within our Australian context. Students could interrogate the representation of these events in Enright's play, commenting on the purpose of the play, its authenticity or accuracy in its portrayal of Australian society and its relevance to audiences. In doing so, students could incorporate (invented) quotes from Stockton residents and draw on their research into the actual case upon which *Blackrock* is based, as well as other contextual research (Unit 2 level).
- Students' feature articles should demonstrate their understanding of the text of the play, their wider research, and their understanding of the conventions of the form of feature articles and the processes of planning, drafting and editing.

Download a [sample assessment rubric](#) (PDF, 145KB).

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**Unit Suitable For AC:** Senior Secondary (English Unit 1 and Unit 2)

**Duration** Three to four weeks.

### Curriculum Summary

Find a [summary table](#) for Australian Curriculum: English content descriptions.

### Themes

[belonging](#), [death](#), [family](#), [family secrets](#), [generation gap](#), [identity](#), [multiculturalism](#), [purpose](#), [relationships](#)

### General Capabilities

[Critical and Creative Thinking](#), [Digital Literacy](#), [Ethical Understanding](#), [Literacy](#), [Personal and Social Capability](#)

## FURTHER DETAILS

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