

A Monkey Baa Theatre Company Production

Based on the book by Li Cunxin, Illustrated by Anne Spudvilas

Adapted by Eva Di Cesare, Sandra Eldridge and Tim McGarry

The Peasant Prince

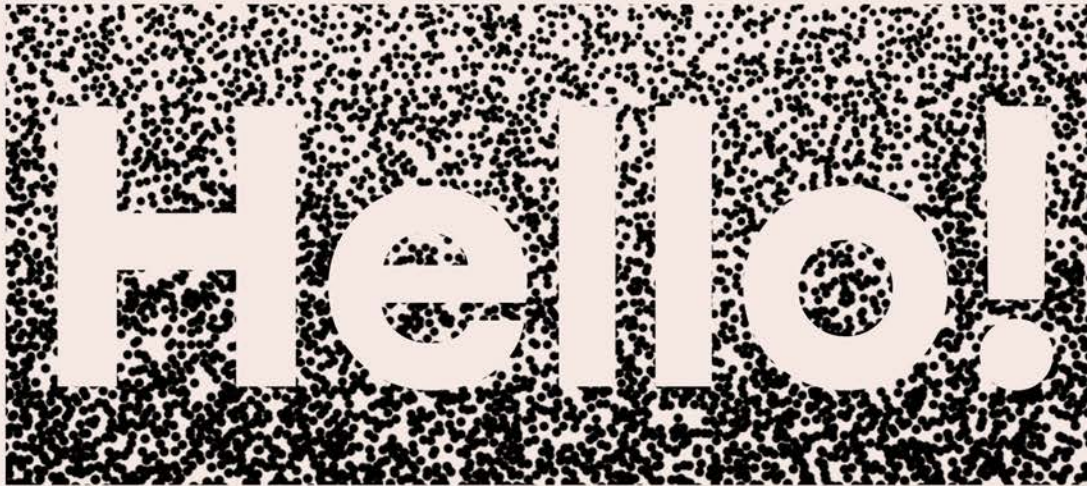


Learning Pack

For students in years 4, 5 and 6

Monkey Baa respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this nation and honours their continued cultural and spiritual connection to the lands, waters and seas. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, on whose land we work, live and share stories

Always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.



My name is Alex and I am the Learning & Engagement Specialist at Monkey Baa. I created this pack for you to explore our production of The Peasant Prince and support your work in the classroom.

This pack follows Li Cunxin's journey from China to the international dance scene and the story of the play, providing historical context, with activities for your students.

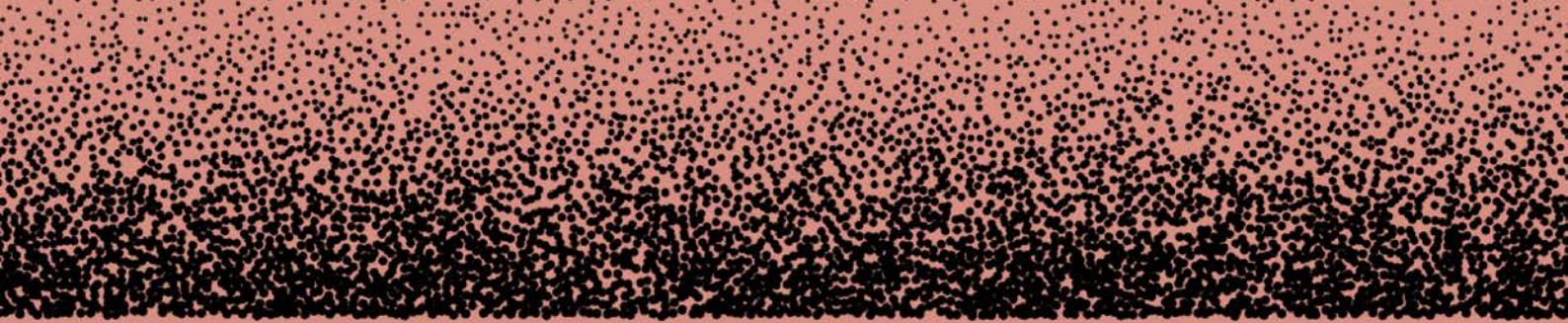
Designed for students in years 4, 5 and 6, the pack includes activities for Drama, Art, English and History, with links to the Australian Curriculum.

The activities in this pack align with the following General Capabilities and Cross-curriculum Priorities:

- Literacy
- Creative and Critical Thinking
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding
- Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia

This pack includes contributions by Tim McGarry and Egan Sun-Bin, with cultural consultation by Jenevieve Chang.





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Monkey Baa

Monkey Baa creates great theatre for young people and for over 26 years we have presented award-winning theatrical experiences that inspire and empower audiences across Australia. We are one of Australia's widest touring companies, with over 29 national tours to 135 regional and remote communities, 5 international tours and 4000 performances reaching more than 1.5 million young people.

We empower young people to shape their lives through inspiring theatre and creative experiences. We create, present and tour performances powered by imagination, with eye-opening ideas and boundless fun.

Our vision is a world where all young people are emboldened by creativity and our mission is to empower young people to shape and navigate their lives through inspirational theatre and creative experiences.



The Peasant Prince

“This is your one chance. You have your secret dreams.... Make them come true!”

The remarkable true story of a peasant boy's journey from impoverished rural China to the international dance scene. Li is plucked from his village and sent to a ballet academy in the big city. He leaves behind everything and everyone he loves, including his family. Li's courage, resilience and unwavering hope for a better life makes The Peasant Prince a story that ignites our imaginations and aspirations.

Director

Tim McGarry

Associate Director

Egan Sun-Bin

Production Designer

Michael Hankin

Composer

Daryl Wallis

Movement Director

Danielle Micich

Remount Movement Director

Lia Reutens

Lighting Designer

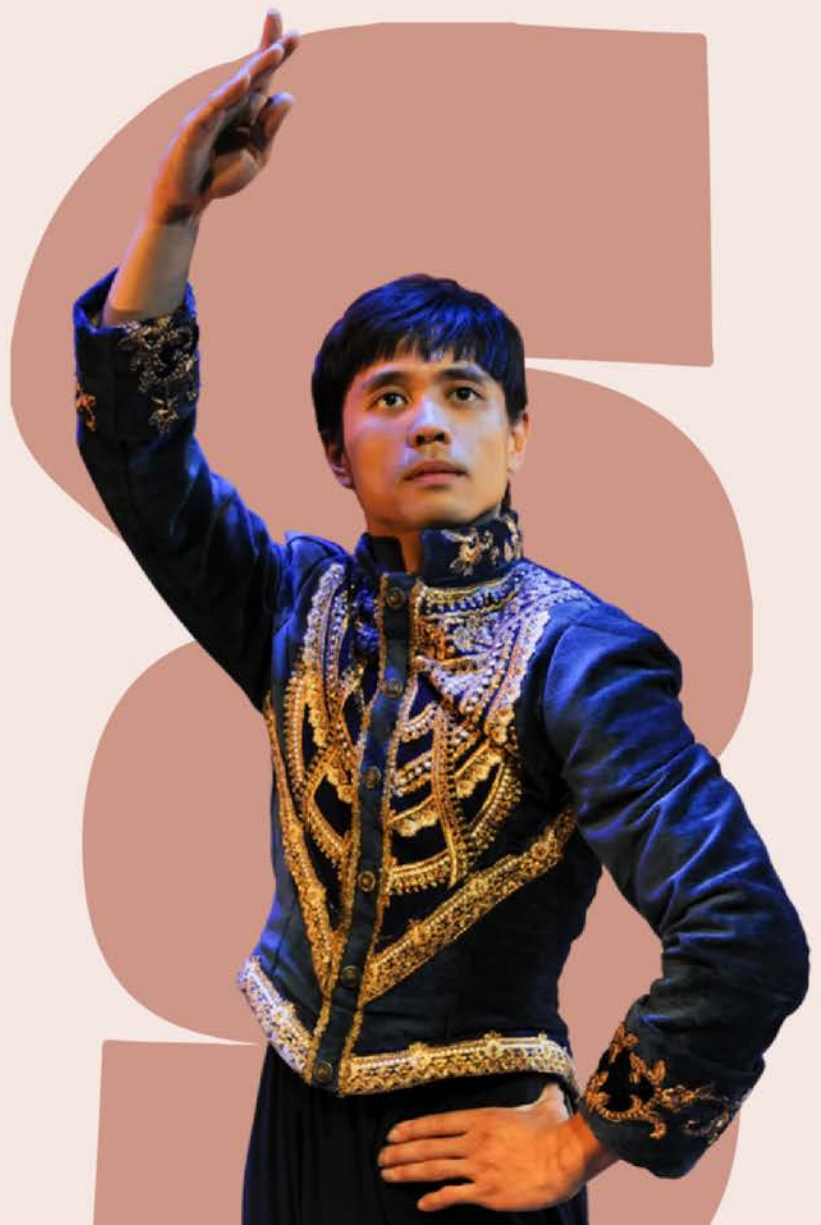
Sian James-Holland

Remount Lighting Designer

Matt Cox

Author and Script Consultant

Li Cunxin



Production Photos



Production photos by Heidrun Lohr

2016 national tour featuring performers Jenevieve Chang,
Jonathan Chan, John Gomez Goodway, and Edric Hong

Themes of the Play

Identity and Cultural Heritage

Li's identity is influenced by his Chinese upbringing, where he encounters traditional customs and expectations of his community. When he is chosen to go to a dance academy in Beijing, he faces a more city-oriented and politically charged environment, which tests his sense of self. Moving to the United States and adopting Western culture brings about a change in his identity.

Determination and Perseverance

Li's journey of becoming a ballet dancer is filled with physical and emotional challenges. He faces exhausting training, language barriers and cultural differences. Despite these obstacles, he remains determined and continues to work tirelessly to improve his skills and achieve his dream. His commitment to his goal is a powerful example of the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity.

Family and Sacrifice

Li's family makes big sacrifices to support his training. His parents face political and social pressures in China, and their love and sacrifice for their son is evident throughout the play. This theme supports the idea that family bonds and the sacrifices made for loved ones are universal.

Cultural Exchange

The play is a window into the cultural exchange that occurs as Li travels from his rural village, Qingdao, to the heart of Beijing and, eventually, to the United States. Li's experiences in the West expose him to new ideas, art forms and ways of life. His story highlights how cultural exchange can lead to personal growth and a greater understanding of the world.

Hope and Inspiration

Li's journey from rural China to international fame as a ballet dancer is a reminder of the power of dreams and hard work. His story serves as a source of inspiration for audiences, encouraging them to pursue their own dreams, no matter how unlikely they may seem.



Meet the Cast

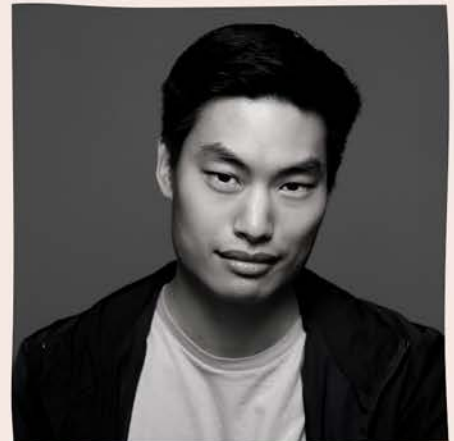
Agnes Choi

Agnes is an actor of Chinese descent who has been training since 2013, participating in programs and masterclasses at The National Institute of Dramatic Art, Screenwise and The Les Chantery Studio. Most recently, Agnes played the role of Ah Kay in the feature film *The Furnace*, directed by Roderick McKay. Before this, she appeared in short films such as *Come Up and Get Me*, *Tea Time* and *No, I Don't Want a Photo*.



Jonathan Lim

Jonathan graduated from The National Institute of Dramatic Arts' Diploma of Stage and Screen in 2021 after deciding to pursue his rediscovered childhood passion for performing. His theatre credits include performing as Hal in David Auburn's *Proof* (Theatre on Chester), as The One in *One Who Wants To Cross* by Marc-Emmanuel Soriano (Lost Thought Arts), and as Patrick Xi in *Chain Play*, a new work by Slanted Theatre (Flight Path Theatre).



Gerwin Widjaja

Gerwin's passion for performing arts emerged early in life. While pursuing a Bachelor of Information Systems, he graduated from the National Theatre's Music Theatre course. His diverse dance training includes jazz, tap and funk. Gerwin has performed at events such as *The Logies* and *Bollywood at the Bowl*. His stage credits include notable roles like Phra Alack in *The King and I*, Chantal in *La Cage aux Folles* and Gede in *Stan's Bali 2002*. On television, he has been featured in *The Very Trevor Ashley Show*, *The Code* and *Barons*. In film, Gerwin stood out as Les Girl in *Carlotta* and Tran Lo in *Without Warrant*.



Alan Zhu

In 2023, Alan starred as Lieutenant Sunderstrom in Sydney Theatre Company's *On the Beach*. He also guest-starred on Paramount+'s *NCIS: Sydney*, Binge's *Strife* and in the National Theatre of Parramatta's *The Life Cycle of Blanco*. In 2022, he played Howard in Sydney Theatre Company's *Death of a Salesman* and Young Yen in the National Theatre's production of *A Practical Guide to Self-Defence*. Alan appeared in the Screen NSW short film *We've Got Me* and in the short film *Repression*. Alan graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting) from The National Institute of Dramatic Arts.





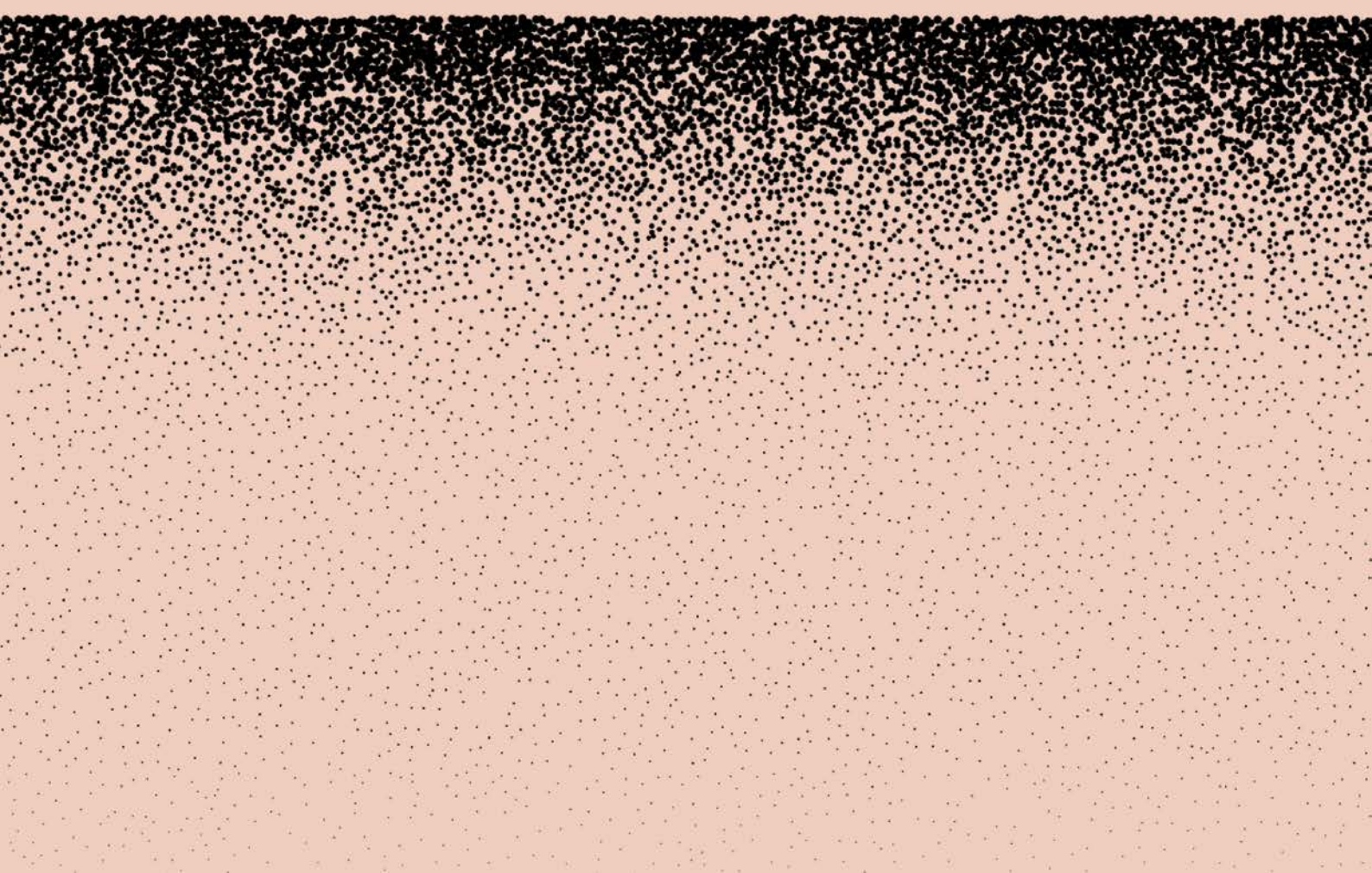
Making the *Play*

The Vision

**Theatre begins with an idea,
a spark of imagination.
This is what we call the vision.**

At Monkey Baa, our ideas come from all around us. The world we live in and the people we share it with are our biggest sources of inspiration. Many of our shows are inspired by picture books and novels by Australian authors.

The Peasant Prince is a picture book by author Li Cunxin and illustrator Anne Spudvilas based on Mao's Last Dancer. The team at Monkey Baa thought it would make a great and important play for young people, so Eva Di Cesare, Sandie Eldridge and Tim McGarry adapted it for the stage. In 2016 our production of The Peasant Prince set off on a national tour and in 2024, we brought it back to theatres across Australia, under the leadership of Director Tim McGarry and Associate Director Egan Sun-Bin.





The Script

The vision is transformed into a script by a playwright.

Just like a poet writes poems, a playwright writes plays. They create characters, scenes and plots for a play. Plays are a unique form of writing with two main elements: dialogue and stage directions. Stories are powerful and magical, letting us delve into other worlds and grasp ideas and emotions. They can teach us to walk in someone else's shoes and take us on amazing adventures.

“I first read Mao's Last Dancer in 2003 and was completely captivated by Li Cunxin's journey. Then years later, while co-facilitating a drama workshop with students from Home Hill State School in far north Queensland, I witnessed the same captivation and enthusiasm for Li's story as the Year 3 students passionately acted out a scene from The Peasant Prince. Li Cunxin's journey is a timeless story. It reminds us that it takes courage and sacrifice to make that almighty leap ‘out of the well’—a leap which saw him become one of the world's greatest ballet dancers. A real-life fairy tale.”

— Tim McGarry, Co-Playwright and Director

The Rehearsal

Once a script is developed, it is handed over to a director and the rehearsals begin.

Rehearsals are when the play comes to life in the rehearsal room, from what is written on the page to how it will be interpreted for the stage. The rehearsal time is the lead-up to the performance when it is presented to an audience and during this time, actors learn their lines and how to move around the stage, the designers come up with the look of the play's world, the composers write the music and the playwrights polish their scripts. It's all run by the leader of the show, the director, who brings their vision to life.



In the Spotlight

Egan Sun-Bin
Associate Director



“You never know, with time and care, a simple idea can turn into something really special.”

Egan is an Asian-Australian storyteller currently residing in Meanjin (Brisbane). He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Acting from Queensland University of Technology. His earlier training stems from his time as part of the Queensland Theatre's Young Artist Company from 2015-2017. His theatre credits include collaborations with Queensland-based companies such as Debase, Shock Therapy Productions, Queensland Theatre and La Boite. Recently, he served as the Assistant Director to Darren Yap on *The Last Five Years*. Egan also manages an artistic collective called The Reaction Theory, producing theatrical works where he has been credited as a writer, director and producer.

Interview with Egan Sun-Bin

What made you want to be a director?

I got inspired to be a director when I joined Queensland Theatre's Young Artist Company. In my first year, I met Jason Klarwien and Wesley Enoch AM, and they really impressed me not just because of their work, but because they were kind people. That kindness is something I see in other directors I look up to. They inspired me to always do my best. Not everyone great is kind, but I believe all kind people are great.

How do you work with actors and the production team?

I like to work with others by being generous. Making theatre is a bit like showing your parents your macaroni art—it can either make your day or make you want to quit macaroni school. As a director, I make sure to accept others' ideas generously. You never know, with time and care, a simple idea can turn into something really special.

What excites you about working on *The Peasant Prince*?

I'm super excited to be part of something that meant a lot to people like me. Li Cunxin's story was huge for my generation. Many of my friends studied the book at school and watched the movie. It's a strong story about not giving up. As an Asian Australian artist, it reminded me of my family and what many other Asian Australian immigrants have gone through. I'm happy to be part of this project and share this amazing story with new audiences.

What advice do you have for someone who wants to be a director?

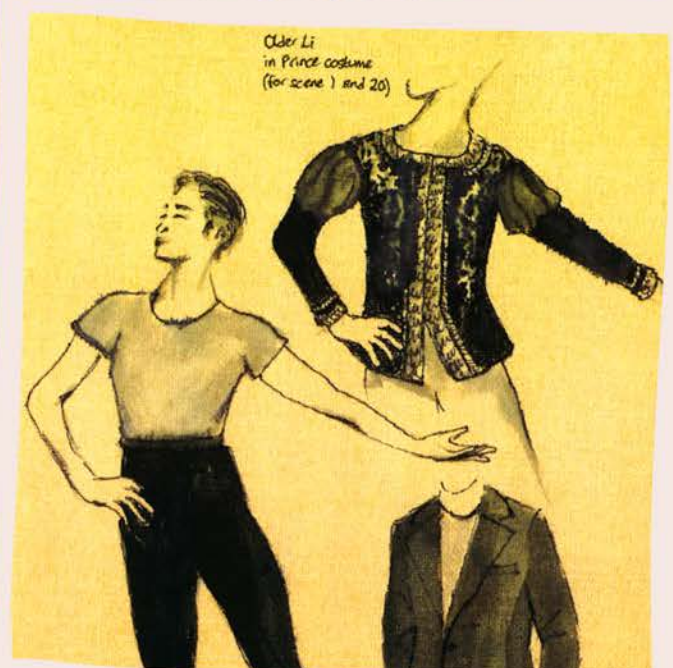
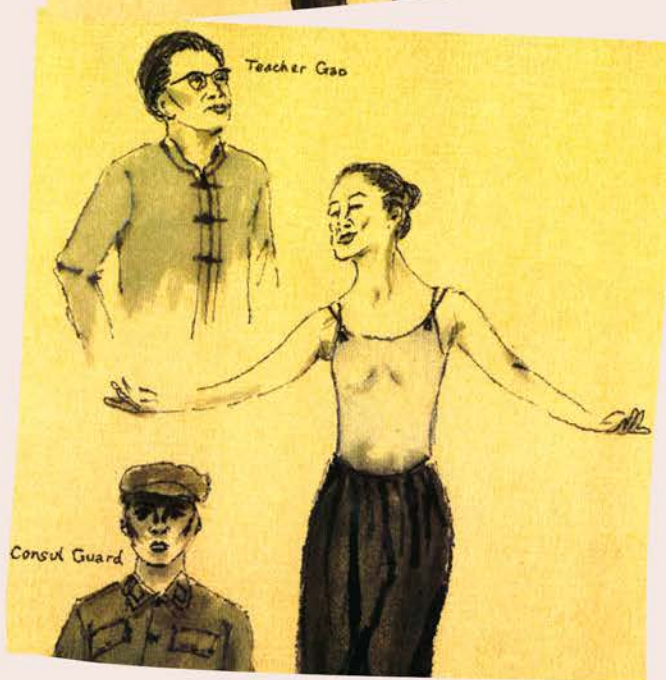
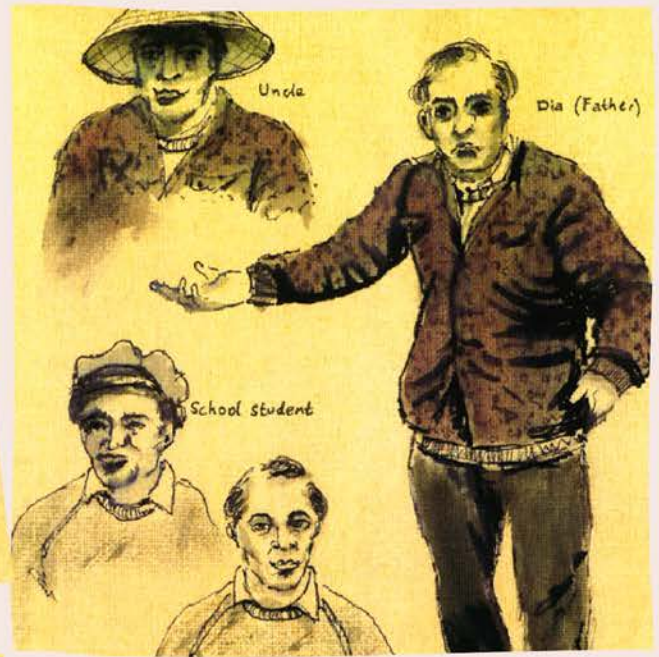
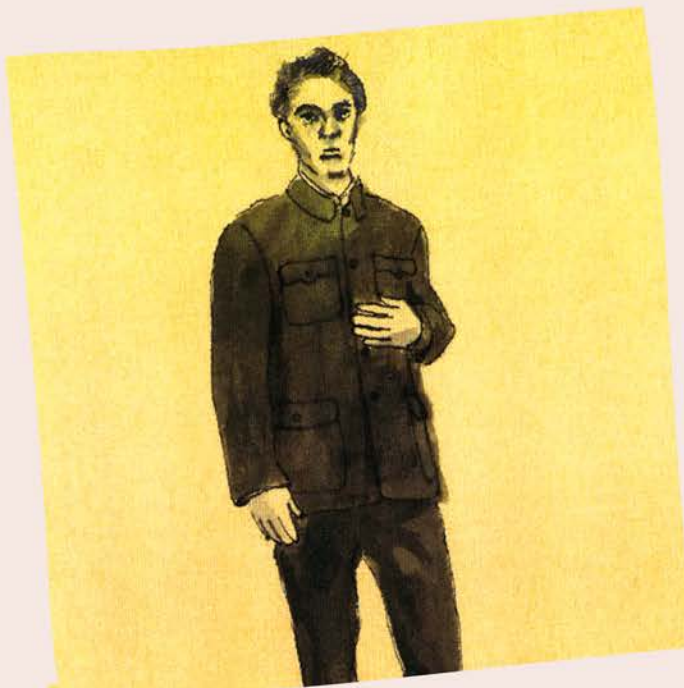
If you want to be a director, you're already on the right track. Now, think about what kind of director you want to be. Being a director can mean many things: classical works, new experimental stuff, film, theatre, arts, even museums. It might take a while to figure out your style, but start by exploring what you like. If you love it, follow it. It took me some time to find my voice as a director, but once you find it, it stays with you.

The Design

As the show takes shape in rehearsal, the designer begins to create the world of the play.

There are a lot of different types of stage designers, such as costume designers, scenic designers, lighting designers, projection designers and prop designers. Designers work with the rest of the creative team on a show, such as the director, producer and sometimes the playwright, to make the look and feel of the play's world. Sets are what create the world of the play. Costumes are the clothes actors wear that show who their characters are, they help tell the story, give actors a foundation for their performance, and let the audience know who the characters are. Props are objects used on stage by actors during a play. The world of *The Peasant Prince* was created by Production Designer Michael Hankin, you can see his amazing set and costume design below.





Historical Context

In the Spotlight

Li Cunxin

Author



From bitter poverty to the stardom of the West—the true story of one boy's great courage and determination.

Li Cunxin (pronounced Lee Schwin Sing) is a remarkable man with an equally remarkable life story. He has written an extraordinary book about his extraordinary life. In his best-selling memoir, *Mao's Last Dancer*, Li reflects on his determination, perseverance, vision, courage and hard work. He particularly highlights the sacred family values and integrity he learned in poverty-stricken China, which have led him to become one of the world's best dancers. He recounts the journey of growing up as the sixth of seven sons born to peasants, initially idolising Mao Zedong, and later defecting to the United States.

Find out more at licunxin.com

Mao Zedong's China

From 1949 to 1976, China was under Mao Zedong's leadership and the country became the People's Republic. Mao Zedong brought ambitious but controversial economic and social policies, including the Cultural Revolution, shaping the nation's modern history.

Why did the Cultural Revolution happen?

Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in China from 1966 to 1976 to strengthen his power and transform society. He wanted to eliminate traditional elements, using young people to challenge authority, causing social disruption. Mao Zedong wanted to make big changes in the country, he had a vision of everyone in China sharing the same ideas about fairness and equality. However, he believed that some people, including those within the Chinese Communist Party, were not following these ideas correctly. So, Mao initiated the Cultural Revolution to reshape the thinking of the people and eliminate what he saw as old traditions and ideas.

What was life like before the Cultural Revolution?

Before the Cultural Revolution, there were challenging times due to World War II and the Japanese invasion. The war led to widespread problems like poverty, famine and a growing gap between different social classes. Chiang Kai-shek's leadership during this time was ineffective, making it difficult to address these issues. When the Cultural Revolution started, it aimed to tackle class divides but ended up causing political and economic challenges, further impacting the lives of the Chinese people.

What unfolded during the Cultural Revolution?

Mao Zedong led the Cultural Revolution in China to protect Communism (the idea that everyone works together for a fair and equal society) by removing traditional and capitalist (an economic system where businesses and industries are privately owned) ways of doing things. The movement involved Red Guards, a student-led military movement, leading to violence and cultural destruction. Schools were closed and cultural works were destroyed, and Mao Zedong's actions led to struggle and economic challenges for many.

How did the Cultural Revolution end?

The Cultural Revolution ended with Mao Zedong's death in 1976. Afterward, Deng Xiaoping became the leader and acknowledged the problems of the past. He introduced economic reforms, moving away from radical policies and focusing on development. This marked a big change, turning China into a more economically open country while maintaining one-party rule (in which a single political party holds power).

Why does the Cultural Revolution matter today?

The Cultural Revolution had a big impact on China. It caused removal of political leaders, cultural changes and economic issues. This period is crucial for understanding modern China, as it influences politics, memory and historical understanding.



Chinese red guards during the Cultural Revolution



Mao Zedong, leader of the Chinese Communist Party



Chinese workers gather around a huge portrait of Mao Zedong

Life in Rural China

“Some time ago, in a remote village in Northern China, a small peasant boy lived with his parents and six brothers in a tiny brick house. They were very poor.”

— The Peasant Prince, Li Cunxin

Life in rural China during the Cultural Revolution was challenging. The government promoted collective farming, urging people to work and live together, sharing everything. There was a strong emphasis on conformity to government ideology, and those who disagreed were publicly criticised. People who rebelled against the government's ideas often faced severe and sometimes violent consequences.

Life became difficult as farming changed drastically and there were great food shortages. People couldn't get the things they needed to live healthily and the government controlled what information they could access. Traditional Chinese culture and customs were seen as old-fashioned and were discouraged.

Young people from cities were sent to the countryside to learn and work, as part of the Down to the Countryside Movement. 17 million urban youth were sent to rural areas and typically only the oldest child had to go, but younger siblings could volunteer.

The impact of this time continued to impact rural communities for a long time.

University teachers from Tsinghua and Beijing working to reinforce a dyke



The Beijing Dance Company



During the Cultural Revolution, the Beijing Dance Academy was founded in 1954 by the Chinese government in order to create propaganda and move away from traditional Chinese arts, which led to the suppression of traditional dance forms that didn't align with the political ideas of the time.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, there was a gradual shift in China's political and cultural climate. As the country opened up to the world in the late 1970s and 1980s, there was a great change in the arts, allowing institutions like the Beijing Dance Academy to revive and expand. The academy began to embrace a more diverse range of dance styles, such as classical dance, ballet, folk and contemporary dance.

Li's journey as a ballet dancer sheds light on the cultural changes and difficulties artists faced in a politically controlled era. It also highlights his moments of personal defiance and individual expression in an extremely challenging environment. Li's pursuit of ballet and experiences in the United States show the tensions between personal passion and government control.

Cultural Exchange: China and America

“Soon I found myself on a plane, travelling halfway across the world... I landed in a foreign city of huge highways and enormous buildings. I could not believe what I was seeing! It was not a bit like China.”

— The Peasant Prince, Li Cunxin



During the Cold War (a long period of competition between the United States and the Soviet Union), countries like China and the United States used cultural exchange programs to create international relationships through sharing of art and creative ideas even when they had political differences.

Li went to America as part of one of these programs and while there he saw a different way of life and more artistic freedom. Cultural exchange programs allowed countries to connect despite political differences. Li's tour to America and his difficult decision to defect and stay there were shaped by exposure to Western culture, desires for freedom, as well as the political tensions between China and America.

The Importance of Li's Story

“Even after all those years, the young man who had become a dancer would always remember the small boy... in a faraway place called Qingdao.”

— The Peasant Prince, Li Cunxin

Li Cunxin's life story gives us insight into a challenging period in China's history, particularly the Cultural Revolution. His story shows the impact of significant historical events on ordinary people, especially during a time of great changes in everyday life.

Li's journey unfolded during a challenging period in China and the play allows us to understand the hardships that ordinary people, like him, faced. His difficult decision to leave his family and move to America adds a personal dimension to the larger tensions occurring during the Cold War.

The play illustrates the challenges and triumphs of an individual torn between personal dreams and government expectations. It humanises history, presenting it as relatable stories about people. This educational tool helps students in understanding China's history, offering a more accessible perspective that highlights the human side of significant events. It transforms complex narratives into more relatable stories.





Classroom Activities

Timeline of Mao Zedong's Rule

Objective

Students will demonstrate their understanding of key events during Mao Zedong's rule in China by creating a visual timeline.

Materials

Pictures and descriptions of key events during Mao Zedong's rule (find a printable page with pictures and descriptions on the next page, they are purposefully out of order), poster boards or large sheets of paper, markers or colored pencil, glue.

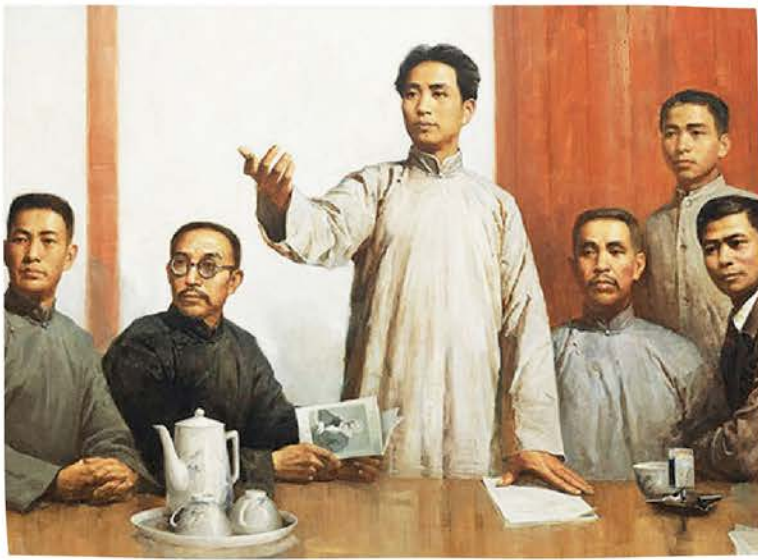
Instructions

Begin by discussing the importance of timelines in understanding historical events. Introduce Mao Zedong and briefly discuss his rule in China, highlighting key events that will be covered in the timeline activity. Explain the objective of the activity: to create a visual timeline that accurately represents the chronological order of events during Mao Zedong's rule.

Divide the students into small groups. Distribute pictures and descriptions of key events to each group. Instruct the groups to arrange the events chronologically on their poster boards or sheets of paper. Encourage students to discuss and collaborate within their groups to ensure accurate sequencing of events. Remind them to leave enough space between events for additional information or illustrations.

Have each group present their timeline to the class. Encourage discussions on why they placed events in a particular order and how each event contributed to the overall narrative of Mao Zedong's rule.

Ask students to write a short reflection on the significance of the events they included in their timelines and how these events influenced China during Mao Zedong's rule.



1921

Mao helps found the Chinese Communist Party



1937 — 1945

China fights against Japan during World War II



1971

The United Nations recognises the People's Republic of China as representative of China replacing the Republic of China



1953 — 1957

Mao focuses on economic development with the First Five-Year Plan, keeping foreign imports to a minimum and increasing industry



1972

Nixon visits China, improving relations between the two nations



1950 — 1953

China supports North Korea in the Korean War



1927 — 1934

Mao becomes a leader during the Chinese Civil War



1934 — 1935

The Long March strengthens Mao's position in the Communist Party



1966 — 1976

The Cultural Revolution causes chaos and persecution



1958 — 1961

The Great Leap Forward leads to famine and economic problems, millions died due to famine, execution and forced labor



1949

Mao declares the People's Republic of China



1976

Mao dies, and Hua Guofeng becomes the new leader

Storytelling Through Art

Objective

Students will create a visual narrative through drawings or paintings, depicting key moments in Li Cunxin's life, with a focus on cultural exchange and defection.

Materials

Information about Li Cunxin's life, particularly his experiences with cultural exchange and defection. Drawing or painting materials (paper, pencils, colored pencils, markers, watercolors). Reference images of Li Cunxin at different stages of his life (see next printable page, find more at licunxin.com). Large sheets of paper or poster boards.

Instructions

Introduce Li Cunxin and provide a brief overview of his life, focusing on key moments related to cultural exchange and defection. Discuss the concept of storytelling through art and its power to convey emotions, experiences, and perspectives.

Have students create a rough storyboard outlining the key moments they want to depict in their visual narrative. Emphasize the importance of sequencing the events in chronological order to tell a coherent story. Encourage students to consider the emotions and experiences associated with each moment.

Provide drawing or painting materials. Instruct students to begin creating their series of drawings or paintings based on their storyboard. Encourage creativity in the interpretation of key moments, allowing for artistic expression.

Arrange students into small groups. Have each student share their visual narrative with their group, explaining the choices they made in depicting key moments. Display the completed visual narratives around the classroom or in a designated gallery space. Conduct a gallery walk, allowing students to reflect on each other's artwork.

Storytelling Through Drama

Objective

Students will create a visual narrative through drawings or paintings, depicting key moments in Li Cunxin's life, with a focus on cultural exchange and defection.

Materials

Information about Li Cunxin's life, particularly his experiences with cultural exchange and defection. Drawing or painting materials (paper, pencils, colored pencils, markers, watercolors). Reference images of Li Cunxin at different stages of his life (see next printable page, find more at licunxin.com). Large sheets of paper or poster boards.

Instructions

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Li's mother and her 7 sons



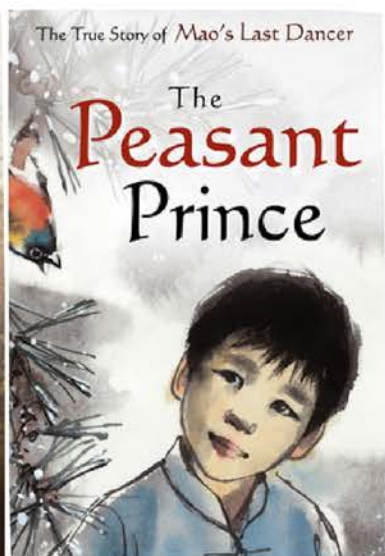
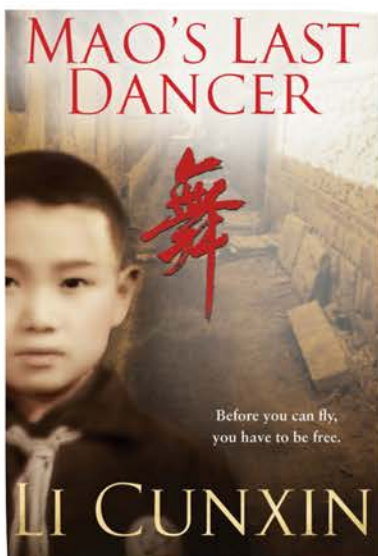
In Mao's China, Li in a Red Army uniform, 1974



Li and his Chinese partner, Guo, being coached by teacher Zhang, 1976



Li dancing with his wife Mary in Esmerelda, 1990



Li writes and publishes Mao's Last Dancer and The Peasant Prince, 2003 & 2007



Li teaching Queensland Ballet dancers

Traditional Chinese Art Exhibition

Objective

Introduce primary school students to the art of Chinese calligraphy and allow students to create their own Chinese calligraphy artwork.

Materials

Large sheets of rice paper or butcher paper, ink or watercolor paint, calligraphy or paint brushes, examples of Chinese calligraphy artwork and Chinese characters reference (see next printable page).

Instructions

Begin the lesson by discussing Chinese calligraphy and its cultural significance. Show examples of traditional Chinese calligraphy artwork.

Demonstrate basic calligraphy techniques, such as holding the brush, applying different levels of pressure, and creating various strokes (e.g., horizontal, vertical, diagonal). Show how strokes come together to form characters.

Distribute large sheets of paper to each student. Provide ink or watercolor paint and brushes. Encourage students to choose a Chinese character from the following page to write in calligraphy.

Ask students to share their artwork with the class. Discuss the diversity of strokes and artistic interpretations. Encourage reflection on their experiences with Chinese calligraphy.

Traditional Chinese Art

Traditional Chinese art, spanning three millennia, showcases China's rich history. Despite changes in techniques and global influences, it has always featured unique qualities such as a love for nature, moral themes, simplicity, skilled brushwork, and recognisable images such as lotus leaves and dragons. Chinese art focuses on expressing philosophical ideas rather than perfection, with calligraphy as one of its most highly respected forms. Calligraphy is the art of writing, see examples below.



Happiness



Hero



Long life



Dream



Faith



Friendship

Time Capsule of Reflection

Objective

Students will reflect on their understanding of history, empathy, and cultural understanding by writing letters to their future selves, incorporating insights gained from stories like Li Cunxin's.

Materials

Writing materials (paper, pens, envelopes), information about Li Cunxin's life and journey, a secure container or box for storing sealed envelopes.

Instructions

Begin by discussing the concepts of empathy and cultural understanding. Introduce Li Cunxin's life journey and discuss how stories like his can broaden perspectives and promote empathy. Emphasise the significance of reflecting on our understanding of history and its impact on personal growth.

Have students write letters to their future selves, incorporating reflections on empathy, cultural understanding, and the impact of historical narratives. Encourage them to include specific examples or insights from Li Cunxin's story that resonated with them. Allow students to decorate or personalise their letters to make them more meaningful.

Instruct students to seal their letters in envelopes. Collect the sealed envelopes and place them in a secure container or box. Discuss the importance of revisiting these letters in the future as a means of self-reflection and personal growth.

Character Diary

Objective

Students will develop a deeper understanding of the Cultural Revolution by immersing themselves in the perspective of a fictional character living in China during Mao's rule.

Materials

Background information on the Cultural Revolution, writing materials (paper, pens, or access to a computer), visual aids or pictures representing the Cultural Revolution era.

Instructions

Provide an overview of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China, focusing on key events, policies, and the impact on individuals' lives. Discuss the concept of empathy and historical perspective, emphasising the importance of understanding the experiences of people during this difficult period.

Instruct students to create a fictional character who would have lived in China during Mao's rule. Encourage them to consider the character's background, occupation, family situation, and political beliefs. Discuss the importance of authenticity in portraying the experiences of individuals from various social backgrounds during the Cultural Revolution. Show visual aids or pictures to inspire students in developing their characters.

Have students imagine a specific day during the Cultural Revolution and write a diary entry from the perspective of their fictional character. Encourage them to include details about their character's daily life, interactions with others, experiences with political campaigns, and personal thoughts and emotions. Remind students to consider the broader historical context and the impact of Mao's policies on their character's life.

Allow students to share excerpts from their diary entries with the class. Facilitate a class discussion on the diversity of experiences during the Cultural Revolution.

Historical Letter

Objective

Students will gain insight into the personal experiences, challenges, and emotions of individuals living during the Cultural Revolution by writing a historical letter as if they were a person associated with the Beijing Dance Academy.

Materials

Background information on the Cultural Revolution, writing materials (paper, pens, or access to a computer) visual aids or pictures representing the Cultural Revolution era.

Instructions

Provide a brief overview of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China, emphasising its impact on cultural institutions like the Beijing Dance Academy. Discuss the importance of personal narratives in understanding historical events and fostering empathy.

Assign each student a role as a person associated with the Beijing Dance Academy during the Cultural Revolution. This could be a dancer, teacher, administrator, or even a student affected by the political climate. Instruct students to conduct brief research on their assigned roles, focusing on the experiences, challenges, and emotions that individuals in those positions may have faced.

Ask students to write a historical letter to a friend or family member, dated during the Cultural Revolution, describing their experiences. Encourage them to incorporate details about their daily life, interactions with others, challenges faced due to political campaigns, and their emotional state during this tumultuous time. Remind students to consider the impact of political policies on cultural institutions and how it affected their character's life.

Allow students to share their letters with the class. This can be done through reading aloud or displaying excerpts. Facilitate a class discussion on the diversity of experiences portrayed in the letters.

Interview with Li

Objective

Students will gain a deeper understanding of Li Cunxin's experiences at the Beijing Dance Academy by imagining and conducting a fictional interview with him.

Materials

Information about Li Cunxin's life and journey, particularly his time at the Beijing Dance Academy, writing materials (paper, pens, or access to a computer).

Instructions

Provide an overview of Li Cunxin's journey, focusing on his experiences at the Beijing Dance Academy. Discuss the role of interviews in understanding individuals' perspectives and experiences.

Instruct students to conduct research on Li Cunxin's experiences at the Beijing Dance Academy, focusing on key events, challenges, and moments of growth. Ask students to create a list of interview questions they would ask Li Cunxin, considering both his personal experiences and the broader historical context.

Have students write a fictional interview with Li Cunxin, including both the questions and his responses. Encourage them to incorporate details about Li Cunxin's emotions, challenges faced, and significant moments during his time at the Beijing Dance Academy. Remind students to consider the cultural and historical background of China during that period.

Arrange students into pairs or small groups. Have students exchange their interviews for peer review, providing constructive feedback on the authenticity, depth, and clarity of the questions and responses. Allow time for students to revise and improve their interviews based on peer feedback.

Select a few students to share their interviews with the class. Conduct a class discussion on the insights gained from the fictional interviews.

Creating a Play

Objective

Students will explore dramatic storytelling by adapting a specific part of Li Cunxin's life into a short play. This activity aims to enhance students' understanding of Li Cunxin's experiences while fostering creativity, collaboration, and theatrical skills.

Materials

Information about Li Cunxin's life, writing materials (paper, pens), performance space or an area for rehearsing, optional: Costumes, props, or simple set elements.

Instructions

Briefly review key events in Li Cunxin's life, emphasising the chosen period or event for adaptation. Discuss the elements of a play, including characters, setting, conflict, and resolution.

Divide students into small groups. Assign each group a specific part of Li Cunxin's life to adapt into a short play. Instruct groups to research their assigned period or event, gathering details to accurately portray the context and characters.

Guide students in the process of scriptwriting, emphasising dialogue, character development, and the inclusion of key events. Encourage creativity while ensuring that the adaptation remains faithful to the historical context. Discuss the importance of a compelling opening, rising action, climax, and resolution in their scripts.

Allocate time for each group to rehearse their short plays. Encourage students to consider blocking, movements, and expressions to enhance the dramatic elements. Provide constructive feedback on performance, delivery, and overall storytelling.

Instructions (cont.)

Organise a performance day where each group presents their short play to the class. After each performance, facilitate a brief discussion allowing students to share insights into their creative process, the challenges they faced, and what they learned about Li Cunxin's life through the adaptation.

Lead a reflective discussion on the challenges and successes of adapting Li Cunxin's life into short plays. Discuss how the adaptation process deepened their understanding of historical events and characters. Explore the impact of theatrical elements on storytelling and empathy.



A graphic of four stylized, light pink mountain peaks of varying heights, arranged in a row. The text is overlaid on these peaks.

**Looking
for More?**

Classroom Workshops

Our classroom workshops reach thousands of students across Australia, bringing the magic of theatre making to young people everywhere.

Our dynamic workshops empower students to build courage through creativity while developing skills across all areas of theatre making. From Early Learning through to Stage 6, our fun workshops can be tailored to suit all students' needs, abilities and areas of study. Our one-hour workshops are priced at \$15 + GST per student, with a maximum capacity of 30 students and a minimum charge of \$300 per workshop. Book a workshop for any day of the year, anywhere in Australia!

Our show workshops

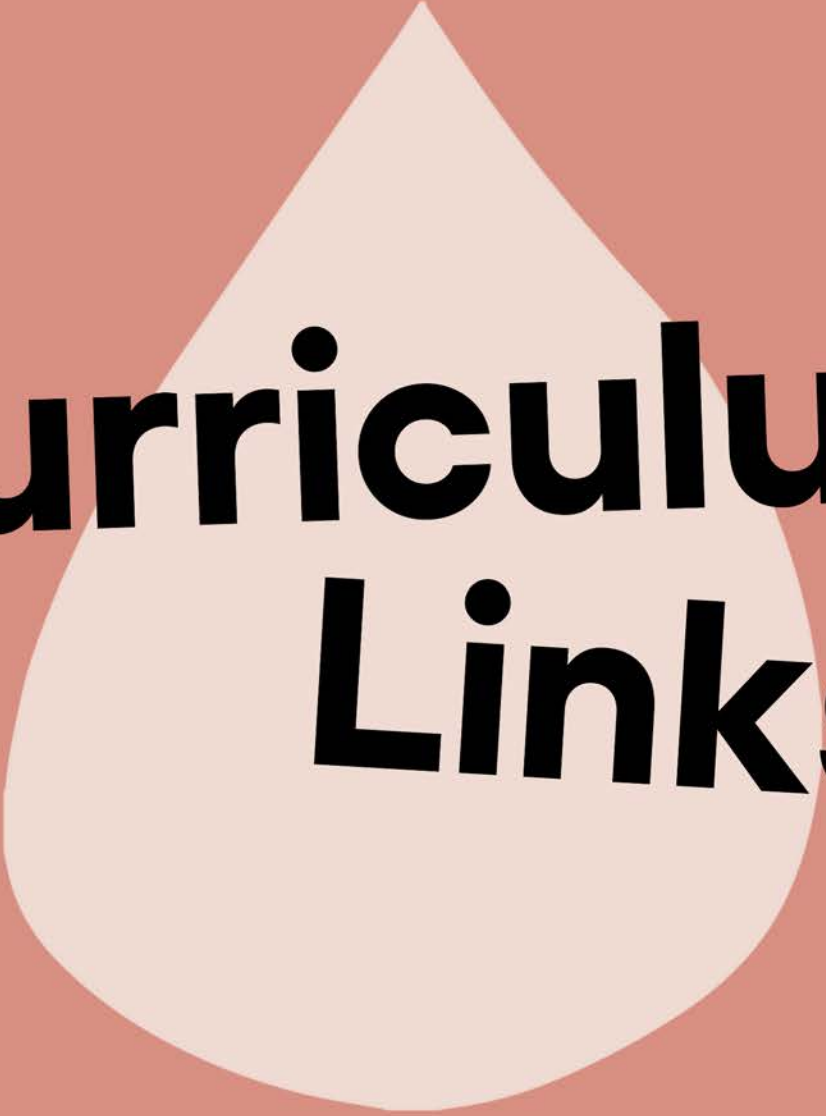
Immerse your students in the themes of our shows with our engaging and interactive workshops! Designed to complement classroom learning, our show-based workshops explore themes through games and activities, and can be tailored to support any area of study.

Our theatre making workshops

Join the theatre making magic with our interactive workshops! Designed to take students behind the scenes, our hands-on programs cover a range of skills. Customisable to complement any area of study, they're perfect for classroom learning.

Contact alex@monkeybaa.com.au for more info.





Curriculum *Links*

Australian Curriculum links

Year 4

Learning area	Outcomes
English	Language Understand that spoken, visual and written forms of language are different modes of communication with different features and their use varies according to the audience, purpose, context, and cultural background. Identify language that can be used for appreciating texts and the qualities of people and things. Identify visual representations of characters' actions, reactions, speech and thought processes in narratives, and consider how these images add to or contradict or multiply the meaning of accompanying words. Literature Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas, and relationships. Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view. Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension. Literacy Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative, and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features.
Humanities & Social Sciences	History Examine information to identify different points of view and distinguish facts from opinions. Interpret data and information displayed in different formats, to identify and describe distributions and simple patterns. Present ideas, findings and conclusions in texts and modes that incorporate digital and non-digital representations and discipline-specific terms.
The Arts	Drama Explore ideas and narrative structures through roles and situations and use empathy in their own improvisations and devised drama. Use voice, body, movement, and language to sustain role and relationships and create dramatic action with a sense of time and place. Shape and perform dramatic action using narrative structures and tension in devised and scripted drama, including exploration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drama. Identify intended purposes and meaning of drama, starting with Australian drama, including drama of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, using the elements of drama to make comparisons.

Australian Curriculum links

Year 5

Learning area	Outcomes
English	Language Understand that patterns of language interaction vary across social contexts and types of texts and that they help to signal social roles and relationships. Understand how texts vary in purpose, structure, and topic as well as the degree of formality. Literature Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural, and historical contexts. Present a point of view about literary texts using appropriate metalanguage and reflecting on the viewpoints of others. Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses. Create literary texts using realistic and fantasy settings and characters that draw on the worlds represented in texts students have experienced. Literacy Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative, and persuasive print and multimodal texts, choosing text structures, language features, images and sound appropriate to purpose and audience.
Humanities & Social Sciences	History Sequence information about people's lives, events, developments, and phenomena using a variety of methods including timelines. Examine primary sources and secondary sources to determine their origin and purpose. Examine different viewpoints on actions, events, issues, and phenomena in the past and present. Evaluate evidence to draw conclusions.
The Arts	Drama Explore dramatic action, empathy, and space in improvisations, playbuilding and scripted drama to develop characters and situations. Develop skills and techniques of voice and movement to create character, mood and atmosphere and focus dramatic action. Rehearse and perform devised and scripted drama that develops narrative, drives dramatic tension, and uses dramatic symbol, performance styles and design elements to share community and cultural stories and engage an audience.

Australian Curriculum links

Year 6

Learning area	Outcomes
English	Language Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects. Literature Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social, and cultural contexts. Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways. Literacy Compare texts including media texts that represent ideas and events in different ways, explaining the effects of the different approaches. Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text. Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative, and persuasive texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images, and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience.
Humanities & Social Sciences	History Sequence information about people's lives, events, developments, and phenomena using a variety of methods including timelines. Examine primary sources and secondary sources to determine their origin and purpose. Examine different viewpoints on actions, events, issues, and phenomena in the past and present. Evaluate evidence to draw conclusions.
The Arts	Drama Explore dramatic action, empathy, and space in improvisations, playbuilding and scripted drama to develop characters and situations. Develop skills and techniques of voice and movement to create character, mood and atmosphere and focus dramatic action. Rehearse and perform devised and scripted drama that develops narrative, drives dramatic tension, and uses dramatic symbol, performance styles and design elements to share community and cultural stories and engage an audience. Explain how the elements of drama and production elements communicate meaning by comparing drama from different social, cultural, and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drama.

