

monkey baa

Your visit to the theatre

social
story



Yong

Written by Jenevieve Chang

Based on the book Yong: The Journey of an Unworthy Son by Janeen Brian

published by Walker Books Australia Pty Ltd

About the show

Yong is a powerful play about a 13-year-old boy who travels from China to Australia with his father during the 1850s gold rush. Their journey is long and dangerous. Yong must face fear, grief and injustice, but also learns resilience, courage and self-belief.

This play is performed live, one actor brings every character to life using movement, voice and storytelling. There is music, sound effects and theatrical lighting, with projected backgrounds.

What you'll experience

The play runs for about 60 minutes without an interval and is performed by one actor who shifts between multiple roles, using movement, voice, lighting and sound to bring the story to life, blending moments of intensity (like storms, racism, conflict and loss) with moments of beauty, humour and human connection.

Some themes explored in Yong

The play explores themes such as identity and belonging, cultural heritage and racism, grief and loss, family relationships, inner strength and resilience, and the importance of speaking out.

Some moments may feel intense

Yong is an emotional story, and some scenes may be challenging to watch. These moments are not included just to shock, they help us understand the reality of Yong's journey and the world he's navigating.

Here are a few things you might see or hear in the play:

- Storms at sea: The play begins with a dramatic shipwreck, with loud sounds and flashing lights.
- Racism and discrimination: Yong and his father are treated unfairly because they are Chinese. These moments are upsetting, but they reflect real attitudes from Australian history.
- Conflict and fear: At times, characters argue, threaten each other or become physically aggressive. There's a scene where Yong is grabbed and yelled at, and another where a character is hurt.
- Death and grief: Yong loses someone close to him during the story. This is portrayed with care, but it may be emotionally intense.

If any of these moments feel like too much, you are always welcome to take a break. Talk to your teacher or a staff member, we're here to support you.

What happens when you arrive

When you arrive, your teacher or group leader will guide you inside. Ushers will welcome you, help your group find your seats and make sure you're comfortable.

You might be sitting near students from other schools. Once seated, you'll stay in your seat for the show, unless you need to leave, in which case your teacher or an usher can assist.

While the show is on

When the show is about to begin, the lights will dim and the room will quiet down so everyone can focus.

You'll see scenes from Yong's journey, his memories, hopes and challenges. One actor plays all the characters, using movement, voice and a few simple costume pieces or props. Some scenes might be funny, emotional or surprising. It's okay to laugh, gasp or clap, just try not to talk or use your phone, as it can distract others.

If you feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable at any point, you're welcome to take a break. Let your teacher or a staff member know, it's completely okay.

After the show

At the end of the performance, the actor will come to the front of the stage and take a bow. This is your moment to clap if you'd like to, it's a way of saying thank you and showing appreciation for the performance.

You might feel a range of emotions afterwards: excitement, inspiration, curiosity, sadness or even confusion. All of that is completely normal. Theatre often helps us connect with ideas and feelings in new ways. Your teacher might chat with you after the show or give you a chance to reflect, write or ask questions about what you've seen.

If you need support

Some scenes in Yong may feel intense or emotional. They include discrimination and racist language, a death in the family, threats or physical conflict and feelings of isolation, fear or grief. These moments are part of the story and are handled with care, but they can still be confronting. If something in the show affects you, please talk to your teacher, a trusted adult or someone from your school's wellbeing team. You can also call Kids Helpline at 1800 55 1800. It's free, private and open 24/7.

What will you see on stage?

The set is simple, but everything on it has meaning, and many items are used in surprising and imaginative ways.

- A wooden frame forms the outline of the stage. It's filled with objects from Yong's world, like kitchen tools, baskets, lanterns, scrolls and farming equipment.
- At the top of the set, you'll see a large sign with a Chinese character written on it. That character means "courage", an important theme in the story.
- In the centre of the stage, you'll notice a ladder. It might not seem special at first, but it transforms into many things throughout the play, a ship's mast, a mountain path, a lookout, a place to think.
- A large woven basket is carried by the actor and placed around the stage. Like the ladder, it becomes different objects depending on the scene.
- There's also a soft white curtain behind the actor. Projections shine across it to create mood, place and atmosphere, like rain, sky, ocean, trees and silhouettes of other characters. It gives the feeling of moving between memory, imagination and reality.
- The lighting and sound play an important role. Shifts in light and music help you feel the storms, tension, grief and wonder in Yong's story.



Photos by Tiffany Garvie

Who will we see on stage?

Alan as Yong and everyone else

Alan Zhu plays Yong, a 13-year-old boy who leaves his home in China to travel across the sea to Australia. Yong is curious, clever and brave, but he's also unsure of his place in the world.

In this solo performance, Alan brings every character to life. That includes Yong's father, Mr Feng and Mr Chung (two men he travels with), George (a cart driver on the goldfields) and several other people Yong meets along the way.

Alan changes characters using just his voice, movement and posture. Sometimes the changes are quick, he might switch between two characters in the same scene. You'll be able to follow who's who by the way he speaks, stands or gestures.

You'll see photos in this guide from an earlier production, they feature actor Wern Mak, who first brought Yong to the stage. In this performance, Alan Zhu steps into the role. His headshot is included here so you know who to look out for when the lights go down.



Alan



Yong climbs a ladder with purpose, using simple props to show his journey.



The lighting can be moody and dim, hinting at quiet moments of reflection or worry.



In stormy scenes, the lighting shifts and wind effects create the feeling of danger and urgency.



Yong stretches out his arms, using movement and gesture to create moments of fear and adventure.



Spotlighting helps us focus on a single thought or feeling, showing what's going on inside.



Yong flaps his arms and squawks like a bird, using his body and voice to transform into animals.

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