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SILENT DISCO


BY LACHLAN PHILPOTT

TEACHER'S NOTES

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ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Lachlan Philpott is a Sydney-based writer and graduate of Victorian College of the Arts, NIDA, University of Sydney and University of NSW.

His first play *Bison* had sell-out seasons in Adelaide, Belfast, London, Melbourne and Sydney. Other plays include *Bustown*; *Catapult*; *Colder* (Winner R.E. Ross Trust Award 2007); *In 3D*; *M.ROCK*; *The Chosen*; *Truck Stop* (Winner Best Play for Young Audiences Australian Writer's Guild Awards 2013); and *The Trouble with Harry*. He has had nine plays published to date. Lachlan also works with Amnesty International writing scripts for many public activation campaigns.

In 2013, Lachlan's new works premiered at the Traverse Theatre Edinburgh, the MAC Belfast, Perth Theatre Company, Tamarama Rock Surfers Sydney, Canberra Youth Theatre Company and Brisbane Girls' Grammar. His play *Silent Disco* was featured at the Singapore Writers Festival and his new work *M.ROCK* was selected for the National Play Festival. He is currently under commission at Bell Shakespeare and the Traverse Theatre Edinburgh, and developing the screen adaption of *Silent Disco* with the support of Screen Australia.

Lachlan co-founded *wreckedAllprods* with Alyson Campbell in 2000 and their work has been featured in *Midsumma*, *London Pride*, *Outburst* Belfast and *Sydney Mardi Gras*.

In extensive work as a teacher, mentor and dramaturg, Lachlan has worked for theatre companies, schools and tertiary institutions around Australia. He was Literary Associate at Australian Theatre for Young People between 2008 and 2011 where he ran *Fresh Ink*—Australia's leading emerging writers program—and a part-time tutor for the post-graduate writing for performance course at NIDA. Lachlan was a Drama Consultant for the NSW Performing Arts Unit and directed the NSW Schools Drama Ensembles for several years. He was also writer in Residence at Red Stitch Theatre Melbourne in 2006, Griffin Theatre Company Sydney in 2010 and 2014, the Playwrights Foundation San Francisco in 2012 and the Traverse Theatre Edinburgh in 2013.

In 2013, Lachlan was awarded an Australia Council Cultural Leadership grant to investigate writer-centred play development models. The fellowship included short residencies at the Playwrights' Centre, Minneapolis, and the Lark Play Development Centre, New York.

As the inaugural Australian Fulbright Professional Playwright Scholar, he will travel to the USA and create a new play for the American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco in 2014.

Lachlan is Chair of the Australian Writer's Guild Playwrights' Committee.

ABOUT THE TEXT

Silent Disco has received the following awards: Winner Griffin Award for Outstanding New Australian play 2009, Winner GAP Competition Aurora Theatre Co. USA 2010, Winner Best Stage Play at Australian Writers Guild Awards 2012).

Silent Disco explores the shared relationships that occur in the space of schools, the distress of adolescence, and the ways in which technology has permeated how we live and communicate.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

The Arts

Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama (ACADRM047)

Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles (ACADRM048)


Practice and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces, including exploration of those developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dramatists (ACADRM049)

Perform devised and scripted drama making deliberate artistic choices and shaping design elements to unify dramatic meaning for an audience (ACADRM051)

Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect (ACADRR052)

General Capabilities

- Assess the impact of ICT in the workplace and in society, and speculate on its role in the future and how they can influence its
- Select and use ICT to articulate ideas and concepts and plan the development of complex solutions
- Use language that indirectly expresses opinions and constructs representations of people and events, and consider expressed and implied judgements
- Pose questions to critically analyse complex issues and abstract ideas
- Create and connect complex ideas using imagery, analogies and symbolism
- Give reasons to support their thinking, and address opposing viewpoints and possible weaknesses in their own positions
- Evaluate the effectiveness of ideas, products and performances and implement courses of action to achieve desired outcomes against criteria they have identified
- Reflect critically on their emotional response to challenging situations in a wide range of learning, social and work-related contexts
- Consider, control and justify their emotional responses, in expressing their opinions, beliefs, values, questions and choices
- Articulate their personal value system and analyse the effects of actions that repress social power and limit the expression of diverse views

 This is an extract from the Australian Curriculum.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 1

Voice, movement and sound

Place three chairs on the stage and ask three students to sit in the chairs with their backs to the audience. Allocate each of the students a role: Petchall, Tamara, Squid. The actors read from 'A bell sounds in five long chilling rings', p. 9 to 'A bell rings', p. 11. At the end of the reading, the student playing Tamara, turns to face the audience and the actors read the same section. At the end of this reading, the actors playing Petchall and Squid turn to face the audience and the actor playing Tamara turns his or her back to the audience.

After completing the three readings of the text in small groups, students complete the following tasks.

- How did the three readings change the way the actors communicated with the audience and therefore the interpretation of dramatic meaning by the audience?
- Evaluate how important voice is in communicating dramatic ideas and action.
- Conduct a moved reading of the play. Assess the importance of movement in conveying dramatic meaning and communicating ideas to an audience.

As a class, consider the ways background noise and sound create atmosphere and setting for example at a stadium when a sporting match is on. Discuss how the use of sound and music could be used to add to the atmosphere and setting of the scene. In small groups students complete the following tasks.

- Identify the kinds of sounds that would be present in the scene.
- Source and/or create the sounds that could be used in a performance of the scene.
- Rehearse the scene with the sounds and considering what the students have learnt in the first part of the activity.
- Perform the scene for the class and record the performance.
- Review the performance and as a group critique the performance using the elements of drama (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes).

In their journals, students reflect on all of the performances they have created based on the text. In the reflection they should analyse which performance they found most effective and which they found least effective. Students should also reflect on the use of sound to create setting and atmosphere.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 2

Tracking a character

Students choose one of the following characters: Petchall, Tamara and Squid. As they read the script, the students 'track' one of the key characteristics of the character, for example, Tamara has a habit of marking time and Petchall has a number of soliloquies. After identifying their chosen moments in the script, students complete the following tasks.

- Identify the main issue or idea that the character is expressing through the script, for example, 'the challenges of youth'.
- Create five to seven freeze frames to represent the moments chosen from the script.
- Using the script, choose a word or phrase to add to each freeze frame.
- In small groups share the freeze frames, evaluating and reflecting on the work in progress using the elements of drama as a framework (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes).
- Make any necessary adjustments to the freeze frames based on the feedback received.
- Add a transition between each freeze frame.
- Perform the sequence for the whole class.

In their journals, students reflect on the effectiveness of their performance using the elements of drama as a framework. In the reflection students should identify their own values and beliefs in regards to the issue/idea they portrayed in their performance, and compare and contrast this to the characters. Students reflect on their response to receiving feedback, especially any emotional responses and how this developed or hindered their work. They should also reflect on their own ability to provide feedback and how they can work on and improve this for the future.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 3

Subtext freeze frames

Students read the following sections of the text in groups of eight or more: 'Squid visits Dane in prison', pp. 21–24 and the GoLo scene, pp. 29–32.

As students read the sections they identify the subtext by noting what the character is showing, not saying and what the playwright reveals to the audience about the characters. For example, in the GoLo scene when Tamara asks Dezzie if she misses school and enjoys working at GoLo we know that Tamara is actually trying to work out what she is going to do with her life as she does not want to spend it working at GoLo. Dezzie's apathy towards working at GoLo ('Can't be bothered looking for another job') represents the life that Tamara does not want to have.

After identifying the subtext, students create a series of freeze frames that show the subtext. Students rehearse the sections with four actors playing the parts of the characters, and the remainder of the group creating freeze frames to demonstrate the subtext. Groups should find a way to transition between each freeze frame and to delineate between the subtext for each character.

Students perform one of the two scenes for the rest of the class.

In their journals, students reflect on the importance of subtext and the ways in which subtext can be presented in a drama.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 4

Adult transitions

Read Petchall's soliloquy, p. 35 and complete the following tasks in small groups.

- Identify the transition/s that Petchall is going through and the challenges that her character is facing.
- Perform the speech as a monologue with the rest of the group creating a series of freeze frames or a movement piece to support the monologue.
- Perform the monologue as a piece of physical theatre.
- Perform the monologue with students acting the other characters that Petchall describes.

At the end of the rehearsal period, decide which performance shows the transitions and challenges most clearly. After the piece has been chosen, complete the following tasks.

- Rehearse the chosen piece again and then show one other group.
- Provide feedback to each other in reference to the elements of drama (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes).
- Rehearse the piece again, taking in any necessary changes based on the feedback.
- Perform the piece for the class with the teacher and/or members of other groups taking photos of the performance.

In their journals, using their memories and the photos, students should reflect on how the elements of drama (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes) were used in their performance to show the transition and challenges faced by Petchall in their piece and one other work.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 5

The elements of design in production

As a class, imagine you are holding a production of *Silent Disco* in a local venue of your choice. Divide the class into groups and allocate each group one of the elements of production, for example, a group for stage design and a group for lighting design, etc. Each group must come up with a cohesive design for their element of production and present their idea to the rest of the class. During the task, the students should hold regular meetings together as a production team to share their creative vision and to ensure that all of the elements of production will work together. The groups should conduct appropriate research into materials they will be using, any historical influences on their design concept, limitations of the venue and venue specifications and any other important information. At all times, the students should be mindful of how a designer provides additional clues and support for the audience in a visual or aural format, for example, by using colour as a metaphor or sound to create atmosphere.

Once the group has completed the research and development phase, they present their work to the rest of the class using an appropriate form of technology. During the presentation students should clarify their ideas and discuss how the element of production will assist the audience in their interpretation of the play. Students should provide each other with feedback based on the elements of drama (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes).

After completing the task, students should reflect on the challenges that a designer faces and how the students can overcome these. They should also reflect on the importance of the elements of design in creating full and meaningful productions.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 6

Technology as a skeleton

Technology has had an impact on the way we communicate each day, the way we learn. However, the universal issues and challenges that have faced teenagers and adults have not changed. The use of technology, especially the iPod, is a through line or skeleton in *Silent Disco*. In other words, technology is a dramatic device to help tell the story of Tamara, Squid and Petchall and show the challenges they face and the transitions their characters make through the play.

In small groups students complete the following tasks.

- Conduct a moved reading of the script noting each mention or use of technology.
- After completing the reading go back to each scene on the list and identify what this shows the audience about the character, the ways we communicate and the ways technology is a part of everyday life.
- Choose one character and create an ICT presentation that shows the character's development and the way technology is used to assist in showing the character's development.
- Students take it in turns to show their ICT presentation to each other. During the presentation, students explain their reasoning and respond to questions from the other groups.

In their journals students reflect on the following.

- Through the examination of the text and character, how do you think technology has effected and will continue to effect human relationships?
- Considering the presentation and the questions that were asked, how accurately did the group articulate their ideas in the presentation? If given the opportunity to make amendments to the presentation, what would be changed, what would stay the same and why?
- Reflect on the emotional response students had to working in a group with diverse ideas. How did the students overcome any challenges?

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 7

The internal and external world

In his original concept for *Silent Disco*, Lachlan Philpott imagined a production where the audience could choose to listen to the dialogue live in the production or they could choose to listen to an iPod. If listening to the iPod, the audience would be given the option to listen to the inner world for Squid whilst watching the actors perform the play as written. As he is portrayed in the text *Silent Disco*, Squid is a character of few external words, but many internal words, which we as an audience do not hear.

In small groups, students will create the internal world of Squid. In order to prepare to create the internal world for the character of Squid, students complete the following tasks individually.

- Keep a diary for one week. In the diary write down all the times that your external monologue conflicted with your internal monologue.
- Note down any physical reactions you may have had during this external and internal conflict. For example, did your facial expression change or the pitch of your voice?
- At the end of the week, read over the diary and note any patterns that have occurred. For example: did the conflict happen more often with certain people? Did the physical reactions always occur in the same way? etc.
- Using the diary and the reflection, write a short piece, in any genre, on the conflict between your personal external and internal monologue.

In small groups, re-read the play and chose one scene that has Squid in it. As a group, students discuss what they believe Squid's inner monologue would be in the scene and why they think this.

Rehearse and record one scene of the inner-monologue. Hold a performance for the class or another drama class giving them the option to listen to the actors as they perform or to listen to Squid's inner-monologue. Perform the scenes again and ask the audience to listen to the other dialogue; for example, if they listened to the actors the first time, then they should listen to Squid's inner-monologue this time. Interview the audience after the performance and identify how their interpretation of the text changed.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 8

The use of doubling

The economic realities of creating and producing Australian theatre means that plays that are written for large casts often have to be performed by small casts using the technique of 'doubling'. Doubling can create a number of dramaturgical challenges in play. For example, Camilla Ah Kin played Petchall, Dezzie, Leanne and Aunty in the original production of *Silent Disco*. Effectively, Camilla played Tamara's friend, her teacher and her mother. Kirk Page played Dane, Laurence and Teacher, meaning he was Tamara's father and the brother of her boyfriend with whom she has an affair.

As a class, discuss the dramaturgical challenges that doubling creates within *Silent Disco*. Choose two or three scenes and perform them with and without doubling. Using the students' knowledge of drama and theatrical conventions, discuss the following.

- Which performance style did the students prefer, with or without doubling?
- What challenges did the students face as performers when engaged in doubling?
- What challenges did the students face as audience members when the performers were using doubling?
- What dramatic techniques and conventions do theatre companies rely on to make sure doubling is successful, i.e. that the audience will accept the use of doubling on stage?

In their journals, students should reflect on what they have learnt about doubling from a dramaturgical point of view.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 9

The tempo and rhythm of speech

Playwrights use overlapping speech and have characters cut off each other's speech to imitate the way people talk in real life. These are marked in a text by the symbol '/' which can indicate overlap or interruption. When two characters are listed with a '/' between their names, then they are saying the lines simultaneously. These devices create a rhythm for and between the characters on stage.

Working individually, students complete the following tasks.

- Record your friends or family holding a conversation.
- Listen to the conversation and mark the points of: interruption, overlapping speech and simultaneous speech.
- Review the conversation again and identify the moments of dramatic tension.
- Link the moments of dramatic tension to the moments of interruption, overlapping speech and simultaneous speech.
- Review the conversation once more, this time listening to the conversation as if it is a piece of music with its own rhythm. Note the ways that rhythm is an important part of speech as well as the ways people use pitch, timber and texture.

Students share their findings with each other in small groups. In the same small group, students complete the following tasks.

- Students choose one of the conversations that have been recorded and analysed.
- As a group, choose a piece of music that is reflective of the rhythm of the conversation.
- Listen to the chosen piece of music and mark the moments of dramatic tension.
- Using the conversation as a base, create a short dramatic scene, with the music, that focuses on the rhythm of conversation and the way the elements of drama can be manipulated using interruption, overlapping speech and simultaneous speech.
- Perform the piece for one other group. Provide feedback for the group using the elements of drama as a framework (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes).
- Rehearse the scene making any necessary adjustments based on the feedback.
- Perform the final scene for the class and recording the scene at the same time.

In their journals students reflect on what they have learnt about speech patterns, tempo and rhythm, and how they will apply this to their own work in drama as both a performer and creator. They also analyse the performance they created using the recording and the elements of drama (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes).

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 10

The soundtrack to your life

Sound is a critical component of the elements of production. It can: tell the audience about the characters; explain the relationships between characters; set a play within a particular time period; create mood and atmosphere and much more. Each of the characters in *Silent Disco* has a critical moment or series of moments in the play, and music and sound play an important role in these moments. For example:

- Petchall begins to examine her life and her choice to become a teacher at the same time that she receives a confiscated iPod, a device that can block out the chaos and noise she is hearing around her (p. 35).
- Tamara, unable to process that her mother is leaving, talks about music as a means of causing her mother damage and puts in her iPod as a way of blocking out her own emotions (pp. 37 – 38).

Working individually, students complete the following tasks.

- Choose one scene in the *Silent Disco* with which you can identify.
- Analyse and describe the way sound is used in this scene.
- If you had to choose one song that epitomises or captures this scene, what would it be?
- Choose a moment in your own life that is similar to or connected with the chosen scene.
- Identify the key moments of dramatic action in the moment from your own life and sketch them into a story board or similar.
- Write one to three key words or phrases for each of the scenes.
- For each of the key moments choose a song or piece of music that best represents that moment.
- Create a playlist of the songs.
- Give your playlist and the key words or phrases to another person in your class.
- Using another person's playlist and words, create a two to five minute monologue that focuses on using sound, in any form or combination of forms, to tell the story of the characters life.
- Alternatively, create a short film, animation or other digital text using the music and the words as the foundation.
- In small groups, perform the monologues or show the digital text to each other and analyse each other's work using the elements of drama (see [graphics organiser](#) at the end of these notes).

In their journals students reflect on the use of and importance of sound when creating characters and short scripted performances. Students should identify how they intend to use this knowledge in their future productions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

'Not in Print'

- Interview with Lachlan Philpott about *Silent Disco*
Introduction to *Silent Disco* read by Noel Jordan
<https://itunes.apple.com/au/podcast/not-in-print/id603327157>

Interviews and articles

- 'Teens play it by earphone', *Sydney Morning Herald Entertainment*, 21 April 2011
<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/teens-play-it-by-earphone-20110420-1dnoy.html>
- 'Silent Disco', *Kevin Jackson's Theatre Diary*, 1 May 2011
<http://www.kjtheatredairy.com/2011/05/silent-disco.html>
- 'The Good News: Griffin's Silent Disco', *James Waites*, 1 May 2011
<http://jameswaites.ilatech.org/?p=6687>
- 'Silent Disco', *Sydney Morning Herald Entertainment*, 2 May 2011
<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/silent-disco-20110501-1e2tp.html>
- 'Lachlan Philpott on Silent Disco', *Time Out Sydney*, 2 May 2011
<http://www.au.timeout.com/sydney/theatre/features/9132/silent-disco>
- 'Lachlan Philpott', *ATYP Fresh Ink*
<http://www.freshink.com.au/lachlan-philpott/>

GRAPHICS ORGANISER

Elements of drama analysis

ELEMENT OF DRAMA	EVALUATION, ANALYSIS, SUGGESTIONS
Role and character	
Situation	
Voice and movement	
Focus	
Tension	
Space and time	
Language, ideas and dramatic action	
Mood and atmosphere	
Audience	

OTHER TEXTS FROM THE AUTHOR

Truck Stop

Sam and Kelly live out west. They spend their lives waiting for texts, for boyfriends and those bitches in Year Ten to leave school so they can have somewhere decent to hang. But the longest wait is till the end of school, and waiting can be deadly.

Bored one recess and with double maths looming, the girls escape through the hole in the fence. Hang out at the truck stop on the highway at the picnic table with the flies. Read graffiti. Talk about sex, prostitutes, Lady Gaga.

When a truck pulls up. Their hearts race. The truckie's kind of young. And hot.

Sam issues Kelly a dare.



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