

A NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE THEATRE COMPANY PRODUCTION  
IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH RAMPS ON THE MOON

# OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD

DIRECTED BY FIONA BUFFINI

BY TIMBERLAKE  
WERTENBAKER

BASED ON THE PLAYMAKER  
BY THOMAS KENEALLY

Nottingham  
Playhouse



# INSIGHT PACK

# OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD BY TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

A NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE PRODUCTION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH RAMPS ON THE MOON

Based on The Playmaker by Thomas Keneally

## CREATIVE TEAM

Writer

**TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER**

Director

**FIONA BUFFINI**

Designer

**NEIL MURRAY**

Lighting Designer

**MARK JONATHAN**

Composer/Sound Designer

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Associate Director

**SIMON STARTIN**

BSL Creative Consultant

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Audio Description Script

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Movement Director

**CYDNEY UFFINDELL-PHILIPS**

Wardrobe Supervisor

**ALISON CARTLEDGE**

Casting Director

**POLLY JERROLD CDG**

**TOURING FRIDAY 9 MARCH - SATURDAY 2 JUNE 2018**

**NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE, NOTTINGHAM**

Friday 9 March - 24 March

**NEW WOLSEY THEATRE, IPSWICH**

Wednesday 28 March - Saturday 7 April

**WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE, LEEDS**

Wednesday 11 April - Saturday 21 April

**THEATRE ROYAL STRATFORD EAST, LONDON**

Wednesday 25 April - Saturday 5 May

**SHEFFIELD THEATRES, SHEFFIELD**

Wednesday 9 May - Saturday 19 May

**BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE, BIRMINGHAM**

Wednesday 23 May - Saturday 2 June

# INTRODUCTION

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This pack supports Nottingham Playhouse's 2018 production of *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker. This production is directed by Fiona Buffini. The play is part of the Ramps on the Moon project, a co-production between six regional theatres, spanning six years of working with integrated casts and audiences to increase diversity within the arts and raise awareness of fully accessible performances. In our production 60% of the cast are deaf, or disabled.

Through this pack, audience can find out more about the play. Some of the activities provided are specifically designed to support KS4-5 students who are attending the performance, or those studying the play.

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# TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER



Timberlake Wertenbaker



*Jefferson's Garden*, 2015

**Timberlake Wertenbaker is a formidable and highly celebrated writer of the 20th and 21st Century. Born in New York and raised in south-west France, she is now based in the United Kingdom and is regarded as one of the greatest modern playwrights.**

In 1983, she became Resident Writer for acclaimed theatre company, Shared Experience. She then moved onto the Royal Court in 1984 – 85. Wertenbaker is arguably most known for her 1988 play *Our Country's Good*, winning her an Oliver Award at the Royal Court, where it was first staged. The play also received six Tony award nominations as well as Best New Foreign Play at the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

Later she went onto write *The Love of the Nightingale* (1989), *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1992) and continued to write throughout the 2000s. Most recently, her play, *Jefferson's Garden* (2015) at Watford Palace theatre won Best New Play awarded by the Writers' Guild.

# THEMES AND IDEOLOGIES OF WERTENBAKER'S WORK

*"Timberlake Wertenbaker clearly has a taste for the epic"*

Theatre Critic Michael Billington.



## Feminism and The Epic:

Wertenbaker certainly has a flare for creating epic worlds with strong women at their core. In her play *The Love of the Nightingale*, she recalls the rape of Philomela by her brother-in-law Tereus, based on the Ancient Greek Legend, which Wertenbaker reimagines as a revenge tragedy. *Dianeira*, also tells the story of an Ancient Greek heroine, Heracles's wife. Finally, in her new version of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Wertenbaker recounts Aphrodite's revenge on Hippolytus for not worshipping her and even has him dragged by wild horses!

## Transportation:

Wertenbaker often writes about characters whose lives change when they become removed from their familiar setting. Once again, *Our Country's Good* exemplifies this perfectly as a group of convicts and officers are uprooted from England and shipped off to Australia. In *New Anatomies*, the central character, Isabelle Eberhardt relocates from Switzerland to Africa.

## Arts in Society:

Wertenbaker challenges the prevailing social attitude in her works. *Our Country's Good* is a crucial example of this, where a play is staged within the play and there appears a divide between the characters, who place different emphasis on the arts. In *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, Wertenbaker also questions the role of theatre and art in contemporary society and the value of culture in the modern world. In three of her other plays, *The Break of Day*, *After Darwin* and *Credible Witness*, Wertenbaker's plot revolves around actors, or drama groups, which continue her works' constant exploration of the value of arts.



# WERTENBAKER'S INSPIRATION & THEATRE IN THE 80S

As well as the true story on which the play is based, Wertebaker also relied heavily upon the novel *The Playmaker* by Thomas Keneally (the same author of *Schindler's List*). Wertebaker was attracted to such a powerful story, which centrally questioned the importance of the arts in society and explored the restorative effect of theatre.

Margret Thatcher was the Prime Minister from 1979 – 1990. Under her government, arts were cut and the whole industry was commercialised as corporate sponsorship dominated the funding streams. Populist blockbuster plays, such as Andrew Lloyd Webber's musicals took center stage. Several writers took to writing controversial plays in direct response to the way the government was treating the arts. Wertebaker was one of many leading writers, who used this time to highlight the importance and the power of theatre and why it must remain in the hands of the people and not the corporations.



Margaret Thatcher

**“[In Thatcher’s government], we saw a shift away from public subsidy to corporate sponsorship, a transformation of the Arts Council from an independent agency to an instrument of government, and the growth of a siege mentality in arts organisations.”** Theatre Critic Michael Billington.



Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Starlight Express*



Michael Billington

# CONTEMPORARY WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS

Despite Wertebaker's success as a writer, many female playwrights struggle with the lack of equal opportunities. Wertebaker was a pioneer female playwright in the 1980s, when she became internationally renowned. She places vulnerable individuals and epic women at the heart of her stories.

Female writers of the 1980s have certainly paved the way for women's voices in theatre.

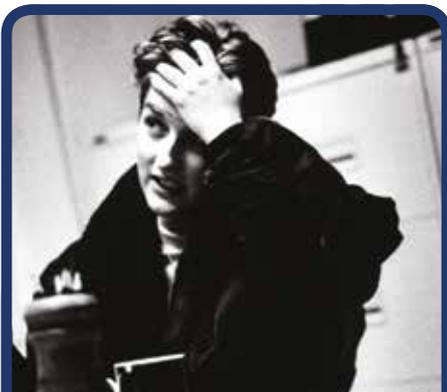
However, with only a third of new plays being written by women, there is still a long way to go.

## Have you seen...

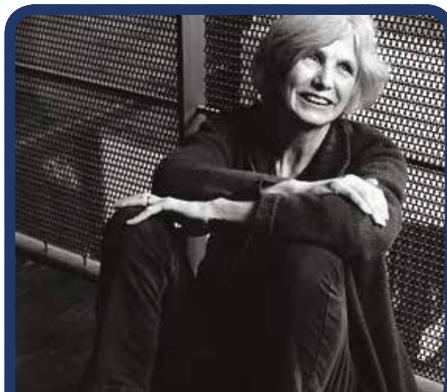
any of Wertebaker's Contemporaries' work? Sarah Kane, Caryl Churchill, April De Angelis, Moira Buffini, Laura Wade, Carol Ann Duffy, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, Lucy Prebble and Bola Agbaje to name but a few, can you suggest any more? Why not look up some of their most recent work.

**Discuss:** Are there any common themes, or similarities in contemporary works that are written by women?

*"I wasn't alone, of course [in the 80s]. There was Caryl Churchill, and other women who later got discouraged. There was one season at the Royal Court Theatre that was almost all written by women. Little did we know that would not happen again in the following decade."*



Sarah Kane



Caryl Churchill



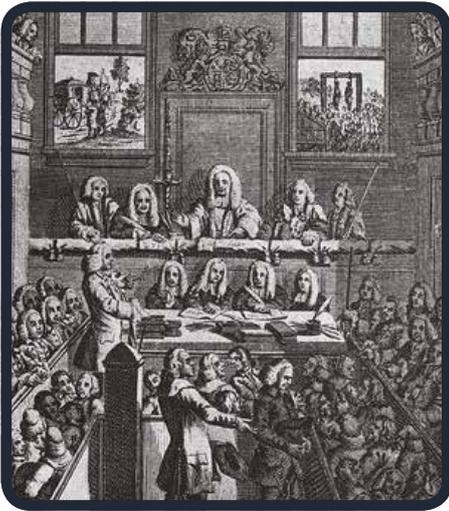
Bola Agbaje

# THE REAL OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD

In this section we'll take a look at the true story behind the play. **What we know:**

**THE YEAR IS 1787.**

**BRITAIN HAD A BRUTAL AND UNRELENTING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SYSTEM IN PLACE**



**PEOPLE WERE TRIED AND CONVICTED OF BASIC CRIMES, SUCH AS STEALING A LOAF OF BREAD, EVEN IF THIS WAS TO FEED THEIR STARVING CHILDREN.**



## The Bloody Code

This was a list of crimes punishable by death. Surprisingly along with treason, murder and rape, smaller crimes, such as burglary, or even stealing a rabbit could also send you to the gallows!



**1,400 PEOPLE WERE HANGED FROM 1751 - 1800.**

## Justice in the 18th Century

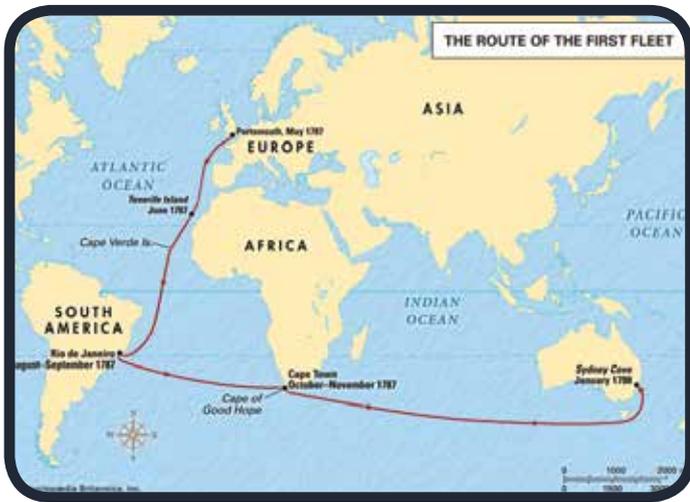
Local Magistrates were often volunteers from wealthy or elite backgrounds and always men. They would dictate if someone was guilty or innocent within their own parish. However, more serious offences such as murder, or rape would be submitted to the Crown courts. These courtrooms were very intimidating, often these trials would be held in Latin and very few convicts had legal assistance. Furthermore, herbs and spices were used to perfume the court's bad odours from unwashed prisoners and also helped stop the spread of disease. The cases would only last a number of minutes and then the criminal's fate would be decided.

Prisoners were already being transported to the USA as a method of punishment. However, as prisons were getting full, a new vision was decided. That new vision was to send convicts to Australia; a land at that time only inhabited by the aboriginals. A deadly land of soaring heat, dangerous animals and insects whose bite could kill in seconds.

And so... 11 ships sailed for the shores of Australia from England on 13 May 1787 and arrived the following year, in January 1788. The voyage would take 252 days. Those ships comprised of both convicts and also officers, who would accompany the prisoners and try to establish order in this new land. There were a total of around 1,500 people on board the ships (778 of these convicts). The Captain in charge of this dangerous task was Captain Arthur Phillip, who features in the play.

Once in Australia, morale was low as many did not know how they would survive. The colony were struggling to feed themselves; the supply ship didn't arrive so they were running out of food, the land wasn't fertile for growing crops and there were no farmers.

# A TIMELINE OF THE FIRST FLEET'S JOURNEY



**1606**

Australia is discovered by Willem Jansz.

**29 APRIL 1770**

Captain Cook landed in Botany Bay.

**13 MAY 1787**

First Fleet set sail from Portsmouth.

**16 MAY 1787**

By now the First Fleet were three days into their trip on the open water, they had lost sight of England's shores.

**3 JUNE 1787**

The fleet landed in Tenerife (Canary Islands, just off the West coast of Africa) to break their journey and load supplies.

**10 JUNE 1787**

After a short stay to load supplies, the fleet continued on their journey and set sail once more.

**14 JULY 1787**

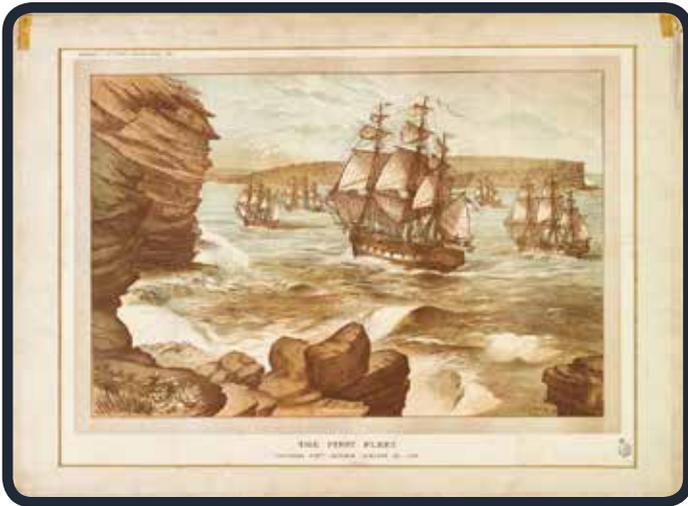
The fleet crossed the equator, reaching average daily temperatures of 30°C, on an overcrowded boat.

## 6 AUGUST 1787

The ships pass Rio De Janerio, they dock and restock their supplies..

## 27 NOVEMBER 1787

It has been decided that three ships, led by HMS Supply would form an advance party and sail ahead of the rest. This would ensure their supplies got to land ahead of the convicts and supervising officers.



## 13 OCTOBER 1787

The ships then pass South Africa, they dock and restock their supplies..

## 10 – 18 JANUARY 1788

HMS Supply finally arrives on the Eastern Australian shore, Botany Bay. Closely followed by the other ships. Then they move to Sydney Harbour.



**Did you know...** Surprisingly many of the convicts in the first journey survived, despite being on board a cramped ship for months and traveling through many different climates! It is estimated that the number of deaths totaled 69, only 29 of those are believed to have been convicts. However, the second fleet sailing in 1790 were not so lucky and the death toll was much higher. Those that survived the second voyage were also more likely to die when they arrived. Rev. Johnson commented that they arrived “wretched, naked, filthy, dirty, lousy, and many of them utterly unable to stand, to creep, or even to stir hand or foot “. This led to huge changes in regulation and after 1800, voyages had surgeons on board and surgeons were given higher status to dictate conditions on the ships. Financial rewards were also offered to those masters who saw their charges safely ashore.

# THE REAL PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

**SEE THE ACTIVITIES SECTION TO READ REAL ACCOUNTS AND LETTERS SENT FROM THE REAL OFFICERS AND CAPTAINS.**

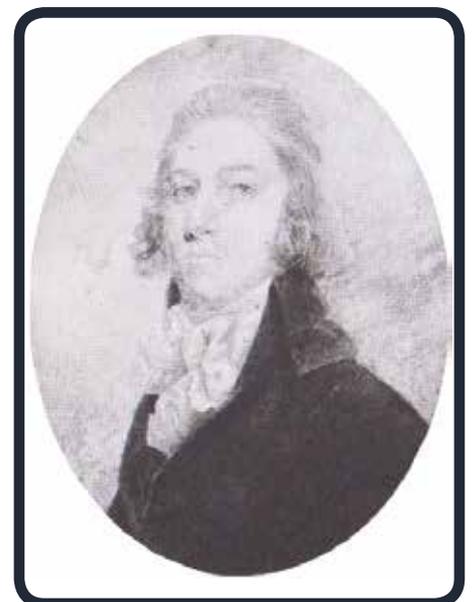


**ARTHUR PHILLIP (1738-1814)** – He was placed in charge of the First Fleet to Australia. He had come from quite a poor background and was sent to 'the establishment of poor boys' at Greenwich school. There he learnt to be a seaman and completed two hard years at sea. Gradually he moved his way up through the ranks in the Navy. After he separated from his wife, after a very short marriage of three years, he served in the Spanish-Portuguese war (1774-78). In October 1769, Phillip was appointed First Governor of the New South Wales expedition, which would carry convicts half way across the world. He was considered by many as brave, honest, just, kind, obedient and self-sacrificing and it was down to his own hard work and success that he had managed to climb up through the ranks. It has been debated that perhaps he was not the first choice to head up the voyage but was chosen on the grounds that he was reliable and stable and the need to find someone in haste.

He was very much like he is presented in the play, he truly cared about the convicts. The low death rate and success of the voyage over to Australia is attributed to his constant planning, organisation and experience. Furthermore, he was very adamant that convicts should be treated humanely as well as the aboriginals, where he was very insistent that they all developed a respectful relationship. He set sail home in December 1792 to seek medical attention but lived for another 28 years, where he embarked on other commissions, although never returned to Australia.

**RALPH CLARK (1762-1794)** – As an ambitious young man, from poorer parents, he decided to join the Botany Bay expedition, setting sail in 1787. He left behind his wife of three years, Betsey Alicia, and his son. Whilst away, he was most known for his extensive diary keeping and his affair with a convict. By 1789 he was promoted to First Lieutenant by Major Ross. Ralph's wife died a few months before him in 1794 and their son, who was at that time a midshipman, died a few months after him of yellow fever.

He is similar to how he is presented in the play; an ambitious young man, competent and brave. He was fascinated by the wildlife of his new home and his surroundings, despite suffering homesickness. Similar to the play, he formed a relationship with Mary Brenham, a convict and they had a child together in 1791.





**CAPTAIN WATKIN TENCH (1758-1833)** – He was from a good background, his father was the owner of a respected boarding school and, as a result, Tench was finely educated. He volunteered for the First Fleet voyage. Whilst in Australia, he was a very enthusiastic explorer and led many expeditions around the island. When he returned to England, he married the daughter of a surgeon and together they adopted four orphaned children.

As in the play, Tench had strict views and beliefs about the convicts and the justice system. Yet despite making his opinions known, he was considered tolerant of the colony.

**MAJOR ROBERT ROSS (1740?-1794)** – He became promoted to Major in 1783 and was returning from the War of Independence in America, when his ship was captured. He was taken prisoner for many months, before being released. He was then appointed for the First Fleet exhibition.



Similarly to the play, Ross never adapted to life in the colony and severely disliked Arthur Phillip, making his duties very difficult during their time together. He disbelieved in everything Phillip's stood for and disagreed with him at every point. By December 1791 he returned to England to resume his duties there and died 3 years later.

**MARY (DABBY) BRYANT** – A convict from a family well known for sheep stealing in Cornwall. She was convicted of assault and robbery and sentenced to death. However, it was decided her death sentence would be replaced by seven years in Australia. On the journey, she gave birth to a little girl. Her husband, William, was also on the island and, whilst in Australia, they had a son together.

At the end of the play, she reveals a plot to escape from the colony. This is something that the real Mary Bryant did along with her husband, children and several other colony members. William was a skilful fisherman and, therefore, worked constantly with boats. In March 1791, a boat was badly damaged in a storm and William repaired this with resources he was provided. This would be the boat they all made their escape on. They travelled over 5,000km in just under 70 days. After landing at Koepang in June, they were soon found out by an English Captain who transport them back to England in chains and irons. Mary lost her husband, her son and her daughter on the return trip. By June they had reached London where Mary's case was reviewed at the Old Baily and was ordered to serve the rest of her sentence. She was later pardoned on 2nd May 1793 (six weeks later than her original sentence had finished).

Whilst there is information about the convicts, it is important to note that there was far more written and documented about the Officers. We have very few original documents and images of the convicts.

**Research Task:** There are other officers in the play. Can you research into the biographies of some of them? Consider choosing one of the following: Captain David Collins, Reverend Richard Johnson and Lieutenant William Dawes. Now present their stories to your group.

# THE FIRST STAGING

## ROYAL COURT THEATRE (AND WEST END TRANSFER) – 1988



- The first production, image above, had many famous faces including Jim Broadbent.
- Timberlake Wertenbaker was consulted during the rehearsal process and many rewrites were made for performance.
- This play was shown at the same time as *The Recruiting Officer*, also on at the same theatre. This meant that audiences could see *Our Country's Good* and also attend a full-length performance of the restoration comedy featured within this.
- The production commented upon the political landscape at that time.
- It was a naturalistic piece of theatre with a naturalistic acting style and set design.
- It was a celebration of humanities' strength against the odds.
- The actors played multiple parts.

# WHY THIS PLAY AND WHY AS PART OF RAMPS ON THE MOON?

Director Fiona Buffini comments that there were several reasons that she chose *Our Country's Good* for a Ramps on the Moon show. (Remember, Ramps on the Moon is a huge project to increase awareness of disability within the arts, aiming to produce shows for both disabled and non-disabled performers and audiences).

*"Firstly, I should say, it's a really good play that deserves to be seen by audiences everywhere and because this is a touring show, that's important. It's also a much loved play.*

*The themes of the play tie in perfectly with the Ramps on the Moon aims. The play is about escaping from the invisible chains that bind us. It's about defying expectation, about human dignity and also compassion. It questions how art can transform reality. Ramps on the Moon is hoping to do just that, to transform how people view disability, using theatre and art to bring about a change in the way we think about those underrepresented."* - Fiona Buffini

Currently, as part of Ramps, we have had a satirical comedy farce (*The Government Inspector*), a musical (*Tommy*) and now we're doing a serious and naturalistic drama, which seems to tie in well.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR, FIONA BUFFINI



Fiona Buffini  
Photography by Tom Wren

### How important is historical research to you?

It's very important. This play is set in a specific time and the historical context is really interesting. Everybody knows something about that time, generally we know that convicts were shipped off to Australia but there is so much more to know beyond this, so much that I didn't know before research.

It really is so important to do research on this topic, especially as most of the people in the play actually existed; they were real people. It's important to know more about them, their lives and their experiences. There were so many wrong judgements made about convicts at that time that they were murderous, or rapists but actually most of the convicts were petty criminals, they were mainly thieves who had stolen small things, like clothes.

A lot of the things in the play really did happen, the colony really did stage a play and the real Dabby, really did escape. It's vital to know these facts.

It's very interesting how easy it is to make assumptions about these people. Especially as we are not far from Austen's time, she wrote 25 years later and so when we think about officers, we usually conjure images of Mr. Wickham. In reality it was very different. By the time the officers got to Australia, every garment was falling to pieces, their uniforms had practically disintegrated. The reality is that they did not know if they would survive, it is certainly very different from the romanticised ideas we have from around that time.

For the design, research was very important. We are trying to create a brave new world, a truthful world but also a world untouched by Western civilisation. A place where survival was far from certain. In this respect, the historical research and understanding of the historical context was vital.

## **What are the challenges and opportunities that excited you about working with such a diverse cast?**

The main thing to say is the cast size is very large; we have 17 performers and it's probably the biggest cast I have ever worked with, it's even more than when I worked at the Royal Shakespeare Company and that's incredibly exciting.

It's also very exciting to be working with a company, which I believe, have been perfectly cast. Every actor fully embodies their character, so I am looking forward to bringing the play alive with actors who are completely right for their roles.

The challenge with this production is integrating access into the show in a way that works with the play and not against it. To create an engaging piece of theatre for both deaf and hearing audiences is going to be challenging too. It's also very exciting to be working with Paula Garfield, who is going to be the BSL consultant on the piece and I'll also be working closely with a captioning consultant. That's the wonderful

thing about the Ramps on the Moon project, you have to consider so many other aspects.

We are creating a naturalistic piece of theatre with naturalistic scenes and so we need to ask how we integrate signing into these scenes, we need to ask why certain characters might be signing to each other and create a narrative for this, so that it feels realistic and fits with the style.

There are many interesting elements to this production that are new to me and I'm really excited about the whole production. I'll be very interested to see how directing this production influences and changes my future work, I think it will certainly have a lasting impact.

## **What characters stand out to you and why, do you have a favourite?**

I don't have any favourites, I think that's the great thing about Wertenbaker. She writes a play where all the characters are very different and all have their own voice, their own realities, moral compasses, needs and drives; they are all unique beings. All of them are written with such an eye for detail, which makes this play an incredibly humane piece of writing. Of course, some of the characters are not very likeable but they are not judged harshly in the writing, rather we can understand why they are acting in the way they are, why they do what they do and why they have their opinions.

It's the richness of characters that is fascinating and how varied they all are, therefore, it's impossible to pick a favourite. Some characters I admire as human beings for their wisdom and compassion but I also enjoy the less wise characters. I love seeing the world from their perspective too.

All the characters are transformed in the play and that's a wonderful thing to enjoy as an audience. Through the staging of *The Recruiting Officer*, the characters go through some kind of transformation and their world view changes, it's incredible and enjoyable to watch this unfold.

# ACTIVITIES SECTION:

## An Island Account

**Activity:** Take a look at the diary entries below, written by the real officers that Wertenbaker based her characters on. Now imagine that it's Christmas day and you have been living in the colony for around eight months. Write a diary entry for this day. You may want to include what you eat and drink, where you've slept, what your daily activities have been and the struggles of completing these tasks, perhaps even describe your surroundings.

25th December - Fine weather but blows fresh from the southward and a great sea rolling into the bay which will make a great surf on the reef on which there is a great dele at present this being Christmas day I wish a merry, merry Christmas to all the world. The most poorest person in England will be better off this day than any of us here for the[sy] will be able to get small beer with their dinner to drink if nothing better and there is not any of us will have anything better but cool water. This will be a dry Christmas doe good Gorgon come and take us away from this place. - Ralph Clark

This Eveng. I went on Shore in the Boat wt. Some of the Ship's Company to the Northside of the Bay to haul the Seyne &: caught a great many fish; all excellent eating. The Soil to a great depth is nothing but a black sand wh. when exposed to the intense heat of the Sun by removing the surrounding trees, is not fit for the vegetation of anything even the grass itself, then dying away, wh. in the shade appears green &: flourishing; add to this that every part of the grown is in a manner cover'd wt. black & red Ants of a most enormous size. - Arthur Bawes Smyth (1750-1790), a surgeon.

25th December

# A LETTER HOME

It is hard to find any of the convicts' letters home, this is because a lot of them could not write and also, if they did, their letters may not be sent home. However, many of the officers wrote letters back to England as often as they could.

Take a look at the real letters below:

*I am Quite charmed with the place - oh that if you was only here and our dear Boy my Alicia I Should not wish to come home if the place agreed with our health but without you I would not Stay if it was the best place under the face of heaven no that I would not my dear Beloved wife for without you I cannot live. The Tents look a pretty amongst the Trees... Cloudy Weather. After I was Releved from Guard I went down to my Island to look at my Garden and found that Some Boat had landed Since I had been there last and taken away the Greatest part of a fine Bed of Onions. It is impossible for any body to attempt[t] to raise any Gardin Stuff for before it comes to perfection the[ly] will Steal it. I thought that having a Garden on an island it would be more Secure but I find that they even get at it my corn.*

- Ralph Clark to his wife, Alicia.

*My dear Lord,*

*I have no doubt but that the people in England will expect some account of our arrival here, long before it is possible they can receive any unless they hear of us from France. The reason why, I must leave to be explained by those, more in the secret, then I either am or wish to be. But it appears to me rather strange, that eight ships should have remain'd here so long, without sending some of them home, or if not home, to the nearest Port, to endeavour to procure some stock or Refreshment for us, which we are in absolute want of, having nothing but salt Provisions to subsist on. And of even this, our allowance is very scanty.*

*I know not why, or whither it was so intended by Administration, that the only difference between the Allowance of Provisions served to the Officer and served to the Convict, be only half a Pint (per day) of vile Rio Spirits, so offensive both in Taste and Smell, that he must be fond of drinking indeed, that can use it. But such is the fact.*

*As soon as we came to this place, every body in health were got on shore, and into Tents. All hands were then set to work, but without order or regularity, nobody could know what was, or ought to be done but our Principial. Every thing was to be done at the same time, and of course nothing is done but what we ought to be ashamed of. A scene of confusion ensued which we have not yet got out of, and, I much fear, never will. In short, my Lord, I do not think (entre nous) that your three Kingdoms could produce another man, in my opinion, so totally unqualified for the business he has taken in hand, as this man is. To establish an Infant Colony with any hope of success or satisfaction to those embarked in the attempt, does it not require a man of a Free, Liberal and Generous way of thinking, it surely does. This Man will be every thing himself - never, that I have heard of, communicates any part of his Plan for establishing the Colony or carrying on his work, to any one, much less, consult them, - whither it proceeds from confused ideas, or from other cause, I know not, but there is hardly a day in which the orders of the preceding are not contradicted, men are taken from one Peice of work before it is well begun, and sent to another which is again left in the same state.*

- Captain Jemmy Campbell reporting back to a Lord.

**Discuss:**

How do the two viewpoints vary? What do these real letters tell you about life in the colony?

**Activity:** Imagine that you are Arthur Phillip and you landed on the shores of Australia two weeks ago. Now write a letter home as if you were Phillip. Consider what you might want to say. You may want to include his opinions of the other officers and convicts. Perhaps he has had the idea to stage the play at this point and wants to explain his initial thoughts on this...

*Dear*

# HAVE A COURT ROOM DEBATE

There are much divided opinions about the justice system in the play and this creates tension between the officers. Take a look at two contrasting views below:

**Arthur Phillip...** believes that criminals are not inherently evil and that their circumstances have often driven them to crime, thereby, they should be treated with compassion.

**Watkin Tench...** believes that criminals should have the same rights as slaves and that they should be tried and punished for their crimes. There is no excuse for breaking the law.

**Scenario:** It's the late 1700s and you are in the colony. One of the convicts has just stolen some bread from the food store when rations are tight and food supplies are running out fast. This is punishable by hanging but the convict was starving...

## Activity:

1. Read the above scenario.
2. Split the whole class in two.
3. Half the group take Arthur Phillip's stance, the other half, take Watkin Tench's viewpoint.
4. Spend a few minutes in your two halves gathering arguments to support your stance and then hold a courtroom debate. Select a group leader to be the judge in the debate.
5. Try to come to a conclusion about what the punishment for the convict should be.
6. Once all the arguments have been heard the Judge can give his or her final decision.

### Discussion point one:

In what ways did you agree with Phillip or Tench? Look back to 'The Real People' section and think about how their backgrounds and upbringing may have influenced their ideas on the punishment system.

### Discussion point two:

If all the prisons were full now, what could we do with the surplus convicts - how would both Phillip's and Tench's views be received in modern society?

### Discussion point three:

Who in modern day politics might Phillip and Tench be the equivalent too?



# BE A MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

There are some challenging scenes to bring to life on the stage in *Our Country's Good*. The opening of the play is a key example of this. The stage direction reads:

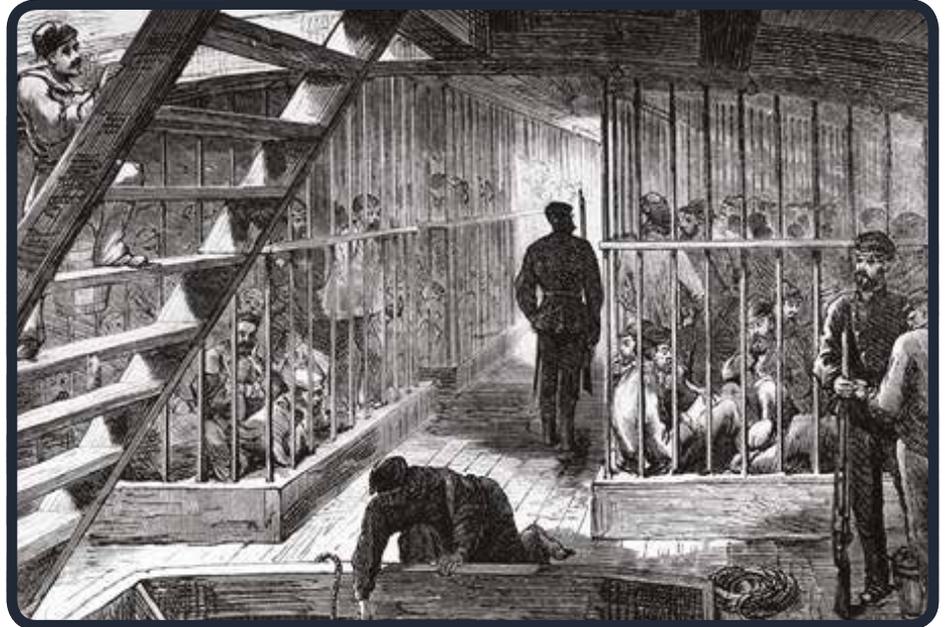
***The hold of a convict ship bound for Australia, 1787.  
The convicts huddle together in the semi-darkness.***

Often Movement Directors are employed to create movements, or basic choreography to convey those scenes that are hard to recreate in live theatre. They work closely with the director to create something of visual interest, using the actors bodies.

**Activity:** Get into groups of five. Work together to decide how you would stage the above stage direction. Think about whether you would like this movement

sequence to be heightened, tightly choreographed and stylised, or if you would prefer it to be naturalistic. Think about tempo, rhythm, how big, or small the movements should be and also the physical state of the characters eight months into their voyage. Create two minutes of physical theatre to set this opening scene without words. Share your opening sequences with the other groups.

**How to start:** Create three distinct actions, or movements and then teach them to the rest of your small group. Once you have learnt everybody's actions, try ordering them to create a sequence. You might want to add some music to underscore this.



**Discuss:** Why did you decide to either create something naturalist, or stylised? In what ways can an effective movement sequence help to tell the story and engage the audience? How could you amend your piece of physical theatre if you were working with artists who were wheelchairs users, or partially sighted?

# BE A LIGHTING DESIGNER

A crucial part of any production are the technical elements. They bring a design to life and can create effective atmospheres in which to tell the story. *Our Country's Good* opens on board a ship and then the action travels to the shores of Australia. Lighting Designers play a very important role in technical discussions, they are often appointed in the very early stages of the process and work closely with the director and designer.

**Activity:** How in a theatre could you create the worlds of the ship and Sydney Harbour using lighting? Look at the picture of the set model and decide how you would light the scene for the ship and also when on land.

**Consider:** Where you may place the lights, the colours and tones you may choose and also if you would use any gobos (a stencil placed inside a light to create effects on different surfaces of the set and the floor. i.e. leafy patterns may suggest a forest).



Model of the set, by Neil Murray

*Lighting the Ship*

*Lighting Sydney Harbour*

# DOUBLING:

In Timberlake Wertenbaker's original script and the first production, the actors were doubled. This means the actors were cast in more than one role. The doubling in this original performance was significant, see how the characters were paired below:

- Captain Arthur Phillip / John Wisehammer
- Major Robbie Ross / Ketch Freeman
- Captain David Collins / Robert Sideway
- Captain Watkin Tench / Black Caesar / Aborigine
- Captain Jemmy Campbell / Harry Brewer / Arscott
- Reverend Johnson / Liz Morden
- Lieutenant George Johnston / Mary Brenham
- Lieutenant Will Dawes / Meg Long / Duckling Smith
- Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark
- Second Lieutenant William Faddy / Dabby Bryant

**Discuss:** What do you notice about the way in which the roles are paired above? In Nottingham Playhouse's production, we will not be doubling parts, therefore, what are the advantages and disadvantages of doubling and not doubling in *Our Country's Good*?

**Consider:** the impact on the overall meaning as well as financial and practical issues.

**Activity:** If you were to stage this play now, would you choose to double the characters, or not and why?

*Make any notes here*

# BE A RAMPS ON THE MOON PROJECT COORDINATOR

Ramps on the Moon is a six year project to increase awareness and access to the arts for disabled artists as well as audiences. The project involves six regional producing theatres. So far the shows as part of this huge initiative have been *The Government Inspector* by Nikolai Gogol and The Who's musical *Tommy*.

*The Government Inspector* is a satirical comedy, which parodies the Bureaucracy system and questions what happens to those who find themselves on the outside of this. Meanwhile, *Tommy* is about a young man who, becoming Deaf and Blind after seeing the murder of his father, goes on to become a pinball champion. *Our Country's Good*, the third play in this series, discusses the themes of division, the redemptive power of the arts and how theatre can bring groups of people together.

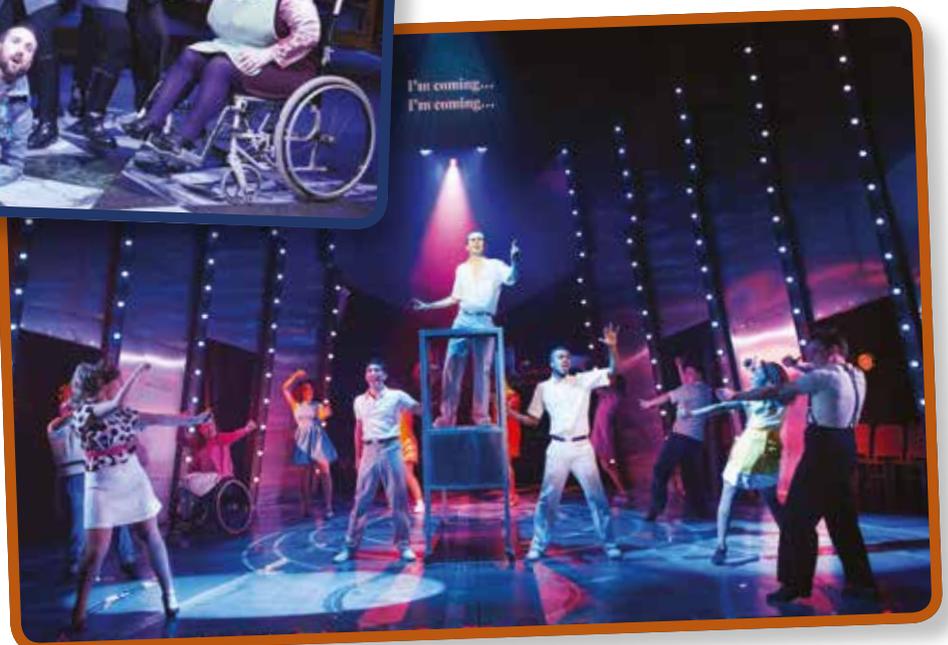
**Activity:** In small groups discuss what next three plays you would choose to programme to continue to develop and explore themes that link to the Ramps on the Moon project. Then present your ideas to the rest of the group. You should aim to create a five minute presentation explaining your choices. How are the themes of the selected plays resonant with the Ramps on the Moon project aims?

**Tip:** Think about plays with large cast sizes. Consider how your choices would excite integrated audiences?



The Government Inspector

Tommy



**Photo Credits:** *Tommy* by Mike Kwasniak  
*The Government Inspector* by Robert Day

# HAVE A FINAL DEBATE:

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In smaller groups, or as a whole class, pick a couple of the questions below to discuss in detail:

- The romance between Ralph Clark and Mary Brenham was based on truth. By including this relationship in the play, what is Wertebaker emphasising and why might she decide to include this story?
- In what ways is this play still so relevant for 21st century audiences?
- Wertebaker wanted to respond to a political and social issue by adapting a true historical story. Think about a current social, or political issue you wish you could change. Can you think of any famous historical stories that you might choose to adapt into a play in order to highlight this issue and promote wider discussion?

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