

# STATE OPERA SOUTH AUSTRALIA EDUCATION

## Cunning Little Vixen Study Guide



### **General Capabilities:**

Literacy, Information and Communication Technology, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding.

### **Cross Curriculum Priorities:**

Sustainability

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### Cunning Little Vixen presented by State Opera of South Australia

An immersive musical, theatrical experience complete with a full orchestra, State Opera's *Cunning Little Vixen* celebrates the beauty of nature and cycle of life.

Musing on the interaction between human and animal life and set in an idyllic forest at the Adelaide Showgrounds, Leoš Janáček's opera follows a Vixen's lyrical journey from youth to adulthood.

Performed in English with English surtitles, *Cunning Little Vixen* is suitable for upper primary to secondary audiences and has a focus on the exploration of the bridge between the industrial and natural worlds and how we exist in those together.

Colour, music and beautiful voices, accompanied by Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, gives young people an excellent introduction to opera for students, and is accompanied by a comprehensive study guide and a post-show Q&A.

The South Australian Public Primary Schools choir will perform as groups arrive for the DreamBig festival school matinee performance on Tuesday 21 May. Student prices are available throughout the season, with a further discount for disadvantaged schools.

*Cunning Little Vixen* is based on a comic-strip story and was developed into a compelling reflection on the cycle of life, which explores themes of love, life and loss.



### General Capabilities:

Literacy, Information and Communication Technology, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding.

*Cunning Little Vixen* covers literacy through communication through language and music, ICT through technical theatre, and Critical and Creative Thinking by giving students an opportunity to look at a unique art form while delving into important topics such as sustainability and interdependency, which allows them to be effective global citizens. The ideas and themes of our relationship with the earth and its inhabitants can be seen in the production through the Vixen's journey, which meets the capabilities of Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding.

### Cross Curriculum Priorities:

#### Sustainability:

By looking at the dynamic nature of the life cycle and the relationships we have with animals, people and planet, *Cunning Little Vixen* allows students to consider social justice, wellbeing and world views.



### Credits

#### Creatives

Conductor – Johannes Fritzscht

Director – Stuart Maunder

Set Design – Richard Roberts

Costume Design – Roger Kirk

Lighting Design – Trudy Dalglish

#### Cast

Vixen – Desiree Frahn

Fox – Antoinette Halloran

Forrester – James Clayton

Schoolmaster – Paul O'Neill

Parson/Badger – Pelham Andrews

Owl/Forrester's wife – Joanna McWaters

Dog/Mrs Pasek – Catriona Barr

Cock – Samantha Rubenhold

Pasek – Andrew Turner

State Opera Chorus

State Opera Children's Chorus

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

## Background of Cunning Little Vixen performances

Cunning Little Vixen premiered in Australia in March 1976 by The Australian Opera in Melbourne where it was sung in English. Opera Australia presented the show in 2004 directed by Neil Armfield AM, which was followed by a Sydney Chamber Opera production in 2011. It will be presented by State Opera of South Australia in 2019.

## Cunning Little Vixen Synopsis

### Act One

On a lazy, summer afternoon while the Badger dozes in the sun and the Dragonfly dances, the Forester stops for a nap on his way home, exhausted by the heat and his search for poachers. While he sleeps, the Cricket and the Caterpillar give a concert and a young Vixen is exploring the forest for the first time. The Frog leaps on a mosquito but instead lands on the Forester's nose waking him suddenly. The Forester sees the cub, grabs her and takes her home as a pet for his children.

But while living with the Forester, the Vixen endures the Dog's unwanted advances and defends herself against the taunts of the Forester's children by biting them, which makes the Forester tie her up. Restrained and sad, she falls asleep and dreams of growing into a young girl. As the rooster crows to summon the morning, the Vixen is outraged by his dominance over the Hens and urges them to go free. Frustrated by their unwillingness to emancipate themselves, she despatches them all and escapes.

### Act Two

The Vixen returns to the forest and evicts the Badger from his comfortable home and claims the den as her own. Meanwhile, the Forester, the Schoolmaster and the Parson are at the local inn. The Forester is teasing the Schoolmaster about his hopeless passion for an old girlfriend, Terynka. But the Schoolmaster reminds him of the Vixen he could not tame.

The Vixen follows the Schoolmaster and the Parson as they stumble home from the inn and on the way, the Schoolmaster mistakes her for Terynka and is inspired to the make the single most passionate outburst of his life as the Parson also laments a lost love, while the Forester persistently hunts the Vixen through the forest.

It's moonlight in the forest and the Vixen encounters a handsome Fox and is smitten; he is equally impressed. He woos her with a dead rabbit. They declare their love and decide to marry. The forest creatures celebrate their wedding.

### Act Three

In the forest, the poacher Harašta is going to visit Terynka, whom he is to marry. The Forester sets a trap for the Vixen.

The little foxes come out to play and the Vixen discovers the trap and decides to find whoever is responsible and punish them. She sees Harašta and lays down in his path. He puts down his basket of chickens, picks up his gun and tries to chase the Vixen but falls flat on his face. The foxes raid his basket of chickens and, nursing a broken nose, Harašta fires aimlessly and kills the Vixen.

Back at the inn, the Forester tells the Schoolmaster he has found the Vixen's den deserted. The Schoolmaster learns that his beloved Terynka is getting married that

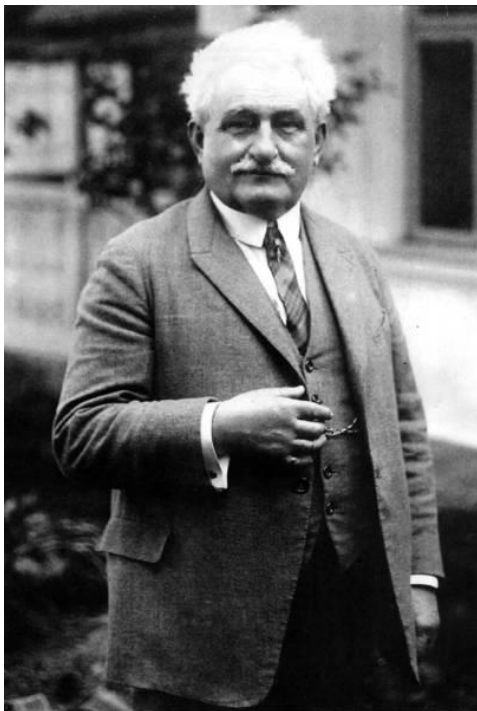


day and together they talk about their friend the Parson, who has left for a new village where he's lonely.

Later in the forest the Forester is remembering his youth and feeling old age approaching. Feeling tired, he admires the natural beauty around him and lays down to sleep. He dreams of the forest animals and searches for the Vixen.

Stretching out his hand towards her, he finds he has instead picked up the Frog. But it isn't the same frog that landed on his face in Act One - that was his grandfather, who used to talk about the Forester. The Forester gently lets his gun slip to the ground as the opera ends.

#### About Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)



Leoš Janáček's music is some of the most expressive to be found in the 20th century. Janáček's life and work are closely connected with Brno, where he lived from childhood and where his work as a composer contributed to the positive development of Brno's cultural life.

Born on 3 July 1854 in Hukvaldy, Leoš Janáček was the ninth of fourteen children to the Hukvaldy teacher Jiří Janáček and his wife Amálie, née Grulichová. As a child, Janáček showed uncommon musical ability. His father's ill health and a shortage of money led his parents to seek a scholarship for musically gifted boys from poor families in Kroměříž or in Brno. Janáček's father became friends with the composer and director of the Brno foundation, Pavel Křížkovský, so they opted for the Augustinian Monastery in Old Brno. The eleven-year-old Leoš left for Brno

in August 1865 to begin his musical career.

Until 1895 he devoted himself mainly to folkloristic research. While his early musical output was influenced by contemporaries such as Antonín Dvořák, his later, mature works incorporate his earlier studies of national folk music in a modern, highly original synthesis, first evident in the opera *Jenůfa*, which was premiered in 1904 in Brno. The success of *Jenůfa* (often called the "Moravian national opera") in Prague in 1916 gave Janáček access to the world's great opera stages. Janáček's later works are his most celebrated. They include operas such as *Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, the *Sinfonietta*, the *Glagolitic Mass*, the rhapsody *Taras Bulba*, two string quartets, and other chamber works. Along with Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana, he is considered one of the most important Czech composers.

### About the Director: Stuart Maunder AM

Stuart Maunder is Artistic Director of State Opera South Australia.



For the past thirty years Stuart has been directing musical theatre and opera in Australia. He joined The Australian Opera as Stage Manager in 1978, becoming a Resident Director in 1981. In 1992 he joined The Royal Opera (UK) as a Staff Director whilst continuing to direct in Australia, regional UK, France and the USA.

In 1999 Stuart was appointed Artistic Administrator of Opera Australia, becoming Executive Producer 2004 - 2008. His OA productions include *Tales of Hoffmann*, *Manon*, *Gypsy Princess*, *Don Pasquale*, *My Fair Lady* and *A Little Night Music*. His *Trial by Jury*, *HMS Pinafore* and *Pirates of Penzance* have been televised nationally on

ABC TV.

Music Theatre productions include Australian tours of *Dusty - The original Pop Diva* and *Shout!* and *Little Women* for Kookaburra. Stuart also directed *Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber* which toured Australasia and Asia in 2012. In 2018 in Seoul, Korea he directed the *70th Birthday Concert for Andrew Lloyd Webber* and the first concert version of *Phantom of the Opera*.

Recent Australian productions have included *Cunning Little Vixen*, *Into the Woods*, *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Sweeney Todd* (Victorian Opera) and *Cunning Little Vixen*, *Tosca*, *Rigoletto*, *Pearl Fishers*, *La bohème* (West Australian Opera).

From 2014 to 2018 Stuart was General Director of New Zealand Opera where he has directed *Candide*, *Tosca*, *Sweeney Todd* and *The Mikado*.

### Director's note – Stuart Maunder AM

Průhody lišky Bystroušky (The Cunning Little Vixen)

On the surface, *The Cunning Little Vixen* is simple enough: a musical biography of a fox based on a comic strip filled with furry familiars. It could be seen as little more than an opera for children – it's based on a comic strip and everything – but it's impossible to dismiss. It contains some of the most moving music ever written, vivifying life's most profound and eternal truths.

Modestly described by the composer as a “merry thing with a sad end”, *Vixen* is a thing of wonder. The story unfolds as a series of seemingly illogical scenes that have little to no care for constraints of time, location or the appropriate order of seasons. Despite its episodic nature, one theme pervades: the cycle of life.

We witness two such cycles. That of an audacious vixen, and that of a Forester, a man on the wrong side of middle age, who over the course of the piece becomes accepting, wise and benevolent. All logic tells us the Forester cannot understand the little frog at the end of the piece, chirruping about the fact that his grandfather told

him about the Forester, but the extraordinary music prompted by this tiny moment illuminates the instinctive bond that exists between man and nature - a bond that in these days of climate change debate we ignore at our peril.

Of course, from a production perspective, profoundly human as the themes are, we still need to figure out how to present 'Nature' on the stage. Ours is man-made. Human fashions and accessories are repurposed to create the host of vibrantly coloured animal characters. Similarly, manufactured materials are reinvented to create the natural world; Wood is bleached of its colour, processed if you like, steel tortured into trees, cotton woven into flat surfaces, those surfaces brought to brilliant seasonal colour by light. The animal world is as brightly coloured as a David Attenborough documentary - seemingly unnatural yet totally real. The human world on the other hand is monochromatic, thereby holding a magnifying glass to its vivid parallel world that is full of surprises and life for life's sake. 'Nature' is a big place and we are here for a short visit only. Its profound, gauche, simple splendour will always be here.

*The Cunning Little Vixen* was Janáček's personal valentine to the human condition in all its inexplicable, maddening, fierce and beautiful inconsistency. The unexpected majesty, grandeur and emotion of the final sixty seconds of Vixen says it all. The essence of life is a mystery: we can't fathom it, we can't harness it, we can't quantify what it is...but we all instinctively feel the unifying power of the indefinable force, much like music. Musicologists across the centuries have been able to explain the elements of music and how they might be organised, but they are unable to find an explanation for the soul-deep effect of this natural, mysterious, mighty and magical force. All the analysis in the world can't tell us why, but with a fist pounding the heart we can all say: 'It gets you right here'. The end of *The Cunning Little Vixen* has 'got me right there' from the first time I saw the piece as an 18-year-old student. Now, as an almost 60-year-old, that 'there' is still being 'got'.





## A Q&A with Director Stuart Maunder

1. *What is the context for this production of Cunning Little Vixen and what are the main themes and ideas?*

The themes are universal; the relationships between humans and animals, the circle of life, the seasons, the inevitability of each age having to prove themselves, adapting, thriving. 'Nature' is a big place and our version is set in 'Nature' but the 'sound' of the piece is European, specifically Eastern European. It doesn't sound like Australia, or America, or Venezuela, it'll be recognisable Nature, a Nature we are all familiar with even if only in story or anecdote.

2. *What has been your directorial approach for the piece?*

The most challenging approach is how to represent the animal and the human characters. We are smudging the edges, animalising the humans, humanising the animals, like the Schoolmaster and Parson do in the opera, mistaking the Vixen for the raven-haired peasant girl they both find attractive. The designer, Roger Kirk is Australia's only Tony Award winning costume designer. He has come up with some surprising and yet totally logical reinventions of animals; witty, economical, charming. My only demand was that it should not look like 'Cats'.

3. *Talk us through the performance and theatrical styles*

The production is highly theatrical, vibrantly coloured, passion writ large. Think of a David Attenborough documentary with all of those closeups and especially of the colour: vibrant, vivid, saturated, seemingly unnatural and yet totally real. There is much use of dance, and the physicality of peasant, 'folkloric' dance is implicit in the piece. It's very grounded and earthy not 'balletic' at all - choreographed everyday movement with recognisable animal traits. An awful lot of it based on my cat, Kaspar.

4. *How will you use the application of stagecraft (lights, sound, set, costume etc) to set the scene?*

'Nature' is the most difficult thing to represent on the stage. We have made a virtue of the difficulty, i.e. emphasising that our 'Nature' in the opera is manmade, recycled, reinvented, allegorical. And all the human scenes will be deliberately manufactured and built by the cast. The Human world is very makeshift; we are here for a short visit only. Nature will always be here.

5. *Have you made any changes to the original script/score?*

No, save for the fact we sing it in English.

6. *What drew you to this particular piece of musical theatre? What does it offer you as a director?*

I first experienced the piece in 1976, my first year of opera-going. That year I'd already seen Carmen, Flute, Seraglio, Rigoletto, Barber, Jenufa, Rosenkavalier, Herring and Figaro. Vixen was the last opera of the season and many friends had said it was 'difficult' music. Paying \$5 for a student rush ticket I had no idea what I was

about to experience. I had adored the searing drama of Jenufa, but this piece I found even more mesmerising; in the ideas, the audacity of mixing animal and human world without getting into bunny suits. The score was like nothing I had ever heard, not even Jenufa; it was totally tuneful, complex and yet completely accessible for this operatic novice. Jonathan Miller's production was simple, direct and totally immersive. I went back to the next performance; I have longed to direct it from that point.

In purely practical terms it allows me the chance to produce something that has the power to make a new audience experience what I experienced all those years ago. It also gives me as a director exciting challenges to tackle. There's portraying animals and humans in the same world. There's also the piece's very loose, episodic and specific structure that is in no way linear, so for this director who is absolutely obsessed with logic, that is a massive challenge.

7. *You describe this work as vivifying life's most profound and eternal truths. What are the truths included in this work, as you see them?*

That's hard. I reckon that eternal truths are so personal, it's something you can't help feeling. The Forester's realisation that he is part of a much bigger world, a much bigger universe I find so moving. I can't explain it. We all matter, all contribute, and all the petty troubles melt away. It's the power of the music, impossible to define and affects all of us completely differently. Very few pieces do it to me; the end of William Tell, Tales of Hoffmann, Magic Flute, Figaro, Candide all express something that you can't straightjacket. You've experienced something through the show and yet the end just blows the walls off the theatre, takes you 'somewhere else' where you experience something you can't articulate.

However, I suppose I should try. The realisation that we are all connected, all interdependent; man, earth, animals. Small as we are, we matter. We give to the next generation, we mould the thoughts of the next generation. Beauty is all around us, we just need to look. The opera is tragic, charming, comic, tender and finally life affirming, especially as it celebrates life in all its transience.

8. *In your Director's statement you mention that the bond between man and nature is illuminated in this work. How has this awareness impacted on your vision for the production?*

Ha! It's informed the whole design, thoughts and execution. As I've said nature is hard to execute onstage, so we've made the most of the essentially unreal, heightened medium of theatre. We've blurred the lines, just as we believe Janáček does, so that these animals have human traits, the humans animal traits. Time is also truncated. An animal's life span is obviously shorter than ours, so we're able to see life's full cycle experienced in a very short space of time. Even though there is a sense of nostalgia and regret in the human characters we are never allowed to dwell on that condition. Rather, like the sudden and shocking death of the Vixen we move on with a speed that only after the fact do we question. This is no death of Bambi's mother, effecting yes, and sentimental. This death is of a whole new order, necessary and welcome, even, as it leads to rebirth, renewal and a better understanding of our place in the natural order. The biggest emotional moment doesn't come at the death of the

protagonist, but at the Forester's moment of realisation.

9. *How would you describe the style or genre of the work?*

I suppose, 'folk opera'. It definitely has an accessible, peasant, 'folkloric' feel amongst the delicate, sophisticated writing. This is a piece that despite being complex, gives us the undeniable reality that it is easy to digest. As far as how it affects the overall design, that's got much more to do with trying to communicate the truth of the piece, so the answer is probably 'see above'.

10. *This work is particularly interesting in the manner of its anthropomorphic portrayal of the vixen, and other creatures, in the story. How did you direct the singers to play the animals in this production?*

Much improvisation, experimentation, and observation of the animals in question. We try to reduce to the recognisable essence of the animal, and the human. The singers shouldn't slavishly try to copy animals, rather should be given licence to make the animal human.

11. *Many of the characters are being portrayed by female voices (both male and female characters), are there specific qualities you need to look for in the performers of these roles?*

No, as with operas in which a female plays an adolescent boy the sound is all important. Janáček was obsessed with recreating speech rhythms and the correct relationship of sounds. We alter that at our peril. The adult animals, with the exception of the curmudgeonly old Badger, are all mature female voices - all in the same aural world. The children all trebles, be they female or male. The humans the 'correct' sexes. It adds to the complexity of the night, and the delineation of the animal and human world.

12. *What is the role of Janáček's music in facilitating the creation of the characters in this work?*

Janáček's music *is* the creation of the characters. I can hone, massage, interpret, but the feel of the characters is expressed in the music...the sadness of the Schoolmaster, the world weariness of the Forester, the sly Poacher, the screechy Forester's wife/Owl, the smooth, 'in love with love' Fox, and most tellingly the irresistible, naughty, romantic, and of course cunning Vixen. No matter what I do the 'sound' of those characters will dominate. That's Janáček's great achievement in this piece. He is the architect of the emotion of the piece.

It is one of the great works. In the words of critic Steph Power writing about WNO's revival of the piece in 2013 the piece has a 'sheer uplifting generosity from a composer seemingly devoid of self-pity'. The opera is tragic, charming, comic, tender and finally life affirming, especially as it celebrates life in all its transience.



### Activities for Primary Students

1. Make a model of the set from The Cunning Little Vixen
2. Devise a different ending for the show and act it out in front of your class
3. Give a 1 minute persuasive oral presentation about the effects of humans on the animal world.
4. Research Leoš Janáček life.
5. Make a poster for your own production of The Cunning Little Vixen.
6. Write a review of The Cunning Little Vixen.
7. Design your own production of The Cunning Little Vixen and describe the costumes, set, lighting and actors you would use. You can even build a diorama of your stage.
8. Make a poster of the lifecycle of an animal you saw in The Cunning Little Vixen.
9. Design an animal costume out of recycled materials.
10. Write a report on the ways humans can improve the way they interact with nature.

Discussion questions:

- The Cunning Little Vixen brings up issues of ageing and death. How did the director bring these to life and how did it make you feel?
- How did the director use costume, lighting, movement and music to get across the main themes of the production?
- Why did the director give the humans animal-like qualities and the animals human-like qualities?
- How did the venue add to the experience of the show?
- Who was your favourite character and why?



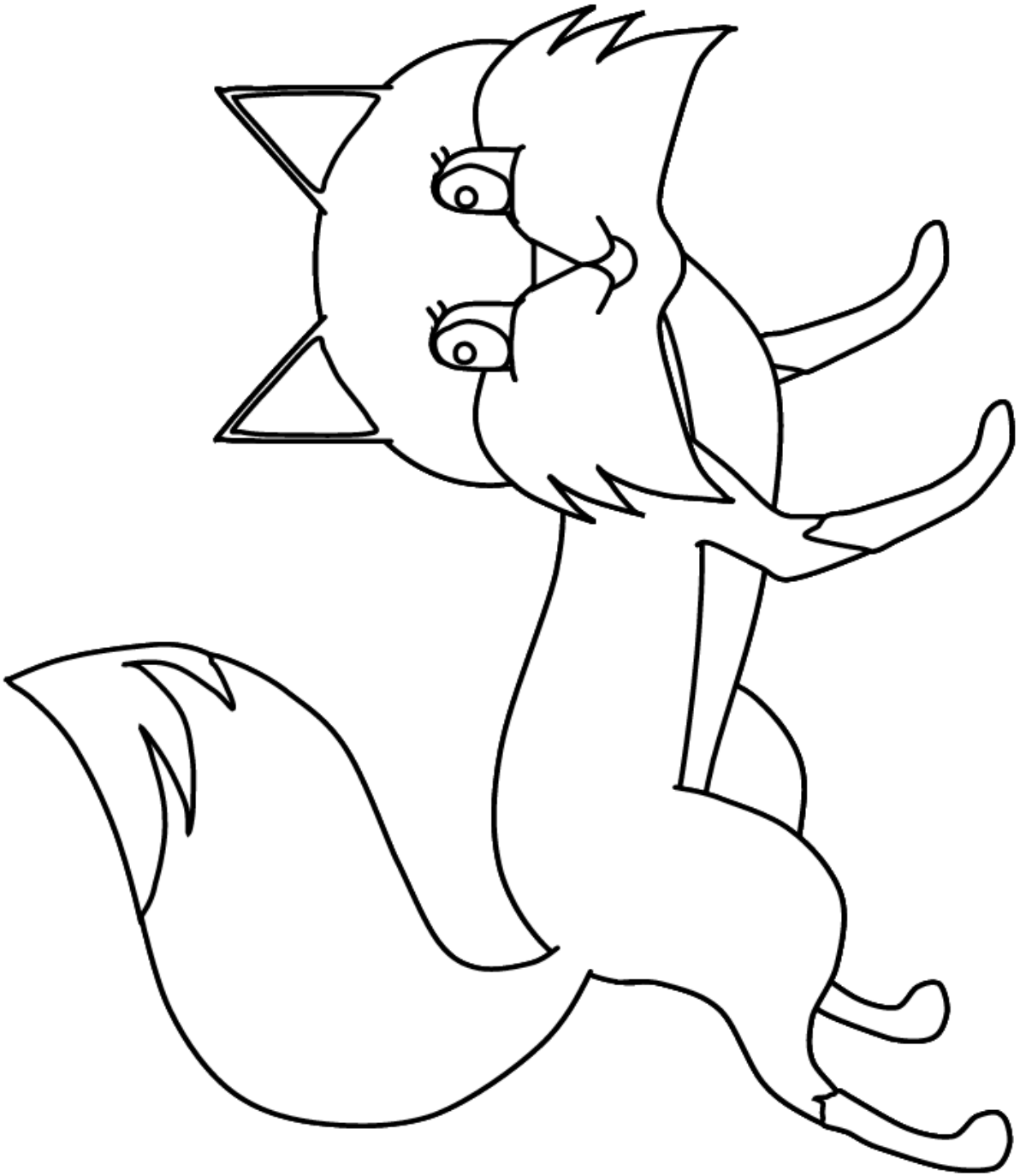




# The Forest







### Activities for Secondary Students

1. Write a review of *The Cunning Little Vixen* (review writing tips are below)
2. Research the life of Leoš Janáček.
3. Design costumes for your own production of *The Cunning Little Vixen*.
4. Choreograph a dance piece or devise a scene where all of the characters are animals. Ensure your performers display the characteristics of the animals they are portraying.
5. Make a poster of your own production of *The Cunning Little Vixen*.
6. Discuss the notion of the loss of innocence in the show.
7. Write an essay discussing how the theme of lifecycle was portrayed through theatrical elements.
8. Research opera as an artform and give a presentation highlighting influential operas and composers.
9. Director Stuart Maunder said nature was one of the hardest things to portray on stage. Why do you think that is? Discuss how you would design your own production of *The Cunning Little Vixen* and how you would depict nature on stage.
10. Composer Leoš Janáček called *The Cunning Little Vixen* a “merry thing with a sad end”. Write about how Janáček structured his story and how he used the elements of storytelling to deliver the themes and ideas of the text.
11. *The Cunning Little Vixen*: fable, allegory or fairytale? Discuss with reference to the show.





## Essay Writing Tips

Writing an essay can seem like a huge task, but with a bit of organisation, a plan and a breakdown of the essay question, an essay can become a manageable assignment.

Here are some tips to help keep the stress levels down and assist you to write an essay you can be proud to submit.

### Choose a question:

- Choose a question you are interested in finding out the answer to.
- Define your purpose. Is your essay to inform or persuade? Once you have determined your purpose, you will need to start breaking down the question.
- Highlight the key words in the question. These will become the focus of your essay. These highlighted words will become the focus of your plan. Highlight words that might narrow the argument down, for example, “between chapters 1 and 3”, “during the 19<sup>th</sup> century” or “with reference to the minor characters”. Use a dictionary to look up any words you don’t understand.
- Highlight what the question is asking you to do. Is it ‘discuss’, ‘argue’, ‘explain’, ‘compare’? Does the question ask for personal opinion or experience? Make sure you keep coming back to these instructions to make sure you are meeting the criteria.
- Don’t Google the question! There may be plenty of answers to the question online, but that doesn’t mean they’re good/right.

### Prepare an outline or diagram of your ideas.

- In order to write a successful essay, you need to organise your thoughts. After you’ve highlighted the key words in the question, jot down your ideas around them. You can do this either in a mind map, spider diagram, or whatever way your planning works best. By taking your ideas and putting them to paper, you will be able to see links between your ideas more clearly, and this will help to flesh them out with examples and evidence.
- A good way to organise the essay is to divide your answer to the question into three parts. If you’re having trouble finding points ask yourself, ‘what are three good reasons this answer to the question is the right one’. Those three reasons become your main points to answer your topic and the ones you will back up with quotes from the text or examples from the performance.

- Note some quotations that may be useful, but also jot down the page number, so you can ensure the source of the quotes is acknowledged and referenced if they're used.

### **Write your thesis statement.**

- Once your ideas are sorted into relevant categories, you can create a thesis statement. Your thesis statement tells the reader the point of your essay; it answers the question. To discover your thesis question, look at your outline or diagram.
- Your thesis statement has two parts. The first part states summarises the question and the second part answers it, presenting the point of the essay.

### **Write the body.**

- The body of your essay argues your answer to the question or topic. Each main idea from your diagram or outline will become a separate section within the body of your essay.
- Each body paragraph will have the same basic structure. Begin by writing one of your main ideas as the introductory sentence. This topic sentence should have impact, so make it strong. Under your topic sentences, write each of your supporting ideas in sentence form, but leave three or four lines in between each point to come back and give detailed examples to back up your position. Fill in these spaces with relative information (quotes, examples, evidence) that will help link ideas together. Use words like 'however', 'moreover', 'in addition' to link to the previous paragraph.
- Always begin your paragraph with a topic sentence to make clear what the paragraph is about. For example:

"Playwrights often present similar ideas in different ways. Williamson's interpretation of Hamlet is no exception to this."

"The death of Tom Robinson can clearly be linked to three people."

- Explain your point and give a clear example from the text or production to support.
- Finish each paragraph by linking the idea back to the question.
- Embed your quotes effectively and intelligently. Don't include a quotation for its own sake, or one that floats amongst your sentences. Integrate them into the paragraphs with context. For example:

*Richard III defends his actions, believing that, "Conscience is but a word that cowards use" (Shakespeare, Act 5, Scene 3, p14). ✓*

versus

*Richard III defends his actions. "Conscience is but a word that cowards use". (Shakespeare, Act 5, Scene 3, p14). ✗*

- Avoid passive language or sweeping generalisations. You should use strong, impactful sentences backed up with relevant evidence.

### **Add an introduction.**

- Now that you have developed your thesis and planned the body of your essay, you can write your introduction. The introduction should attract the reader's attention, show the focus of your essay and answer the question.
- Make sure you name any texts to be discussed.

### **Write the conclusion.**

- The conclusion should do just that: conclude. No new information should be brought up in the conclusion and you should avoid using quotes or evidence in this part. The conclusion brings closure of the topic and sums up your overall ideas while providing a final perspective on your topic. To write a strong conclusion, simply review your main points and provide reinforcement of your thesis.

### **Polish your essay.**

- If this is a draft, it is important you are submitting your best work for drafting. Your teacher should not be seeing the first draft of your work. You should proofread (reading your essay aloud will help you to find errors) several times and make sure you are giving a draft that is free of errors. If your teacher is spending their time adding or subtracting apostrophes, correcting spelling, telling you to reference or adding inverted commas to quotes, they will not be paying close attention to the content, which is where the good grades are. Help your teacher to get you the best grade possible by submitting your best work for drafting.
- Check the order of your paragraphs. Your strongest points should be the first and last paragraphs within the body, with the others falling in the middle. Make sure that your paragraph order makes sense and you have effective linking sentences.
- Read the question again. Have you answered it?

- Read the assessment criteria. Have you met the requirements?
- Have you 'discussed', 'explained', 'analysed', 'compared' as the essay question asks you to do? Have you included personal experience or opinion in every paragraph (only if the essay question indicates)?
- Delete anything irrelevant and stick to the word limit.
- Read your essay again (and then maybe again!).
- You are ready to submit!



## Review Writing Tips

While there is no perfect formula for review writing, there are some basic techniques you should consider in order to write an effective, engaging review. A review is both a report of an event and an appraisal of it. As a report, it should give basic factual detail, such as the place and date of the performance, the full name of the company and the name and author(s) of the text (and the text it is based upon, if applicable). It is also important to credit the director, costume, set and lighting designer(s) and actors. Make sure to access a program, rather than try to improvise without one. Programs often include all the facts you need, as well as directors' notes, which might help you get an idea of the company's objectives and viewpoints.

When you attend the event you are going to review, make sure you get there in comfortable time, get your program and get settled in. Look around you a bit; take a look at the set, if it's visible. See who the audience is and get some sense of their reaction to the show. Take notes if you can, but you may discover it isn't easy writing in the dark. The important thing is that you note your impressions, themes, moments when the show comes to life, or times when it is unsatisfying.

Prepare yourself beforehand. If it is a classic work, like *Richard III* by Shakespeare or an historically recent work like *Waiting for Godot*- read the play, or at least become familiar with it. You are not there for the suspense and titillation of the story; rather, you want to know what they have done with the original production.

In the review itself, don't get caught up retelling the plot - we already know what happened to Macbeth and Hamlet. But, in the case of a new play, you will need to give a synopsis of the plot as part of your information. Having said that, the synopsis should only be brief, and not a bunch of paragraphs recounting the narrative.

Your review is a personal piece and can be in any sequence you wish, but it might be advisable to start factually and work your way gradually to the evaluative comments. A sequence like the following works well:

- An introduction indicating the name and nature of the production.
- A paragraph or two briefly outlining what happens.
- A paragraph on the director's role - what styles has he/she used, what interpretation has been imposed?
- An account of the performances, the design (costumes, set, lighting) and how well these aspects highlight the ideas and themes in the work.
- Don't generalise - superlatives or condemnation are not much use without examples. Always try and find an instance which illustrates your point. Don't just say it was 'wonderful' or, worse still, 'boring', without accounting for yourself.
- A conclusion appraising the success of all these elements.

Remember that the production sets its own terms of success - within budget, expertise, the quality of the concept, whether it's a touring company etc. Be reasonable within those terms. Be gracious. You are assessing a production, rather than writing an essay arguing why the company did or didn't ruin *Romeo and Juliet*. You can be honest, but not insulting. You're not a sit down comedian and your review shouldn't be full of clever one-liners. Your task is to give a clear and vivid account of the performance.



It helps to read other reviews, but not ones on the show you are covering. You either end up feeling you can't repeat ideas or that you are in a debate with another reviewer, or sometimes you might inadvertently take those ideas and use them as your own. Trust your own judgment, it doesn't matter what the others are saying. If you want to read reviews to get an idea of how some good ones are written, though, look in *The Australian*, *The Adelaide Review*, *The Guardian*, *New Yorker*, etc.

Theatre reviewing will help you develop your understanding of drama and the theatre. It will improve your theatre literacy skills. The task of reviewing will make you more responsive to what you see and improve your creative and critical thinking skills.

Theatre reviews should:

- Give an accurate impression of the performance for someone who has not been there
- Convey a considered, personal judgement of the quality of the experience
- Consider how a text was interpreted.

Here are some other things to mention:

- *What kind of play is it? What is it about? Mention the genre and style of the piece.* Is it dance, drama, music? Is it absurdist, realism or contemporary? Is it elaborate, simple, rough, naturalistic, or a mixture of styles?
- *What is the nature of the theatre experience?* You must note your own responses, but as theatre is a public event, you should make mention of how others respond, the atmosphere of the evening, and the social context.

Style guide:

*This will vary from teacher to teacher, publication to publication, but here are some things to note*

- List the details of the show, theatre, date at the top of the review
- Use the full names of the author, playwright, crew, actors, director in the first instance. Subsequent mentions must be referenced by surname.
- Use title case and italics for the show name
- Use short paragraphs
- Don't use too many gushing superlatives ('amazing' is way overused. Try something different – there's a list below)
- Check your facts: spelling, grammar, dates, names, historical references etc.
- Talk about all of the aspects of theatre (set, costume, design, lighting, script, direction, music, sound, acting, theatre)



*associated with performance:*

Outrageous, shocking, persuasive, compelling, inspiring, affecting, absorbing, daring, provocative, obscure, delightful, captivating, morbid, surreal, challenging, nostalgic, complex, spectacular, chilling, foreboding, enchanting, astonishing.

*Words to describe the mood or tone:*

Entertaining, facetious, sensational, didactic, bombastic, forceful, servile, persuasive, chauvinistic, nostalgic, querulous, guarded, indifferent, sensible, earnest, fervent, wistful, embittered, detached, sincere, tolerant, jocular, cautious, pensive, thoughtful, passionate, conservative, arrogant, critical, ponderous, antagonistic, ardent, admiring, disrespectful, bitter, cynical, satirical, sardonic, sarcastic, quizzical, ironical, anxious, resentful, disappointing, cautious, neutral, despondent, pessimistic

*Words to describe the direction:*

Skilled, purposeful, exciting, clever, thought-provoking, challenging, stimulating, visually exciting, aesthetic, earnest, cautious, sincere, sensitive, sensitive, aggressive, theatrical, dynamic, confident, bold, adventurous, conservative, lacklustre, predictable.

*Words to describe the set:*

Elaborate, realistic, understated, rough, skeletal, simplistic, minimal, abstract, naturalistic, unrealistic, cubist, surreal, stylised, traditional, representational, imaginative, lush, dense, open, vivid, jagged, symbolic, shiny, lavish, detailed, sparse, functional, elegant, delicate, durable, romantic, impressionist, expressionist.

*Words to describe costumes:*

Outrageous, transforming, flattering, stylish, elegant, chic, bright, dull, plain, elaborate, ornate, evil, revealing, tailored, period, symbolic, ornate, vivid, lavish, stylised, colourful, extravagance, simplistic, beautiful, dainty, alluring, luxurious.

*Words to describe the makeup:*

Skilfully applied, realistic, period, fantastical, shocking, simple, elaborate, vivid, stylised, abstract, traditional, clever, minimal.

*Words to describe sound:*

Menacing, rhythmical, repetitive, haunting, eerie, overpowering, complementary, engulfing, pulsating, lapping, trickling, swishing, blaring, lyrical, grating.

*Words to describe lighting and effects:*

Simplistic, minimal, abstract, eerie, dull, gloomy, bright, majestic, shocking, forbidding, shadowy, luminous, flickering, twinkling, hypnotic, pulsating, flashing, thematic.

*Words to describe style and/or genre:*

Comedy, classical, symbolic, expressionistic, absurdist, naturalistic, representational, tragic, comic, satirical, melodramatic, surreal, period, traditional, contemporary, existentialist, avant-garde, romantic, allegorical, farcical.

*Words to describe character:*

Miserly, clumsy, careless, conceited, cocky, ambitious, mean, merciful, confident, generous, gracious, greedy, gregarious, garrulous, noble, needy, humble, grotesque, irritable, lazy, loyal, patient, pragmatic, placid, serious, eccentric, quarrelsome, industrious, petulant, enlightened, reliable, determined, cruel, arrogant, sophisticated, slovenly, vivacious, cantankerous, fussy, obsessive, unpredictable, neurotic, uncouth, vicious, mature, shrewd, insular, feminine, effeminate, calculating, callous, self-indulgent, flippant, jaded, compassionate, zealous, brash.

*Words to describe performance:*

Dynamic, disciplined, pedestrian, uninspired, complex, flat, skilful, agile, versatile, emotive, compelling, surprising, delightful, demanding, under-stated, lively, energetic, restrained, inspired.

*Words instead of 'good':*

Capable, quality, fine, adept, accomplished, masterly, skilful, seasoned, vigorous, adept, high-standard, superior, skilled, proficient, choice, sound, supreme, prominent, pre-eminent, potent, important, distinguished, illustrious, influential, awe-inspiring, grand, splendid, majestic, monumental, resplendent, brilliant, impressive, magnificent, imposing, enjoyable, profound.

*Words instead of 'effective':*

Powerful, practical, emphatic, moving, affecting, compelling, competent, impressive, potent, striking, telling, cutting, penetrating, sharp, successful, efficacious.

