23 MAY-2023 METBOURNE SOUTHBANK THEATRE THEATRE SOUTHBANK THEATRE

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EDUCATION PACK – PART A

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Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Boon Wurrung and Wurrundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, create and gather. We pay our respects to all First Nations people, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories. As a Company we remain committed to the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for voice, truth and treaty. Look out for these icons for opportunities to learn more:



Activity



Discussion



Reading



Video

Melbourne Theatre Company

At Melbourne Theatre Company we believe theatre is for everyone. We are Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual season of plays created for and about the world today.



Beyond the stage, we run a range of initiatives that support artist development, champion new writing, invest in future audiences and address underrepresentation across the industry.

OUR VISION

To be recognised as one of the world's preeminent theatre companies, leading the cultural conversation and chosen as a favourite destination for Australians.

OUR PURPOSE

To share remarkable stories that enable people to better understand the world around them.



Melbourne Theatre Company Headquarters Virtual Tour

Walk the halls of Melbourne Theatre Company Headquarters in this virtual tour and explore the spaces where plays are rehearsed, sets are built, costumes are sewn and wigs are created one strand of hair at a time: <u>mtc.com.au/eduhub</u>

About the play



Director Cassandra Fumi and Carly Sheppard

SUMMARY

An elegy for the future we're yet to inherit, World Problems by Emma Mary Hall is comical and terrifying, gripping and cathartic. A solo time capsule catapulting across the ages, the play blends a poetic sensibility with rigorous attention to global and historical matters.

A woman summons up her childhood with an intensity so visceral it seems to be playing out in front of us. But as her memories draw closer to the present, the space between the personal and the speculative grows ever more blurry. Where do you end, and everything else begins?

Performed with vivid physicality by Carly Sheppard, World Problems trains a microscope on one soul to chart the future of all humanity.

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains coarse language, sexual references and mature themes. For detailed information about the production's content, visit our production content guide at mtc.com.au/production-content-guide.

DURATION

Approximately 1 hour with no interval.



Explore the digital programme for this production to read about the cast and creative team, and see more photos from the rehearsal room: mtc.com.au/programmes

Cast and creatives



Carly Sheppard Performer



Emma Mary Hall Writer

Director



Cassandra Fumi



Dann Barber Set & Costume Designer



Harrie Hogan Lighting Designer



Rachel Lewindon Composer & Sound Designer



Amelia Jean O'Leary Movement Consultant



Additional Dramaturgy Kamarra Bell-Wykes

Annah Jacobs Brittany Stock **Robert McDonald Award Placement** Bridie Noonan Set & Costume Design Secondment (VCA) Ashley Reid

Stage Manager

Assistant Stage Manager



Director Cassandra Fumi, Lighting Designer Harrie Hogan, Movement Consultant Amelia Jean O'Leary, Composer & Sound Designer Rachel Lewindon and Carly Sheppard.

Playwriting



Writer Emma Mary Hall in rehearsal

Writer Emma Mary Hall says *World Problems* is about her life: 'It's autobiographical.' Both a writer and an actor, Hall originally wrote *World Problems* in 2018 and performed it herself with an entirely different design. A revelation for Hall working on this new production (which will be performed by Carly Sheppard) has been how many of Hall's memories and experiences in the script also resonate with Sheppard.

Hall recalls seeing science fiction movies depict the future as a clearly imaginary world that she didn't live in. In *World Problems*, Hall is 'trying to imagine a way of talking about the future in a way that might feel real enough that we actually believe climate crisis is something we've got to do something about.'

In February, Hall joined the cast and creative team for a creative development week at Melbourne Theatre Company HQ. As they explored the text, key ideas that emerged included decomposition, strawberries, black holes, cyborgs and transhumanism (the idea that humans could evolve beyond our current physical and mental limitations by means of science and technology).

'I remember reading about [transhumanism] when I first started writing this play,' recalls Hall, 'because I was thinking very much about the future. Being a place where it wasn't clear where the human body sits, because the human body through its waste production and creation is polluting the planet.'

During the creative development, Hall worked on updating her original script. 'The world has changed profoundly in the last six years – what a time to be alive.



Writer Emma Mary Hall



Make a list of themes and big ideas that you identify in the script. How might these be present in the performance you see?



What events from the last six years would you incorporate into this play? Write these in the style of Hall's script, beginning with "I remember..."

'I would say the play is about my life, because the form of the work is about memory.'

EMMA MARY HALL

We wanted to think about what we need to do to bring it into 2024, so we brainstormed some themes that we felt we were missing and I went away and wrote some content for that. Then we came back into the room and wrote down the bits that resonated with us.'

'It has been an amazing gift to be on the outside, and only be the writer,' says Hall, 'and watch the team engage and excavate my life in a way that makes meaning to their lives. It's going to be really amazing.'



'We know that climate change is happening right now – it's inside of us. So I was trying to talk about the future as if it had already happened, in a hope that we might believe it.'

EMMA MARY HALL

Carly Sheppard

Context and setting

The performer in *World Problems* recalls significant events from their past throughout the play. Some of these memories are personal, but many are of historical events that affected people around the world. Most are mentioned fleetingly, painting a picture of a complex world with interrelated challenges.

Many of these memories are the playwright's own and stretch back before 2024 VCE students were born. Below are summaries of some of the events included in the script. After reading them, return to the text and consider why the playwright has included these events.

9/11

On September 11, 2001, terrorists associated with Al-Qaeda (a militant Islamist organisation) hijacked four commercial aeroplanes in a coordinated attack. The terrorists intentionally flew two of the planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, causing the towers to collapse.

A third plane was flown into the Pentagon (the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense), while passengers and crew members on the fourth plane, which terrorists were flying toward Washington, D.C., launched a counterattack and forced the hijacker pilot to crash the plane into a field in Pennsylvania.



The 9/11 attacks killed 2,977 people and caused the deaths of 441 first responders. Days after the attacks, President George W. Bush declared a 'war on terror', which continued for almost 20 years with ongoing impacts.

CANBERRA BUSHFIRES

On 18 January 2003, four people died and 510 properties were destroyed in a catastrophic firestorm in Australia's capital city – one firefighter described it as 'Armageddon'. Australia had been experiencing one of the most severe droughts on record when a dry lightning storm ignited four fires in the areas surrounding the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

Over several days, the fires merged and eventually crossed the ACT border and entered Canberra, devastating homes in the Weston Creek suburbs.

Lights commemorate where the Twin Towers once stood in New York City on the tenth anniversary of 9/11.

Photo: Kim Carpenter

The fires overwhelmed firefighters and caused a power and communications blackout. In the ensuing confusion and panic, thousands of residents fled the burning suburbs in their cars. Others stayed, desperately trying to protect their homes. Almost 70% of the land in the ACT was burned.



Firefighters battle the Canberra firestorm in 2003.

Photo: Graham Tidy

FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, ending more than 28 years of division. After World War II ended in 1945 with Nazi Germany's surrender, Germany was divided into Soviet, American, British and French zones of occupation, which eventually evolved to become two independent nations: the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR or West Germany), allied to Western nations, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany), allied to the Soviet Union. Berlin, although located within the Soviet zone, was also divided between East and West.



West Germany became wealthy and prosperous (the allies poured money into reconstruction and encouraged trade), while East Germany stagnated (the Soviets sought reparations in the form of money and resources). As a result, millions of East Germans escaped to the West, leading the GDR to the brink of economic and social collapse. To stop the exodus, the GDR closed the border and erected the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961. The concrete barrier, complete with 300 guard towers at regular intervals, was almost 155 km in length and 4 m high. Behind the wall was the so-called 'death strip', containing anti-vehicle trenches, beds of nails and other defence devices to stop people escaping. At least 138 people lost their lives trying to escape across the wall.

The Berlin Wall, 1986. Photo: Thierry Noir Rising political protests in 1989 pressured East Germany to relax travel rules, and on 9 November 1989 a GDR government representative mistakenly announced at a press conference that the border was open. People flocked to the wall, overwhelming guards and surging through the checkpoints. The wall was slowly demolished over the months and years that followed.

CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT

On 26 April 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine suffered a catastrophic explosion and meltdown. The accident was attributed to a flawed reactor design coupled with serious mistakes made by the plant operators – a consequence of Cold War isolation and the lack of safety culture. It is the most serious accident ever to occur in the nuclear power industry, with considerable amounts of radioactive material released into the environment. Some 350,000 people were evacuated as a result.



The power plant is now within a large restricted area of around 2,600 km², called the Chernobyl exclusion zone, where radioactive contamination is highest and public access is restricted. Due to the lack of human activity, the zone (including the ghost city of Pripyat) has become a thriving sanctuary with some of the highest biodiversity and thickest forests in all of Ukraine.

TIANANMEN SQUARE PROTESTS AND MASSACRE

In April 1989, people from across China gathered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of the liberal Communist Party leader Hu Yaobang. Over several weeks, the gatherings grew into peaceful protests with demonstrators, mainly students, calling for an end to official corruption and for political and economic reform. In May, hundreds of students went on hunger strike for several days, party officials declared martial law in Beijing to regain control and hundreds of thousands of people protested on the streets. On the night of 3 June, troops began to move towards Tiananmen Square, arresting protestors, opening fire and even crushing people to death with military vehicles.



The ghost city of Pripyat in northern Ukraine, with the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the distance.

Photo: Jorge Franganillo

Photo: Derzi Elekes Andor

Tiananmen Square in 1988. A year later, the square would be filled with protesters.

Nobody knows for sure how many people were killed. After the incident, the Chinese government said 200 civilians and several dozen security personnel had died, however other estimates have ranged from hundreds to many thousands.

On 5 June, a man carrying two shopping bags was filmed blocking the path of a line of tanks heading away from the square. He has become a defining image of the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre. The incident remains a sensitive topic in China, with authorities banning all mention of the protest even today.

THE HOLOCAUST

During World War II, the Nazi Germany regime and its allies and collaborators murdered nearly six million European Jews. This genocide is called the Holocaust. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, they began to strip Jewish people of all property, freedoms and rights under the law. Antisemitism, the hatred of or prejudice against Jews, was a basic principle of Nazi ideology and the foundation of the Holocaust.

During World War II, Nazi Germany and its allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews using deadly living conditions, brutal mistreatment, mass shootings and gassings and specially designed killing centres (sometimes called extermination camps or concentration camps).



Auschwitz was the largest of the concentration camps, where over 1.1 million people were killed. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the world has struggled to come to terms with the horrors of the genocide. The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (pictured) opened in 2005.

THE WORLD

The script for *World Problems* references many places all over the world. Among the Australian locations referenced in *World Problems*, **Uluru** (a massive rock formation sacred to First Nations people) and **Kakadu National Park** in the Northern Territory are included on the UNESCO World Heritage List. You may be less familiar with **Snowtown** – a small town in South Australia known for a series of grisly murders in the 1990s.

Within the African continent, the play references **Cape Town** (a city in South Africa) and **Mauritius** (an island nation in the Indian Ocean). The play also references a video taken in a refugee camp in Africa, which the playwright was shown by a stranger on a Melbourne tram. 'This is a key part of the script,' says Playwright Emma May Hall. 'I don't know exactly which camp the video I refer to was taken in, but it looked to me like a self-settled camp, not managed or planned, so maybe around **Tanzania** or **South Sudan**. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) describes refugee camps as 'monuments to human suffering'.

Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. Photo: Kurt Kaiser



The play references the South American continent (which includes 12 sovereign states) and mentions **Peru** specifically.

Within the continent of Europe, the play references many cities and countries. The cities of **Amsterdam**, **Rotterdam** and **Utrecht** (known as models of sustainable mobility) in the Netherlands are mentioned, as are many more cities in countries nearby.

Many of the locations in this play are places the playwright has lived or travelled to, while others are the sites of world events that exist in a collective memory. Although many cities are explored here, thousands more exist around the world – home to more than 8 billion people all with their own memories, hopes and problems.

Amsterdam. Photo: Juke Schweizer

Directing



Carly Sheppard and Director Cassandra Fumi

Director Cassandra Fumi says *World Problems* is a solo performance about the climate crisis that explores what it is to be human.

During the creative development week, Fumi said a discovery the team made was 'that the whole show is a composite, a collage.' Fumi is excited by the prospect of audiences making connections between the performer's physicality, the spoken text and the images onstage. 'Every object that is brought into the space transforms, like matter does,' says Fumi.

Fumi highlights the contrast between artifice and reality within *World Problems*. 'The only things that are real onstage are the strawberries and the human body,' says Fumi. 'We researched strawberries and found that their DNA is 60% similar to humans. There's something so thrilling about those two pieces of organic matter in this space when everything else is artificial.'

'How do we, as individuals, form a collective to fight the climate crisis, which I actually think is the issue of our times. How do we work together in the face of this crisis? We've explored everything from vagina dentata to the stages of decomposition to black holes, but I think this work is really about what it is to be human.' DIRECTOR CASSANDRA FUMI



Director Cassandra Fumi



What are some props you predict might be used and transformed in this production? Make a list of props with a prediction for each.



Discuss the potential application of symbol: how might the actor communicate ideas and themes with strawberries?

Set and costume design





Set & Costume Designer Dann Barber

Carly Sheppard

Set and costume designer Dann Barber has created a monochromatic collage design for the world of *World Problems*.

COSTUME DESIGN

'The performer starts the show going back into her memories,' says Barber. 'She remembers school, so we'll initially see her in a school uniform that consists of shirt, tie and skirt – but the skirt is made out of many ties and the shirt is patchworked together out of many shirts.'

Everything in the costume is broken down and art finished. The shirt allows for a lot of looks – untucked, rolled sleeves, buttoned etc. During the play, the performer will also put a TV on their head, and then turn into the world, which will be an inflatable globe costume. Director Cassandra Fumi says this is an opportunity for levity among the heavy topics being discussed in the play. The base costume has an exoskeleton feel to it, but will be made from stretch materials that allow the performer to move freely. This costume will also be art finished and broken down. The costumes utilise a stark, restricted palette with pops of colour. Fumi says the set, like the costumes, is also an extension of the performer. Themes

The designer is hoping for much of the costume to be recycled from op shops and old costumes Melbourne Theatre Company has in storage. How might the costume support ideas and themes in the play?



How might costume manipulate mood during the performance? Think about two contrasting moments in the script.

'We're trying to collage things everywhere, in set and costume, and the collage will break down during the play into detritus.'

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER DANN BARBER







Costume renders by Dann Barber



'For all the costume elements, everything should look inside out - the stitching is exposed, which links the performer to the set, and reinforces the ideas of collage, patchwork and composite.'

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER DANN BARBER



the dramatic elements.

Annotate the costume designs on this page to highlight aspects that are practical, symbolic or relate to one of



Director Cassandra Fumi and Carly Sheppard

SET DESIGN

Barber's monochromatic set design references black holes, wormholes, deflated hot air balloons and infinite blackness to create a playing space that the performer can explore, climb over and reach within. As much as possible the creative team have used recycled and sustainable materials to create the set and costumes.

Barber recalls Writer Emma May Hall saying she's not trying to answer any questions with this play, she's just asking. From this idea, Barber researched tools that people have used to understand the world – apparatus and diagrams of the universe.

Other design influences include a porcelain urinal sculpture by Marcel Duchamp called Fountain (which strikes the balance of irreverent and political that the team are imagining for this production), larger-than-life spider sculptures by Louise Bourgeois (which feel menacing and existential, but also offer a safe refuge) and artwork by William Kentridge including collage and bronze sculptures that resemble cardboard.

To incorporate the nostalgia in the script into the design, Barber says set should appear to be made of naïve, childlike materials – cardboard, papier-mâché – referencing children's craft and vinegar/bicarb soda volcanoes from science fairs. The set has been coated and varnished in order to withstand many performances.

The exposed timber rings that support the main structure also offer exciting potential for the lighting designer to create shadows. 'The set itself acts as a gobo,' says Barber, referring to the etched plate that can be placed inside a light fixture in order to cast a pattern onstage.

Discuss the interrelationship between space and mood in the set design. How might the set be used by the performer to vary mood?



The creative team use Milanote (a digital tool for organising creative projects) to collate reference images and discuss the evolution of the design. Research some of the artworks mentioned above and create your own Milanote with additional images you discover as you investigate the script further.

'The set feels like a cosmos, a person's universe or the universe exploded around them.'

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER DANN BARBER



Set renders by Dann Barber

Performance styles



POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

This production of *World Problems* uses aspects of postdramatic theatre. The term 'postdramatic' distinguishes drama (story/narrative) from theatre (performance/show) and can refer to a production without a traditional plot. The focus is more on the actor-audience relationship than the story.

Conventions of postdramatic theatre you may identify include repeated text, stylised movement, direct address. Postdramatic theatre practitioners include playwrights like Samuel Beckett and Heiner Müller, and directors like Robert Lepage (artistic director of Ex Machina) and Pina Bausch.

PHYSICAL THEATRE

Combining drama and dance, physical theatre emphasises the movement of the body in telling a story. It therefore doesn't contain as much text as a traditional play. Physical theatre is influenced by a number of genres, ranging from ancient Greek theatre to French mime to Italian commedia dell'arte to Japanese Noh. Dance has been an important part of First Nations culture for thousands of years. In this production, Movement Consultant Amelia Jean O'Leary (a First Nations Gamilaroi Yinarr from Northern New South Wales living in Naarm) will work with First Nations performer Carly Sheppard to experiment and explore ways of incorporating dance and storytelling into the performance.

'The performance style is incredibly heightened. The physical language of this world is hugely important – there's a physical score. The physical language is as important as the text and has come out of the text, but you'll never hear things and see them at the same time, so it's a complete composite in the way that it's made.' DIRECTOR CASSANDRA FUMI

Physical theatre conventions you may identify include heightened use of gesture, mime, dance and more. Jacques Lecoq, a French actor and movement coach, helped establish the style of physical theatre. Physical theatre companies include Australia's Legs On The Wall and Zen Zen Zo, and the UK's Frantic Assembly and Complicité.

Carly Sheppard and Movement Consultant Amelia Jean O'Leary

'It's a list play that follows a structure of saying "I remember" multiple times ... It's definitely postdramatic - there's a lot of meta-theatricality in the show. Our performer is always aware that she's in a show, we are talking to you about you, so the audience is very present and it's very much direct address.'

DIRECTOR CASSANDRA FUMI

Dramatic elements

The following questions are intended to help you consider how *World Problems* might be interpreted onstage through the lens of VCE Drama. Refresh your memory of the definitions with our dramatic elements flashcards at <u>mtc.com.au/eduhub</u>.

CLIMAX

Which moments in the script do you identify as potential moments of climax? How might various production areas enhance these moments?

CONFLICT

Where do you expect to see conflict in a solo performance?

CONTRAST

What are some examples of contrast within the design aspects of the production that you're expecting to see?

MOOD

Although the play addresses serious themes and topics like climate change, the team are keen to include moments of levity. Identify where in the script you think these might occur.

RHYTHM

What effect might the spoken repetition of "I remember" have on rhythm within the performance? Annotate your script with predictions about rhythm based on the length of sentences or paragraphs.

SOUND

What might this set design sound like when the performer interacts with it? Thinking about black holes as a reference for the design, when might silence be used for effect?

SPACE

What opportunities does the set offer for the performer to vary levels, proximity and depth? In what ways is the set design symbolic?

TENSION

Identify one moment in the script where tension may be broken for comic effect.



After you've seen *World Problems*, download Part B of this Education Pack to read more from the cast and creative team, see photos from the production, and respond to analysis questions: <u>mtc.com.au/eduhub</u>



Carly Sheppard

Activities

The following questions are intended to help you consider how *World Problems* might be interpreted onstage through the lens of VCE Drama.



YOUR MEMORIES

Make a list of significant events you remember from your childhood. What world events do you remember being reported in the news? How did you feel when you heard about them? What are some joyous memories you have? Write a page in the style of *World Problems* using your own memories. How might you write in a postdramatic style?

In rehearsal



PHYSICAL LANGUAGE

Choose a section of the *World Problems* script and think about how you could communicate the text without speaking. What kinds of movements might you use? How can you use movement, gesture and facial expression to evoke the words on the page with your body? What physical theatre conventions could you incorporate?

Carly Sheppard



A 'BLACK HOLE' SET

One of the key terms when designing the set for *World Problems* was 'black hole'. Brainstorm some ways you could create this image or idea onstage. Think about the role lighting might play. What theatre technologies could you use to demonstrate this concept?

Set model by Dann Barber



Director Cassandra Fumi

HEAR FROM THE TEAM

Watch the video and answer these questions:

- What are some playmaking techniques the team are using?
- What discoveries are they making? What clues do you get about the lighting design?
- Make predictions about how two production areas could be manipulated for application of symbol.
- What predictions can you make about the actor-audience relationship in this production?
- What ideas and themes do the team discuss?

Learn more on the Education Hub





 Interactive Map

Explore more of the locations referenced in the script in an interactive world map on our Education Hub.

Explore the map at mtc.com.au/eduhub





Watch the video trailer for *World Problems* and make predictions about how the team will bring this story to life onstage.

Watch the video at mtc.com.au/eduhub





Explore the Lawler at Southbank Theatre, where World Problems will be performed in Melbourne, in this interactive virtual tour.

Go backstage at <u>mtc.com.au/eduhub</u>

SOURCES

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IMAGES

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