No Sugar

A play by Jack Davis
Context Research Task

USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DEVELOP A HISTORICAL PORTFOLIO ON YOUR SELECTED TEXT ‘NO SUGAR’ BY JACK DAVIS

Social
What was Aboriginal society like in the early twentieth-century?

Consider the following aspects in your response
- Economy?
- Social class (Aboriginal Apartheid)?
- Employment?
- Gender roles?

Historical
- Write a paragraph on each of the following events:
  - The Great Depression (Australia)
  - Protectionism/Control Policy
  - Stolen Generation
  - Swan River Settlement and Captain Stirling’s declaration.
  - Dreamtime (What is it? Why is it important to Indigenous people?)
  - White Australia Policy

Cultural
Explore Aboriginal culture of the early twentieth-century.

Consider the following aspects:
- Relationships between Aboriginal people and White Australians
- Ways that elements of the culture were preserved
- Standout individuals who were voice for their people
- Portrayal of indigenous Australians in the media of the time

Resources to consider

A GOOD PLACE TO START
http://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM TIMELINE 1901 TO 1969

DETAILED TIMELINE OF EVENTS FROM 1900 TO 1969
http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/aboriginal-history-timeline-1900-1969

BACKGROUND ON INDIGENOUS MISSIONS
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0336b.htm
Jack Davis as playwright

- Concerned with preserving Aboriginal history.
- Plays often merge historical events with depictions of Indigenous life.
- His rich depictions of daily life allow modern audiences to learn about Aboriginal culture.
- Davis is respected for his realistic portrayal of Indigenous life, and often connects his writing to childhood experiences.
- At age 14 he was sent to the Moore River Settlement with the promise of being trained as a farmer. These years provide much of his material for ‘No Sugar’. Historical figure, ‘Protector of the Aborigines’ A. O. Neville is portrayed in the text (and not in the most positive light).
- Creating the text allowed Davis the opportunity to reconnect with his Indigenous heritage - learning not only his own tribal language, but those of the Nyoongah people.
- Davis has had many different career paths, from a mill hand, an engine driver, a lay preacher, a boundary rider, a boxer, a horse breaker and a stockman.
- He became interested in writing as a teenager.

PUBLISHED WORKS

- 1972 - Aboriginal and Islander Identity, a magazine about Aboriginal topics (Editor).
- 1978 - First play Kullark (Home) produced. Explores the first contact between the White settlers and indigenous people in the nineteenth century and the lasting trauma to the present day.
- 1982 - The Dreamers. Part of the trilogy - The First Born, with his two later plays No Sugar and Barungin, presents the conflicts and suffering in an urban Aboriginal family.
- 1985 - Commissioned to write for the festival of Perth, Davis produced his most celebrated play No Sugar.
- 1987 - Won the Australian Writer’s Guild Award for the best stage play of the year.
- 1988 - The third play of the trilogy Barungin (Smell the Wind) - Deals with the death of indigenous people in custody.
- 1990 - In Our Town his last full-length play, is about the love affair between an Aboriginal service man and a non-Aboriginal woman.
Plot Summary: No Sugar

*No Sugar* is the story of a *Nyoongah* family in the 1930s fighting against the White administration, which gradually deprives them of their land and culture.

The Millimurra family includes three generations: Gran, the grandmother, Milly and Sam, Milly’s brother Jimmy and their three children, Joe, Cissie and David. They live in Northam, in the south-western part of Australia, depending on the government rations and hunting rabbits for their living.

Because of the Depression, A. O. Neville, the chief Protector of the Aborigines, decides to cut down the ration of soap and meat, making the lives of Aboriginal people more difficult.

Moreover, taking the epidemic of scabies as the excuse, Neville forces all Aboriginal people in Northam to move to the Moore River Settlement. After fruitless complaints to the authority, the Millimurra family and other indigenous people have no other way but to forsake their homes and belongings and move to a distant land.

After the family settles down in the Settlement, Joe meets Mary, an Aboriginal girl from another tribe, and falls in love with her. One night, Mary, leaving the compound without permission, runs to tell Joe that Neal, the Superintendent of the Moor River Settlement, assigns her to the job in the hospital, which implies his intention of assaulting her.

Joe decides to run away with Mary to his homeland, Northam. Joe and Mary, after defeating the tracker Billy who takes the order from Neal to catch them, return to Northam but find out that their belongings are not under good protection as the local government had promised.

After living in Northam for a few months, Joe is arrested and Mary is sent back to the Moore River Settlement. Although she is pregnant, she is severely whipped by Neal because of her refusal to work in the hospital. Few months later, she gives birth to a baby boy and Joe is set free from the prison. Finally, Neal gives Joe permission that he and Mary can move out of this Settlement and live wherever they want except Northam. Hence, Joe, Mary and their newborn baby, with the blessings of the whole family, leave to find their new home.

As for the content of these two plays, there is a debate over Davis’s attitude toward the endangered Aboriginal culture: whether he is pessimistic to the fading of Aboriginal traditions or he is optimistic in believing the coming of the long-awaited compensation for his people’s resistance.
Understanding the text Scene by Scene Analysis

ACT ONE

ACT ONE – SCENE ONE: NORTHAM (PP 15-17)
1. How are both poverty and resilience represented in this scene?

ACT ONE – SCENE TWO: NORTHAM (PP17-24)
1. Why has Davis used cross-cutting (moving between locations/realities) in this scene? What is its function?

ACT ONE – SCENE THREE: NORTHAM (PP 24-30)
1. Why is it important that women are the ones shown to stop the men from creating trouble?

ACT ONE – SCENE FOUR: NORTHAM (PP 31-33)
1. What is ironic about a white man like Al Jolson putting on black make-up and, as Jimmy says, ‘makin’ out he was black’ (p 33)?

ACT ONE – SCENE FIVE: NORTHAM (PP 34-36)
1. Why do each of the three men charged receive such different sentences?

ACT ONE – SCENE SIX: NORTHAM (PP 37-38)
1. How do poverty and isolation create a sense of potential for tragedy in this scene?

ACT ONE – SCENE SEVEN: NORTHAM (PP 39-44)
1. What is ironic about the Sergeant’s comment about the ‘Tasmanian solution’ in light of the diminishment in government care and sustenance given to the Northam Indigenous community?

ACT ONE – SCENE NINE: NEVILLE’S OFFICE (PP 46-49)
1. How does this scene show the level of hypocrisy in the bureaucracy of the time?

ACT ONE – SCENE TEN: NORTHAM (PP 49-52)
1. Why does the Sergeant concede to Gran’s demands?

ACT TWO

ACT TWO – SCENE ONE: THE TRACK TO MOORE RIVER (PP 55-57)
1. Why does Billy introduce himself initially as ‘politjman’?

ACT TWO – SCENE TWO: MOORE RIVER (PP 57-58)
1. Why does Davis have this significant meeting happen while the characters are collecting water?

ACT TWO – SCENE FOUR: MOORE RIVER (PP 61-63)
1. How does this scene dramatically juxtapose despair and hope?

ACT TWO – SCENE SIX: MOORE RIVER (PP 65-70)
1. How does this scene give a sense of why Billy lives in the shadows between his own culture and the non-Indigenous world?
2. This is an important scene which has little narrative function in the play but broadens an audience's understanding of several Indigenous male characters. In what ways is this scene pivotal to our understanding of these characters?

**ACT TWO – SCENE SEVEN: MOORE RIVER (PP70-71)**
1. How does this scene create a feeling of hope and renewal?

**ACT TWO – SCENE EIGHT: MOORE RIVER (PP71-73)**
1. How is the whip seen as a symbol in the play of white power and aggression? What is the significance of Neal giving it to Billy at this point?

**ACT TWO – SCENE TEN: MOORE RIVER (PP75-77)**
1. Matron trues quandong at the end of the scene. What does this symbolise?

**ACT THREE**

**ACT THREE – SCENE ONE: NORTHAM (PP 79-80)**
1. How does this scene show devastation but also suggest hope and survival?

**ACT THREE – SCENE TWO: NORTHAM (PP 80-81)**
1. What does this sequence show us about Joe that was not obvious before?

**ACT THREE – SCENE FOUR: NORTHAM (PP 84-85)**
1. How would you describe Joe’s attitude to being arrested?

**ACT THREE – SCENE FIVE: PERTH (PP 85-87)**
1. How does Davis use historical material (such as the text of the speech) to make a comment on attitudes and values?

**ACT FOUR**

**ACT FOUR – SCENE ONE: MOORE RIVER (PP 89-91)**
1. What does this scene show about the role and place of religion in some Indigenous communities?

**ACT FOUR – SCENE TWO (PP 91-93)**
1. What is the significance of Billy holding down Mary while Neal beats her?

**ACT FOUR – SCENE THREE (PP 93-94)**
1. How is a sense of renewal and hope evident in this scene?

**ACT FOUR – SCENE FOUR (PP 95-96)**
1. How and why does Davis encourage us to relate to Sister Eileen’s attitudes more than to Neal’s?

**ACT FOUR – SCENE FIVE (PP 96-99)**
1. How does bringing together the worlds of the different characters give the climactic events in this scene more dramatic impact?

2. Some critics see the singing of the parody verse of the hymn ‘There is a Happy Land’ as indicating a moment of defiance, whereas others see it as an act of resignation. Which do you think it is, and why?
ACT FOUR – SCENE SIX (PP 100-101)
1. Why at the end of the scene does Milly appeal to Matron for a proper coffin for Jimmy?

ACT FOUR – SCENE SEVEN (PP 101-104)
1. What is the significance of having Mary’s baby delivered by Gran?

ACT FOUR – SCENE EIGHT (PP 104-106)
1. What are the messages put forward by the events in this scene?

ACT FOUR – SCENE NINE (PP 107-108)
1. Billy says to Joe, “That your country. You back sit down that place” (p 108). What is the significance of Billy saying this and giving Joe the whip as a parting gift?

ACT FOUR – SCENE TEN (PP 108-109)
1. What is the symbolism of Joe and Mary being given a sugar bag that is filled with supplies rather than sugar?

2. What is the significance of Gran singing a song in an old language as Joe and Mary set off to seek a new life in Joe’s homeland?
Reading and Responding

This unit of work is asking you to consider what the author wants the audience to think, see, feel, believe or question, and how they use the text to do this.

Questions for discussion -

What do you think Jack Davis wants us, as a modern audience, to learn from his play?
Throughout the text, how does he elicit emotions in us as readers or viewers?
Highlight some of the questions that were raised upon your first reading of the play.
Explain how the beliefs of his characters are expressed throughout the text.
Describe some of the key literary devices Davis makes use of to express his message.

Essential questions to consider when writing about this text

Before preparation for your essay, ensure that you are able to provide detailed questions to the following. These questions will help you become aware of any gaps in your knowledge.

1. How does Davis use dramatic techniques to convey meaning to his audience?
2. How are key themes of racism, prejudice and injustice represented in the text?
3. What was Australia’s social and historical context in the early 1900s?
4. How did policies of assimilation, integration and protectionism effect Indigenous people?
5. What were the attitudes and actions demonstrated by white Australians towards the Aboriginal population?
6. Were the actions of the white settlers morally ambiguous?
7. How do Davis characters represent Indigenous identity and belonging throughout the play?
Key scenes to explore

You may like to ‘zoom in’ on the following scenes from the novel. Consider how they highlight Davis' message as an author.

Pay close attention to the literary devices that may feature. In your text response essay, you must not only comment on the characters and themes, but on the significance of how Davis has constructed his play.

ACT ONE

- SCENE 5 – COURTROOM SCENE
- SCENE 7 – NEVILLE TAKES HIS TIME RETRIEVING A TRAIN FARE FOR JIMMY

ACT TWO

- SCENE 3 – MATRON INSPECTS THE MILLIMURRA’S FOR SCABIES
- SCENE 6 – MASSACRE IS DESCRIBED

ACT THREE

- SCENE 1 – CAMP IN NORTHAM IS BURNT

ACT FOUR

- SCENE 1 – SUNDAY SCHOOL AND MARY BEING BEATEN
- SCENE 5 – JIMMY’S HEART ATTACK
Additional character activities

**ACTIVITY ONE**
Throughout ‘No Sugar’ Davis’ characters attempt to grow and change, but thwarted by obstacles that are in their way. Create the following table in a word document. Fill out your table using the formula ‘wants...but...so.’ The first two have been done for you as an example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Wants ... but ... so</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gran</td>
<td>Gran wants to be recognised as a matriarch, but Matron attempts to override her, so she attempts to display her skills to the other woman.</td>
<td>“Isn’t that the neatest belly button you seen? Have a look Matron. I brought him into the world with me own two hands.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>Jimmy wants to have autonomy within white society, but his actions are controlled, so he rebels by taunting and teasing the white policemen while in lock up.</td>
<td>“Sergeant! Tell your boss the koomp buckets got a hole in it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cissie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topsy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matron</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Justice of the Peace</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACTIVITY TWO**
Once you have filled this out, rank the characters in order of importance.

Write a sentence next to each stating why you have assigned them this position and what role or purpose they serve throughout the play.
ACTIVITY THREE

Create a mind map for each character like the one below:

Key character traits

Themes this character represents

Key actions of this character

Significant relationships

Key quotes
Grouping characters

It may be useful to talk about a group of characters together when discussing an idea or theme.

For the following questions, identify which characters would be best to refer to when responding to each.

For example:

What different kinds of resistance do you see displayed by the Aboriginal characters in the face of white oppression?

Grouping -

Jimmy – Playful disobedience, law breaking, vocal protests.
Frank – law breaking, making friendships across cultural boundaries.
Billy – outright violence displayed by his community, desire to change to fit in and please white authorities on Billie’s part.
Mary – stands up to Neal and refuses to work in the hospital, runs away with Joe.

1. Which characters represent a desire to preserve Aboriginal identity whilst experiencing oppression?

2. Which white characters disrupt the idea that the Protectionism policy intends to assist the Indigenous population?

3. Which white characters disrupt the idea that all the white people represented have fundamentally racist attitudes?

4. Which characters show the audience that there is hope for the Aboriginal people?

5. Which characters communicate the idea that Aboriginal resistance is ultimately futile, and their culture is already beyond repair?
Exploring the themes

Within each key theme, identify one scene, two quotes and several characters who illustrate each theme.

- **CONFLICT**
- **GOVERNMENT CONTROL**
- **RESISTANCE**
- **IDENTITY AND BELONGING**
- **POLITICAL POLICIES**
- **RACISM**
- **IMPACT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION**
- **HOPE**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Darwinism</td>
<td>Language about language’ – the devices and techniques we refer to when speaking about texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split-scene</td>
<td>An action or movement a character might make.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motif</td>
<td>An image or object that stands in for an idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Protector</td>
<td>The time in which a text was produced and the significant events that were taking place at this time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-Caste</td>
<td>A camp where Aboriginal people were taught how to be ‘white.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve</td>
<td>Racist term for someone who has one white and one Indigenous parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>A symbol that recurs (repeats) throughout the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage</td>
<td>A pseudo-science that allowed the white authorities to proclaim superiority over the Aboriginal people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture</td>
<td>A character’s monologue (section of unbroken speech) spoken directly to the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soliloquy</td>
<td>When two scenes appear on stage in front of the audience at one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical context</td>
<td>The official put in charge of Aboriginal affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>The pseudo-science of attempting to ‘breed out’ Aboriginal people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenics</td>
<td>Camps were Aboriginal people were gathered together – It was hoped they would ‘die out’ here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practice prompts

There are several ways you can use these prompts to prepare for your SAC. You can write an essay plan for each, use them to practice writing contentions, or turn them into full submissions to be marked by your teacher.

When you first read the prompt, ask yourself - What questions would you need to answer in order to be able to respond to this prompt comprehensively?

For example -

1. Through the construction of white characters, Davis’ demonstrates that mutual respect and acceptance could exist between the races represented within the play.

You would need to address the following:

- How does Davis construct the white characters?
- How does he construct the Aboriginal characters?
- In what key scenes do we see them interact?
- In these scenes, is there a sense of respect and acceptance, or not?
- What is Davis ultimate message to the audience about the relationship between the races?

2. Rebellion against authority is the core theme of Davis' play 'No Sugar.'
   To what extent do you agree?

3. Jimmy’s speech at the Australia Day ceremony is the pivotal scene of the play.
   To what extent do you agree with this statement?

4. How does Jack Davis use character alongside dramatic techniques to communicate the dominant attitudes of the social and historical context in which the play is set?

5. The female Aboriginal characters are ultimately shown as being the most disempowered individuals.
   To what extent do you agree?

6. Sergeant: “Too late to apply the Tasmanian solution.” How are white characters used to demonstrate the political response to Aboriginal people at this time, and how do the Indigenous people react?

7. JP – “I understand the difficulty of the situation you were in, but it's my duty to protect natives from alcohol.” To what extent do the white authorities assist the Aboriginal people?
Task words and **indicator phrases**

When you are reading an essay question for this section of the exam, you will encounter some subject specific terminology such as discuss, extent, evaluate or outline. It is important that you understand what these words are asking you to do, and what phrases you can use to indicate to your marker that you are engaging with these terms. The table below provides some examples of possible phrases you could use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Synonym</th>
<th>Indicator phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outline</strong></td>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Davis argues...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Davis believes...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In outlining his argument, Davis communicates...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluate</strong></td>
<td>Consider, Judge</td>
<td>Davis perspective is correct because...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The audience will agree with Davis because...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In critically evaluating Davis’ ‘No Sugar’...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compare/Contrast</strong></td>
<td>Identify similarities or differences</td>
<td>The white authority’s views are vastly different to those of the indigenous people... Jimmy believes his community is being oppressed, however Neal...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent</strong></td>
<td>How far</td>
<td>Davis wants the audience to mistrust the white characters to an extent. To an extent, the resolution of the play allows the audience to feel a sense of hope for the Aboriginal people. However...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discuss</strong></td>
<td>Explore, describe</td>
<td>Throughout the play, the theme of racism is explored in a variety of different ways. In considering the effectiveness of Davis’ play...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>