Bunjil Place

CHARCOAL

Education Resource
Years 7–10



Choreography by Keia McGrady

Focus: First Nations Australian Dance | Country | Identity | Regeneration | Choreography | Visual Art

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Respecting Culture, Knowledge and Country

Charcoal is a contemporary dance work created by Keia McGrady, a Githabul Migunberri Gomeroi First Nations artist and storyteller from South East Queensland. The work is grounded in Country, family, cultural knowledge, lived experience and knowledge passed through generations.

As we study *Charcoal*, it is important to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have cultural knowledge, stories, practices, performances, designs, languages and artistic expressions that belong to particular peoples, families, communities and Countries.

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) refers broadly to First Nations peoples' rights and interests in their cultural heritage, including traditional knowledge, cultural expression, performances, stories, artistic works and cultural practices. First Nations peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage and knowledge.

As students, we will:

RESPECT

Recognise that the cultural knowledge explored in *Charcoal* belongs within specific First Nations cultural contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGE

Name and credit the artist, performers, cultural collaborators and sources of knowledge when discussing the work.

LISTEN

Understand that we are learning from a First Nations artist and responding to the work as an audience member and student.

DO NOT COPY

We do not copy, imitate or reproduce cultural movements, stories, symbols, designs, ceremonies or practices from *Charcoal*.

CREATE RESPONSIBLY

When creating our own dance or visual art responses, we can explore broader choreographic ideas such as movement, space, repetition, mark-making, connection, place, change and regeneration. We do not claim cultural ownership of knowledge that does not belong to us.

A guiding question

How can we learn from an artist's ideas and creative choices while respecting the cultural knowledge and Country from which the work comes?

Remember:

We are studying, observing and responding to the work — not appropriating or recreating cultural material.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we learn, create, perform and experience dance.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have cared for and connected with Country for thousands of generations, and that Country holds knowledge, culture, story, identity, relationships and living connections.

Wherever *Charcoal* is performed or experienced across Australia, we encourage audiences, students and teachers to learn about and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of that particular Country.

At Bunjil Place we acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land, the Aboriginal communities of Casey, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We also acknowledge Keia McGrady, a Githabul Migunberri Gomeroi contemporary dance artist and storyteller from South East Queensland, whose practice is deeply connected to Country, family, culture, ancestry and knowledge passed through generations.

As we watch *Charcoal*, we recognise that Country is not simply a place or backdrop. Country can hold knowledge, memory, identity, relationships and living stories.

We enter this work as learners and witnesses, with respect for the artist, her cultural knowledge, her collaborators and the many Countries on which First Nations people continue to live, create, practice culture and tell stories.

A reminder for audiences and students

Where are we?

Which Country are we on?

Whose Country is it?

Who are the Traditional Custodians?

Whose story are we encountering?

Who created and holds this cultural knowledge?

How can we respond respectfully?

How can we learn without copying or claiming ownership?

Country is not just where dance happens. Country can be part of the story, the knowledge and the relationship being communicated through dance.

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE WORK

1. About This Resource 6
2. Curriculum Connections 7
3. Meet the Artist — Keia McGrady 9
4. About the Work — *Charcoal* 9
5. The Choreographer's Notes 10
6. The Creative Team 10

BEFORE YOU WATCH

7. First Nations Perspectives and Country 12
8. ICIP — Respecting Cultural Knowledge 12

WATCHING AND RESPONDING

9. Watching the Work 14
10. Elements of Dance — Space 15
11. Elements of Dance — Time 15
12. Elements of Dance — Energy / Dynamics 16
13. Choreographic Device — Motif 17
14. Repetition and Development 17
15. Contrast 18
16. Unison and Relationships 18

PRODUCTION AND MEANING

17. Production Element — Lighting 20
18. Production Element — Sound 20
19. Production Element — Costume 21
20. Production Element — Canvas and Charcoal 21
21. Body as Canvas 22
22. Charcoal, Fire and Regeneration 22

EXPLORING THE WORK

23. Watch the Work — Exploring and Responding 24
24. The Big Idea — Connection to Country 26

CREATING AND MAKING

25. Creative Response — Years 7–8 28
26. Creative Response — Years 9–10 29

REFLECTING AND ANALYSING

27. Final Reflection — Years 7–8 31
28. Final Reflection — Years 9–10 32

REFERENCE

29. Key Vocabulary 34
30. Teacher Discussion — Possible Observations 35

ABOUT THE WORK

1. ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Charcoal is a contemporary dance work by Githabul, Migunberri and Gomeroi contemporary dance artist, storyteller and choreographer Keia McGrady.

This education resource invites students to explore how movement, choreography, visual art, sound, lighting, costume and space can communicate ideas and perspectives.

Students will investigate the relationship between:

DANCE + COUNTRY + STORY + MEMORY + VISUAL ART + REGENERATION

The resource encourages students to move beyond simply describing what they see and develop the ability to explain how and why choreographic choices communicate meaning.

Our approach

Throughout the resource, students will use:

WATCH → IDENTIFY → DESCRIBE → EXPLAIN → INTERPRET



2. CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Australian Curriculum v9.0 — Dance

Years 7–8:

Exploring and Responding — AC9ADA8E01

Investigate ways that dance works, performers and/or choreographers across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts use the elements of dance, choreographic devices and/or production elements to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning.

First Nations Australian Dance — AC9ADA8E02

Students investigate the diversity of dance choreographed and/or performed by First Nations Australians while considering culturally responsive approaches to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).

Developing practices and skills —AC9ADA8D02

Reflect on own and others' dance works and/or practices to inform choreographic choices and use of technical and expressive skills

Creating and Making— AC9ADA8C01

Choreograph dance by selecting and manipulating elements of dance and choreographic devices to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

General Capabilities – Critical and Creative Thinking

Create possibilities, put ideas into action, interpret concepts and problems, draw conclusions and provide reasons, evaluate actions and outcomes.

Years 9–10

Exploring and Responding — AC9ADA10E01

Students investigate how choreographers use the elements of dance, choreographic devices, techniques and production elements to communicate and/or challenge ideas, perspectives and meaning.

First Nations Australian Dance — AC9ADA10E02

Students investigate the diversity of dance choreographed and/or performed by First Nations Australians while considering culturally responsive approaches to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).

Developing practices and skills — AC9ADA10D02

Reflect on own and others' use of the elements of dance, choreographic devices, structure, genre- or style-specific techniques and/or technical and expressive skills to inform their choreographic or performance choices

Creating and making — AC9ADA10C01

Choreograph dance that communicates ideas, perspectives and/or meaning by selecting and manipulating elements of dance, choreographic devices and/or structure

General Capabilities – Critical and Creative Thinking

Create possibilities, put ideas into action, interpret concepts and problems, draw conclusions and provide reasons, evaluate actions and outcomes.

Years 7–8:

Explore and Express Ideas

Use safe dance practice, elements of dance, body actions and improvisations to explore ways of making literal movements into abstract movements **(VCADAE033)**

Develop their choreographic intent by applying the elements of dance to select and organise movement **(VCADAE034)**

Dance Practices

Structure dances using choreographic devices and form **(VCADAD036)**

Present and Perform

Rehearse and perform focusing on technical and expressive skills appropriate to style and/or choreographic intent **(VCADAP037)**

Respond and Interpret

Analyse how choreographers use elements of dance and production elements to communicate intent **(VCADAR038)**

Years 9–10

Explore and Express Ideas

Explore personal movement style by combining elements of dance and using improvisation and safe dance practice to develop new movement possibilities **(VCADAE040)**

Manipulate combinations of the elements of dance and choreographic devices to communicate their choreographic intent **(VCADAE041)**

Dance Practices

Structure dances using movement motifs, choreographic devices and form **(VCADAD043)**

Present and Perform

Perform dances using genre-and style specific techniques, expressive skills and productions elements to communicate a choreographer's intent **(VCADAP044)**

Respond and Interpret

Evaluate their own choreography and performance, and that of others, to inform and refine future work **(VCADAR045)**

3. MEET THE ARTIST

Keia McGrady



Keia McGrady is a Githabul, Migunberri and Gomeroi contemporary dance artist, storyteller and choreographer from South East Queensland.

Her practice embodies Country and incorporates knowledge passed down through generations. She works through contemporary dance and storytelling while exploring social and political issues connected to lived experience.

Keia's practice is grounded in:

- deep listening
- Country
- family
- storytelling
- visual art
- collaboration
- movement
- lived experience.

She has performed and collaborated with a range of Australian artists and organisations, including work presented at festivals and major performing arts venues.

Key idea

A choreographer's cultural identity, experiences and relationships can influence the stories they tell and the way they create dance.

However, First Nations artists do not all tell the same stories or have the same experiences. We should consider the individual artist, their cultural context and their specific work.

4. ABOUT THE WORK

Charcoal

Charcoal invites audiences to reflect on what caring for Country looks and feels like.

The work draws inspiration from the importance of cultural burning and regeneration, using charcoal as a material and metaphor for the residue and impacts left on Country.

The work explores ideas including:

- regeneration
- Country
- memory
- family
- ancestry
- collective experience
- grief
- love
- connection
- knowledge
- environmental impact.

Charcoal becomes both a physical material and an artistic way of exploring ideas.

The dancers interact with a large canvas, creating marks and drawings while simultaneously using their bodies to create movement pathways and gestures.

The work brings together:

DANCE + VISUAL ART + SOUND + LIGHTING + MATERIAL

5. THE CHOREOGRAPHER'S NOTES

Keia McGrady describes *Charcoal* as a work that carries knowledge passed down through generations.

The work was developed through deep collaboration with family, including walking, listening and learning on Country.

Family stories and knowledge inform the movement.

The work is inspired by the physical and invisible textures of landscape and invites audiences to consider Country as a living, breathing presence.

The body becomes another way of drawing.

Just as charcoal creates marks across a canvas, the body creates pathways, shapes and gestures across the stage.

Consider

How can a body communicate a story without using words?

Why is the creative team important?

A dance work is not created by the choreographer and dancers alone. Sound, lighting, costume, set, visual art and technology can all contribute to:

- atmosphere
- meaning
- storytelling
- focus
- emotion
- audience interpretation.

6. THE CREATIVE TEAM

ROLE	ARTIST
Choreographer / director / performer	Keia McGrady, *Githabul Migunberri Gomeroi*
Original cast / collaborator	Olivia Adams, *Willi Willi*
Performer / collaborator	Amelia Jean O'Leary *Gamilaroi, Wadawurrung*
Cultural advisor	Keiron McGrady, *Githabul Migunberri Gomeroi* Bridie McGrady, *Githabul Migunberri*
Past collaborators / creative developments	Alinta McGrady, *Githabul Migunberri Gomeroi* Amarina Toby, *Githabul, Gaangalu* Waveney Yasso *Yuwi Burra & South Sea Island*
Sound Composer	Joshua Santospirito & Waveney Yasso
Sound Engineer	Joshua Santospirito
Lighting Designer & AV	Jason James
Original Costume Designer	Noah Johnson



BEFORE YOU WATCH

7. FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES AND COUNTRY

What is Country?

In *Charcoal*, Country is explored as much more than a physical location.

The work invites us to consider relationships between:

- people
- land
- family
- ancestry
- memory
- knowledge
- responsibility
- belonging
- regeneration.

McGrady's choreographic notes describe Country as a living presence and connect the work to family knowledge and learning on Country.

Important

There is **not one universal First Nations understanding of Country.**

Different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have distinct Countries, languages, histories, cultural practices and knowledge systems.

When studying *Charcoal*, we focus on Keia McGrady's artistic practice and the perspectives communicated through this particular work.

8. ICIP — RESPECTING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, or ICIP, refers broadly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural knowledge and expressions. https://www.artslaw.com.au/information-sheet/indigenous-cultural-intellectual-property-icip-aitb/

This may include:

- stories
- dance
- music
- language
- knowledge
- cultural practices
- performances
- places
- artistic works.

Different communities have their own cultural protocols and expectations about how cultural knowledge can be shared and used.

Before using cultural material, ask:

WHO created it?

WHO holds the knowledge?

WHO has permission to share it?

HOW can it be respectfully used?

HOW should the artist or community be acknowledged?

Important classroom principle

We analyse and respond to *Charcoal*. We do not copy, imitate or claim ownership of cultural material that does not belong to us.

Students can be inspired by general choreographic ideas such as space, dynamics, repetition and motif without attempting to reproduce cultural movements or practices.

WATCHING AND RESPONDING

9. WATCHING THE WORK

WATCH → IDENTIFY → DESCRIBE → EXPLAIN → INTERPRET

As you watch *Charcoal*, choose three moments that stand out to you.

Moment	What did you notice?	Dance element/device	What might it communicate?

Remember

There can be more than one interpretation.

Your interpretation should always be supported by **evidence from the work.**

10. ELEMENTS OF DANCE — SPACE

Look for:

- high, medium and low levels
- small and large dimensions
- movement close to the floor
- movement across the canvas
- circular pathways
- movement around each other
- changes in direction
- proximity between dancers
- movement through the performance space.

Watch for:

At the beginning of the work, the dancers spend considerable time close to the floor.

Later, the movement expands through the space and becomes larger and more energetic.

Question

How does the dancers' relationship with the floor and space communicate ideas about connection to Country?

Use a specific moment from the work.

11. ELEMENTS OF DANCE — TIME

Look for:

- stillness
- slow movement
- sustained movement
- acceleration
- changes in tempo
- repetition
- pauses
- rhythmic movement
- percussive movement.

Question

Where does the timing of the movement change? What effect does this have on the audience?

Challenge

Identify one section where the movement:

slows → accelerates

How does the change in timing affect the mood or meaning?

12. ELEMENTS OF DANCE — ENERGY / DYNAMICS

Throughout the work, movement qualities change.

Vocabulary

SUSTAINED
Movement that continues smoothly over time.

FLUID
Movement that flows continuously and smoothly.

SWINGING
Movement that has a pendulum-like quality or follows through naturally.

PERCUSSIVE
Sharp or accented movement that appears to strike or emphasise a beat.

BOUND
Movement that appears controlled, restricted or held.

FREE
Movement that appears released and less restricted.



Activity

Which qualities can you identify?

Beginning

☐ sustained
☐ fluid
☐ swinging
☐ bound
☐ percussive

Middle

☐ sustained
☐ fluid
☐ swinging
☐ bound
☐ percussive

Later

☐ sustained
☐ fluid
☐ swinging
☐ bound
☐ percussive

Explain

Why might McGrady change the energy of the movement throughout the work?

13. CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICE — MOTIF

A **motif** is a short movement idea that can be repeated and developed throughout a dance.

In *Charcoal*, we see recurring movement ideas involving the hands, arms, head, chest and drawing-like gestures.

At different moments, similar movement ideas return in different contexts.

Student activity

Identify one recurring movement motif.

Describe the motif:

Where do you first notice it?

Where does it return?

Has it changed?

What might the motif communicate?

14. REPETITION AND DEVELOPMENT

Another recurring movement phrase involves:

arm swing → step → stomp → step → stomp → heel kick / pivot

The phrase is then developed and enlarged.

Remember

Repetition does not always mean performing something exactly the same way.

A choreographer can repeat a movement while changing its:

- size
- timing
- energy
- direction
- level
- relationship with other dancers.

Question

How does McGrady develop a repeated movement phrase to create a change in energy or meaning?

15. CONTRAST

Charcoal uses many contrasts.

One quality	Contrasting quality
Stillness	Acceleration
Small movement	Large movement
Fluid	Percussive
Low level	Medium level
Individual	Together
Slow	Fast
Quiet	Loud
Imagined gesture	Physical charcoal

Question

How does contrast help communicate changing ideas, emotions or experiences in the work?

16. UNISON AND RELATIONSHIPS

At different points, the dancers move:

- in unison
- in contrast
- at different levels
- close together
- apart
- around each other.

Think

When dancers move together:

What might this communicate?

When dancers move differently:

What might this communicate?

Challenge

How does the relationship between the two dancers change throughout the work?

PRODUCTION AND MEANING

17. PRODUCTION ELEMENT — LIGHTING

Lighting plays an important role in *Charcoal*.

At one point, the spotlight gradually increases in size and becomes warmer, eventually illuminating the canvas.

Later, side lighting creates the visual impression that the dancers are floating within the black-box theatre.

Questions

How does the lighting direct your attention?

How does the lighting change the way the dancers and canvas appear?

How might the changing lighting contribute to the mood or meaning of the work?

18. PRODUCTION ELEMENT — SOUND

Listen for:

- silence
- breath
- water
- percussion
- sudden sounds
- robotic sounds
- changes in tempo
- changes in atmosphere.

Question

How does sound influence the way you interpret the movement?

Choose one moment where the sound and movement work particularly strongly together.

19. PRODUCTION ELEMENT — COSTUME

The dancers wear costumes that closely match the colour and earthy tone of the canvas, creating a visual connection between the dancers, the artwork and the performance space.

The costume includes a knee-length dress worn over pants, allowing the dancers to move freely while maintaining a simple, unified visual appearance.

The similarity in colour between the costume and canvas can make the dancers appear connected to, or part of, the visual artwork.

Think about it

Why might McGrady choose costumes that are the same colour as the canvas?

Consider:

- How does the costume connect the dancers to the canvas?
- Does it make the dancers appear separate from, or part of, the artwork?
- How does the earthy colour palette contribute to ideas about Country and landscape?
- What happens visually when the dancers move across the canvas?

Dance + Production Connection

The costume, canvas, movement and lighting work together to create a unified visual world.

20. PRODUCTION ELEMENT — CANVAS AND CHARCOAL

The canvas is more than a backdrop.

It becomes part of the choreography.

The dancers interact with it through:

- drawing
- walking
- stepping
- movement pathways
- gestures
- physical contact.

At different points, the dancers create marks using charcoal.

Question

How does the physical material of charcoal influence the movement?

21. BODY AS CANVAS

One of the most interesting ideas in *Charcoal* is the relationship between drawing and movement.

With the hand

The dancers create marks on the canvas.

With the body

The dancers create pathways through space.

With the feet

The dancers create marks on the ground.

Through movement

The dancers communicate ideas, memories and relationships.

Think about this

If a painter uses a brush to make a mark, how does a dancer use their body to make a mark?

22. CHARCOAL, FIRE AND REGENERATION

The work draws inspiration from the importance of cultural burning and regeneration.

Charcoal can represent the residue or impact left behind after burning.

At the same time, fire can be connected with regeneration and the renewal of Country.

Consider the cycle:

FIRE → CHARCOAL → MARKS → MEMORY → REGENERATION

Question

How can something associated with burning and destruction also represent renewal and new life?

EXPLORING THE WORK

23. WATCH THE WORK

Exploring and Responding

What do you notice?

As you watch *Charcoal*, notice how the movement, energy, space and sound change throughout the work.

You don't need to write everything you see. Instead, choose three moments that stand out to you.

1. BEGINNING — What do you notice?

Look for:

stillness | breath | low levels | small movements | hands | sustained energy

I noticed:

One dance element I can identify:

2. CHANGING — What happens?

At some point, the movement becomes more energetic and percussive.

Look for:

stomping | repetition | swinging | faster timing | larger movement | strong/percussive energy

What changed?

☐ Timing
☐ Energy
☐ Level
☐ Dimension
☐ Movement quality
☐ All of these

The change made me think/feel:

3. RETURNING — What comes back?

Watch carefully for movement ideas that appeared earlier in the work.

Can you spot a repeated motif?

Draw it, describe it or use words:

Why might McGrady bring this movement back?

☐ To create connection
☐ To remind us of an earlier idea
☐ To show change
☐ To create a cycle
☐ Other:

4. ENDING — What has changed?

Listen and watch for the water sounds and the shift towards:

Slower | fluid | sustained | low levels | sustained movements | slow timing | large dimension

Compare the beginning and ending:

Beginning	Ending

Think

What has changed, and what has stayed the same?

YOUR BIG OBSERVATION

Now choose **ONE moment** from the whole work.

I noticed...

Movement:

Dance element:

Choreographic device:

Production element:

I think this communicates...

My evidence is...



24. THE BIG IDEA — CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Throughout *Charcoal*, the dancers repeatedly return to the ground.

We see:

- sitting on the floor
- hands touching the ground
- feet pressing into the ground
- stomping
- drawing on the ground
- crawling
- low-level movement
- sliding
- movement close to the earth.

Question

How does McGrady use the dancers' physical relationship with the ground to communicate connection to Country?

Use **at least two specific examples.**

CREATING AND MAKING

25. CREATIVE RESPONSE — YEARS 7–8

Creating and Making

RESPECTFUL RESPONSE

Charcoal is a First Nations work grounded in Keia McGrady's cultural knowledge, family stories and relationship with Country. Your response should not copy cultural movements, stories, symbols, artworks or practices from the work. Instead, explore the broader choreographic idea of movement, mark, material and visual art through your own ideas.

Movement + Visual Art

Can movement create a mark?

In *Charcoal*, the dancers combine movement and visual art, using their bodies and charcoal to create marks and patterns.

In groups, create your own movement + visual art response inspired by the general idea of movement leaving a trace.

Step 1 — CREATE YOUR VISUAL STARTING POINT

On a large piece of butcher paper, create an abstract drawing using:

- lines
- shapes
- curves
- spirals
- angles
- repeated patterns.

Do not copy images, symbols or drawings from *Charcoal*.

Your artwork should be your own abstract response to an idea such as:

connection | movement | nature | change | growth | memory | place

Step 2 — FIND A MOVEMENT

Choose one shape, line or pattern from your artwork.

Turn it into a movement motif.

For example:

spiral → circular arm movement

zigzag → sharp, angular pathway

long line → sustained travelling movement

circle → turning movement

Step 3 — DEVELOP YOUR MOTIF

Develop your movement using at least three of these:

☐ repetition
☐ variation
☐ contrast
☐ change of level
☐ change of energy
☐ change of dimension
☐ change of direction.

Step 4 — CONNECT DANCE + ART

Place your butcher paper on the floor or wall.

Perform your movement phrase in relationship to the artwork.

Think about:

How does your body interact with the shapes and lines?

Can your movement follow, contrast or extend the artwork?

Can the audience see a connection between the movement and the visual art?

REFLECTION

How did your visual artwork influence your choreography?

Which choreographic device did you use to develop your movement?

How did your movement and visual art work together to communicate your idea?

26. CREATIVE RESPONSE — YEARS 9–10

Creating and Making

RESPECTFUL RESPONSE

Charcoal is a First Nations work grounded in Keia McGrady's cultural knowledge, family stories and relationship with Country. Your response should not copy cultural movements, stories, symbols, artworks or practices from the work. Instead, explore the broader choreographic idea of movement, mark, material and visual art through your own ideas.

Movement + Visual Art

Choreographic inquiry

How can the body communicate a relationship with place?

Create an **abstract visual artwork** on butcher paper based on your group's interpretation of **place**.

Your artwork might explore:

- connection
- belonging
- change
- movement
- memory
- environment
- growth
- loss
- renewal.

Use abstract shapes, lines, patterns and textures rather than copying cultural imagery.

Your choreography must include:

- one recurring motif
- repetition
- variation
- contrast
- at least two levels
- a change in energy
- a clear relationship with space
- a deliberate relationship between the movement and visual artwork.

Challenge

Your choreography could:

follow the artwork

contrast the artwork

extend the artwork

transform the artwork.

Reflection

How did your visual artwork influence your choreographic choices, and how did the relationship between movement and visual art communicate your idea about place?

REFLECTING AND ANALYSING

27. FINAL REFLECTION — YEARS 7–8

WATCH → IDENTIFY → DESCRIBE → EXPLAIN

Question

How does Keia McGrady use the elements of dance, choreographic devices and production elements in *Charcoal* to communicate ideas about Country, connection and regeneration?

Your response should refer to:

- one element of dance
- one choreographic device
- one production element
- one specific example from the work.

Sentence starter

Keia McGrady uses _____ to communicate _____ . For example, _____ . This can be seen when _____ . This choice may communicate _____ because _____ .

Sample Answer

Keia McGrady uses low levels and sustained energy to communicate a strong connection to Country and the ground. For example, the dancers use a repeated drawing motif throughout the work. This can be seen when the dancers use circular and sweeping movements with their arms and later use charcoal to create marks on the canvas. The canvas and earthy-coloured costumes also connect the dancers visually to the artwork and the ground. These choices may communicate connection to Country, memory and regeneration, as the dancers repeatedly return to the ground and create new marks through movement and charcoal.

28. FINAL REFLECTION — YEARS 9–10

Extended response

How does Keia McGrady use movement and production elements in *Charcoal* to communicate perspectives on Country, identity and regeneration?

In your response, consider:

- elements of dance
- choreographic devices
- motifs
- repetition and variation
- relationships between dancers
- visual art
- charcoal
- sound
- lighting
- costume
- space.

Extension

How does *Charcoal* expand or challenge your understanding of Australian identity and the relationship between people and Country?

Support your ideas with **specific evidence from the work.**

Sample Extended Response

In *Charcoal*, Keia McGrady uses movement, repetition and production elements to communicate perspectives on Country, identity and regeneration. The dancers frequently use low levels and grounded movement, including sitting, kneeling, stomping and moving close to the floor. This creates a strong physical relationship between the dancers and the ground, suggesting that Country is not simply a setting for the dance but an important part of the work's ideas about connection and belonging.

McGrady also uses repetition and variation to develop movement motifs throughout the work. Early in the performance, the dancers use circular and sweeping gestures that resemble drawing. Later, similar movements return as the dancers physically use charcoal to create marks on the canvas. The repeated movement connects the body with the visual artwork and suggests ideas of memory, knowledge and the marks that people leave on Country.

The production elements strengthen these ideas. The earthy colour of the dancers' costumes connects visually with the canvas, while the lighting changes the way the dancers and artwork are perceived. Sound also contributes to the changing atmosphere, particularly when the movement shifts from slower, fluid qualities to more percussive and energetic movement. Towards the end, water sounds accompany slower, sustained and fluid movement, creating a contrast with the earlier grounded and percussive sections.

Through these choices, *Charcoal* presents Country as a living relationship connected to family, memory, identity and regeneration. Rather than communicating these ideas through words, McGrady uses the dancers' bodies, the charcoal, the canvas and the production elements to create a contemporary First Nations perspective and invite the audience to consider their own relationship with Country.

Extension — Sample Answer

Charcoal expanded my understanding of Australian identity because it presented identity through connection to Country, family, ancestry and responsibility, rather than only through national symbols or ideas about Australia as a place. The dancers' repeated contact with the ground and their use of charcoal on the canvas made the relationship between people and Country physical and visible. The return of movement motifs throughout the work also suggested that knowledge and memories can be carried across generations.

The work also made me think about regeneration. *Charcoal* can represent what remains after burning, but the work connects this material with renewal and new growth. The changing movement qualities, sound and lighting helped communicate this shift. This challenged me to think about Country as something that is living, changing and connected to people, rather than simply being the landscape around us.

REFERENCE

29. KEY VOCABULARY

Term	Meaning
Element of dance	A fundamental component of dance such as space, time or energy
Space	Where movement occurs. Levels, dimension, direction, shape – curved or angular.
Level	High, medium or low position in space
Dimension	The size or scale of movement, small, medium or large
Time	How quickly, slowly or rhythmically movement occurs, accents, duration of the movement.
Energy / dynamics	The quality or force/flow of movement. Percussive, sustained, fluid, bound, sustained, swinging, suspension, percussive, collapsing, vibrative.
Motif	A short movement idea that can be repeated and developed
Repetition	Repeating a movement, phrase or idea
Variation	Changing an existing movement or motif
Contrast	Using opposing qualities or ideas
Unison	Two or more dancers performing the same movement at the same time
Percussive	Sharp, accented or striking movement
Sustained	Smooth movement that continues over time
Fluid	Continuous, flowing movement
Bound	Controlled or restricted movement
Direction	The route the body travels through space, forward, backwards, side to side, diagonally, circular.
Production elements	Elements such as lighting, sound, costume, set and AV
Perspective	A particular way of seeing or understanding an idea
Regeneration	Renewal, restoration or new growth
Country	A complex relationship between people, place, culture, knowledge, responsibility and belonging; meanings vary between First Nations peoples and communities
ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

30. TEACHER DISCUSSION — POSSIBLE OBSERVATIONS

Possible observations include:

Opening

- stillness
- breath
- low level
- small dimensions
- sustained/fluid energy
- focus on hands.

Drawing motif

- circular pathways
- sweeping gestures
- drawing-like movement
- repeated hand/arm gestures.

Canvas / charcoal

- direct physical relationship with material
- feet and hands connecting with ground
- visual marks becoming part of the choreography.

Percussive section

- stomping
- repetition
- swinging arms
- heel kicks
- pivots
- increased tempo
- larger dimensions
- stronger/percussive energy.

Robotic section

- angular shapes
- hesitation
- repetition
- unison
- contrasting levels
- spatial awareness.

Later sections

- return of motifs
- slowing and acceleration
- contrast between fluid and percussive qualities
- low-level grounded movement
- water sounds
- sustained, fluid movement.

References:

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BlakDance (2022) *BlakDance residency program - Keia McGrady*. Available at: https://www.blakdance.org.au/blakdance-residency-program-keia-mcgrady (Accessed: 27 September 2026).

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Cultural Foundations of Movement:

The movement language in *Charcoal* is deeply connected to Keia's cultural dance practices and the knowledge passed on to her through cultural learning.

The grounded movements seen throughout the work draw from these practices, which Keia has interpreted and expressed through a contemporary dance context.

This movement vocabulary is informed by cultural teachings and protocols, including specific grounding practices that Keia has undertaken as part of her cultural learning. Rather than simply drawing inspiration from cultural dance, *Charcoal* reflects the continuation and contemporary expression of embodied cultural knowledge.