Spare Parts Puppet Theatre’s

Blueback

Adapted by Peta Murray from the book by Tim Winton

---

Teachers Resources

A comprehensive set of classroom activities relating to the performance of Blue Back
Devised by Rebecca Palmer 2015
About Blueback
Tim Winton’s exquisite language is translated into an aural narrative between a mother and her son. Juxtaposed by a visual world transforming between underwater swims with a life-size groper and the coastal town Abel Jackson calls home.
Blueback is not only a comprehensive feast of general capability skills, it spans numerous learning areas. Lists, seasons, cycles of life, the fishing industry, sustainability, ethical understanding, personal and social capability are all very present.
The fusion of aural and visual media provides experimentation and investigation in music, the drama of the story telling using puppets and people.

The Puppet Designs
Rod Puppets, the Japanese Bunraku style of puppetry and Object Theatre are all featured in Blueback. These styles of puppetry effectively give the illusion of Abel travelling through time, across the land and deep into the ocean.

The Music
Don Hopkins is the composer for Blueback and he has used various music genres to create the soundtrack for the show. The music by Don is an original score created specially for Blueback to give definition to the sequence of events in the performance.

The Creative Team
Director: Philip Mitchell
Adapting writer: Peta Murray
Designer: Hanna Parssinen
Composer: Don Hopkins
Puppet Construction: Greg Methe
Production Manager: Elliot Chambers
Performers: St John Cowcher and Bec Bradley

About the Author
One of Australia’s most celebrated authors Tim Winton was born Perth and raised in Albany. He draws much of his inspiration from the natural coastal environments of Western Australia which make the setting for most of his books. He is a strong advocate for environmental conservation and has contributed to campaigns to protect Ningaloo Reef, Moreton Bay and other campaigns.
Information on theatre etiquette

*Blueback* is rich with links to curriculum outcomes, but the experience of attending a professional theatre production is as valuable learning experience in itself.

An important learning process for young children is learning how to behave in a public performance. We would appreciate a class discussion on what it means to attend a live theatre show;

- How is watching a play different to going to the movies?
- If something funny happens as part of the performance on stage is it okay to laugh?
- What does it mean if you laugh or cry when you are watching a play?
- How do you think the actor feel when they can sense your reaction to their performance?
- How do you think the actors would feel if you reacted in a way that didn’t fit with what was happening on stage?
- How do you think the actors would feel if they knew you weren’t paying attention?

Result: students are prepared for what a visit by Spare Parts Puppet Theatre will be like and what that means for how they should behave. Students understand that the performers feed on audience reactions and audience enjoyment of the play.

Spare Parts Puppet Theatre prides itself on being engaging and entertaining theatre for children and acknowledges a degree of responsibility if students are bored during a performance but want to be sure that students get the most out of our visit by learning what seeing a live theatre performance is all about.

It’s okay to laugh!
## Contents

Activities before the performance ................................................................. 5
Planning your unit of work .............................................................................. 5

**Language: Knowing about the English Language and how it works**

Text structure and organization .................................................................. 6
Expressing and developing ideas ................................................................... 6

**Literacy: Expanding the repertoire of English**

Interacting with others .................................................................................. 7

Interpreting, analysing and evaluating ......................................................... 7
Creating texts .................................................................................................. 8

**Literature: Understanding, appreciating, responding to, analyzing and creating literature**

Literature and context ..................................................................................... 9
Responding to literature .................................................................................. 9
Examining literature ......................................................................................... 9
Creating literature ............................................................................................ 9

Additional Resources ...................................................................................... 10
Activities before the performance

- Read the book. Find out about author. Look at Spare Parts website and YouTube videos they have posted of other performances.
- Spare Parts performance of Blueback is a multimodal/visual text. Focus on expanding your students’ vocabulary. Ask students about their understanding of the words ‘performance’ and
- Discussion.
  1. What are the 5 modes of multimodal text? (Some excellent resources in this hyperlink.) FYI - Written, Visual, Audio, Visual and Spatial.
  2. What is an ‘adaptation’?
  3. Why is the performance Blueback called “an adaptation”?

Planning your unit of work

These Teachers Resources use ACARA English Content Descriptors for Year 4 only. In order to plan for a unit of work using the relevant ACARA content descriptors and elaborations for multimodal texts for your year, follow this link –


Alternatively, search for ‘multimodal text’ on the ACARA website and apply the relevant filters for your year level.

Similarly, you may wish to look at Learning Continuum for Visual Literacy to inform your planning –

http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/generalcapabilities/literacy/continuum#layout=columns&page=8
Text structure and organisation

- Just before the big storm, Abel and his Mother write letters to each other and these are read out at the same time. Abel describes his travels and research in lagoons and oceans all over the world, his mother describes the events in the lagoon – the dolphins dying, huge tides, wild storms and the whale bones on the shore and asks Abel "What does it mean?"

Working in groups, brainstorm reasons why there are two sets of dialogue being performed at the same time.

- Create informational posters on:
  1. Breathing apparatus for abalone divers over the years. Show how they work step by step. Use technical details and expert language, details and illustrations. (Curriculum link – History)
  2. Abalone, what is the bag limit in Western Australia? When is the Abalone season? Understand how texts vary in complexity and technicality depending on the approach to the topic, the purpose and the intended audience (ACELA1490)

- Dora Jackson says that Abel has learned to be a marine biologist and knows many names for a fish. Make a slide show (or use Haiku Deck app) focusing on expert language and vocabulary for the various species of fish and sea creatures from Blueback. Include the status of marine life

- Create a class library with information texts on marine creatures. Then have students perform online research and discuss similarities between print and digital information. Identify features of online texts that enhance readability including text, navigation, links, graphics and layout (ACELA1793)

Expressing and developing ideas

- Select a part of the story not included in the play and design set... think about colours and music that you would use.

- Set Design. In Blueback, some of the sets were moveable and some were fixed. What did they represent? Why do you think the designers built them that way? Some ideas to explore - home, reef, under the ocean above the ocean. Discuss foreground and background, framing, composition, point of view. (Curriculum Link – Technology and Enterprise)

- The scene with Costello, (the abalone diver who was plundering the ocean instead of responsibly fishing), used special music and sound effects. Describe what you heard and what you think it meant. (See YouTube video in additional resources.) Explore the effect of choices when framing an image, placement of elements in the image, and salience on composition of still and moving images in a range of types of texts (ACELA1496)
Interacting with others

The performance of Blueback is a visual text. The following questions are based on information from Syllabus BITES Visual Literacy © State of New South Wales through the Department of Education and Communities.

- Work in a group on butcher’s paper to respond the following questions.
- What is the Visual Text? (Type, Mode, Source, Main Purpose: Persuade, Inform, Entertain, Date, Author, and Context.)
- How is the visual text constructed? (Structure/layout/form.) What conventions are employed? What are the techniques and visual components? Why did Spare Parts construct them this way, what choices did they make and why? What is the tone and style? How do the visual elements relate to the target audience? (Structure, form, movement.)
- How effective is the visual text? Does the combination of the modes of text achieve its desired effect on the audience? How did it make you react?
- NB. MyRead has a visual text analysis guide that may be useful when answering these questions.
  Interpret ideas and information in spoken texts and listen for key points in order to carry out tasks and use information to share and extend ideas and information (ACELY1687)

- Prepare a group presentation based on the task above.
- Plan, rehearse and deliver presentations incorporating learned content and taking into account the particular purposes and audiences (ACELY1689)

Interpreting, analysing and evaluating

Abel and his mother are in the boat when a pod of whales come by. ‘Look at that,’ said his mother. ‘We used to hunt them. Your father’s family, the Jackson’s, came here as whalers… I used to feel bad about it,’ said his mother, ‘even though it was before our time. ‘But the sea has taken its fair share of us. I think we must be even by now.’

- Devise an oral presentation, persuasive debate or an agree/disagree chart on the following topics. Indigenous way of life vs modern conservation, shark culling or whaling in Western Australia.
- List reasons for and against both perspectives.
- Collaborative group work/brainstorming Use a Plus/Minus/Interest chart to examine all sides of an issue. Highlight the positive / negative. Identify characteristic features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text (ACELY1690)

Abel’s mother Dora writes him letters when he goes to school. She writes about the life they have at Longboat Bay. The scene has his voice in the background, talking about the subjects he is studying at school with Abel counting and saying “Holding my breath.” He says, “Sometimes when I’m away in town, I can’t breathe.” What does he really mean? Discuss figures of speech and inferring. Also discuss this in terms of multimodal text – Why did they layer the dialogue? What was its intended effect on the audience?

When Abel is away researching the oceans of the world, Longboat Bay is the scene of the death of millions of pilchards – ‘If only fish could talk,” Dora says. What do you think she means? What do you think has happened to the ocean near Longboat bay and Robbers Head?
  Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts (ACELY1692)
Creating texts

• What is the whaling history of Western Australia? Design a poster – then and now comparing some of the products created from whales and alternatives used today. (Cross curriculum link – History)

• Abel studies the ocean to understand, his mother writes letters to make others understand. Letters can be powerful. Think of something that you would like to change for the better at school. Write letters to the Principal about your campaign and how it will benefit the school.

• Abel and Dora Jackson exchange many letters to each other over the years. Write a letter or an email to a distant relative and tell them a little about yourself.

• Abel wonders how long Blueback must have lived a long time to reach such a size. Find out how old blueback must have been at various times during his life. Create a table showing age to weight/size ratio for gropers or another sea creature that interests you. (Curriculum link – Science/Mathematics)

• Create a map of protected marine areas in Western Australia. Find out if they have changed over time with a Google search in Maps/Images. (Curriculum link – Geography/Mathematics)

• Research Coastal Environments, changing environments in Western Australia, mans’ impact on sea lions, groper, sharks and whales. Use a KWL Chart as a structure for examining new learning or previous learning. (Curriculum link – Science)

• Abel and his mother lived alone. Challenges of that environment are very different compared to those of towns and cities. Explore elements of environments that impact positively and negatively on a given living situation. (Curriculum Link – Geography)

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 (ACELY1694)
Literature: Understanding, appreciating, responding to, analyzing and creating literature

Literature and context
- Compare Blueback with other stories about the ocean. Explore different points of view about the subject and the reasons and justifications. Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602)

Responding to literature
- Write a blurb for the performance of Spare Parts' Blueback.
- Explore how figurative and descriptive language in the story helps to create images for the viewer. For example Abel describes a dream where his mother dies. He asks Blueback where they go, but Blueback swims down into the darkness, “his tail swinging like a gate.” Abel realizes that Blueback must have seen many things because he was so old. “All those creatures around him all those years, the boats and the people and the time that had passed out there at Robbers Head…People spoke to each other. They told stories and remembered. But a fish was different” Write an explanation - Why is it important to remember the past? Find and use at least 3 different quotes from a websearch. (Curriculum link – History, ICT) Use metalinguage to describe the effects of ideas, text structures and language features of literary texts (ACELT1604)

Examining literature
- Use a Y chart graphic organizer to explore one of the scenes in Blueback under these headings - 'looks like', 'sounds like' and 'feels like'.
- Plot analysis. Use a digital brainstorming app such as Popplet or a placemat graphic organizer as a collaborative tool for a discussion on the content descriptor below. 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 (ACELT1605)

Creating literature
- Respond to the performance on your classroom blog. “If you were Abel…If you were Blueback…”
- Write an email or a letter to Spare Parts about the part of the performance you liked the most and why.
- Combine two characters in the story in order to invent a new character and write a short story with the new character as the main character of your story.
- Abel wonders what fish think. Write a story from the point of view of a shark or a whale. Would they wonder about what humans think about? Use thought bubbles on cartoons or posters to show what different fish are thinking.
- Create literary texts that explore students’ own experiences and imagining (ACELT1607)
- Make a poster showing a combination of a plot timeline and an excitement rating chart.
- Use a comic strip or digital storytelling tool such as iMovie, to recount and sequence the storyline of Blueback.
- How many different modes of text are there in the performance Blueback? What were they? Create a concept map or poster showing the different modes of text used in the performance. (See links to multimodal text) ICT: use Popplet App.
- Use a graphic organizer to show the relationships between the characters.
- If you could have a conversation with one of the characters in the story which character would you choose and what would you talk about?
- Create literary texts by developing storylines, characters and settings (ACELT1794)
Additional Resources

The shape of text to come: How image and text work

A literature companion for teachers.

Assessment Guide for students engaging with visual and multimodal texts.

Teaching with Puppets: A video Resource for Teachers Dept. of Education and Early Childhood Development Canada

http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/earlychildhood/puppets/

ICT. Apps to use Popplet, Timeline, Haiku Deck, PuppetPals,