



**YSTER  
BOY**



**EDUCATION  
PACK**

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Activity



Discuss



Look and act

## About the Show

Duration: 50 minutes

Oyster Boy lives inside an oyster. He is a big fishy weirdo just waiting to be shucked. But is the world ready for this nutrient rich, gender fluid, sand intolerant character?

Created by comic geniuses Kyle Walmsley and Elizabeth Millington, *Oyster Boy* is an hilarious black comedy for anyone who's ever tried to fit in – but failed. After a Darwin Festival 2020 world premiere, this show is guaranteed to shock, delight, disturb and entertain.

**THIS PHYSICAL AND ABSURD  
CLAMMY COMEDY WILL HAVE  
YOU FINDING YOUR INNER  
BIVALVE MOLLUSC!**



The creative minds behind Oyster Boy, Elizabeth Millington and Kyle Walmsley. Production meeting in Melbourne.

## Cast and Creatives



**Elizabeth Millington**, Director and Co-creator, is a Russian born director, writer and designer. Prior to arriving in Australia, Elizabeth worked at the Moscow National Theatre Institute and trained at the Moscow Conservatorium and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

In Australia, Millington has created award-winning works for Metro Arts, the Adelaide Fringe, Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Next Wave and La Mama. Millington was also a participant of the inaugural Women Director's Program at the Melbourne Theatre Company. She specialises in visual and immersive theatre, black comedy and puppetry.



**Kyle Walmsley**, Co-creator and Performer, is a director, performer and theatre maker. He has worked for many companies around Australia such as Queensland Arts Council / Arts Link, Brown's Mart Theatre, Darwin Festival,

Polyglot Theatre and The Flying Fruit Fly Circus. Walmsley was the Associate Artist at the Flying Fruit Fly Circus from 2017- 2018 and is currently the Artistic Program Manager for Corrugated Iron Youth Arts. He was a national finalist in ABC's Raw Comedy Competition and state finalist in Green Faces Comedy Competition.

## About the creation of the work

Elizabeth and I are both drawn to the darkly comic and problematic things about life.

*Oyster Boy* is allegorical and is intended to be read as a tale of transition. What kind of transition is up to the audience. This can be done by leaning into the story, likening oneself to the character or relating to a real life experience. We thought these relatable moments could be the ending of a relationship, 'coming out', starting a new job, moving away from home or delivering a difficult truth to someone you care about. These are just some, there are plenty more.

The ending is intended to be somewhat ambiguous, and these tricky moments in life don't always come with neat, well tied up endings. Instead these moments can often be messy, and situations feel a lot worse before they get better.

While *Oyster Boy* is left dying on stage, the voice over tells a different story. You might decide which is the ultimate truth. Often in choosing our 'ultimate truth' or even the decision that is freeing, it causes us to sacrifice. This is part of the cycle of all living things, death and regeneration.

**IN A TIME WHEN WE'VE ALL  
BEEN INSIDE FOR TOO LONG,  
SOMETIMES YOU JUST HAVE  
TO GO SHUCK YOURSELF.**



## Themes

How does Oyster Boy deal with the following themes that are in the play? What relatable experiences do you have with Oyster Boy or the themes?

- Loneliness and isolation
- Depression and mental health
- Queer identity and 'coming out' narratives
- Challenging the status quo
- Family and identity
- Theatricality and metatheatricality



## Lighting

How do the lighting choices underscore the shifts in mood and tone throughout the play?

In the show, Oyster Boy's standing lamp features as a key lighting element. Make a list of low budget or around the home light sources that could be used if the story was set in your home.

What if it were set in a school or a shopping centre, what light sources could be used?



## Sound

How does the use of music support the action?

What does the ringing phone represent?

Oyster Boy's father was a conductor. How does the piece of music that Oyster Boy conducts relate to the action of the play? Think about the musical qualities of the piece.

The piece of music Oyster Boy conducts is Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No 2. Have a Liszt-en (classical music joke) **here** and describe some of the qualities of the piece and how it changes. Watch a snippet of Oyster Boy conducting during rehearsals **here**

Oyster Boy performs a cabaret-esque number as Liza Minelli. This part-song, part comedy, audience direct address can be seen in movies such as **Cabaret**, **Chicago**, and this clip of **Bette Midler** on YouTube.

Use **this track** to tell a story, using a punchline ending for a comedic effect.



## Dramaturgy

How does the use of repetition underpin the dramatic action?

Metatheatre is a style that draws attention to itself as a performance work. What are the moments within the play that ask us to be aware that we are watching a show?

Think about the way Oyster Boy directly addresses the audience or themes within the play. Are there references to popular culture?



## Design and Performance

How are changes in characters signalled as the actor transitions between characters?

What aspects of the minimal set supports the narrative?



Dress rehearsal for *Oyster Boy* at Darwin Community Arts. Photographer: Liz Rogers



## Mood Board

This is a visual representation of Oyster Boy's mood board. How do you think these images convey the ideas or the feelings of the themes in the play?

Thinking about the themes, make your own mood board that reflects your own real life experience or is in empathy with the character.





## **Clowning**

### **Object Game 1**

Divide the class into small groups of four. Call out an object for the groups to make as a shape using their bodies.

You can use an everyday object or an object from a theme in the play. The object shapes can involve movement and sound. Groups can also be given a couple of minutes to devise their own object and perform to the rest of the class to guess.

### **Object Game 2**

As a group or in small groups, take turns turning an everyday object such as a brush, shoe, pen or a ball into things they are not. Show what it is by using the object as its new identity. For example: using a ball as a shoe, place it on your foot and mime tying up shoelaces. Pass the object on to the next person, who must then turn it into something different again.

### **Characters in 1 minute**

Choose someone to be a facilitator who will also need to be the time keeper. Give one person from your group a random prompt such as a factory, frame, pot or trailer. From this they must create as many characters as they can in one minute.

The rest of the group will count. The facilitator will count aloud when they have identified the character. There must be a clear 'who', 'where' and 'what'. For

example: “I’m Captain Mackerel of the SS Titanic, and I have been travelling the seas for the last 10 years”.

Big character choices, vocal changes and physicalities are encouraged.

### **Pairs Voiceover**

In pairs choose one person to record an inner monologue for the other actor to perform.

Use a phone, or recording device, person one records their monologue away from their partner. When completed person one returns and person two will have a single first attempt at responding to the inner monologue silently acting out what’s being said.

The pair can then rehearse this to share with the rest of the group. Players can choose to highlight and respond to the voiceover by following it, or reacting to and opposing the voiceover by doing something different.

What effect does each of these choices have for an audience?

### **Interrupting**

Moving back into the small groups, one person starts an improvised monologue about the character they developed. As the student starts to tell the story, other members in the group interrupt them and say “No, you didn’t”. At that moment the story stops and the player admits they didn’t do what they said and changes their story.



## Writing a Memoir

Think of a memory that was a significant life milestone for you, such as the first day of school, saying goodbye to a friend or getting in trouble for something. Write down your memory as factually and objectively as you can remember. Do not attach any emotion to the milestone you are writing about. Now rewrite your memory as a theatricalised retold version. You can exaggerate or dramatize your story.



## Further Reading or Viewing

Choose one of the following plays to read or watch and then discuss using the question prompt.

### **The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams**

Tennessee Williams, through his semi-autobiographical fictional play, 'The Glass Menagerie', uses the character of Tom to explain that the play is a memory play. Tom recounts growing up without his father, the challenges of having a sister with a disability, and an overbearing mother. Tom escapes to the movies in order to forget about the realities of his own world.

The text is available **here**

Read Scenes One and Two. How does Tom use memory and recount to inform actions in the present and future?

## **Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind directed by Michel Gondry**

'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind' is a 2004 American comedy-drama film written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Michel Gondry. It follows an estranged couple who have erased each other from their memories.

You can watch the trailer **here**

After watching the film in pairs discuss and play out what would happen if you erased your memory of a friend, sibling or someone else close to you. What do you think would happen if you met them again?

## **The Eisteddfod by Lally Katz**

Drawing on performance, storytelling and a good old fashioned Eisteddfod, two strange siblings have their sights set on first prize. The play draws on gaps and silences, awkward rhythm and dialogue between two characters. The story unfolds with strong parallels to Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'.

What are the ways in which this play uses 'performance' as content within the play? Think of how the siblings use anxiety, trauma, imagination and play.

You can read a review of the show when it was performed by Black Swan Theatre Company **here**

## Hamlet by William Shakespeare

Hamlet, a teenager, avenges the murder of his father by killing the new King who is his uncle. How does Hamlet navigate his family's issues including battling though his relationship with his mother?

You can read a synopsis and plot overview of 'Hamlet' [here](#)



The telephone conversation. Dress rehearsal for *Oyster Boy* at Darwin Community Arts. Photographer: Liz Rogers



Oyster Boy dying on stage. Dress rehearsal for *Oyster Boy* at Darwin Community Arts. Photographer: Liz Rogers

## Key Terms

**Allegory:** a narrative in which a character, place, or event is used to deliver a broader message about real-world issues and occurrences.

**Black Comedy:** a film, play, or other work that deals with tragic or distressing subject matter in a humorous way.

**Direct Address:** a character or actor addressing the present audience directly, ignoring or breaking through the notion of the 'fourth wall'.

**Dramaturgy:** the study of dramatic composition and the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage.

**Fourth Wall:** a performance convention in which an invisible, imagined wall separates actors from the audience. While the audience can see through this 'wall', the convention assumes, the actors act as if they cannot.

**Improvise:** create and perform music, drama or verse spontaneously or without preparation.

**Metatheatricity:** the notion of a work of art, or in this case, theatre, drawing attention to itself as a work of art. When something is self-referential.

**Monologue:** a long speech by one actor in a play or film.

**Narrative:** a spoken or written account of connected events.

**Theatricality:** the quality of being exaggerated and excessively dramatic in relation to acting or the theatre.

## How to use this education pack?

This education pack has been designed to support secondary school teachers as a learning resource for students years 8 and above who have seen the play, *Oyster Boy*. The resource includes discussion topics, activities and prompts to use in the classroom.

Mood Board Images: top L-R *Oyster Boy* illustrated by Danny Chricton ; [https://www.instagram.com/age\\_aesthetics\\_club/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/age_aesthetics_club/?hl=en) ; <https://www.behance.net/gallery/21523239/Beyond-The-Mask> (middle L-R) <https://theplusones.com/melbourne/2016/09/27/melbourne-fringe-salty/> ; <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/640988959452511070/> (bottom L-R) <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/127719339402944702/> ; *Oyster Boy* illustrated by Danny Chricton

Cover Images: *Oyster Boy* publicity image. Photographer: Duane Preston

*Oyster Boy* education pack has been prepared by Kyle Walmsley with support from Rebecca Renshaw and Liz Rogers. Design by Oscar Waugh