

QUEENSLAND THEATRE CO.

THE SAPPHIRES

Written by Tony Briggs
Directed by Wesley Enoch



EDUCATION RESOURCE

Co-Producer



Production Partner



The Sapphires was first produced by Melbourne Theatre Company in 2004.

Queensland Theatre Company acknowledges the Jagera and Turrbal people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, and their unique relationship with the lands, seas and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



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ABOUT THE SAPPHIRES

The iconic Australian musical returns

Four sisters from country Victoria dream of a stage far beyond their small-town roots. When their girl-group harmonies catch the attention of a big-city talent scout, their lives are changed forever.

Based on the incredible true story of writer **Tony Briggs'** mother, *The Sapphires* follows four Yorta Yorta women who blaze a trail from regional Victoria to the frontlines of Vietnam — entertaining American soldiers, breaking barriers and discovering love along the way.

Featuring '60s soul classics performed live including *Respect*, *Ain't No Mountain High Enough* and *The Shoop Shoop Song (It's in His Kiss)*, this joyous production transforms the intimate Bille Brown Theatre into an electrifying concert-style celebration — up close, personal and impossible to resist.

For more than 25 years, the multi-award-winning play — and the hit film it inspired — have captivated audiences around the world. At its heart, *The Sapphires* is a proud story of First Nations women whose talent, humour and resilience lit up a remarkable moment in Australian history — a story that, for many years, remained largely untold.

Now the beloved musical returns in a sparkling new production, with the next generation of First Nations performers stepping into the legacy of the women who inspired the story, led by original director and theatre legend **Wesley Enoch**.

Big-hearted, infectious and full of soul, this celebration of sisterhood, culture and unforgettable music builds to a roof-raising finale — and promises the **feel-good musical night out you'll love from the very first note**.

28 APR – 24 MAY 2026
BILLE BROWN THEATRE

THE SAPPHIRES

Written by **Tony Briggs**
Directed by **Wesley Enoch**

Venue

Bille Brown Theatre, 78 Montague Rd, South Brisbane

Duration

2 hours 10 minutes, including interval, subject to change without notice.

Extended Warning

This production contains coarse language and adult themes, including references to racism, war and violence. It includes the use of historical racial language and moments of threat. The work also explores themes of pregnancy, including references to abortion. There are depictions of alcohol use and smoking (herbal cigarettes are used on stage), dynamic sound effects, including gunfire, and the use of theatrical haze.

The Sapphires contains culturally sensitive stories and may include images or references to people who have passed.

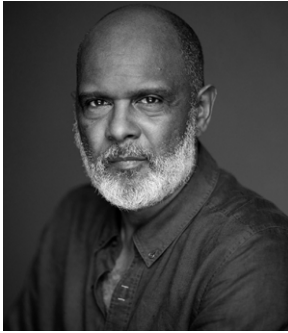
Age Recommendation

Recommended for Year 8–12, Tertiary (Age 12+)

*This Education Resource was created by Queensland Theatre Company
in collaboration with Lucy Harkin.*

WRITER'S NOTE

TONY BRIGGS
(YORTA YORTA/WURUNDJERI)



It's a thrill to bring this story back to the stage, and even more so to share it with Brisbane audiences for the first time.

Having Wesley Enoch back in the director's chair means something deeper to me. It feels like a full-

circle moment, twenty-one years on. There's a shared history in this work, and a shared understanding of where it comes from and why it exists.

The genesis of this story wasn't in writing, but in the anecdotes my mother shared with me over time, recounting her youth and the experiences she carried. In hearing them, I realised I was being given access to a part of my own history I might never have known otherwise. Writing it became a way of holding onto that, honouring it, and making sure it didn't slip away.

The Sapphires was born out of a need I couldn't ignore.

I had just come off a stage production that left the other performers and me emotionally spent. It was important work, but it carried a heaviness. I remember thinking, where are the other stories? Where are the ones that reflect who we are in full? Our joy, our humour, our pride, our strength. The stories that feel like home. Of course, those stories existed, but at the time it felt like our trauma was the only thing people expected to see on stage. As if it were the only version of Aboriginal experience worth telling.

But that's never been the full picture.

I wanted to show what I knew. Family. The way we laugh and cry together and carry each other. I wanted to humanise my community in a way that hadn't often been seen on our stages.

I kept thinking about how I felt after seeing the original stage production of *Bran Nue Dae*. That sense of pride, of lightness, of being seen properly. It stayed with me. I was inspired.

That's what I was chasing. To leave people with the same feeling. To sit in the joy, humour, and love, and recognise something real in the characters I created. Because that's who we are, too. And that deserves its place on stage.

At its heart, *The Sapphires* is a celebration of the Aboriginal community, particularly the women. Their strength, their beauty, their humour, and the way they hold everything together, often without recognition. These are the women I grew up around. The backbone of our communities. The ones who carry culture, family, and spirit forward, no matter what's placed in front of them.

This story is for them.

One of those women, and one of my greatest inspirations, was my Aunty, Naomi Mayers. Her spirit, her strength, and the way she moved through the world helped shape not only who I am, but how these women live on stage. With her recent passing, her presence in this story feels even more personal. This story carries a part of her and always will.

I've always believed our stories should hold more than just what's been done to us. They should also carry what we give to each other. The laughter, the music, the connection, the pride. The parts of our lives that bring us together and move us forward. Because there is power in joy. There is strength in choosing to celebrate who we are. Bringing this story back now, in this place, reminds me why it had to be written in the first place. And why it still matters.

— Tony

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

**PROF WESLEY ENOCH AM
(QUANDAMOOKA)**



There is a particular authority that comes with a true story in our communities. Not because it is fixed or unchanging, but because it has been carried across generations through memory, voice and spirit. In Aboriginal culture, story is our archive. It is how we remember, how we teach, and how we understand our place in the world.

The Sapphires sits within this tradition.

This is one of many true stories I've had the privilege to work on, and each time I return to it, I'm reminded that theatre is more than entertainment or distraction. Theatre is continuation. Long before stages and spotlights, we gathered to share stories that made sense of the world around us. Today, theatre still carries that responsibility, documenting history in ways that help us understand who we are now.

We live in a time where the line between informing and entertaining has blurred. The media often trades in spectacle, and so it falls to artists to hold and share

deeper truths. We see war now through our screens... constant, immediate, and often numbing. But *The Sapphires* reminds us of a moment when war first entered Australian living rooms through television, and how profoundly it shaped us who witnessed it.

At its heart, this is not just a story about four young Aboriginal women travelling to Vietnam to sing. It is a story of possibility.

Set just months after the 1967 Referendum, these women stepped into a world that had only just begun to acknowledge them. They didn't wait for permission. They chose ambition. They chose to be heard. And in doing so, they redefined what was possible.

In 2026, as we reflect on more recent moments of national reckoning, we are also witnessing the fragility of progress. Rights can be challenged, gains can be undone. Which is why stories like this matter. They remind us to stay the path. That we must keep singing our ambitions into being.

This production honours that spirit—of courage, joy, and imagining beyond limitation.

Because these stories are not just about the past.

They are about who we are becoming.

— Wesley

Watch how 'A Story That Still Resonates' comes to life in rehearsals.

Watch Wesley and the cast reflect on what it means to 'Carry The Fire'.

CAST AND CREATIVES

CAST



JACK BANNISTER
DAVE LOVELACE



RUBY HENAWAY
CYNTHIA MCCRAE



CAMERON LEONARD
ROBBY



**AURORA
LITTLE-CHRISTIE**
KAY MCCRAE



GARRET LYON
JIMMY/DANCE CAPTAIN



TEHYA MAKANI
JULIE MCCRAE



CHRIS NGUYEN
JOE



TAEG TWIST
GAIL MCCRAE

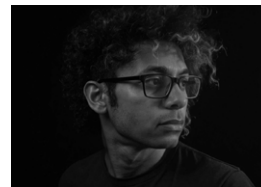
BAND



ELI BADGER
BASS



DIMPLE BANI
DRUMS



JAMES FEAGAI
KEYS

CREATIVES & STAGE MANAGEMENT



TONY BRIGGS
WRITER



WESLEY ENOCH
DIRECTOR



NATHANIEL ANDREW
MUSICAL DIRECTOR



YOLANDE BROWN
CHOREOGRAPHER



RICHARD ROBERTS
SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER



BEN HUGHES
LIGHTING DESIGNER



CRAIG WILKINSON
VIDEO DESIGNER



ISAAC OGILVIE
SOUND DESIGNER AND SOUND
SYSTEM DESIGNER



CHENOA DEEMAL
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



NJ PRICE
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER



ANDREA MOOR
INTIMACY COORDINATOR



NAOMI ANDREW
VOCAL COACH



YANNI DUBLER
STAGE MANAGER



LIALIZE DU PLESSIS
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Purpose	Context	Themes	21st Century Skills
Celebrate Empower Challenge or Provoke Educate or Inform Chronicle or Document	Sociological Political Cultural Personal	Racism Identity Family Resilience Empowerment	Critical Thinking Creative Thinking Communication

STYLE AND CHARACTERISTICS

Key styles and stylistic characteristics which are evident throughout the play as defined by QCCA Drama Subject Matter Support Resource (2026):

- Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre
- Realism
- Magical Realism
- Contemporary Political Theatre
- Contemporary Performance

KEY CONVENTIONS

- Use of Song
- Breaking out of realist action
- Dreamscape
- Direct Address
- Exaggeration
- Intertextuality
- Juxtaposition
- Montage
- Motif
- Stylistic movement
- Openness of Form

General Drama 2025 v.1.3

UNIT 1: SHARE

The Sapphires shares the lived experience of four First Nations women touring as a singing group during the Vietnam War. The production explores the diversity of Australian experiences and stories from the Asia-Pacific demonstrating hybridity of style in storytelling.

Inquiry questions:

1. *The Sapphires* shares stories of First Nations people, specifically Aboriginal women's lived experience. How does the dramatic action document the women's experiences of family, sisterhood and identity?
2. How does director Wesley Enoch shape dramatic languages of Tony Briggs's *The Sapphires* to communicate and challenge an understanding of First Nations experiences and the concept of cultural identity?
3. How does the production include hybridity of style and storytelling practices to engage audiences in communicating the resilience of characters during the 1960s?

UNIT 2: REFLECT

Inspired by real people and real-world events, *The Sapphires* provides an authentic and truthful reflection of the human condition utilising realism and magical realism which both informs and challenges audiences and invites empathy to understand others' lived experience.

Inquiry questions:

1. How does the production include stylistic features of both realism and magical realism to layer purpose and meaning for the audience?
2. How do the actors manipulate their performance skills to authentically and truthfully reflect the experience of First Nations people both in Australia and abroad?

UNIT 3: CHALLENGE

The Sapphires as a piece of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre explores how drama can be used to challenge our understanding of humanity over time.

The production demonstrates how dramatic form and style can be used to express philosophical and political viewpoints in action in society during the 1960's, inviting comparison to contemporary society and reflection on social conscience in our complex and ever-changing world.

Inquiry questions:

1. Consider how the use of dramatic languages in the production makes social comment about the historical disparity between First Nations and Non-Indigenous Australians?
2. This production is set in 1968, how does director Wesley Enoch manipulate the dramatic languages to draw parallels to contemporary social and political issues faced by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Achievement Standard

Students analyse how and why the elements of drama, performance skills and/or conventions are manipulated in drama they create, perform and/or experience.

Exploring and Responding:

- Investigate use of elements of drama, performance skills and/or conventions to communicate and/or challenge ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in drama across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts
- Investigate the ways that drama created and/or performed by First Nations Australians celebrates and challenges multiple perspectives of Australian identity
- Comparing and critiquing ways in which contemporary drama and cultural expressions celebrate and challenge influences on Australia’s identity

They evaluate how drama in a range of styles from a range of contexts communicates ideas, perspectives and/or meaning.

Developing Practices and Skills:

- Develop performance skills and/or techniques to manipulate elements of drama and/or use conventions to communicate the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions
- Reflect on their own and others’ drama or practices to refine and inform their use of elements of drama, conventions and/or approaches to shape and sustain dramatic action

Students work individually and/or collaboratively to shape and manipulate use of the elements of drama, conventions and/or dramatic structures to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning.

Creating and Making:

- Improvise and devise drama, and interpret scripted drama, using elements of drama and conventions to shape and manipulate dramatic action and convey intended ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

Cross-curriculum priorities

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority provides opportunities for all students to deepen their knowledge of Australia by learning about the world’s oldest continuous living cultures.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority engages with Australian First Nations Peoples’ knowledges, experiences, values and perspectives. Through the Australian Curriculum, students learn that contemporary First Nations Australian communities are strong, resilient, rich and diverse. It also allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to see themselves and their cultures reflected in the curriculum.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority has three aspects: **Country/Place, Culture, People**

(Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Cross-curriculum priority, August 2022)

Other Curriculum connections

Modern History 2025 v1.2

Unit 4: International experiences in the Modern World
Topics: Australian engagement with Asia since 1945 (World War II in the Pacific ends)

ACiQ V9

History, Yr 9 – 10
English, Years 10-12

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

The following references provide context for the setting of *The Sapphires*

Watch:

[Real Sapphire reveals sparkle behind silver screen gem](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7csqw2MvaR4)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7csqw2MvaR4>

[Entertainers in Vietnam](https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F03752)

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F03752>

[Australia's thoughts on conscription and the Vietnam War \(1964\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tT41P9VjdVU)

[Our Vietnam War ABC Australia](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tT41P9VjdVU)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tT41P9VjdVU>

[Vietnam - Century of service Australian War Memorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICT_dGRbuyQ)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICT_dGRbuyQ

[Pub refuses to serve Indigenous patrons \(1975\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl8b1oaUfKQ)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl8b1oaUfKQ>

[Voice of the People: The White Australia Policy \(1962\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zb8yLammAO)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zb8yLammAO>

[FLASHBACK: Martin Luther King, Jr. Gives 'I Have A Dream' Speech](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNskL7yDVlw)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNskL7yDVlw>

[Understanding the 1967 Referendum | NITV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEQT5DIPNG4)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEQT5DIPNG4>

[Yes: The Ongoing Story of the 1967 Referendum](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEzzURvJGCw)

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

[Talking about the 1967 Referendum - Behind the News](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyOYO6hNcnU)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyOYO6hNcnU>

[Acknowledging the Stolen Generations on National Sorry Day - Behind the News](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKU9rVKMxuY)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKU9rVKMxuY>

[Black Enough: Living as a fair-skinned Indigenous person](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F269NJO_L4)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F269NJO_L4

Read:

[The Sapphires: where are they now? By Gary Nunn September 2012](https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/history-culture/2012/09/the-sapphires-where-are-they-now/)

<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/history-culture/2012/09/the-sapphires-where-are-they-now/>

[Defining Moments in Australian History timeline: 1962 – 1970](https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/defining-moments-timeline)

<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/defining-moments-timeline>

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY 1:

Understanding relationships, family and identity

Ask students to work individually to create a character map of their family and their own connections.

Ask students to write their name in the centre of the page, then ask students to map their family members around their name, direct students to label their connection (for example: younger brother, mother).

After students have completed their family, ask them to consider who else impacts them and include their names and label their connections (for example: friends, influences etc).

Ask students to form a pair and share their maps with each other, as they share ask students:

- Which connection/relationship do you feel closest to? Who would you ask to help you solve a problem?
- Who on this map inspires you? Why?
- Reflect on these relationships and how they have impacted the person you are today

As a class, read Tony Brigg's character bios for the central characters in *The Sapphires*:

Gail:	Kay:	Cynthia:
The oldest Sapphire. She has a tough love approach and pushes her sisters to make the most of their talents. The bossy self-appointed manager who is stern, to the point and will never take a backward step.	The level headed one. She is intelligent, caring, and strong. Loves and protects her sisters unconditionally especially her baby sister Julie. A lonely soul, she is looking for something or someone to replace the emptiness inside of her.	Loves life and enjoys every minute of it. She is a cheeky risk taker with a rebellious side to her. Always good for a laugh with her tongue in cheek sense of humour. She glows with an outward confidence that is attractive to all around her. Especially the men. But her loyalty and complete adoration are reserved for only one man. Jimmy.
Julie:	Dave:	Jimmy:
The youngest of the sisters with a passion for singing. She can stop a room with her voice that is as sweet as honey. Timid and naive, she has a fire and determination in her belly for independence.	The talent scout. Fancies himself as a mover and shaker. He has a heart of gold and thinks he has everything under control but can't quite get it right. He falls in love with Gail.	Cynthia's ex fiancé. Cheeky, frivolous and lovable. Conscripted into the army. He tries to rekindle the romance with Cynthia again after a two-year disappearing act.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY 1 (CONT.):

Understanding relationships, family and identity



In pairs, create a character map for the characters in *The Sapphires*. Based on the bio information from Briggs, ask students what assumptions they can make about the character's status, relationships and connections.

Reflect on:

- Which characters may clash and why?
- Which characters may feel excluded or feel like outsiders?
- What pressures are these characters facing and how would this impact their relationships?

In groups of 4, ask students to manipulate movement and mood to create 5 freeze frames to symbolically represent *The Sapphires* family dynamic. Rehearse and perform.

Hint - Post Show Reflection:

After viewing the production of *The Sapphires*, allow students to revisit the above activity

Discuss as a class how Director Wesley Enoch manipulates the dramatic languages to highlight the complicated nature of the sisters relationships

- How does each sister's past experience shape them during the production? What specific stagecraft or acting skills reflect this?
- How do the actors manipulate their performance skills and expressive skills to build tension of relationships?
- How is status manipulated throughout the production? How does this impact the audience understanding of relationships?

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY 2:

First Nations experience in Australia during 1960s

Throughout the production of *The Sapphires*, the central characters express how they are treated differently because they are Aboriginal. In 1960s Australia, racism was often open, built into laws and unfortunately considered everyday behaviour. In *The Sapphires*, the audience are seeing the impacts of institutional and casual racism through the eyes of four First Nations women.

As a class watch: Defining Moments: 1967 Referendum

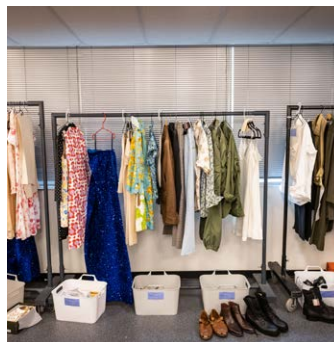
Research

- Ask students to research what 1960s Australia looked like for First Nations people. Place students into smaller groups and provide each group with a specific point of view to frame their research.
- Ask students to manipulate conventions of direct address, montage, multimedia and multiple roles to create a performance that captures 1960s Australia in the form of a news report.
- Invite students to utilise multimedia to create an authentic and culturally safe voice for First Nations 'characters'. For students who are not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent, in this instance do not ask them to portray First People, but instead find a role they can play that responds to the lived experience of Australia's First People in the 1960's, leading with empathy to ensure a respectful and inclusive environment.

Rehearse and perform.

As a class discuss:

- How do you think these laws and public opinion influenced Australians at the time?
- Do you think these past points of view impact First Nations people today?



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY 3:

Manipulating Mood

Throughout *The Sapphires*, music is manipulated to layer mood and continue the narrative for the audience. Music is layered at specific moments in the performance to engage the audience in the dramatic meaning and purpose.

Ask students to select one of the songs below which are performed in *The Sapphires*. Once students have listened to their song and read the lyrics, ask the students to choose 30 seconds to a minute of the song that creates a specific mood (alternatively, you as the teacher can provide students with a specific song and specific mood)

Respect – Aretha Franklin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A134hShx_gw

Ain't No Mountain High Enough – Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABfQuZqq8wg>

People Make The World a Better Place – Juanita Tippins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pU4iYSqseic>

Hold On, I'm Coming – Sam & Dave

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AREppyQf5uw>

Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud – James Brown

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



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY 3 (CONT.):

Manipulating Mood

Ask students to create stylised movement to accompany their music that creates their mood. Explain to students that their movement can feature a montage of moments, encourage students to use literal and symbolic movements to create their movement piece. After 10 minutes of devising, ask students to add the conventions of repetition and exaggeration into their movement piece. Give students time to rehearse and present to the class.

After performances, ask students to reflect on each other's performances:

- How do the actors layer their mood through their choices in expressive skills?
- Was there a particular moment in their performance that drew your focus as an audience member? Why?
- What meaning did you as an audience member start to create from the use of song, mood and movement?

Listen to the 2013 interview with playwright Tony Briggs and his mother Laurel Robinson, a real-life Sapphire, as part of press for the film version of *The Sapphires*.

As a class discuss:

- Why do you think Tony would choose the songs above to include in the play?
- Why do you think the experience of the First Nations sisters is paralleled with sounds and messages of Motown/Soul music?

Hint - Post Show Reflection:

- What do you believe is the key message of the play?
- What does the production tell us as an audience about: Racism? Family? Belonging? Inclusivity?
- Do you think Gail, Cynthia, Kay and Julie had the same childhood experience? What assumptions/conclusions can you draw about their experience?
- How was meaning created when Dave's voiceover plays as Gail reads his letter? How did the manipulation of stage craft build tension and layer mood?
- How does Wesley create a social comment throughout the production? Consider the use of sound, multimedia and juxtaposition?
- What insight did you gain about First Nations peoples experiences of prejudice? What specific moments of action captured this?
- Did any of the characters parallel people in real life, past or present?
- How did you feel as an audience member when Gail, Cynthia, Kay and Julie all experience discrimination throughout the play?
- During the medley before the end of Act One, the 'war' overshadows and even interrupts *The Sapphires* performance, with the action ending when Julie says: "I wanna go home." How did the juxtaposition of the performance and war layer meaning for the audience?
- How did the use of music and lighting impact the production?
- Were there moments of the production that challenged you as an audience member?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY 1:

Key Moments and Recall

As a class ask students to brainstorm all the key moments in *The Sapphires*. Ask students to work in groups of 4 – 5 and select 5 key moments from the class brainstorm. In groups ask students to create one freeze frame for each moment from one characters' perspective (Gail, Cynthia, Kay, Julie, Dave). Then progressively ask students to:

- Add in one movement for each freeze frame
- Add one piece of dialogue for each freeze frame
- Add a moment of repetition
- Add a moment of unison
- Add a transition between each freeze frame
- Add music

Present to the class. Discuss why these moments were chosen as key moments and how they have an impact on students as audience members.

Ask the class to discuss:

- How does the characters' experiences make us feel?
- What do you think the purpose of the performance was?
- How do you think this performance will create meaning for a 2026 audience?



POST-SHOW ACTIVITY 2:

World beyond the play

As a playwright, Tony Briggs makes many choices to manipulate time and place to create a climactic structure. This structure involves an exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and a resolution to build tension to engage an audience in a story. As a result of this form, in *The Sapphires* action occurs that the audience does not see yet this action impacts the character's motivation and purpose.

Considering the key moments from the previous activity ask the class to brainstorm moments of action that were not included in the play but contribute to Gail, Cynthia, Kay and Julie's characters journey.

Ask students to consider the given circumstances of *The Sapphires*. Direct students to consider how they can use Realism conventions such as objectives and motivation to help build the dramatic action of the moment.

Possible moments include:

- Gail and Cynthia at work before their gig
- Telling their mum they are going to Vietnam
- Julie on a date
- Cynthia and Jimmy before the war
- Kay and her American Soldier saying goodbye
- Julie writing a letter to her mum
- Gail finding out that Dave has been injured

Ask students to individually devise a short moment of action for one unseen moment. In groups of 4 - 5, ask students to share their moment and decide on one to create. Ask students to consider the set design of *The Sapphires* and use space in a similar way.



POST-SHOW ACTIVITY 3:

Music as a way of layering meaning

Read the interview below with Nathaniel Andrew, Musical Director as he discusses his process for the production of *The Sapphires*.

When performers first approach this style of music, what do they tend to discover or have to adjust?

When performers first step into this style, one of the biggest discoveries is that it's not just about singing the notes "correctly", it's about understanding and feeling where the music comes from and what it carries with it. In *The Sapphires*, we're working at the intersection of African American soul traditions and Aboriginal/Yorta Yorta cultural expression, and each of those has its own deep history, meaning, and unique ways of being performed.

There's an initial adjustment where performers realise they need to hold both respect and freedom at the same time. On one hand, there's a responsibility to honour the cultural integrity of the music, and to treat it with care, awareness, and intention. On the other, the music only really comes alive when performers bring their own voice and identity into it. Finding that balance is a big part of the process.

What's beautiful is that once that understanding settles in, the music invites honesty. It asks performers to show up as themselves vocally, physically and emotionally, while also blending into a shared sound. The harmonies and choreography really reinforce that idea of individuality within a collective; everyone has their own colour, but together it creates something cohesive and powerful.

I think the biggest shift performers experience is realising how much vulnerability is required. You can't sit on top of this music, you have to be inside it. And when they allow themselves to be fully present, while still holding respect for the cultures they're representing, that's when the groove deepens. That's when it stops being something you perform and becomes something you feel, and the audience feels that immediately too.

Can you describe a moment in rehearsal where something evolved over time - and how you guided that change?

One of the most interesting things to watch in rehearsal is how tentative the first musical exchanges can be. When performers first start singing together, there's often this gentle "offering", almost like giving just enough as bait and waiting to see what comes back. No one wants to overstep too early. But over time, as trust builds, those small offerings start to grow. The energy gets shared more freely, and suddenly what began as cautious fragments turns into a really cohesive, unified sound.

A big part of that evolution has been figuring out how each performer connects to their character, and how that connection shapes the way they sing. Everyone brings something completely individual (their own tone, instincts, emotional access) and a fun challenge has been guiding that into something that feels truthful to both the character and the overall world of the show.

Early on, there's also a tendency to "perform" the music straight away, to act it out before it's fully settled in the body. That can create a surprising amount of physical and emotional tension, which actually gets in the way of the voice. So part of the process has been gently peeling that back by creating space for the performers to explore the music without forcing it, and making sure we're looking after their vocal and physical wellbeing at the same time.

One really tangible way this showed up was in how we approached language and the difference between how we say words and how we sing them. Small shifts in pronunciation can completely change how the voice sits, how the sound resonates, and how the energy moves through the body. We spent time experimenting with that together, finding the most natural and resonant way for each performer to deliver certain phrases. And as those adjustments settled, you could see the shift to more ease, more confidence, and a fuller, more connected sound emerging across the group.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY 3 (CONT.):

Music as a way of layering meaning

What does it physically feel like when someone is singing this music in a way that really lands?

When it really lands, you don't just hear it, you feel it with your whole body. The mind kind of steps aside and something more instinctive takes over. You're not analysing anymore, you're just experiencing. There's often a physical response that happens without you even realising, a smile creeping in, your chest tightening a little, your eyes welling up, or your foot starting to tap along. Even something as simple as suddenly remembering to breathe more deeply. The music bypasses all the usual filters and goes straight to the soul. And when that happens in the room, you can feel everyone be together in the moment as one.

What's something about this music that audiences might not immediately realise?

I think one thing audiences might not immediately realise is that this music isn't just entertainment, it's a direct reflection of lived cultural experience. In the context of *The Sapphires*, it carries the voices and perspectives of four Yorta Yorta women, but it also connects to the broader histories of both Aboriginal and African American communities.

These songs act almost like a soundtrack to moments of change, resistance, joy and survival. They sit alongside real historical shifts that have shaped who gets to be in the room, who gets to be heard, and who gets to tell their story. It really wasn't that long ago that a space like this, with these stories being centred and celebrated, wouldn't have existed in the same way. So there's something quite powerful about recognising how far things have come, while also understanding there's still more work to do.

There's also a layer within the music that isn't always obvious on first listen. A lot of these songs carry coded meaning, messages that sit just beneath the surface. They can be playful and joyful on the outside, but underneath they're often telling deeper stories, offering different interpretations depending on how you listen. And part of the richness of this music is that it allows all of those layers to exist at once.

What do you hope the audience feels in their body when the music is really landing?

Love and happiness.



As a class consider:

- How is the true lived experience which the production is based on captured?
- How was the stage action extended through the manipulation of live music?
- How did Wesley's directorial choices capture as Nathaniel describes "real historical shifts that have shaped who gets to be in the room, who gets to be heard, and who gets to tell their story"?
- What moments of the production capture the celebration of culture that Nathaniel discussed?
- How was lighting design and costume design used to enhance the experience for the four Yorta Yorta women this moment?
- How was symbol and contrast manipulated in the performance by Wesley to layer meaning?
- Reflecting on Nathaniel's answers, how were dramatic languages manipulated to make a social comment?

Step inside the rehearsal room — and watch how the 'Sound of Soul' comes alive.

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA QUESTIONS

Human Context: Role, Relationships, Situation

- How are the relationships of the sisters influenced by status?
- The audience meet Gail, Cynthia, Kay and Julie before they depart for war-torn Vietnam, how are their roles and relationships communicated to the audience through their performance and expressive skills?
- How is Joe's role and situation communicated to the audience? How does Joe's situation communicate the dramatic meaning to the audience?
- Each sister speaks to their Mum differently on the phone, what does this tell us about their relationship and their role in the family?

Tension

- How is Tension of Task established when Dave first asks *The Sapphires* to come with him to Vietnam? How does this moment establish the sisters' ambition and resilience?
- How is Tension of Relationships built between the sisters throughout the performance? Consider the use of movement, language and status.
- How is Tension of Relationships manipulated between Gail and Dave throughout the production?
- How is Tension of Relationships manipulated between Cynthia and Jimmy throughout the production?
- How is Tension of Mystery manipulated through the use of split stage when Dave steps on the landmine?

Language

- Tony Briggs uses familiar and authentic language throughout the production. Describe how the language positions the audience to feel about the key themes.
- In the scene where Kay and Julie discuss child loss, how does the use of language confront the audience?
- How does the use of language position the audience to reflect on Australia's response to racism today?





Movement

- How did the use of military-style movement help to build tension and status for the audience?
- During Gail's conversation with Dave, when they smoke, she punches her hand into the air as a symbol. What social comment does this movement and symbol create?

Contrast

- How does the song lyrics 'Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud' performed by *The Sapphires* at the end of the production, contrast their experience throughout the play?
- How do the multimedia and projection moments in the production contrast with the experiences of the sisters in the production? How does this contrast create a social comment for the audience?
- Before the interval, discuss how the war sounds contrast the sisters' performance?
- How does the upbeat Motown music layered through the production contrast the sisters' experiences?

Symbol

- What do you think the television at the beginning of the production is symbolic of? How does this layer meaning?
- Through the performance Gail uses a strong, loud tone of voice, how does this layer symbolic meaning for the audience?
- How is symbol layered when the American Soldiers surround Julie in the darkness? What do you think the darkness is symbolic of? Describe how meaning is layered through the use of voice and symbol?

Mood

- What mood is created when the sisters sing NGARRA BURRA FERRA for their mum over the phone? How does this mood build tension for the audience?
- How was mood created when the sisters speak to their mother, then sing?
- How does Kay's manipulation of voice layer mood, when she tells Julie about her pregnancy?
- What mood is created when Joe discovers his family is gone? Describe specific expressive and performance skills that were manipulated to create mood.
- Consider how production techniques, such as lighting, sound and music create mood.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

(Adapted from QCAA Drama 2025 General Senior Syllabus v1.3 and Australian Curriculum Version 9, Drama Y 7–10)

Dramatic Concept:

Working as a deviser, you will view Queensland Theatre Company's production of *The Sapphires*, written by Tony Briggs and directed by Wesley Enoch. Using the production as a stimulus, you must brainstorm how the dramatic languages were manipulated through the professional production and devise an original dramatic concept that expresses a social comment.

- As a class brainstorm key moments of dramatic action to discuss the dramatic languages manipulated to create meaning.
- In pairs, select a specific moment of dramatic action and mindmap the moment. Ask students to place the moment in the centre of the page, then in one colour write everything they saw and heard during this moment, encourage students to be as specific as possible. Then in another colour, ask students to identify the dramatic languages used in that moment. Lastly, ask students to consider how through the manipulation of specific dramatic languages meaning was layered for the audience.
- After this process ask students to create a short paragraph explaining how a specific moment from *The Sapphires*, will inspire them to create an original performance.

Extended Response Questions

“The fact that it’s a true story is really important because it just puts it into context that our women, our people have been doing these kinds of ambitious, big things for decades... And this is one of those plays, a really classic play that lifts everyone up and says, there is a future. We just have to work harder to achieve it... And the more we can celebrate our powerful voices, the better.”

— Wesley Enoch for National Indigenous Times (2026)

How effectively do key moments of dramatic action and meaning in *The Sapphires* connect to the future as communicated by director Wesley Enoch above? Argue a position by evaluating how the use of the dramatic elements of mood and relationships were manipulated within the production.

Argue a position of how effectively the concept of belonging was communicated in *The Sapphires*. Analyse and evaluate the manipulation of dramatic languages (including elements, conventions, stagecraft) within the production to create dramatic meaning and layer a social comment for the audience.

Consider Wesley’s manipulation of fluidity of time and place to capture the sisters’ ‘stuck’ without accommodation. Analyse how the use of stagecraft (prop movement, blocking, reacting to cue) was purposefully manipulated to highlight the passing of time and build tension of relationships. Give specific examples of dramatic action from the production in your response.

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