

No Sugar



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JACK DAVIS

Jack Davis was born in Perth, Australia, but raised in the city of Yarloop and on the Moore River Native Settlement, which serves as one of the settings for his play, *No Sugar*. Davis's first language was English, but he began to learn the language of his Aboriginal ancestors while living on a Reservation as an adult. Davis then became interested in politics, advocacy, and activism, serving as director of the Aboriginal Centre in Perth, and chairman of the Aboriginal Lands Trust, in addition to founding the Aboriginal Writers, Oral Literature, and Dramatists Association. Davis was a lifelong poet, memoirist, and playwright, although he did not publish his first work, *The First Born and Other Poems*, until 1970. He went on to publish a dozen other works, including his 1991 memoir *A Boy's Life*, and the three plays in his First Born trilogy, which documents Aboriginal Australian life over the course of the 20th century: *No Sugar* (1985), *The Dreamers* (1982), and *Barungin (Smell the Wind)* (1989).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

No Sugar takes place over the course of four years, beginning in 1930 and ending in 1934. These years represent the peak of a worldwide Great Depression, a financial and economic crisis that began with the American stock market crash in 1929, but soon became a global disaster. In Australia, as in America and other countries around the world, unemployment rates rose and poverty became widespread. Although the Great Depression was a global crisis, *No Sugar* also deals with history specific to Australia, primarily the treatment and regulation of its indigenous population. Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years, and lived undisturbed until British explorers first encountered Australia in the 18th century. Although the population of indigenous people was between 500,000 and possibly greater than a million at the time of colonization, violent colonial policies and diseases introduced by the European settlers quickly wiped out the majority of Aboriginal Australians. By the 1930s there were only around 50,000 Aboriginal Australians left. Many white Australians, including many government officials, believed that the Aboriginal community was inferior to theirs, and that it was their duty to do their best to control and improve (i.e. Westernize) their lives. Aboriginal Australians were quarantined in Reservations and closely monitored. They were forbidden from various behaviors, such as drinking or leaving their mandated homes. Although *No Sugar* only tangentially deals with this, one particularly despicable policy enacted by

the government was the “child removal policy,” which took indigenous children from their families, with the intention of raising them to be as “white” and Western as possible.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

No Sugar is the second of three plays in Jack Davis's First Born Trilogy, in which he depicts the everyday lives of Aboriginal families over the course of the 20th century. The other two plays in the series are *The Dreamers*, published first in 1982, and *Barungin (Smell the Wind)*, published 1989. Davis also belongs to a canon of Aboriginal Australian writers who write about the Aboriginal experience. The first person to do so was David Unaipon, who in the early 1900s primarily collected Aboriginal legends and stories. Others include Oogeroo Noonuccal, a poet who published the first ever book of Aboriginal poetry, and Kevin Gilbert, a playwright, activist, and poet active at the same time as Davis.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** No Sugar
- **When Written:** 1980s
- **Where Written:** Western Australia
- **When Published:** 1985
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Realistic Drama
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction, Drama
- **Setting:** Western Australia
- **Climax:** Neville's Australia Day Speech
- **Antagonist:** Neville, Mr. Neal, the Sergeant, the Constable
- **Point of View:** Play

EXTRA CREDIT

About the Title. In the play's early scenes rations are cut, and the characters exclaim that there is “no soap!” and “no meat!” Although their ration of sugar is never cut, and so they never exclaim that there is “no sugar!,” the title refers to the lack of kindness and empathy displayed by white Australians towards their indigenous neighbors, and the hardship the play's central family must face on a day to day basis.

Real Life Influence. Jack Davis spent much of his life in Western Australia, and a few years of his childhood on the Moore River Native Settlement, where many of the events of *No Sugar* take place.



PLOT SUMMARY

The play begins in 1930 in the city of Northam, on the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve, where the Millimurra-Munday family, comprising Jimmy, Sam, Milly, Gran, Joe, Cissie, and David live. Australia, like the rest of the world, is suffering from the Great Depression, and so work and money are scarce. The Millimurra-Mundays survive on limited government rations, meat they've caught themselves, and a little money that Sam, Jimmy, and Joe earn doing odd jobs around town. The Millimurra-Mundays have to deal with various problems, including diminishing ration allotments, Jimmy's imprisonment for public drunkenness, and Cissie's poor health. Although they struggle to stay afloat, each member of the family looks out for everyone else, and makes compromises for the wellbeing of the group.

As the Millimurra-Munday family attempts to make ends meet, the audience is given insight into the bureaucratic plots of Neville, Miss Dunn, the Sergeant, and the Constable, who frequently talk on the telephone as they make plans to relocate the Northam Aboriginal community to the Moore River Native Settlement. Although the Millimurra-Munday family and their neighbors will be the most affected by this move, they have no say in the decision. Instead, one day the Sergeant and the Constable arrive at their encampment and announce that they must uproot their lives. Jimmy and Gran fight back, but it is a losing battle. In the end, the whole family makes the move.

Moore River is run by Mr. Neal and his wife, Matron Neal, who runs the local hospital. Matron Neal genuinely cares about the wellbeing of Moore River's indigenous population, but Mr. Neal is more interested in his own quality of life, and in taking out anger, aggression, and lust on the Aboriginal Australians under his "care." The Millimurra-Mundays arrive at Moore River and are immediately inspected by Matron Neal. The family, and dozens of other Aboriginal families, were sent to Moore River because they supposedly had scabies. However, upon examining the group, the Matron determines they're perfectly healthy. Unfortunately, they will still be forced to stay in Moore River, clearing space in Northam for white families and white recreation, which was Neville's plan all along.

The Millimurra-Mundays make a new life in Moore River. Joe meets and falls in love with another girl living at the camp, Mary. She eventually becomes pregnant, and Joe convinces her to elope with him back to Northam, where they can live independently. They illegally escape Moore River, and live freely and happily for several months, but are eventually recaptured by the Sergeant and Constable. Mary is sent back to Moore River, and Joe is sent to prison.

Back in Moore River, the Millimurra-Mundays care for Mary and adopt her into their family. When Neal whips her for rejecting his offer to work at the hospital (where she suspects

he would attempt to sexually harass or assault her), Milly and Gran tend to her wounds. She eventually delivers her baby, and Gran is the one who tends to her and ties the knot on the baby's umbilical cord.

On Australia Day, 1934, Neville comes to Moore River to deliver a speech. Jimmy and his extended family are unimpressed with the speech, which seems to suggest that Aboriginal Australians should be grateful for their white colonizers. Jimmy and others parody a hymn that Neville sings, and Neville stops the event to chastise Jimmy. Jimmy fights back, but he has a weak heart and cannot handle the exertion. He becomes overexcited and dies.

Joe is released from prison and meets his new son, who he names "Jimmy" after his uncle. He asks Neal for permission to leave Moore River, which he finally grants. The play ends as Joe, Mary, and their baby leave Moore River for a second time.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

James "Jimmy" Munday – A middle-aged Aboriginal man. He is Milly's brother and Gran's son. Jimmy likes to drink, and often becomes argumentative and violent when he does, lashing out at anyone who gets in his way, including his family. While most members of his family are more willing to comply with the orders and instructions of the white bureaucrats (Neal, Neville) and law enforcement officials (the Sergeant, the Constable) constantly monitoring the lives of the Aboriginal community, Jimmy is rebellious. He sees the racism and hypocrisy of the Sergeant, Neal, and others, and is unwilling to cooperate with people who clearly do not have his or his family's best interests at heart. Jimmy is punished for his defiance. The community knows him as a troublemaker, and during the play he is imprisoned once, but has been imprisoned multiple times in the past. Jimmy moves from Government Well to Moore River with his family midway through the play, but because of a heart condition he is forced to take the train instead of walk. His heart condition, and his rebellious nature, eventually kill him; Jimmy grows overexcited at an Australia Day event, during which he begins an argument with Neville about his treatment of the Aboriginal community, but collapses and dies from the heat, the stress, and the excitement of the moment.

Gran Munday – Gran is the matriarch of the Millimurra-Munday family, which is at the center of the events of the play. She is mother to Jimmy and Milly, and grandmother to Joe, Cissie, and David. Together Gran and Milly make sure the family is taken care of—that their clothes are clean and that there is enough food to eat. Gran has even delivered several generations of children herself, including her grandson, Joe, and his child with Mary, her great-grandson Jimmy Millimurra. Gran is also not above diving into family arguments and

physical scuffles—at one point she physically pulls apart Jimmy and Sam, grown men who nonetheless have gotten into a fistfight and have to be separated. Gran is tough, and has no problem talking back to the white bureaucrats and law enforcement officials who attempt to control her life. For example, when the Sergeant and Constable demand that the Millimurra-Munday family board a train and relocate to Moore River, Gran not only insists she travel by foot, but also that her dogs be allowed to come with her.

Milly Millimurra – A middle-aged Aboriginal woman. She is the daughter of Gran, sister of Jimmy, wife of Sam, and mother to Joe, Cissie, and David. Together with Gran, Milly is the backbone of the Millimurra-Munday family. She makes sure her children are clean and that everyone is fed and clothed. She is always advocating for her clan. When rations are cut, she argues and barter with the Sergeant and Constable. When Cissie is sick, or Mary is hurt, Milly drops everything to take care of them.

Sam Millimurra – A middle-aged Aboriginal man. He is Milly's husband, and Joe, Cissie, and David's father. Sam is technically the patriarch of the family, but much of the of the parenting and decision making is done by Milly and Gran. Sam always puts family first, most frequently contributing to his family by catching meat for dinner or else working on nearby farms in exchange for food or supplies. Sam and his brother-in-law Jimmy have a complicated relationship. Sam is more willing to cooperate and comply with the white officials who oversee his life, whereas Jimmy is more rebellious. Still, both men care about the wellbeing of the family and are willing to overlook their differences in the service of their relatives.

Joe Millimurra – Sam and Milly's teenaged son. Joe takes after his uncle, Jimmy, more than he takes after his father. Joe, like Jimmy, is rebellious, and challenges the authority of the white Australian law enforcement officials and bureaucrats. However, Joe isn't opposed to the idea of authority figures; instead, he recognizes that he and his Aboriginal family members have been systematically mistreated by white Australians who are supposed to be protecting them, and he refuses to accept this kind of disrespect and abuse. Joe and Mary meet at the Moore River Native Settlement and fall in love. Knowing that Neal will never grant him permission to marry his lover, Joe elopes with Mary. He is eventually recaptured and sent to jail, but upon his release he is as committed as ever to leaving Moore River with Mary and finding a better, freer life somewhere else.

Auber Octavius Neville – Neville is a real historical figure, and the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia for the first quarter of the 20th century. Neville works in Perth with his secretary, Miss Dunn. Like many other characters, such as Mr. Neal or the Sergeant, Neville's job is ostensibly to protect the Aboriginal community under his care, but he is more interested in controlling and containing them than he is with making sure they are happy and healthy. He is responsible for the

Millimurra-Munday family's relocation from Government Well to Moore River, and is likely also the figure behind the fabricated scabies outbreak, which he then uses as an excuse to quarantine them. Although not addressed in the play, historically, Neville is remembered for various unethical and controversial programs, including separating Aboriginal children from their parents and bringing the children to camps like Moore River, where they were encouraged to forget their culture and embrace a white, European way of life.

Mr N. S. Neal – A white man and Superintendent of the Moore River Native Settlement, he is married to Matron Neal. Although Neal's job is to protect and care for the Aboriginal families under his jurisdiction, he is more interested in suppressing and controlling them. He explicitly tells Sister Eileen that he disapproves of her teaching Indigenous children to read and write because he thinks it will make them more rebellious, and he seems to enjoy beating any members of the Aboriginal community who stand up to him. Neal also likes to prey on young indigenous women, assigning them to work in the hospital and then using their proximity to him as an excuse to sexually harass them. This behavior is an open secret in the Moore River Native Settlement—Mary knows (and rejects his offer to assign her to work in the hospital), as does his wife.

Matron Neal – A white woman in charge of the hospital at the Moore River Native Settlement, she is married to Mr. Neal. The Matron is more sympathetic to the plight of the Aboriginal families under her care than is her husband. She sees The Millimurra-Munday family, Billy, and Bluey as people, worthy of kindness and respect. She often clashes with her husband over his treatment of the Aboriginal community, which she sees as unnecessarily cruel and violent. At the same time, she does little to stop her lecherous husband from preying on Aboriginal girls.

Cissie Millimurra – The daughter of Sam and Milly. Cissie becomes sick early in the play, and her whole family rallies around her and cares for her. Although the play takes place over the course of four years, Cissie remains a child the whole time, and is protected by her family from major events, such as when Joe and Mary elope, or when Mary has her baby.

David Millimurra – The youngest son of Sam and Milly. David is a playful, easily distracted child. Although he ages four years over the course of the play, like his sister Cissie, he remains young enough that his older extended family tries to protect him from unnecessary trauma, like when Joe and Mary elope, or when Mary has her baby.

Sergeant Carrol – A sergeant on the Northam police force. He works with Constable Kerr, and sometimes remotely checks in with Neville and Miss Dunn. Part of his job involves helping and coordinating with the local Aboriginal community, but the Sergeant seems to have little respect for their wellbeing or their way of life. The Millimurra-Munday family distrusts him and the entire police force. Their interactions with law

enforcement have rarely been positive; instead, they have grown used to constant state-sanctioned police harassment.

Mary Daragurru – An Aboriginal teenager who lives at the Moore River Settlement. She and Joe meet soon after he arrives with his family, and the two quickly fall in love. Mary becomes pregnant and she and Joe elope, although they are eventually recaptured and Mary is sent back to Moore River, while Joe is sent to jail. The Millimurra-Munday family adopts Mary, and Gran even helps deliver her son. Mary is strong-willed and holds fast to her convictions, but sometimes this leads to additional, unexpected pain. Mary must navigate Mr. Neal's sexual advances, and when she rejects him he savagely whips her, even though she is several months pregnant. She eventually gives birth to her son, Jimmy Koolbari, named after Joe's uncle. Mary and Joe then receive permission to marry and leave the settlement from Neal, and venture out into the world.

Jimmy Koolbari Millimurra / The Baby – Joe and Mary's infant son, often simply referred to as "the Baby." Mary delivers Jimmy with Gran's help while Joe is still in jail. She gives him a Nyoongah name, Koolbari (meaning magpie), but waits for Joe's release to give him an English name. Joe names his child Jimmy after his late uncle, Jimmy Munday.

Frank Brown – A white farmer who has traveled to Northam looking for work. Frank has a wife and children who he has not seen for many months. Because of the depression, he's been unable to find employment, and has been unable to send money home. Frank befriends Jimmy and Sam, and provides them with alcohol in exchange for their friendship and the meals they've shared with him. He is taken to court for purchasing alcohol for Aboriginals, and is sentenced to six weeks of hard labor.

Sister Eileen – A white nun who works at the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve. She has more respect for the Aboriginal men, women, and children in her care than does her superior, Neal. She does not condone using violence against her Sunday School students, and she disagrees with Neal when he tries to convince her to stop teaching her indigenous students how to read. Still, she participates in a racist system without ever acting to dismantle or oppose it, and is only an ally to the Millimurra-Munday family and others because she is not explicitly an enemy.

Billy Kimberley – One of two black trackers employed by Neal at the Moore River Native Settlement, the other being Bluey. Billy follows Neal's orders, but also spends time with the Millimurra-Munday family as friends. Billy was originally from the Northern part of Western Australia, but his community was destroyed during the Oombulgarri Massacre. Billy's allegiance is split between his own indigenous identity and the authority of Neal and the Matron, but he generally privileges his duty to his job over his duty to himself or his fellow Aboriginal Australians.

Herbert "Herbie" Munday – A distant relative of the

Millimurra-Mundays who lives on a farm near them in Northam. Herbie has more money than his relatives, and although he is willing to lend them his cart to transport Cissie to and from the hospital, he expects the men in the family to work off their debt on his farm. Herbie is also related to Topsy, who the Millimurra-Mundays meet after they are relocated to Moore River.

Captain James Stirling – A real-life historical figure invoked by Neville in a speech to the Royal Western Australian Historical Society. An admiral in the British Royal Navy, Stirling helped found the Swan River Colony in Western Australia, at the site of the present-day city of Perth. Stirling also oversaw the slaughter of a group of native Australians who, unhappy at having their homeland invaded, had been antagonizing the colonists.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Constable Kerr – A constable on the Northam police force. Although part of his job is to help protect the Aboriginal families in his district, he shows little respect for their lives, livelihoods, health, or comfort.

Miss Sybil Dunn – A white woman who works as Neville's secretary. Although Miss Dunn receives few opportunities to express her own opinions, she demonstrates that she's fine with Neville's explicit and institutional racism as she happily transcribes and enables his various schemes regarding the future of the Aboriginal population within his care.

Justice of the Peace (JP) – A white Northam farmer who oversees the trial of Jimmy and Sam for public intoxication. He is not sympathetic to the two men's cases, imprisoning Jimmy and giving Sam a steep fine.

Topsy – A teenage Aboriginal girl who lives at Moore River Native Settlement. She and Mary are close friends, and she discovers that she is related to the Millimurra-Munday family through their shared uncle Herbie. Topsy eventually begins to work with the Matron Neal in the hospital.

Bluey – One of two black trackers employed by Neal at the Moore River Native Settlement, the other being Billy. Bluey follows Neal's orders, but also spends time with the Millimurra-Munday family as friends when he is off duty.

Streak – Jimmy Munday's pet dog. Streak was shot by the Northam police before the events of the play.

Jimmy Mitchell – A real-life historical figure, Jimmy Mitchell was a white Australian politician who was the Premier (or head of the executive branch of government) of Western Australia until he was ousted in the 1933 election by the opposition Labor party.

Wow Wow – Gran's pet dog. Although he makes the move from Government Well to Moore River, he is then killed by Billy, who is ordered by Neal to cleanse the camp of dogs.

Midja George – A white man from Western Australia. He appears in Billy’s story of the Oombulgarrri Massacre. According to Billy, Midja George beat a sleeping Aboriginal man who retaliated, killing Midja George. This upset the white townspeople, who in turn massacred the native population.

Skinny Martin – A white man who lives in Northam and who occasionally employs the men of the Millimurra-Munday family.

TERMS

Government Well Aboriginal Reserve – A settlement in southwestern Australia where the Millimurra-Munday family lives at the beginning of the play. It is adjacent to the town of Northam.

Moore River Native Settlement – A settlement in southwestern Australia where the Millimurra-Munday family is relocated midway through the play. The Moore River Settlement was a kind of internment camp for Aboriginal Australians. It was not merely a place for the family to live—they were forced to stay there, and they were not allowed to freely come and go.

Long Pool Camp – The specific camp within the Moore River Native Settlement where the Millimurra-Munday family has made their home.

Nyoongah – Both the language spoken by the Millimurra-Munday family, and the Aboriginal cultural group to which they belong.

Kargudda – The word for “south” or “southern” in Nyoongah.

Oombulgarrri – An Aboriginal community indigenous to the Northwestern part of the country.

Centenary – A one hundred-year anniversary.

Scabies – A contagious condition caused by mites burrowing under the skin. It causes itching and rashes. It is highly contagious among people who have close physical contact with one another.

Wetjallas – The Nyoongah word for white people, along with gudeeah.

Gudeeah – A Nyoongah word for white people, along with wetjala.

Blackfella – A slang word for an Aboriginal person.

Damper – A traditional Australian bread. It is made simply, using only flour and water, but milk and baking soda can be added. Often cooked by travelers or campers, it is often made in the ashes of a campfire.

Perth – A city on Australia’s western coast, and the capital of the state of Western Australia.

Northam – A city in southwestern Australia. The Millimurra-Munday family lives on the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve, which is adjacent to the city.

Black Tracker – Historically, this term referred to Aboriginal men and women who helped British colonists navigate and exploit Australia’s unfamiliar landscape. Black trackers would also often align themselves with the British, sometimes forming informal or official police forces, who primarily monitored and punished the behavior of local Aboriginal communities. **Billy** and **Bluey** are both black trackers. Although they are still in touch with their Aboriginal language, culture, and history, they are quick to side with their white employers and willing to carry out violence on the Millimurra-Munday family.

Oombulgarrri Massacre – Also known as the Forrest River Massacre, this was a historical massacre of the Oombulgarrri people in northwestern Australia. Billy recounts a version of this story, in which he says a white man, **Midja George**, attacked a sleeping Aboriginal man, who killed Midja George in self-defense. The white residents of the nearby town retaliated, killing dozens of Aboriginal men, women and children.

Cat-o’-nine Tails – An especially painful kind of whip, in which a handle is attached to nine knotted pieces of cotton rope.

Corroboree – An Australian-Aboriginal ceremony involving music and dance. In the play, participants play the clapsticks and digeridoo, and paint themselves with wilgi paint, in patterns representing stories and folklore.

Clapsticks – Handheld wooden percussive instruments invented and played by Aboriginal Australians.

Bungarra – A monitor lizard—a large Australian reptile.

Digeridoo – A wooden wind instrument invented and played by Aboriginal Australians.

Wilgi – Special body paint used for Aboriginal ceremonies.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, AND COLONIAL VIOLENCE

The Millimurra-Munday family, the Indigenous (or Aboriginal) Australian protagonists of *No Sugar*, are forced to endure racism daily, both personally and institutionally. They are taken advantage of and abused, forced to accept unequal treatment and invasive government control simply because white Australians have political and social power, and they themselves are not white. Davis clearly illustrates the impact that racism can have on the lives of minorities, but he also takes a broader view of the racist history of Australia, and the centuries-long disenfranchisement of the

Aboriginal people. He examines the ways different individuals respond to the trauma of colonial violence—either by becoming angry and fighting back, attempting to assimilate and follow their oppressors’ rules, or even becoming complicit in the behaviors of the racist ruling class. By highlighting both the day-to-day racism wielded against the Millimurra-Mundays, and the long-term effects of colonial violence on Aboriginals as a whole, Davis illustrates how decades of casual interpersonal racism can lead to the systematic disenfranchisement of many generations of people.

The Millimurra-Munday family endures small acts of racism every day, which are the direct result of a colonial culture that devalues the Aboriginal Australian. Although this discrimination is familiar, it is difficult to tolerate. Even the youngest members of the family recognize the ways they are mistreated because of their race—Cissie complains that the grocer sells her and her siblings “little shriveled” apples while “wetjala [white] kids” get “big fat ones.” When Gran and Milly go to the police station to pick up their rations, the Sergeant tells them their real problem is that they have “got three healthy men bludging off you, too lazy to work.” These three men, Sam, Milly’s husband, Jimmy, her brother, and Joe, her teenage son, are unable to find employment—largely because the Great Depression is going on, and unemployment rates are over 30%—but the Sergeant implies that it’s a result of laziness, which he attributes to their race. The white Australians also have little respect for the Aboriginals’ belongings. One notable instance of this is their total disregard for the Millimurra-Mundays’ pet dogs. When they are forced to relocate, the family wants to take their dogs with them, since the dogs are like members of the family and are used to catch game. The white Australians do not care, and the Millimurra-Mundays correctly predict that any dogs that are left behind will be killed “with a police bullet.”

In addition to the more casual racism that the Millimurra-Mundays face daily, the Aboriginal people of Australia must deal with institutional racism at the level of local and state governments, which leads to their systematic disenfranchisement. Most horrifyingly, this colonial violence manifests in genocides, such as the Forrest River Massacre (also called the Oombulgurri Massacre), a historical event recounted by Billy. What begins as more minor racist harassment turned into a large-scale effort to rid a white community of all its native residents. This genocide was the result of already simmering racial tensions, and it gave white Australians an excuse to exterminate a population they already had no respect for. In another instance, three white officials at the Police Station—the Sergeant, Neville, and Miss Dunn—discuss Aboriginal women and teens who “went out in domestic service last year.” Of eighty women, “thirty returned to the settlement in pregnant condition.” Although the implication is that these women have been raped by their white

employers, the officials at the police station don’t see this as a problem, and take no steps to prevent it from happening again, or to care for the pregnant women in the present. This shows that even on the governmental level, white Australians show a systematic disregard for the lives and safety of their Aboriginal neighbors.

For the Aboriginal Australians, dealing with daily harassment as well as large-scale physical and sexual violence takes a toll on both individuals and communities. There is no single correct way to deal with the trauma of this centuries-long colonial violence, but by showcasing various solutions, Davis suggests there are better and worse ways to cope. Responses that bring about real change, or at least force white Australians to consider the plight of the Aboriginal community, are more productive than responses that continue to perpetuate the pain of the colonizers.

In response to a lifetime of discrimination, Jimmy becomes increasingly antiestablishment, challenging the authority of any white civil servants. This is evident in essentially every interaction he has with a white character in a position of power, but is especially clear when he and Sam are imprisoned for drunkenly fighting. While Sam is happy to cooperate, Jimmy plays the harmonica to irritate the Constable and Sergeant, talks back to them, throws a bucket at them, and generally tries to prove that, although they have locked him in prison, they cannot control him. Meanwhile, Billy and Bluey have done their best to assimilate into white society. Both men are policemen working for the Moore River Native Settlement. Even though Billy and Bluey are Aboriginal themselves, they treat the Millimurra-Munday family with the same disrespect that white Australians show them, and Billy especially has internalized the violent and racist tactics that his white employers use. Davis depicts their behavior critically, suggesting that assimilation into a racist system is not a productive way to deal with trauma. However, there is a possible way to break from the cycle of mistreatment and violence, Davis suggests. Joe and Mary, for example, attempt to escape their Settlement twice during the play. *No Sugar* ends with the two teens packing their bags and beginning a search for a home where they can control their own lives. Their departure is bittersweet but hopeful, as the play suggests that some Aboriginal men and women can find a way to escape the colonial violence and racism that has plagued them for centuries.

Throughout *No Sugar*, the Aboriginal protagonists are forced to endure racism and harassment on multiple levels. Although each individual attack could be bearable, added up over years and generations these assaults become systemic colonial violence. Davis makes clear the relationship between racism at an individual and at a governmental level, and argues that such violence takes an incredible toll on its victims. However, he also suggests that how a person reacts to this violence is an individual choice, and allows room for hope that, in spite of

great adversity, some Aboriginal men and women can break free from the cycles of violence, and learn to work through intergenerational trauma.



GOVERNMENT, CIVILIZATION, AND RELIGION

Throughout *No Sugar*, the white civil servants who control the lives of the Aboriginal Australians constantly justify their authority and their actions by claiming that they are merely helping to civilize the Aboriginals and bring them into the twentieth century. For these white men and women, most notably Matron Neal, Mr. Neville, and Mr. Neal, religion and so-called civilization are tools of control and oppression, which they can use to disenfranchise the native people they are ostensibly supposed to be caring for. By contrasting the reality of the Aboriginal Millimurra-Munday family's living conditions against the high-minded rhetoric of government officials, Davis suggests that the concept of Western civilization, including the introduction of Christianity and a white, Western government, is not meant to serve the best interests of the Aboriginal people, but instead to make it easier for white colonizers to control them.

The government controls almost every aspect of the Millimurra-Munday family's lives, as well as the lives of all other Indigenous Australians. Supposedly, this is for the good of the Aboriginal people, but in reality, it limits their autonomy and deprives them of the freedom granted to whites. At the beginning of *No Sugar*, the Millimurra-Munday family lives on the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve. However, the local government and local whites want the Millimurra-Mundays to move and consequently force them to relocate to the Moore River Settlement. The people who are most affected by this decision have no say in it, but are forced to uproot their lives or else be arrested. Later in the play, when Joe and Mary try to escape Moore River, they are first tracked down by police, and eventually arrested and returned to their settlement. Their movement is supposedly restricted so that they can more easily access government resources, but in reality, the government imprisons the Millimurra-Mundays and others because their white neighbors do not want to live near Aboriginals.

The government also controls the food its Aboriginal citizens can eat and what goods they receive. The Millimurra-Mundays receive rations from the government, which are constantly being decreased. In 1929, when the play begins, rations for soap have just been cut, and Milly and Gran are upset to realize that, without money to buy soap of their own, they will be unable to clean themselves or their families. Later, in 1932, Milly is shocked to discover the meat ration has been indefinitely discontinued, as has the fat in which she cooks food. Although the Millimurra-Mundays objectively benefit from rations, they are given much less food than is allocated to their white counterparts, keeping them on the verge of starvation.

Whereas unemployed white Australians receive seven shillings a week, Aboriginal Australians rations cost only two shilling and fourpence. Even as the government claims to help them, it is starving them instead.

The white government officials who care for the Aboriginal population of Western Australia often refer to their mission as one of "civilisation." They believed they are doing good work, and enhancing the lives of Australia's native population, by forcing them to live according to Western ideals. However, instead of genuinely caring for the Millimurra-Mundays and other Aboriginal Australians, the government is instead trying to exploit them or drive them out. Early in the play, Neville writes a letter to M.S. Neal, Superintendent at the Moore River Native Settlement. Neville explains, "I'm a great believer that if you provide the native the basic accouterments of civilisation you're halfway to civilising him. I'd like to see each child issued with a handkerchief and instructed on its use." He notes that although money is tight, he has a plan for how each Aboriginal child could have a handkerchief with which to wipe their nose. Neville makes it clear that he does not care about the wellbeing of those under his care; he only cares about the *appearance* of wellbeing. It is not the lack of food or opportunities that concerns him, but the "dirty little noses amongst the children." In the same letter, Neville notes that if you "can successfully inculcate such basic but essential details of civilised living you will have helped them along the road to taking their place in Australian society." Although he presents civilization as something that could benefit the Aboriginal Australians, in reality, civilization is a list of rules and restrictions designed to make the Aboriginals more manageable for whites in power, not necessarily happier or healthier.

Religion, specifically Christianity, is also used to oppress and control the Aboriginal population. The rhetoric surrounding the white settlers' colonization of Australia suggests that it was God's plan for them to take over, painting the genocide of the native population as an inevitability (and even a divine right), as opposed to a preventable tragedy. During the Australia Day speech, Sister Eileen suggests that everyone should "remember today not just our country and King, but the King of kings, the Prince of princes, and to give thanks to God for what He has provided for us." She continues, "The Lord Jesus Christ has sent His servant, Mr. Neville, Chief Protector of the Aborigines, to speak to us on this special day." Sister Eileen implies that the white colonists who took over Australia were allowed to do so by a mandate from God, and suggests that Neville is not only in a position of authority because of his profession but because he was selected by Jesus. Instilling the white colonial mission with divine purpose helps the white Australians justify their actions, and undermines the Aboriginal Australians' claim to the land of their ancestors.

The Aboriginal Australians recognize that their colonizers are using religion to justify participating in what is essentially

genocide. Sister Eileen and Neville lead the group in the song “There is a Happy Land,” which is a religious hymn that includes the lines, “Worthy is our Saviour King! / Loud let His praises ring, / Praise, praise for aye!” However, the Millimurra-Mundays and others corrupt the lyrics, singing, “no sugar in our tea, / bread and butter we never see. / That’s why we’re gradually / Fading away.” The Aboriginals recognize that the white Australians’ Christianity has blinded them to the injustices that their neighbors face. Although religion, welfare, and the comforts of Western civilization are potentially uplifting forces, the white colonizers use these forces as tools to oppress and control the Aboriginals.



WHITE AUSTRALIANS VS. THE ABORIGINAL FAMILY UNIT

Family is incredibly important to the Millimurra-Mundays, the Aboriginal Australian protagonists of

No Sugar. From the very first scene, in which they are demonstrably poor, with few physical belongings, they are shown to be rich in love and affection for each other, with each member of the family doing his or her best to alleviate the suffering of the others. Additionally, the definitions of family are loose, and the Millimurra-Mundays are easily able to absorb into their family white itinerant farm workers (like Frank), other Aboriginal men and women who want to participate in song or ceremony, and the love interests of their children. The bonds and obligations of family are what allow the Millimurra-Mundays to survive, but unfortunately their white colonizers pose a constant threat to their wellbeing and happiness. Neville (the “Protector of Aborigines” in Western Australia) and Neal (Superintendent at the Moore River Native Settlement) especially, two men whose job it is supposedly to improve the lives of Western Australia’s Aboriginal community, instead spend much of their time concocting ways to further oppress their native charges. By attacking family units, white Australians hope to destabilize and control Aboriginal Australians. However, while the bonds of family alone are not enough to completely erase the hardships the Millimurra-Mundays have been through, having a loving, supportive family can help an oppressed or disadvantaged group continue on, and maintain hope for the future and future generations.

The family provides emotional support, but they are also physically there for one another, taking care of each other’s medical needs when the government or reservation fails them. At Government Well in Northam, everyone contributes in any way they can. Milly and Gran collect rations, Cissie and Joe tend the fire, Jimmy brings some turnips, and so on. Although living in extreme poverty, the Millimurra-Mundays take care of each other through loving cooperation. When Cissie gets sick in the first act, the entire family drops everything to take care of her. Milly tells her husband, Sam, that he won’t be working today so he can carry Millie to the doctor, and her son, David,

that he will have to walk to school alone. Everyone is quick to make sacrifices if it means they can take care of one of their own. Later, when Cissie returns from the hospital, the family borrows a cart. Sam knows borrowing it will mean he has to do more physical labor (cutting fence posts) as repayment, but Milly points out “ne’mine the posts, long as we git her home.” Later in the novel, Joe becomes romantically involved with Mary. The two are not legally married, but their families recognize them as a couple, and the child they conceive as legitimate. When it comes time for Mary to give birth, it is her in-laws who take care of her, immediately absorbing her into their family unit. Mary doesn’t want the Matron to help her, and so Gran is forced to deliver the child herself, just as she delivered her grandchildren. For generations, the Millimurra-Mundays have not only been caring for each other’s health, but literally bringing each other into the world.

The white Australians attempt to “civilise” the Aboriginal Australians under their care, and to instill their own set of Western family values. However, ironically, the people with the lowest regard for families and least amount of respect for the importance of ancestral bonds are the government officials who claim to have the Millimurra-Mundays’ best interests at heart. When Jimmy dies during Joe’s imprisonment, the Millimurra-Mundays petition Neal to let him out for a day for the funeral. Neal refuses—he enjoys denying the Aboriginal community’s requests, because it allows him to demonstrate the power he holds over them, and the ways in which they must defer to his judgment and authority. When Mary gives birth, she fears someone will come and take her baby away. She refuses to let the Matron help her because she knows of other Aboriginal women who had babies that were taken from them and killed by black trackers at the settlement. This fear is not unsubstantiated. Mary says: “My friend went last Christmas and she came back [pregnant] [...] and when she had that baby the trackers chocked it dead and buried it in the pine plantation.” As shocking as this disregard for human life is, it mirrors the callous way Neville and the other officers described how many women in their care were raped by the men who employed them. Similarly, Mr. Neal himself is known for preying on young women at the Moore River Settlement. Mary knows that “when Mr. Neal sends a girl to work at the hospital it usually means [...] that he wants that girl [...] for himself.” Even after Mary has been married and had a baby, Neal attempts to coerce her into working with him, demonstrating a total lack of respect for women generally, Mary specifically, and the institutions and bonds of family and marriage.

Each member of the Millimurra-Munday family recognizes the importance of the family unit, and of looking after those people in their family, biological or chosen. Their commitment to family and helping others is especially important when faced with the total disregard for family, women, and mothers demonstrated by the play’s white Australian civil servants. Although the

strength of family is not enough to avoid racist mistreatment or extreme poverty, a respect for and emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships helps the Millimurra-Mundays endure many of life's hardships.



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

In *No Sugar*, both white and Aboriginal Australians use language to reinforce their own racial and cultural identities. Although all of the characters in the play predominantly speak English, the Millimurra-Munday family peppers their speech with *Nyoongah*, an Aboriginal language. When reading the play, readers can turn to the glossary for definitions of over one hundred words and phrases. However, for those watching the play, the frequent *Nyoongah* vocabulary is likely unfamiliar and disorienting. Like the white Australians within the play, audience members are forced to use context clues to uncover meaning. Living in a world where so much has been taken from them—their land, their autonomy—Aboriginal Australians hold on to language as one of the last vestiges of their culture. In contrast, white Australians use English, especially written English, as a method of gatekeeping, actively discouraging Aboriginal children from learning to read, or else using complicated documents to confuse the Aboriginal people who are signing them. In both cases, language serves to isolate one community from another. However, the white Australians use it in order to disenfranchise the Aboriginal people in their communities and deny them the opportunity to improve their conditions, whereas the Millimurra-Mundays and other Aboriginal characters use their language to protect themselves and their culture, which white Australians have attempted to steal from them or destroy.

The Millimurra-Munday family has very few physical possessions, and very little agency over their own lives—even the food they eat and the land they live on is regulated by the government. However, they are able to hold on to aspects of their rich cultural history through speech and song, even as other aspects of their identities are taken away. The *Nyoongah* language bonds together those that speak it, while creating a divide between the Aboriginal Australians and the white Australians who only speak English. In court, for example, Sam refers to his “*gnoolya*,” or brother-in-law, Jimmy, which the white men in the room do not understand. Later, Gran asks the Constable about “them *wanbru*,” or blankets, which he also is unable to translate. By preserving their language, the Millimurra-Munday family is able to preserve some of their culture and dignity. Songs and phrases in the *Nyoongah* language further preserve the family's culture and history. The play ends with Joe and Mary leaving Moore River in search of a better life, as Gran sings them off with a song in *Nyoongah*. The song, which translates to “woe, woe, woe. / My boy and girl and baby / Going a long way walking,” acts as a bridge across four generations. Even as Joe, Mary, and their baby leave their

families and home behind, they remain connected to their ancestors and to their culture through their shared language.

Mr. Neal, a white Australian, is more interested in controlling the people in his care than helping them. He attempts to use access to language and information as a way to oppress the Millimurra-Mundays and other Aboriginals, and keep them from gaining power or influence. At the Moore River Settlement, Mr. Neal tries to convince Sister Eileen to stop lending books and novels to the Indigenous population. He explains, “There's a sort of unofficial directive on this: it's the sort of thing which isn't encourage by the Department.” When Sister Eileen clarifies what he means, asking, “you don't encourage the natives to read?” Neal explains, “my experience with natives in South Africa and here has taught—led me to believe that there's a lot of wisdom in the old adage that ‘a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.’” He believes that if the Aboriginal Australians are allowed to read, they will get “ideas,” which will make them harder to control. If Neal genuinely wanted to improve the lives of his charges, he would be happy to let them read. However, it seems that his goal is simply to keep the Aboriginals docile, so depriving them of knowledge and the ability to read will only depress them further.

Mr. Neal also uses the written word to manipulate the Aboriginal people under his care. He knows that Joe wants to leave the settlement with Mary and so Neal gives Joe a document to sign, which declares that Joe will “Undertake not to domicile in the town of Northam, nor anywhere in the Northam Shire. I fully understand that if I return to Northam I am liable to be returned under warrant to the Moore River or other Government Native Settlement.” Joe begins to read the paper on his own, but when he is too slow, Neal takes it from him and reads it aloud. Although Joe understands the basic gist of the document—“You mean if I put me name on this, me and Mary can take off?”—its formal wording, and the rushed way in which it is presented to Joe, means that he does not get the opportunity to fully consider its implications. That is, although Joe will be allowed to leave, he is not free.

In *No Sugar*, spoken and written languages are used to create and enforce cultural boundaries. In the play, white Australians use formal and written English to purposefully confuse the Aboriginal people with whom they interact. Government officials especially understand that keeping the Aboriginal community ignorant makes it easier to manage. They understand that knowledge is power, and that knowledge is often easily gained from books and other written texts. Meanwhile, the Millimurra-Munday family uses their Indigenous *Nyoongah* language to relate to each other, to remind themselves of their ancestral roots, and to assert their identity as Aboriginal Australians. The white Australians and civil servants actively use language to disenfranchise the Indigenous people, whereas the Millimurra-Mundays use it to empower themselves and their community.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



QUANDONGS

Quandongs are the fruit of a kind of sandalwood tree that grows wild in Australia. They are edible, have a distinct flavor that is tart and sour when ripe, and are used as an ingredient in “bushfood,” or traditional Aboriginal cuisine and medicine. In *No Sugar*, Joe gathers some quandongs to give to Mary, who finds them too sour and then starts vomiting (an early sign of her pregnancy). When Billy appears and tries to catch Joe and Mary—the couple has run away from the settlement—Joe beats him up, handcuffs him, and replaces the handcuff keys in Billy’s pockets with quandongs. Billy, humiliated, then returns to Mr. Neal and Matron Neal, who are frustrated by what has happened and especially infuriated to find only quandongs in Billy’s pockets. After Billy is sent away, the Matron tries to eat one of the fruits, but also finds it “bitterly sour.”

Through these appearances in the play, quandongs come to act as a symbol representing both the resiliency of the Aboriginal way of life and the bitter, oppressive situation that Aboriginal Australians have been placed into by white colonizers. Billy, an Aboriginal himself—but one who works as a black tracker for Neal—finds himself punished for turning against his own people, as the keys to the handcuffs with which he was supposed to arrest Joe and Mary are stolen and replaced with quandongs. The tools of white oppression are thus replaced with a reminder of Billy’s own Aboriginal origins and forsaken way of life. At the same time, the quandongs themselves are too bitter for both Mary and the Matron Neal to enjoy, suggesting the bitterness of white oppression of the Aboriginals. Mary, as an Aboriginal herself, is of course directly affected by this oppression, but the Matron too lives an unhappy life married to a man who cruelly exploits and violates the people he is supposedly “protecting.” In a wink to the play’s title, Joe also consoles Mary by saying that quandongs are “nice with sugar on ‘em.” However, as the Aboriginal characters sing later in the play, there is “no sugar.” They are not accepted into white Australian society, but also can no longer enjoy the fruits of their traditional way of life, because this too has been taken from them. Any sweetness is hard to find, and most of their experience is bitter and frustrating.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Currency Press edition of *No Sugar* published in 1998.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

☞ JOE: ‘The—blood—was stirred...as if by a trumpet... by the history-ical...Headed by a tab-leau... [...] ‘...Commemorating the pioneers whose lives...’ [...] ‘...Were a steadfast performance of duty in the face of difficulty and danger. With them was a reminder of the dangers they faced, in the shape of three lorries...carrying Aborigines.

[*They all stop what they are doing and listen.*]

[...]

JOE: All right! ‘...Dancing...to a brass-band!’

SAM: *Koorawoorung!* Nyoongahs corroboreein’ to a *wetjala*’s brass band!

JIMMY: Ah! That beats everythin’: stupid bloody blackfellas...You fellas, you know why them *wetjals* marchin’ down the street, eh? I’ll tell youse why. ‘Cause them bastards took our country and them blackfellas dancin’ for ‘em. *Bastards!*

[...]

JOE: ‘The pag...page...page-ant pre-sented a picture of Western Australia’s pre-sent condition of hopeful optimum-optimis-tic prosperity, and gave some idea of what men mean when they talk about the soul of the nation.’

SAM: Sounds like bullshit to me.

Related Characters: James “Jimmy” Munday, Sam Millimurra, Joe Millimurra (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 15-16

Explanation and Analysis

Each morning and evening, the Millimurra-Munday family spends time together. They care about one another deeply, although they also joke with and heckle each other. This morning, in the play’s first scene, Joe reads a special centenary edition of the newspaper, celebrating 100 years since the founding of the city of Perth. This is a bittersweet celebration for Aboriginals in Western Australia, because the founding of Perth marked the beginning of the white colonizers’ century-long war against them.

Joe is able to read, but his reading comprehension is clearly low. He is a teenager but no longer attends school, likely because there are few educational opportunities for Aboriginal children, and because his family needs him to work and catch meat for meals. It is already difficult for Joe and his family to find employment opportunities, but their lack of a traditional education makes it even more difficult.

Sam and Jimmy are offended by the idea of a parade celebrating 100 years of colonization, as well as the fact

that Aboriginal people are participating in the parade itself. In their eyes, Aboriginal men and women are dancing in a parade that essentially glorifies the beginning of their oppression. As Jimmy points out, the white people marching are celebrating the fact that they stole the land from the Aboriginals now asked to dance alongside them.

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

☛ NEVILLE: Can you take down a note for the Minister, please? [...] Item one: the native weekly ration currently costs this Department two shillings and fourpence per week. Perhaps this bears comparison with the sustenance paid to white unemployed which I believe is seven shillings per week. [...] Item two: off the cuff, the proposed budget cut of three thousand one hundred and thirty-four pounds could be met by discontinuing the supply of meat in native rations. Soap was discontinued this financial year. Item Three: of eighty girls from the Moore River Native Settlement who went out into domestic service last year, thirty returned—

[...]

NEVILLE: Where was I?

MISS DUNN: Of eighty who went out in the domestic service last year...

NEVILLE: Thirty returned to the settlement in pregnant condition, yours etcetera... If you could type that straight away I'll run it up to the Office myself.

Related Characters: Auber Octavius Neville (speaker), Miss Sybil Dunn

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 20-21

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Neville dictates a letter as Miss Dunn transcribes it. He is writing to the Minister, and although the man's title is never specified he is likely the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs of Western Australia. Neville is suggesting that, to help the department save money during the worldwide depression, rations for the Aboriginal population should be cut. Neville remarks that although Aboriginal Australians receive only two shillings and fourpence of rations, compared to the seven shillings of welfare white Australians receive, he is going to cut their rations as opposed to the welfare given to their white counterparts. This is a clear racial preference—Neville has less respect for the health and quality of life of Australia's indigenous population, and sees

their lives as less worthy of government support and funding. Because Neville is in a position of power, his personal bigotry then makes its way into government policy.

In these second part of the quote, Neville calmly remarks that dozens of Aboriginal women have become pregnant as they worked as cooks, maids, and nannies for white Australian families. He says this without emotion, and without disgust or remorse. It is likely many of these women were raped by their employers, but Neville is uninterested in investigating these crimes further, or in giving these women any kind of protection at all. Once again, his personal disinterest in the wellbeing of Australia's indigenous population has resulted in policies that do not benefit them, or that are actively dangerous.

☛ MILLY: Whose idea was it to stop the soap?

SERGEANT: The idea, as you call it, came from the Aboriginal Department in Perth.

GRAN: Mister Neville?

MILLY: I just can't believe it: no soap!

SERGEANT: Your trouble, Milly, is you got three healthy men bludging off you, too lazy to work.

MILLY: Where they gonna get work?

SERGEANT: They're afraid to look for it in case they find it.

MILLY: Cockies want 'em to work for nothin'.

GRAN: They not slaves, Chergeant!

SERGEANT: Well, they'll have to work if you want luxury items like soap.

MILLY: Look, last week my Joe cut a hundred posts for old Skinny Martin and you know what he got? A pair of second-hand boots and a piece of stag ram so tough even the dawgs couldn't eat it; skinnier than old Martin 'imself.

Related Characters: Sergeant Carrol, Gran Munday, Milly Millimurra (speaker), Skinny Martin, Joe Millimurra

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Milly and Gran go to the Northam police station to collect their government unemployment rations, only to find that soap has been cut from the usual rations. They then complain to the Sergeant, who dismisses them by saying that their male family members (Joe, Jimmy, and

Sam) should just find jobs.

Australia, like much of the world, is in the grips of an economic depression during the events of the play, and unemployment is at an all-time high even for white workers. For Aboriginal Australians it's even worse, as they face continuous systemic discrimination because of their race, so if they can find work at all they are often paid far less than their white peers. The Sergeant surely knows this—and if he didn't, Milly makes it clear here—but he still prefers to just think that Aboriginals are inherently lazy, and so don't deserve "luxuries" like soap. The racist hypocrisy of this is especially highlighted by the fact that earlier in the same act, Neville reveals that unemployed whites receive seven shillings per week, while unemployed Aboriginals receive only two shillings and fourpence.

As I mentioned, I was a little concerned to see so many dirty little noses amongst the children. I'm a great believer that if you provide the native the basic accoutrements of civilisation you're half way to civilising him. I'd like to see each child issued with a handkerchief and instructed on its use. [...] I think some practical training from yourself and Matron in its correct usage would be appropriate. If you can successfully inculcate such basic but essential details of civilised living you will have helped them along the road to taking their place in Australian society.

Related Characters: Auber Octavius Neville (speaker), Matron Neal, Mr N. S. Neal

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation comes from a letter Neville writes to Mr. Neal at the Moore River Native Settlement. Neville thanks Neal for hosting him, but notes that he was concerned about the "dirty little noses" of the Aboriginal children. He then proposes the solution of providing every child with a handkerchief, and instructing them in its "correct usage." This absurd and superficial suggestion would be wholly comic if it weren't also juxtaposed with the real suffering and deprivation the Aboriginals are facing. They are having meat and soap cut from their rations, but their supposed "Protector" wants the priority to be pocket handkerchiefs. (There's also the irony of cutting soap from their rations and then complaining about their children being dirty.)

This quotation makes it clear that Neville is primarily

interested in the *appearance* of cleanliness, and the *appearance* of "civilization." He does not want to spend money on measures that would actually improve the health of the children, but rather on something that would make them more palatable to him visually. He does not care about the actual wellbeing of the Aboriginal men, women, and children under his care. Instead, he wants them to adopt the affectations of Western society, assuming both that Western society is superior and that appearing civilized is more important than being actually healthy and happy.

Act 1, Scene 6 Quotes

CISSIE: [*holding her throat*] Hurts, Mum, here; hurts when I cough.

MILLY: Well, no school for you today, my girl. [*To SAM*] You ain't goin' post cuttin' today, and David, you walk to school.


DAVID: Aw, Mum!

MILLY: Don't, 'Aw Mum' me. Joe, you git on that bike and go and ask Uncle Herbie for a lend of his horse and cart. We takin' her to the doctor straight away.

[*JOE takes the bike from DAVID.*]

SAM: Aw Mill, can't you and Mum take her? I only want another hundred posts and I'll have enough *boondah* to pay me fine.

Related Characters: Sam Millimurra, David Millimurra, Cissie Millimurra, Milly Millimurra (speaker), Joe Millimurra

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 37-38

Explanation and Analysis

One morning as the Millimurra-Munday family prepares to go to school and work, Cissie, the young daughter of Sam and Milly, becomes ill. The other members of the family then immediately rally around her to take care of her, sacrificing their own comforts and duties for Cissie's sake, even though they certainly don't have any extra resources or time to spare. David agrees to walk to school instead of biking, Joe takes the bike to go ask to borrow a horse and cart, and Sam accepts that he will go with Milly to take Cissie to the doctor. This is an especially big sacrifice for Sam, as he is working to pay off the fine that the discriminatory police force unfairly punished him with. This scene then shows the strength of the family unit for the Aboriginal characters in the play, as they stick together and contribute whatever they can to each other, even in the face of nearly constant hardship and oppression.

Act 1, Scene 10 Quotes

☛☛ CONSTABLE: You're being transferred to the Moore River Native Settlement.

GRAN: I ain't goin'.

CONSTABLE: You're all goin'. You're under arrest.

GRAN: What for? We done nothin' wrong.

SERGEANT: It's for health reasons. Epidemic of skin disease.

JIMMY: Bullshit, I'll tell you why we're goin'.

CONSTABLE: You wouldn't know.

JIMMY: You reckon blackfellas are bloody mugs. Whole town knows why we're goin'. 'Coz *wetjalas* in this town don't want us 'ere, don't want our kids at the school, with their kids, and old Jimmy Mitchell's tight 'coz they reckon Bert 'Awke's gonna give him a hidin' in the election.

Related Characters: James "Jimmy" Munday, Constable Kerr, Sergeant Carrol, Gran Munday (speaker), Jimmy Mitchell

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

The Sergeant and the Constable come to Government Well to announce that the Millimurra-Munday family, as well as the rest of the Aboriginal community living there, will be relocated to Moore River. The family knows they have done nothing wrong, but the presence of law enforcement officials makes them worry they are going to be charged with some crime. This demonstrates how fraught the Aboriginal population's relationship is with the police force—instead of seeing police as a helpful or even neutral force, they assume the police are going to do something actively harmful.

The Millimurra-Munday family recognizes that they are being forced to leave Government Well not for their own good—to be treated for scabies, as the Sergeant and Constable claim—but instead to free up the land for the white community. Jimmy especially recognizes that their evacuation is a political move, one that might garner support for incumbent candidate Jimmy Mitchell. Although the Sergeant and Constable deny this, Jimmy is likely correct. He and his family are seen as political tools, not as human beings to be respected and cared for.

☛☛ MILLY: Who's gonna look after our dogs?

CONSTABLE: We'll attend to them.

MILLY: Yeah, we know that.

JIMMY: With a police bullet.


GRAN: [*frantically*] You're not gonna shoot Wow, you're not gonna shoot Wow Wow. You hear me, Chergeant? I'm not goin'.

[*GRAN is frantic now. She tears her hair and throws plates and mugs about.*]

SERGEANT: Oh Jesus, take your bloody mangy Wow Wow, whatever you call it. Take the bloody lot, just remember to be ready to move out tomorrow morning.

[*The police escort JIMMY away. The family looks on in stunned silence. CISSIE clings to her mother and cries.*]

Related Characters: James "Jimmy" Munday, Constable Kerr, Sergeant Carrol, Gran Munday, Milly Millimurra (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 51-52

Explanation and Analysis

After being told that they are officially under arrest and must move to the Moore River Native Settlement, the Millimurra-Munday family then learns that they must leave their dogs behind as well. They are clearly attached to their dogs as beloved pets, but they also rely on them for help in catching much-needed meat. This is then an especially cruel directive on the part of the white government—and even more so because they promise to “attend to” the dogs, when they really mean to just shoot them. It's likely that the Constable and Sergeant don't have any special disdain for dogs, but only for dogs belonging to Aboriginal Australians—it seems unlikely that they would act so brutally towards the pets of their fellow whites.

Tragically, this scene shows the family seemingly at wits' end. Usually they are able to adapt and help each other out in even the most trying of circumstances—and they do indeed endure through this upheaval—but for a moment they can only despair, with Gran growing hysterical and Cissie crying desperately. They can only maintain so much strength in the face of such consistent oppression and antagonism.

Act 2, Scene 4 Quotes

☛☛ Mary: I don't like the way [Mr. Neal] looks at me.

Joe: Well, you got me now, for what I'm worth.

Mary: He's always hangin' around where the girls are workin'; in the cookhouse, in the sewin' room. And he's always carryin' that cat-o'-nine tails and he'll use it, too.

Joe: Bastard, better not use it on you or any of my lot.

Mary: He reckoned he was gunna belt me once.

Joe: What for?

Mary: 'Coz I said I wasn't gunna go and work for *guddeah* on a farm.

Joe: Why not? Be better than this place.

Mary: No! Some of them *guddeahs* real bad. My friend went last Christmas and then she came back *boodjarri*. She reckons the boss's sons used to belt her up and, you know, force her. Then they kicked her out. And when she had that baby them trackers choked it dead and buried it in the pine plantation.

Related Characters: Joe Millimurra, Mary Daragurru (speaker), Sister Eileen, Matron Neal, Mr N. S. Neal

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Mary and Joe discuss the danger Mary and other Aboriginal women are constantly facing. Although both teens suffer at the hands of white bureaucrats and racist government policies, Mary's struggles, as a woman, are unique. She feels constantly sexually threatened by Mr. Neal, but knows that even if she escapes his advances and procures work off of the Reserve, she could then face sexual threats from other white employers. Mr. Neal, the Matron, and Sister Eileen are not doing their jobs and protecting the Aboriginal men, women, and children under their care.

Mary is understandably afraid of sexual violence, but she is equally afraid of becoming pregnant and having her child taken away. This happened to one of her friends, who went to work on a white man's farm, and returned pregnant (*boodjarri*) from rape. Her child was then killed by black trackers, likely to conceal the wrongdoing of many white men and women—those who allowed her to be raped, those who raped her, and those who were unwilling to help her care for her child.

In this horrifying instance, institutional racism as well as individual disregard for the lives of Aboriginal women and children come together. Notably, Mary and Joe use the Nyoongah language to make a horrible situation more

familiar, to unite themselves against the apathy and violence of the white Australians around them.

Act 2, Scene 6 Quotes

☛☛ [He picks up inji sticks. The Nyoongahs, SAM, JIMMY and JOE, dance with them. BILLY joins in. They dance with increasing speed and energy, stamping their feet, whirling in front of the fire, their bodies appearing and disappearing as the paint catches the firelight. The dance becomes faster and more frantic until finally SAM lets out a yell and they collapse, dropping back to their positions around the fire. JIMMY coughs and pants painfully.]

[...]

BILLY: This country got plenty good dance, eh?

BLUEY: *Wee-ah!*


JIMMY: Ah, *yuart*, not too many left now. Nearly all finish.

BILLY: No, no, no. You song man, you fella dance men. This still your country. [*Flinging his arms wide*] You, you, you, you listen! *Gudeeah* make 'em fences, windmill, make 'em road for motor car, big house, cut 'em down trees. Still your country! Not like my country, finish... finish.

[*He sits in silence. They watch him intently. JOE puts wood on the fire. He speaks slowly.*]

BILLY: *Kuliyah*. [*Miming pulling a trigger, grunting*] *Gudeeah* bin kill 'em. Finish, kill 'em. Big mob, 1926, kill 'em big mob my country.

Related Characters: Bluey, Billy Kimberley, James "Jimmy" Munday (speaker), Joe Millimurra, Sam Millimurra

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 66-67

Explanation and Analysis

Although Billy, Bluey, Jimmy, Joe, and Sam are often in conflict because Billy and Bluey work for Mr. Neal and act as law enforcement, carrying out orders that actively hurt other Aboriginal people, the men are able to come together for this dance and ceremony. Billy and Bluey have dealt with colonial violence by becoming agents of violence themselves, while Joe, Jimmy, and Sam continue to resist and refuse to assimilate into white, Western society.

Billy uses more Nyoongah words than Sam, Joe, or Jimmy generally uses. This is perhaps to connect him to a culture and community that has largely been destroyed, killed and scattered across Western Australia. Now, the only connection he has to his family and his culture is his language, and ceremonies like this one.

Act 2, Scene 8 Quotes

☛☛ MATRON: Apparently you told [Mary] she was going to work at the hospital and stay in the nurses' quarters.

NEAL: Who told you that? [Yelling] Billy!



BILLY: [off] Comin', boss.

MATRON: It seems she was terrified at the prospect of working in the hospital.

NEAL: They're all scared of the dead.

MATRON: I think she was scared of the living.

Related Characters: Billy Kimberley, Mr N. S. Neal, Matron Neal (speaker), Mary Daragurru

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 72-73

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Matron Neal obliquely confronts her husband about his predatory intentions towards Mary. Neal has told Mary that she is to work at the hospital and stay in the nurses' quarters, but Mary knows that when he makes a woman do this, it usually means that he "wants her for himself." She is terrified, and so runs away with Joe to avoid this fate.



Matron gives the news of their escape to Neal here, and hints at the fact that it wasn't the hospital Mary was afraid of—it was Neal himself.

While Matron is critical of her husband and seems to know just how harmful he can be to the Aboriginal Australians he is supposed to be protecting, she also does almost nothing to actually limit his behavior. She is clearly unhappy with her husband's actions, but also refuses to stand up for the people in her charge, who are the direct victims of Neal's abuse of power. This shows how racist oppression and sexual violence can be perpetrated not just through actively antagonistic individuals, but also by those who stand by and do nothing.

Act 3, Scene 5 Quotes

☛☛ When referring to Australia's treatment of her Aborigines we are apt to refer somewhat scathingly to Tasmania's harshness in ridding herself of her natives within the first seventy years of settlement. In that time some six thousand natives disappeared and only one was left alive. Yet here, in the south-west of our State, within an area about twice the size of Tasmania between 1829 and 1901—seventy-two years—a people estimated to number thirteen thousand were reduced to one thousand four hundred and nineteen, of whom nearly half were half-caste.

Related Characters: Auber Octavius Neville (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 86-87

Explanation and Analysis

During a presentation to the Western Australia Historical Society, Neville gives a history lesson. He describes the settling of Western Australia by Captain James Stirling, a British admiral who landed in present-day Perth, and committed many acts of violence against the native population in order to ensure the safety of his colonial settlement. In the final lines of his speech, Neville references the "Tasmanian Solution." The Aboriginal population on Tasmania was entirely destroyed, and so white Australians often see themselves as, in contrast, having treated their Aboriginal population with dignity and respect. However, although there are still some Aboriginal people left in Western Australia, as opposed to the zero (or one) left in Tasmania, the population has still drastically declined due to murder, disease, starvation, poverty, and various other ills brought on by colonization.

Act 4, Scene 4 Quotes

☛☛ NEAL: Just a moment... There's another matter I'd like to discuss with you. I believe you've been lending books—novels—to some of the natives.

SISTER: Yes, I have.

NEAL: There's a sort of unofficial directive on this is; it's the sort of thing which isn't encouraged by the Department.

SISTER: What do you mean? That you don't encourage the natives to read?

NEAL: That's right.

SISTER: [incredulously] But why? I'd intended to ask your permission to start a small library.

NEAL: I'm sorry, Sister, but—

SISTER: [interrupting] It won't cost the Department a penny, I can get the books donated. Good books.

NEAL: It's quite out of the question.

SISTER: But why?

NEAL: Look, my experience with natives in South Africa and here has taught—led me to believe that there's a lot of wisdom in the old adage that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing'.

Related Characters: Sister Eileen, Mr N. S. Neal (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Neal, who runs the Moore River Native Settlement, reveals that his mission is not to help the Aboriginal families under his charge, but to control them completely. He understands that knowledge is power, so if he can keep the Aboriginal community ignorant, perhaps he can also keep them powerless. Here, he uses the power of the institution of Moore River to carry out his own personal biases. Sister Eileen genuinely believes she is helping the Aboriginal children in her care, and believes that by teaching them about Christianity and using the Christian Bible she is genuinely saving them and improving the quality of their lives. Teaching them to read and write is part of her mission, which, although misguided and imperialist, is nonetheless one of education and self-improvement.

In this conflict, language and the written word become tools of freedom. Sister Eileen sees the ability to read as something everyone should have, and which will further the mission of Moore River. Mr. Neal does not care what the stated mission is, instead carrying out his own agenda of disenfranchising the Aboriginal population of Western Australia.

Act 4, Scene 5 Quotes

●● SISTER: It gives me great pleasure to be with you all on this very special day, when we gather together to pledge our allegiance to the King and to celebrate the birth of this wonderful young country [...]. We must remember today not just our country and King, but the King of kings, the Prince of princes, and to give thanks to God for what He has provided for us [...]. Even we here today, Mr Neal, Matron Neal and myself, are but His humble servants, sent by Him to serve your needs. The Lord Jesus Christ has sent His servant, Mr Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, to speak to us on this special day. Mr Neville is going to say a few words before leading us in a song of praise to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[NEVILLE rises. The whites clap while the Aborigines remain silent.]

Related Characters: Sister Eileen (speaker), Matron Neal, Mr N. S. Neal, Auber Octavius Neville

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Sister Eileen's speech implies that God gave white, Christian Australian colonists the continent of Australia. Additionally, she calls out Neville as a servant of Jesus Christ, making his mission an explicitly divine one. By using the language of destiny and religion, Sister Eileen, well-meaning as she often is, sets up a divide between the white Australians, who were chosen by God to colonize Australia, and the Aboriginal inhabitants, who must be saved. When she says that she and others are fortunate to be living in Australia, she is speaking only of white Australians, who she believes were allowed to live here by the grace of the British monarchy and by God. She ignores the Aboriginal people who were perhaps not given such a supposedly divine mandate, but who do have thousands of years of sustained occupancy on their side. The assembled Aboriginal crowd does not applaud for Neville, then, as they see the hypocrisy in Sister Eileen's speech.

●● ALL: [singing]
 There is a happy land,
 Far, far away,
 Where saints in glory stand,
 Bright, bright as day:
 Oh, how they sweetly sing,
 'Worthy is our Saviour King!
 Loud let His praises ring,
 Praise, praise for aye!

[As the whites continue, the Aborigines break into full clear voice with a parody of the words.]

There is a happy land,
 Far, far away.
 No sugar in our tea,
 Bread and butter we never see.
 That's why we're gradually
 Fading away.

Related Characters: Auber Octavius Neville, Sister Eileen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

This is the hymn that Neville leads the crowd in singing after being introduced by Sister Eileen and giving a short speech. While the whites in the crowd dutifully sing the hymn, the Aboriginal Australians soon break into a parodic version that expresses their discontent. The original song—on the

surface about the hope of Heaven—in this context expresses gratitude that God gave white Australian colonists the continent of Australia. However, Aboriginal Australians rightfully feel that this land was stolen from them, and so have no reason to thank a god from a religion they do not necessarily observe, who has given their homeland away to foreigners. In their reworked version of the song, then, the Aboriginal community calls out the white officials for mistreating them. They say that they are far from a happy land, and that they have no sugar, no bread, no butter, and as a result they are starving and dying.

Notably, this is also the only instance of the play's title. "No sugar" refers both to the Aboriginals' actual lack of physical sugar for food, but also to a lack of kindness and empathy on the part of the white bureaucrats who control their lives.

Act 4, Scene 10 Quotes

☛ DAVID: Eh, brother, you want my pocket knife? You might need it.

JOE: No, Brudge, I can use glass if I wanna gut a rabbit.

[SAM hands JOE a home-made knife.]



SAM: Here, son, take this one.

JOE: No, I'll be all right.

SAM: Take it. I can git another bit of steel and make another one. Here, take it.

[Magpies squawk. GRAN begins to sing. They farewell each member of the family, then walk off into the distance.]

Related Characters: Joe Millimurra, Sam Millimurra, David Millimurra (speaker), Mary Daragurru, Gran Munday

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

The whole family loves and cares for Joe, Mary, and their son. Although they have very little to give, they do what they can to help one of their own. For the Millimurra-Mundays, the good of the group is more important than the wellbeing of any individual, and by this logic the safe travels of Joe, Mary, and their son is worth small sacrifices from the rest of the clan.

Although the family will be separated, they will remain united spiritually and culturally. Gran goes on to sing a song in Nyoongah that translates to "Woe, woe, woe. / My boy and girl and baby / Going a long way walking [...] pity, pity, pity, / hungry, walking, hungry [...]" Although not an uplifting song, it connects her to the journey of her grandson, granddaughter-in-law, and great grandson, and provides a glimmer of hope: that the Nyoongah culture will survive outside of the settlement, in language, song, or in the bodies of the family itself.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The physical stage is decorated to represent a huge swath of Western Australia. On one side is the town of Northam and Government Well Aboriginal Reserve, where the Millimurra-Munday family lives. On the other side is the Moore River Native Settlement, where the family is eventually forcibly relocated. Facades, signage, or furniture represent other locations, such as Perth and the Western Australia Historical society. The play begins in 1930 at Government Well, as Sam, Joe, Gran, Milly, David, and Cissie eat breakfast and prepare for the day.

Gran and Milly wash clothes. Jimmy sharpens an axe “bush fashion.” Joe struggles to read from the Western Mail newspaper. It is a centenary edition, celebration 100 years of colonization, and describes a parade of white men, “commemorating the pioneers,” carrying “with them...a reminder of the dangers they faced, in the shape of three lorries...carrying Aborigines” who were dancing to a brass band. The whole family listens as Joe reads. Sam and Jimmy are upset by the idea that Aboriginal men and women would volunteer to dance to the music of white Australians in a celebration of white settlement. Jimmy criticizes the “stupid bloody blackfellas.”

Jimmy argues that the wetjals (white people) are only marching because “them bastards took our country and them blackfellas dancing for ‘em.” Milly responds that had Jimmy been at the celebration he would have danced too, but he disagrees.

Milly makes David and Cissie stop playing cricket and get ready for school. She gives them twopence each to buy an apple for lunch, but Cissie complains that the grocer gives her and her siblings “little shriveled ones,” while white children receive “big fat ones.” Hearing this, Joe gives his siblings an additional thrippence.

Milly notices that David’s shirt is inside out which, he explains, is because it is dirty on the other side. She makes him change and then sends David and Cissie to school. Milly tells Joe and Sam they’ll have to catch meat for dinner, and then exits the stage with Gran.

The setup of the stage does its best to portray the vastness of Western Australia. However, the Millimurra-Munday family and other Aboriginal people are only allowed to inhabit small corners of the state. The play begins in 1930, the second year of the worldwide Great Depression, which destroyed the economies of many nations and led to devastating unemployment in Australia.



Joe is barely able to read the newspaper, as he only went to school for a few years. This is just one form of government oppression—preventing Aboriginal people from learning to read and obtain information about their own country. The centenary celebrates the establishment of the Swan River Colony, which would go on to be the city of Perth. Ironically, Aboriginal men and women, whose ancestors were killed to make way for the white Australian colonizers, are made to participate in a parade celebrating their own oppression.



Jimmy believes the white marchers understand that Australia was founded only because the country’s indigenous inhabitants were first subjugated.



Cricket is a British sport, and just one way that British and Western culture has made its way into the Millimurra-Munday family’s lives. The children do suffer from the racism of the grocer who privileges white children over Aboriginal ones.



Milly is constantly taking care of her family’s wellbeing, be it their appearance or their next meal. She is the center of the family and the woman who guarantees life runs smoothly for everyone.



Joe continues to read the paper to Sam. The paper describes “Australia’s present condition of hopeful optimistic prosperity.” Sam is unimpressed. Sam and Joe leave to catch some rabbits.

Sam recognizes that in the midst of an economic depression, and especially as an Aboriginal family, there is little opportunity for “optimistic prosperity.”



ACT 1, SCENE 2

On the street in Northam, Sergeant Carrol interrupts Frank as he rolls a cigarette. Although Frank is camping out with a group of other white men, the Sergeant has seen Frank hanging out with the Aboriginal Millimurra-Munday family. Frank points out that socializing with them is not against the law, but the Sergeant suggests that Frank has been supplying Aboriginal men with alcohol, which is a crime.

The lives of Aboriginal Australians are heavily regulated. They are not allowed to drink alcohol, ostensibly for their own good, but this mindset assumes Aboriginal people are unable to take care of themselves in the same way as white Australians, who are allowed to purchase and drink alcohol.



Jimmy was discovered drunk, and the Sergeant suggests that Frank bought him alcohol. The Sergeant warns Frank that, although Jimmy only received a warning, next time he’s going to jail, and his supplier will be punished.

Jimmy’s drunkenness should only affect himself, but because it is illegal for him to buy or consume alcohol as an Aboriginal man, his drinking has become a legal issue.



The Sergeant suggests Frank leaves town, but he doesn’t want to go. He’s looked for work all over the area and found nothing, and he can’t afford to return home to his family. Taking pity on him, the Sergeant gives Frank a few cigarettes, before warning him that “natives best left to keep to themselves.” He says, “I got nothin’ against ‘em, but I know exactly what they’re like.”

The Sergeant makes it clear that he is not only doing his legal duty in persecuting Jimmy and others, but he also has a personal grudge against Aboriginal people. By saying “I know exactly what they’re like” he suggests that he thinks they are somehow worse or less deserving than white Australians.



Frank exits the stage, and the Sergeant enters the police station. Across the stage, Miss Dunn and Neville sit at their desks in Perth. They share an office with a sign on the door that reads “Government of Western Australia, Fisheries, Forestry, Wildlife and Aborigines.”

The fact that Aboriginal people are lumped in with Fisheries, Forestry, and Wildlife demonstrates that the government does not see them as people, but as a natural resource to be managed.



Miss Dunn makes a personal phone call. She is trying to sell her brother’s motorcycle. He has been unsuccessfully looking for work, and after failing to find employment in Perth is now in South West Australia. Neville remarks that unemployment is at thirty per cent, so it is unsurprising he hasn’t found a job.

When Aboriginal characters struggle to find work, they are chastised for not trying hard enough or for being lazy. However, when a white character struggles to find work, other white characters are sympathetic.



Neville has Miss Dunn call the Sergeant. As they wait for the call to connect, Neville dictates a note to a superior in the government. He reports that the Department is short on money, and suggests no longer including meat in the rations supplied to the Aboriginal community. He compares the two shillings and fourpence per week spent on the rations compared to the seven shillings per week paid in welfare to white workers.

Sergeant Carroll returns Neville's call, interrupting his dictation. Neville reports that he has had trouble finding a new location to serve as a reserve for Northam's Aboriginal population. A man has protested the proposed site because he "claims he wouldn't be able to go out and leave his wife home alone at night." Neville tells the Sergeant to recommend a new site "well away from any residences."

Gran and Milly arrive at the Northam police station to collect their rations, interrupting the Sergeant's call. He and Neville hang up, and the Sergeant turns his attention to the two women. As he speaks to them, Miss Dunn and Neville have an overlapping conversation in Perth, Neville continuing to dictate a letter to the Minister. He reports of eighty Aboriginal women who left their settlement to work in domestic service. Thirty returned pregnant.

Back in Northam, the Sergeant gives Milly and Gran their rations: flour, sugar, meat, fat drippings for cooking, and cream of tartar. The Sergeant jokes that life is easier now that Gran doesn't have to grind her own flour out of jam and wattle seeds. Gran says she preferred it. The Sergeant says she still could if she wanted, but Gran points out that the "wetjala cut all the trees down."

Milly is upset when she realizes that soap has been cut from the rations. The Sergeant says she can buy some, and when she asks what money she will use, he tells her she has "three healthy men bludging off you, too lazy to work." Milly points out there is little work, and what work the men find is poorly compensated. Milly and Gran leave, mocking the Sergeant and cackling. He returns to work.

Neville's job is to ensure the health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal population of Western Australia, but as a cost-saving measure he is willing to deprive them of the food they need to survive. Although the economy is struggling, the government manages to pay unemployed white Australians almost three times as much as they agree to spend on Aboriginal people.



One man's individual racism—his claim that Aboriginal men are dangerous sexual predators—has influenced government policy. Northam's Aboriginal population is being relocated not because it is better for the Aboriginal community, but because the white community cannot tolerate them and wants their land.



Neville emotionlessly reports the rape of over eighty Aboriginal women at the hands of their white employers, demonstrating that he does not care about their wellbeing at all. He is not shocked or disgusted, and makes no effort to find a solution to what is clearly an epidemic of sexual violence.



Jam and wattle seeds came from an indigenous Australian plant whose population was devastated by white colonizers. The destruction of this food source was the result of governmental neglect and a racist dismissal of the needs of the Aboriginal population.



Although there is a nationwide (and worldwide) economic depression at the time, the Sergeant acts as though Sam, Jimmy, and Joe being unable to find work is their fault. As offensive as this is, Milly and Gran find comfort in each other and are able to laugh off the Sergeant's racism.



In his office, Neville finishes his letter and dictates a thank you note to Mr. Neal for hosting him at the Moore River Native Settlement. While Neville compliments Neal's hospitality, he criticizes the "dirty little noses" of the Aboriginal children. He believes "if you provide the native the basic accouterments of civilization you're half way to civilising him," and suggests giving each child a handkerchief. He has a plan on how to provide handkerchiefs, even though the entire Government is short on money.

Neville is interested in "civilizing" the Aboriginals of Australia, which he sees as making them appear more Western, and therefore more white. He is uninterested in actually improving their lives (earlier in this act he cut rations for soap, which would actually clean children) and is instead interested in the appearance of cleanliness, not the actual cleanliness of the children.



In his letter, Neville announces he will be sending limited supplies of toilet paper to the Settlement, and that it is Neal's job to teach the Aboriginal people under his care how to use it. Neville suggests "If you can successfully inculcate such basic but essential details of civilised living you will have helped them along the road to taking their place in Australian society."

Neville's racism becomes government policy. He personally believes that Aboriginal people can only be happy if they become more like white Australians, and so he forces them to do so though the policy he holds the power to create.



ACT 1, SCENE 3

It is evening at the Government Well Reserve. Cissie prepares a damper (a kind of bread) for dinner. Joe and David play with bottlecaps, until Cissie calls Joe over to help her with the dough, and has David go get her more wood for the fire.

Everyone in the family looks out for everyone else. Even Cissie, a child, helps contribute food for the whole family's dinner.



Jimmy, Billy, and Frank return to camp drunk. Milly and Gran follow behind. Jimmy complains about the soap rations being cut. Seeing that Cissie is also upset, Jimmy promises to go give the Sergeant "a piece of my mind," but Gran warns him he that if he does so he will get "six months." Jimmy is unfazed, and laughs.

Jimmy is angry about the soap on behalf of his family, who he cares deeply about. However, Jimmy's response to a lifetime of discrimination is to act with violence (as opposed to Milly and Gran's frustration and anger). Luckily, his family often holds him back.



Gran and Milly begin to cook a stew. Jimmy contributes some stolen turnips.

Everyone contributes to the family and family meals in the best way he or she can.



The men discuss jail time. Jimmy has been in jail four times, starting when he was a young choirboy, "pinchin' things off other people's clothes lines." The conversation shifts to how Sam and Milly met in the same church where Jimmy used to sing. They were married in that same church, though Jimmy jokes they were "engaged under a Government blanket." Milly tells him to "shut up! *Dawarra, nitja wetjala.*"

Jimmy's joke is that Milly and Sam had premarital sex, which prompted their engagement. Milly says, "Shut up! This is a white man," an attempt to keep racy jokes inside the family, and to prevent a white man (Frank, who is present) from looking down on them. She does not speak in English to keep the meaning of her words a secret.



Milly calls the children and they all assemble. David returns with an old bike he has spent the day repairing. Milly serves everyone damper and rabbit stew. Frank is grateful for the meal and the meat. Jimmy drinks as the others eat.

Jimmy tells the group that Frank used to have his own farm. Frank verifies this, but explains that “between the rabbits...a couple of bad seasons and the bank” he lost it all. He has a family back home but has been unable to find work and send money back to them. Jimmy points out that Frank still has more freedom than an Aboriginal man. Frank can still “walk down the street after sundown,” but for Jimmy that is against the law.

Jimmy further complains that the policemen have little respect for Aboriginal people or their animals, and frequently shoot their dogs. Jimmy remembers Streak, a dog who, before the police shot him, caught “meat for every blackfella in Northam.”

Jimmy, who has left the circle to tend to some cooking potatoes, returns, tripping over David’s bike. Joe jumps up and cautions Jimmy to be careful, since David has been working hard on it. Joe runs over to the bike, and Jimmy, drunk and aggressive, accidentally hits him in the nose. Sam gets up and joins the fray, pushing Jimmy and telling him to cut it out. The two men begin to fight. Frank recognizes that the police might come, which will put him in danger, so he says goodbye to Milly.

Gran intervenes in the fight and pulls the men apart by their hair. Jimmy goes to put on his coat and reaches for the bottle of alcohol, but Milly pours it out before he can take a drink.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Jimmy and Sam are locked in adjacent jail cells. The Sergeant and Constable catalogue their belongings, including a harmonica, which they confiscated from Jimmy. Jimmy, however, has a second harmonica and begins to play. Jimmy doesn’t want to hand it over, but Sam insists he does.

Although Frank’s whiteness serves as a barrier between him and the Millimurra-Mundays, they have partially adopted him into their clan and happily share what little food they have with him.



As much as Frank has suffered in his life, he still has more personal freedoms than any Aboriginal person in Australia. He has freedom of movement, and the freedom to legally drink if he wants to. Unlike Jimmy, Sam, and the others, Frank is not under constant threat of arrest and imprisonment for simply living his life.



Dogs are members of the Millimurra-Munday family, contributing meat to family meals. Unfortunately, police officers, who are ostensibly enforcing the law but in reality enacting their own prejudices, have no respect for the Aboriginal community’s animals.



Jimmy drinks to deal with the trauma of his experience as an Aboriginal man deprived of many personal freedoms. However, his drinking can get out of control and cause him to lash out at his family. Although the Millimurra-Mundays do love Jimmy, they are willing to stand up to him when necessary.



Although the fight was initially between Jimmy, Joe, and Sam, the entire family quickly becomes invested. Gran treats Jimmy and Sam like two children, while Milly makes sure that Jimmy will not get drunker, and hopefully will not get in legal trouble.



Jimmy and Sam represent two ways Aboriginal Australians can deal with racist government officials and policies. Sam does his best to comply, while Jimmy rebels at every possible opportunity.



Jimmy complains that the toilet bucket in his room has a hole in it. When the Constable ignores his complaint, Jimmy throws the bucket against the wall. The Sergeant adds “damage to government property” to the charge sheet.

Adding “damage to government property” is a spiteful gesture, indicative of a personal prejudice—the property is barely damaged and worth almost nothing.



Sam attempts to be quiet and cooperative, while Jimmy continues to harass his captors, reciting poems, swearing at the Sergeant and Constable, and finally singing, “I don’t give a damn for any damn man, / That don’t give a damn for me.”

Throughout the scene Jimmy and Sam use opposite approaches to their imprisonment. Jimmy feels that people who do not respect him because of his race do not deserve his respect in turn.



ACT 1, SCENE 5

Jimmy, Sam, and Frank stand trial in a courthouse in Northam. The Sergeant and a local farmer, JP, act as the prosecution. Frank pleads guilty with an explanation — he says the Millimurra-Mundays were kind to him and fed him, and so he felt obligated to pick up a bottle of wine for Jimmy as a thank-you. JP claims to “understand the difficulty of the situation” but says it is his “duty to protect natives and half-castes from alcohol.” He sentences Frank to six weeks imprisonment and hard labor.

JP’s insistence that he is obligated to “protect natives and half-castes [mixed race white and Aboriginal people] from alcohol” assumes that these people are not smart enough or strong enough to make decisions for themselves. This approach is less about protection than it is about governmental control.



Sam and Jimmy are called in next. Jimmy is slow to enter; he claims he was on the toilet. JP says he hopes Jimmy is not “making a mockery of the court by delaying proceedings.”

Once again, Jimmy rebels against what he sees as a racist justice system by slowing and complicating procedure whenever possible.



The Sergeant announces that Jimmy and Sam were arrested when they were drunk the night before. The Sergeant claims Jimmy was “noisy and abusive.” Jimmy tries to argue back but JP threatens him with contempt of court if he continues to speak.

Although Frank was allowed to defend himself, Jimmy is not. This preference for Frank over Jimmy is the result of personal prejudices held by JP and the Sergeant, and reinforced by the system in which they work.



Because Jimmy has had previous offenses related to alcohol, JP gives him three months imprisonment with hard labor. Sam, who has no criminal record except for a time he was caught drinking with Jimmy, is given a fine of twenty-five shillings, plus two and sixpence in exchange for not serving a week in prison. The Sergeant tells JP Sam will need time to pay, and so Sam is given fourteen days to come up with the money.

Although it is unfair that Sam receives any punishment for a behavior that is legal for white Australians, this is one of the few instances in the play where white characters are somewhat sympathetic to the plight of Aboriginal people, and do not punish them in as severe a capacity as they potentially could.



ACT 1, SCENE 6

The scene opens in Government Well Reserve. Gran builds a fire, David prepares for school, and Milly cooks breakfast—fried fat and damper. Sam complains that Jimmy, who is still in prison, is probably eating better than he is. Joe returns to camp with empty rabbit traps. He is disappointed that he has been unable to catch anything.

Cissie is feeling sick. Milly can tell that she has a fever, and tells Cissie she is not going to school. The whole family is concerned. Milly sends Joe off to borrow a horse and cart from their neighbor, Herbie. Sam has been cutting posts for the neighbor for money, and is close to paying off his fine. However, borrowing the cart will put him in debt again. Milly insists they borrow the cart anyway. She also tells Sam and Joe to work on patching up their home and insulating it against the cold. Sam picks Cissie up and they leave for the hospital.

The economic depression continues to negatively affect the Millimurra-Munday family. Still, they all make do and do their best to contribute what food they can to communal meals.



The whole family rallies around Cissie to make sure she gets the medical care that she needs. Everyone is happy to make personal sacrifices if it will save the life of another member of the family. Even though Sam does not want to do extra work, he understands he must in order to help save his daughter.



ACT 1, SCENE 7

Jimmy waits outside the Chief Protector's Office in Perth. It is now winter, 1932. Jimmy tries to flag Neville down as he goes in to work, but Neville insists they cannot talk until the office opens at 9 am. Jimmy explains that he has to catch an early train, but Neville is not moved.

Miss Dunn arrives at the office and Jimmy runs into her. He wants to speak to Mr. Neville. Miss Dunn says she'll check in with Neville, but that Jimmy should sit on the back veranda (which is where the entrance for Aboriginal people is) in the meantime.

Neville has Miss Dunn call Sergeant Carrol in Northam. Jimmy interrupts her as she waits for the call to connect. He wants train fare for an 11 am train home. Miss Dunn reports this to Neville, who refuses to answer and makes Jimmy wait, telling Miss Dunn that Jimmy can have a travel voucher if he returns after 2 pm.

Miss Dunn has an overlapping in-person conversation with Jimmy and a phone conversation with the Constable. She tells the Constable that she is calling from the Aborigines Department. The Constable announces to the Sergeant that the "Niggers' Department" is on the line.

Over a year has passed since the play began. Jimmy has been in jail for three months. Neville uses excuses about office policy to brush Jimmy off, but he also uses these policies to mask his own personal indifference to Jimmy's struggle.



Like Neville, Miss Dunn is personally indifferent, when not actively hostile to Australia's Aboriginal population. She uses public policies (such as segregated entrances and seating)—which are themselves based in racism—to enact her own personally held prejudices.



Because Miss Dunn and Neville are personally uninterested in Jimmy's desire to get home, they use their positions of authority to deny him the ability to return to Northam and his family.



Once again, personal prejudices become intertwined with governmental responsibility. Here "Nigger," a slur used to denigrate African-Americans, is instead used to refer derogatorily to Aboriginal Australians.



Miss Dunn transfers the call to Neville, who announces to Sergeant Carroll that they've run into more trouble relocating the Reservation. Although they've found a location that has "a water supply and a couple acres of grazing land," the Council has decided to develop the land into "a recreation park, for boy scouts and picnic parties." The Sergeant tells Neville that the Council would prefer it if the Aboriginal community was moved to Moore River. The two men hang up.

In Northam, Milly and Gran arrive at the station. Gran tells the Constable that she demands to speak to the Sergeant. They didn't collect their rations the day before because they were at the hospital with Cissie, and they want to pick them up now. Meanwhile, in Perth, Jimmy barges into Neville's office. He cannot wait until 2 pm, like Neville told him to, because he needs to take an 11 am train.

Milly needs blankets for Cissie, but they have not arrived yet. The Sergeant calls Milly by her first name, and Gran corrects him, saying she should be referred to as Mrs. Millimurra, as she was "proper church married."

The Sergeant suggests that Milly and Gran ask the vicar at a local church for blankets, but the women are not confident he will help them. When they ask after their meat order, the Sergeant announces that meat rations and cooking fat have been discontinued.

Gran complains that the Sergeant is supposed to be the "native tector." As she and Milly leave, the Sergeant comments to the Constable "looks like I'm the one needs protectin.'" The men joke that they should have poisoned the women's flour, or else employed the "Tasmanian solution."

Back in Perth, Neville calls Jimmy into his office and gives him a travel voucher, insisting that the man get on the 11 am train. Jimmy says now he might take a 5 pm train instead. As he leaves, he remarks that in jail people were kinder to him. He says, "Native Protector, couldn't protect my dog from fleas."

Although the exact nature of the council is never clarified, it's likely a Council on South West Australian Aboriginal Affairs. Here it becomes clear that government officials tasked with taking care of Aboriginal communities care more about recreational opportunities for the white townspeople than where Aboriginal families will live.



All across Western Australia, the Millimurra-Munday family faces complete and total apathy from the government officials whose jobs are ostensibly to make sure they get the support that they need to survive. Still, the family does its best to take care of itself.



Although relatively powerless, Gran insists on respect for her daughter—the one small bit of dignity and authority the pair can claim for themselves.



The vicar at the local church is likely racist and unwilling to help a group he sees as undeserving. Once again, although rations are supposed to help the Millimurra-Mundays survive, they are given barely enough to get by.



The Sergeant and Constable allow their own racist attitudes to affect how they do their jobs. Although they are supposed to protect Aboriginal people, they joke about the Tasmanian solution, which was a total government-sanctioned genocide of the island's native population.



Hundreds of miles apart, multiple members of the Millimurra-Munday family criticize government officials who are supposed to protect them but instead are doing their best to ignore or get rid of them. Jimmy, however, does his best to complicate Neville's life, a sort of rebuke for Neville being unkind to him earlier in the morning.



ACT 1, SCENE 8

At the Government Well Reservation, Jimmy repairs shoes as Gran and Milly sew. Sam and Joe enter and sit. Joe has brought back fat, potatoes, and onions to cook with, but they do not have money for meat.

Joe announces he's seen the Sergeant, who told him Cissie is ready to be taken home from the hospital. Milly wonders why Joe didn't ask the Sergeant for a lift home, but Joe just laughs. Jimmy says the only time the Sergeant would give Joe a ride is taking him to jail.

Jimmy volunteers to go ask Herbie to borrow a cart. He also plans to steal a sheep while he's there. Joe volunteers to help, too. Gran warns Jimmy to be careful, or else he'll go back to jail.

As is always the case at mealtimes, everyone in the family does his or her best to contribute to the wellbeing of the group.



Jimmy recognizes that the local law enforcement officials and bureaucrats have no desire to help the Aboriginal people under their jurisdiction because of their prejudices.



Borrowing a cart from Herbie will require the men from the family to do additional manual labor, and stealing a sheep could lead to jail time, but feeding and transporting the family is more important than any individual's wellbeing.

**ACT 1, SCENE 9**

At their office in Perth, Miss Dunn types as Neville dictates to her. Neville lists the members of the Millimurra-Munday family. As he talks, he is interrupted by a knock. The Sergeant has taken a train from Northam to visit him. The Sergeant sits, and Neville announces that a doctor examined the Aboriginal community at Government Well and found them to be "rotten with scabies." Because of this, they will all be transferred to the Moore River Native Settlement.

Neville has arranged for a train to transport the Aboriginal families. He's calculated the exact cost of each person, and exactly how much he is willing to spend on food. The families will not be allowed to leave the train, and will only be allowed to bring limited luggage with them. The Sergeant proposes that dogs and horses be allowed to come too, and suggests a road party with animals and additional luggage. Neville relents to this idea, but insists that all dogs must be left behind.

The meeting now over, the Sergeant leaves. He plans to pick up presents for his wife and children while he's in Perth. He wishes Merry Christmas to Neville and Miss Dunn.

Neville claims that the Millimurra-Munday family, as well as the rest of the Aboriginal community, has scabies, a highly contagious skin infection. This will prove to be untrue, and was merely a falsehood invented to reclaim the Government Well Reservation for the white residents of Northam.



The government is constantly placing restrictions on what Aboriginal people can and can't do. Now, as they are forced to relocate, they are also forced to leave behind items potentially precious to them. Once again, dogs, which are often important parts of the family, are seen as unimportant possessions to be left behind as well.



Ironically, the Sergeant is buying more possessions for his white family on a trip that will disenfranchise the Aboriginals under his power and cause them to lose many of their personal goods.



ACT 1, SCENE 10

Cissie checks David for lice as Milly and Gran sew at their home in Government Well. The group is interrupted by the Sergeant and Constable, who arrive with Jimmy, Joe, and Sam. The Sergeant announces that he has warrants for the family's "arrest and apprehension." Milly is confused, as they've done nothing wrong. The Sergeant explains that they're being transferred to the Moore River Native Settlement.

Gran says she won't go, but the Constable tells her she's "under arrest" and must do what she's told. The Sergeant tells them they are under medical quarantine and therefore are obligated to leave, but Jimmy is skeptical of this claim. He suspects that the white Australians don't want the Aboriginal families in their town, and that Jimmy Mitchell is trying to purge the region of its Aboriginal population. The Constable argues that Jimmy can't vote and so can't understand politics, and the Sergeant adds that "Jimmy Mitchell's got nothin' against blackfellas."

Sick of arguing, the Sergeant threatens to charge the family with resisting arrest. Sam and his family will go by the road, but Jimmy, who has a heart condition, will go by train. The dogs must be left behind, but Gran threatens not to go without Wow Wow, as she knows the police will likely kill him. Frustrated, the Sergeant gives in, and tells Gran she can keep the dog. He leaves with Jimmy, who will be forced to ride the train without his family.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

The Millimurra-Munday family arrives at the Moore River Native Settlement. Jimmy is working on creating shade for the family's tent when Billy approaches. The family is shocked when Billy, who is an Aboriginal man, reveals that he is a police officer working for the Settlement. Gran comments that Billy isn't a "politjman, you just a black tracker."

Jimmy, Milly, and Sam discuss dinner. There's a soup kitchen on the Reservation, but Jimmy, who has already been at camp a few days, says the food is "bloody pig swill." Sam and Jimmy go off to find a sheet of iron that they can use for cooking, and Milly and Gran lay down to rest.

Cissie is checking David for lice and ensuring his cleanliness just as the family is accused of having another skin disease—scabies. The family's transfer being framed as an "arrest and apprehension" implies that their very existence is criminal.



In this passage Jimmy references some local politics. He suspects opponent that Bert Hawke will defeat incumbent Jimmy Mitchell for the Northam seat in the Western Australian Legislative Assembly. Jimmy believes Jimmy Mitchell hopes that by clearing Northam of its Aboriginal population, he will win crucial local votes. This is a clear intersection of personal and systemic racism.



The Sergeant is dismissive of the family's desire to stay together, and their desire to hold on to their animals, who are like members of the family too. However, he also cares so little about his job that he's willing to make compromises if it will make his life easier.



Billy is an Aboriginal man who has decided to work for white bosses and enforce white Australian laws. The Millimurra-Munday family does not fully respect his authority, refusing to call him a policeman, which is an official position, but instead a black tracker, which is a historical term referring to a certain class of Aboriginal sellouts.



Each member of the family does their best to contribute to the group meal. Milly and Gran will cook later, and so they rest, while Sam and Jimmy can do work now. Ironically, although the camp is supposed to care for the family, the food is barely edible, if not an outright health hazard.



ACT 2, SCENE 2

David, Joe, and Cissie collect water down by the river. Once they've gotten enough, they look for a place to swim. Two girls, Mary and Topsy, have also come down to the river. Joe introduces his siblings, and Topsy introduces herself and Mary. The Millumurras realize that they are Topsy's cousins, related through Uncle Herbie. However, Mary is unrelated to them, which is lucky for Joe, who is instantly attracted to her.

Joe sends Cissie and David back to camp with the water. They complain that they wanted to swim, but he promises they can later. Mary and Topsy have to leave, but before they go, Joe asks Mary to meet him by the river the next day at the same time. She agrees.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Back at the Long Pool Camp in the Moore River Settlement, the Millimurra-Mundays play, work, and rest. Billy arrives with Matron Neal, Topsy, and Mary. Matron Neal examines the family for scabies, the ostensible reason for which they were sent to Moore River, even as they protest that they are clean. Unsurprisingly, she finds them healthy, and tells Milly it's a credit to her parenting.

Although there's nothing wrong with Joe, Matron Neal has him take his shirt off for an examination. The Matron comments that he's a "strapping lad" and Gran draws attention to Joe's belly button. She's proud of it because she tied it herself, and "brought him into the world with me own two hands."

The Matron concludes there is nothing wrong with the Millimurra-Munday family. She gives Milly some soap and handkerchiefs to keep the children clean. As she leaves, the Matron asks how many dogs the family is keeping. The family remains silent for a moment, before Sam admits that they have a handful. Billy tells the Matron the family has seven, causing Joe, David, and Cissie to curse at him as he leaves.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

One evening, Joe and Mary meet in a clearing on the Moore River Settlement. Mary has brought Joe a present: damper she made with emu fat and raisins. They talk as they eat. Mary has been at Moore River for three years, and says she hates "everything in it," except for Joe.

David, Joe, and Cissie collect water for the family, doing their part to contribute. Here, the bonds of family also help the children make a new friend, and help Joe find a new potential girlfriend. Luckily they are not related, but Joe feels a connection to her that will cause him to treat her with the care and attention with which he would treat a loved one.



One good thing about Joe's relocation to Moore River is his opportunity to meet Mary. He immediately feels a romantic connection to her, which improves the quality of his life.



Milly is the center of the family unit and does her best to make sure her clan is healthy and clean. It is kind of the Matron to acknowledge this, but it is a crime that the family was brought to Moore River at all, as there was never evidence that they had scabies, and it was only a plot to get Aboriginal families out of Northam.



Gran has delivered many generations of Millimurra-Munday babies. Like Milly, she is deeply invested in the physical wellbeing of the family, from birth onwards.



Billy is more loyal to the Matron, his employer, than he is to the Aboriginal community. Instead of protecting them by concealing the number of dogs they have, he happily admits that they have several, meaning the dogs will likely be killed by the officials at Moore River.



Finding Joe has made life bearable for Mary. Although they are (luckily) not biological family, they have become chosen family and provide each other with physical and emotional support.



Mary doesn't mind Matron and Sister Eileen, but she doesn't like Mr. Neal. She finds him scary and predatory. He often hangs around the Aboriginal girls when they're cooking or sewing, threatening them with lustful looks and his cat-o'-nine tails whip.

Mary reveals that Mr. Neal threatened her once, because she didn't want to go work for a white farmer. Mary cries as she tells the story of a friend who went to work on a farm and returned pregnant, having been beaten and raped during her service. When the girl had the baby, black trackers killed and buried it. Joe jokes that he doesn't like Mary, and she pulls away. He clarifies that he loves her, and the two kiss. They make plans to see each other the next night.

Mr. Neal doesn't respect Aboriginal people, and sees Aboriginal women and girls as sex objects to be exploited. He does not care about their relationships or their consent, only about his own pleasure.



This story shows an intersection of personal apathy towards Aboriginal wellbeing with high-level cover-ups of horrible crimes against Aboriginal women, which are allowed to occur because the government takes no effort to stop it. This also shows white disdain for Aboriginal families and lives. Even if the children were products of rape, the women should be given the opportunity to decide if they want to keep their babies.



ACT 2, SCENE 5

One morning at the Moore River Settlement, Jimmy wanders around outside Mr. Neal's office as Neal, hungover, arrives for work. Neal chastises Jimmy for leaving quarantine, and Jimmy fires back that the "quarantine camp is a load of bullshit, so don't try and tip it over."

Neal promises to deal with Jimmy later, and enters his office. Matron Neal is angry that Neal was secretly drinking in a hotel room somewhere while she was at the quarantine camp checking everyone for scabies. In the end, only four of the eighty-nine Aboriginal men, women, and children had scabies. This infuriates Neal. He's "busted [his] gut" to get the camp ready, and now he feels "the whole job's a waste of time."

The Matron says the dogs are the only true health hazard in the camp. Neal agrees, and calls Billy into the room. Neal grabs a gun and ammunition from his cabinet, and tells Billy to prepare "horses and a length of rope."

Jimmy frequently acts out in an attempt to fight back against the many restrictions placed on him as an Aboriginal man. He enjoys calling out governmental lies and hypocrisies.



Matron Neal recognizes that the Aboriginal families were sent to Moore River primarily to move them out of Government Well. This frustrates her because these people were not sick and did not need to be moved. Neal is more frustrated by the loss of his personal time.



Although Neal does not care about the health of the Aboriginal community, he is interested in killing their dogs, which is more of a display of power than a genuine concern for public health.



ACT 2, SCENE 6

It is evening on the Moore River Native Settlement. Jimmy and Sam, who have painted themselves for a corroboree ceremony, sit by a fire. Joe enters with firewood, and tends to it. Bluey and Billy enter and remove their shirts. They paint themselves with the same wilgi paint that Jimmy and Sam used.

Although Bluey and Billy often act in opposition to the Millimurra-Mundays, they are still Aboriginal men, and still participate in Aboriginal rituals and ceremonies as members of an extended community.



Jimmy begins hitting clapsticks together and sings a song in Nyoongah. Bluey doesn't understand the words, and Jimmy explains that it's his grandfather's song, calling crabs to come out of the river so he can catch them more easily.

Billy and Bluey speak different Aboriginal languages than Jimmy and Sam, but are nonetheless able to join together and relate to the shared ceremony.



Sam begins a group dance. He plays on the clapsticks and Bluey plays the didgeridoo. After a while Sam turns to Jimmy, wondering if he wants to slow down to protect his weak heart.

Although the dancing and music is fun, Sam is always looking out for his brother-in-law, and places his health above the continuation of the ceremony.



Billy comments that this country has good dances. Jimmy responds that he feels there isn't a lot of country, or a lot of dances, left. Billy argues that this country still belongs to Jimmy and his family. In contrast, Billy feels he has no country left, "gudeeah make 'em fences, windmill, make 'em road for motor car, big house, cut 'em down trees." This is still the Millimurra-Munday's country, unlike "my country, finish...finish."

Billy recognizes that the white colonization of Australia has destroyed his culture and the land that used to house his ancestors. His country was turned into towns and cities and farmland, leaving nothing for its original inhabitants, driving them out or actively causing them to die, either through the destruction of resources or through direct violence.



Billy is quiet for an moment and then tells the story of the Oombulgarri Massacre of 1926. A white man, Midja George, saw an Aboriginal man sleeping near the river, and went over and began to whip the man and break his spear. The sleeping man fought back and speared Midja George, killing him. Jimmy interjects that it served Midja George right, but Billy explains that it was bad for his community. The next day, more white men came and found Midja George's corpse. A mob of policemen and white civilians formed, and they began to shoot all the Aboriginals in the area—men, women, and children. They burned the corpses in a bonfire and tossed the bodies in the river.

This massacre is an event that began as the result of an individual's anti-Aboriginal racism, but turned into a community-wide, government-assisted ethnic cleansing. Although ostensibly the white community was reacting to the death of Midja George (who was killed in self-defense), their response is disproportionately violent, and clearly Midja George's murder was an excuse to assault a population white Australians had already barely tolerated.



Billy has some family left, but none of them will return to the land where the massacre took place. Joe asks why, and Billy explains that at night they can hear the voices of mothers and babies crying. Spooked, the men sit in silence and then decide to return home.

This is one of the play's only examples of the supernatural, but even if these voices are more metaphorical than literal, the language of the dead acts as a bridge between generations past and present, and demonstrates the long-term effects of violence and trauma.



Joe holds back for a moment. Mary calls to him from offstage and he responds. She enters, and they embrace. They sit together, and Mary begins to cry. She tells Joe that Neal is trying to make her work at the hospital, and that this means her wants her "for himself."

Joe at first doesn't understand why Mary is upset but does his best to support her. Mary, meanwhile, knows Neal is sexually interested in her.



Joe wants to marry Mary, but they need Neal's permission and fear they will not get it. Joe decides they should run away and get married in Northam, where he can show her his home.

Joe sees that Neal's personal prejudices will prevent him from doing his duty and granting them a marriage license. The only option left is to break the law and elope.



ACT 2, SCENE 7

Joe and Mary return to the Long Pool Camp later that night. He announces that he and Mary want to run away and get married. Milly warns that they will be captured and sent to jail, but Jimmy says prison isn't a big deal. Milly gives Joe a bit of damper, which is all she has. Joe bids her and Sam goodbye, though Milly cautions him not to wake his siblings as the "less they know the better." Jimmy warns Joe to walk mostly on gravel, so black trackers cannot easily follow him.

Although Milly fears for Joe's safety, she recognizes that he is making the best decision for him and supports him in his choice. Milly, like the other adults in the family, has also welcomed Mary into the fold. They see how important she is to Joe, and therefore she has become important to them.



ACT 2, SCENE 8

The next day, Neal sits in the Superintendent's Office reading the West Australian newspaper. It is April 10, 1933, and the headlines of the newspaper say "Government Routed," and that the Labor party is in power.

Earlier in the play Jimmy predicted that the Labor Party would beat the incumbent party, and that sitting Legislator Jimmy Mitchell, a racist in his personal life and policy, would be booted from office.



Matron Neal enters and tells Mr. Neal she has some news. He assumes she's talking about politics, but she reveals that Joe and Mary ran away last night. The Matron tells Neal Mary was "terrified at the prospect of working in the hospital." Neal comments "they're all scared of the dead," but the Matron suspects Mary was "scared of the living."

Matron Neal knows about Neal's lecherous behavior around the settlement, and although she personally disapproves, she does not use her power as Matron or as his wife to stop him.



Neal calls Billy into the room and tells him to chase down the runaways. Billy takes his whip and leaves. He is especially anxious to recapture Mary, who is his fellow "countryman." As the Matron turns to go, she tells Neal she thought it was her job to assign women to work in the hospital. Neal says he was only trying to help her, but the Matron says she suspects he was only trying to help himself.

Billy and Mary are both Oombulgarri, which is a specific Aboriginal group. Although Billy often prioritizes his allegiance to his white bosses over any obligations to fellow aboriginals, he feels a special, almost familial connection to Mary, and wants to return her to the camp.



ACT 2, SCENE 9

Mary sleeps in a clearing by the railroad tracks. Joe returns with water and **quandongs**. He wakes Mary. Her feet hurt, and he washes and rubs them as she tries to eat a quandong, but it is too sour. Joe tells her it is better with sugar. Suddenly, Mary jumps up and begins to vomit. Joe comforts her and wraps her in their blanket.

The quandongs are bitter, just like Joe and Mary fear their future will be. Although it appears to be sweet, and the fruit occasionally is, its bitterness reflects the play's title, and suggests there is little hope for a couple alone in a hostile, racist world.



As Mary and Joe sit, Billy sneaks up on them from the cover of the tree line. He tries to grab Joe, who manages to avoid him. The two men circle each other, Billy with whip in hand. Billy insists that Mary, who is his countryman, must return with him.

Billy is more interested in returning Mary to the camp than he is returning Joe, because he feels connected to Mary because of their shared ancestry.



Billy says Mr. Neal wants them to return, but Joe doesn't care. Joe grabs Billy's whip and chokes him with it. Mary begs him not to kill the older man, and so Joe has her throw him Billy's handcuffs, which the older man has dropped, and he uses them to restrain Billy. Mary runs for the train and Joe follows, but first he throws away Billy's handcuff keys, and stuffs the man's pockets with fruit. Billy, unable to chase after Joe and Mary, begins to hobble home.

Joe, like his uncle Jimmy, has grown skeptical of authority. Instead of complying with Billy and Neal's requests, Joe fights back aggressively, doing his best to ensure his freedom and Mary's, which he hopes will lead to a better life for both of them.



ACT 2, SCENE 10

Billy limps back to the Superintendent's Office in Moore River. David, Cissie, and Topsy follow him and call him names.

The children can see that Billy has betrayed his connection to his fellow Aboriginal people, and instead sided with their white oppressors.



Billy enters Neal's office. Neal and the Matron, who enters behind Billy, are shocked by Billy's condition. Neal begins to yell at Billy, asking why Billy let Joe get on the train, as Billy tries to explain that Joe overpowered him. Billy asks if they can take the handcuffs off of him, but when the Matron checks his pocket for the keys she only finds **quandongs**. Neal calls Billy a "bloody incompetent savage."

When Neal calls Billy a "bloody incompetent savage" he reveals his own racism and prejudice. His treatment of the Aboriginal people at Moore River is not just an enactment of policy, it is an exercise in his own personal hatred and need for control.



Neal decides the handcuffs are a job for the blacksmith. The Matron tells Neal to send Billy to the hospital, where she can examine him and give him dinner. The Matron and Billy joke for a moment, but Neal comments that this situation is not funny at all. Neal and Billy leave, and the Matron tries a **quandong**. It is too bitter to eat.

The quandongs are bitter—they have "no sugar," as alluded to in the play's title. When the Matron tries to eat it, the bitterness is a reminder to her that her and her husband's treatment of the Aboriginals under their care is neither sweet nor kind.



ACT 3, SCENE 1

Joe and Mary arrive at Government Well Aboriginal Reserve. The camp has been torched, and there is nothing left. Joe points out rocks where he and Cissie used to play, and finds Sam's rabbit trap, Jimmy's wine bottle, and the remains of David's bike buried in the scorched grass. Joe is especially upset by the bike, and he tells Mary the police had claimed "they was gunna look after everything we left behind." Mary urges Joe to walk away with her. He agrees and takes the rabbit trap with him.

Joe is devastated both by the destruction of his family's precious belongings and by the betrayal of the local government. The Sergeant and Constable, who likely carried out the burning of Government Well, had no concern for the belongings of the people who once lived there, people who had left possessions behind assuming they would soon return.



ACT 3, SCENE 2

Sergeant Carroll intercepts Joe and Mary as they walk down the street in Northam. He doesn't understand why Joe is back in town. Joe asks why the Sergeant burned everything. The Sergeant says he was "simply following orders."

Joe wants to pick up rations, but the Sergeant says that, since the entire Aboriginal community has "shifted out," Northam no longer gives out rations. Joe complains he was not shifted but "booted out." He asks about the horses, and the Sergeant says they were shot or claimed by white farmers. The Sergeant tells Joe he doesn't care where he camps as long as he isn't at Government Well. Joe spitefully points out that he couldn't if he wanted to, and leaves with Mary.

The destruction of Government Well has a personal impact on Joe and his family, but for the Sergeant it is simply government policy. Joe sees it as a racist dismissal of the needs of the Aboriginal community, while the Sergeant sees it as his job.



The government's eviction of the Aboriginal population is a kind of systemic, colonial violence, but the townsfolk's claiming of the Aboriginal's horses is an example of personal greed and bigotry that prevents these men and women from seeing the horses as the property of the Aboriginal community.



ACT 3, SCENE 3

Sergeant Carroll calls Miss Dunn. She connects him to Neville. Neville wants to know how many Aboriginal Australians are in Northam, but the Sergeant insists it is only Mary and Joe. The Sergeant says they're not bothering anyone, and he doesn't have a warrant to arrest them, but Neville points out that Mary is a minor and Joe will get six months in jail for eloping with her. Feeling as though the issue is resolved, Neville hangs up.

In Northam, the Sergeant ropes the Constable into helping him pick up Joe and Mary. He struggles to remember her last name and calls her "Darg...something." The Constable doesn't understand the rush to arrest the couple, but the Sergeant explains that "some mob of do-gooder women are kicking up about them being shifted out before the election."

Neville frames his concern about Joe and Mary's return to Northam as a legal issue—Mary is a minor and needs protection. But in fact, she and Joe escaped Moore River because she was unsafe there with Neal—a man who was supposed to protect her.



The Sergeant is unwilling to take even a few seconds to correctly pronounce Mary's last name. This is a result of personal bigotry, and a lack of desire to understand the language and culture of a group of people he has coexisted with his entire life.



ACT 3, SCENE 4

Later that day, Sergeant Carroll and Constable Kerr approach Joe in the streets of Northam. The Sergeant produces a warrant for Joe's arrest. Joe is confused, as he and Mary are not living in town, and he assumed he was behaving legally, especially since he has been in Northam for two months.

The Constable tries to handcuff Joe, but he resists. He clarifies he isn't resisting arrest; he just doesn't want to put them on. The Constable wants Joe to walk in front of him, but Joe insists on walking side by side, as the Constable is "not the sort of bloke I want to turn me back to." Before he goes, Joe directs the Sergeant to where Mary is staying, and the Sergeant walks off to find her and return her to Moore River.

The law is enacted inconsistently and arbitrarily, and so it is difficult for Joe, Mary, and other Aboriginal people to understand when they are violating a law and when they are not.



Joe has learned from his uncle Jimmy, and does not want to be disrespected by white law enforcement officials. He does not trust the Constable, and does not want to allow the Constable to have any authority or power over him, even if Joe does decide to comply with his arrest.



ACT 3, SCENE 5

Neville, formally dressed, delivers a speech to the Royal Western Australian Historical Society. He stands on a podium in front of a portrait of the King, the Union Jack, and the flag of Western Australia.

Neville is ending a long speech, and concludes with a look back to the early days of Australian colonization. Captain Stirling had laid out rules regarding the treatment of Australia's extant Indigenous population. Neville quotes Stirling, who wrote that anyone found behaving in a "fraudulent, cruel, or felonious manner" towards the Aboriginal Australians would be prosecuted as though they had committed a crime against a white person in their home country. However, later in the proclamation he also called for men to enroll in the army to protect their colonized territory from "the attacks of hostile native tribes."

Neville continues to recount the history of Stirling and his band of white colonizers. At first, Aboriginal inhabitants helped white explorers navigate and find food for the first eighteen months of their invasion, but when white settlers shot an Aboriginal Australian who stole some flour, it "was the beginning of the end." Stirling and his white settlers waged a war on Australia's native population, cutting off food and water supplies. Some Aboriginal men and women fought back, but white soldiers devastated their communities in retaliation.

Neville concludes his speech by bringing up the genocide of Aboriginal people in Tasmania, which once had a native population of six thousand, and in the end "only one was left alive." Neville compares that to South Western Australia, which in over seventy-two years reduced its own native population from 13,000 to 1,419, half of whom were half white.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

Sister Eileen leads an outdoor Sunday School at Moore River. Cissie and Topsy sit with other Aboriginal children as Sister Eileen tells the story of the Three Wise Men.

The portrait of the King, Union Jack, and flag all give Neville a sense of authority bestowed upon him by his connection to Britain, which colonized Australia. Ironically, there is no gesture towards Australia's indigenous population, only towards its conquerors.



Stirling's personal prejudice against Australia's native population became government policy. Like Neville and Neal and later generations of public servants, Stirling claimed to protect the Aboriginal people in speeches and writing, while in reality enacting policies that were discriminatory when not actively destructive. "Hostile native tribes" is a vague enough term to describe any group angry that their land has been invaded. This is policy created specifically to give colonists free range to kill Aboriginal people and claim their land as their own.



Like with the Oombulgarri Massacre, white colonists used a single legal violation by an Aboriginal person as an excuse to wage war on the entire Aboriginal population of Western Australia. This response was not proportionate, and the settlers were clearly just looking for an excuse to wipe out a group they already had no respect for, and whose land and resources they wanted.



Neville is proud that Western Australia has not devastated its Aboriginal population in the same way that Tasmania has. Still, only 10% of the population from seventy years ago remains, and it seems Western Australia is well on its way to systematically wiping out Aboriginal people entirely.



Historically, at places like Moore River, Aboriginal children were educated in a Western style. Officials hoped they could be raised as culturally white Australians, as opposed to as Aboriginal Australians.



In the background, as Sister Eileen teaches, David enters the stage. Billy comes behind him and grabs his shoulder. David was skipping class to go swimming, and Billy whips his legs as punishment. Cissie sees this and calls out to Sister Eileen, before getting up and running to defend her brother. She picks up a rock and prepares to throw it, but Sister Eileen chases after her and grabs her arm.

Sister Eileen chastises Billy for beating David. Although David was cutting class, she tells Billy “we don’t hit people to make them do God’s will.” Billy leaves, and Sister Eileen makes sure David is not hurt. She reminds him that “in one way it’s your own fault,” because had he been at Sunday School Billy would not have beat him. Sister Eileen returns to her class and continues the story of the Three Wise Men and Jesus’s early life. When she finishes, she passes out hymn sheets and the class practices singing “There is a happy land,” in preparation for Australia Day.

ACT 4, SCENE 2

The Matron enters Neal’s office and announces that Billy and Mary, who is visibly pregnant, have arrived. Mr. Neal immediately dismisses the Matron, who warns him “that girl is pregnant, and unwell.” Mr. Neal promises he will not touch her.

Billy brings Mary into Neal’s office but is ordered to wait outside while they talk. Mr. Neal tells Mary she can stay in the nurse’s quarters, but she says she wants to stay with Milly and Sam. He pressures her, but Mary refuses twice more, infuriating Neal. Billy walks in and tells Mary she should cooperate. She refuses, and Neal, with Billy’s help, stretches her over a pile of flour bags and begins to whip her.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

Mary stumbles into the Long Pool Camp, where Milly, Sam, Jimmy, and Gran are going about their day. Milly can immediately tell something is wrong; she sits Mary down and lifts her shirt to see the welts on her back. Gran gathers some medicinal leaves and the two women comfort Mary. Jimmy threatens to kill Neal, while Sam wonders if they should take Mary to the hospital.

Billy has reacted to the trauma of colonial oppression by doing his best to assimilate. This has included adopting the attitudes of his white superiors. He uses the same violent tactics on Aboriginal children as Neal does, demonstrating his internalized racism and self-hatred.



Although Sister Eileen helps save David, she is patronizing. She tells him it is his own fault for skipping class, although he did not ask to be enrolled in Sunday school, nor did he ask to be transported to Moore River. Sister Eileen assumes Christianity is better for the children, but that is a personal bias that overlooks the value of Aboriginal culture.



Neal has no respect for Mary, no respect for pregnant women, and no respect for her unborn baby. The Matron knows this, but is not moved enough to actually protect Mary from her lecherous husband.



Mary recognizes that Neal is sexually interested in her, but has no desire to begin any kind of relationship with him. She, like Joe and Jimmy before her, chooses to resist, even if it means she will have to endure physical punishment. This punishment is carried out as though it is in an official capacity, but it is really an outlet for Neal’s bigotry, rage, and sexual frustration.



The Millimurra-Munday family has completely adopted Mary as one of their own. They care for her wounds and provide her with what medical attention they can, in the same way they cared for Cissie, and in the same way they would care for any other member of their clan.



Mary doesn't want to go to the hospital. Gran tells her that she delivered Joe, and she can deliver also deliver Joe's child.

Mary knows that other Aboriginal women who had babies out of wedlock had their babies killed, and is afraid of what will happen to her child.



Cissie and David enter. They have a letter from Joe, who is still in prison. Cissie reads the letter out loud. Joe asks after the family and about Mary and the baby. When Joe gets out of jail, he says, he wants to marry Mary at the same church where his parents wed. He says prison isn't that bad; there are other Nyoongahs around and the food is better than at the Moore River Settlement. Cissie finishes the letter and Milly gets Mary to lie down and rest.

Although no one in the family can read especially well, everyone has had enough education that they can communicate through the written word. The family often comments on the awful quality of the food provided to them—ironically, prison food is better than the sustenance Moore River claims to provide.



ACT 4, SCENE 4

Neal has summoned Sister Eileen to his office. He wants to know what hymn she has planned to sing for Australia Day, and she tells him she has been teaching the Aboriginal children "There is a Happy Land."

"There is a Happy Land" is a hymn that teaches the Aboriginal children to be grateful for the land given to them by God. Ironically, the Aboriginal children have had this "happy land" stolen from them by the white colonists.



Neal then criticizes Sister Eileen for lending books to the Aboriginal families at the Settlement. He says there is an "unofficial directive," and the Aborigines Department discourages teaching Aboriginal Australians to read. Sister Eileen is surprised, and admits she had been planning to ask to start a library. She insists it would cost nothing, as the books could be donated, but Neal shuts her down. Neal believes "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," and that the Settlement has enough "troublemakers" as it is "without giving them ideas."

By preventing Aboriginal children and adults from learning to read, Neal again turns personal bigotry and bias into official policy. Because he does not like Aboriginal people, he guarantees that vast numbers of them will be kept in docile ignorance. He does not think this is actually for their own good; instead, he thinks it will make his life and his job easier.



Before Sister Eileen leaves, she tells Neal that she doesn't like that attendance at her Sunday School classes has been violently enforced. Neal believes that no one would attend her classes if he did not force them, but Sister Eileen would "prefer that they come of their own free will." Neal threatens to send Sister Eileen to another settlement by the Gibson Desert. Sister Eileen leaves, but before she goes, she asks Neal if he considers the Bible a book.

Sister Eileen is genuinely well-meaning, and she stands in stark contrast to Neal, who has no actual desire to help the Aboriginal people under his care. Still, Sister Eileen believes that religion will help save and enlighten Aboriginal children, assuming that her religion is better than theirs, and that she knows best.



ACT 4, SCENE 5

It is Australia Day, 1934. Neville, Neal, and the Matron sit on a platform above the crowd. Billy and Bluey, wearing ill-fitting new uniforms, stand beside an Australian Flag. Sister Eileen delivers a speech.

Sister Eileen calls on the assembled crowd to “pledge our allegiance to the King and to celebrate the birth of this wonderful young country.” She also asks the crowd to remember to give thanks to God. She says she, Matron Neal, and Neal are the Lord’s servants, and Jesus Christ himself has sent Neville to speak to the Settlement today. The white people in the crowd applaud, but the Aboriginals do not.

Neville rises and begins to speak. He describes driving to Moore River and seeing hundreds of men on the road, likely out of work and itinerant. He says that, although a depression has swept the globe, the people “in this small corner of the Empire, are fortunate in being provided for with adequate food and water.” Under his breath Jimmy comments, “yeah, weevily flour.”

Neville concludes his speech by reminding the assembled Aboriginal audience that they are preparing to join “Australian society, to live as other Australians live” and to “earn to enjoy the privileges and shoulder the responsibilities of living like the white man, to be treated equally, not worse, not better, under the law.” Sam asks Jimmy what Neville is even talking about. Jimmy says Neville is just “talkin’ outta his kwon.”

Neville forgets what is next on the agenda, and Sister Eileen has to remind him that they will sing a hymn, (not a song, as he mistakenly announces) and that the hymn is “There is a Happy Land.” Everyone sings the first verse together, but on the second verse the Aboriginal crowd sings a loud parody, “No sugar in our tea, / Bread and butter we never see. That’s why we’re gradually / Fading away.”

Neville yells for the crowd to stop singing, but they continue and repeat the parody. Neville calls the Aboriginals ungrateful, as Jimmy heckles him from the crowd.

Billy and Bluey have done their best to assimilate, but their ill-fitting uniforms demonstrate that their performative whiteness is just that, a bad performance, and they remain caught between being Aboriginal and being accepted by white Australians.



Sister Eileen believes that white colonizers were able to overtake Australia because they had a Christian God on their side. This implies that white Australians are blessed and deserve to control the Australian continent, whereas the pagan Aboriginals do not.



Although Moore River claims to provide its residents with all that they need to live a healthy, happy life, in reality the food they offer is barely edible. In trying to control and corral Western Australia’s Aboriginal population, the government has instead forced them to accept a lower quality of life than they would have on their own.



Neville’s personal prejudices have affected his professional policies. He believes Aboriginal Australians should assimilate into white Australian culture, as in his mind, it’s the superior culture. Jimmy violently disagrees, saying that Neville is “talking out of his kwon,” or ass.



The song “There is a Happy Land” thanks God and Jesus. However, the Aboriginal community at Moore River has little to be thankful for, and has no connection to the Christianity referenced in the song. They are not ungrateful, but they are resentful that they have been treated so poorly for so long, and are now expected to be happy.



As always, Jimmy reacts to white authority figures trying to silence him by speaking more loudly and aggressively.



Neville and Neal accuse Jimmy of being a troublemaker and a ringleader. Jimmy invites Neville to come eat the dinner served to the Aboriginal families. Jimmy asks Neal if he voted for Jimmy Mitchell, which silences the men and the crowd. Jimmy continues, beginning to shout that he understands that the quarantine was not because of scabies—it was so the white Australians in their newly all-white towns would vote for him.

Neville and Neal's hatred of Jimmy comes as much from their own personal prejudices as it does from positions of power, which he does not respect. Jimmy does not respect Neville and Neal because he sees that their policies are not for the good of the Aboriginal population, but instead for the perceived good of the white community.



Overexcited and overexerted, Jimmy collapses on the ground. Mary rushes towards him and asks the Matron for help. She takes his condition seriously and orders Billy and Bluey to help take him to the hospital. The group exits as Neal assures the white crowd “he’s only fainted” before exiting in the other direction. Sister Eileen remains onstage, not sure which group to follow.

Mary knows that Jimmy has a heart condition, and so is immediately concerned about his wellbeing. The white Australians for the most part do not care enough to even investigate. Sister Eileen, who does care about the wellbeing of the Aboriginal community, but still feels an alliance to her white employers, is torn—physically unable to decide who to align herself with.



ACT 4, SCENE 6

Neal sits in his office reading the newspaper, which shows that today is Monday, January 30, 1934. The Matron enters and asks if there is any news. Neal says no, but when the Matron pushes him about news from Kalgoorlie, he says “Oh, yeah...Three dead.”

Although three people have died, these people were likely Aboriginal men and women, and so Neal barely registers their deaths as important.



Milly and Sam approach Neal’s office. They ask if Joe can come to the funeral. Neal says no, although they point out that other Aboriginal prisoners have been let out for the death of a relative. Sam suggests calling Neville, but Neal says it is too late because the funeral is tomorrow. Sam suggests postponing the funeral, but Neal refuses. Milly is clearly getting more and more upset, and Sam steers her out the door.

Neal doesn't care about the Millimurra-Munday family, and doesn't care about their deep connection or that they would love Joe to come to his uncle's funeral. Neal uses his position of official authority to enforce his personal distaste for Aboriginal sorrow.



As the couple leaves, Neal comments that this is a “classic case of emotion com[ing] in through the door and reason go[ing] out the window.” The Matron agrees, clarifying that she has seen this in Neal’s office more and more.

Neal is a bigot, and sees Milly and Sam as emotional and unreasonable. However, their family member has died, and their reaction is entirely reasonable. Neal is the one who is behaving unacceptably.



ACT 4, SCENE 7

In the evening down at the Long Pool Camp, Mary begins her contractions. She cries out, asking for Joe, and begs the Millimurra-Mundays to keep “them” from taking the baby. Gran comforts Mary and promises no one will take the baby, and says that the Matron is coming to help. Mary doesn’t want the Matron to come, and she is beginning to give birth, so Gran serves as midwife, calling out to Milly to collect clean ashes while she soothes Mary.

Mary delivers her baby, and Gran cuts and ties the umbilical cord, just like she did Joe’s. She uses the ashes Milly gathered as baby powder, joking that it’s “better than Johnson’s Baby Powder.” She hands the baby back to Mary and tells her “He’s yours for life.”

David wakes up and comes to look at his new nephew. Sam rushes in to meet his grandson. The Matron finally arrives, but Mary refuses to hand over her baby. The Matron insists she only wants to help, but Mary is convinced that if she gives up her child black trackers will take him and kill him. The Matron leaves, but first offers some cotton wool, baby powder, and soap. Gran turns her down, saying the ashes from the fire are good enough.

ACT 4, SCENE 8

Gran sits by the fire down at Long Pool Camp. She looks much older than in the previous scene.

Cissie, David, Milly, and Sam are all quietly playing games. Mary is watching over the Baby. Suddenly, they all hear a whistle from offstage. It’s Joe! Mary embraces him, and David climbs on his back. The rest of the family gathers to greet him.

Mary brings Joe to meet their Baby. They’ve given him a Nyoongah name, Koolbari, which means magpie, but waited to give him a wetjala name. Joe wants to name the baby Jimmy.

Mary is still afraid that her baby will be taken away from her, like the babies of other Aboriginal women who had children out of wedlock. Luckily the Millimurra-Munday family is there to take care of her and comfort her.



Gran is able to easily deliver Mary’s baby, just like she delivered Joe. She takes pride in her ability to take care of her family’s medical needs.



The whole family is excited to welcome the new addition and comfort the new mother. Although the Matron arrives with Western medicine and birthing supplies, Gran has already delivered the baby and does not need her help.



Understandably, Gran has difficulty dealing with the death of Jimmy, her only son.



The family is thrilled to welcome Joe back. They are happy to see him, and they are happy for his sake—that he is free and that he will get to meet his son.



Koolbari honors Joe and Mary’s Aboriginal heritage, but the name Jimmy directly honors Joe’s uncle, who recently passed away, and whose fiery resistance to colonization Joe has inherited.



Joe brings gifts for the family. He earned money working in prison, which they gave to him when he got out. He gives Gran and Sam tobacco, Cissie hair ribbons, David a knife, and Milly a needle and cotton. He gives Mary a red dress. She exits to try it on.

Ironically, Joe earned more money in prison, which was supposedly punishment, than he ever could on Moore River, which is supposed to be an institution that cares for its Aboriginal inhabitants. This emphasizes just how bleak life is in Moore River, and how few opportunities there are for personal advancement.



Mary returns and has Joe do up the back of her dress. He can see the scars from when Neal whipped her and asks what happened. The family explains. Joe is enraged and immediately prepares to run off and confront Neal. Mary holds him back. She doesn't want Joe to return to jail. She suggests talking to Neal and asking if they can leave Moore River as a family.

Joe is obviously upset by Mary's scars. Like Jimmy before him, his initial instinct is to repay Neal's violence with his own.



ACT 4, SCENE 9

Joe waits outside the Superintendent's office as Neal rifles through his drawers. Neal finds the paper he was looking for and calls Joe in. Joe begins to read the document but Neal, frustrated with his slow pace, takes it from him and reads it to him. The document declares that Joe will not return to Northam, and if he does, he will be brought back to Moore River. Joe clarifies that "if I put me name on this, me and Mary can take off." Neal confirms this.

Joe is so excited to be able to legally marry Mary and leave Moore River that he is unconcerned with the fine print of the document. Neal counts on this, and counts on Joe not reading carefully, using the denial of full literacy as a method of control. Joe cares most about leaving Moore River, and so does not notice that he will be unable to return to Northam.



Neal calls Billy in to act as witness. He asks if Billy understands the paper. Billy does not. Neal is happy to hear this, and has Joe sign the document.

Neal counts on Billy's illiteracy to keep him from counseling or warning Joe about signing the document.



Billy walks Joe out and asks what the document said. Joe explains that it will let him and Mary leave Moore River, with the condition that they do not return to Northam. Billy thinks they should return anyway, as "that is your country."

Billy sometimes takes a while to relate to his Aboriginal peers. Although he enforces the law professionally, he sees the land of Australia as belonging to Aboriginal people, and thinks they deserve to claim what is rightfully theirs.



Billy tells Joe to watch out for Mary, as she is still an Oomboolgari girl even though she has married into a Kargudda family. Billy gives Joe his whip as a gift. Joe gives Billy some cigarettes in thanks. Joe walks off and Billy stays behind. Neal calls to him, and Billy answers.

Billy cares about Mary, especially because they are from the same Aboriginal cultural group. Although earlier in the play he violently tracked the couple down, now Billy takes a moment to honor their union and bless their journey. Still, by responding to Neal's call he demonstrates that he remains loyal to his white boss.



ACT 4, SCENE 10

Early in the morning, the Millimurra-Munday family gathers at Long Pool Camp. Milly gives Mary a sugar bag full of flour, a frying pan, mugs, onions, potatoes, and fat. Joe says he is going back to Northam, and Gran warns him to be careful. David offers Joe his pocketknife, but Joe turns him down. Sam gives Joe a homemade knife, and insists his son take it with him.

Gran sings as Joe and Mary pack up and leave the camp with their baby. Her song is in Nyoongah, and goes “Weert miny, jinna koorling, weert miny. / Jinna koorling / Wayanna, wayanna, wayanna...”

Although Milly and the family have very little, they give what they can to make Mary and Joe’s journey a little easier. Although the document Joe signed forbade him from returning to Northam, Joe feels it is his homeland and Neal has no right to tell him what to do.



Gran’s song translates to “Woe, woe, woe. / My boy and girl and baby / Going a long way walking...pity, pity, pity, / hungry, walking, hungry.” Although not particularly uplifting, it warns of the dangers ahead and also serves as a point of connection between the past and the present; many generations of Aboriginal Australians, carrying their history and culture with them into the future.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Sanders-Schneider, Ivy. "No Sugar." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 6 Sep 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Sanders-Schneider, Ivy. "No Sugar." LitCharts LLC, September 6, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/no-sugar>.

To cite any of the quotes from *No Sugar* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Davis, Jack. *No Sugar*. Currency Press. 1998.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Davis, Jack. *No Sugar*. Sydney: Currency Press. 1998.