



THEATRE / IRAN

Manus

Directed by Nazanin Sahamizadeh

Education Resources

75 minutes no interval

Suitable for Year 10 students onwards

Compiled by Kimberley Martin, December 2018

Copyright protects this Education Resource. Except for purposes permitted by the Copyright Act, reproduction by whatever means is prohibited. However, limited photocopying for classroom use only is permitted by educational institutions. The content remains the property of the Adelaide Festival Inc. 2018.

Arts Curriculum subjects, English and areas covered and relevant IB subjects
Suggested curriculum links presented in following colours:

ACARA

Drama
English

SACE

Drama
English

IB

Arts
Individuals and Societies
Language and Literature

CAPABILITIES

Literacy and numeracy come in many forms – non-verbal, visual and embodied, the Arts provide opportunities for students to deepen their literate and numerate experiences. Viewing and experiencing performance requires Critical and Creative Thinking, and challenges Personal & Social viewpoints, Intercultural Understanding and Ethical Understandings.

Content Warnings

Contains some graphic video and live, on-stage content of violence and strong language as well as employing haze and smoke machines.

NB *Manus* is performed in Persian with English surtitles

Contents

Pg. 5	About
Pg. 7	Synopsis and Themes
Pg. 8	Production
Pg. 10	Curriculum: provocations and activities pre and post show
Pg. 14	Meet the company plus additional resources

About

SACE Stage 1 English KU1: [Learn more](#)

As Australians struggle with their responses to offshore detention centres it is important for performing arts students to experience theatre that deals with tough and divisive topics and the authenticity of the delivery in the language of the subjects.

Hossein Babaahmadi, who spent 75 days on Manus Island before volunteering to return to Iran in 2013, helped organise interviews for the *Manus* script with asylum seekers who were in the camps. Nazanin Sahamizadeh, Iranian female director, has produced a raw agit-prop theatre in which interviews with Iranian asylum seekers on Manus and Nauru are relayed verbatim by a cast of eight. At the centre of the work is the brutal murder of Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati at the Manus Island detention camp.

Director's Note

IB MYP Arts Criterion D: [Learn more](#)

We live in a world in which every three second, one person is forced to flee home. A child, a woman or a man is forced to flee to seek safety, security or simply a better life in peace and freedom. Tragedy of our time shows its ugly face when the borders are closed rather to be open to these women, men, girls and boys. For several years now, Australia has been the land of dreams to many of refugees and asylum seekers; yet Australian government decided to punish those who approach their shores not because of why, rather for how they reach there. Manus and Nauru, two offshore detention centers, have been, in our eyes, the epitome of marginalization. Keeping asylum seekers far away from the sight of others, from the eyes of the media and prevent access to them for those who could support and assist them and suppressing their voices by any and every possible mean; is what has been happening in these detention centers.

If you have left your home, your country, seeking a safe place to live in and have taken the risk of travelling on a small boat crossing the ocean, it does not matter who you are, what your reasons are to flee and what is it you are running away from. You would be seen as a criminal, deserve to be detained. For more than five years, more than a thousand persons have been affected by this decision. As the matter of fact, even in their own countries of origin, not many people know about them. The years have passed, the crisis is still there, yet the news channels have moved on.

The play, Manus, is the story of eight forgotten Iranian refugees who have been detained on their way to Australia in two islands of Manus and Nauru for more than five years now. Each of these persons reminisce their personal reasons for fleeing Iran, they recall and tell the story of all the pressure and risks they took throughout their journey and details of what they have been put through while in exile and imprisoned.

Art, probably, can bring back those shunned from the center of attention into the spotlight again.

Let us, at least, hope so.

- Nazanin Sahamizadeh, Director



Photo: Reza Ghazian & Mohammad Sadeq Zarjouyan

Synopsis

IB MYP Individuals and Society Criterion A: [Learn more](#)

Manus, is the story of eight forgotten Iranian refugees who, on their way to Australia and refuge have been detained two islands, Manus and Nauru for more than five years now. Each of these IRANIANS reminisce their personal reasons for fleeing Iran, they recall and tell the story of all the pressure and risks they took throughout their journey and details of what they have been put through while in exile and imprisoned.

Themes

- Detention centres
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Humanity



Photo: Reza Ghazian & Mohammad Sadeq Zarjouyan

Production

Style and Conventions

ACARA English ACELT1641: [Learn more](#)

Verbatim Theatre

Theatre that is created using records of true events i.e. interviews, newspaper articles, digital journalism, letters, documents and traditionally relies solely on people's reports of the subject matter.

Includes video as part of the narrative.

Venue

Adelaide College of the Arts Main Theatre is a proscenium arch theatre with the audience raked steeply from the stage level upwards. The steeply raked seating in the auditorium allows audience members an intimate and uninterrupted view of the performers from every viewpoint

Tech Insight

IB Diploma Theatre Objective 4: [Learn more](#)

SACE Stage 1 Drama Ap3: [Learn more](#)

Manus uses the motive of rain in the set design. Students could explore the idea of using water on a set during a performance and what hurdles this may cause. They should consider but not be limited to exploring:

- The final effect on the audience;
- The requirement that this is repeated every performance;
- The safety of performers, technicians and audience;
- The effect of water on the set;
- The effect of water on costume;
- The effect of water on lighting
- The effect of water on sound and vocals;
- Where the water runs off to;

- The cost of this water;
- The possibility of re-using the water and if this is a hazard or not;
- How to rig the system alongside electricity/lighting;
- The additional time added to bumping in and out and the personnel this might affect.

The company has asked for drops of water to fall at a distance of 50cm from each other across the entire stage but more heavily in the upstage two thirds. Our Adelaide Festival production team has come up with the following plans in preparation to bump in:

[**See production plan here**](#)

Curriculum

Prompt Questions & Topics to Explore Pre-Show

IB Diploma Global Politics Objective 3: [Learn more](#)

From <https://www.redcross.org.au/refugees-facts>

The information and facts below can be used as prompts for students to consider why and how people seek safety. It can also help clear up some common myths and misconceptions. These questions will stimulate rich discussion prior to clicking through to the answers for a deeper engagement with students either as a class, in small groups or individually

1. *What's the difference between an asylum seeker, a refugee and a migrant?*
2. *Is it illegal to come to Australia by boat and seek asylum?*
3. *Do all people seeking asylum come to Australia by boat?*
4. *Does Australia have more asylum claims than other countries?*
5. *Does Australia have more refugees than other countries?*
6. *Is there a queue for people who come to Australia seeking asylum?*
7. *Where do the most refugees come from?*
8. *Why do refugees and people seeking asylum move across many countries?*
9. *What is needed for someone to be granted refugee status and allowed to stay?*
10. *Do people seeking asylum come to Australia for economic reasons?*
11. *Are refugees and people seeking asylum security checked?*
12. *What benefits to people seeking asylum receive from the government?*
13. *What benefits do refugees receive?*
14. *How do refugees contribute to the Australian community?*

Video: Interviews with NSW school students explore the myths and facts around refugees and asylum seekers <http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/resources/dvd-gallery.html>

SACE Stage 2 English KU1: [Learn more](#)

In Someone Else's Shoes

Students to brainstorm, share and discuss the following:

- *What circumstances would make you leave your home tomorrow?*

- *Where would you choose to go and what would you expect as a human arriving in need?*
- *How much would you pay for this opportunity given the circumstances in the first question?*
- *What would you try and take with you?*

Students to research the structure and intent of verbatim theatre

- Prompt question: *What is Verbatim Theatre and how is it constructed?* For further information and ideas watch this excellent National Theatre Video *An introduction to verbatim theatre*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui3k1wT2yeM>

Post Show

SACE Stage 2 Drama Ap2: [Learn more](#)

IB MYP Languages & Literature Criterion D: [Learn more](#)

- Having researched the methodology of verbatim theatre, students discuss how this impacted them on the truth of what they saw, and their response as audience.
- Students discuss the way in which the playwrights Leila Hekmatnia and Keyvan Sarreshteh received the accounts of the asylum seekers that were included in this performance and challenges that would have brought in constructing the script for the performance.

Activity Ideas

IB Diploma Literature & Performance Objective 4: [Learn more](#)

ACARA Drama ACADRM48: [Learn more](#)

Create a piece of verbatim theatre

Useful from National Theatre: *A Guide to Creating Verbatim Theatre*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-a0qNEhCly4>

There are various ways of going about this (see National Theatre videos above for more information and ideas) but this is one way students could explore:

- a. Students decide on a topic that exists and is controversial in their lives. This is easiest done in the realm of the school or immediate community setting so as to have access to witnesses, people involved and others with relating accounts;

- b. Students prepare interview questions and collect interviews using recording devices such as mobile phones.
- c. Interviews are then transcribed into writing, including 'umms', pauses and other natural parts of the interviewees' speaking.
- d. These transcripts need to be experimented with in order to create an engaging narrative arc. Students should consider ways this can further come to life e.g. physicality, projection, sound, movement and other dramatic elements that will heighten the transcript content rather than just re-telling the interviews as they were.
- e. Rehearse and tighten the work until it is ready to be shown or recorded for students to review so that the process has an end goal.

After students have created and watched their piece they could discuss the following:

- How did using real account heighten this true story?
- Was the order of the transcripts effective in engaging the audience as a dramatic performance? Why or Why not? What would you change if you did it again?
- Was it limiting having to adhere just to the transcripts or did it provide truth and structure? Would you use the same system of developing the script if you were to create another verbatim piece? Why or why not?

Props and set

What item(s) could be versatile like the jerry cans in *Manus*? We see them used as set, props, chorus, instrument, screen, rises as well as being symbolic of the volatile situations revealed in the performance. Students could experiment with items to see what could be useful across these and the effect

Revisit the themes

- Detention Centres
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Humanity

Students to discuss if having explored them prior to the production did this add/distract from the intent of the performers and the production.

Student Review

For the student's review, points for them to consider in addition to normal review practice:

- Did the presentation in Persian add to the authenticity of the narrative
- You would have read, heard, discussed responses to the situation on Manus Island and Nauru, how did the production persuade you to affirm your views or challenge them
- How important it is to present theatre based on true life events

For review writing format: See Review Writing Guide doc

Meet the Company

About Verbatim Theatre Group

Verbatim Theatre Group was established in 2013 by director Nazanin Sahamizadeh to provide audiences with an opportunity to observe matters 'hidden under shadows... to be informed, to think, to remember and to be challenged.

An all-Iranian company performing in Persian, Verbatim is based in Tehran, a more progressive city than others in Iran, where theatre audiences are growing.

'Verbatim' means word-for-word – to tell the story of every person, in their own words. Manus has been staged in Qashqai Hall of Tehran's City Theatre Complex, Iran; at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala, India; and the International Theatre Festival in Chittagong, Bangladesh.

Before "Manus", the group performed "Eye for an eye", a play about a very well-known acid-attack victim and her struggles to find justice and at the same time the controversies surrounding her decision to seek Qisas(nemesis).

Performers

Cast

Ebrahim Azizi

Navid Bani

Ehsan Bayatfar

Ehsan Karami

Elham Khodaverdi

Hamid Reza Mohammadi

Nasrin Nakisa

Nazanin Sahamizadeh

Creative Team

Playwright: Leila Hekmatnia, Keyvan Sarreshteh

Director: Nazanin Sahamizadeh

Set Designer: Amir Hossein Davani

Light Designer: Ali Koozegar

Graphic Designer: Javad Atashbari

Composer: Behrouz Seifi

Additional Resources

Asylum Seekers Resource Centre

<https://www.asrc.org.au/resources/for-students/>

Roads to Refuge

<http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/index.html>

Roads to Refuge - Teaching Resources and Lesson Plans: <http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/resources/teaching-ideas.html>

Relevant Media Articles

The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/mar/08/australias-shocking-offshore-immigration-regime-inspires-play-staged-in-iran>

The Independent:

<http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/120881>

Sydney Morning Herald

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/spotlight-on-inhumane-treatment-by-australia-catches-highlevel-attention-in-iran-20170326-gv6ls9.html>

Radio New Zealand

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/328194/behrouz-boochani-'i-will-not-be-silent'>

The Daily Star

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thedailystar.net/arts-entertainment/interview/theatre-cannot-be-confined-borders-1482166%3famp>

The Hindu

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/poignant-narratives-from-a-refugee-camp/article22580160.ece>

Iran Theatre:

<http://theater.ir/en/101157>

Tehran Times

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/411023/Play-portrays-ordeal-of-seeking-asylum-in-Australia>

The Age

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/spotlight-on-inhumane-treatment-by-australia-catches-highlevel-attention-in-iran-20170326-gv6ls9.htm>