

# Jack davis' revolutionary play no sugar essay sample

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Jack Davis' revolutionary play No Sugar challenges the perception that colonisation is an acceptable part of Australian history. He utilizes drama as a powerful medium to successfully engage the audience and make them reflect upon what is being presented. Here Davis can effectively initiate an attitudinal change towards the situation of the Aborigines through the manipulation of staging, symbolism, characterisation and dialogue. The play seeks to expose the racist attitudes experienced by Indigenous people at the hands of the white authority, whilst simultaneously promoting the strength of those suffering, hoping to defy the oppressors and challenge the white power.

As a playwright, Jack Davis shows clever manipulation of dramatic space to expose the lack of justice and the hardship that the Aborigines have endured due to the oppression placed upon them. The separate settings on the one stage serve as a representation of the division between the White Europeans and the Indigenous Australians. Alternatively these groups can be known as the oppressors and the oppressed, respectively, and Davis' construction of staging works to represent these power relations and challenge the pre-conceptions of their place in society. Traditional drama, originating in England, employed techniques such as; blocking, soliloquies and a static positioning of the audience; however, in his efforts to challenge power relations Jack Davis chose not to use such techniques. Instead, Davis opted to have separate settings on the one stage and have the audience moving amongst it. Before the play begins, the separate settings correspond to the segregation felt by the Aborigines; but as it starts the audience is made to move around, in order to see the whole play, which is Davis' way of forcing

audience members (both white and indigenous) to break the segregation and come together.

The notion of the audience having no control over their own time and space enforces the idea of the forced removal of the Aborigines to the Moore River Settlement and makes members of the audience experience the injustices of the Aborigines. Every one of the different elements and dramatic conventions employed by Davis were applied with the desire to destabilize the power relations between the oppressors and the oppressed. Davis undermines some of the traditional power structures in performing arts where the black actors play the main roles and the Eurocentric values are pushed to the margins of the stage.

There are various uses of symbolism drawn on in No Sugar but the most noteworthy one, for me, is the way Jack Davis has used blood as a symbol; significant in establishing the meaning of cultural oppression and social discrimination the Aborigines have been subjected to by the white people. The blood symbolizes both the close connection the Aborigines have to their land and the importance of family within the Aboriginal culture. By using the blood of the Aborigines as a symbol, Davis is exploring the issue that despite the oppression, they are willing to sacrifice their own blood for their cause and fight back against the white power.

A great example of this is when Jimmy nicks his finger with the axe and lets the blood fall to the ground. In a metaphorical sense this action could represent the Aborigines as a united front against the white Europeans;

declaring that they are not afraid to shed their blood as a statement to regain power over their land. From this we see the resilience and continuity of the Aborigines in their attempts to challenge the power held by the whites. The blood cast from a single Aborigine symbolizes their culture as a whole and reinforces the idea of oppression and injustices, making the audience empathize with the Aborigines and perhaps force them to have a negative attitude towards the oppression placed upon this group of people.

The characters in No Sugar are all representations of particular groups in society and Davis has constructed them in a way that ensures the Aboriginal characters are treated racially and the white authorities are the instigators of such racism. In doing this, Davis has created a platform for which the Aborigines can retaliate and challenge the oppressors by way of fighting back against white power. Jimmy and Joe's characters have been structured to represent those who refuse to conform where characters like Sam stand for the individuals who want to keep the 'peace' between themselves and the white authorities for fear of being subjugated further.

While Jimmy's character stands up for the rights of the Aborigines and challenges the power of the white authorities, Davis has made sure he paid the ultimate price; that of an imminent downfall brought about in a world of unequal power relations within which they live. So although Jimmy's character challenges the authorities, Davis is trying to illustrate that despite the Aboriginal people never having a chance at victory against the oppressors, they refused to stop trying. Characterisation is one of the most influential techniques Davis has used in his efforts to challenge the power

relations between the Indigenous Australians and the white Europeans as he is able to use one character to represent an entire stereotype or group; both oppressor and oppressed. It is powerful because Davis can challenge these power relations in a creative yet obvious way that is easily understood by the audience.

Davis' ideas about the strength of the Aborigines are suggested convincingly through the dialogue of the play. Using a mixture of both Nyoongah and English language Davis has enabled the oppressed and disabled the oppressor because the white people have been shut out of some major parts of the play for reason of not being able to understand the Nyoongah language. Originally the Aborigines found themselves unable to understand what the white people were saying because they had brought a new language to their land; however, Davis has placed them in a power role reversal and made the white audience feel isolated by the use of hybridity; incorporating both the Indigenous language and the language used by the white colonisers. Incorporating the native Nyoongah language, as well as shutting out the white audience, enables the oppressed to show their defiance against the white culture thrust upon them and allows them to practice one of their few forms of power. Davis has denied the white audience all the language needed to understand the play, only providing some contextual clues as to what it all means.

#### References:

Davis, Jack, 1986 No sugar / Jack Davis Currency Press, Sydney

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