Introduction
These teachers’ notes have been designed to assist you with classroom preparation in relation to Bangarra Dance Theatre’s work, **TERRAIN**. We hope that this resource will assist your students to further enjoy and enhance their performing arts experience back in the classroom.

NSW Board of Studies Syllabi has been used as guides for the planning of these activities. You should adapt the activities to suit the student age and stage of your class and the curriculum foci and outcomes used in your school.

Some websites are suggested throughout this resource. It is recommended that you first visit the sites and assess the suitability of the content for your particular school environment before setting the activities based on these.

Classroom Context and Curriculum Links
These notes will provide information about the work **TERRAIN** – its creative themes, the processes involved in its making, and the work of the creative team who bring its realisation to the stage.

The material contained in these notes will assist in preparing students prior to their attending the performance and also provide suggestions for activities and follow-up research as a way of enriching and extending the experience beyond the performance and into relevant areas of cross curricula study.

Performance Description and Synopsis
About **TERRAIN**

**TERRAIN** is an homage to country. It is a story of the fundamental connection between people and land - how we treat our land, how we understand its spirit, and how we care for its future. **TERRAIN** presents the vastness and the diversity of a landscape like no other. It’s about the power of natural forces and the vulnerability of ecosystems within a landscape that has existed and evolved as long as the Earth itself – a landscape from where human beings draw life and express meaning to that life.

**TERRAIN** is Bangarra Dance Theatre’s twentieth new production and represents the first full-length work from choreographer and Bangarra artist-in-residence, Frances Rings.

About BANGARRA

Bangarra is recognised nationally and internationally for distinctive dance theatre performances that combine the spirituality of traditional culture with modern story-telling. The company was founded in 1989, and since 1991 has been led by Artistic Director Stephen Page. Bangarra presents over 110 performances each year, tours internationally as well as extensively to national, regional and remote centres across Australia.

Bangarra’s vision is fuelled by the spirit, energy and inspiration derived from the culture, values and traditions of Indigenous Australians. From these roots, Bangarra creates theatre that is artistically innovative, technically outstanding and truly exciting.
About the Work

Introduction to TERRAIN

*Kati Thanda* (Lake Eyre) is a place that cannot be measured in our everyday western timeframes. Days are measured by the length of shadows, or when the afternoon clouds roll in; months are measured by the level of salt crust on the surface of the lake; and years are measured by the rise and fall of waters that sweep through ancient river systems, transforming the desert and bringing new life.

Lake Eyre is a great salt lake of tectonic origin situated in the remote north west of South Australia. As a closed inland drainage basin with an area of 1,140,000 km², the Lake Eyre basin is one of the largest areas of internal drainage in the world.

The Arabunna people have existed and maintained deep connection with the Lake Eyre basin for thousands of years, and recently won land rights for Lake Eyre and its surrounds. Their understanding of the landscape, and all the variances of its ever-changing behaviour enable the Arabunna to read the landscape, know its purpose and be able to share with us, stories of how *Kati Thanda* survives and thrives through its very dramatic natural cycles of flood, drought and everything in between. Even more importantly, this knowledge serves to maintain the cultural life that has existed for tens of thousands of years of Indigenous relationship to the terrain of central Australia.

Presenting TERRAIN

The work is presented as nine interconnected sections or ‘states of experiencing’ the terrain of Lake Eyre. The audience is guided though each of these descriptive chapters as they depict various aspects of Lake Eyre’s cultural, environmental and political life. The work’s substantive content and structure is the result of a long period of research, personal reflection and creative development by the whole artistic team, led by Rings. *TERRAIN* explores:

- How we feel and acknowledge connection to place
- How we experience the emotional and palpable power of an untouched landscape
- How we sense our responsibility to that landscape
- How we learn and share the stories that emanate through traditional dreaming of the Arabunna

**RED BRICK** Looking beyond urbanscape to hear an ancestral Calling to Country.

**SHIELDS** Reflecting on the struggle for Land Rights and Recognition that continues to affect Indigenous people today.

**REBORN** Land is passed down through the lineage along with knowledge and customs.

**SPINIFEX** Inspired by the trees in and around Lake Eyre that resemble the gatherings of spirit women waiting, suspended in time.

**SALT** Beyond the white salt vastness lies an abstract landscape that resonates an ancient power.

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*Kati Thanda* is one of the Aboriginal names given to Lake Eyre.
The impact of man's actions scars and disrupts the delicate balance between man and environment.

Through each evolution the land regenerates and heals, awakening the cultural ties that connect people to place.

Traversing the horizon to glimpse the sacred realm where earth and sky meet.

Waters begin their journey towards Lake Eyre bringing with it transformation and ensuring the life cycle continues.

Creating TERRAIN

Creating a full-length work like TERRAIN involves a great deal of time, commitment and collaboration. The director/choreographer will firstly be inspired to tell a story, to bring something to the stage that will awaken people’s awareness and touch their lives. Story telling is one of the most powerful means to communicate cultural, social and political issues and dance is a very visceral and effective way to give a story life. Story telling is the mainframe of cultural life for Indigenous Australians.

The choreographer and the creative collaborators will enter into the research period with ideas, intent and a certain amount of hunger to explore the dimensions of the subject matter. They will gather the information and expressive fuel from other stories in order to be inspired and create layers of knowledge and creative possibilities. They will consult closely with each other in order to galvanise the ideas as they progress on the journey of creating the work.

Once the initial period of research and discussion is well developed, the choreographer will start to work with the dancers and together they will explore the movement language that will tell the story in a way that is evocative and captivating.

As the choreography starts to take shape and order, the choreographer works with the rehearsal director and dancers to refine the more nuanced elements of the choreography. Getting the right dynamic into a movement, perfecting the technical elements, building the relationships between the performers – all of these aspects need to be worked on and consolidated.

The music and design for the work needs to be in synch with the development of the choreography and as all these parts come together the director/choreographer has to hold onto the essence of the story, the message, and the telling.

The TERRAIN creative team

Choreographer – Frances Rings

Adelaide-born Frances Rings is a descendant of the Kokatha Tribe and is also of German descent. Frances joined Bangarra in 1993 after graduating from NAISDA Dance College, and performed with the company for over a decade. At the same time she began developing her work as a choreographer.

TERRAIN marks Frances’ sixth choreographic work for the company, following the success of her work Artefact (as part of of earth and sky, 2010), X300 (2007), Unaipon (2004), Bush – co choreographer with Stephen Page (2003) and Rations (as part of Walkabout, 2002).
Frances Rings on TERRAIN:
‘I believe country reveals to us the natural laws that govern our existence and that as people, no matter what our background, we all have an innate longing to sink our feet into the sand, for our hands to splash water and to connect with the natural world.’

Composer – David Page

David Page on TERRAIN:
‘Lake Eyre is a place of heritage, mystery, threat and natural beauty and has given me, and the creative team the opportunity to explore the vastness of spirit, colour and sound.’

Set designer – Jacob Nash
Jacob is a murri man who grew up in Brisbane. He graduated from the NIDA Design Course in 2005. He designed of earth & sky for Bangarra in 2010 (winning a Greenroom Award for Best Design in Dance), Belong (2011), Warumuk - in the dark night (2012) and TERRAIN (2012).

Jacob Nash on TERRAIN:
‘The challenge as the set designer of TERRAIN was to create a design that was not obvious, almost unknown; to create a language that was truthful to the place and the stories that Frances was telling. We wanted to achieve a ‘world’ that is always alive like the lake itself – always within a cycle that will never stop, it is an everlasting continuum.’

Costume designer – Jennifer Irwin
Costume designer Jennifer Irwin’s career spans 30 years constructing & designing costumes for drama, opera, film and in particular for dance & ballet. Jennifer designs regularly for many major Australian companies and has also designed some of the largest scale spectacular productions ever staged in Australia including Awakening, the Indigenous segment of Sydney 2000 Olympic Opening Ceremony.

Jennifer has designed and constructed many of Bangarra’s costumes for the last 20 years.

Jennifer Irwin on TERRAIN:
‘Being inspired by so many beautiful images of Lake Eyre I was captured by its surrealism and vastness. I focused on the textural elements of the materials I was working with, abstracting the narrative – the continual changing of the landscape; the cracked salt lake and earth that has avoided human influence.’
Lighting designer – Karen Norris

Karen Norris was born in New Zealand and has been a lighting designer for ballet, opera, theatre, dance, concerts and outdoor events for over 25 years in Australia, UK, Europe and New Zealand. Karen has designed previously for Bangarra on the work *The Dreaming* (1999) and for the Bangarra involvement in the Sydney Olympics (2000).

Karen Norris on TERRAIN:

‘On a site visit to Lake Eyre, I was confronted by a vast, immense landscape – places in the middle of nowhere – this pink encrusted jewel: Lake Eyre. Apart from being awesomely emotive in its history – present and past – it was bathed in this undulating, fragmented light.’
### LESSON ON TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. **BANGARRA**
   - Have students become familiar with Bangarra’s work, if they are not already familiar. Visit their website for more information: [www.bangarra.com.au](http://www.bangarra.com.au). You might like to focus on the following pages:

2. **THE SUBJECT MATERIAL OF TERRAIN**
   - Students can then be introduced to the subject material of TERRAIN, and the creative process of the team that developed and produced the work, from raw initial ideas through to full production. Students could also be provided with information about Lake Eyre, the Arabunna people, and the bio-diversity of great salt lakes.
     - For information about Lake Eyre: geology, geography, fauna, origins and mythology, visit: [http://austhrutime.com/lake_eyre.htm#The_Lake](http://austhrutime.com/lake_eyre.htm#The_Lake)

   You might like to use the attached student handout (see resources section) to help students with these pre-show activities.

#### POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

3. **RESPONDING TO THE WORK**
   - After attending the performance, students will have a more tangible sense of the production TERRAIN. Their responses can be captured and explored in the context of Dance curriculum objectives, or through a variety of other curriculum related activities. E.g. students could be asked to create:
     - **A dance specific response** – using the concept of land, story and place, devise a choreographic framework for a dance composition piece. What type of movements would illustrate the chosen subject matter, and what range of dynamics would be explored? This task could be approached as exploration of an idea, performance of examples of
key phrases, and/or discussion.

OR - in the form of a short essay that identifies distinguishing choreographic motifs, structural elements (e.g. how the sections relate, how the design, sound, movement are integrated), and how contemporary dance language is 'spoken' though cultural expression of knowledge and tradition.

- **A visual/graphic arts response** – in the form of a poster, painting, drawing, animation, postcard, collage, short film, or t-shirt design
- **A sound/music response** – in the form of a song or rap, a soundscape, or a music composition
- **A critical or creative writing response** – in the form of a critical review, short story, short play, poem or a letter

### 4 RESEARCH TASK

Have students complete a research task to develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and stimulus for *TERRAIN*. For example:

- An investigation of the **cultural history** of Lake Eyre and/or the Arabunna people
- An **environmental study** of the Lake Eyre basin
- A **geological** report of the Lake Eyre environment

### TEACHER’S OVERVIEW AND UNIT EVALUATION
References and Resources

Websites
Comprehensive information developed specifically for students and produced by the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum (Dept of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and the Queensland, South Australian and Northern Territory governments). Covers environmental, economical, geological information and indigenous interests including native title claims:
For visual examples from an exhibition of images by Murray Fredericks Lake Eyre: reflection in the outback – visit Australian Geographic:

Summary information about the Lake Eyre Basin:
www.lakeeyrebasin.org.au

Film
Salt (JERRYCAN Films)
Producer/director – Michael Angus and Murray Fredericks
www.saltdoco.com/index.htm

Book
Lake Eyre: A journey through the heart of the continent
Paul Lockyer
ABC Books, 2012
... Landscape is at the core of our existence and is a fundamental connection between us and the natural world. The power of that connection is immeasurable. It cleanses, it heals, it awakens and it renews. It gives us perspective. It reminds us of something beyond ourselves and it frees us. But more importantly when we are surrounded by nature we begin to understand our place and how we are a very, very small part of a much larger, much bigger picture.

*Terrain* is where spirit and place meet.

... Frances Rings, Choreographer

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**About Bangarra**

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**The Creative Team**

The creative team for *Terrain* includes some of the most renowned artists in Australia. They have worked with Bangarra - and with each other - for many years.

**Choreographer** Frances Rings

**Composer** David Page

**Set Designer** Jacob Nash

**Costume Designer** Jennifer Irwin

**Lighting Designer** Karen Norris
**Introduction to TERRAIN**

*Kati Thanda* (Lake Eyre) is a place that cannot be measured in our everyday western timeframes. Days are measured by the length of shadows, or when the afternoon clouds roll in; months are measured by the level of salt crust on the surface of the lake; and years are measured by the rise and fall of waters that sweep through ancient river systems, transforming the desert and bringing new life.

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**Presenting TERRAIN**

*TERRAIN* is presented as nine interconnected sections or ‘states of experiencing’ the terrain of Lake Eyre.

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.... all of these layers are explored in the nine sections of *TERRAIN* which are described below:

**RED BRICK** Looking beyond urbanscape to hear an ancestral Calling to Country.

**SHEilds** Reflecting on the struggle for Land Rights and Recognition that continues to affect Indigenous people today.

**REBORN** Land is passed down through the lineage along with knowledge and customs.

**SPINIFEX** Inspired by the trees in and around Lake Eyre that resemble the gatherings of spirit women waiting, suspended in time.

**SALT** Beyond the white salt vastness lies an abstract landscape that resonates an ancient power.

**SCAR** The impact of mans actions scars and disrupts the delicate balance between man and environment.

**LANDFORM** Through each evolution the land regenerates and heals, awakening the cultural ties that connect people to place.

**REFLECT** Traversing the horizon to glimpse the sacred realm where earth and sky meet.

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*Kati Thanda* is one of the Aboriginal names given to Lake Eyre.
DELUGE Waters begin their journey towards Lake Eyre bringing with it transformation and ensuring the life cycle continues.

ACTIVITIES: Prior to attending the performance

1. Have a look at the following Bangarra website pages for information about the company, as well as the production TERRAIN:

A film clip that includes interviews with Frances Rings, David Page and Stephen Page, filmed examples of the Lake Eyre landscape and the choreography of Frances Rings:


A comprehensive current and archive collection of Bangarra’s productions over the last 21 years, including video, images and information about the works:


2. Explore the following websites in order to be introduced to the subject material of TERRAIN.

For basic information about Lake Eyre - geology, geography, fauna, origins and mythology:

http://austhrutime.com/lake_eyre.htm#The_Lake

For information and short film clips about the Arabunna people:


For more comprehensive information developed specifically for students, covering environmental, economical, geological information and indigenous interests including native title claims:


For visual examples from an exhibition of images by Murray Fredericks:

Lake Eyre: a reflection in the outback, Australian Geographic