

# REFLECT

Realism, Magical Realism & Australian  
Gothic Theatre  
2020 Online Resource



LA	BOITE
THEATRE	COMPANY

## REALISM

'A style of drama crafted to create believable representations of life; roles and characters in Realism drama draw on real-life or life-like motivations,'(QCAA, Drama 2019 v1.0).

### **Conventions:**

- fourth wall
- three-dimensional characterisation
- subtext and the inner- life/psychologically motivated action
- objective and super-objective and beats and units of action
- magic-if
- the given circumstances

### **Character Study Task:** Origin Stories

Origin stories serve the purpose of telling us how a character got to be where they are now and explain why they are the person they are now.

1. Consider origin stories in pop culture (super hero movies are a great place to start - think of all of the Marvel/DC origin stories).
2. Select an example from pop culture and explain what new information about a character the origin story reveals. How does this add to the tension of the work? How does this enhance the audience's engagement?
3. Pick a character from the play/text you are studying/making in class and write their origin story. This is a chance for you to fill in the blanks and strengthen their motivations/actions in the work. Think about their history, family, context, culture and any major events that have made them who they are.
4. Once completed, explain how this has enhanced your understanding of the character. Will you change some of your acting or writing choices? Have you got a better understanding of some of the dialogue/action?

### **Extension Task:**

Complete this task using your own origin story - if you were to be made into a Marvel/DC comic, what would your origin story be?

## Character Study Task: The Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey is a structure devised by Joseph Campbell who studied multiple myths, legends and fairytales to understand what the traditional structure of a protagonist is. It's an extremely useful tool when studying magical realism and story structure and charts out the steps that a protagonist (or hero) takes to achieve their end goal in a story.

The steps include:

- The Call to Adventure
- Assistance
- Departure
- Trials
- Approach
- Crisis
- Treasure
- Result
- Return
- New Life
- Resolution

Visit the TEDEd Page to watch a brief summary and complete *The Hero's Journey Quiz and Quiz*: <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-makes-a-hero-matthew-winkler#watch>

Although this structure was originally applied to fantasy/legends, it can be applied to most Realism work. For example, the 'Assistance' phase may not be a wizard, but instead a friend, parent or teacher.

It is also important to remember that sometimes the steps swap around slightly. So a character may depart and face some trials, before meeting the person who assists them .

1. Apply the hero's journey to a text/play you're currently studying or writing.
2. Map out the central character's journey, in relation to The Hero's Journey. You may need to swap some of the steps around, but, traditionally, most Realism plays with a central protagonist will follow this journey.
3. Once completed, consider how this has changed your understanding of the character and the plot. Do most of the actions in the play revolve around this character and the Hero's Journey? Do the people or the place around the character change depending on where they are at in the journey? Does the tension change depending on what stage they are at?

## **Devising Task: Text Messages**

1. Pick 2 characters from the play you are currently studying/making.

For example:

Mum + Daughter

Dad + Daughter

Friend + Friend

2. Pick a scenario from the play that the two characters could talk about over text message. Write 10-12 lines of text message dialogue about that scenario between them. Try and make it clear who is talking and what they are talking about.

For example:

Romeo: Hi J. When can I come over?

Juliet: Not now, my Mum is here. I'll let you know later.

Romeo: I need to talk to you. I did something really bad.

Juliet: Did you get in a fight again?

3. Brainstorm how you would stage your text message scene using the Realism conventions. How would you stage the two people texting to one another? Where would you put this scene in the existing work? What new information/insight into the character's feelings can you add by placing it. Could you use technology (lighting, sound, projection) to enhance your scene?

## **Character Study Task: Character Effigy**

On pieces of butcher's paper, draw a large human outline for each of the Wong family members. On the inside of the effigy, write down words and phrases that describe how they might view their relationships to their heritage, their home, and their friends/family members.

Outside the effigy, write down words and phrases to describe the *assumptions* other characters might have of them.

Now discuss how these views and assumptions intersect and sometimes clash. How does this drive the characters' motivations and attitudes?

## MAGICAL REALISM

Magical Realism sits under the style/form of Realism. It's important to first have an understanding of traditional Realism before exploring Magical Realism.

### **Definition:**

'A genre or style incorporating fantastic or imaginary elements and often unsettling images or events depicted in a sharply detailed, realistic manner,'(QCAA, Drama 2019 v1.0).

In magical realism the fantastical and supernatural exist in a realistic setting and are almost always accepted by other characters as normal.

### **Conventions:**

- supernatural intrusions into the fourth wall
- surreal transformations
- breaking out of realist action
- fluidity of space, time and characterisation

## AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC THEATRE

Australian Gothic Theatre is similar to Magical Realism. However, Australian Gothic must include tropes specific to the Australian experience, and the supernatural elements must haunt and stay while in Magical Realism the supernatural visits and leaves.

### **Definition:**

A style that has grown out of 19th century Gothic which explores the uniquely Australian spectre of our history or identity. Themes emphasise the terrors of isolation in this postcolonial land and expose a tormented communal psyche weighted by dark secrets.

### **Tropes:**

- The environment as participants / landscape as character
- Supernatural intrusions
- Themes of violence and escape
- Exploration of the colonisation of Australia.
- Foreboding mood
- Intertextuality
- The lost child

## **Devising Task: Personification**

Personification is 'the attribution of human nature or character to animals, inanimate objects or abstract notions, especially as a rhetorical figure'.

Magical Realism often uses this as a device. A play set on a farm may have a chicken that can talk or a play where the main character is a writer could be interrupted by a pen that keeps running away.

This can add to the narrative by shining a light on the inner psyche of the character or through symbolising a larger idea or topic within the world of the play.

OPTION ONE: Write a monologue from the perspective of an object. Either:

- Within the context of an existing scene, commenting on what is happening to the audience using direct address. This can be used to enhance understanding or provide an alternative perspective within a scene.
- As a stand-alone piece. You can use this in an exercise where the audience guesses what the object/animal is after viewing.

OPTION TWO: Write a duologue between a character in the play and an object or animal. Can they have an argument? Can the object or animal give the character advice? Can the object or animal have seen something in a previous scene, that they need to tell the character about?

## **Devising Task: Injecting Magic**

The Magical Realism conventions are often used to enhance the tension of a scene. They can provide more obstacles for characters to overcome, they can interrupt the 'realism' of the scenario or they can provide more information for the characters or audience.

1. Pick a domestic situation in your everyday family.
2. Consider how you can inject tension in to that situation, by applying the magical realism conventions.

For example:

Mum has sat everyone down at the dinner table to talk about something serious. The kids are in trouble but they don't know what about yet. Whenever she goes to tell them, something unseen moves all of the cutlery on the table.

3. Pick two of the magical realism conventions and write your scene.

### **Devising Task: Magical Realism and The Hero's Journey**

Similar to Realism, Magical Realism will often follow The Hero's Journey narrative structure (see page 2). A common example of this is the 'Assistance' phase, where the main character is guided by someone wise.

The difference in Magical Realism is that this may not necessarily come from a normal human character. They could be visited by a supernatural being, or a figure from history. They could have an animal or object talk to them and give them advice, or a character who has died could visit them.

1. Identify the main protagonist in the play you're writing/studying.
2. Create a moment where the character reaches the 'Assistance' phase, in the style of Magical Realism. Consider who or what can visit them and why. How are they helping the main character in their journey?

### **Devising Task: Intertextual Poetry**

Nursery rhymes and poetry are often used in Australian Gothic Theatre to enhance the mood or add symbolism to what is happening.

1. Research nursery rhymes and poems (especially Australian Poems) that could be used in the play you are studying/writing.
2. Add the rhyme or poem to a scene and justify how it enhances the mood or adds symbolism to the piece.

For example, the poem below could be used to contextualise a play set in the forrest and enhance the eery or suspenseful mood.

Bell Birds  
By Henry Kendell

*By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,  
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling;  
It lives in the mountain where moss and the sedges  
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges.*