

Settlers Under Sail

(formerly published as *Bound for Port Phillip Bay*)

Exploring Immigration through Drama at the Immigration Museum

*A drama unit for primary levels exploring
immigration to Melbourne in the 1840's*



by Jo Raphael

The inspiration for this drama unit has come from the *Journeys of a lifetime* gallery at the **Immigration Museum**. In the centre of the museum's long hall stands a large ship installation. Visitors to the museum discover an entrance and as they step inside they are taken on a journey back in time. Three different time periods of immigration are evoked and described in the cabins within: 1840's, 1900's and 1950's. This process drama work focuses on the period of the 1840's. This section of the exhibit is particularly evocative offering many exciting sensations particularly for students at primary level. They can climb into the dimly lit, cramped bunk bed to find a lumpy mattress while all around the timbers creak and the cries and murmurs of fellow passengers are heard. Such a place tempts young and old to play dramatically within it. In this unit the period of the 1840's is the focus, however, connections should be drawn between the themes of immigration explored in this unit and other periods of immigration. By using the strategies outlined here, drama works could easily be developed with the focus on other times and lands of origin.



The museum's *Journeys of a Lifetime* Gallery could be visited in preparation for this unit, allowing students to experience the ship exhibit and collect information. A good way to do this is to ask students to explore the ship with their senses, making lists and describing the things they see, hear or can touch. Alternatively the gallery could be visited during the unit or as a follow up to the unit allowing students to add to the understandings gained through the drama exploration. Classes participating in some of these drama experiences at the Immigration Museum have the opportunity to gather information from the exhibit and possibly even perform some of the drama activities within it.

This drama unit uses images, documents and other artefacts of the time. Many examples of these are built into the exhibit where students may discover, read, touch and absorb them and others are presented here so that they can be used within regular classrooms. There are many excellent pictures and documents available in history books that would enhance teaching and learning in this unit. The more authentic these are the better. (Some example reference texts are listed at the end of this unit.) The drama strategies presented here are designed to engage children physically, emotionally and intellectually with the topic. Through interacting with roles and taking on roles they are able to better comprehend the dilemmas, decisions and dangers faced by immigrants as they leave their homeland and journey to an unknown land.

The following drama activities could be done during the course of a day or a selection of them may be used during a study of this topic spread over a number of weeks. While they have been designed with the CSFII SOSE and Performing Arts outcomes for level 3 and 4 in mind, they are easily adaptable to other levels. The depth of understanding and the sophistication of responses will differ with older students.

Whilst there are plenty of small performance opportunities throughout this unit, a larger performance for an audience outside the class may be a desired outcome. The drama activities presented here provide some material including characters, scenes and text which could contribute to a theatrical performance created by the students for a wider audience. These scenes could be linked with narration and or music to form a piece of collage theatre.¹

Focus Questions

The following are some questions explored in this unit.

- Why did people choose to immigrate to Australia in the 1840's?
- What was the journey like aboard an immigrant ship in the 1840's?
- What did the immigrants leave behind in their homeland?
- What did Australia offer the immigrants in the 1840's?
- What was the impact of immigrants on Australia?

¹ For further suggestions and examples see O'Toole J. and Dunn, J. (2002) *Pretending to Learn: Helping children learn through Drama*, Longman, Frenchs Forest.
<http://museumvictoria.com.au/ImmigrationMuseum/education/>





The Homeland

Getting a feel for the times

Invite the class to look closely at the illustration of a street scene in London that highlights the conditions of the times. This would be a good opportunity to explain some of the social and economic changes occurring in England and Ireland during this period. Focus students' attention on some of the details by asking them some questions:

Describe what you see. Describe the conditions. What is happening?
What are the people doing? Can you imagine what some of the people might be thinking, saying or feeling?



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Teacher in Role as English woman

Ask the students if they would like to meet one of the people in the picture. Point out the woman standing below the door where the sign says 'Good Beds'. She appears to be holding a young child. Explain that she will be visiting their class (time travel is a wonderful thing!). If the students are new to the strategy of teacher-in-role, explain that when you put on a certain prop eg: a shawl, you will be her. (Alternatively, a male teacher could choose to take the role of another character eg: the man standing next to the woman who could be the woman's husband and father of the child.)

In role as the woman, respond to their questions and feed in the following information. Explain that you and your husband have travelled from the countryside to London with your child to find work. Things had become difficult in your village since new farm machinery had taken the jobs of many farm labourers. There were few jobs to be had and it became hard to make enough money to buy the things needed in order to survive let alone own a house or land. You and your husband hope for a better life especially for your young daughter. You hope she will be able get a good education because you and your husband only had a little schooling before you had to go out to work, he as a farm labourer and you helping a local milliner. You've come to try your luck in the town but so far you have found no work and haven't liked what you've seen.

Produce the 'Emigration to Australia' notice (this is included as a resource for this unit and has been closely based on an original document²). Explain that you were very interested in its contents. In role you could read out parts, get students to read out parts or summarise it for them. (It is possible to play the role as a woman who is illiterate due to her lack of opportunity to attend school, and who needs their help to read the notice and perhaps later to help her write her letter of application.) After learning the contents of the notice the woman wonders whether it would really be a good idea to immigrate. The prospects sound hopeful but she has some concerns. Finally the woman leaves them to go and think further about the idea of immigrating.



²In Willey, K. (1982) *Australia's Heritage: a History in Pictures since 1788*, Sunshine Books, N.S.W. p.73. Also in Cannon, M. (1995) *Perilous Voyages to the New Land*, Today's Australia Publishing Co., Vic.

Deciding to Leave

Now out of role, encourage students to think of reasons for and against this woman immigrating to Australia. Ask the class to form pairs, person A and person B. For every reason that person A gives for immigrating to Australia, person B comes up with a counter argument or a reason why immigrating might not be a good idea.

Ask the students to list the kinds of people that might give the woman advice (friends, family members, people that they meet in the street...). Ask them to take on the roles of such people in order to offer the woman some advice. Teacher takes on the role of woman again to listen to their advice. Positive and negatives should have been presented and by the end the woman may have made up her mind to leave.

Thought tunnel – the final decision

This activity is an extension of the previous one and is suited to upper primary levels. Explain to the students that the woman and her husband wrestled with the decision of whether or not to immigrate to Australia. In the end she decided she would go. Ask the students to line up in two lines facing each other. Explain that as the woman walks down the line between the students they are going to speak her thoughts one by one as she passes by each person in the line. Try to let the thoughts alternate between negative and positive. For example 'I will miss my home land', 'In Australia we might be able to earn enough to buy land and build a good house'. Finally when she reaches the end, she will have made her decision to go.

Creating Roles

Students are asked to create a role for themselves as someone in England or Ireland in the 1840's who is planning to immigrate to Australia. They are given an outline of a person on paper, or alternatively, make their own cut out person, and write the following information on it: name, age, occupation, reason for wanting to immigrate. This activity will require some research by students. They will need to find out some of the typical names and occupations of the times. These can be obtained from passenger lists and other historical sources and some children may find names from their own family tree. There will also need to be some further investigation of the conditions in the England in the mid 1800's and reasons for immigrating.

When the students have created their character profiles they can take on the roles of these immigrant characters and ask each other some questions.





Teacher in role as Agent of the 'Emigration Committee'

Ask students to again take on the roles that they have created on paper. Ask them to imagine they have been asked to attend a meeting and interview for potential immigrants. Explain that you will be taking the role of agent of the 'Emigration Committee' whose job it is to make sure that only young men and women of 'good character' and preferably with certain labour skills are selected (refer to the emigration notice). You may choose to take on a prop or item of costume to signify this role. In role ask them some questions. Some may be directed to the group as a whole such as - 'Do you all realise that the climate is very different in Australia?' Other questions may be directed to individuals- 'What is your trade?', 'Are you strong and healthy?' or 'Why are you wanting to leave England?' Ask them if they have any questions about the journey or about Australia. This is an opportunity for the teacher to feed in more information about conditions on the journey and in Australia in the 1840's.

Farewell to Old England

Tableaux and tapping in – Embarking on the voyage

In groups of about six, ask the students to create a tableaux (a still picture using their bodies) to show immigrants as they prepare to board the ship, saying farewell to their homeland and possibly to family and friends. Some will be immigrants and others may play family, friends or acquaintances. As they create the scene and take their frozen positions ask them to also consider what each person in their tableau might be thinking or saying. Each group in turn shows their scene. Students hold positions and when the teacher taps a character on the shoulder they speak aloud the thought their character is thinking or words they are speaking in the moment of that scene.



Skipton Primary School students at the Drama & Cultural Diversity workshop (Immigration Museum) in Term 2, 2004



The Voyage

Sailing Ship on the wall

Students are invited to place their paper cut-out immigrant onto the shape of a sailing ship for display in the classroom. This may be done ceremoniously with the details of each of the immigrants being read out as if from a ship's log. The teacher can then add other key personnel who were also on the voyage such as the captain, surgeon, chaplain, superintendents, crew etc. Supplies may also be added such as two milking cows, fourteen sacks of potatoes, six sides of salted pork etc. (Information about the supplies for the journey can be found in the ship installation.) The result is a striking visual representation of the ship its population and cargo to which more detail and information can be added as the study continues.



Short scenes - Surviving the voyage

There were many risks to passengers and crew on the voyage. If students have the opportunity to read some of the material around the ship exhibit they will gather some information about these dangers. These included storms and mountainous seas, navigating the narrow gap between Cape Otway and King Island, possible shipwreck, icebergs in the southern ocean, killer diseases including typhus, typhoid, cholera, diphtheria and most commonly, diarrhoea through sea sickness, poor hygiene and spoiled rations.

Students form groups of about six. Each group is given a short excerpt from the ships' log alluding to a range of different conditions and difficulties faced on the journey. Groups are asked to interpret the log and create a short scene to show how the people aboard were affected. Scenes may be performed with one member reading the log entry.

Sample log entries:

Rough weather this day has caused considerable sea sickness among passengers and crew.

Still no breeze to fill the sails. Ship becalmed for the third day. Many passengers suffering from the heat.

Ships surgeon extremely busy as more passengers are infected. It seems the deadly disease is spreading.

Storm at sea and ship tossed about. Almost lost one passenger overboard.

Some tensions amongst children aboard after 113 days at sea. Superintendent organised games to relieve boredom.

Nearing our destination and passengers now in good spirits. A dance was held on deck this evening.



Example diary entry by a Year 5 student.

Writing in role – a diary entry

In role as immigrants aboard the ship, students write an entry in their diary describing some of the conditions and events of the voyage.³ Here, as at any stage, the teacher may choose to return in role as the immigrant woman to read (thus modelling) her own diary entry or to offer a further perspective on her own immigration journey.

Within the Immigration Museum this activity could be done with students sitting at the bench and bunks of the museum's ship installation with its background sounds of the creaking vessel, babies crying, snippets of conversations, toilet noises and so on.

When students have written the diary entries a selection of them may be read aloud with the noises of the ship in the background. In the classroom a sound scape could be created by students or some appropriate background music could be used.

³ Some authentic immigrant diaries are published in Charlwood, D. (1998) *The Long Farewell: The perilous voyages of settlers under sail in the great migrations to Australia*, Burgewood Books, Vic.



Collective role - Remembering why

The following quote is taken from the entrance to the ship installation at the Immigration Museum.

Before reading it aloud, ask the students to remember the woman with the child from the picture who they 'met' at the start of this unit. Ask them to imagine that they are her.

It is five weeks since you sailed from your homeland with 200 other assisted immigrants, but Australia still seems so far away. Your family has been allocated just one of four berths in this small quarter of the steerage deck.

Each day is filled with the noise of chattering passengers and children crying, while at night the stench of sweat and urine is overwhelming. Barely a week into the voyage your two year old daughter contracted scarlet fever and she is still very ill. This morning she asked 'Why did we have to leave home?' and you could find no words to reply.

Ask the students to say aloud some of the things they imagine the mother would be thinking as if they were her as she gathers her thoughts.

Arrival in a New Land

Writing a letter home

Ask students to look closely at the illustration of Collins Street in Melbourne from around the time of the first immigrants (pictured at left). Compare this with the sketch of the streets of London during the same period that was shown at the start of this unit.

In role as immigrants ask students to write a letter home to family or friends telling them about their new life and comparing it to their old life. They could also draw a picture or a map to send with their letter. These letters and pictures could be displayed in the classroom along with the poster of the ship.





An aboriginal view

Draw the students' attention to the aboriginal family in the foreground of the picture. Ask them to imagine what they are thinking and/or talking about. Students could enact these conversations in groups of three or four. This is an opportunity to discuss the ways that immigration to Australia impacted upon the aboriginal people and their way of life.

Making connections with our own immigration stories

Ask students to find out about their own family's immigration stories. There will be a range of stories about migration from different lands for different reasons that could be shared in the class. Apply the focus questions listed at the start of this unit to the students own immigration stories.

Reflection

Hold a discussion with students during which they reflect on what they have learned in this unit. They should consider learning within the immigration topic as well as in drama.

Drama Victoria and the Immigration Museum would appreciate hearing about any other ideas for exploring immigration through drama. Your experiences of trying any of the ideas presented here or any further suggestions or feedback on this unit are welcomed.

<http://museumvictoria.com.au/ImmigrationMuseum/education/>



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Some Resources

Adams, K.M. (1977) Australia: Gaol to Colony, 1810 – 1950, Seeing History 2 Series, Angus and Robertson, London.

Cannon, M. (1995) Perilous Voyages to the New Land, Today's Australia Publishing Co., Vic.

Charlwood, D. (1998) The Long Farewell: The perilous voyages of settlers under sail in the great migrations to Australia, Burgewood Books, Vic.

Dugan, Michael (1997) Australia's Children: The Spread of Settlement, Macmillan Education, Melbourne.

Pook, Michael (1981) A Worker's Paradise? : A history of working people in Australia, 1788-1901, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Willey, K. (1982) Australia's Heritage: a History in Pictures since 1788, Sunshine Books, N.S.W.

Classroom Resource for photocopying (see overleaf).

Acknowledgements

Image 1: 'A Court for King Cholera', Punch magazine, 1853.

Image 2: Departure of an immigrant ship, Adams, K.M. (1968) Australia: Gaol to Colony, 1810-1850. Seeing History 2 series, Angus and Robertson Publishers, London.

Image 3: Living quarters below decks, *ibid*.

Image 4: Illustration by Lisa Murphy based on a watercolour by William Knight, 'Collins Street, Town of Melbourne, 1839', National Library of Australia.

Jo Raphael is a lecturer in Drama Education in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. Jo has worked as a drama educator in a range of settings including primary and secondary schools, TAFE colleges and in the community. This unit was devised as part of Drama Victoria's Cultural Diversity project in partnership with the Immigration Museum.

See overleaf for classroom resource . . .



Feel free to photocopy this resource for use in the classroom.



EMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

*The committee for promoting the emigration
of*
YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN
To AUSTRALIA, acting under the sanction of His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies

Hereby give notice that

THE SPLENDID TEAK BUILT SHIP

“Evermore” of 773 tons register

*carrying an experienced surgeon and a respectable person and his wife as superintendants to
secure the comfort and protection of the emigrants during the voyage.*

WILL SAIL FROM

GRAVESEND

ON THURSDAY 10TH JULY NEXT,

Direct for

MELBOURNE

The committee is especially seeking young men and women of good character. Employment prospects are very favourable in this highly prosperous land especially for those with trades including, mechanics, carpenters, sawyers, joiners, brick-makers, bricklayers, stone masons, quarrymen, lime burners, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, tailors, shoemakers, handcraftsmen and women dress-makers, domestic servants and agricultural labourers.

Payment shall be £5 or no money whatsoever as Notes of Hand may be taken for payment at a reasonable time after arrival.

Those wishing to avail themselves of this excellent opportunity should apply to the Agent to the Committee, Edward Forster, in person or by letter to the Emigration Committee, London.

~BY AUTHORITY~

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