

# Neighbourhood Watch

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*By Lally Katz*



*CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN THEATRE PRACTICES*

*HSC DRAMA*

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## Playwright Lally Katz

### **INTERVIEW WITH LALLY KATZ, PLAYWRIGHT, *NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH***

**Lally, in an interview with Belvoir before the 2011 premiere of *Neighbourhood Watch* you talk about the way you researched the play and structured it; in three acts, and drawing on the traditional hero journey structure. In *Neighbourhood Watch* who are the heroes and in what way are they heroic? In *Neighbourhood Watch* there are two main heroes, Ana and Catherine. Well, I don't know if they're really heroes, but I used some of the heroes' journey structure in writing them. But I guess they're heroic to me. Certainly Ana is, as a person and as a character. Her life has been full of so many adventures that are hard to imagine for those of us who haven't grown up in the midst of a war. Her stories of survival are incredible. But also her stories of suburban life in Kew are also pretty wonderful to me!**

**When you write do you imagine the world of the play? If so, how did you imagine all those characters and Ana's incredible life being staged? Did you imagine a large cast? A large set? An ensemble of actors?**

To be honest, when I write, I don't actually imagine a play or a stage or a set. I just imagine it all happening in real life. Like if the scene is on a street, I see the street, not the set of the street. Or if the scene is in the woods- I see the real woods. The only way I know how to write is by feeling that it's all real- feeling the truth of the scene and the characters and the story. However, this can make it complicated for a director when they've got to work out how to make the characters change location without having clumsy set changes. Simon Stone and designer Dale Ferguson have done a fantastic job with this in this production of *Neighbourhood Watch*!

**Would you talk about how time - present, past, and juxtaposed - works in the play?**

Well when I was hanging out with Ana and we would be sitting in her lounge-room telling me stories of the past- it was like we were living in two times at once. The present time and Ana's past. She and I were both in her lounge-room, but it was like a magic dust was sprinkled and we were transported to her past. Often she would be telling me stories to help me with a predicament of the present. Maybe I'd be having boy troubles and she would begin this very involved story about Hungary during world war two and that magic dust would sprinkle around us and suddenly we'd be in the story. And then at the end of the story, there was always something for me to learn from and use in my present situation. So I guess time in the play is used to teach Ana and Catherine about their lives in ways that they maybe can't see in just one time frame.

**In VCE Drama students study the form known as 'non-naturalism'. What is non-naturalistic about *Neighbourhood Watch*? What is truthful about the play?**

Gosh, I'm not a hundred percent familiar with that term- but I'm guessing that it means something sort of surreal or another kind of reality? There's plenty of that in *Neighbourhood Watch*. There's really naturalistic stuff, but then it departs from there and the characters become characters in Hungary. I've always loved the magic in the ordinary- like the magic in the suburbs- places that seem ordinary, but then there's this secret magic. To me that's non naturalism. And that's what we go for with *Neighbourhood Watch* at certain parts. That someone like Ana can exist- this sort of magic woman- in suburban Kew. And that time can be manipulated. And that ghosts can seem alive.

**What other aspects of theatrical styles do you think are present in the production? For instance is there magical realism? Is there fantasy?**

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I guess there is probably both magic realism and fantasy. But it's hard for me to answer that properly, because to me everything feels real. But to audience members watching it, I'm sure some of it will feel like magic realism or fantasy.

**Lally, would you talk about the design of the play? Did you have input into those choices?**

I was around for a lot of the initial rehearsal period and saw it all coming together and loved it - but I had very little to do with any of the aesthetic. That was really the Director Simon Stone and the designers. I was there if they wanted to ask me about the way a particular character dressed, but they didn't need my input on the design. Sometimes with a production a writer has a lot of input and sometimes they don't. I never really have strong ideas on design, because I'm always just picturing stuff happening in real life. But I know if I like it or not when I see it. And I love the design for this show. I think Simon and Dale Ferguson handled the changing locations and times in a really brilliant way with the use of the revolve, helping the characters to move seamlessly through time and space. And it's also a lot of fun! I love the piano composition and think that it really adds to the feeling the world. Simon is a brilliant director and the world and aesthetic that he and the designers have created is one that I love. I love how the revolve can be a tram and then a river and then Mary Street in Kew.

**What do you think this play says about the world that we live in?**

For me it is a story of the epic and the domestic. We are always living in front of the backdrop of history, even if we don't know it. And so often we disregard the wisdom of the elderly. The elderly are so often invisible in our modern world. But they hold the key to our past. And in the past there can be lots of answers to now and the future. It's also a story about a woman displaced after the war. It's the story of a refugee. And that is certainly something that is part of the world we live in now.

## About the Play

### **SYNOPSIS**

Neighbourhood Watch takes place in the year between Kevin Rudd's election as Australian Prime Minister and Barack Obama's as US President. Everything was changing in the Western World and for a brief time anything seemed possible. Against this backdrop we meet Catherine, a young woman stuck in suburbia, waiting for her life to change as monumentally as the world around her is. Into her life comes Ana, an elderly Hungarian immigrant carrying the weight of the twentieth century on her shoulders. As their unlikely relationship develops, Catherine's life is transformed by Ana's stories of an almost forgotten world: through her new friend's eyes she witnesses the traumas of war, the desolation of the refugee experience, and the struggle of settling in a foreign land. It's a common tale in our country, but one that's all too foreign to middle-class Australians like Catherine. In meeting Ana and hearing her stories, Catherine is given the rare opportunity of learning from someone who has survived the unthinkable. The courage this gives her in dealing with her own past is Ana's gift to her. In turn, Ana is granted one last great friendship at a time when the journey to her life's end was looking to be a lonely one.

### **SETTING**

Neighbourhood Watch is a contemporary play set mainly on a street in suburban Australia. In the published script it is set in Sydney, and where it was first performed. This production it is set in Kew, Melbourne, the setting for which it was originally written, but it can easily be set in the suburbs of any other Australian city, depending on where it is performed. The play has multiple locations, including the outside street, Ana's house, Catherine and Ken's house, the doctor's surgery, the chemist, the cinema, and Hungary during World War Two. It is up to the director and design team to work out the best way to represent these shifts in location and time (Notes from script)



## Introductory Activities

1. What does the title of the play suggest to you?

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2. What is a Neighbourhood Watch organisation? What purpose does it have? You may need to research this.

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3. What is Magic Realism?

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4. What effects has the ageing population had on Australia?

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5. What are the stages of grieving?

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6. Why was there a rise in Hungarian migration to Australia during WWII?

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7. What are the Romani people?

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# Scene Analysis

## Act 1, Scene 1

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 2

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 3

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 4

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 5

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 6

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 7

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 8

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 9

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 10

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 11

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 12

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 13

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 14

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 15

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 1, Scene 16

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 1

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 2

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 3

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 4

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 5

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 6

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 7

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 8

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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## Act 2, Scene 9

### Synopsis

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### Quotes

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### Experience

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### Theme and or use of symbolism

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# Themes

## Reconciliation

Definition	Characters	Quotes

How is theme explored throughout the play?

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How is this theme relevant to Australian audiences?

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How can particular parts of the play be staged in such a way to communicate this theme?

Costuming: .....

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Set: .....

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Lighting: .....

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Blocking: .....

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Character relationships: .....

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## Grief

Definition	Characters	Quotes

How is theme explored throughout the play?

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How is this theme relevant to Australian audiences?

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.....

How can particular parts of the play be staged in such a way to communicate this theme?

Costuming: .....  
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Set: .....  
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Lighting: .....  
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.....

Blocking: .....  
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Character relationships: .....  
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## Courage and Resilience

Definition	Characters	Quotes

How is theme explored throughout the play?

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How is this theme relevant to Australian audiences?

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How can particular parts of the play be staged in such a way to communicate this theme?

Costuming: .....

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Set: .....

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Lighting: .....

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Blocking: .....

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Character relationships: .....

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## Trust

Definition	Characters	Quotes

How is theme explored throughout the play?

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How is this theme relevant to Australian audiences?

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How can particular parts of the play be staged in such a way to communicate this theme?

Costuming: .....

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Set: .....

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Lighting: .....

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Blocking: .....

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Character relationships: .....

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## Memory

Definition	Characters	Quotes

How is theme explored throughout the play?

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How is this theme relevant to Australian audiences?

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How can particular parts of the play be staged in such a way to communicate this theme?

Costuming: .....

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Set: .....

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Lighting: .....

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Blocking: .....

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Character relationships: .....

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## Friendship

Definition	Characters	Quotes

How is theme explored throughout the play?

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How is this theme relevant to Australian audiences?

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How can particular parts of the play be staged in such a way to communicate this theme?

Costuming: .....

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Set: .....

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Lighting: .....

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Blocking: .....

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Character relationships: .....

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## Characters

*"In Neighbourhood Watch there are two main heroes, Ana and Catherine. Well, I don't know if they're really heroes, but I used some of the heroes' journey structure in writing them. But I guess they're heroic to me. Certainly Ana is, as a person and as a character."*

- Lally Katz

Character Name	Personality/ Interests	Quotes
<b>Ana</b>		"There's an art to it." (to what?) "Escape." Page 51
<b>Catherine</b>		
<b>Ken</b>		
<b>Martin</b>		
<b>Katrina</b>		
<b>Jovanka</b>		
<b>Nancy</b>		

<b>Doctor White</b>		
<b>Ana's Father</b>		
<b>Ana's Mother</b>		
<b>Ana's Sister</b>		
<b>Gypsy</b>		
<b>Soldier</b>		
<b>Artur</b>		

# Artistic, Cultural, Social and Political Issues

## “Happy Kevin ’07.....Happy Obama”

1. These lines bookend the play; what political comment could be made here about what the general population is looking for?

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2. The play starts by commenting on Australian politics and end discussing American politics. What is the significance of this? What is being said about Australia and Australian leadership?

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3. Ken is absorbed in playing *World of Warcraft* and watching *The West Win* throughout the play.
  - a. What social comment does this make?

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- b. What does this say about how Ken views himself and his place in society?

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- c. What comment does it make on political and social leadership?

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4. What does the play say about the Refugee experience in Australia?

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# Dramatic Techniques and Conventions

## Key Knowledge

- The way in which non-naturalistic performance styles and conventions are used in performance
- The ways in which characters are represented in non-naturalistic performance through the actors' use of expressive skills
- The ways in which dramatic elements, conventions and stagecraft are manipulated to enhance non-naturalistic performance
- Drama terminology – relevant to non-naturalistic performance

## Key Skills

- Analyse the representation of characters within a non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse and evaluate the manipulation of dramatic elements, conventions and stagecraft within a non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse non-naturalistic performance styles within a production
- Analyse and evaluate the use of expressive and performance skills in non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse and evaluate establishment and maintenance of the actor-audience relationship in a non-naturalistic performance
- Drama terminology

## Dramatic Elements:

- Climax, conflict, contrast, mood, rhythm, sound, space, symbol, tension

## Expressive Skills:

- Voice, movement, gesture, facial expression

## Performance Skills:

- Focus, timing, energy, actor-audience relationship

## 1 THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

The structure of *Neighbourhood Watch* is two acts. Act I begins in Mary Street in 2007 and Act II begins in Hungary during WW2 in an infirmary (Hospital). What did you first feel and think when you entered the theatre to see the production?

- What aspects of the production were already apparent?
- What 'world' did you seem to be entering?
- Was it a contemporary world?
- What was familiar about the world of *Neighbourhood Watch*?
- What was unfamiliar?

Lally Katz states that *Neighbourhood Watch* is a world of the both the surreal and the real.

- What aspects of the performance seemed 'surreal'?

What aspects of the performance felt more 'real'?

- How did the play create both these worlds?
- How does the use of a predominantly empty space assist in creating different worlds?

## 2 STRUCTURE & NARRATIVE

*Neighbourhood Watch* is presented in two acts which are comprised of many smaller scenes or vignettes

- Were these small scenes or vignettes clearly signposted? How was this achieved? Sound? Light? Narration?

- Is the production a linear narrative?
- Does this production play with the concept of time? Flashback? Parallel time? Spheres of time?

# Dramatic Forms and Styles

## PERFORMANCE STYLES & CONVENTIONS

Neighbourhood Watch is considered to be a non-naturalistic play. Your task is to analyse the theatrical conventions it drew on in order to achieve and enhance the non-naturalism.

***I've always loved the magic in the ordinary- like the magic in the suburbs- places that seem ordinary - Lally Katz, writer***

- Consider the opening to the play – piano music and wheelie bins appearing outside houses
- How do these simple elements create a sense of an 'ordinary' suburb?
- How does the use of space combined with other elements such as lighting create the separate houses?
- How do we know we are outside?
- What seems real about this particular aspect of the play?
- How are each of the characters introduced to us?

***...but then there's this secret magic. To me that's non naturalism. And that's what we go for with Neighbourhood Watch at certain parts – Lally Katz, writer***

- When did you first notice aspects of 'secret magic' in this play?
- In what way were they magical or even fantasy like?
- Consider the use of lighting in this scene. How does it shift to represent the past?
- But to audience members watching it, I'm sure some of it will feel like magic realism or fantasy.

***Lally has written a play for the modern age: a time travelling mix of fantasy, hyperrealism, sitcom and epic theatre. The eclecticism of its form is not haphazard – it's a tribute to the myriad life we lead nowadays – Simon Stone.***

## Sitcom

- What is a sitcom? What conventions do we associate with it?
- Consider the following vignettes or scenes in the production – the arrival of NHW Nancy, the arrival of the Woolworths delivery boy, the ironing scene
- What aspects of these scenes could be considered similar to a sitcom?

## Hyperrealism

- Simon Stone's directorial style is known for the hyper real nature of the acting whereby we feel we are watching a very real and believable scene.
- Consider the scene between Ana and Dr Valker in Act II, this is quite a dramatic or serious scene
- What could be considered to be hyper-real in this scene?
- What other scenes can you recall that included such a sense of truthfulness or reality?
- How does the writing and language contribute to the hyper realism?

## Epic Theatre

- What are some key conventions of Epic Theatre?
- How were they present in the production of Neighbourhood Watch?
- Consider the role of the pianists and how he created his many 'types'
- Consider the stories contained within the production and their capacity to 'teach'
- Consider the juxtaposition of scenes and how they manipulated the actor/audience relationship

## Fantasy

- Discuss what fantasy is and identify some conventions
- Now consider the tale that Ana tells Catherine about Artur, the mass murderer.
  - We flashback to Hungary before WW2. Old Ana becomes Young Ana. The piano begins to play melancholic Hungarian music. The present and the past merge:
  - Discuss this scene in some detail and identify the 'fantastical' elements within it
  - How does costume contribute?
  - How does accent and language contribute? Ana says, 'We are speaking in the English so you understand'
  - How does the stage revolve and the construction of the tram contribute?
  - How does lighting and music shift and intensify in order to create this 'nightmare' like world?
  - How does this scene explore the dramatic elements of – mood, conflict, climax, contrast, rhythm, tension, sound, and symbol?
- Consider the Gypsy scene. As Ana begins to tell her first story to Catherine we are transported back to Hungary before WW2. New characters appear, period costumes, the revolve turns, older Ana becomes younger Ana watching her parents.
  - Whose fantasy or memory are we witnessing?
  - How are all these moments working together to enhance the non-naturalistic style?
  - Consider the use of lighting in this scene. How does it shift to represent the past?

## ACTOR/AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

Discuss the design of the playing space and all its elements – entrances, exits, shape, size, the revolve, the piano setting

- How was this space used in order to set up particular actor/audience relationships?
- Was there a fourth wall?
- Were certain moments intended to be intimate? Did they succeed?
- Where were you sitting in the auditorium and what impact do you feel that had on the actor/audience relationship?
- What was non-naturalistic about the actor/audience relationships that were established and manipulated within the production?

## DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

While it is useful to be considering dramatic elements across all aspects of your analysis, this section invites you to explore some in more detail

There are several moments of CONFLICT in Neighbourhood Watch.

- Between characters ie Ana and Milinka, Catherine and Ken, Ana and Catherine
- Within certain characters – internal conflict
- Between countries – meta conflict of war
- Select three scenes from the production and explore how CONFLICT is evident
- Consider the use of language, silence, facial expressions, gesture, movement
- Consider how lighting and sound contributed to establishing moments of conflict
- Did the conflict contribute to moments of 'realism'?
- How did the conflict contribute to moments of non-naturalism?

There is much representation and SYMBOLISM in the play

- How is the neighbourhood represented?
- How is Hungary represented?
- How is time represented?
- What is potentially symbolic about the STAGE REVOLVE?
- Is the music or sound symbolic at all? Why?

## STAGECRAFT

### Set & Properties

Describe the set design in as much detail as possible – colour palette, textures, theatre technologies used.

- How did the set design help to create multiple locations and multiple time frames?
- How did it enhance the non-naturalistic styles in the production?
- Evaluate its effectiveness in creating the world(s) within the play – was it too abstract, not abstract enough?

With a minimalist set design, smaller set items and props take on significant meaning. Some of the smaller set items and props in the production include:

- The wheelie bins
- The tea trolley with its coffee making items
- The ironing board and iron
- Various sets of chairs
- The laptop
- Catherine's mobile phone
- The raft on the river

Discuss how each of the set and prop items were used in the production, who used them, how they were used and what they represented or symbolised

- How did the choices of these small set items and props contribute to the non-naturalistic styles present in Neighbourhood Watch?

### Costume

Dale Ferguson designed the costumes as well as the set.

- It may be useful to analyse and evaluate them in relation to character.
- It may also be useful to consider the costume design from the present day then the costume

design from the past in Hungary

- Choose TWO characters from the present and TWO from the past
- Describe/list aspects of their costume (you can use the production shots in these notes to assist)
- Would you consider their costumes to be naturalistic or non-naturalistic?
- How did the costumes evoke era and time?



- How did the costumes enhance the narrative or story?
- How did costume create CONTRAST in the production?

After the opening scene of Act II, Catherine is still wearing her costume from war time Hungary when she returns to the present

- Can Ken see her costume or is it meant only for us?
- What do you think this symbolises within the play?
- How does it contribute to the non-naturalism?

### **Sound**

There are other sounds heard throughout the production of Neighbourhood Watch.

- Bella the dog, telephones, door bells are some – discuss others
- Would you consider these realistic sound effects? Can the performers hear them ie are they diegetic sound?
- How do these sound effects contribute to the theatrical styles present in the play?

### **Lighting**

On such a minimalist and somewhat abstract set, the lighting in this production plays an important role.

Lighting designer, Damien Cooper, has used light in a remarkable manner. Consider the following

scenes:

- The opening scene on Mary Street
- The first time we meet Martin
- When Catherine as young Ana meets Artur the murderer
- The montage scene at the cinema
- The final scene when Ana is dying

See if you can recall how these scenes were lit considering the colour, the intensity, the direction of the light.

- What stood out for you in terms of lighting? Why?
- How did particular lighting states evoke mood?
- Was lighting used symbolically ie to capture characters' feelings or states of mind?

## Reviews and Productions



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Megan Holloway and Charlie Garber in Neighbourhood Watch



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Natasha Herbert and Robyn Nevis in Neighbourhood Watch



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Robyn Newls, Anthony Harkin and Kris McQuade in Neighbourhood Watch



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Megan Holloway, Kris McQuade, Robyn Newls and Anthony Harkin in Neighbourhood Watch



MTIC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY  
Megan Holloway and Alex Armont in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTIC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY  
Robyn Neels and Megan Holloway in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Akon Armont, Megan Holloway and Robyn Nevin in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Megan Holloway and Akon Armont in *Neighbourhood Watch*





MTC PHOTO, JEFF BUSBY

Nicos Amest, Megan Holloway and Robyn Nevin in Neighbourhood Watch



MTC PHOTO, JEFF BUSBY

Kris McQuade, Megan Holloway and Robyn Nevin in Neighbourhood Watch



