Selection Project

1. Read the following play excerpt and think about how the scenes could be staged. If you are able to access a copy of the play, reading the whole play will add depth to your understanding of the text and your interpretation.

2. Using the excerpt provided, create an annotated script by underlining all references to, or suggestions of, production elements (light, sound, set, props, projection and costume). You can use a notes section to provide further thoughts if you wish.

3. Consider how a key dramatic moment from the excerpt could be staged using production elements (set, lighting, props, costume, sound, projection, etc.). Support your ideas with visual materials such as reference images, sketches, etc.

4. Make TWO of the following items to demonstrate your ideas in more detail. It’s a good idea to choose items that are most aligned to the area(s) of interest you selected in your Supplementary Form.

   o A prompt copy
   o An item of costume
   o A prop
   o A scale model of a set
   o A 2D rendering of a costume design concept
   o A stage plan shown to scale
   o Cue synopsis for sound
   o Cue synopsis for lighting
   o Cue synopsis for projection
   o Sound concept demonstrated through sourced or created sound
   o Lighting concept shown through sourced or created images
   o Projection concept shown through sourced or created images
KEVIN GILBERT
1933–1993

Born in Wiradjuri country at Condoblin, NSW, Gilbert was a leading poet, playwright, essayist, editor and political activist. Raised by relatives and in welfare homes after he was orphaned at seven, he worked as a seasonal agricultural worker and station manager. In 1957 he was sentenced to life imprisonment when his wife was killed in a domestic dispute.

Gilbert learned to read while in prison and became interested in art and literature. He discovered a gift for lino printmaking and is considered to be the first Aboriginal printmaker. In 1968, while still in prison, he wrote the first play by an Aboriginal author: The Cherry Pickers (1971/1988). Gilbert was paroled in 1971 and The Cherry Pickers was performed in August that year in Sydney, the first production of an Aboriginal play. He disowned the 1971 publication of his poems, End of Dreamtime, as his editor made significant alterations without permission. The corrected volume, People Are Legends: Aboriginal poems (1978), is considered to be Gilbert’s first authorised collection of poetry.

Gilbert joined the Aboriginal Black Power movement and played an important role in establishing the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. Beginning with Because a White Man’ll Never Do It (1973), he wrote and edited a number of political works arguing for Aboriginal land rights and the restoration of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual autonomy. His oral history Living Black: Blacks talk to Kevin Gilbert (1977) won the 1978 National Book Council Award. In 1988 he coordinated the Treaty ’88 Campaign and wrote Aboriginal Sovereignty: Justice, the law and the land, promoting Aboriginal sovereignty and treaty.

Many of Gilbert’s books combine art, photography and language. He helped to organise the photographic exhibition Inside Black Australia, and used this title for a groundbreaking anthology of Aboriginal poetry, which won HREOC’s 1988 Human Rights Award for Literature. Gilbert refused the award, protesting that his people were still deprived of human rights in their own land. The Kevin Gilbert Memorial Trust was established in 1993 to advance his political, literary and artistic aspirations. His other books include Child’s Dreaming (1992) and Black from the Edge (1994).
From The Cherry Pickers

Act 3, Scene 2

At the old Cherry Tree—King Eagle.

King Eagle stands down stage, right of centre. He is a huge old cherry tree with twisted boughs wrought with life’s growth. His leaves are plentiful but brown and dying off.

Lighting simulates a hot parched atmosphere. Tall sparse tussocks of grass are wilted and browned by the summer heat.

A breeze moves the leaves and small eddies of dust.

A whisper of Aboriginal tribal music is heard, didgerridoo and bullooare. Faint voices mean in corroboree, spirits from the past.

TOMMLO enters. Looking directly at audience, he stares unseeing, discomfortingly hard at them. He glances around the orchard and stares again at audience with look of despair, pain, hopelessness, as his face reflects his inner loss and uncertainty. In his left hand is an old carved Churinga stone. Bullooare sounds softly as he places the stone on the ground reverently. He faces King Eagle, rips at his clothes and discards upper sections.
He approaches King Eagle in small quick nimble steps, whirs around, facing audience, 
and angrily throws away his belt and trousers. He whirs around in several flexing leaps. 
Tempo and volume of tribal music ascends. He scoops up a handful of earth, sweeps it towards base of tree, slaps leg with right hand in time to haunting digeridoo and 
corroboree chants. As he faces audience, music fades.

TOMMLO: [yelling] ZEEENAA!!!! ZEEENAA!!!
ZEENA: [off-stage] Alright, ALRIGHT! I'm coming Tommlo.

[Enter ZEENA, carrying a cumbersome bundle: A sugar-bag, a brown paper parcel 
and two spears under her arms.]

I get on OK in my rightful role as your gin and your wife Tommlo, but I am not 
acustomed to acting as a bloody myall bush donkey or workhorse for you!

TOMMLO: It's the woman's place to carry the family possessions, Zeena.
ZEENA: Since when has the woman have to carry the flamin' spears? You didn't carry any.

TOMMLO: Zeena, I had to carry the Bullroarer and the Sacred Churinga stone 
that I found on Corroboree Hill.
ZEENA: How do you know it is a Sacred Churinga? Just because you 'found' it 
in the old place?
TOMMLO: This is not the time—or the place to argue. I know—I feel it, 
woman. I feel it an' recognise it for what it is!
ZEENA: Recognise it do you? Your feelings have been wrong before today. 
Remember Kathy and your feelings that you were meant for each other? That was 
until I smashed a wine bottle on your thick head for being so damned silly!
TOMMLO: OK OK!! I was wrong then—but that feeling sprung from my guts.
This one is straight from my heart!
ZEENA: [laughing] Not your guts Tommlo, but from what hangs from it! I never 
realised that you'd grown so you could tell the difference between the heart and 
the other part of the body that makes you do the things you do!
TOMMLO: [pained, accusing] Zeena, Zeena, our People are dying. We've lost our 
way. Their hearts are breaking because they have been denied justice and human 
rights, because they have been denied their rightful place in this our land and—
the only thing you can contribute is your silly laughter!!
ZEENA: [hurt] Tommlo? That's not right, Tommlo. I'll do anythin' to help them. 
I want to stop the starvation, the needless dyin', the endless pain too. I do!!
TOMMLO: Undress! Get those skirts off!
ZEENA: This is impossible! Tommlo, we can't go back in time!
TOMMLO: We can change things. We have to change things. It is our destiny to 
find our human way.
ZEENA: I want to help. I would do any thing Tommlo to have stopped our babies 
from dying. I would do anything to bring my babies back to life and make our 
living easier—but we can't!! We can't go back. We can't change what has happened!!
TOMMLO: We've got to. We've got to find our place!! Our rightful place. Not a 
'place' where we've been kicked and trodden, smashed and starved, killed and
conquered until we take the shape of whitemen—imitation whitemen. I'm a man!!
I'm gunna live as a man, and by the livin' Jesus I'm gunna die as a man! I'm gunna fight for the right for my kids to live, and to live as whole human beings!!!
ZEENA: They were my babies too, Tommlo. Mine too!!!
    [TOMMLO springs towards the base of the huge tree, he pulls the tussocks of grass together then springs back and rips open the brown paper parcel. ZEENA sits slumped with head in hands, emotionally overcome, near the parcels and spears.
    TOMMLO tears a small decorated shield from parcel, picks up bullroarer, leaps to pile of grass. He rubs the bullroarer on the shield to spark off the fire. ZEENA has slowly, tiredly, risen and removed her blouse.]
TOMMLO: Enough!! This has to be done!
ZEENA [defiantly] If it has to be done, then why ain't you and I, two Australian Aborigines, dancing this Sacred Dance under an Australian gum-tree? A gum-tree with the Sacred Bora Ground symbols carved deep into its guts? We two are corroboreeing beneath a cherry-tree. Doesn't this prove that some advance has been made because 'cherry tree' means money—and food?
    [TOMMLO leaps up in fury and cuffs ZEENA across the head with his open hand.]
TOMMLO: Shut up!!
    [He goes to the sugar-bag, picks up a wooden boondi and a glass jar containing gum 'blood'. He passes the boondi and jar to ZEENA and commands—]
Now!!
ZEENA: This blood has jellied together!
TOMMLO: Use it!
    [He kneels, facing audience, hands at side, head back. ZEENA's face twists as she dips the boondi applicator into the jar of 'blood' and taps it rapidly on his shoulders. As sufficient 'blood' flows on, she quickly presses featherdown onto the 'blood' to form patterns.]
TOMMLO: [pained] You don't believe our culture should exist, either??!
ZEENA [tremulous, positive] Of course I believe our old culture should exist!—Culture is the development of man, it is the outward expression of man's inner beauty and is relevant to—and through every age!
    [ZEENA rapidly taps his arms, his thighs and decorates with down.]
TOMMLO: Then what are you complaining about?
ZEENA: Oh, I'm not complaining. I am merely trying to tell you that we can't live, nor find a new life, by embracing a stone-age identity in this nuclear age. We should be rightfully proud of our old culture for it was the expression, the cry, the search for beauty by man. This truth we should hold and advance by, not revert to that cultural age. We must advance, must mature and must never, never revert back, for life is a constant process of growth.
TOMMLO: Our growth has been stopped—through this we can grow again! We have nothing save our culture. We must get back our culture!!
ZEENA [sorrowfully, gently] Our culture, the age of our culture has passed for we have outgrown it! Man must go forward, must advance with the times, the age!
TOMMLO: We must keep our identity! Without it we have lost all. Do you see us advance?
    [TOMMLO attempts to light fire again.]
ZEENA: [listlessly] I have some Federal safety matches here, Tommlo. They’ll be much quicker.

TOMMLO: [savagely] This is how it has to be done. Now shut up and git undressed!!

ZEENA: No. No!! Not everything. Not Everything!!

TOMMLO: Everything! The lot! Git the bloody lot off! Are you frightened that God made your body black, ugly and unclean so it can’t face the clean air of day without shame!! Are you ashamed of your black body?!

ZEENA: I—No! It’s not that but I—

TOMMLO: Then show yourself as you were made, woman!

[ T O M M L O  leaps to the hessian sugar-bag, pulls out rings of red, white, black feathered symbols placing them either side of the tussock at the base of the tree, parallel with a perpendicular blaze of a white feathered shaft, as ZEENA slowly, hesitantly undresses.]

Help me. Come on woman, help me with these!

ZEENA: No woman is allowed to touch the Sacred Churinga symbols. To touch is to die.

TOMMLO: It is different now. There is no one left out of our tribespeople to help me!

[ T O M M L O  moves at a furious leaping pace, kicking aside sticks, leaves, grass and pushes the circle symbols into the earth. He leaps to the paper parcel, grabs several feathers and forms arm-leg patterns on circles, while ZEENA, in a leaping crouch, places the other symbols beside him. She squats on ground, hands between legs, and zig-zags in kangaroo hops between the symbols. Occasionally she sits up, scratches ribs with forepaws, wibbles at grass. TOMMLO has begun his corroboree. Aboriginal ghost music ascends. ZEENA sits upright, scratches rib in kangaroo pose.]

ZEENA: This is wrong, only learned ones can do this!

TOMMLO: [corroboreeing] Uh—uh—ghnuuu—there are no Learned Ones left, therefore we must do it!!

[ Z E E N A  moves again in the Kangaroo dance.]

ZEENA: But I am a woman and the sacred ceremonies would not produce miracles if a woman was even present in the old days.

TOMMLO: The old days have gone!

[ T O M M L O  leaps forward, twirls, springs again toward her his spear ready to thrust—he stops, as if confused, as she glances up at him.]

ZEENA: No!! No!!! What are you doing?? If the old days are gone, then what are you doin’, what are we doin’ here???

TOMMLO: It’s alright! We’re doin’ what we must, now shut up!!—Dance!!

ZEENA: Six strong warriors and the Songman must attend these rites. You are no Songman an’ I am no Warrior.

TOMMLO: Our Songmen have all died. Only you and I believe, and it is said: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name …’

ZEENA: God said that, not the Corroboree Men.
TOMMLO: This dance isn’t for the Corroboree Men either. It’s for us, a People. It’s for us blacks and our right to live!!

ZEENA: This is wrong, Tommlo. We can’t go back in time and change things!

TOMMLO: We can’t go back in time—but we can bring time back to us. Dance, dance!! Keep movin’ or so help me Christ!!

[Tribal music ascends.]

ZEENA: [afraid] Those were cave-age days, the Stone Age. This—this is an anachronism! The truths from the beginning of time—the truth of two hundred years ago can’t be given rebirth and become the truth applicable to today!

TOMMLO: This is not the time to argue! What are you trying to say?

ZEENA: I can’t say it. Do you remember the poem that Bidjarng wrote? The one about true truth and each man’s right being another’s wrong?

TOMMLO: So what the hell does that mean?

ZEENA: [reciting]

I know you’re right—when you claim I’m wrong
that I’m out of tune with your own sad song
For you believe and to me, it seems
that your feet of clay keeps your heart from dreams
and away from a Nobler Truth.
Yet you believe, and I know I know
that man must crawl before he grows
and man must leap and often fall
yet aeons pass and still you crawl
still you believe
and I know, I grieve—I know.

[The last words are uttered as a sob-sighing of spirit.]

TOMMLO: What does all that supposed to mean?

ZEENA: It means the Jews shouldn’t go and build a Golden Calf again, just because it belongs to a story in Moses’ time. Nor should we attempt to imprison the spirit of man, nor his attempts to mature. Just because we believe something, doesn’t necessarily mean it is right. It is little more than one hundred years ago since a high court in England tried a pig, yes, an animal on a charge of witchcraft. The pig had to stand in the dock—and the court found it guilty as charged and sentenced it to be burnt!!!

The poem means we should grow out of superstition. It means we should not crawl forever, nor leap, then crawl back into the protective past and become blinded by cowardice and bigotry, too afraid to grow again, to leap again. It means we should leap to our full height. We might fall, but we must be prepared to fall and leap again. We must hold to a truth only until such time as we can think it out and then supersede it by a higher truth.

TOMMLO: Zeena, this is not just for the old culture. This is for the goin’ forward. This is our hope for a People. It means we find we’re trapped—and we’ve got to leap. Without hope, without justice, without true identity a People die! Come dance!! Dance!! Dance!!

[ZEENA remains squatting]
Don’t you understand, Zeena? I’ve looked at life, the world, the whiteman’s way. I’ve looked through a whiteman’s eyes and I was lost. [Pause.] I ain’t lost anymore. I am a nothing. The trees, the grass, the river, the earth is life, is everything. I am nothing, a nothing. Now that tree is me. It is all of me. I am that tree. I am nothing, yet I am somethin’ because the earth is me. These rocks are me and I am the movin’ soul of them all. See, I looked at the tree and said that is a tree. I kept it all separate and alien, but now, like the old days, I am a nothing but that tree is me and I am a something and when I die I will flow into the creative essence that made me, the tree and all created life, for we are all inseparable. I have come home, Zeena. I am me, a nothing, that tree is me. I have come home because the infinite living immortal essence of all life is me. I am the moving soul and the truth of me is the truer truth that Our People will find.

It’s not going back to the ‘Stone Age’, it’s flowing our soul back to the Beginning, the Dreaming, being one with the Presence of the undying Spirit. Why did them Old People of ours sit in the ashes and chant their chants? Whitemen call it ‘yuckaiing’, but our Old Ones know it’s calling the Spirit. You want to talk in poems, hey? Listen then to this:

By my campfire at night with the heavens in sight with the Great Serpent Spirit a-star I sing songs of love to the Presence within as it plays with the sparks in my fire!

[Silence.]

That’s what we had. That’s what we have to regain. Now dance!! Dance!! Dance!!!

[TOMMLO follows ZEENA with spear poised—she moves into a frenzied tempo—the kangaroo trying to evade its hunter—TOMMLO leaps to the small fire, picks up the Churinga stone, rubs the designs quickly. Background tribal music and chanting heightens. TOMMLO holds Churinga in left hand, pulls ZEENA back by grasping her hair. He cuts her upper arms in initiation, her breasts. He hurls her to her feet, springs away in a weaving corroboree midst the circles—their tempo increases as ZEENA follows him in the dance. He now weaves in high stepping, feet stamping, kangaroo hopping motion.]


[She snatches her dress.]

TOMMLO: You spoke of Truth and the times, Zeena. Your body is not a shameful thing. This land is our Garden of Eden. We were created here in this land. We’ll restore our place, we’ll restore our place, we’ll find our God again, a new and true way, Zeena, and no man will stop us!

[ZEENA drops the dress, places her arms about him in a quick embrace. He caresses her hair, gently pushes her away. He picks up the bullroarer, the sacred circles, places them quickly back on the ground, gathers his pants, leaps to pick up ZEENA’s dress, claps his spears. TOMMLO and ZEENA move slowly gracefully and exit.]