

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL 2026



# Mama Does Derby

YEAR LEVELS 9 & 10

EDUCATION RESOURCE

Youth and Education Program Partners



# Overview

## Suitability and Content Warnings

*Mama Does Derby* has been created for audiences 12+ and this education guide provides ways of exploring the themes, issues and ideas for years 7/8; 9/10; and 11/12. It is recommended that teachers might consider this production for students in Year 10 and above due to the mature themes and content.

The performance contains strong coarse language, references to domestic violence, mental health and sexual references. Some content may be distressing or triggering for some students.

This production includes theatrical smoke, haze, strobe effects, live music and loud noises. It is performed with immersive staging approaches; actors very infrequently come close the audience.

A scene breakdown can be accessed [[here](#)] which outlines in detail which scenes the above warnings refer to, to provide teachers with further context and clarity.

## Genre

Immersive Theatre, Expressionistic/Non-Naturalistic Theatre, Theatre for Young People.

## Planning for your excursion

*Mama Does Derby* covers sensitive content, concepts and issues.

Use this education resource for more information and ways to explore the themes, ideas and issues.

Use your knowledge of your cohort and context plus relevant site policy and procedures to determine the suitability of this show for your students. Department for Education staff can refer to the [Selecting and using resources for educational purposes guideline](#).

Notify parents and caregivers of the content of the show in advance when seeking active permission for students to attend the performance.

Notify wellbeing staff prior to attending the performance so they are ready to provide follow up support.

## Wellbeing for students

If any of the themes in this show raise concerns, headspace offers free mental health & wellbeing support for young people & their families.

Visit [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au) for more information.

## Synopsis

A hilarious and heartfelt tale collides with the exhilarating, radical world of roller derby as fifteen-year-old Billie finds herself stuck in the pressure cooker of growing up while trying desperately to hold herself together. She and her mum, Maxine, have landed in a small regional town in the middle of nowhere - just the latest stop in a life spent moving and making their own fun. It's always been the two of them against the world, dancing in supermarkets and trading wild stories, but this time something is different. Billie's anxiety has begun to manifest as paralysis, sleeplessness, and the overwhelming belief that she must control everything to stay safe, while Maxine's old strategy of masking her trauma with chaos, humour, and constant motion is no longer enough. Their internal storms spill into the world around them as the play gives physical shape to their emotional battles: the Sleep Demon lurks near Billie, Dave embodies the steady adult world, Maxine wants but fears she doesn't deserve, and the quirky residents of their new town become living symbols of the unpredictable world they've never quite learned to trust. When Maxine stumbles into the anarchic sisterhood of roller derby she finds a wild new freedom in skates and elbow pads, pushing both herself and Billie toward a collision of love, fear, rebellion, and the possibility of finally standing still long enough to heal.

## A Note from the Skate Consultant

Chaos. Strategy. Swagger. A moving chessboard where the queens wear helmets and the pawns hit back. Roller derby didn't just arrive in the world. It skidded in sideways, sparks flying, laces loose, and hearts thumping like a Metallica double kick bass drum solo. Born in Chicago during the 1930s by promoter Leo Seltzer, Roller Derby was staged as endurance skating marathons during the Great Depression. It found its true personality the moment people started jostling each other for position. Suddenly it wasn't just skating, it was theatre on wheels.

Fast forward through TV fame in the 70s and into the early 2000s, where a group of women in Austin, Texas rebooted the sport taking the velodrome style track and adapting it onto a flat track surface. With a lot of DIY grit, glitter, and guts, modern roller derby was reborn. From there, the magic kept migrating, until one Adelaide-bound cyclone of charisma and enthusiasm, Sarah "Barrelhouse Bessy" Strong-Law, rolled into town with a flyer and a vision. She brought together a room full of curious locals, enticed us to get on skates and boom! July 2007 the legendary Adelaide Roller Derby community was born.

And why is roller derby fun? Because it's not just a sport, it's a living, breathing, eight-wheeled ecosystem. You learn to skate, to fall, to hit, to fly, to trust, to lead, to follow, to laugh at bruises and wear your purple pride like war paint. Everyone belongs. Everyone matters. Bodies of all kinds. Genders of all kinds. Identities that don't fit boxes, don't want boxes, and actively set the boxes on fire. Derby doesn't ask who you're "supposed" to be. It asks who you are, and hands you a helmet.

It's a gang, a family, a circus, a small business, and a love story all gaffer-taped together. One person runs training, another runs tickets, another finds venues, another handles first aid, another saves the day when someone's car breaks down. Derby grows muscles, friendships, confidence, courage, and community. Derby rolls through your city like a human road train, clattering hearts and changing lives.

Roller derby is fun because it's speed and sass, impact and intimacy, teamwork and thunder. It's belonging on the track. Power with purpose. A place where you don't just learn to skate, you learn to stand tall, fall loud, and roll forward together as one.

*Written by Jude 'Vaderella' Gaffney, Skate Consultant & Founding Member,  
Adelaide Roller Derby League*







# Themes and Ideas

## Family and Mother-Daughter Relationships

Maxine and Billie represent a non-traditional family unit; not only is Maxine a single mother raising a daughter, Billie and Maxine have also switched the traditional roles and responsibilities of parent and child. Billie is almost sixteen and navigating the challenges of adolescence, change and anxiety while taking on the parental responsibilities in the family. Maxine a rebellious free spirit who has never been good at staying in one place. Billie and Maxine share a close relationship, one that is built on a genuine care for and friendship with each other, but this has contributed to blurring the lines of the roles in their relationship. Maxine depends on Billie for emotional stability and security to balance out her sense of youthfulness, fun and flightiness, while Billie has become the pragmatic, sensible and responsible adult ensuring bills are paid on time (or at all) and holding their homelife together. Despite the focus on a single mother and daughter family unit, and suggestions of diverse family circumstances through the peripheral Derby characters, the play provides opportunities for young audiences to question the values, roles and responsibilities of the people in their own families and appreciate that family looks different in every person's unique context.

## Coming of Age

Coming-of-age stories in literature refer to narratives that focus on a protagonist's journey from childhood to adulthood, from naivety to maturity. These stories in theatre and film, and known as Bildungsroman in literary fiction, explore themes of self-discovery and growth, loss of innocence, internal and external conflicts such as insecurities, social and familial expectations, and the construction of identity. In these stories, the central characters learn their place in the world and become equipped with their own set of values. While coming-of-age stories typically centre on the child characters growth through their experiences and pivotal milestones, *Mama Does Derby* depicts this journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance for both Billie and Maxine. Both characters present relatable narratives about the difficulties involved in growing up, maturing, embracing their identity, fitting in, and navigating the gap between their ideals and their realities. Billie does this by growing to accept and be proud of her mother's imperfections, addressing her mental health and learning strategies and coping mechanisms to help with her anxiety, all while balancing the pressures of school and finding a place to belong in a new town. Maxine does this by discovering new perspectives on her own identity as a woman and mother, as well as finding a place where she can finally belong through her new connections in the derby team. For both, despite their ages, their experiences see them move from immature and idealistic to wiser and more mature, ready to embrace adult realities of life together and independently.

## Isolation, belonging & the importance of community

Billie and Maxine arrive in a new town isolated in different ways - Billie through anxiety, Maxine through a lifetime of restlessness. Billie is desperate for security and stability. Billie's friendship with Hux gives her a quiet space to be seen without pressure or performance; Hux's own confidence in their identity is an invitation for Billie to let her guard down and find authentic connections. Meanwhile, Maxine finds a vibrant, energetic community through the roller derby team. Derby culture is known for being more than a sport – it's a movement and a community where players are encouraged to be brave, gutsy, resilient and stronger because of what they bring to and gain from their team. Both characters learn that belonging is not created through intensity or dependence, but through trust, honesty, and shared experiences.

## Self Discovery & Reinvention

As both characters adapt to their new environment, they undergo personal transformation. Billie begins to discover who she is beyond the role she has played at home and unlock her capabilities that have been inhibited, to this point, by debilitating anxiety. She has also not had the opportunity to stay in one place long enough to create connections and a sense of her own identity resulting in her shyness. Maxine has largely rebelled against the responsibilities of being an adult and has left behind a trail of failed relationships, careers, and abandoned hobbies.

There is an element of unfulfilled potential about both Maxine and Billie who come to blame each other for their own limitations: Billie blames her mother's eternal restlessness, unreliability, and instability for her inability to belong anywhere, while Maxine blames having to support Billie's anxiety and mental health for weighing her down. With support, initially begrudgingly, from her school assigned therapist, Billie learns to acknowledge, name, and live with her anxiety which gives her the freedom and courage to not be defined by it, and to thrive despite it. Meanwhile, Maxine's chance discovery of derby awakens aspects of her identity she had set aside, unlocking her inner strength and need for belonging. Derby allows her to embrace an alter-ego Derby personality that juxtaposes her responsibilities as a mother and adult, amplifying her strength and resilience.

Derby players embrace a character name and alter-ego which works as a strong symbol for reinvention and transformation in the play. When asked about identity and transformation in context of derby culture, co-creator Virginia Gay says *'I would say that roller derby doesn't necessarily ask you to change yourself or to put on a mask. I think it reveals the most exciting qualities about yourself and puts them centre stage. It's about finding exactly what it is that makes you exceptional and totally and uniquely yourself – and then turning up the volume on that.'* (<https://www.aussietheatre.com.au/news/virginia-gay-discusses-the-ideas-people-and-moments-that-shaped-mama-does-derby/>).

For both characters, reinvention and self-discovery is not presented as a rejection of the past but instead as an expansion and growth of the present self.

## Mental Well-being

A potentially confronting aspect of *Mama Does Derby* is its depiction of anxiety and mental health issues. The co-creators were inspired to explore the anxieties that young people have about living and growing in the world: sustainability, the cost of living, prejudices and discrimination, political and social unrest, and uncertainties about the future all play a part in Billie's fears and anxieties. These are presented through a variety of physical symptoms such as sleep paralysis personified by the character of the Sleep Demon. Maxine's need to keep moving is a strategy she has employed to avoid having to face and deal with her own past traumas.

The play portrays both character's struggles with fear, anxiety and mental health without shame, using surrealistic theatrical techniques to give a closer assessment of their psychological and emotional truth. The beauty of how anxiety and mental health is explored in *Mama Does Derby* is that mental health is not portrayed as something that can be 'fixed' or cured or that the characters 'just get over'. Instead, mental health is presented as something that is an integral part of the characters, and which makes them who they are; that by acknowledging, naming and accepting their anxieties, they are able to live, survive and thrive. It is a strong message about the power of community and dealing with mental health issues - rather than avoiding them and the impact can have on an individual's sense of wellbeing.

## Resilience: Falling & Rising

Threaded through the play is the roller derby metaphor: falling, getting up, and doing it again with support. This physical language mirrors the emotional journeys of both characters. Derby reframes failure as part of growth. It shows that resilience is learned collectively — through community, repetition, and the willingness to be caught when you fall. The play argues that identity and mental health are not solitary pursuits; they are shaped in connection with others.

## Yr 9&10 Health and Physical Education

Identities and Change

AC9HP10P01

analyse factors that shape identities and evaluate how individuals influence the identities of others

AC9HP10P02

refine, evaluate and adapt strategies for managing changes and transitions

Interacting with Others

AC9HP10P04

evaluate the influence of respect, empathy, power and coercion on establishing and maintaining respectful relationships

AC9HP10P06

evaluate emotional responses in different situations to refine strategies for managing emotions

Making healthy and safe choices

AC9HP10P08

plan, rehearse and evaluate strategies for managing situations where their own or others' health, safety or wellbeing may be at risk

AC9HP10P10

plan, justify and critique strategies to enhance their own and others' health, safety, relationships and wellbeing

# Theatrical Styles

*Mama Does Derby* integrates a breadth of theatrical styles while also drawing from live music and sport to create an energetic hybrid performance experience. While the characters present relatable experiences, explore universal themes, and the actors provide engaging realistic portrayals, the production draws mostly from non-realistic styles of theatre to convey its ideas.

## Non-Realistic / Non-Naturalistic Theatre

Non-realistic theatre is an umbrella term used to describe any style of theatre that moves away from realistically or naturalistically imitating everyday life. In many cases, there are still realistic elements to the production, but it will use distortion, abstraction, and symbolic elements to explore deeper truths, emotions, ideas and perspectives of the characters. Often, non-realistic plays will feature techniques like breaking the fourth wall (direct audience address), non-linear narratives, surrealist or expressionistic depictions of character emotional and psychological truth, and symbolic representations to depict the character's internal world.

Non-realistic theatre conventions tend to focus on the transformation of the elements of character, place, object and time. An actor may play multiple characters and transition between them fluidly by changing aspects of their portrayal and simple costume or prop items. This can be seen where one actor plays the 'Many Men of Maxine's Life' seamlessly transforming from one to the next by changing his physicality, voice, facial expression, costume, and supported by an appropriate soundscape that alters for each character's personality. Characters may also be presented as stereotypes in non-naturalistic plays making the character archetypes immediately identifiable to the audience.

Set and props are also used in a variety of ways in non-realistic plays and this is characterised in the production by the transformational nature of the set which becomes multiple locations through the production including the derby ring, counsellor's office, Billie and Maxine's home, a supermarket, the school, and the streets of the neighbourhood. This is achieved with minimal set changes and by manipulating lighting, sound and the way the actors work with the space to convey the idea of changing locations to the audience.

More information about non-naturalistic theatrical conventions:

<https://thedramateacher.com/non-naturalistic-theatrical-conventions/>



## Immersive Theatre

Immersive theatre usually involves staging the production without a traditional purpose-built theatre. Instead, the production removes any separation between the audience and performance space allowing the actor-audience relationship to become fused. The audience is invited and regarded to be part of the action so that it is an active participant in the performance, not a passive observer. In *Mama Does Derby*, the audience is seated either side of the roller derby rink. This staging format is known as a traverse stage. There are no visible theatre walls, rather the audience is made to feel like spectators at a roller derby bout. This experience is created prior to the performance with roller derby skaters zooming around the space as the audience enters to take their seats. Immersive theatre also sees actors move into the audience space, to interact with and invite them to participate in creating the atmosphere and action in ways the audience would be more restricted in a conventional theatre. There are moments in *Mama Does Derby* where the derby players come up to the audience and even high-five them! The audience is integral in creating the atmosphere and setting of the derby; this is what makes the production an exciting experience.

## Surrealism and Theatre of Cruelty

Surrealism seeks to unlock the unconscious mind of the character and present these ideas on stage in highly imaginative and abstract ways as opposed to literal reality. This style of theatre explores characters' dreams and the subconscious merging dream imagery and logic with reality to express inner thoughts through irrational juxtapositions, and illogical plots and scenarios. A collage of theatre techniques and manipulation of dramatic elements helps to achieve the effect of surrealism often blending imagery, projections, sound, text, lighting, and non-human physical and vocal effects in the exploration of the character's subconscious truth.

Antonin Artaud's (1896-1948) experiments in surrealist theatre gave way to a style known as Theatre of Cruelty which sought to bypass reason and logic to directly assault the audience's senses with primal physical performances and terrifying visual imagery and soundscapes. The manifestation of Billie's fears as the Sleep Paralysis Demon accompanied by expressionistic lighting, non-human physicality and the distorted voice of the actor create a terrifying personification of her emotional state and allows the audience to more deeply understand her experience of living with anxiety and sleep paralysis.

### Further reading on Surrealism

<https://thedramateacher.com/surrealism-theatre-conventions/>

### Further reading on Theatre of Cruelty and a downloadable infographic

<https://thedramateacher.com/theatre-of-cruelty-infographic-students/>

## **Epic Theatre**

Largely developed in the early 20th Century by German Expressionist Bertolt Brecht, Epic style plays force audiences to think critically about the social and political issues that underpin the story. This presentational style of theatre presents aspects of reality through loosely connected scenes (or episodes), frequently breaking the fourth wall, transforming place, character and time through visible stage craft, and deliver the story through a non-linear narrative structure often moving back and forth in time. The overall effect of Epic Theatre is creating a distance between the audience and the dramatic action so as not to immerse the audience too deeply in the emotional world of the characters which in turn emphasises the social and political messages often at the heart of the play. Epic conventions used in this production include:

### **Verfremdungseffekt (Alienation Effect)**

The integration of non-realistic staging and performance techniques reinforces to the audience that they are watching a play and frequently interrupts their emotional investment in the characters to critique the messages and meanings conveyed through the story. The use of real roller derby athletes, a roller derby track as a transformational performance space, and a live band are examples of alienating devices reminding the audience that they are watching a constructed performance.

### **Breaking the Fourth Wall**

In realistic dramatic theatre, the actors perform as though unaware of being watched implying an imaginary 'fourth wall' that separates the world of the characters from the audience. In Epic Theatre, the actors intentionally and directly address the audience, breaking the illusionary barrier between them; the effect is a more intimate relationship with the characters and overall more engaging experience for the audience.

### **Music and Song**

Epic Theatre often includes live music and songs that interrupt the action and might complement or juxtapose the themes and ideas presented in the previous or following action. In *Mama Does Derby*, a live band provides the underscoring of the dramatic action to build atmosphere, determine setting or enhance the mood, and also perform punk pop and rock songs that contribute to the narrative storytelling and exploration of the characters' circumstances.

### **Visible Stagecraft**

The set design constructed of moveable platforms and set pieces on trucks that seem to float or skate to transform into different settings as needed with the aid of a roller derby crew on skates. Most set and some costume changes occur in view of the audience; the mechanisms of stagecraft and crew are not hidden or disguised. The actors also sometimes become the set with simple props to suggest to the audience locations such as the moment where the derby players arrange themselves in rows and hold grocery items in their outstretched hands to suggest they have become the shelves in aisles of the supermarket.

### **Episodic Structure / Non-Linear Narrative**

The plot reflects the process of the mother-daughter relationship changing and evolving as the characters find their own sense of place and identity; Billie learning to take control of her anxiety and Maxine making her journey into roller derby. Early in the show the two protagonists describe their backstory including the places they've lived and Maxine's trail of failed relationships. As they describe the exposition, they seem to go back to moments and relive snapshots of the past. They sometimes narrate scene transitions to move the action backwards or forwards in time or to a different place.

### **Social Commentary**

*Mama Does Derby* tackles significant social issues such as parenting, youth mental health and well-being, family violence, resilience and reinvention and does so by manipulating the elements of drama in an epic and non-realistic way. These techniques encourage the audience to think critically about how the themes and ideas presented in the play exist in their world outside of the theatre and provoke questions and discussion rather than offering simple solutions. There is no 'simple solution' for Billie's anxiety, for example. Instead, the company presents Billie's anxiety as something she learns to befriend, recognise and live with raising questions for viewers about their own experiences of living with anxiety and fears.

### **Further reading on Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre**

**Read:** Epic Theatre Conventions Part 1 via [thedramateacher.com](#) [[here](#)]

**Read** Epic Theatre Conventions Part 2 via [thedramateacher.com](#) [[here](#)]



## Theatre for Young People (TYP)

Windmill Production Company is one of Australia's premier professional theatre company creating theatre for children and young audiences. Mama Does Derby contains all the hallmarks of theatre for young people targeted to teenage and young adult audiences.

TYP works are created for a specific target audience (in the case of Mama Does Derby, teens and young adults) and explores characters and themes that are important and immediately identifiable to this demographic. Themes such as identity, hopes and fears for the future, health and well-being, family relationships, independence and autonomy, coming-of-age, first loves, belonging and friendships are all themes explored through the story. TYP works also often include:

### **Comedy**

Even when exploring darker themes, such as mental health and fears, comedy hooks young audiences and keeps them engaged. Physical comedy, comic gags, comic irony, and witty dialogue can also help distance the audience from the more confronting ideas and images presented inviting them to become critical of these aspects of the production without lessening their weight and meaning.

### **Non-realistic elements**

TYP often transcends the genres of theatre combining surreal, expressionistic and magical elements of theatre in the presentation of the character's truth. Actors playing multiple roles, visible character and set transformations, and non-human characters such as the Sleep Paralysis Demon allow young audiences to suspend their disbelief and use their imagination to interpret the dramatic ideas in a more fun and engaging way.

### **Magical Realism**

This involves the interruption of realism with fantastical or imaginative elements to communicate the action. Magical Realism borrows techniques from styles like Epic Theatre, Expressionism and Surrealism creating a collage-style theatrical event. Techniques evident in Mama Does Derby include a non-linear structure to the narrative, non-human characters (the Sleep Paralysis Demon), fluid and transformational shifts in time and place, and moving between realistic and non-realistic settings, for example, how Billie shifts between the realistic setting of her bedroom to the heightened terrifying setting of her bedroom fused with the dream-logic of the manifestation of the Sleep Paralysis Demon.

### **The Real Becoming Unreal**

Unusual events and actions become fused with real life events. When Billie learns to live with her anxiety and fears rather than be debilitated by them, the Sleep Paralysis Demon becomes almost like an imaginary friend. The Demon lives with her, follows her around, even eats from her fridge! There are moments where they interact with each other, and Billie accepts the demon as part of her reality rather than something she needs to eradicate in order to thrive







# Curriculum Links

This unit includes learning experiences and assessment linked to The Arts: Drama, English and Health and Physical Education Australian Curriculum across Years 9 and 10. Teachers can choose to use individual learning experiences to complement existing drama units or complete the entire unit of work with their students.

The learning experiences can provide a structure to view and explore *Mama Does Derby* with your students. They will provide opportunity for students to explore the play resources independently as well as generate class discussion and sharing of interpretations of the play.

## Year 9 and 10 Drama

- Analyse how and why the elements of drama, performance skills and/or conventions are manipulated in drama they create, perform and/or experience.
- Evaluate how drama in a range of styles and/or from a range of contexts communicates ideas, perspectives and/or meaning.
- Evaluate how drama is used to celebrate and challenge perspectives of Australian identity.
- Work individually and/or collaboratively to shape and manipulate use of the elements of drama, conventions and/or dramatic structures to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning.
- Use performance skills relevant to style and/or form to sustain belief, roles and characters in performances of improvised, devised and/or scripted drama for audiences.

### Content Descriptors

Exploring and Responding

AC9ADR10E01

investigate use of elements of drama, performance skills and/or conventions to communicate and/or challenge ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in drama across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts

AC9ADR10E02

investigate the ways that drama created and/or performed by First Nations Australians celebrates and challenges multiple perspectives of Australian identity

Developing Skills and Practices

AC9ADR10D01

develop performance skills and/or techniques to manipulate elements of drama and/or use conventions to communicate the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions

AC9ADR10D02

reflect on their own and others' drama or practices to refine and inform their use of elements of drama, conventions and/or approaches to shape and sustain dramatic action

Creating and Making

AC9ADR10C01

improvise and devise drama, and interpret scripted drama, using elements of drama and conventions to shape and manipulate dramatic action and convey intended ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

AC9ADR10C02

rehearse and refine drama making deliberate aesthetic choices to unify dramatic meaning

Presenting and Performing

AC9ADR10P01

perform improvised, devised and/or scripted drama to audiences, using performance skills and conventions to shape the drama.



## Year 9 and 10 English

### Receptive modes (listening, reading and viewing)

- Analyse the ways that text structures can be manipulated for effect.
- Analyse and explain how images, vocabulary choices and language features distinguish the work of individual authors.
- Evaluate and integrate ideas and information from texts to form their own interpretations.
- Select evidence from texts to analyse and explain how language choices and conventions are used to influence an audience.
- Listen for ways texts position an audience.

### Productive modes (speaking, writing and creating)

- Understand how to use a variety of language features to create different levels of meaning.
- Understand how interpretations can vary by comparing their responses to texts to the responses of others.
- In creating texts, demonstrate how manipulating language features and images can create innovative texts.
- Create texts that respond to issues, interpreting and integrating ideas from other texts.
- Make presentations and contribute actively to class and group discussions, comparing and evaluating responses to ideas and issues.
- Edit for effect, selecting vocabulary and grammar that contribute to the precision and persuasiveness of texts and using accurate spelling and punctuation.
- Recognise how language empowers relationships and roles
- Understand how language can have inclusive and exclusive social effects and can empower or disempower.

## Content Descriptors

Year 9 English

Language

AC9E9LA01

Understand how language choices, including non-verbal, visual and auditory elements, shape meaning, position audiences and influence interpretation.

AC9E9LA02

Analyse how evaluative language, symbolism, connotation and imagery express attitudes, values and emotional states.

AC9E9LA03

Analyse how text structures are adapted and manipulated to organise ideas and shape meaning.

Year 10 English

Language

AC9E10LA01

Understand how sophisticated language choices, including non-verbal, visual and auditory elements, shape meaning, influence interpretation and position audiences.

AC9E10LA02

Analyse how evaluative language, metaphor, symbolism and imagery convey values, attitudes and emotional complexity.

AC9E10LA03

Analyse how text structures are deliberately manipulated to challenge audiences and shape meaning.

## General Capabilities



Literacy



Ethical  
Understanding



Critical and  
Creative Thinking



Personal and  
Social Capability



Intercultural  
Understanding

# Characters



## Billie

Daughter (Billie). Almost sixteen, creative, responsible and riddled with anxiety. Loves Frida Kahlo. She's worried about the future, about Mum. She's overwhelmed by the chaos around her. At home, across the world... the climate, the conflict, the expectations. She knows these thoughts are too big for her age. She just wants to be still. Mum is her best friend.



## Mama

Maxine. Single Mum. Total ratbag. Outrunning her fears, her troubles, she's always moving, always up for an adventure. She's filled with joyful, chaotic, teen-like energy. She's a serial hobbyist, someone who dives passionately into projects but rarely sticks around to finish them. Billie is her best friend.



## Hux

Billie's new friend – the alternative kid at school. Progressive and unapologetically themselves. It feels like they've kind of cracked the code on having a good time. Always on a skateboard or BMX, skidding through life with confidence and just enough edge to make it look effortless... to Billie anyway.



## Drew 'The Wombat'

Maxine's first friend in the derby team. Wild, fearless. Drew won't let a torn tendon keep her from being part of the action. Big-hearted and brutally honest, she's the kind of friend Mum needs right now. She embodies derby: loud, physical and competitive, but also ready to back her teammates on and off the track.



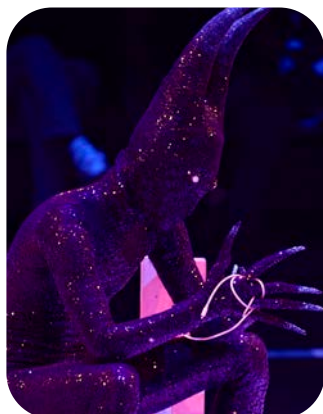
### **Therapist Agatha**

A middle-of-the-road, small-town therapist. A bit mediocre, but well-meaning and ultimately gives helpful advice to Billie and Mum. Genuinely cares.



### **Neil**

The next-door neighbour of unplaceable origin and relentless gloom. Also Billie's driving instructor. They've got some stories that's for sure – whether we want to hear them or not is another question.



### **Nathan**

Billie's nightmares come to life. A sleep paralysis demon. Flexible is an understatement. Terrifying, intrusive, conspiratorial and deeply unsettling. Deep (deep) down they are there to keep Billie safe, whether she wants them to or not.



### **Dave**

Mum's latest boyfriend. Painfully beige both in personality and attire. Still waters run deep with Dave. Billie doesn't trust him at first.





# Production

## Set Design

Jonathon Oxlade's set design functions as an active storytelling device rather than a decorative backdrop. The space is deliberately flexible and symbolic, allowing rapid shifts between domestic environments, psychological states, and the heightened world of roller derby. Minimalist and modular elements suggest multiple locations while avoiding naturalism, reinforcing the play's focus on internal experience rather than literal realism. This openness allows the audience to imagine spaces rather than be told exactly where they are, encouraging emotional engagement.

Importantly, the set supports themes of containment, isolation, and transformation. Empty or exposed areas emphasise vulnerability, while reconfigured arrangements where the set pieces come together signal moments of empowerment, connection, rebuilding or reinvention mirroring the lives and relationships of the characters.

The roller derby track is implied rather than fully constructed, positioning derby as both a physical and metaphorical space where identity is tested and rebuilt. The performers help shape the environment through movement and the crew – played by local derby players – become a living, breathing, moving and skating part of the set itself!

**Read:** Five Questions with Designer, Jonathon Oxlade [\[here\]](#)





# Music and Sound

Sound and music in *Mama Does Derby* are integral to the production's emotional rhythm and storytelling as well as being a physical and active part of the set. A three-piece punk pop band float on a platform moved by derby players playing live covers of songs that complement or juxtapose the thematic ideas presented in scenes. This Brechtian concept of interrupting the action with songs alienates the audience from the narrative to consider the play's themes and ideas as well as providing engagement during set changes and movement.

A combination of composed soundscapes, rhythmic beats, and moments of silence creates an immersive environment that reflects the characters' internal states. Sound is often used to represent anxiety and pressure, with pulsing rhythms, drones, or distorted effects heightening tension and signalling moments of psychological overwhelm.

Music associated with roller derby scenes introduces energy, momentum, and a sense of collective identity. These moments contrast sharply with quieter, more intimate sound design, emphasising the shift between isolation and belonging. Silence is also used deliberately, allowing emotional moments to land without distraction and encouraging the audience to sit with discomfort or vulnerability.

Crucially, sound design does not simply underscore action; it interacts with movement and lighting to create meaning. This integration reinforces the play's exploration of mental health, demonstrating how internal experiences can feel loud, intrusive, or overwhelming, even when they are invisible to others.

# Lighting

Rather than simply illuminating action, Lucy Birkinshaw's lighting shifts in intensity, colour, and direction to reflect Billie's psychological landscape. Stark contrasts between light and shadow evoke feelings of isolation, anxiety, and vulnerability, particularly during moments involving the Sleep Paralysis Demon. These choices reinforce the play's non-naturalistic approach, allowing internal experiences to be staged visibly. Notice, too, how lighting and shadow impact the Demon's costume intensifying the non-human appearance of the terrifying creature.

As the narrative progresses, lighting becomes more dynamic and energised, mirroring Billie's increasing confidence and sense of agency. Warmer tones and broader washes signal moments of connection and belonging, while sharper, more contained lighting isolates characters during moments of fear or self-doubt. Transitions between lighting states are often fluid rather than abrupt, supporting the dreamlike quality of the production and blurring the boundary between reality and imagination.

Lighting also helps to create the energy and bold bright atmosphere of roller derby during the derby scenes, particularly during the play's resolution.

# Costumes

Costumes help to visualise the themes of identity, transition, and self-perception. Costumes shift between everyday clothing and heightened derby-inspired elements, reflecting the contrast between Billie's private self and her emerging public identity. Rather than disguising the performers, costumes amplify aspects of character, mirroring the production's message that confidence comes from embracing, not masking, one's authentic self.

Derby costumes are particularly symbolic, combining practicality with boldness. Protective gear such as helmets and pads simultaneously signify vulnerability and strength, reinforcing the idea that resilience involves care as well as courage.

One of the most striking costumes is the surreal interpretation of the Sleep Paralysis Demon dressed in a sleek, black sequinned body suit that completely covers the performer's face. The faceless figure has extenuated and exaggerated fingers and built-up platform feet resembling a hooved demon which enhances the sharp menacing movements of the performer. The sequinned fabric shimmers under the stage lights creating an appearance that is simultaneously surreal, terrifying and beautiful which is reflected in the later softening of the character when Billie befriends the demon and accepts her anxiety as a part of her life that she can live and thrive with rather than something to be controlled and paralysed by.



# Direction

Clare Watson's direction prioritises emotional clarity, accessibility, and theatrical playfulness. She uses a blend of realism and stylisation to ensure complex themes - such as anxiety, fear, and identity formation - are communicated in ways that are engaging and appropriate for young audiences. Directorial choices emphasise storytelling through action and image rather than exposition, trusting the audience to interpret symbolism and metaphor.

Transitions between scenes are fluid, often overlapping through movement, sound, or lighting, which maintains momentum and reinforces the play's dreamlike logic. The Sleep Paralysis Demon is directed not as a literal villain but as a manifestation of internal experience, encouraging empathy rather than fear. This framing is central to the play's message that mental health challenges are something to be understood and managed, not defeated.

The direction also enhances and is enhanced by the symbolism of movement, circles and cycles reflecting Maxine's need to be in constant movement to avoid dealing with her trauma and reality, the spinning wheels of roller skates and car types that are significant for both Maxine and Billie, the circular track of roller derby, and the notion that Maxine and Billie both find themselves in repeated patterns of behaviour or have recurring fears that hinder their personal growth and development. Notice the way that circular actions and movement feature in the blocking; most significant is the depiction of the counsellor's office as the characters seated on couches that circle the track during their sessions: are Billie and Maxine just 'going through the motions' of counselling? Are they in a repeated cycle of counselling and support that has, to this point, been ineffective? How else might the physical circular patterns reflect the circumstances and relationships of the characters?

# Performance & Acting

Performance in *Mama Does Derby* relies heavily on physicality and embodied storytelling. Actors use posture, movement, gesture, and spatial relationships to convey emotional states, often expressing what cannot be easily articulated through dialogue alone. Billie's journey is marked by visible changes in physical confidence, from tentative, inward-focused movement to grounded, assertive presence, allowing audiences to track her development non-verbally.

The portrayal of the Sleep Paralysis Demon is particularly significant, blending menace with vulnerability to avoid simplistic representations of fear. The portrayal of the demon softens toward the end of the play as Billie 'befriends her demon' as a way of managing her stress and anxiety; the once terrifying creature becomes almost human and likeable. This performance choice supports the play's compassionate approach to mental health, framing anxiety as complex and persistent rather than something that can be easily overcome.

# Symbolism & Motifs

Symbolism, as an element of drama, allows the thematic concerns and character circumstances in the production to be enhanced in ways that invite the audience to actively engage in making meaning. The fusion of non-realistic theatrical styles in *Mama Does Derby*, such as Epic Theatre, Expressionism, Surrealism and Magical Realism, sees the production heavily layered in symbolism.

## Circles & Cycles

The dominating aspect of the production design is the staging of a roller derby track. The track provides a circular playing space for the action as well as for the derby bouts and reflects broader symbolic ideas of repeated patterns and cycles that both Maxine and Billie find themselves in. Until they can intentionally break the cycles of avoidance and running away, they can never be truly free to be themselves. This motif is reflected in every aspect of the design and direction of the production including the circular movement of Maxine and Billie on the moving set pieces during their counselling sessions to the concept of repetition in Billie's repeated nightmares featuring the Sleep Paralysis Demon.

## The Sleep Paralysis Demon

Billie's anxieties, fears and intrusive thoughts are personified through the Sleep Paralysis Demon, a heavily-sequined, dark superhuman figure that slides out from under her bed, crawls around her room and follows her about with features that at various times resembles a predatory spider, a snake and a vulture. The highly-physical manifestation of Billie's internal fears appears like a shadowy, slick, half-formed presence making distorted shapes with its body, elongated limbs and unnatural movement, voice and posture. It is seen only by Billie but invisible to others.

## Fracturing, Healing and Rebuilding

Fragmented set pieces are constantly pulled apart and brought back together by the roller derby crew reflecting the fracturing and reunion of the characters and their relationship and the rebuilding of the characters, lives and identities.

Maxine, Billie and the derby players also reference experiences of emotional and physical brokenness, sometimes as the result of the experience of family violence.

Derby players also frequently injure themselves – it's a very physical sport. Maxine's derby friend, Drew 'The Wombat', wheels herself around on a knee scooter as she heals from an injury and Maxine returns from her secret skating bouts covered in bruises that raise suspicion for Billie about the new man her mother is seeing.

The visual and verbal references to brokenness, fracturing, pain, and bruising, healing and rebuilding reinforce a message of the human capacity to heal and grow stronger and more resilient through challenging experiences.

## Movement: Skates, Cars and Wheels

The fast-paced, active sport of roller derby is immediately felt when entering the theatre with derby skaters zooming through the auditorium. This sets up the feeling of energy, pace and chaos synonymous with the sport and reflective of the character's circumstances. Just as Maxine is constantly moving from place to place to avoid confronting her reality and past trauma, the direction of the production sees the characters and set in constant movement, too. Director, Clare Watson, positions Billie and Maxine in the middle of the derby track in their final showdown contrasting the swift movements of the derby players who zoom past and around them. This directorial choice in using the movement and stillness as symbols suggests that when the characters stand still for long enough to confront themselves and each other, they have the opportunity to truly find connection, truth and healing.

While Maxine learns to skate and play derby, Billie is getting her own wheels: she's learning to drive. Getting a driver's licence is a significant milestone in a young person's life, granting the freedom to move, find your own way, and the independence and responsibility that comes with being an adult. The spinning wheels of the skates and cars are vehicles that become the catalyst for their growth and self-discovery.

Movement is also symbolic in the description of roller derby itself being not just a sport or a hobby, but as a collective effort of a group of people with shared grievances, goals or values organised around social, political or cultural change or awareness. The players in the Derby team all have an experience, whether directly or indirectly, with issues surrounding identity, exclusion and family violence. Derby gives the players a place to belong and a vehicle to engage in collective action through

## The Hearse

The car that Maxine buys as a get-around vehicle is a second-hand hearse, a car used to transport coffins for funerals. While these cars are closely associated with death, the hearse becomes a symbol of rebirth and reinvention. Through the hardships that they face and a symbolic 'death' of their former lives characterised by personal and shared trauma, Billie and Maxine are able to embrace their new lives and move forward filled with a sense of hope, confidence and empowerment. This is enhanced at the end of the play where Billie has painted the hearse with Kahlo inspired art and the company sing a celebratory finale rendition of Tom Cochrane's 1980s hit, *'Life Is a Highway.'*



Credit: Frida Kahlo, The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas), 1939. (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City)



## Frida Kahlo

Billie idolises Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) as an artist and role model. Kahlo is known for her portraits and self-portraits and having overcome physical and emotional hardships as the result of a near fatal bus crash in her youth. She suffered polio as a child resulting in a limp from having one leg shorter than the other. This was the beginning of her lifetime of feeling different and isolated from others. In the road accident, she broke her spinal column, collarbone, ribs and pelvis. Her right foot was dislocated and crushed, and she spent the rest of her life in pain undergoing surgeries and treatment until she died at age 47. Kahlo famously painted self-portraits that depicted beauty, pain, and triumph as interconnected parts of her enduring spirit. While her paintings could sometimes appear grotesque reflecting her lived experience, her work saw her passionately embrace her Mexican culture rejecting European traditions and forming an identity that honoured her roots, individuality, and strength. Frida Kahlo's spirit endures as an iconic figure of resilience. For Billie, Kahlo is a kindred spirit. Kahlo said of her own work 'I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best' and 'I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality.' Billie, herself, is often alone and her own artwork reflects her own reality, including the pain and fears she carries that manifests in her anxiety.

## The Two Fridas

Of Frida Kahlo's most famous works is the portrait of The Two Fridas (1939). Kahlo painted this portrait following her brief divorce from muralist Diego Rivera (1886-1957). The painting sees two versions of Kahlo sitting side-by-side and holding hands against a stormy sky. One Frida wears a white European style dress stained with blood spots and the other wears a traditional Tehuana costume. Both Fridas have their hearts exposed and are connected to each other by an artery showing the eternal fusion of these two sides to Kahlo's experience and her enduring pain and vulnerability. The Two Fridas is referenced by Billie in the play and works as a symbol for Billie and Maxine's relationship: one that is characterised by pain and hardship, of being equal parts to each other, and in their capacity to find identity within and outside of their family unit while being eternally bonded to each other.

# Learning Activities & Resources

This education resource has been developed with links to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, (ACARA) with codes and performance descriptors. Activities have been created to reflect each of the achievement standards, depending on the year levels. The teaching resource aims to assist teachers guiding students with their learning area, prior to the performance while offering activities for the classroom after viewing the performance.

Teachers and students are encouraged to look through the study guide for the learning tasks in the subjects provided as the learning activities are inclusive. Adjustments and differentiation strategies are suggested. These activities and can be applied as individual learning experiences or adapted to form the basis of bigger assessment tasks.

The Pre and Post Show Activities include Thinking Routines adapted to provide students structure for viewing, responding, and connecting to the broader ideas of the production. There are many Thinking Routines which may be suitable for your students in supporting their engagement with dramatic literacy.

You can find a full library of Thinking Routines at Harvard University's Project Zero Thinking Routines Toolbox [\[here\]](#)

## **BEFORE THE SHOW**

### **Thinking routine 1: See, Think, Wonder**

Marketing and promotional materials for a theatre production provide audiences with some context of what to expect when coming to see a performance. The aim of marketing and promotions is to attract audiences to see a production, to communicate something about the style or themes of the show without giving away too much, and ultimately to sell as many tickets as possible for the company.

This thinking routine will ask students to engage with the visual ideas produced by Windmill's marketing team, to consider the impact of the visual and the messages conveyed.

Complete this Thinking Routine before discussing any of the themes and ideas of the play with students as it is designed to raise their curiosity and make inferences about the production.

Present students with the following marketing and promotional images from Mama Does Derby and have them respond to the prompts.

You may wish to divide the class into groups or pairs and give each group or pair a different image to work through together before feeding back to the class. Alternately, you might wish to work through the first image with the prompts together as a class to model the routine and then ask students to work independently or in smaller groups or pairs to respond to the second image.



**SEE:** Ask students to list what they observe (movement, staging, lighting, costume, people etc) in the image.

**THINK:** Encourage them to interpret what ideas the image raises for them. What might the image be depicting? Who are the characters? What is their relationship? What mood or atmosphere is created? What is the story that is being told by the image? What is it about the imagery that suggests these ideas?

**WONDER:** Finally, ask what questions the image raises for them about the performance? What are they anticipating about the production? What about these promotional materials would encourage (or not) to buy tickets to see this show?

**Extension:** Repeat the Thinking Routine having students respond to the official trailer for the production.

In this step, students are encouraged to also consider movement, sound, and the actors' performance.

You can find the video [[here](#)]

You may also find it beneficial to revisit this Thinking Routine after seeing the production.

## Thinking routine 2: Headlines

Headlines encourages students to make thematic inferences about the production using concise language and considering a specific audience and purpose.

Ask students to imagine they are journalists who have not yet seen the play.

1. Students write a headline for a news story that they think could describe *Mama Does Derby* to a potential audience. Have them limit their headlines to 10 words or fewer.
2. Ask students to write beneath the headline a short paragraph explaining
  - Why they chose the specific words in their headline
  - What themes or ideas they expect the play to explore

In small groups, students compare their headlines and discuss how different language choices and techniques suggest different interpretations and create a different impact for the reader, for example alliteration in a headline can grab the reader's attention and make them curious to explore further or metaphor might make the headline more accessible, vivid and relatable for the reader.

## Thinking routine 3: Compass Points

*Mama Does Derby* deals with some topics that might be confronting, challenging or triggering for some viewers. Billie's experience with fear and anxiety is presented in a highly stylized surreal personification of her internal thoughts through the Sleep Paralysis Demon, and there are also references to mental health, family violence, discrimination and isolation.

The Compass Points Thinking Routine provides an opportunity for students to consider their surface expectations of the production, to raise concerns and their curiosity prior to seeing the show. It can also be a valuable way for teachers and well-being support staff to prepare individual students with strategies for safely viewing and responding to the production.

Task: Create a compass on a large piece of paper dividing the page into four quadrants and label the points: N, S, E, W

Ask students to respond to the following prompts making notes on their compass on each point:

**N = Need to Know:** What questions do you have before seeing the show? What is necessary for you to know prior to the excursion?

**S = Stance:** What do you already think or feel about stories focused on family, growing up, and mental well-being? Why?

**E = Excited:** What are you excited about seeing this production? Why?

**W = Worried:** What might be challenging, confusing or confronting for you about seeing this production? What might be some useful strategies or supports for you to address some of your worries before seeing the show? How might your teacher help?



## PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

These questions are suitable and relevant to all year levels.

- What themes, issues, ideas and milestones do you associate with growing up?
- What expectations come with being part of a family, and who decides them?
- How might social class, access to opportunities, and a person's environmental surroundings shape or impact their dreams?
- What do you expect the relationship between Maxine ("Mama") and her daughter, Billie, to be like? Why?
- What does it feel like to 'belong' [to a group, team, community, or organisation]?
- To what extent do you think belonging impacts a person's mental health and well-being?
- Where does your sense of belonging come from? What groups, teams, communities or organisations do you 'belong' to? What freedoms and responsibilities are connected to your belonging to these groups?
- What factors contribute to a person's identity? What sorts of things make you who you are?
- Why is having a sense of your own identity important?
- What makes a story about family and growing up universal, even when the details in the plot are very specific?
- What emotions do you expect to feel during the performance?
- What moments in the production do you think might make the audience feel uncomfortable? Why can it be valuable for theatre to challenge the audience's feeling of comfort when dealing with important social themes?
- Who was Frida Kahlo and what is significant about her work?
- What is significant about the portrait 'The Two Fridas' by Frida Kahlo? How do you think this painting might work as a symbol for the relationship between Maxine and Billie?
- Based on what you now know about the production, what personal experiences, thoughts or ideas do you bring with you to the theatre that are relevant to the themes of the show?
- What questions do you think or hope the performance will answer – or deliberately leave unanswered?

## AFTER THE SHOW

These Thinking Routines are suitable for each year level and for students Drama, English and Health and Physical Education. Some year level appropriate differentiations are suggested that can also be applied for students who require adjustments to support their capabilities.

### Thinking routine 1: See, Feel, Wonder

This Thinking Routine is similar to the pre-show See, Think, Wonder activity, so it should feel familiar to students when responding to the show. See, Feel, Wonder aims to capture students' first impressions, emotional responses, and curiosities before any formal analysis.

Use this routine immediately after the performance (you could provide students a worksheet or prompts to respond to as a homework task) or as the basis of discussion in the next lesson. Students should respond individually at first, then share in pairs or small groups.

Students are encouraged to provide honest responses rather than seeking to provide 'the right answer'. See, Feel, Wonder encourages student development of emotional literacy, awareness of audience response, and understanding and consideration of how theatre-makers create meaning.

**SEE:** Students write 3 – 5 moments, images, lines, or staging choices that stayed with them or impacted them from the production.

**FEEL:** Students identify 2-3 emotions they experiences physically or emotionally during the performance.

**WONDER:** Students write two questions that the production raised for them. Some prompts include:

- The characters
- Identity
- Relationships
- Belonging
- Wellbeing
- The world of roller derby

**Extension:** Require students to provide specific exmaples to expand their ideas.

## Thinking routine 2: I Used to Think...Now I Think...

This Thinking Routine invites students to consider their preconceptions about the production and its themes and ideas prior to seeing the show and identify where their perspectives may have shifted. It also provides an opportunity for students to experience the capacity for theatre to create impact, to challenge personal values and promote social and cultural change.

I Used to Think...Now I Think... allows students to explore how the production challenges assumptions about themes such as identity, femininity, mental health and wellbeing, and belonging.

Teachers should model a response aloud and encourage students to think beyond 'liking' or 'disliking' the show. It may also be valuable for teachers to explicitly link roller derby in the show as a metaphor for identity and encourage students to consider how their own identities are formulated or supported by groups or teams they belong to.

Invite students to state their reactions and responses to the production by filling in the blanks:

- ***I used to think.... Now I think... because in the play...***

**Differentiations: Require students to connect their ideas to character arcs or moments of conflict in the show.**



## Thinking routine 3: Values, Identities, Actions (VIA)

This thinking routine supports students to explore rich social and cultural aspects of arts works and to find a personal values-based connection to the characters, setting, or context of the story. VIA is particularly useful for *Mama Does Derby* as, on the surface, some audience might not feel that they are visible or represented in the story eg adolescent boys might not see themselves represented in the casting, however they are encouraged by this routine to make connections to the characters' relationships, circumstances, challenges, or motivations.

Discuss the following in response to seeing *Mama Does Derby*:

### Values

What values does *Mama Does Derby* advise us to think about?

Values are things that people regard as important, that they respect or live by eg fairness, justice, safety, respect, traditions, culture, ethnicity, creativity...

Dig deeper with the following questions:

- Are they your values?
- Are they other people's values? Whose?
- Does *Mama Does Derby* affirm, challenge, or raise questions about these values?

### Identities

- Who does *Mama Does Derby* speak about? Who is represented? Are you?
- Who is it trying to speak to? (Not necessarily the same people!)

Dig deeper with the following questions:

- Is anyone left out of the story that should be in it?
- To what extent do you fit into the story? Do any of the characters, themes or situations reflect or represent you? Or not so much? Why?

### Actions

- What actions might *Mama Does Derby* encourage?

Actions could include doing something definite, refraining from doing something, or even just learning more about something.

Dig deeper with the following questions:

- Who might be encouraged to take these actions in response to viewing the production? Why?
- What does it make you want (or not want) to do? Why?

## POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

- To what extent did the production meet your expectations with regard to the themes or issues you thought would be explored?
- What surprised you in the production? Why?
- What aspects of the production did you find realistic or relatable? Why?
- How did the non-realistic (surreal) aspects of the production help to enhance meaning? How?
- How did physical aspects of the production such as physicality of actors, movement, and the staging of the production communicate ideas or enhance meaning in the play?
- What symbols or metaphors did you notice that had significant meaning? What meaning did they communicate for you?
- How did you feel about Billie's anxieties being presented as the Sleep Paralysis Demon? Why? Why do you think the company chose to present Billie's fears and anxieties in this way?
- Mama Does Derby deals with some complex and confronting themes and ideas, for example references to mental wellbeing, anxiety and family violence. What responsibilities do performers and creators have when presenting personal, social, or emotionally challenging stories to an audience?
- What role did the band play in the production? How did the band contribute to or enhance dramatic meaning, mood and atmosphere at different times? How?
- In what ways did the production challenge stereotypes or social expectations about families, parents, sport, and identity?
- What does the production have to say about the importance or impact of belonging on a person's wellbeing?
- How did the traverse staging and immersive nature of the production impact your experience of the production? Do you think the production would have the same impact if it were presented in a more conventional end-on theatre? Why? Why not?
- How did the set design reflect the central themes of the play?
- What do you think the challenges were for the actors performing in a traverse stage?
- What do you think the challenges were for the designers in producing the production for a traverse stage?
- What do you think audiences will learn, think, feel or question as a result of viewing this production?
- How did you feel about the conclusion of the story? Why?



# Suggested Tasks

## BEFORE THE SHOW

### Activity 1: Surrealism & Dreamscapes

This task supports students to:

- Explore psychological and emotional states through non-naturalistic theatre
- Apply dramatic conventions and practitioner theory (Artaud)
- Make intentional performance choices for audience impact
- Reflect critically on how meaning is created beyond realism and dialogue
- The task prioritises process, intention, and reflection, making it appropriate for senior secondary assessment.



It prepares students to understand the Sleep Paralysis Demon in *Mama Does Derby* as a theatrical device rather than a literal character.

### Step 1: Conceptual Understanding

Lead a short discussion:

- What do dreams or nightmares feel like in the body?
- How do fears behave differently in dreams than in real life?
- Why are dreams often illogical, fragmented, or exaggerated?

Introduce Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty:

- Theatre should shock the senses
- Meaning is created through sound, movement, light, repetition, and imagery, not just dialogue
- The aim is for the audience to experience a psychological truth, not simply understand a story

Emphasise that this activity is about impact and sensation, not realism or plot.

### Step 2: Group Formation

Divide the students into groups of 3 – 5 and provide each group with:

- A large piece of fabric or sheet
- Smaller pieces of fabric (optional)
- A torch or phone light to create shadows
- Access to recorded sounds (such as heartbeats, sirens, white noise etc) or the capacity to create live sound

### Step 3: Object Transformation

Give students the following instructions:

1. Using only the fabric and your bodies, transform the fabric into at least five different objects or personas.
2. You must move fluidly between each transformation.
3. You may not use spoken dialogue, but you may use sound. Sound may be prerecorded, distorted, edited, or produced live using your own voices, bodies or instruments.

Suggested transformation prompts (choose freely):

- An ominous presence
- A threat or predator
- A trap or restriction
- A cocoon or protective space
- A weight on the body or mind
- A non-human creature or force

You may come up with your own transformation ideas, too.

Teachers should encourage:

- Strong physical intention
- Clarity of shape, level, tension and ensemble awareness
- The audience should feel what the object represents

### Year 9 & 10 Drama Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01

AC9ADR10D01

AC9ADR10C01

AC9ADR10C02

AC9ADR10P01

### Year 9 & 10 English Content Descriptors

AC9E9LA01 / AC9E10LA01

AC9E9LA02 / AC9E10LA02

AC9E9LE01 / AC9E10LE01

AC9E9LE05 / AC9E10LE05

AC9E9LE06 / AC9E10LE08

AC9E9LY01 / AC9E10LY01

AC9E9LY02 / AC9E10LY02

AC9E9LY06 / AC9E10LY06

AC9E9LY07 / AC9E10LY07

## ACTIVITY 2: Dream Logic Performance

Building on the object transformation work from Activity 1, students work in their groups to devise a 1 – 2-minute surreal dream sequence based on:

- A recurring fear
- A sleep disturbance
- The feeling of being watched, trapped, silenced, or overwhelmed

Students may use a real dream shared voluntarily from one of the group members, or they may choose from teacher-provided prompts such as:

- Being chased by an indistinguishable predator
- Trying to run away from a scary situation but your legs are too heavy to move
- Being lost or trapped in a dark, unfamiliar place
- Trying to escape a fire
- Trying to shout, speak or scream but no sound comes out

In the dream sequence:

- The fabric must transform multiple times into different things
- At one time, the fabric must become a persona or entity
- At one time, the fabric must restrict, control or trap the character

Groups should also add at least two of the following:

- Pre-recorded sound that is looped or distorted
- Live sound such as breath, whispers, stomping, vocalisations, thumps, clicks etc
- Torch or phone light to create shadow
- Silence as a deliberate choice to create impact

Students rehearse and refine their presentation of these dream sequences before performing them to the class.

## Critical and Creative Thinking

Some reflection questions to consider in class discussion, or written, oral or multimodal reflection:

- How does sound affect the body in performance?
- How did sound affect your body when you viewed the other group's performances as an audience member?
- What can shadow or partial visibility reveal or suggest?
- How can repetition of sound, movement, or gestures create discomfort?
- What is one image presented by another group that stayed with you? Why?
- What emotions did you physically experience in response to another group's performance?
- What questions or ideas were raised for you by another group's performance?

Students select another group's performance that, for them, best captured the sense of fear and dream logic and produce a written, oral or creative response to the following:

- How did the work reflect dream logic rather than realism?
- Which moments felt most unsettling – and why?
- How did object transformation and physicality help to externalise fear?

Students should link their responses to an understanding of Surrealism and Theatre of Cruelty.

Use this task to explicitly connect learning by explaining that the Sleep Paralysis Demon can be understood as

- A physicalised psychological state
- A manifestation of fear, pressure, or loss of control
- A theatrical device shaped through intentional performance and design approaches rather than a literal monster

## Year 9 & 10 Drama Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01

AC9ADR10D01

AC9ADR10C01

AC9ADR10C02

AC9ADR10P01

## Year 9 & 10 English Content Descriptors

AC9E9LA01 / AC9E10LA01

AC9E9LA02 / AC9E10LA02

AC9E9LE01 / AC9E10LE01

AC9E9LE05 / AC9E10LE05

AC9E9LE06 / AC9E10LE08

AC9E9LY01 / AC9E10LY01

AC9E9LY02 / AC9E10LY02

AC9E9LY06 / AC9E10LY06

AC9E9LY07 / AC9E10LY07



## ACTIVITY 3: Traverse Tableaux

Tableau, or 'living picture', is a dramatic technique where the actors are arranged in the performance space to create powerful, silent, frozen images manipulating physicality, space and expression to tell a story.

The key components of effective tableau are:

- Body language: using levels, shapes and gestures created by actor's bodies independently and with the ensemble
- Facial expressions
- Spatial relationships between actors and on-stage elements
- A clear focal point
- Thematic relevance to convey character, mood and narrative without words
- Focus and stillness
- Mood and atmosphere

Tableaux are used in drama to explore character, relationships, theme, plot, and to build co-operative skills.

They are also effective starting points for blocking active scenes considering the use of the acting space and interaction between the actors and the physical space.

### Part 1: Thematic Tableaux

If an image were paused forever, what story would the audience read?

In groups of 3-5, students create three tableaux that each represent a theme from the play:

- Isolation
- Belonging
- Relationship conflict

Students must

- Use clear use of levels and spacing
- Present with strong facial expressions, body tension, and total stillness
- Ensure each character has a distinct relationship to the moment/central action

Groups present their tableaux to the class in a traditional end-on theatre setup; that is, the audience and actors face each other as in a traditional theatre.

## Part 2: Tableaux in Traverse

Introduce the concept of traverse staging: the audience is arranged on two opposing sides with the acting space in the centre between them. There is no 'back' of the stage – everything is visible. Pose the following provocations to students:

- What do you think the relationship between the actors and the audience is like in a production presented on a traverse stage?
- What are the challenges for actors working on traverse stages?
- What are the challenges for designers – particularly set designers – working on traverse stages?
- What happens if one side of the audience sees something the other doesn't?

Groups now re-stage their same three tableaux to be presented for a traverse stage. They must now adjust:

- Body orientation (avoid turning their backs)
- Focus
- Levels and spacing
- Use of negative space on the stage

Their main challenge is to now ensure that both audiences receive meaning and can understand the story presented in each tableau.

Groups rehearse then presented the modified tableaux for the class arranged now in traverse.

## Critical and Creative Thinking

Students reflect on their own work and the work of others in this activity:

- How did the meaning of the tableaux change when it was reworked for traverse staging?
- Which theme was hardest to stage in traverse? Why?
- What extra responsibilities do actors have in traverse staged performances?
- How does the way in which an audience is positioned change what they see, feel and understand about the performance?

## Year 9 & 10 Drama Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01

AC9ADR10D02

AC9ADR10C01

AC9ADR10C02

## Year 9 & 10 English Content Descriptors

AC9E9LA01 / AC9E10LA01

AC9E9LE05 / AC9E10LE05

AC9E9LE04 / AC9E10LE03

AC9E9LY01 / AC9E10LY01

AC9E9LY02 / AC9E10LY02

AC9E9LY06 / AC9E10LY06

AC9E9LY07 / AC9E10LY07

## ACTIVITY 4: Create your own Derby character

- Students create their own Derby identity that reveals and emphasises their own 'exciting qualities' and uniqueness, and 'turn the volume up' on it.
- Students list the qualities, skills and talents that make them unique. They might consider:
  - Creative strengths eg a skilled visual artist, a great public speaker, a good comic actor...
  - Academic strengths eg a Maths Wiz, a wordsmith, a scientific superstar...
  - Physical or athletic strengths eg a lightning-speed runner,
  - Emotional and relational qualities eg a loyal friend, an underestimated introvert, reliable and trustworthy
  - Social and cultural dimensions of their identity eg ethnic background or heritage, gender identity, zodiac traits that they embody
- Students identify the ways that they embody these aspects of their identity. This may be in visible or more implied ways.
- Students then consider how they might 'turn the volume up' on these aspects of their identity by emphasising or over-exaggerating them and what this might look or sound like.
- Students then develop a Derby character and a character name that synthesises these ideas.
- Have students develop a costume design concept that considers practicality in performance (eg how will the costume allow free movement in a derby?), safety elements (eg kneepads, helmet) and incorporate symbols that reflect aspects their character identity.
- Students provide a written, oral or creative analysis of how their design concept reflects their character identity.
- Students write and rehearse a short introduction for their Derby character to be read by another student as an MC. The introduction should create a concise, vivid introduction that establishes the character's traits, attitude and presence.

The introduction should be 3 – 5 short sentences (40-60 words) and be targeted to a live audience who has never met the character. The following structure will be helpful for students to construct their introduction

**What were the central ideas that inspired the characters and story?**

**What impact did Virginia Gay and Clare Watson hope to have on young audiences in their staging and telling of this story?**

*"Well, I would say that roller derby doesn't necessarily ask you to change yourself or to put on a mask. I think it reveals the most exciting qualities about yourself and puts them centre stage. It's about finding exactly what it is that makes you exceptional and totally and uniquely yourself – and then turning up the volume on that.*

*That's what you do when you make characters too. When you write characters, you're trying to find what makes them interesting and exceptional and charismatic and magnetic and then turning up the volume on that to make sure that they're all they're always saying what is true to them in the most succinct and dynamic and impactful ways."*

**Read:** interview with Virginia Gay via Aussietheatre [[here](#)]

### Sentence 1: Name and Identity

Introduce your derby name and who you are including a nickname, title or reputation:

'This is \_\_\_\_\_, also known as \_\_\_\_\_. By day, they \_\_\_\_\_, but at night they \_\_\_\_\_.'

### Sentence 2: Attitude and Energy

Describe the character's attitude, vibe or personality using strong verbs and adjectives:

'They roll in with \_\_\_\_\_ energy – part \_\_\_\_\_, part \_\_\_\_\_.'

### Sentence 3: Backstory or Motivation

Give the audience a hint as to why the character is here and what drives them. Keep it brief and suggestive rather than detailed.

'They skate for \_\_\_\_\_, and they never forget \_\_\_\_\_.'

### Sentence 4: Signature Strength or Trait

Highlight what makes your character dangerous, impressive or memorable. This could be a physical, emotional or symbolic aspect of their presence.

'\_\_\_\_\_ is known for their \_\_\_\_\_. They're the kind of skater who \_\_\_\_\_.'

### Sentence 5: Punch Line

Finish your character introduction with a bold, powerful image of the character, a warning or even a catchphrase. You could use one of the following sentence starters:

'So buckle up, because when \_\_\_\_\_ hits the track, \_\_\_\_\_!'

'Strap yourself in because \_\_\_\_\_ will leave you \_\_\_\_\_!'

'Don't mess with \_\_\_\_\_ because like they always say, \_\_\_\_\_!'

'If you get in \_\_\_\_\_'s way, you'll soon understand \_\_\_\_\_!'

'When \_\_\_\_\_ says \_\_\_\_\_, they really mean it!'

### Extension:

Students work with a partner to rehearse and perform their Derby character introductions with each student reading the introduction for their partner.

### Year 9 & 10 Drama Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01

AC9ADR10C02

AC9ADR10P01

### Year 9 & 10 English Content Descriptors

AC9E9LA01 / AC9E10LA01

AC9E9LA02 / AC9E10LA02

AC9E9LE01 / AC9E10LE01

AC9E9LE04 / AC9E10LE03

AC9E9LE06 / AC9E10LE08

AC9E9LY01 / AC9E10LY01

AC9E9LY02 / AC9E10LY02

AC9E9LY06 / AC9E10LY06

AC9E9LY07 / AC9E10LY07



# Suggested Tasks

## AFTER THE SHOW

### ACTIVITY 5: The Space Tells the Story

**Read:** the interview with designer Jonathon Oxlade and his approach to set design [[here](#)].

- How did he intend for the set to tell the story of Billie and Maxine – not just enhance it?
- What was significant about his use of the space to tell the story?
- Clear the room so that it can become an immersive performance space.
- Give students access to everyday objects like chairs, tables, shoes, fabric, cardboard or other large items you may have in the space.
- Allow students access to sound equipment (eg Spotify, a bank of sound effects) or instruments to help them make their own sounds including their own voices and bodies.
- Give students access to torches, phone lights, or if they are capable, lighting equipment to be able to create mood, atmosphere, and positive and negative space.

Divide the class into groups of around 5 or 6.

Give each group one theme:

- Belonging
- Isolation
- Family
- Rebuilding
- Self-discovery
- Overcoming fear and anxiety

Groups plan how they might use the space including arranging physical set pieces, props, symbols, sound and lighting to transform the space into an immersive experience of the theme so that the audience can feel the theme as they enter.

Take it in turns to have groups transform the space without the audience present. Then have the audience enter and walk through the space silently as the group aims to immerse them in the feeling of the theme.

#### Reflection:

- What emotions did the space create?
- How did the group create the feeling of these emotions and an understanding of the theme?
- How did the placement of the objects, the audience, and the integration of sound and lighting guide your movement through the space and interaction with the ideas being conveyed?

#### Year 9 & 10 Drama Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01

AC9ADR10D01

AC9ADR10D02

AC9ADR10C01







## ACTIVITY 6:

### Values, Identities and Actions - Version 2

This version of the VIA Thinking Routine is especially effective for exploring character motivation, identity formation, agency, and ethical choices, all of which sit at the core of the production. Rather than attempting to relate the characters and the production to themselves, students are supported to analyse the values, identities and actions of the characters and understand these as motivations for the characters' behaviour and choices.

This version of the Values–Identities–Actions routine supports students to:

- Examine what characters care about
- Understand how identities are constructed and performed
- Analyse how values and identity drive choices and behaviour

It helps students move beyond what happens in the play to why characters act as they do, making it ideal for character analysis, theme exploration (belonging, confidence, agency) and post-performance reflection.

Clarify for students that in this version of VIA they are concerned with:

- **Values** = what matters to the character
- **Identity** = how the character sees themselves or is seen by others
- **Actions** = what the character does as a result of what occurs in the play

Model one example using a minor moment from the play

Assign or let students choose a character (or moment from the play) and work through the following steps.

#### STEP 1: VALUES

What does this character care about? What matters most to them?

List the beliefs, priorities, or needs that seem important.

Sentence starters:

- "This character values..."
- "What matters most to them is..."
- "They care deeply about..."

Examples:

- Belonging
- Respect
- Strength
- Independence
- Being seen or heard
- Protecting themselves or others

## **STEP 2: IDENTITIES**

How does the character see themselves? How do others see them?

Consider:

- Private identity vs public persona
- Derby identity vs everyday self
- How identity shifts across the play

Sentence starters:

- "They see themselves as..."
- "Others see them as..."
- "In derby, they become..."

Examples:

- Confident / unsure
- Powerful / invisible
- Performer / protector
- Beginner / warrior

## **STEP 3: ACTIONS**

What does the character do because of their values and identity?

Identify key actions, choices, or behaviours.

Sentence starters:

- "Because they value..., they..."
- "Their identity leads them to..."
- "This is shown when they..."

Examples:

- Joining the derby
- Taking risks
- Withdrawing from others
- Confronting fear
- Standing up for themselves



#### STEP 4: SYNTHESIS

Students articulate their analysis of the character's Values, Identities and Actions by completing the following statement:

[Character name] values ..... and sees themselves as ....., therefore they choose to....

This statement is useful as

- a topic sentence for an analytical paragraph that explores character motivations and actions
- a prompt for a character monologue
- essay planning

#### STEP 5: APPRAISAL

Students extend their reflection by preparing responses to the following prompts:

- Do the character's actions align with their values?
- Where is there tension or contradiction between their values, identity and/or actions?
- How did the actor show these aspects of the character in their portrayal?
- How did their posture, voice or movement reveal their character's values and/or identity?

Use this as a scaffold for a critical written, oral or multimodal review or evaluation of the production.

#### Year 9 & 10 Drama Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01

#### Year 9 & 10 English Content Descriptors

AC9E9LA01 / AC9E10LA01

AC9E9LE01 / AC9E10LE01

AC9E9LE05 / AC9E10LE05

AC9E9LY01 / AC9E10LY01

AC9E9LY02 / AC9E10LY02

AC9E9LY06 / AC9E10LY06

AC9E9LY07 / AC9E10LY07

## ACTIVITY 7

### Group Devised Thematic Performance

Students devise an original play or interpret a pre-existing text or a concept for a hypothetical work that deals with one or more themes of the play including

- Identity and Self-Discovery
- Family conflict and resolution
- Isolation and Belonging
- Failure, Reinvention and Rebuilding
- Mental health and wellbeing, and strategies to cope with fear and anxiety

They experiment with and apply staging and performance techniques they have explored in previous activities present in the production including

- Object transformation
- Dream logic
- Surrealism
- Symbolism
- Non-linear structure
- Immersive staging choices
- Innovative staging such as traverse or in-the-round
- Live music and sound
- Innovative and stylistic technical elements
- Physical theatre

#### Year 9 & 10 Drama Content Descriptors

AC9ADR10E01  
AC9ADR10D01  
AC9ADR10D02  
AC9ADR10C01  
AC9ADR10C02  
AC9ADR10P01

# About Windmill

Based in Adelaide, Australia, Windmill Production Company has a global reputation as a leading producer of theatre and screen projects for children, teenagers and families. We bring artists together to uncover and ignite stories that are burning to be told. Each year we perform in our hometown, and tour across Australia and around the world.

## **Clare Watson** **Co-Creator, Director**

Clare Watson is a multi-award-winning director and theatre-maker. In 2023, she was appointed Artistic Director of Windmill. Her first work for the company, *Hans and Gret*, enjoyed a sell-out season at the Adelaide Festival.

From 2016-2022 she was Artistic Director of Black Swan State Theatre Company and the former Artistic Director at St Martins Youth Centre. Clare has directed work for several major theatre companies and festivals including Malthouse Theatre, Belvoir, Melbourne Theatre Company, State Theatre Company South Australia, Sydney Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival, Adelaide Festival among others. She directed *Cyrano*, adapted by Virginia Gay which won a Fringe First Award in Edinburgh and was nominated in London for three Offies Awards including Best Production and Best Director. Clare is the recipient of a Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award.

## **Virginia Gay** **Co-Creator, Writer**

Virginia Gay is an award-winning actor, writer and director. She recently starred in *Colin From Accounts*, SBS' *Safe Home*, *Savage River* and *Thank God You're Here*. She was Artistic Director of Adelaide Cabaret Festival 2024-25 and received a Logie nomination for most Outstanding Supporting Actor for *After The Verdict*. She won a Sydney Theatre Award for Best Actress for *Calamity Jane* and wrote and starred in *Cyrano* for Melbourne Theatre Company in 2022. *Cyrano* had a smash-hit new production for Edinburgh Fringe 2024 (winning a Fringe First Award for Most Outstanding New Writing), followed by a London season (nominated for an Off West End Award for Best Lead Actor). In 2026 she will direct Yve Blake's new show *Mackenzie* for Bell Shakespeare.

## **Acknowledgements**

Produced by Windmill Production Company. Compiled by drama education specialist Aldo Longobardi. The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this work. © Copyright protects this Education Resource. Except for purposes permitted by the Copyright Act, reproduction by whatever means is prohibited. However, limited photocopying for classroom use only is permitted by educational institutions. This resource is proudly supported by the Cybec Foundation.







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