SETTING

Black Diggers contains a variety of settings.

Pre-Nation scenes
The scenes that are set prior to World War I occur in Australia in Far North Queensland and in Sydney.

Enlistment scenes
The scenes where we learn about the experiences of Indigenous men signing up to fight for Australia occur in Gwydir in outback New South Wales, at a recruitment parade, trying to enlist in Brisbane, and Frying Pan Creek in outback New South Wales.

The Theatre of War scenes
The scenes set during the war vary in location from boat crossings to France, the Dardanelles, on a ship transporting soldiers to Europe, in a foxhole in Passchendaele (Belgium), Bullecourt (France), Villers-Bretonneux (France), the Ypres (Belgium), Polygon Wood (Belgium), in a trench, Pozieres (France), Beersheba (Palestine), Zössen prisoner of war camp (Germany), in a field hospital, Abbeville (France) and Messines (Belgium).

The Return scenes
The scenes that explore how the Indigenous soldiers were treated upon their return were set in: Glebe Town Hall (Sydney), getting off the boat at a variety of ports in Australia, outside a country pub, at a meeting in country Victoria, Bertha Downs (outback Queensland), Cherbourg (country Queensland), a country cemetery, Murgon (country Queensland), on the Murrumbidgee (outback New South Wales), Castlereagh St (Sydney), Mount Gambia (South Australia), a residence in Sydney and George Street (could be any city in Australia).

Legacy scenes
The final scenes are not as clearly defined in their location. The first scene in this section could be any room in a returned Indigenous soldier’s home anywhere in Australia. The second scene in this section, an audio of ex-Prime Minister Paul Keating’s dedication to the Unknown Soldier, does not have a setting as it is the recording of his speech. The final scene is set in Callan Park, which was a hospital for the insane.
STRUCTURE

Black Diggers consists of 60 scenes. The scenes are short and do not necessarily link together: this fragmented nature of the narrative reflects the shellshock soldiers experienced as a result of the war, though often an event in one scene may link to the following scene. Wright explains in his introduction that “it deliberately tries to be a patchwork quilt of the past, presenting a variety of short sharp scenes, as if the theatre itself is suffering from shellshock.” (Pg. 6)

The play is also not written in chronological order and therefore jumps around. This also reflects the patchwork quilt described above.

Five Parts

As explained in the foreword of the script, the play is broken into five parts. The information below about each part has been taken from the foreword directly:

- Pre-nation – a reflection on the wars and experience of Indigenous people before nationhood
- Enlistment – the process of Indigenous men signing up
- The Theatre of War – the stories from the front as reported in journals, letters, official records and oral history
- The Return – the effects of returning and the expectations of both the men who returned and those they were returning to
- Legacy – what has been left behind for us

STYLE

Black Diggers is not the sort of play to rely on a narrator or to have a few main characters and some minor ones. The play contains nine central Indigenous characters: it is their stories we are being told. However, because there are nine main characters the voice and language used varies greatly depending on whose story we are being told.

Colloquial language has been used throughout the play, reflecting the language commonly used at the time.