Queensland Theatre Company presents

The Road to Mecca

by Athol Fugard

Directed by Carol Burns

Performance notes for Educators
Prepared by Mitchell Holmes

Funded with the assistance of Education Queensland
Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide Queensland Educators with information and resources about Queensland Theatre Company's production of *The Road to Mecca*. The activities and resources contained in this document are designed as the starting point for Teachers and Educators in developing more comprehensive lessons for this production.
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Mitchell Holmes is seconded to Queensland Theatre Company from Education Queensland as an Education Liaison Officer.

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Produced by Queensland Theatre Company and Education Queensland.
The Road to Mecca

by Athol Fugard

Performance Notes

SYNOPSIS

Set in a small village in the semi-desert Karoo region of South Africa, The Road To Mecca is the story of Miss Helen, an artist trying to survive in an isolated community, and her two friends: Marius, the local clergyman, and Elsa, a progressive school teacher from the city.

Feeling alone and unable to complete her work Miss Helen, in a state of depression, writes a letter pleading for help to her long time friend, Elsa. Both women have much in common – both are rebels against social conventions: Elsa teaches radical material to her coloured students, and Helen’s exotic artwork defies traditional notions of art encompassing her entire house and garden; her own homemade Mecca.

On arriving at the house, Elsa discovers Miss Helen is desperate for someone to help her renew her faith in herself. After a series of accidents around the house (and a failed suicide attempt), the local clergyman, and good friend, Marius has decided to try and convince Miss Helen to retire to his church’s home for the elderly.

In one evening, friendships are challenged and beliefs questioned as they confront themselves and one another. Convinced that Miss Helen is unfit to live by herself, Marius tries to manipulate and cajole Miss Helen into moving into the retirement home. Elsa, on the other hand, praises Miss Helen’s freedom and individuality claiming that Miss Helen is “the first truly free spirit I have ever known”.

In the end, the friendship of the two women triumphs in a reaffirmation of friendship and love reconciling differences.

Athol Fugard, South Africa’s greatest playwright, brings us this moving story which captures the fragility of our attempts to make meaning out of the ‘darkness’ of existence.

DIRECTOR’S BRIEF

I believe that it’s important to give audiences a stimulating visit to the theatre. I want to engage their minds and their hearts in the progress of the play. I want it to influence them after they leave the theatre. The Road to Mecca is a ‘three-hander’ which is a good size cast to work with in a theatre of the Cremorne’s dimensions. It’s a play that will benefit by being close to its audience. The marriage of big important themes and three rich characters makes for a great piece of theatre, which is of interest on many levels.

I hope through this play that people will value their own ideas. I want them to stop pigeon-holing people. I want them to value friendship and be prepared to find it in unlikely places. I want them to fear the loss of importance of artistic endeavour in their society. I want them to recognise the importance of striving to create meaning in their lives until the day they die. I want them to reject complacency. I want them to reject prejudice. I want them to question received wisdom.
THEMES and ISSUES

• The individual in society
• Friendship and trust
• The obligations to make a life
• Trust as a greater thing than love
• Complacency
• Conservative versus Liberal
• Treatment of aged people in society
• Social action
• Prejudice
• Outsider Art/ Art Brut

STYLE

_The Road to Mecca_ provides drama students with a strong introduction to the World Drama context of Drama studies. Directed by Carol Burns, designed by Alison Ross with lighting design by Jason Organ, _The Road to Mecca_ engages students in the following aesthetic elements:

• Set & lighting design and their integration into meaning on the stage
• Naturalistic acting style
• The importance of form
• Set design influenced by Outsider Art

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer Advice</th>
<th><strong>The Road to Mecca</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>2 hrs 20 minutes including interval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Low – Blasphemous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Venue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$18.50 per student with H-ed Space</td>
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</tbody>
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**Other**

H-ed Space workshops
Venue: The Shed
Dates: Wednesday 20 February, 11 am-12 pm
       Wednesday 27 February, 11 am-12 pm
       Wednesday 6 March, 11 am-12 pm

Join Carol Burns as she discusses her new work _The Road to Mecca_. Carol will explore: how a director uses the elements of drama, her directorial vision for the production, and how as a director she was able to draw out the themes of the play. Also take a tour of the set with Mitchell Holmes as he points out various elements of the set and answers questions about the production.
The Road to Mecca
by Athol Fugard

Director
Carol Burns
Designer
Alison Ross
Lighting Designer
Jason Organ
Stage Manager
Danielle Kellie
Assistant Stage Manager
Peter Nielson

Cast
Miss Helen Julia Blake
Marius Byleveld Phillip Hinton
Elsa Caroline Kennison

Queensland Theatre Company

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Governor of Queensland

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*on secondment from Education Queensland

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Head of Workshop: Peter Sands
Company Carpenter/Head Mechanist: John Pierce
Wardrobe Trainee: Lisa Cochran
Collected Handouts
"My real territory as a dramatist is the world of secrets with their powerful effect on human behaviour and the trauma of their revelation. Whether it is the radiant secret in Miss Helen’s heart or the withering one in Boesman’s or the dark and destructive one in Gladys’, they are the dynamos that generate all the significant action in my plays". (Fugard, 1994).

Biography
- Born 1932 in Middelburg, South Africa
- His full name is Harold Athol Lanigan Fugard. As a child he was known as Hally before he decided he wanted to be called Athol.
- South African playwright, actor, and director.
- He describes himself as an Afrikaner writing in English.
- Attended the University of Cape Town but dropped out to hitchhike through Africa.
- Worked as a deck hand on a ship for a number of years.
- 1950’s he worked with a group of actors in Johannesburg, including Zakes Mokae, who were influenced by Strasberg’s method acting.
- Fugard wrote his first play No Good Friday and later his first international success The Blood Knot (which led to his passport being withdrawn). These plays were performed in The Rehearsal Room.
- 1965 he became director of the Serpent Players in Port Elizabeth.
- 1972 he was a founder of Cape Town’s Space Experimental Theatre.
- One of the first white playwrights to collaborate with black actors and workers, Fugard writes of the frustrations of life in contemporary South Africa and of overcoming the psychological barriers created by apartheid.
- Some of his works, such as Blood Knot (1960), the first in his family trilogy, were initially banned in South Africa.
- The restrictions were relaxed somewhat in 1971, when he was allowed to travel to England to direct his play Boesman and Lena (1969).
- Fugard’s plays have been regularly premiered in fringe theatres in South Africa, London (The Royal Court Theatre) and New York.

Activities
1. In an interview with African Odyssey Interactive, Fugard claimed that: “Most of the images, and I say images, not ideas, that go on to become [my] plays come to me from life: either something I’ve actually seen or heard or sometimes read about in newspapers. Books don’t lead me as a writer even though I do love and cherish them”. With a partner, list some images in the world you have seen recently that you think may make a good play. These images could come from TV, magazines or newspapers articles.

2. Combine your group with another in your class and present your list of images to the new people.

3. Choose an image that you all like and create a short series of freeze frames that depict that story.

4. Choose one person in the story you have created and write a monologue that indicates how this person feels. Remember, you don’t have to choose the main person in the story (often the more interesting ideas can come from people who are not directly involved in the story).

5. Present your monologues to your original group. As you watch the other students present theirs, think about how your character could interact with some of the people from the original image.
The **Road to Mecca**
by Athol Fugard

The **Road to Mecca** was for some people about getting old and going to an old age home..." (Fugard 1985). I think that it is possible for some people in South-east Queensland to also think that **The Road To Mecca** is just about a woman getting old and going into an old age home. I think this play, however, is more relevant to our society because of our antipathy to 'big ideas'. This antipathy, I think, is the same we share with the village people of Nieu Bethesda in the Karoo. We don’t want our established ways of thinking disturbed either. And that’s why theatre is in danger of being reduced to a sort of easy listening way of passing the time. That’s what I want to confront the audience with: that darkness of the death of ideas.

**Words.**
I love words and ‘the space between words’, which is a phrase of Fugard’s. There is a lot of dialogue in this play and each of the characters has an individual style. They all have good big speeches too. Not only are the characterisations supported in the dialogue but the arguments of the play are clear as well.

**Ideas.**
In **The Road to Mecca**, Fugard has taken a real life story as a starting point and turned it into an investigation of the place of the artist in society, the survival of art itself in an, at best, apathetic society. Some commentators say that it is a very autobiographical piece because Athol Fugard, like his character Helen Martin, wouldn’t fit in with society’s norms. The story through which he pursues this theme is that of the friendship between two very different women, one young, one much older, both at crisis points in their lives. The third character is the local Dominee who is hoping Miss Helen will go into a retirement home – he is representative of establishment thinking.

**Plot.**
The story of the play is the story of the friendship and the differences in the characters of Elsa and Helen. It is the nature of this friendship that drives the plot forward. The almost aggressively active Elsa provokes a seemingly passive Helen to explain why she feels as she does. Through trying to explain their motivations to each other they achieve a greater understanding of their own actions as well as those of their friend. Helen’s friend Dominee Marius is an added catalyst introduced at the very end of the first act to give another perspective.

Athol Fugard could have dealt with the themes through any number of stories. In **Mecca**, Elsa and Helen are both oppressed by their environments. They are both white South Africans: Elsa from the liberal city, and Helen from the conservative Afrikaner society. The working title for “**The Road to Mecca**” was “My English Name is Patience”. The character of Patience is a black African woman who is only referred to and never appears. Neither does Katrina, Helen’s young coloured friend from the village. Although all three characters are white, the oppression of a society divided along lines of race is one of the pressures on the characters. The subject of a play is the supporting frame of the ideas. By emotionally involving us in well-drawn characters we are interested in the dilemmas the playwright imposes on them.

**Research.**
I certainly do a lot of background investigation of the writer and his sources but “the play’s the thing”. The play is what the audience is going to see and that must carry the sense of the story. Athol Fugard has referenced a real artist in his construction of the play. He lived in the same village as she did for a while but it is his creation from the stimulus of real life, not real life itself, which we are dealing with. Theatre is a distillation of things and the most important is the refinement of the raw material of life in the thinking of the writer. I would never watch reality TV for this reason. The absence of these elements in it would bore me rigid.
The true story of Helen Martins may have been the stimulus for Athol Fugard’s play, but the inner truths about people and human relationships is the crux of this story. Fugard explains his treatment of the stimulus and the relationship between Miss Helen and the young woman, Elsa:

“I’ve done my own thing; I’ve not written a documentary. I discovered that the friendship had been very, very meaningful. I accidentally happened to meet the young woman. I was struck by her because she was very strong, a very remarkable person, with a strong social conscience, a strong sense of what South Africa was about, a strong outrage at what was wrong with it”. Athol Fugard, from an interview with Gitta Honegger, 1984 (first printed in Yale Reports)

Miss Helen
(1898 – 1976)
The following is the factual information about the real Helen Martins.

- Born in Nieu-Bethesda as the youngest of six children.
- 1915 to 1918 attends teacher’s training college.
- Worked as a teacher for most of her life.
- Married Johannes Pienaar; a teacher, dramatist and in later years a politician.
- The marriage did not last long and knowledge about her activities in the years that followed is sketchy and often contradictory.
- Helen returned to Nieu-Bethesda in the 1930’s to care for her ailing and elderly parents.
- Her mother died in 1941 and in 1945 her father died.
- Helen Martins Lived alone after this time in the remote Karoo village.
- It was some time after this (perhaps in 1945) that ‘Miss Helen’ began to transform the interior of her house.
- It is certain that Miss Helen sought praise and attention through her work but as time progressed, and derision and suspicion grew within the village, she became increasingly reclusive.
- Miss Helen was notorious for not taking care of herself and as time, arthritis, and the arduous nature of her undertaking took its toll on her physique, she became increasingly shy of her appearance and took great pains to avoid seeing people in the street.

- By 1964, Miss Helen had begun work on the exterior of her house – creating The Owl House.
- Friends described her as an intensely passionate person who became particularly animated and excited when discussing the latest ideas for her artwork.
- On a cold winter’s morning in 1976 (at the age of seventy-eight) Helen Martins, convinced she was going blind, committed suicide by swallowing caustic soda.
- It was her wish that her creation be preserved as a museum. Her house was made into a Museum (called the Owl House) and to this day is open to the public.
- The Owl House is now considered the single most important asset of the village of Nieu-Bethesda.

The Owl House
Location: Nieu Bethesda, South Africa.
Description: Nieu-Bethesda is a tiny town, located in the Eastern Cape of South Africa and houses the prodigious creative talent of the late Helen Martins. Helen would collect broken bottles and bits of mirrors and direct a local sheepshearer, Koos Malgas, to build a wonderland of art with cement and glass. Mysterious statues of mermaids and wise men, camels and churches, inhabit the garden of the Owl House and a row of smiling Mona Lisa’s are on eye-level with the roof. Inside the building are fragments of glass in the walls to create different shapes and images.
In 1946 Art Brut, or Outsider art, was a name used for the artworks of mad people. The artform was popularised and introduced through the researches of psychiatrists early in the twentieth century.

The work of Dr Morganthaler documented his patient Adolf Wolfli (an outsider artist who produced large volumes of works from a mental asylum), brought this artform to the forefront of discussion in the artistic community. The most influential work, however, came from Dr Hans Prinzhorn in his book "Bildnerei der Geisteskranken" (Artistry of the Mentally Ill), which consisted of thousands of collected works by psychiatric patients and published in 1922. French artist Jean Dubuffet first coined the term Art Brut to describe the unorthodox creative expression of individuals outside of the mainstream art world.

(Source: http://www.rawvision.com/whatisoa.html)

Jean Dubuffet
- French painter, born at Le Havre in 1901
- Son of a wealthy wine merchant.
- Began to paint in his early years as a child in a style that would continue until his death.
- Dabbled in painting on and off until 1942 when he began to devote serious time to his talent.
- His first exhibition, at the Galerie Rene Drouin was in 1945 when he was 44 years of age.
- In 1946, his exhibition called "Hautes Pates: Mirobolus Macadam et Cie" consisted of pictures that were built up from plaster, glue, putty and asphalt and embedded with gravel and shards of broken bottles. These works were scribbled and scratched upon to give the impression of the surfaces of old walls.
- Dubuffet was the forefather of the tendency in contemporary art to disregard traditional artistic materials and to bring all disparaged values to the forefront.
- Became interested in the drawings of children, graffiti on slum walls, the art of the insane, and in the production of what is now called Outsider Art.
- Was interested in the inner world of the creative mind and rejected the more traditional purposes and organisation of art.
- During the 40s and 50s, Dubuffet was an advocate for anti-art, which went back to the Dada movement.
- In 1947, he arranged an exhibition of objects produced by children, the mentally handicapped, psychotics, and others isolated from the accepted fine art world and coined the term Art Brut.
- 1954 he exhibited a series of small figures built from newspaper, foil and other discarded materials at the Galerie Rive Gauche.
- He continued with his assemblages until 1961 when he had an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

(Source: http://www.artcellarexchange.com/dubuff.html)

Characteristics of Outsider Art
- Art Brut can be considered Raw Art
- The artists are often culturally alienated and asocial. They are often considered to be fringe dwellers.
- The artwork itself is difficult to define due to the lack of rules governing the form. There are some common aspects.
- The creators of this form of art often embark on their work in the second half of their life, without any formal art training, and continue passionately and very often obsessively for many years, some until they die.

Other Examples
- South Africa - The Owl House
- Los Angeles - The Watts Towers
- India – Nek Chand
- France - Raymond Morales

Outsider Art

Raymond Morales Le Parc-exposition, Port de Bouc, France

The Road to Mecca
by Athol Fugard

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At the time of writing this play, Fugard’s South Africa was entrenched in a political system called the Apartheid. Literally meaning “separateness” in the Afrikaans language, the Apartheid divided South Africa segregating the black population from the white. While the heart of Fugard’s play evolves around a three-way conflict, the political climate of this world has a strong presence.

**Apartheid**
- The South African National Party introduced the Apartheid as part of their campaign in 1948
- The Apartheid laws classified people according to three major racial groups—white; Bantu, or black Africans; and Coloured, or people of mixed descent.
- Later Asians, or Indians and Pakistanis, were added as a fourth category.
- The laws determined where members of each group could live, what jobs they could hold, and what type of education they could receive.
- Laws prohibited most social contact between races, authorised segregated public facilities, and denied any representation of non-whites in the national government.
- People who openly opposed Apartheid were considered communists and the government passed strict security legislation which in effect turned South Africa into a police state.
- From 1960 to the mid-1970s, the government attempted to make the Apartheid a policy of “separate development.”
- Blacks were consigned to newly created and impoverished homelands, called Bantustans, which were designed to eventually become petty sovereign states.
- The white population retained control of more than 80 percent of the land.
- Increasing violence, strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations by opponents of the Apartheid, and the overthrow of colonial rule by blacks in Mozambique and Angola, forced the government to relax some of its restrictions.
- From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the government implemented a series of reforms that allowed black labour unions to organise and permitted some political activity by the opposition.
- The 1984 constitution opened parliament membership to Asians and Coloureds, but it continued to exclude black Africans, who made up 75% of the population.
- Apartheid continued to be criticised internationally, and many countries imposed economic sanctions on South Africa.
- In 1990, the new president, F. W. de Klerk, proclaimed a formal end to the Apartheid with the release of ANC leader Nelson Mandela from prison and the legalisation of black African political organisations.

(Source: http://encarta.msn.com/index/conciseindex/26/026B0000.htm)

**Political Issues in the Play**
- Miss Helen’s friendship with Katrina (a coloured teenage mother who is the housekeeper)
- Elsa offering a ride to a young black mother
- Marius’ use of Nonna (his coloured housekeeper)
- References to alcoholism in the coloured community and; The community’s approach to solving the alcoholism problems for the coloured people
- Elsa asking her students to question the country’s political system – the inquiry from the Cape Town School board over her conduct
- Elsa’s questioning of Marius at the start of Act 2 on whether the coloured people of the Karoo feel as contented with life as the white people...
The Road to Mecca is a difficult play for a lighting designer. Fugard indicates that the first artificial lights aren’t lit until page 32 which is about 36 minutes into the first act. The time is dusk when the play starts so there is fading daylight to use to start with. At the same time as allowing the gloom to gather, the designer and director must also ensure that the actors can still be seen. It’s interesting that the setting is at its gloomiest when the text of the play is talking about the importance of trust and the loss of trust. The artist in the play, Miss Helen, has learned how to manipulate light to banish darkness from every corner of her house but it’s the ‘darkness within’ that is the hardest to learn to cope with. It is her lifelong struggle to learn to do that. Light on stage is used literally to banish darkness but also, figuratively, for the wonder of the creative drive. Late in the second act the lighting is supposed to create magic. Our designer, Jason Organ, has chosen to reinforce the practical onstage sources with hidden lights that will enhance the effect of the candles and lamps that are lit.

Alison Ross, the designer, had to create her own versions of the works of art that populate the garden and house of the Helen Martin character. Some are individual sculptures. The walls are painted and stuccoed with glass in patterns. The room of the house that we see is itself one of the artworks Helen has created. The manipulation of light is also a work of art.

We wanted to show the bones of the ordinary little Karoo desert village house so that you could see how Helen had manipulated the space. The slightly forced perspective of the set closes it down towards the back of the stage and makes the audience feel as if they are sitting in the garden of Helen’s home.

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We wanted to show the bones of the ordinary little Karoo desert village house so that you could see how Helen had manipulated the space. The slightly forced perspective of the set closes it down towards the back of the stage and makes the audience feel as if they are sitting in the garden of Helen’s home. The ‘fourth wall’ of the stage is used as the fourth wall of her house - almost - with just a slight angulation of the curtain.
A good working relationship with the director is critical in designing a new show, as the ideas that are put in place in the early creative time shape the production. These ideas often evolve or sometimes change dramatically, and the communication and collaboration needs to accommodate that. Sometimes I come up with the winning idea, sometimes the lighting designer. But usually, the best designs come out of collaboration with all those involved in the creative team.

This was the case on *The Road to Mecca*. Carol Burns, Jason Organ and I all contributed to the design. Carol wanted to evoke a sense of wonder of Helen’s world, and her creations, but steep it in a realism where the detail is more like that of a film. We also wanted her to be something of an island, juxtaposed against her community, and wanted the audience to be voyeurs – statues looking in – from her prized garden.

Creating Worlds:
Discussion with Alison Ross

The outdoor corrugated iron awning positions the audience outside of the house in Miss Helen’s garden. The ‘fourth wall’ of the stage is used as the fourth wall of the house.

Special artistically shaped grooves have been placed in the ceiling of the set to help create a natural lighting effect. The changing light represents the time passage between dusk & evening.

I am hoping to evoke a sense of Helen Martin’s work and passion. As the play happens over ‘real time’ and is based on a ‘real person’ I really wanted to create a ‘real’ environment, where these characters live for two hours.

The magic of Miss Helen’s world is revealed at the end of the play when all the candles on the stage are lit.

The background research was handed to me on a platter. Because Helen Martins was an artist who had become quite renowned after her death, and because her house and garden, where the play is set, were also her canvas and gallery, there was a wealth of information and imagery for me to draw on. Because of her style, she is considered an ‘outsider’ artist, so I also researched this bold, ‘charged’ art movement.
Ideas for the Drama Teacher
Classroom Ideas

**Insider/ Outsider**

1. Seat the students in a circle and present to them a collection of items. These items should include the following: a candle; a mirror; a picture of a famous, classic painting; a backpack. Tell the students that all these items were left to them in a deceased estate by an elderly relative who they had a very close friendship with.

2. In the circle, each student is to explain to the group, what each of the items meant to them and their friendship with the elderly relative.

3. Using one of the items, the students in pairs are to create a short scene that depicts how this item came to have a significant meaning for them.

4. Discuss as a group the various uses of the items. What sort of friendship did these two people have? What sorts of things could these two people discuss, given the massive age difference?

5. Create a character profile of the young and elderly person.

6. Inform the students that the day before the elderly person died, the young person was at the house. Police have said that the person died under suspicious circumstances but that it doesn't look like murder. The police are interested in what happened the day before.

7. Ask the students to present a short scene that depicts what happened the day before the elderly person died. The students must use one of the objects from the initial exercise and they must also try to incorporate why the object might hold a special significance to them.

8. How do the conversations between the elderly person and the young person the day before, effect the young person’s feeling towards the object(s) that were left to them in the will?

9. Inform the students that the police have now discovered that there was a Third person who visited the elderly relative the night before as well. This person is also not a suspect as it has become clear that the relative died from an overdose of pain relieving tablets (eg. Panadol). The police believe that all three people were in the house together for at least some amount of time the night before the elderly relative died.

10. Ask the students to present a short scene that depicts what happened when this person entered the house. The scenes should pick up where the last one finished.

11. Discuss with the class how the introduction of the third person affected the dynamics of the relationship between the young person and the elderly relative. What changes? Why?

**A Work of Art**

1. Introduce the students to the concept of Outsider Art (see collected handout section). Explain the nature of this type art.

2. Give each student either the letter A or B. As a class, ask each student to find their own place in the room.

3. Do a brief physical warm-up with the students. At the end of the warm-up, ask the students to lie on the floor.

4. Play a piece of classical music (or any instrumental music that is emotive in delivery).

5. Ask the students to imagine shapes and figures in their minds as they listen to the music. Guide the sorts of shapes they might see (ie. Circles, wavy lines, etc). After a few moments, stop the music and ask the students to create, with their bodies, one of the shapes they imagined.

6. Repeat the exercise with different music.

7. At the conclusion of the second round, ask all the students to freeze and remember their positions and shapes.

8. Ask all the students who are in Group A to remain frozen. Play the music again as students in Group B walk through the space. Reverse the roles after a few moments.

9. As a class, discuss the type of environment that was created with the body shapes and the music. What sort of spatial arrangements were created with the human shapes?

10. Ask the students to move through the space. Play the music one more time and ask the students to form shapes or physical relationships with other people as they walk past them. Make sure the students are aware they can only form a relationship with one other person through the course of the exercise.

11. Repeat the exercise adding the following rules: Students are to move, and spend some time doing the following: stopping, sitting, standing still, skipping and following other people.

12. As a class, discuss the nature of the environment created in the exercise.

13. Ask the students to consider other things that their bodies and spacial arrangements could forge relationships to (ie. Desks, chairs, the building itself).

14. As a class, discuss how this form of movement could be considered outsider art. What are the main differences? What are the main similarities?
15. Using various items in the room, ask the students to create their own art installations with the items making a statement about their lives, school, parents and friends (the students may even wish to be physically part of the installation).

Working with Text
Listed below is a synopsis of themes and issues that can be explored using the text extracts in the Collected Handouts section (page 21) of this document.

Extract 1
This scene explores the relationship between Miss Helen and Elsa at the beginning of the play. The scene alludes to the political climate of South Africa in 1974 – but it also gives us an insight to the two women. Each is hiding a pain from the other that is only really implied through Elsa’s story of the African woman on the highway. Miss Helen’s pain is in a failed suicide attempt, while Elsa’s pain is in an abortion she has had recently.

Extract 2
In this scene, Miss Helen explains to Elsa that the church council has decided for her that she is unfit to live by herself. This is the main reason Miss Helen asks Elsa to drive 800 miles to see her. It is important to note that this early on in the play (Act 1) Miss Helen does not trust Elsa enough to tell her about her failed suicide attempt. Again, the nature of their relationship can be explored through the sub-text of the play.

Extract 3
The start of Act 2. Marius arrives. This scene explores the tensions in the play that exists between the three characters.

Extract 4
In this scene the truths that Miss Helen tried to conceal from Elsa are revealed. It is interesting to note also that Elsa has not admitted to Miss Helen about the abortion she had.

Ideas for assessment

Responding
1. In his article “Athol Fugard’s ‘Insubstantial Pageant’ : The Road to Mecca”, Stephen Gray claims that:

   “Fugard’s play is more than a tribute to a lone nutcase in the Godforsaken Karoo; it is one of those dangerous acts of rebellion made against darkness, and an affirmation of how art can illuminate a road towards salvation”. (Gray 1985)

   Choose one character from the play and discuss the effect that Miss Helen’s art had on that character. You may wish to create a character profile as a starting point to determine the characters and the nature of the relationships between them.

2. The friendship between Miss Helen and Elsa is at the heart of the drama in The Road to Mecca. Both women have very different reasons for being friends with the other – sometimes these reasons are in conflict, other times they act as a support structure. Choose a moment from the play and discuss how the set, lighting and the staging of the production, was able to highlight the diverse nature of this friendship.

Presenting
1. In small groups, present a collage drama based on the idea of friendship and trust. Consider the use of outsider art as a means to link and bind your texts together.

2. Prepare and present a monologue from one of the characters in The Road to Mecca, set immediately prior to the opening of the play. In your monologue, try to identify the purpose and objectives of your character (ie. why are they there – what do they need to achieve in the next 24 hours?).

Forming
1. Using items and objects from everyday life, create a model set for a play that you are currently studying in Drama. Consider different approaches to the use of these items. Does your set need to be naturalistic or surreal? Explain the reasons for your set choice based on direct references to the play you are studying.

2. Create a hybrid drama utilising a variety of dramatic styles (ie. monologues, audience address, naturalism, etc) to convey a political statement about the Apartheid in South Africa from the 1940’s to the 1990’s. You may wish to use a host of multimedia to assist in the delivery of ideas.
Collected Handouts
**South Africa**

**A Brief History: 1931 to 1986**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931-34</td>
<td>South Africa gains independence from Great Britain. The white minority controls the government and moves to limit the powers of non-whites and create special designated areas, or homelands, for them to live.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 8, 1946</td>
<td>The United Nations adopts a resolution condemning the South African Government’s treatment of its Indian minority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 26, 1948</td>
<td>The conservative Afrikaner-dominated National Party wins parliamentary elections and begins taking steps toward implementing apartheid (apartness), the national policy of racial separation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 13, 1950</td>
<td>Group Areas Act is enacted. It segregates communities and relegates the black population to a minor percentage of the nation’s land.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 7, 1950</td>
<td>Population Registrations Act is enacted. It requires all South Africans to register their race with the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Enactment of pass laws. The laws require blacks to carry passbooks so that the government can regulate their travel through the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Separate Amenities Act is enacted, establishing separate public facilities for whites and non-whites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 26, 1955</td>
<td>The African National Congress and other opposition groups adopt the Freedom Charter, calling for equal political rights for all races.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 31, 1961</td>
<td>South Africa becomes a republic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 12, 1963</td>
<td>U.N. General Assembly President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria suspends South Africa from participating in the remainder of assembly sessions for that year. The following day South Africa recalls its U.N. ambassador and freezes its $1 million annual contribution to the organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 12, 1964</td>
<td>Nelson Mandela, an ANC leader, is convicted of sabotage and trying to overthrow the government. He is sentenced to life in prison.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 16, 1976</td>
<td>A student protest in the black township of Soweto against mandatory education in Afrikaans spreads. The government, in an effort to suppress the civil unrest, kills 575 people over eight months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2, 1983</td>
<td>White voters approve a new constitution that creates separate chambers in the legislature for Asians and Coloureds (people of mixed race), although not for blacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12, 1986</td>
<td>A national state of emergency is imposed following widespread strikes and riots. The decree gives virtually unlimited powers to the security forces and imposes restrictions on the press.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1, 1986</td>
<td>Laws requiring blacks to carry passbooks for identification are abolished.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: [http://www.facts.com/cd/094317.htm](http://www.facts.com/cd/094317.htm))
Text Extract 1
Text Extract 2
Text Extract 3
Text Extract 4