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TEACHERS' NOTES: FANGIRLS BY YVE BLAKE

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This package is designed as a resource for teachers of the NSW HSC Drama examination, Topic 2: Contemporary Australian Theatre Practice. This is not designed as a unit of work or a program, rather as activities and resources that can be explored with students. Teachers are best placed to guide and decide what is relevant to their students.

» **CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

BACKGROUND

The idea for the musical FANGIRLS originated from a conversation that playwright Yve Blake had with a 13 year old girl, in which the girl had exclaimed she'd met the man she was going to marry: Harry Styles. When Blake laughed at this ostentatious revelation, the girl responded: 'don't laugh at me. I'm serious. I love him so much I would slit someone's throat to be with him.' Fuelled by the subsequent media attention when Zayn Malik left the band One Direction, Blake noticed the way young women's passion was written about as being 'hysterical', 'hormonal' and how gendered this language was. This prompted Blake to question why the image of young girls screaming at a pop concert often carries labels such as 'psycho', 'crazy', or 'excessive', whereas the image of young boys screaming at a football match is typically regarded as 'loyal' and 'passionate.' This realisation sparked Blake's desire to develop a show centered around fangirls. To Blake, the gendered portrayal of fangirls in society exemplifies a broader trend of undermining young women by questioning their intelligence and portraying them as overly emotional.

FANGIRLS was written and developed over a period of five years from its initial beginnings and research in 2015 through to its premiere at Belvoir St Theatre in 2019. The show has continued to evolve with each subsequent production in 2021 at the Seymour Centre and 2022 at the Sydney Opera House and again with a London premiere in 2024 at the Lyric Hammersmith which also features a new song. Blake's intentions when writing FANGIRLS was not just to make fun of fangirls, nor only defend them, instead she designed the show 'like a Trojan horse' where the audience begins laughing at the fangirls, then ultimately 'smuggles them into your heart.'

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The roots of boy bands can be traced back to African American barber-shop quartets of the 1800s, however the term didn't appear in popular culture until the 1980s. The Jackson 5 established a lot of the genre's calling cards that we can recognise today – an all boy group, who have a certain curated look/style, sing together with vocal harmonies and have particularly choreographed moves. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s boy bands continued to rise with the likes of Take That, The Backstreet Boys, Boyz II Men and NSYNC. However, as Billboard host Tetriz Kelly states, 'One Direction was one of the first boy groups to benefit from social media,

and later paved the way for fan-based armies to thrive, as with BTS (the Bangtan Boys).’ FANGIRLS both satirises and leans into the joy of boy bands with True Connection; especially through the pop concert immersion at the beginning of Act 2.

The initial productions of FANGIRLS were present during the rise of TikTok as a new platform. The FANGIRLS social media pages were able to capitalise on spaces where its audiences were interacting to create content and generate more interest. One TikTok video posted to the FANGIRLS account went viral with the original Harry star AYDAN riffing in a rehearsal video that reached over 1.5 million views. So much interest was generated from commenters wanting to know the context of the rehearsal that a response TikTok was made in the FANGIRLS account to explain where this music clip had come from and to advertise the 2021 production and imminent release of the cast recording. Blake’s understanding of social media literally places FANGIRLS within the online communities it studies, scrutinises and celebrates.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

Contemporary Australian theatre is no longer dominated by the stereotypes we once saw on stage. Australia itself is culturally diverse, especially so in our major cities, and these experiences are more widely seen now in contemporary plays. Whilst the focus of FANGIRLS is the empowerment of young female voices, the casting choices across the four different seasons of the musical, from Australia and the UK, reflect a cultural diversity of actors, and well as those who are representative of the LGBTQI+ spectrum. This is also highlighted in the program where actors are able to specify their preferred pronouns. Blake’s understanding of theatre growing up was from a mostly white, male perspective. FANGIRLS seeks to be the antithesis of this.

FANGIRLS is grounded in contemporary Australia, echoing the need to lean on the internet for connection due to our geographical distance from pop culture centres like the US and UK. The ‘life or death’ situation the young girls in the play are faced with will feel incredibly familiar to any Australian whose favourite artists hail from overseas. The audience feels the total absolution of the band ACTUALLY coming to Australia; complete with the hefty ticket prices, diminished tour cities (‘how can you tour Australia and just skip Tasmania, that’s like totally placist!’) and the FOMO (fear of missing out) that such an event could cause.

Influenced by Australian playwrights such as Lally Katz (*Neighbourhood Watch*), Matthew Whittet (*Girl Asleep*) and Tommy Murphy (*Holding the Man*), Blake admires her peers and predecessors who use distinctly Australian humour as the oil for tough conversations. Blake was invested in being able to see and hear an authentic teenage experience on stage, something she struggled to see when she was a young theatre goer. Musicals like *Muriel’s Wedding*, that embrace an Australian sensibility and lean heavily into our long vowels, is something that Blake also wanted to emanate in FANGIRLS: ‘...actresses who get to embody [it] and sing in a musical in an Australian accent and get to play women who are multidimensional and true.’ Blake also wanted to work against the image of a ‘perfect’ American teenager that has been presented in popular culture for years. Being a teenager in Australia does not feel as manicured, with sweaty school uniforms due to our extreme weather; often accompanied with feelings of isolation from the rest of the world.

THE POWER AND VULNERABILITY OF TEENAGERS

'It has a narrative that we are not often told, that if they put their mind to it, teenage girls can achieve anything.'

The phenomenon of teenagers speaking up for themselves, perhaps fostered by a sense of community through their spaces online, also reflects the mood shift in contemporary Australia and the wider world at the time of the creation of FANGIRLS. As director Paige Rattray states in her director's note: 'If watching 16 year old Greta Thunberg address the UN the week we started rehearsals for the premiere season was anything to go by, the world needed to brace itself — because the myths teenage girls have been told for so long, that they're "weak" and "hysterical" that their love and passion is 'crazy' were being dismantled rapidly.'

FANGIRLS also explores the vulnerability of teenagers in contemporary Australia, living in a widely connected world, yet simultaneously feeling isolated and concerned with 'presenting' the right image of themselves. Edna is conscious of her social economic status amongst Brianna and Jules, as a 'scholarship kid with a single mum'; something that she feels connects to Harry's own background. Edna's family situation means that tickets to the True Connection concert are unaffordable as 'the cheapest seats are \$139.95?' This economic disparity becomes a push-point for the three friends. Edna, however, proves her power, determination and resourcefulness when she makes her dreams become a reality; highlighted in the song 'Become Brand New'.

We see Jules and Brianna voice their own insecurities in 'Disgusting', listing some of the societal expectations that put pressure on young women to look and perform a certain way; 'Mum says looks aren't everything, but as if they're even not though. Your looks are the way people look at you, how they decide if you're someone they'd like to actually know.' These are the messages young people receive from their peers and social media; that the way you look or present is your ticket to credibility and power. Yet these characters explore their own strength and potential to influence in ways that go beyond their appearances; for Brianna this is seen when she braves the vigil alone and makes connections with strangers and feels understood when her friends are not present. Jules' power and influence over her friends is at first manipulative, however she shows growth and repentance for her selfish attitude; finally realised in the concluding song: 'we were tryna to win a competition we never asked to be in.'

CONNECTION THROUGH COMMON INTERESTS: FANDOM

'If it's only pretend, then why is it the only place that I'm not pretending?'

FANGIRLS raises themes about obsessions and connections through common interests and the strength of these bonds: fandoms. Fandoms, particularly those dominated by women, have long attracted gendered and negative language. These spaces and the connections that are built through them hold power, influence and a strong sense of community and connectedness. At times this can be something stronger than the band or music itself, by presenting a way of exploring your relationship with the world; as in the last song 'Nobody Reprise', the three fans Ash, Lily and Salty sing, 'It was a feeling, of throwing my hands up, and falling in love with life and never having to land.'

Researcher Sascha Salai describes the ‘effectual power’ of fangirls, as ‘when fans unite to bring about social or political change’. We witness this with BTS (Bangtan Boys), whose fandom is known as ARMY (Adorable Representative MC for Youth). Recognised worldwide as one of the most powerful fandoms who ‘use their fangirl powers to reach a common goal for philanthropic means, referring to themselves as activists and coming together to become positive creators of change’, BTS ARMY have previously raised US\$1million for the Black Lives Matter campaign, as well as other guerilla campaigns focused on social justice. We see the FANGIRLS characters engage in their own activism when the fans unite for the vigil; and their passion and willingness to fight for their love is evident in ‘Justice’ with lyrics like ‘tease us and hate us but don’t underestimate us’. We also see their capacity to organise community exemplified by Salty’s timezone spreadsheet to identify anyone at risk of self-harm: ‘you put in your name and time zone and then you can see who else might be awake if you need a chat.’

FANGIRLS also explores ‘parasocial’ relationships, a term coined in 1956 (R. Richard Wohl and Donald Horton) to describe a one-sided relationship with a public figure. ‘The definition of parasocial is non-reciprocated: I know the person, they don’t know me back’, writes Gayle S Stever — a common occurrence when consuming media and engaging with famous personalities who might share thoughts and glimpses of their life with fans, alongside their artforms. ‘You said, you loved me... in my headphones’ (‘Silly Little Girl’).

» FORM AND STYLE

Contemporary Australian theatre tends to blend forms and styles on stage in an eclectic mix. In FANGIRLS we see forms and styles like musical theatre, magical realism and Australian Gothic providing a wider lens through which to comment on society.

The innovation made necessary in Australian theatre is also what makes this musical uniquely placed in contemporary Australian theatre practice. For example, musicals from America or the UK are predominantly large scale, with large casts, extravagant sets, live orchestras. FANGIRLS’ original cast was made up of seven actors, managing roles through double casting; consisted of a mostly bare set to allow for the ease of transitions through different scenes; and the music by its nature was pre-recorded. Blake has described Australian theatre as necessarily ‘scrappy’, where innovation is something Australian theatre makers are adept at due to our more limited economy of the arts.

MUSICAL THEATRE

‘This often exuberant, sometimes exhilarating art form elevates emotion from speech to song; it celebrates the heart; it rides the waves of emotion. It is a form full of vitality. It’s a genre for dreamers. It speaks the language of girls, queer kids and outcasts. When you’re starring in a musical, you can sing loud and celebrate the rush.’ — Cassie Tongue, The Guardian

FANGIRLS is amongst a new generation of musicals, interested in diverse casting, combined with lyrics that are focused on a conversational delivery (think *Hamilton*, *Six*, & *Juliet*, *Matilda*, *Zombie! The Musical* etc). Musical theatre has been quite a popular choice for theatregoers

in its ability to completely transport audiences through story, song, dance and spectacle. It's said of musical theatre, 'When the emotion becomes too strong for speech, you sing, when it becomes too strong for song, you dance.' For musical theatre, songs are a dramatic device, just as important as scenes in needing to be informative. Lyrics should give audiences new information and insights to characters that may not be present in spoken dialogue. Recurring phrases, imagery, and symbolism in lyrics allows playwrights to create unity and continuity throughout a production — seen in FANGIRLS through repeated phrases like 'Nobody loves you like me' delivered in different contexts through the fans, Edna, Caroline and as a True Connection song. These elements can help to strengthen an overall narrative in a musical and deepen an audience's engagement with its underlying messages.

Solo songs are even more pointed towards a character's emotions; usually revealing to the audience what exactly it is they want and even perhaps how they're going to get it, similar to a monologue. This is particularly true for Edna's solo songs like 'Wait and See'. Dialogue and action are usually directed out towards an audience and in this way, audiences can feel more acknowledged in musical theatre than they do in dramatic theatre.

By its very nature, musicals are non-naturalistic through the very convention of bursting into song. However this is often balanced by characters, settings and dialogue based in realism.

MAGICAL REALISM AND THE AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

By juxtaposing the ordinary with the extraordinary, the genres of magical realism and the Australian Gothic invite audiences to explore the boundaries between reality and imagination, tradition and modernity. The Australian Gothic, typically explores a darker side of the Australian identity against a harsh landscape, and a nation that is still uncovering its own sensibilities. Elements of the gothic style can be linked to FANGIRLS as it explores this in a more contemporary and metropolitan context through a teenage lens. FANGIRLS is populated by dark humour, with storytelling myths (fanfictions based in apocalyptic scenarios; the kidnapping tale that becomes a reality); fluid settings and the manipulation of mood and atmosphere to create foreboding for the audience (Edna's preparation of rope, bleach, etc). The musical score also serves as its own form of tension; taking us from pop driven beats, to ethereal choir's of mournful voices as the stakes become higher.

The intense, rollercoaster feelings of fangirls are captured through the heightened and fantastical elements of magical realism. There are constant juxtapositions of the youthful and, at times, flippant voices of the FANGIRLS characters against darker scenarios. In Scene 7, 'The Announcement', when the girls are desperate to find tickets to True Connection, 'something takes over Edna — dark underscoring'. Edna's voice is amplified and distorted to a lower tone and resonance in these lines to encourage Jules to manipulate her parents into buying the tickets; going so far as to blackmail her mum. In the following scene 'Got No Chill', Salty steers their fanfiction in a dark direction by proposing their 'character' pretend she has cancer — 'the boys always sing to a girl who has cancer'. In Scene 12, we see the darkly comic moment of Jules and Edna singing their apologies to one another as a refrain from the previous and subsequent verses that wonder how to dispose of Harry's body.

IMPACT OF FANGIRLS

Audience responses to FANGIRLS have been varied and extreme; some fans have been to see the show over 20 times; it's even garnered its own fan base; the 'FGFG's: FANGIRLS' fangirls. As the show grew over its various seasons in Australia, this fanbase developed and connected over X (formerly Twitter) as a gathering place — a real echo of some of the scenes in the show.

Blake also described the impact the show has had on parents being able to connect more to their teenagers: 'This dad took me aside after a show and said he'd had a fight with his teenage daughter about a year before, because he took her to some type of fan convention and he'd been really embarrassed by her shrieking all day at the event,' says Blake. 'He told her that her behaviour at the convention was embarrassing and undignified, but now that he had seen the show he wouldn't use those words anymore and the show made him see things differently.'

» ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Yve Blake is an Australian composer, lyricist, playwright and screenwriter born on the lands of the Eora Nation (Sydney, Australia). She is a digital native who, after being dissuaded from continuing her music elective in high school, has gone on to write an entire musical on her laptop after learning some skills on YouTube.

Blake is, of course, best known for writing the Book, Music and Lyrics for the hit musical FANGIRLS, which premiered at Queensland Theatre and Belvoir in 2019 to great acclaim.



FANGIRLS was awarded the 2019 Sydney Theatre Award for Best Mainstage Musical and the 2019 Matilda Award for Best Musical or Cabaret, 2020 AWGIE Award for Music Theatre, 2021 Green Room Award for New Australian Writing for Musical Theatre, and also scored an ARIA nomination for Best Original Soundtrack or Musical Theatre Cast Album. In 2024, FANGIRLS premiered in the UK at the Lyric Hammersmith produced by Sonia Friedman Productions.

Blake is a 2024 Women in Music Australia Soho House Fellow, and has been a visiting artist at Princeton University. Previously, Yve has had her work developed and presented at Soho Theatre, Southbank Centre, Old Vic New Voices, the National Theatre Studio, The Barbican, Griffin Theatre Company and the Brisbane Powerhouse. She was the inaugural recipient of the ATYP Rebel Wilson Theatremaker Scholarship, and is an alumni of the Royal Court Writers' Programme. In 2019, Yve took the stage in front of five and a half thousand people as a speaker

at TEDxSydney. Her talk '[For the love of Fangirls](#)' has since been promoted to an official TED talk on TED.com, where it has received more than a million views.

Currently, Blake is developing several other new works for stage, film, TV and podcast audio.

» **CONTENT NOTES: SENSITIVITY**

FANGIRLS contains references to self harm and teachers should be mindful of some moments that might be sensitive to some young students.

SENSITIVE MOMENTS

At the end of Act 1, the audience might be led to believe that Edna is going to self harm.

- Scene 10, page 36 – 'Edna appears. She holds a coil of rope. Suicidal'.
- Scene 12, page 40 – Edna hears a knock at the door and hides the rope she's knotting.' Subsequent lyrics: 'Say what you want, you've got no clue just how sorry you're all gunna be, when I'm gone from your tiny world. Just you wait and see.'
- In Act 2, there are specific references to self harm.
- Scene 3, page 51 – Salty: 'What if he *'did something to himself?'*
- Scene 5, page 5 – Sally mentions a petition trying to stop the hashtag *#cutforharry*.

RESOURCES

- [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14
- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800
- [MensLine Australia](#) on 1300 789 978
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) on 1300 659 467
- [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 22 46 36
- [Headspace](#) on 1800 650 890
- [QLife](#) on 1800 184 527

» WAYS INTO THE TEXT

Although this is a musical text, students and teachers not skilled specifically in dance or music should not be dissuaded when approaching the material. Using resources like the original cast recording of all songs (on Spotify, Apple Music and a vast range of music streaming services found here) will be extremely helpful — especially regarding the rhythm and tone as delivered to create specific moments on stage.

The following articles and videos would be a great way to introduce students to the phenomenon and history of fangirls in popular culture and some of the media hype surrounding the productions of FANGIRLS. Teachers should use their own discretion as to when to use these resources — as some contain spoilers for the text, or show staged scenes from each of the 2019, 2021 and 2022 productions (which may influence students' own imagined stagings).

- Read the introduction in FANGIRLS: 'Enough warmth, witty lines and catchy tunes to win its own fangirls' by Alistair Blanshard
- Watch Yve Blake's TED talk ['For the Love of Fangirls'](#)
- Watch the ABC's two feature reports: ['The Unapologetic Passion of Fangirls'](#) and ["Fangirls" the musical celebrates teen boyband fandom'](#)

ACTIVITY: 'JUST A MINUTE!'

Learning intention:

In this activity, students will engage on a personal level by sharing a fandom they are a part of. The aim is to understand where the interests of students in your class lie, and reflect on the response to these fandoms through collective cultural and gendered biases.

Instructions:

- Students are instructed to think about something they are a fan of: a band/musician, a sporting team, an actor, a game, a book series etc.
- Select a few students to share details of their given fandom with the class in an impromptu speaking task - however the challenge will be that they must speak uninterrupted for 1 minute, without hesitation, repetition or deviation.
- Students will then start walking around the classroom space. Thinking of their fandom, and the rules of 'Just a Minute' they will walk around telling anyone who will listen all about their fandom. Try to out-fan classmates... tell the teacher, tell the curtains!
- Ask students to amplify their performance where the energy is 6/10.
- Take it up to an 8/9
- Teacher to facilitate calling on particular students to EXPLODE with their chosen fandom in a 10/10 moment

Reflection task:

Did you feel that your particular fandom was 'more' or 'less' cool/acceptable than any of the others? Why? Why not? Are there any particular lenses that may have affected your vision of these fandoms (gender/age/type of fandom?)

- Why do you think the 'type' of fandom was more or less acceptable than others?
- How would you define or describe a 'fangirl'?

Extension activity:

Interview a parent or someone older than you on something they are a fan of. Pay attention to their body language, expression and ability to speak on a topic that they LOVE.

- Did this make you engage more with their chosen 'fandom' after listening to what they love about it? Did you learn something new about your interviewee?

ACTIVITY: 'DEAR YOU'**Learning intention:**

In this activity, students will connect personally with their younger self, establishing a sense of understanding with past and present concerns of teenagers.

Materials:

It might be helpful to read through Blake's original letter to herself found in the [Belvoir Schools Resource Pack](#).

Instructions:

- In her 'Writer's note' in the [Resource Pack](#), Blake writes a letter to her younger self in her early teens. In it she states, 'I know you're terrified all the time, and I know that you hate yourself. But I guess what? I don't hate you. I think you're so powerful in all these ways that you haven't realised yet.'
- Instruct students: As an older student at school now, what are the things you wish your younger self had known, or what do you wish you could tell them?
- Students will write their own letter/note to their younger selves - be as encouraging and reassuring as you can.

Reflection task:

How did this task make you feel? Did you connect more to your younger self from a position of empathy? Do you think that you'll connect to the issues and concerns present in FANGIRLS?

ACTIVITY: 'QUOTE ME ON THAT!'**Learning intention:**

In this pre-reading activity students will explore some of the lyrics and lines of FANGIRLS, as well as explore more of the context for why Blake was inspired to write for a powerful and authentic female teen voice. Lines and lyrics can be experimented with to create predicting activities.

Materials:

- 'FANGIRLS Quote Page' in appendix of this resource
- Bluetack
- ['For the Love of Fangirls' TED talk](#)

Instructions:

Pre class Teacher Task: Take the page of quotations from FANGIRLS in the appendix of this resource - cut up each quote and hide them in different locations around your drama space using bluetack (enlisting the help of a class prior to this lesson can be useful!) You could choose to omit some quotations or supply less.

- Students are to find all the hidden quotes in the class - a competition to see who can find the most can make for an energising few minutes!

- Once found, try to even out the quotes between the students in your class.
- In a circle read out the lines one by one.
- Prediction activity: Ask students, who do these characters seem to be? What is it about language that causes us to make assumptions about character?
- Ask each student to choose ONE line to focus on and read aloud.
- Experiment with the different ways to perform this line a few times around the circle — you could also incorporate throwing a ball around the circle for less predictability about who goes next.

Reflection task:

Did you speak in your own voice? Why, why not? Did you inflect at the end of sentences? Did you PERFORM teenager?

- Watch a section of Blake's TED talk: [00:04:15 - 00:08:05](#)

In her TED talk, Blake speaks about research on teenage female voices. Look at the following explanations of said voice coach, Amy Hume, and how she describes a 'Valley Girl' voice.

- Swallowing words at the ends of phrases. This is when you start strong, but you drop away by the end of the sentence. It comes across as unconvincing.
- Using filler words (like, so, um, you know, I mean...)
- Speaking quickly and racing through your words, giving the impression of wanting to get things over and done with (so you can run in the other direction, perhaps?)
- Fidgeting. This is often about making yourself small, meek and dare I say it, invisible
- Cowering when challenged instead of calmly justifying yourself, and trusting in what you have to say
- Avoiding eye contact
- Adding breath (for maturity)
- Vocal fry (for apathy)

Were any of these methods of delivery present when you delivered your lines in the earlier quote task? Why/why not?

- Go around the circle one more time, choosing one of these 'Valley Girl' trends to evoke in your performance of your line.

Extension activity:

Split students into groups of 3-4 with their one line each. Ask them to create a tableau for at least two of the lines — transforming from one into the other. It may be interesting to try and blend the two, or contrast them depending on the lines.

» LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES

WARM UPS

The following activities can be used prior to any of the workshops below — or before engaging in class readings. Just a bit of fun with the text in mind! *NB:* To add to any of the games below, your class might like to create a special movement to perform ‘the death drop’ from ‘Actually Dead’ when getting out/death through using a repeated lyric from the song ‘ACT-UALLY DEAD’. Other lines:

- ‘Plan my funeral because I think I’m DEAD’
- ‘Google my Symptoms ‘cause I think I’m DEAD’
- ‘Identify my body ‘cause I think I’m DEAD!’

‘WE’RE FANGIRLS...’

This game is based on a TikTok trend from early 2024. Therefore, by the very nature of social media it’s definitely already passed as a trend.

Instructions:

In a circle, ask students to step forward one at a time saying the line ‘We’re fangirls...’ and ending with their own improvised assumption about fangirls beginning with ‘of course...’

- For example: ‘We’re fangirls... of course we sleep on pillowcases of Harry’s face’. ‘We’re fangirls... of course I’ve lost my voice in an imagined concert in my living room...’

ZIP/ZAP/BOING – FANGIRLS EDITION

Every teacher has their own slight variations on this game. Use your normal rules as the base and exchange FANGIRLS references below.

Instructions:

- ‘Hey’ replaces ‘Zip’ — in one direction
- ‘HARRY’ to replace ‘Zap’ — is the other direction (or across the circle in some variations)
- Call and response: “Nobody loves you like..” direct the flow towards another student in the circle who must respond with... ‘Meeeee!’ — game picks back up from that student.
- Call and response — crossing the circle: Initiator directs the following to one student elsewhere in the circle: ‘Eye broccoli, what if people call me...’
- Both students join in the middle for the rest of the line: ‘Frumpty Dumpty with a butt that’s lumpy’ and trade places.
- When a student gets ‘out’ they cry ‘ACT-UALLY DEAD!’ and perform the ‘death drop’ or one of the other variations mentioned at the top of this section.

LOOK DOWN/LOOK UP – ‘HARRY!’

A quick and energising warm up or closing activity.

Instructions:

- Students stand in a circle and begin by looking down. The teacher instructs ‘look up’. All students must look up and look straight at another student — it must be another student.
- If two students make eye contact, both students must yell ‘HARRY!’ and dramatically die.

- When the teacher says ‘look down’ all students must look down again until they are told to “look up” and look at another student.
- Make the circle tighter as more students get out. The winner is the ultimate fan.

‘ONE DIRECTION IS THE TRUE CONNECTION’ (FLOCKING)

This class warm up works well for Workshop “Concert Medley” and follows the basic premise of a flocking exercise. As a reflection after this task it’s important for students to note that they do not have to be ‘dancers’ to create interesting, choreographed movements — it can even be improvised!

Instructions:

- Students stand in a big group (clump) — this can be as a whole class, or broken into small groups. Odd numbers work well.
- For the beginning, a leader is chosen who is in front of the group.
- The leader starts slowly moving in a stylized walk or movement.
- Everyone else follows the leader.
- If the group’s direction changes, whoever is currently in the front of the group becomes the new leader.
- Encourage the group to experiment with levels, gestures, pace and articulation of movement to create interesting moments.
- Music: Use the Wax Ecstatic remix of ‘Let Them’ as musical accompaniment or ‘Got No Chill’

» CLASS READING SUGGESTIONS

You may wish to have your students read the play together in class, and design the workshops around the rubric. You can explore how the elements of drama are used to create dramatic meaning as you read through the text together, or you may wish to have read the text in its entirety first. Below are some suggestions for reading through the text before engaging with workshops:

Group Reading and Discussion:

- Gather as a class in a circle and collectively read and discuss the play with some focus questions on the play’s central themes.
- The cast recording of FANGIRLS can be accessed through most streaming platforms and is a fantastic resource when approaching the musical element of this text.

Character Exploration:

- *Focus:* Explore the relationships between characters and how spatial relationships are developed
- Stand in a circle with your copies of the play.
- Take turns stepping into the centre to act out the characters’ lines, focusing on physical expression.
- Pause for discussion on complex moments.

Small Group Scene Analysis:

- *Focus:* Work on scenes that explore elements from the rubric —social/artistic/political/personal etc.
- Read scenes in smaller groups, then reconvene to discuss them in the context of the entire play.
- Each group could choose a moment to present from this scene that they determine is essential for understanding.

Individual Reading:

- If time is limited, you may read certain scenes at home.
- Write a reflection on your initial reading of the scenes.

Preliminary Scene Design:

- *Focus:* Search up set design images from the various productions and discuss the variations. What do these different set designs add to dramatic meaning?
- Sketch out set changes and elements, experiment with costume, props, sound, lighting, and space to understand their impact on the play's meaning.

» WORKSHOPS

The workshops below are designed to be specific experiential learning of certain scenes for students to engage with and then be able to write about with clear connections to the rubric. There are many more scenes and potential workshops to explore with students, the following are some ideas throughout various points and with different characters in the text.

WORKSHOP: TRANSITIONS AND PERFORMANCE STYLES

Learning intention:

How does Contemporary Australian Theatre utilise and practise different forms and styles through its staging? Students will consider the transitions and how these are managed as both directors and actors moving through the styles of realism, magical realism and musical.

Learning materials:

Act 1, Scene 5—Scene 6, pages 14–17

Optional: access to FANGIRLS cast recording of [‘Feels So True’](#)

Instructions:

The focus for this activity will be from Scene 5, page 14, Caroline's line: 'I know you think I'm annoying...' — through to Scene 6, Salty's song 'Feels So True'.

- In groups of 3-5 students, consider the transitions in time, place and space.
- Prepare a presentation/performance of the transitions that ensures they are managed in a way that is theatrical. Try to see that the rhythm of the play is uninterrupted.
- Think about how you can symbolise these changes with movement, voice, prop, costume and space

Consider:

- How will you show the audience the transition from Edna's kitchen / to bedroom / to fan forum / to separate chat room with Salty?
- You may wish to omit some of the dialogue and attempt to enter the further world of the fanfic and the start of the song 'Feels So True'.
- Alternatively, how would this scene work if the song was a monologue instead? How would this change the dynamic of the scene?

Reflection:

- As actors and directors, how did your groups manage the transitions in time, place and space?
- What elements of realism, magical realism and musical were explored in different moments from Scenes 5–6?

WORKSHOP: TECHNOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

Learning intention:

How do Contemporary Australian playwrights work with technology as a dramatic device to create specific images on stage? In this workshop you will utilise certain digital technologies to recreate the sense of a 'connected worldwide fandom' that recurs throughout FANGIRLS.

Teaching notes:

- Not all classrooms will be resourced the same, so this workshop may take some pre-planning. If your school doesn't have access to class sets of devices, and phones cannot be used in the classroom, you may wish to request any students who have laptops to bring them in for this session — ensuring that all devices are able to be connected to the internet.
- If the technology aspect is not at all possible in your classroom setting you may wish to change this workshop into a staging exploration. How can you stage the impression of a connected online community without the use of screens and technology?



Learning materials:

- Access to a projector on stage (your stage space may need to be considered)
- Access to a teacher laptop to connect to Zoom or Teams or any other online conferencing tool.
- Devices that can film and connect to online conferencing.
- Access to the cast recording of FANGIRLS song '[Don't Exist](#)'
- Act 1, Scene 10 'Don't Exist', pages 33–35

Instructions:

Pre class Teacher planning:

- Access your preferred online conferencing tool (Zoom, Teams etc) and set up a meeting

that students will be able to access. As the host of the meeting, remove yourself from view (available in video settings) and alter the settings to show all participants on a grid/gallery view.

- Ensure a projector is in your performance space to be able to show all connected students on screen.
- Depending on your class, you may like to explore these scenes (Act 1 Scene 10) with the accompanying music track, or read the lyrics as lines.
- Once students have joined the meeting with their videos on—encourage them to spread around the drama space—they can even be positioned as audience members to watch themselves on the stage projector.
- As you rehearse and explore the use of technology as a dramatic device, you might like to employ another student to ‘direct’ the gallery view through your online conferencing tool—playing with when students can have a featured solo camera appearance, and when to revert back to the gallery view.
- For this whole class exercise you will explore the use of technology as a dramatic device in Scene 10 — ‘Don’t Exist’; two students will play Edna and Caroline, the rest of the students (who are able to access online conferencing tools) will create the ‘Video Fan Chorus’.
- Assign roles to students for the different fans lines: Fan 1, 2, 3, Salty, Ash, Lily

Consider:

How can you juxtapose the moment between Edna and Caroline against the video fan chorus? Try emphasising the changing nature of the refrain ‘nobody loves you like me’.

Extension:

How can you blend the following stage direction from the first time we see the Video Fan chorus in Scene 3 with what you’ve been exploring in Scene 10?

An ocean of short sentences is projected across the space. We are swimming in fan messages to Harry: ‘did you get my letters?’ ‘love you baby’, ‘falling asleep thinking of u’, ‘plz notice me’, ‘love your smile’, ‘luv you my cupcake’, ‘how was ur day’. etc

Reflection:

- How is connection/disconnection explored in this scene through technology as a dramatic device?
- How were your class able to experiment to establish theatrical moments with technology as a staging design feature?

WORKSHOP: CONCERT MEDLEY

Learning intention:

How are audiences encouraged to engage with the social and personal concerns of characters in contemporary Australian plays? In this workshop you will explore the intentional inversion of the ‘theatre audience’ into a ‘True Connection’ audience.

Learning materials:

- Access to FANGIRLS cast recording of song ‘Concert Medley’
- Some ‘preppy boy band’ style costumes may help
- Act 2: Scene 1: The Concert page 43–48

Instructions:

- In groups of 3-5, assign students a different section each of the ‘Concert Medley’ from

the beginning of Act Two. Each group will need a 'Harry' leader. Sections and timings on songs are:

- a. Concert Intro + 'Nobody' 0:00–1:08
- b. 'Let Me In' (Latin style) 1:09–2:09
- c. 'Cool Girl' 2:09–3:01
- d. 'Touch the Moon' 3:01–4:27 [end of track]

Extension activity:

You may like to explore the final moment of Harry's 'Acoustic version' which encourages the audience to use their phone lights.

- Each group must aim to not only engage your audience but INVOLVE them, like an Australian Idol/The Voice style competition.
- Groups can choose to mime or sing along to the lyrics.
- The performance must include choreographed moves; this can be dance inspired and have flair or can be more simple – perhaps to inspire your audience to dance along; a flocking exercise to start is useful here.
- Discuss the actor/audience relationship and how this particular moment adds to this.

Consider:

Blake describes FANGIRLS as 'theatre as a pop concert, meets rave, meets church'. How can you use this quote to inspire your performance?

Reflection task:

- Discuss how the actors/performers ENGAGED and influenced their audience.
- How was movement/dance and atmosphere created by your own group? What effect did this have on your audience? What are the challenges actors face in working with the movement required for this musical?
- Why do you think Blake structured this moment to open Act Two of FANGIRLS?
- A *TimeOut* reviewer described this moment as the audience being ['together in an electric kind of unity.'](#) Did your class achieve this sense of connection in your workshop?

WORKSHOP: LIFE OR DEATH DIRECTION

Learning intention:

How do directors use the stage to create mood and atmosphere to highlight issues and concerns for an audience?

Materials:

- Access to the song 'Life or Death'
- Act 2: Scene 5 'Life or Death', pages 56–57

Instructions:

- Working from the beginning of Act 2: Scene 5, students will become the directors of this task.
- Teachers could choose for students to collaborate together as directors; assign one director per group; or employ younger students to become the actors so each student has a chance to direct their own scene.
- As a director and performers, students will prepare a presentation of Scene 5 working from juxtaposing the atmosphere and serious nature of the fans preparing for a vigil against the 'radiobro' statement.

- Consider the transitions in time, place and the transformation of characters.
- Use lighting, staging and the music to create atmosphere that is then transitioned to the harsh radiobro statement.

Extension activity:

Evolve your working of this scene to create a different mood and atmosphere for each small vignette of characters: Salty; Caroline; Jules and Brianna.

Reflection task:

As a director, how did you create an atmosphere to contrast the different moments in Scene 5 and highlight the double standard expected of young men against that of young women and their passions?

WORKSHOP: CHARACTER: 'SILLY LITTLE GIRL'

Learning intention:

How are the effects of a parasocial relationship explored through the character of Edna? In this workshop, students will explore the acting and characterisation of Edna and why the audience connects with her character and supports her journey.

Materials:

Access to Scene 12, lyrics of 'Silly Little Girl'

Instructions:

Students will consider the given descriptive lines from reviews below on the portrayal of Edna. Students, as actors, will take inspiration from these descriptions to develop the sense of the protagonist's characterisation on stage, attempting to convey both the powerful and naive dimensions of her character in their own reading of "Silly Little Girl" (Act 2, Scene 11—page 73).

- **Option a)** a student with musical abilities may like to perform this as a song
- **Option b)** students who are not singers will explore the lyrics as a monologue.
- Students should first rewrite the verse into prose, putting in their own punctuation to help establish a rhythm that is different from the musical version.
- Students will perform an excerpt of their version of 'Silly Little Girl'.

Consider:

Descriptions on the portrayal of Edna from reviews:

- '... brings a refreshingly vulnerable take to Edna. She feels achingly young and still bursting with her own power and potential. Even when her actions are questionable, we can't help but root for her.' — [The Guardian](#)
- 'inviting naivety and charm. Her ever increasing sense of panic fuels the show with a heightened energy' — [The Queer Review](#)
- 'Edna is one of those rare teens onstage – she feels like a teen. Lovingly, but not uncritically constructed, we see her ambition and impatience alongside her wit' — [TimeOut](#)

Reflection task:

How did you use the given descriptions as inspiration to create an empathetic response from the audience on the cultural issues and concerns of a young female voice? Describe your body language, tone and intention of a particular moment you either watched or performed.

» RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

ON THE PHENOMENON OF FANGIRLS/FANS

[Fanning the flame: The history and stigma of fangirls](#) | Sydney Opera House - 2022
[Fangirls by Hannah Ewens review - beyond idolatry and lust](#) | The Guardian - 2019
[Why are Fangirls scary?](#) | Yve Blake | TEDxSydney - 2019
[I Used to Be Normal - A Boyband Fangirl Story](#) | Jessica Leski | Film - 2018
[Billboard Explains: The Magic of Boybands](#) | Billboard - 2022
[Up, Up and Away!: The Power and Potential of Fan Activism](#) | Henry Jenkin - 2012
[What the Taylor concert was really like](#) | Mamamia - 2024

FANGIRLS THE MUSICAL

[‘Fangirls’ the musical celebrates teen boyband fandom](#) | ABC The Mix - 2019
[The unapologetic passion of Fangirls](#) | ABC Art Works - 2022

REVIEWS OF FANGIRLS THE MUSICAL

[Fangirls \(2019\)](#) | Timeout - 2019
[Fangirls review: new musical has enough warmth, witty lines and catchy tunes to win its own fangirls](#) | The Conversation - 2019
[Screaming in the aisles, crying in the foyer: hit show returns to Belvoir](#) | Sydney Morning Herald - 2020
[Delightful musical homage to fandoms, screaming very much encouraged](#) | The Guardian - 2021
[FANGIRLS – Theatre Review](#) | Lithia Reviews - 2021
[Not being dramatic, but this pop-musical will probably change your life](#) | TimeOut - 2022
[Fangirls Review](#) | ATYP - 2022
[Theatre Review: Fangirls \(Seymour Centre, Sydney\)](#) | The Queer Review - 2022

OTHER RESOURCES

[Belvoir Education Resources](#) - search FANGIRLS
[Belvoir Cast briefing](#) - Facebook recording
[Industry Chats: Yve Blake](#) | Department of Education - 2020
[Hear it From the Playwright](#) | Australian Plays Transform - 2024
[7 amazing teenage activists that prove Greta Thunberg is not alone](#) | The Independent - 2019

FANGIRLS SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS:

[Instagram](#)
[TikTok](#)
[Website](#)

» APPENDIX

Quote Search resource for activity: 'Quote me on that!'

EDNA: Homework! Mum! CAN YOU KNOCK?!	GRETA: You give me hand sweat	ASH: WHY IS LIFE SO UNFAIYA?!
JULES: I don't even care! TEAGAN has a moustache! Okay? She's not even hot!	JULES: Look at you, you're a fourteen-year-old fangirl and you write psycho fan fiction about him where you go on the run together and kill cops.	EDNA: I remember sleeping over every single Saturday Staying awake in a sweet sugar rush
CAROLINE: ...those boys are—products designed to reinforce all of these toxic ideas about who you are...	SALTY: Did I like it? I'm PREGNANT with it! You're like, the [Beyoncé] of fan fiction, seriously.	I can't even! What is breath?
CAROLINE: Edna, society twists girls when they hit puberty / Into petrified pretzels of insecurity	CAROLINE: It's just a product, a packaged preteen fantasy So your love is not reality 'cause he's a celebrity You're just projecting onto An infallible effigy	BRIANNA: Every billboard preaches the lesson that we are less
JULES: Mum, if I don't go I'll die—I'M NOT BEING OVERDRAMATIC. Mum?!	SALTY: I'm obsessed with how dark this is. Can you imagine if someone actually did this?	BRIANNA: They've only been out one time though. And they kissed but I don't know if it was even with tongues.
JULES: Hot big brothers! I'll sniff 'em out, push past the DRUNK MOTHERS	BRIANNA: It's just ... last time I had it { <i>Red Bull</i> } it made me a bit seizure-y.	JULES: You're basic, I'm acid, I'm vinegar, I'm balsamic
CAROLINE: And it's just, it's dangerous that young women are taught that romantic love is the only end goal, because you are already so powerful in your own right, okay, Eddy?	HARRY: I like your fingertips, I like your soul/ Thinking of your messy hair, I'm like woah	BRIANNA: I can't believe I didn't get ANY pics! As if my phone died. Can you send me the ones you took?
EDNA: They just love you 'cause you're famous but I don't care I see past the branding, I see past the [gulp] hair	EDNA: 'Cause the chances you don't take Are the monsters that you make	RADIOBRO: Well, you wouldn't, you wouldn't see boys going on like this— Or, y'know—listening to that music in the first place.
BRIANNA: Heyyyy, was my makeup last night, like was it more pretty or was it more hot?	JULES: Hey, random question: do you reckon guys notice if your bra strap is showing in pics?	EDNA: No—I'm not doing this to be famous?

JULES: Mum says looks aren't everything / But as if they're even not though	BRIANNA: Pip has boobs, But Jules says one's too big And she'll never get a boyfriend now ...	BRIANNA: And I'm tired of not knowing If this skin suit will ever feel like home 'Cause what. If this. Is it.
EDNA: I don't want her to go to jail, Salty, I want no-one to ever find out what she did.	SALTY: Hey, um, here's my number. If you want it. You can [Whatsapp] me any time. It'll come up with my parentally assigned name. Jonathan, that's me.	EDNA: MUM, WAIT! YOU WOKE ME UP! JUST LET ME GET DRESSED-A.
CAROLINE: Oh, it's a brave thing to love / To have something to lose / That could just tear you apart	NAZ: I would ho-old you, so you could feel love I could kiss each of your eyelids Before slowly removing each of them With toenail clippers	FANS: We want Justice! Harry! And your kneecaps!
BRIANNA: Last night I was sad about it and my brother just kept laughing.	CAM: You wanna know why the media isn't covering the search for Harry anymore? It's because they're too busy DRAGGING us for BEING in LOVE.	TAL: Why should we hide our feelings Because they annoy you? OH! Because it isn't what the boys do?!
BRIANNA: It's fine if Dad cries / 'Cause some guy didn't catch a ball But if I cry over Harry I'm a freak?	BRIANNA: Why did you run off and jump on that random bus without me? ... Jules?	JULES: [sniggering] Kyle called it the virgin festival.
EDNA: You. Said. You loved me / In my headphones / In the lonely black	EDNA: But that was every single story I'd ever been told Unless I was half of someone else I could never be whole	ALL: Serious-laayy!
LILY: Because teenage girls are all that's wrong with the world	LILY: To remember how it felt to SCREAM Inside all the noise	BRIANNA: Because the world told us we're never enough So we got stuck in trusting we were just disgusting,