

Research and preparation

1. Information booklet

The play is set in 1787 on a transport ship from England to Australia and then in 1788 in the first penal colony, which became Sydney. It will be useful, when studying the play, to know about this time in history and the background to the writing of the play. Choose one of the following topics to research and produce a typed information sheet, one A4 side in length. (The sheets can be put together to create an information booklet for the class).

18th century London

1. Criminal life (e.g. criminal language) to help you understand Act 2 Scene 1; the criminal code of honour to help you understand Act 2 Scene 10.
2. Exploitation of women and children, e.g. prostitution.
3. Punishment, e.g. hanging, transportation.
4. Conditions on transport ships.

18th century Australia

1. Captain James Cook and his voyages to Australia.
2. Sydney and Australia's first penal colony.
3. Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of Australia.
4. The Aborigines and the effect of the colony on them.

Literary links

1. 18th century theatre, to help understand Act 1 Scene 5.
2. Find a summary, review and extract from:
 - *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar
 - *The Playmaker* by Thomas Keneally
 - *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes.

2. Discussion of crime and punishment in 18th century England

The characters in the play *Our Country's Good* are based on real people who were transported to Australia as punishment for the crimes they committed in England. Examples of the men and women and accompanying crimes that led to seven years' transportation include:

- young female servants, aged 13 to 17, who stole clothing or household goods from their employers
- young men, in their twenties, who stole from houses and shops
- men and women sentenced to be hanged for highway robbery or violence, which could be commuted to transportation.

Think about the following questions and be ready to discuss them in class.

- Was it fair for the same punishment to be handed out for different crimes in different circumstances? Do you feel any sympathy for any of the criminals?
- The play contains examples of other forms of 18th century punishment, e.g. the play opens with a flogging and in Act 1 Scene 3 hanging is described as 'entertainment'. How do you feel about punishment being used to intimidate or entertain onlookers?
- How do these punishments compare to transportation to the other side of the world, with return to England at the end of the sentence difficult and unlikely?
- How do modern punishments compare to these? Are we more civilized in our treatment of criminals today?