

# Teacher Resource for The Unknown Soldier by Sandra Eldridge

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
About the Show .....	2
How the story is told.....	3
Production Design: The Set.....	3
Production Design: The Costumes .....	5
The Hero Project - “Who Is The Unknown Soldier?” .....	7
Activities for younger students (Ages 10, 11 and 12) .....	8
1. The Home Front.....	8
2. Conscience Alley.....	8
3. Life In The Trenches .....	9
Activities for older students (Ages 13, 14, 15 and up).....	10
4. Personal Opinion.....	10
5. What Is The Play About? – Pre Show Activity .....	11
6. Scene From The Play The Unknown Soldier.....	12
America’s Involvement in WWI.....	14
Acknowledgements .....	15

## Introduction

These resources have been created for North American students and teachers as a complement to the touring production created by Monkey Baa Theatre Company.

Content in these notes is suggested for students aged 10 – 15.

**Topic links include (but are not limited to):**

**History** – World War I; Contemporary Conflicts in the Middle East; Afghanistan; Veteran Welfare

**English** – Text type, Drama; Different purposes and functions of language; Crafting dialogue for the stage; Language and self-expression in different places, cultures and times

**Drama** – Text type, Drama; Play-building and play writing; Flashback as a theatrical technique; Character transformation

## About the Show

*The Unknown Soldier* is an Australian play by Sandra Eldridge. The production premiered on May 16 2015, at the Lendlease Darling Quarter Theatre, Sydney, Australia. This theatre is an intimate black-box space that seats 236 people.

For the original production, the personnel were as follows:

<b>Writer</b>	Sandra Eldridge
<b>Director</b>	Matt Edgerton
<b>Production Designer</b>	Anna Gardiner
<b>Lighting Designer</b>	Matt Cox
<b>Sound Designer</b>	David Stalley
<b>Dramaturge</b>	Tim McGarry
<b>Stage Manager</b>	Kelly Ukena

**Cast** Sandra Eldridge (in the roles of Angela and Grace) and Felix Johnson (in the roles of Albert and Charlie).

## How the story is told

*The Unknown Soldier* uses a range of theatrical techniques to tell the story of Angela, Charlie, Albert and Grace.

**The two actors play four characters:** the actor playing Charlie doubles as Albert Jackson, and the actor playing Angela also plays Grace. This doubling of roles is a striking and memorable feature of the production, with the actors moving seamlessly from one role to another.

**Shifts in place and time:** the play moves from the present day to 1916 in the trenches of the Western Front. This change of place and time is indicated by: lighting changes; sound effects; costume changes; the actor changing the physical and vocal attributes of their character.

**Sound design:** pre-recorded sound effects help to tell the story of place and time. Sound adds to atmosphere, tension and suspense on the stage.

**Lighting design:** changes in the intensity and colour of stage lights help to shift the stage action in time and place. Lighting also impacts mood and tension on stage. The lighting designer works closely with the director to ensure the lighting on stage is serving the story. The story's structure is further defined using blackouts and lighting changes.

The creative team of Lighting, Production (set and costume) and Sound designers work closely with the director to ensure the story is told clearly to the audience.

## Production Design: The Set

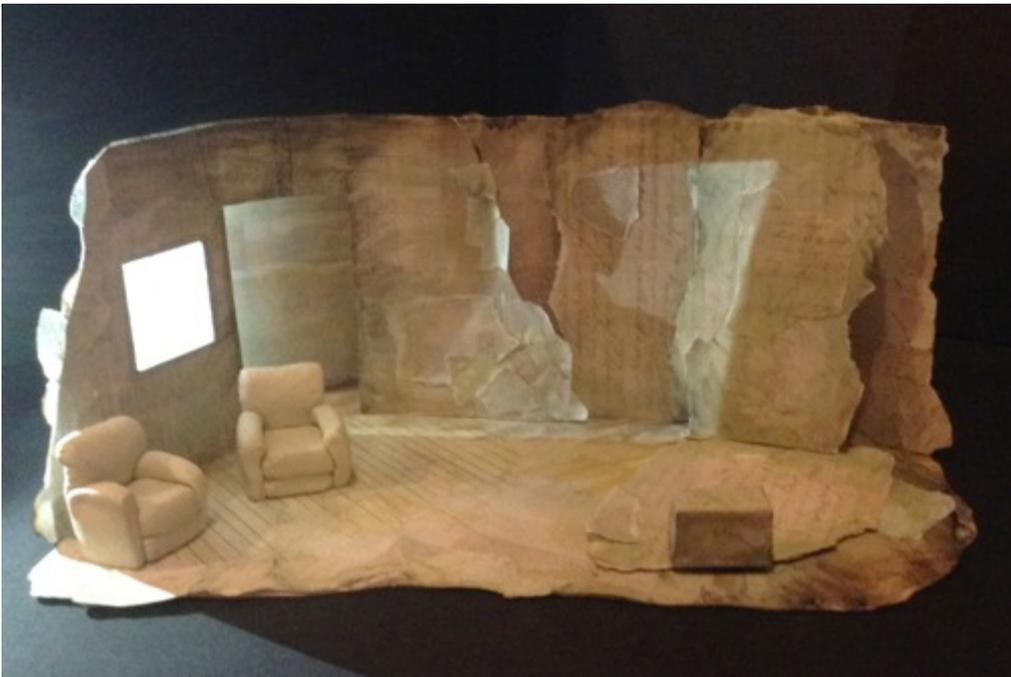


© Anna Gardiner, *The Unknown Soldier* set model box, 2015



© Anna Gardiner, *The Unknown Soldier* set model box, 2015

The walls of the set for *The Unknown Soldier* are lined with large-scale reproductions of letters from an actual WWI soldier. There are two main points for lighting to create shadows, the window (see image below) and the back wall (as per the picture with the pyramids, above). These shadow effects help to change the setting by indicating to the audience a particular place, for example Egypt as per above.



© Anna Gardiner, *The Unknown Soldier* set model box, 2015

The window and furniture create a domestic space, defining Angela's lounge room in her house in the Blue Mountains.

## Production Design: The Costumes

Anna Gardiner designed the set and the costumes for *The Unknown Soldier*. The costumes can be seen in the below production images. Note how character changes are delineated through small additions to the base costume for each actor.



Production image from the 2015 production © Heidrun Lohr



Production image from the 2015 production © Heidrun Lohr



Production image from the 2015 production © Heidrun Lohr

## The Hero Project - "Who Is The Unknown Soldier?"

In *The Unknown Soldier*, the central character Charlie finds letters from a WWI soldier, Albert Jackson, written from Albert to his mother. Charlie is able to use websites similar to those listed below to trace Albert's journey, and find out the battle and place in which he died. Through this research Charlie connects to Albert's identity, and decides to visit a prominent war memorial, the ANZAC Memorial in Sydney's Hyde Park to commemorate Albert's service.

We encourage students to complete this research project before seeing *The Unknown Soldier*; it will give them a real connection to Charlie's story when they see the play on stage.

### Process:

1. Visit your local war memorial: there might be one in a local church, or park, or town square near where you live or go to school.
2. Choose a name from that memorial and write it down. Note any dates and other information on the memorial listing as well - write it all down.
3. Enter that name into one of the following search sites;  
The Commonwealth War Graves Commission <http://www.cwgc.org>  
The National Archives of Australia <http://www.naa.gov.au>  
The Red Cross Wounded <http://www.redcross.org.uk>  
The Australian War Memorial Canberra <https://www.awm.gov.au>

Using these sites, trace the journey of the chosen soldier, creating a biography for him/her. Note where they were born, how old they were when they joined up, where they came from, where they died – any details you can find. Make a presentation to your whole class to share what you discovered about your hero and his/her service.

## Activities for younger students (Ages 10, 11 and 12)

### Aims:

- Young people will experience the joy of creative expression and drama play
- Young people creatively explore themes and ideas

### Learning outcomes;

- An experiential understanding of ideas within the story
  - Collaboration skills from group drama
  - Time for reflection and discussion of the story, themes and ideas
  - Develop empathy and understanding for this story from another time
  - Reflect on the service and sacrifice of those involved in war
  - Preparedness for attending the theatre production
  - Artistic expression, creative play and group team-building
- 

## 1. The Home Front

The class is going to explore the experience of being at home in a country that is involved in a war. Have the class members spread out and find a quiet place where they can sit comfortably. They should then close their eyes. Ask them to choose one of the following: to imagine being a soldier's relative, for example the mother, or brother, of a soldier. Once they have chosen this person, have them visualise this person's age...what they look like...and where they are located at this moment. The students are going to have a go at becoming this character, using their imagination, voice and body.

After a few minutes of this visualisation, instruct the class to silently open their eyes. Imagine their character has just woken up. Go through the steps their character takes to get ready – washing, dressing, and eating breakfast. Have them think of a name for their character. The postman arrives at their house, and delivers a letter addressed to them. This letter is from their loved one who is involved in the fighting.

**NOW:** setting up a chair as the HOT SEAT, you are going to ask the characters one by one to introduce themselves, tell the group what it was they read in the letter, how that affected them and why. They will then create that letter by composing it onto paper.

## 2. Conscience Alley

In this activity the class will explore the dilemma faced by a young Australian considering joining the Armed Forces. Have the class form two lines. Have the lines stand parallel to each other, facing each other. Instruct one line they are PRO joining up. The other line is AGAINST joining up. The student playing the soldier (or you as the teacher in this role) walks between the lines as each member of the class speaks their advice: the PRO line is going to encourage the soldier to join up as the soldier walks along the line, the AGAINST line arguing their opposing case to the soldier.

The soldier can stay quiet and just listen to each of the voices. At the end of the 'alley', the soldier is going to explain what their decision is, and what persuaded them to make this decision.

### **3. Life In The Trenches**

Have the class look online and in books/other texts to find images from WWI – these can depict life in the trenches, life for those who stayed behind, or any other aspect of WWI that piques their interest.

Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 and have each group choose one WWI images. Working with one group at a time, in front of the rest of the class, have the group replicate this image adding one person to the tableau at a time. Once the frozen picture is established, you can experiment with bringing it to life with movement and sound, even improvising a short scene using the tableau as the starting point. Next ask the groups to create the tableau of the moment that they imagine happened just before their stimulus photo was taken; and finally to create the tableau of the moment just after. Each group then has a sequence of three pictures they can perform for the class.

### **RESPONDING TO THE CLASS TABLEAUX**

For an extension on the above, the students could compose a short story inspired by the tableaux, or sketch one of the tableaux as the basis for an artwork.

## Activities for older students (Ages 13, 14, 15 and up)

### Aims:

- Young people will experience the joy of creative expression and drama play
- Young people creatively explore themes and ideas

### Learning outcomes:

- An experiential understanding of ideas within the story
  - Collaboration skills from group drama
  - Time for reflection and discussion of the story, themes and ideas
  - Develop empathy and understanding for this story from another time
  - Reflect on the service and sacrifice of those involved in war
  - Preparedness for attending the theatre production
  - Artistic expression, creative thinking and group team-building
- 

## 4. Personal Opinion

In this activity, students will place themselves on a continuum of opinion, acknowledging why they have made this decision and committing to a particular point of view. You will need three signs printed on A3 paper:

1. Strongly Agree
2. Uncertain
3. Strongly Disagree

Place these signs on the floor or the wall, evenly spacing them out, with 'Uncertain' in the middle. Ask the class the below questions, or any of your own, and have them stand on this continuum of opinion in the place that most closely reflects their opinion. Quiz them about the justification for their opinion.

Example questions to pose:

1. A good man joins the fight
2. Women should not fight on the front line in conflicts
3. I would join the army
4. The world can be totally at peace
5. There are too many conflicts in the world today
6. Countries should spend more on defence
7. Bombs and weapons make the world safer
8. I feel safe here
9. Returned servicemen and women are well looked after

## 5. What Is The Play About? – Pre Show Activity

In this exercise, students are going to make decisions based on class discussions about the plot of the play, having only read small text snippets, not the whole script. Students will make deductions on what they think the play is about, who the characters in the play might be, what the themes are and when/where the play is set. There is no right or wrong: there are just educated guesses.

Below is a series of text snippets – not in any particular order – of lines of dialogue from *The Unknown Soldier*. These come from all different scenes from various points in the play.

Dad's a bit like Albert. Far away from home...

It's good we're honouring Albert...Dad's glad I came.

He looked like Jack, but Jack when he was 16.

Charlie, your mum rang.

28<sup>th</sup> June 1916. Dearest Mother, well we have all arrived, I'm not allowed to say where.

I just wanted to find out if Albert was killed in the war?

Here, take a sip, that's right.

Why's it your fault?

Has mum called?

Don't you understand anything? You don't get it. The army will never have him back. Not now. And maybe mum won't either.

Are you sure you're ok?...No, Charlie's in the other room.

That's the battle we think Albert was in.

It stinks...mouldy old books.

Cuppa?

He's guarding the house.

No it can't wait. Switch that thing off before you get cross-eyed.

I'm on the website of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

You're not my parent.

Am so exhausted, hundreds of wounded men are arriving from the front.

Charlie? It's 3am. Can't you sleep?

Mother...mother...

Shrine of Remembrance.

The class should first of all read all of the snippets aloud once. The students can start to brainstorm ideas as to who might be saying the lines: how old is this person, what is their gender, and in what timeframe do they live, for example. The class can then start to piece together their conclusions, and thread together the narrative of the play. There will often be more than one feasible answer at this stage, as the class doesn't know the full story. This activity works well with the class divided into small groups of around 5 students. Also, you can cut the text lines into individual strips so only one line can be read at a time. Although the set up seems fiddly, the students gain a wonderful sense of ownership when they do eventually see the play, as they finally get to see that intriguing line of dialogue in context: often their guesses are remarkably accurate, too.

## 6. Scene From The Play The Unknown Soldier

This activity fosters greater connection with the text from the play to increase engagement with the production, and add to the experience of going to the theatre. The scene takes place in the present day and is between two characters, Angela and Charlie. Angela is Charlie's Aunt. Charlie is about 14 years old. Charlie is staying at Angela's house because his father is suffering traumatic episodes stemming from what is likely to be Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Charlie's father was involved in the conflict in Afghanistan. This scene takes place in the dining room of Aunt Angela's house, in the morning (around breakfast time).

This script extract picks up part way through the scene. The class can discuss what they think may have happened before the beginning of this dialogue.

**Angela:** I've been thinking. It sometimes took 6-8 weeks for letters to arrive right? So what if all these letters came at once? With the box?

**Charlie:** This is the box then that Albert was carving?

**Angela:** Yeah. His mum kept this and not the telegram because he was wounded missing in action.

**Charlie:** She didn't believe he was dead. Just missing?

**Angela:** Yes, but why did Albert's mum keep this newspaper cutting?

**Charlie:** 'To all the Mothers'. It's a letter from this lady Grace Robertson telling all the Mothers of Soldiers Missing in Action to stop hoping. I guess, in a way this was like a last letter to her from Albert.

**Angela:** Yes, I think you're right. She knew her son was dead. Hence the black ribbon, round all the letters, buried in the box.

**Charlie:** But we could be wrong because even if she had got the telegram there was nobody, he was wounded missing in action, so she couldn't ever really know if he was dead or not.

**Angela:** But no bodies came back Charlie.

**Charlie:** No dead bodies came back to Australia?

**Angela:** No.

**Charlie:** None? Not one from all those soldiers killed?

**Angela:** I've got a feeling I read somewhere that there was only one body returned. But that's all. The rest are buried in France, Belgium, Gallipoli, where they died. That's why there are so many War Memorials. People have to have a place to grieve.

**Charlie:** So Albert's body would be buried in France?

**Angela:** I guess. He was wounded in action. We will never know where exactly, his body is buried.

**Charlie:** (*indicating iPad*) I've got an idea. Can I?

**Angela:** Sure, you know the password. You often see a statue of a soldier, on the War Memorials, the Unknown Soldier. He represents all soldiers, even today, all the men and women killed defending their country, who never return.

**Charlie:** (*reading off iPad*) Australian Cemetery in France WWI, "*The VC Corner Cemetery in France. There are no epitaphs to individual soldiers, simply a stone wall inscribed with the names of the 1,299 Australians who died in battle nearby and who have no known graves. The cemetery rests in the middle of the former No Man's Land on the site of the Australians' bloody initiation on the Western Front – an event later formally titled 'The Battle of Fromelles'*"

**Angela:** That's the battle we think Albert was in.

**Charlie:** He was. He was there Aunt Angela. Look, I've found him. Albert Jackson. Missing wounded in action 20<sup>th</sup> July 1916. That's where his body is, France.

**Angela:** Far away from home.

© Extract from *The Unknown Soldier* by Sandra Eldridge

Have the class divide into pairs and allocate one person to play Angela and one to play Charlie (boys and girls, gender is immaterial in this scene). Consider how the scene is staged, using entrances, furniture, props etc. Encourage students to 'raise the stakes' – to lift the scene out of being a casual conversation and make the discoveries and discussions as exciting and important as possible.

Here are some points to discuss:

- Why did it take so long for letters to arrive? What other modes of communication existed?
- The box referred to is a hand carved wooden box that was hidden within a 'Mystery Box' Angela bought at an auction. A Mystery Box is full of bits and pieces and you never know what might be in there. In the play, this little wooden box contained all the letters referred to that were written by a soldier, Albert Jackson, to his mother.
- What is the telegram referred to?
- Discuss and explore the fact the soldiers are buried overseas, and the different memorials for these soldiers
- Charlie is using the same websites and methods the class followed to complete their 'Hero Project' in Section 3 of this Resource

## America's Involvement in WWI

Have students research and complete the following questions and/or complete the sentences:

- The United States of America declared war on the German Empire on \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_, 19\_\_
- The USA entered the war as an independent power and not one of the 'Allies' – true or false?
- US soldiers arrived on the W\_\_\_\_\_ Front in 19\_\_ and made a major contribution to battles there until the end of the war.
- How many US personnel were mobilised for WWI? And how many casualties were suffered?
- Who was the American president during the USA's involvement in WWI?
- What were the two most significant provocations that led to the US entering the conflict?
- The \_\_\_\_\_ Telegram was a famous message from the German Foreign Minister to the German Ambassador in Mexico City. What did this message say?
- The Treaty of \_\_\_\_\_ was created in January 19\_\_.
- What was the purpose of the above Treaty, and who was involved in its drafting?

## Acknowledgements

*The Unknown Soldier* was funded under the Commonwealth Government's *Saluting Their Service* Commemorative Grants Programme.

*The Commonwealth has not participated in the research, production or exercised editorial control over The Unknown Soldier or its contents. The views expressed and conclusions reached herein do not necessarily represent those of the Commonwealth, which expressly disclaims any responsibility for the content or accuracy of The Unknown Soldier.*

Monkey Baa would also like to thank the Chatswood and North Bondi Returned Servicemen's League Clubs and Sub-Branches, The Engadine RSL sub-branch, and Learning and Development Solutions.

Thank you to the NSW Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Thank you to the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, and the Blake Beckett Trust.

These notes were written by Saskia Ilott, Education Manager for Monkey Baa Theatre Company. Any inquiries can be directed to [education@monkeybaa.com.au](mailto:education@monkeybaa.com.au).