



THE
REDFERN
STORY



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A STUDY GUIDE BY CASEY LANGSFORD



AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA

<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>

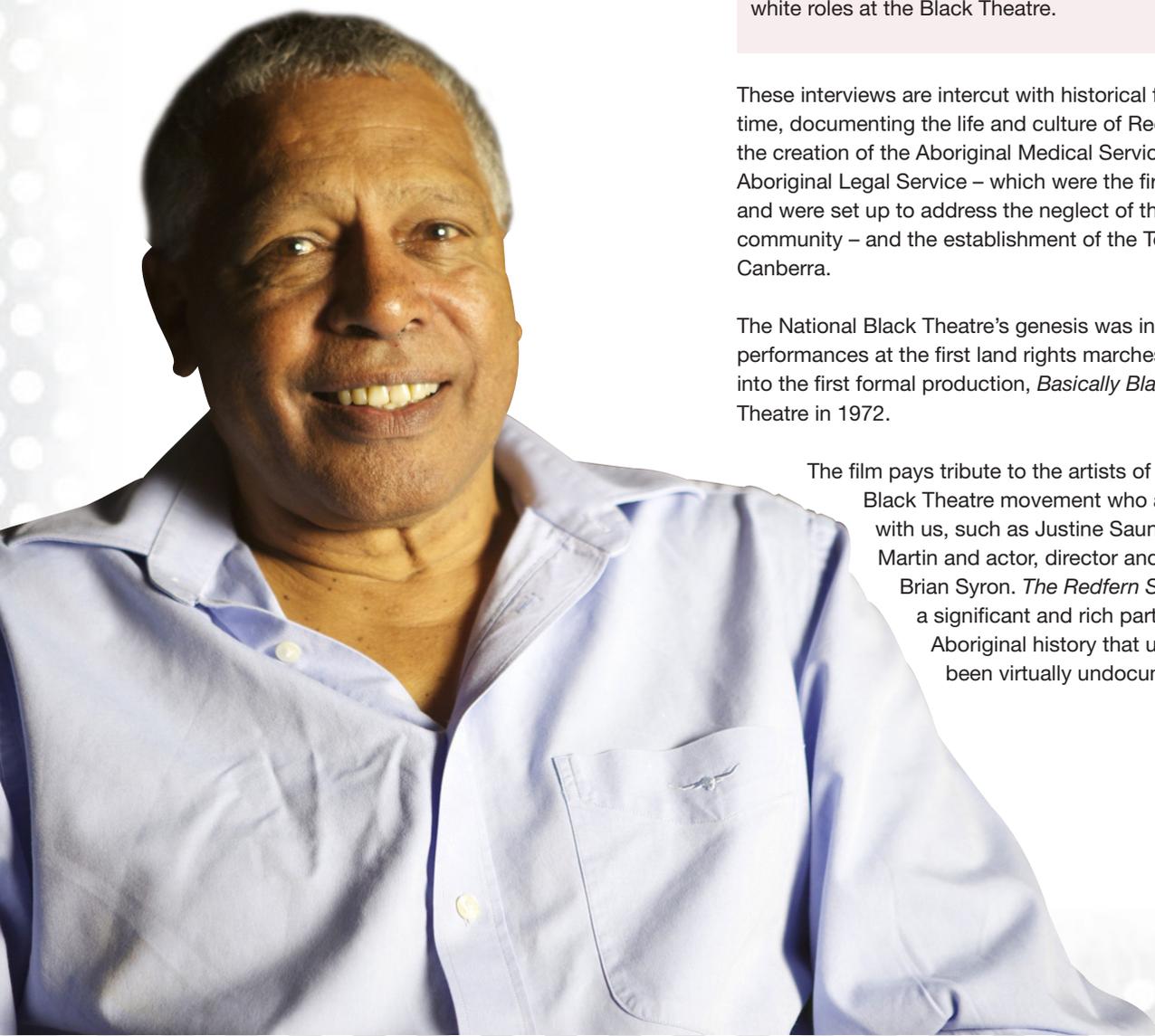
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<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>

SYNOPSIS

The film focuses on the events that led to the setting up of the National Black Theatre in Redfern in 1972 by a small group of untrained political activists, writers, dancers and actors, with Bob Maza at the helm. Spanning only five years, it was a way that Aboriginal people felt they could get their voices heard effectively.

In 1970, Maza and fellow activists travelled to America to learn from the black American experience, bringing back and implementing what they had learned. On his return to Australia, Maza moved his family from Melbourne to Sydney and the National Black Theatre was established at the Maza residence at 181 Regent Street, Redfern. It later moved to a warehouse on Cope Street.



The film contains interviews with people who worked with Bob Maza, and who were involved in the Black Theatre and were instrumental in shaping and bringing about significant social change. They include academics **MARCIA LANGTON** and **GARY FOLEY**, brothers **GERRY AND LESTER BOSTOCK**, actors **ALILEEN LOUISE CORPUS**, **BINDI WILLIAMS**, **BRONWYN PENRITH**, **LILLIAN CROMBIE** and the talented daughters of Bob Maza, **RACHAEL** and **LISA**. Actors **BRYAN BROWN** and **MAX CULLEN** are also interviewed about playing white roles at the Black Theatre.

These interviews are intercut with historical footage of the time, documenting the life and culture of Redfern. We cover the creation of the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Legal Service – which were the first of their kind and were set up to address the neglect of the struggling community – and the establishment of the Tent Embassy in Canberra.

The National Black Theatre's genesis was in street theatre performances at the first land rights marches, developing into the first formal production, *Basically Black*, at Nimrod Theatre in 1972.

The film pays tribute to the artists of the National Black Theatre movement who are no longer with us, such as Justine Saunders, Zac Martin and actor, director and drama teacher Brian Syron. *The Redfern Story* is about a significant and rich part of modern Aboriginal history that until now has been virtually undocumented.



CREDITS

Written and directed by
Darlene Johnson

Produced by
Sue Milliken and
Darlene Johnson

Curriculum Guidelines

Teachers will be able to connect *The Redfern Story* with Year 10–VCE curriculum in the following subject areas:

- » History
- » English

The Australian National Curriculum for History outlines that students investigate struggles for human rights in depth. This will include how rights and freedoms have been ignored, demanded or achieved in Australia and in the broader world context. Teachers can use *The Redfern Story* to supplement students' knowledge and understanding of the significance of the civil rights movements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and the methods used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to achieve civil, political and social rights in the period from 1945 to the present day.

The Redfern Story examines notions of identity and belonging in Australian culture as well as how Aboriginal people in Redfern encountered conflict. VCE English requires students to undertake a study of a Context and focus on reading and writing and their interconnection. The Contexts of 'Encountering Conflict' and 'Identity and Belonging' could both be supplemented with this documentary.

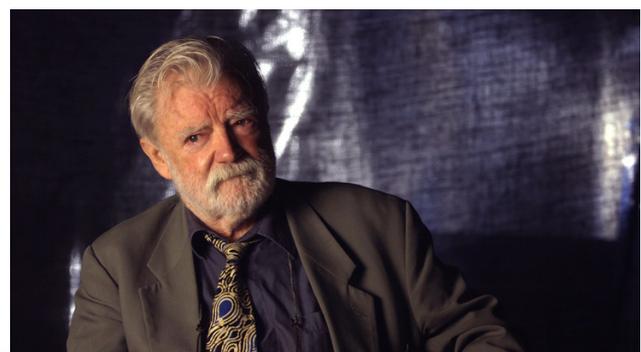
In conjunction with these discipline learning based subjects, *The Redfern Story* connects to the cross curriculum priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. This documentary can be used to highlight how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are strong, rich and diverse. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identity is central to this priority and is intrinsically linked to living, learning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, deep knowledge traditions and holistic world view.

CONTEXT AND PRE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

The National Black Theatre movement in Redfern formed at a very crucial time in Australian political history, culminating with the establishment of a political movement and the setting up of a number of significant Aboriginal organisations. The National Black Theatre has left a lasting legacy on national politics, social welfare and the Australian arts scene.

Before viewing *The Redfern Story*, it might be useful for students to complete the following activities:

- » Research Indigenous history in Australia. The following website might be useful to get started: <<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/>>. Record your research under the following headings: politics, culture, spirituality, arts, and history.
- » Write down your thoughts on how Aboriginal culture and life has changed since the arrival of Europeans to Australia. Be prepared to discuss your ideas with the class.
- » Create a timeline of significant moments in Aboriginal history. For each key date you will need to explain why you have included it, or why you think it is significant. *Complete Table 1 on the following page; an example is given in top row.*





VIEWING ACTIVITIES

As students watch *The Redfern Story* they can complete the following activities:

- » Describe how Redfern, a suburb in Sydney, looked from the archival footage. What were the problems facing people who lived and grew up there?
- » Record the different people who are interviewed and discussed in the documentary. Explain, in dot points, who they were and what their role was in Redfern and the National Black Theatre. *Complete Table 2 on the following page; an example is given in top row.*

≡ Prejudice and 'Living out a Siege'

The 1960s and 1970s in Australia was a time of great political and social change. The consequences of the White Australia policy, however, were still being felt. Aboriginal people began to move to Sydney during this time in search of work and connections. The suburb of Redfern in Sydney became home to over 20,000 Aboriginal people during these years. Even with massive social upheaval and calls for change, Aboriginal people in Redfern faced daily racism, difficult living conditions and ongoing harassment from the police. Bronwyn Penrith describes the situation as 'like living out a siege'.

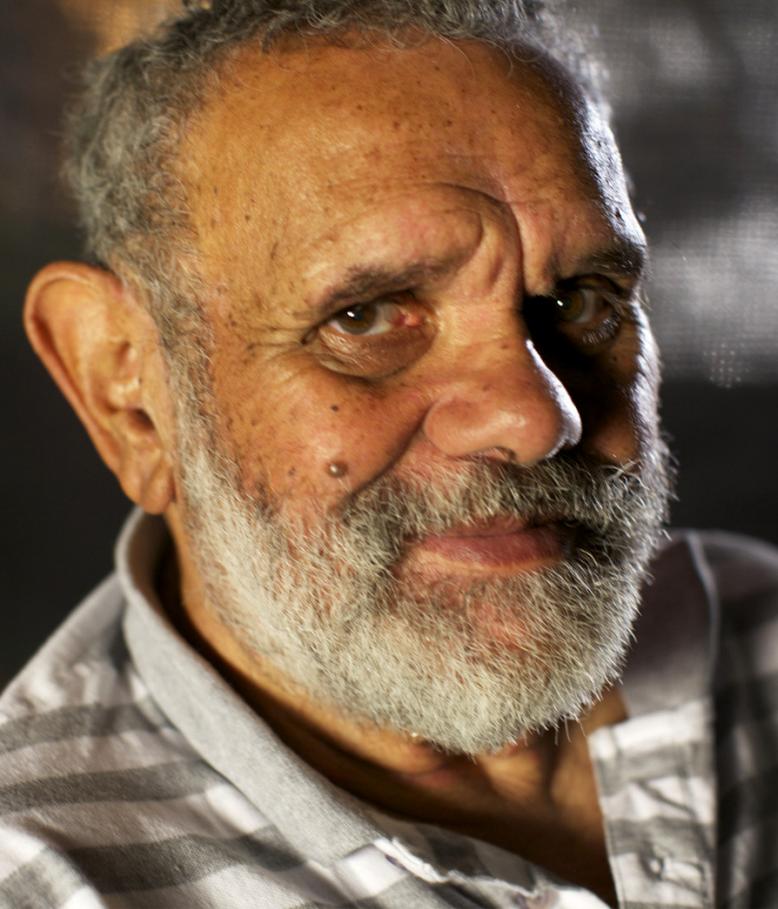
- » Locate on a map of Sydney the suburb of Redfern. Explain the different reasons why Aboriginal people moved to Redfern.
- » What was the White Australia Policy? Use this website to help your research: <<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/59.html>>. Outline the impact of the White Australia policy.
- » Define the words 'prejudice' and 'racism'. How might Aboriginal people have experienced both during the 1960s and early 1970s? Use the film and your own ideas to explain your answer.
- » Examine the relationship between the Aboriginal people in Redfern and the police. Why was there so much anger and violence towards each other? What role do police play in society? Imagine how citizens feel when the police force is not focused on protection and justice. Can you think of any places in the world or times in history when police have acted in a similar way?
- » Why did Bronwyn Penrith describe living in Redfern as like 'living under siege'?
- » How do communities hold on to traditions, culture and history? Why is it important that communities remember their past?

TABLE 1



NAME	EXPLANATION OF ROLE AND IMPACT
Example: Bob Maza	Example: At the helm of the National Black Theatre, which he established using ideas from the civil rights movement in America.





≡ Civil Rights and Activism

Across the world, the 1960s and 1970s saw a change in the way people understood civil and political rights. Many movements gained momentum during this time with feminism, anti-war and civil rights movements all attempting to have their ideas and voices heard. Australians took to the streets during these years to protest female rights, Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War and the rights of Aboriginal people. While ideas were drawn from the American experience of civil rights, especially Black Power, the Indigenous rights movement in Australia was unique.

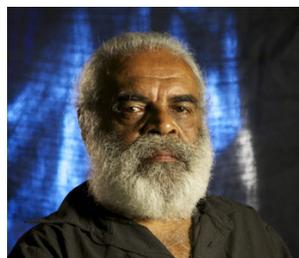
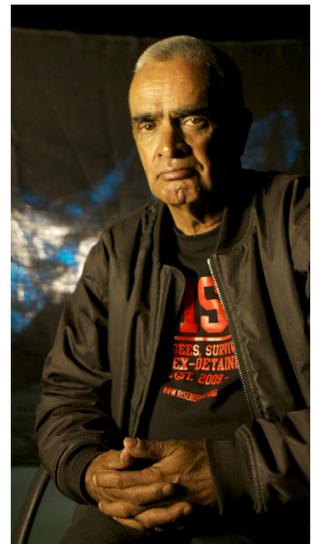
- » Research the 1967 Referendum. Use the following website to begin your research: <<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs150.aspx>>. Write up your notes in a one-page report that also includes a discussion on why the referendum was important.
- » The 1960s and 1970s was a time of great change for society and Aboriginal people. How did Aboriginal people try to create change in their communities and the rest of Australia? How do people today create change in their communities and the world?
- » What role did education play for the activists depicted in *The Redfern Story*?
- » Explain the impact on the Redfern community in having the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern?
- » What is meant by the term 'Black Power'? Rewatch the documentary if you need help in defining this term.
- » Who was Bob Maza? Spend some time researching him and create a one-page summary of his life and achievements, focusing especially on his role in establishing The National Black Theatre.

- » *The Redfern Story* explores the issue of land rights and the activism that developed in pursuit of this issue. What is meant by land rights and why has it been such a contentious issue?
- » Why was the Aboriginal Tent Embassy established? Write a one-page expository piece in which you discuss its establishment and role in Australia from 1972 to now.
- » How did people in Australia respond to the Tent Embassy?

≡ The National Black Theatre

On Bob Maza's return to Australia from a trip to America, where he had been investigating the American civil rights movement, he and his family moved to Sydney and established the National Black Theatre in Redfern. *The Redfern Story* documents how important this moment was for the people of Redfern. It gave them a voice and chance for their stories to be heard.

- » How was the National Black Theatre political?
- » Define 'street theatre'. How did Black Theatre use elements of street theatre?
- » What role did Black Theatre play in Redfern?
- » What were the stories being told by Black Theatre? Why was this important? Why might Indigenous Australians feel like their stories had not been heard?
- » *Basically Black* was the first formal production. How do you think people responded to this production? What was the role of satire and ridicule in Black Theatre?
- » Who was Gough Whitlam and why did his election in 1972 signify a shift in the policy towards land rights?

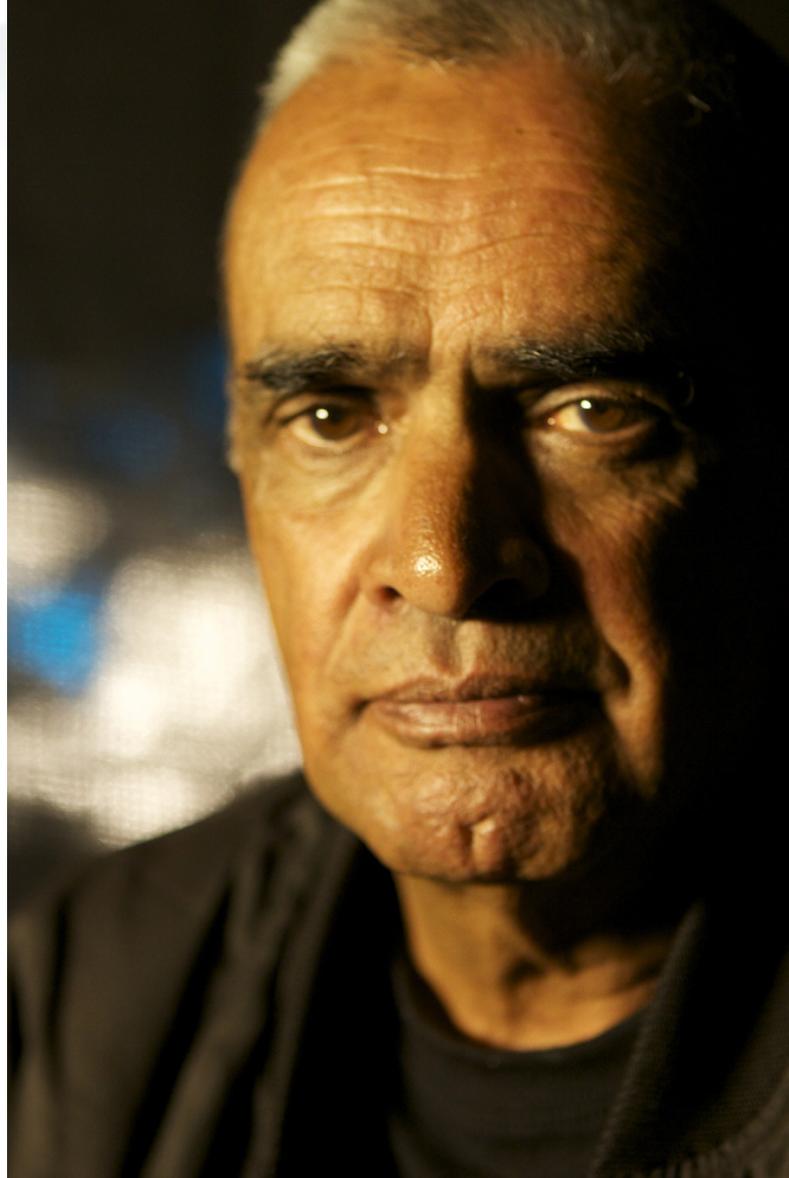


- » Explore the idea that activism requires both political and cultural activists who are working for change. Is it just as important to have 'literary and artistic records' as well as political? Be prepared to discuss your responses.
- » The ABC developed a pilot TV programme of *Basically Black*. This was never shown on TV. Why do you think this was the case?
- » Explain why Lester Bostock said 'to call it a Black Theatre we needed to do everything from top to bottom'.
- » What was the 'bail fund' and what does it highlight about culture and life in Redfern at the time?
- » Rewatch the clips that show the production of *The Cakeman*, by Robert Merrit. What elements of Aboriginal history and culture do we see being portrayed? Why was this play and its production important?
- » What do you think the impact has been from the development of the National Black Theatre? How did the activists and artists from this time 'change [their] world'?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Students can complete these activities as extension work or as preparation for an assessment task:

- » Investigate one of the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. Why did these movements develop? What opposition did these movements face? Is there still a need for political and cultural movements today? Write an expository essay on the movement and how it created change. You might wish to use one of the following or focus on another group of your choice: Feminism, antiwar movement, anti-nuclear movement, environmentalism, gay rights movement.
- » Using *The Redfern Story*, respond to the following two prompts in either a creative or persuasive piece of writing: 'Identity can be shaped by both positive and negative experiences' and 'Although a conflict may have ceased, its effects on people may be long-lasting'.
- » Chart the history of the Indigenous rights movement in Australia. How were rights removed from Aboriginal people with the arrival of Europeans? Look for examples of Aboriginal activism. Research Aboriginal activism that is ongoing in Australia.
- » The experience of Aboriginal people is unique but there are similarities with other Indigenous populations around the world. Explore how ONE Indigenous community has faced a colonising force and the outcome. Note how their story is both similar and different to the experience of Aboriginal people.
- » *The Redfern Story* references the American Civil Rights movement, especially Malcolm X and Black Power. Spend some time examining this period in



- American history. Create a presentation for your class that highlights key moments and key figures in the struggle for civil rights in America.
- » Research the history of land rights in Australia. Imagine you are a lawyer or investigator and present the case for land rights for Aboriginal people.
 - » Using the film *The Redfern Story* and other sources, research three Aboriginal people who have been pioneers in the arts, education, politics, sport or the law. Present a biography on these three people that outlines who they are and their achievements.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Indigenous Australians are advised that some of these websites include images or names of people now deceased

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- <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/>
- <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/59.html>
- <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs150.aspx>
- <http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/context/encountering-conflict/encountering-conflict-prompts>



MAIL

P.O. Box 680, Mitchell, ACT
2911

WEBSITE

<http://www.roninfilms.com.au>

PH

02 6248 0851

EMAIL

admin@roninfilms.com.au



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