

# DRAMA

## Theoretical Component

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The plays *The Removalists* by David Williamson (1971) and *Norm and Ahmed* by Alex Buzo (1968) can be staged to communicate distinctly Australian values and attitudes. Some of these values and attitudes, which I will discuss in this essay, are violence, racism, and masculinity. The plays communicate these through mirroring society and making everyday issues realistically extreme, which shocks the audience, hence facilitating the realisation of such values and attitudes.

The value and attitude of violence, and also aggression, can be communicated to the audience in both *The Removalists* and *Norm and Ahmed* in how they are staged. In *The Removalists* violence is a significant theme – mostly in the corruption of the police, but also in the domestic violence committed by Kenny. The play shows that it is the Australian way to have violence as the resolution. As a realism 'New Wave' work, it is important that *The Removalists* is set in its place and time, so that it is realistic and believable, ensuring that the audience is affected. This play would do well in close, intimate staging, in a theatre such as the Stables. This makes the violence and aggression very much 'in your face' and shocking for the audience. For the actors, a variety in vocal techniques should be used as the tension increases and decreases, such as in dynamics and pace, which communicates the aggression in the script, which can be reiterated by similar use of movement. There is a potential changing fourth wall in this play. If it is gradually introduced at around where the women enter the story this allows the audience to feel more involved earlier, then like a helpless observer later. In terms of the staging of the actual violence, it is important that it is convincing and powerful so the audience is affected. In the first performance of *The Removalists*, Kenny's body was hidden behind the kitchen counter while Ross kicked a pumpkin, and 'blood' was also used. This was an effective way to communicate the violence, as it made some audience members physically ill. In the performance of this scene in class, loud thumping was used as Ross hit Kenny, which was very effective.

For *Norm and Ahmed*, violence can be communicated in a similar way, as it also suggests the attitude that violence is the resolution. However, while *The Removalists* suggests this from the start, in *Norm and Ahmed* it is hinted at throughout the play, but only comes into full effect at the end. To achieve believability in the end and therefore effect, it is important that these hints of aggression are amplified, and also combined with subtle movements, such as Norm nudging Ahmed. Combined with language like "I floored this bloody Kraut" such subtle movements builds the tension and engages the audience. Violence in *Norm and Ahmed* can also be communicated through the ways it is communicated in *The Removalists*, such as in its theatrical setting, vocal techniques, and sound. It would also work well with a limited fourth wall to create the sense that the audience is watching from their front porch across the street.

The value and attitude of racism can also be communicated to the audience mainly in *Norm and Ahmed* in how it is staged. Throughout the play the issue of racism is prominent, and there are times where the audience think that perhaps Norm comes around, which demonstrates that the attitude of acceptance towards foreigners is conceivable, but then this idea is dismissed abruptly when we see Norm's true intentions, which are based on racism. Such ideas can be amplified through the way the actors approach the script, like building up the tension in certain areas, emphasising phrases that allude to racism, playing with changes in the characters, and developing Norm and Ahmed's relationship and the way Norm manipulates Ahmed. This can be enhanced by several other aspects of theatre. A great contrast could be made between Norm and Ahmed's costumes, for example, to suggest that Norm's actions are based solely on Ahmed's ethnicity. The use of symbolism could also create a similar effect. The place and time the play is set could also have a great influence on the audience, as if it is set in a contemporary setting it would be more relevant. Racism in *The Removalists* is not as palpable, although it does indicate this value and attitude, and also discrimination in a wider sense, through dialogue such as, "Can't stand micks."

The value and attitude of masculinity, and hence attitudes to women, can be communicated to the audience mainly in *The Removalists* in how it is staged. The male characters all value the idea of being superior and dominant while the female characters are represented as weak and bland. This is demonstrated in the dialogue, enhanced by the use of colloquialisms, such as “you’d be the greatest twat flasher in Melbourne bar none” (Kenny to Kate). The use of vocal techniques, such as an ‘Aussie’ accent, can emphasise this. It can also be demonstrated through costumes, which represent the characters in particular ways (for example, Kate wearing revealing clothing represents her as a sexual object for the men to exploit). The body language of the actors also reiterates the masculine or feminine representations of the characters. This idea of masculinity is explored from early on, with Simmonds treating Fiona inappropriately at the station. The use of a fourth wall from around this point would be very effective in manipulating the audience to make them feel like a helpless observer, which facilitates the realisation of the issues in this idea of masculinity. In *Norm* and *Ahmed* the value of masculinity is also made clear, especially in *Norm*, which depicts this as a distinctly Australian value. This can be emphasised in the same ways it could be emphasised in *The Removalists*.

The plays *The Removalists* and *Norm* and *Ahmed* can be staged to communicate distinctly Australian values and attitudes – violence, racism, and masculinity. The plays communicate these through mirroring society and making everyday issues realistically extreme, which shocks the audience, hence facilitating the realisation of such values and attitudes.