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FEATURE TEACHER

ANNETTE BOX



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Society

1. IF YOU COULD HAVE ANY SUPER POWER WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE?

To not need to sleep, but still be able to receive all of the benefits of a full 8 hours per night.

2. WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR MOST FAVOURITE PLAYS AND/OR PRODUCTIONS AND WHY?

Seeing Cate Blanchett & Noah Taylor in Chekhov's *The Seagull* directed by Neil Armfield at Belvoir in 1996 was a seminal theatre experience for me. He was hot property at the time, she wasn't yet a household name but was set to be, as she was utterly intoxicating. Armfield's work has always enthralled me and having since seen his epic 5 hour production of *Cloudstreet* in 2001 and The

Secret River last year has elevated him to hero status for me. In January this year, I saw Ben Platt in Dear Evan Hansen on Broadway twice in the one week (it was so good I had to go again). Platt's Tony-Award winning performance was beyond deserving of this accolade.. he was achingly pure and beautifully broken...it is near impossible to describe. To quote the musical, "words fail".

3. YOUR GO-TO DRAMA GAME?

I don't have one in particular as I like to mix it up and ensure I am as delighted by the game as the students. I often adapt games for the classroom based on those Jimmy Fallon plays with his guests on The Tonight Show and I occasionally whip out the good old Heel and Toe Polka to 'Little Lion Man' (Radio Edit of course!) by Mumford & Sons, which appeals to all ages, gets the blood pumping and welcomes an often much-needed endorphin rush.

4. SOMETHING THAT YOU WISH TEACHERS REMEMBERED...

I am lucky enough to work in a school with a swag of Arts teachers who are practicing artists or emerged in their professional industry in some way. This keeps them energised and excited about their classroom practice, which has an inevitable spillover effect for the students.

So, find that thing that reminds you that not only are you a teacher (which alone is already a phenomenal achievement), you are (or can be) MORE than a teacher.

ABOUT

Power City is the most beautiful city in the world, but not by accident. Local hero Laser Beak Man works hard to keep it that way. Drawing energy from the underground crystals that power the city, his beak shoots lasers that turn bad to good. That is until Peter Bartman, evil genius and Laser Beak Man's estranged childhood friend, steals the crystals. Robbed of his super powers, Laser Beak Man must find a way to stop his oldest nemesis from destroying Power City.

Jam packed with the trademark visual puns of artist Tim Sharp, and featuring live music by Sam Cromack of Ball Park Music, the world of *Laser Beak Man* is brought to life in puppet form by the creative minds of Dead Puppet Society (The Wider Earth, Argus, The Harbinger) in a new visual theatre work with offbeat humour and cult classic aspirations.

CAST & CREATIVES

Director/Co-Designer David Morton
Creative Producer Nicholas Paine
Original Artwork Tim Sharp
Composer Sam Cromack (Ball Park Music)
Designer Jonathon Oxlade
Sound Designer Tony Brumpton
Technical Manager Samuel Maher
Dramaturgs Louise Gough & Todd MacDonald
Projection Designer Justin Harrison
Lighting Designer Jason Glenwright
Cast Nathaniel P Claridad, Lauren Jackson,
Jeremy Neideck, Helen Stephens, Maren Searle,
Jon Riddleberger, Betsy Rosen.

ESTIMATED RUNNING TIME

90 minutes no interval

WARNINGS

(Please note these will be confirmed closer to the production):

Please note that this performances contains haze, flying objects, loud music and sound effects, as well as the use of bright lights, flashing, and rapidly changing colours.

PURPOSE, CONTEXT AND TEXT

To empower, to entertain, to celebrate;

Dramatic, sociological, cultural and political contexts;

Devised and scripted work performed through multiple art forms.

DRAMATIC FORMS AND STYLE:

Contemporary Puppetry, Visual Theatre, Cinematic Theatre, Comedy.

THEMES:

The heart of this piece is in not only the backstory of the *'Laser Beak Man'* original creator Tim Sharp, but also the way in which his tale reveals the beautiful simplicity and impact of some basic human values, often forgotten in society today.

The values that become thematic pillars of *Laser Beak Man's* narrative, as revealed in this play are:

- Individuality
- Courage
- Equality
- Loyalty
- Friendship
- Hope

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Puppetry
- Object Theatre
- Ensemble
- Contemporary Music Production for Theatre
- Musical Theatre
- Live Music
- AV and Cinematic Theatre elements

THINGS TO PONDER

CENTRAL THEMES:

THE TITLE:

LASER BEAK MAN...the title of the show immediately gives audiences a glimpse into the world they are about to discover, especially if they are not yet familiar with Tim Sharp's iconic characters.

LASER – conveys futuristic, scientific, light and colour.

BEAK – depicts bird, more specifically a bird's mouth, from which they eat, protect and fight.

MAN – means of the male gender.

Ask your classes to define these three words and then use these definitions to create a one sentence (100 words maximum) 'Press Release' for *Laser Beak Man* before they get to know too much about the production. You can also provide one or more of the key images for the show (see an example below as well as any more contained via the links provided at the end of these resources) to generate a greater understanding for the show they are about to experience.

A DOUBLE SHOT OF HAPPINESS



WHY PUPPETRY, WHY NOW?

In a world in which we leap towards updates and upgrades, the newest, the latest, with the most compact design, immediate delivery and instant gratification, the Dead Puppet Society are dedicated to "uniting an old world aesthetic with cutting edge technical elements...where the mythic sits alongside the macabre, and the old school meets the technological" (www. deadpuppetsocieety.com.au). Laser Beak Man is a perfect demonstration of these values, with a blend of traditional theatrical approaches infused with activated scenery and large-scale animation projections, live performances of original music and controllable floating helium objects, creating an immersive and unique theatre experience that launches puppets into the twenty-first century and beyond.

WHY LBM?

Tim Sharp's iconic super hero Laser Beak Man emerged in his artwork at the age of just 11, after being encouraged to communicate through art from an early age by his mother Judy Sharp, following his diagnosis as autistic at age three. His artwork and characters have gone on to attract an international following, having now been bought to life in galleries, through festivals and on screen. The kaleidoscopic colours, witty humour and visual puns of his work are a perfect match for DPS' signature style, begging to leap off the two-dimensional pages, through around 40 fully functional three-dimensional puppets. Add to this the fact that Sharp is a Brisbane-based artist and you have the perfect recipe for a show to premiere as a headline act of the 2017 Brisbane Festival. Sharp's work is a celebration of great artistry, imagination and hope; all things which the world truly needs right now, and which will hopefully contribute to challenging the limits we often impose on our concept of what constitutes the form, nature and purpose of theatre.

THE ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTORS

Dead Puppet Society are dedicated to creating theatrical experiences which feature innovative and outstanding artists in their individual fields and uniting them to create explosive and exhilarating collaborations not yet seen before, and this work is the ultimate demonstration of this commitment. Exploring and becoming familiar with the many artistic contributors prior to viewing the work will significantly enrich the experience for your students, so be sure to read up on the biographies of the artists in the program prior to viewing the show, as well as visiting the webpages and other relevant sites, all listed at the end of this resource.



Watch the Laser Beak Man trailers:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmXNnc6iDXw https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEg1LPcIRJM https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6rvjOfnT2c https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ie-HKuA9RSY

- Learn all about Laser Beak Man: http://www.laserbeakman.com/
- Watch Tim Sharp and his mum, Judy's TEDx Talk https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=78VbeiAbcYI
- Listen to their two conversations with Richard Fidler
 - http://www.abc.net.au/local/ stories/2013/04/11/3734882.htm
 - http://www.abc.net.au/local/ stories/2016/02/08/4401429.htm
- Research Autism and understand Tim's diagnosis.
- Watch this fantastic documentary about Tim and his mum
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= mRGSDnMAeE

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA DISCUSSION POINTS

According to the latest version of the F-10 Australian Curriculum: The Arts, Drama, the Elements of Drama are Role and character, relationships, situation, voice, movement, focus, tension, space, time, language, symbol, audience, mood and atmosphere (https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/). Additionally, the QCAA Drama Senior Syllabus includes contrast and place (https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/). Here are a few of the elements that feature in this show, which you may wish to discuss with your students...

ROLE AND CHARACTER

While there are many, the characters of Laser Beak Man are easily identifiable and distinguishable thanks to the fact that they are puppets, with a fixed design and image, crafted according to their character's name (such as Evil Emily) and nature (see a line-up of the featured characters below). While some of the performers may operate multiple puppets, it is the appearance and characteristics of the puppet that helps us to distinguish them, ably supported by the performers' skills of puppet manipulation, movement and voice. The characters are also written around the stock characters often familiar in superhero narratives, with the villain, sidekick and hero all making an appearance along with the presence of the 'crowd', a Greek Chorus-like presence of animals who serve to guide, caution, question, doubt and champion Laser Beak Man on his journey.

Characters featured in the play are:

Laser Beak Man

Peter Bartman – His enemy. An old friend. Evil. Evil Emily – Another old friend. Evil by association. The Black Sheep – A perpetual outcast in search of a friend.

Amazing Grace – A free spirited traveller.

The Mayor – A perfectly corrupt politician.

The Government – A talking computer on a trolley

The Reporter – A sensationalist.

Barbie – Short for Barbara.

Ram – A meathead.

Chicken – Nervous poultry.

Boar – Has the IQ of bacon.

Tomato Man – A giant deformed tomato.

SYMBOL

The presence of easily identifiable colours and animal characters such as the black sheep, along with metaphors for joy and happiness such as flowers, rainbows and glitter help to convey the world of *Laser Beak Man* before the dialogue and action even begins. Additionally, the physical and natural structures such as city walls and an isolated island help to make the narrative easier to follow and ensures that the many important themes underpinning the work are communicated through the audio-visual aspects of the work.

PLACE AND SPACE

Assisted by the highly symbolic nature of the work, the establishment of a number of key places as well as the variety and number of places where the action occurs is much easier to follow through the activated and animated cinematic scenery, complete with signature colour schemes and graphic characters. The large-scale projection of the original sketches of these places, teamed with activity of the puppets and the transport and movement generated by the drone-like flying objects, will assist audiences with following Laser Beak Man through various areas of this otherwise unfamiliar, imagined world.

Laser Beak Man is set in a range of locations including:

- A kindergarten
- Power City (see below) and its various locations such as City Hall, the streets, the secret underground lair, a warehouse BBQ, the Magna Crystal Chamber
- Lonely Island
- POWER CITY



ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

F-10 AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: THE ARTS, DRAMA

MAKING: You might like to use the monologue activity (see Activity 3 in Post Show Activities) to write a monologue for Laser Beak Man and then perform it. Alternatively, develop a short devised scene (see Activity 2 in Post Show Activities) which brings a scene from the play or an imagined scene to life, using appropriate language, voice and movement expression for each character.

RESPONDING: Using any previous research or learning you may have undertaken about puppetry, reflect on the skills of the puppet manipulators to make Laser Beak Man and his friends come to life onstage. Consider the following:

How much did you notice the performers operating the puppets? What physical and visual aspects (such as costume and movement) helped to make the audience focus on the puppets? How did the voices of the actors help to make the puppets believable? Were there any other aspects (such as set, animations and projections, music, drones) which helped to make the puppets the major focus onstage? Who was your favourite puppet (and performer) and why?

QCAA DRAMA SENIOR SYLLABUS

FORMING: Laser Beak Man comes to life through puppetry, animation and cinematic scenic projection, live music, flying drone-like objects and performers who manipulate the puppets and voice the characters. Imagine that you have been given a collection of Tim Sharp's illustrations for Laser Beak Man and have been asked to imagine these for the stage in a completely different way. Devise a dramatic treatment that re-envisions Sharp's work or an original dramatic concept based on one (or more) specific illustrations not featured in the production. Pay specific attention to the style and form of theatre that you wish to explore and the associated dramatic conventions, how you would manipulate key dramatic elements and your application of the skills of drama, such

as stagecraft. Ensure that the intended dramatic meaning is clear and honours the originally intended purpose of the character of Laser Beak Man.

PRESENTING: If possible, engage with teaching artists from Dead Puppet Society (contact via their website) and have them come to your school and work with students using their training puppets to learn how to manipulate and voice a puppet to bring it to life. This may be within the context of the world of *Laser Beak Man* or another entirely different framework. Shape and polish a routine or scenario which combines movement and voice to deliver a scene in which students authentically bring to life one of the Dead Puppet Society training puppets.

RESPONDING: Select one of the quotes below (or find your own from a review or article published throughout the season of the show) as the framework for the task:

"Many assume that because Tim's work is bright and colourful that it is exclusively for young people, but his humour is actually quite adult and is able to speak to people of all ages." (LBM Media Release, 2017).

"This...is a work of pure entertainment – part puppet show, part pop concert, all heart."

(David Berthold, Brisbane Festival Artistic Director, 2017).

Using your selected quote, select one or more specific moments from the live action that you believe embodied the quote. For example, the art seems to be for young people but actually speaks to all ages OR the ways in which the various artistic facets of the show such as puppetry and pop music appeal to aspects of the heart in one or more ways. Referring to a selection of relevant elements of drama, skills of drama and dramatic conventions appropriate to the featured styles (contemporary puppetry, comedy, visual and cinematic theatre) as seen in specific examples in the live action on stage, analyse how the specific moment appeals to all ages OR captures aspects of the heart through multi-art forms. Evaluate your analysis progressively, ensuring that you refer to the overall intended dramatic meaning and purpose of the production.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITES

- 1. GETTING TO BE SHARP through Tim's website (www.laserbeakman.com) explore the man behind the artwork and the characters featured in the play. Learn about the genesis of the work and the characters from both Tim and his mother Judy by listening to Tim's podcast with ABC Radio's Richard Fidler as well as extracts from his TED Talk and other press interviews. You can also explore his range of artistic collaborations, extracts from his mother's autobiography and his vast number of artworks to gain a thorough understanding of exactly who Laser Beak Man is, and why he was originally created. This will provide greater insight into the relevance and importance of this production.
- 2. PUPPETRY IN PRACTICE use the Dead Puppet Society's website (www.deadpuppetsociety. com.au) as a starting point to investigate the research, science and artistry that underpin their approach to manipulating three-dimensional puppets. Awareness of the importance of the core elements of focus, breath and gravity will give you a greater understanding of the skill and technique required to bring these puppets to life and create characters with whom the audience can connect.
- 3. PEOPLE, PLACES AND PURPOSE draw on the images provided on social platforms and websites for La Boite Theatre Company, Dead Puppet Society, Brisbane Festival and Tim Sharp's own site to create a series of visual profiles for the characters and locations featured in the play. These might include details about the purpose of the person or place, their contribution to Laser Beak Man's story and any specific or unusual characteristics. Students might complete this in smaller groups or pairs and could complete and display this either through a digital medium, using more traditional visual arts materials as used by Tim, or a combination of both to create a reference guide to assist their viewing and understanding of the play before their theatre visit.
- **4. THE SUPERHERO'S PERIL** at the heart of every story with a hero and a villain, lies a 'fatal flaw'; an obstacle that they must face and overcome in order to succeed, and therein lies the source of any major tension in such narratives. From the exploration and discoveries already made about the Laser Beak Man narrative as well as

the students' understanding of the dramatic element of tension, create a list of the types of tension and consider why tension of that nature might exist and how these might be revealed onstage throughout the show to create dramatic meaning. For example, tension of relationships could reference the relationship between Laser Beak Man and his enemy Bartman, with the tension springing from the fact that these now enemies were once childhood friends. This might be demonstrated onstage through the convention of flashbacks, or through language or movement exchanges, which reveals some doubt as to how much each of the characters is willing to sacrifice in order to achieve their ultimate goal. To assist you with your predictions as to what, how and why tension exists or develops in Laser Beak Man, explore a range of other superhero narratives (such as those seen in the DC or Marvel comics, Disney stories and even some lesserknown tales or folk fables). You can then try to identify common characteristics of the plot lines, narrative arcs and storylines featured in superhero adventures.

POST SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. ANIMATION STATIONS – In order to track and chart the narrative, try to recall and chart the seventeen scenes that occur in Laser Beak Man using visual images and storyboards (you may like to draw on any work you complete in Activity 3 in the Pre Show Activities here). By visiting the links provided at the end of this document, students can source original images to use to assist with their storyboards, or they may like to create their own interpretations or re-imaginations of the key people, places and events through their own illustrations, realised through digital or more traditional forms. Once they have arrived at seventeen different images, students should create a name for each scene that captures the essence, importance and purpose of the scene, so that they can track the progression of the narrative and the main characters. From here, students can use additional visual cues such as arrows, clouds or thought bubbles to identify the presence of the Elements of Drama in the various scenes. This task should create a visual point of reference that also allows students to begin to chart the dramatic choices throughout the show, which have contributed to the overall intended dramatic meaning.

2. TAKING STOCK – Superhero characters share much in common with the stock characters seen in theatrical styles such as Melodrama and Commedia dell'arte. Create a profile for each of the most familiar stock characters (such as the Villain, Hero, Sidekick) and list familiar or famous examples of these (such as the Joker and Pantalone, Wonder Woman or Superman, LeFou and Arlecchino) as well as typical qualities (physical and behavioural) that these types of characters possess. Once these are completed, students can use the descriptions and visuals above and add the Laser Beak Man characters to the relevant stock character profiles (again, you may like to draw on any work you complete in Activity 3 in the Pre Show Activities here). Drawing on the physical characteristics of other known stock characters who appear on your character profiles, try to develop a walk for each

Laser Beak Man character to transition them from puppet to person. Reflect on how the puppet and its manipulator moved and try to incorporate any identifiable traits from this into their walks. Consider the pace at which they move, their preferred method of transport or moving, whether a physical feature leads them through the space and their personality traits. Attempt to capture and 'coin' a set walk for the some of the Laser Beak Man characters and teach this to the class. Once you have mastered these, you can commence creating physical improvisations between characters where you imagine them in scenarios featured both in the narrative of the play, as well as some alternative scenes. Next, play with the vocal characterisation of each role, revisiting the expression and delivery for each as provided by the manipulator (note: you will not be able to revisit the voice of Laser Beak Man for obvious reasons, but do feel free to try OR wait for the next activity!). Attempt to replicate or reinvent a voice for each character before teaming this with their newly established walk. You can now explore improvising in role featuring dialogue and conversation in a series of scenarios from the play, as well as those you may wish to create to explore from the action before and after the play, or to extend a favourite or intriguing moment from the play.

Here is a short extract of scripted text from **Scene 11** that you may like to use to get you started with voice work:

MAYOR: You all have to work together if you want the Magna Crystals back.

RAM: Huh! That's rich.

MAYOR: It's not exactly watertight.

BARBIE: And what if we like, succeed?

BOAR: Yeah? What then?

RAM: They regain their power and we're all left

in the dust, that's what!

CHICKEN: This is all a waste of time anyway. No one even knows where Bartman is!

BLACK SHEEP: I do.

RAM: Who said that?

BLACK SHEEP: I did.

3. WHAT WOULD HE SAY? – Discuss why Laser Beak Man is the only character who does not speak in the play.

What does the absence of his voice and dialogue tell us? How does he manage to communicate

with not only the other characters but also the audience, without speaking? Make a list of the many methods and strategies he uses to communicate with others as seen in the play. Using the storyboard and the character profile from previous activities, draw on your understanding of Laser Beak Man and the challenges he faces and (eventually) overcomes in the life of the play. Pick a clear moment from the narrative, noting the exact scene where it fits (if you have completed the storyboard activity) where you think that Laser Beak Man (or even Beak Boy) is on his own but might have something he wants to say aloud. It might be a moment where he needs to conjure up his courage, a moment where he is questioning his strength or even contemplating the future.

Once you have determined where this moment fits in the sequence of the play and what Laser Beak Man wants to say, write a monologue using appropriate scripting conventions as you have experienced in your studies of drama (and as evidenced in the extract above). Consider how he might speak and what kind of language and words he might use. Draw on your familiarity with the character from the puppets in the show as well as any other prior research you have completed on the narrative, the character and Tim Sharp to assist with your development of how Laser Beak Man might express himself. Swap monologues with a partner and perform your partner's monologue in role as Laser Beak Man, with the scriptwriter also acting as director for the scene and giving advice for movement, blocking, characterisation and vocal expression.

4. THE SONG IS THE THING: LBM MEETS BPM -

Laser Beak Man is lucky enough to benefit from a suite of originally composed songs thanks to Sam Cromack and his Ball Park Music bandmates. The music not only contributes to the mood and overall sensory feast that is this production, but 'The Singer' (played by BPM front man and composer Sam Cromack) is also as a key character in the story, billed as 'the omnipresent narrator'.

Here is an example of some of the lyrics featured in a song from Scene 3:

What do you do when you hate your lot And your heart's not right Where do you go when there's no one else And the City's full of spite Who do you to turn to, to sort out the mess When it's you all alone
In the night
And there's nothing to do
And there's nowhere to go
It's just you all alone
In the night

Consider the role that music plays in this production and the importance of this in narrating the story and assisting the audience with following the action. Using the storyboards you may have completed and your understanding of the structure of the play, select a moment where narration (in the form of song) may have already existed or where you feel that narration could have been included. Using the sample above and your knowledge of poetry and song lyrics (visit a range of familiar and new examples of both from other, unrelated sources to assist you), write your own narration extract in the form of song lyrics or verse, with a minimum of eight lines.

Consider using a rhyming scheme or other poetic devices known to you to help express your narration in song or verse form. Once you have written this, work in small groups with one of the most effective examples of narrative verse. Approach it as an extract from a Greek Chorus or as a song extract from a Musical, as performed by the chorus. What movements could you layer in to help express the story and sentiments expressed in the words?

Consider the use of the following movement and dance elements and devices to enhance the delivery of your lyrics:

- Entrances and Exits
- Formation
- Travelling Steps and Floor Patterns
- Levels
- Motif and Symbolic Gestures and Actions
- Repetition
- Pedestrian Movements
- Unison, Accumulation and Canon

CHECK IT OUT

Dead Puppet Society: www.deadpuppetsociety.com.au

Tim Sharp: www.laserbeakman.com

Ball Park Music: www.ballparkmusic.com

Jonathon Oxlade: www.jonathonoxlade.com

AirOrbs by airstage: http://airstage.de/?lang=en

Trent Dalton's interview in The Australian:

http://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekendaustralian-magazine/laser-beak-man_

Conversations with Richard Fidler on ABC: http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2016/02/08/4401429.htm

Brisbane Festival's Exhibit of Art by Tim Sharp:

http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/whats-on/laser-beak-man-tim-sharp-exhibition

Brisbane Festival and Laser Beak Man: http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/whats-on/laser-beakman

La Boite Theatre Company and Laser Beak Man: http://laboite.com.au/laser-beak-man/

Laser Beak Man and Dead Puppet Society in the Financial Review:

http://www.afr.com/lifestyle/arts-andentertainment/brisbane-festival-raises-the-curtainon-other-ways-of-seeing

A Double Shot of Happiness, an autobiography by Judy Sharp:

https://www.allenandunwin.com/authors/s/judy-sharp_

And be sure to subscribe to the social media platforms for Dead Puppet Society, La Boite Theatre Company, Laser Beak Man, Tim Sharp, Brisbane festival and more for all the latest news, reviews, videos and images.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- Doors open 20 minutes prior to performance.
- Please brief your students about appropriate theatre etiquette before seeing the play. Due to the nature of the theatre configuration the students can be seen and heard by both the actors and fellow audience members.
- Photography and filming of the production is strictly prohibited due to copyright. Please ask your students to switch off their mobile phones inside the theatre. We also ask that all patrons refrain from taking food and drink into the theatre.
- Please do not bring school bags into the foyer and theatre.
- Please arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the show starting. If you are running late please call Box Office on 3007 8600 and let them know.



9am - 5pm, Monday - Friday La Boite at the Roundhouse Theatre The Works Level 5, 6-8 Musk Avenue Kelvin Grove Village, QLD 4059 PO Box 232, Red Hill LPO QLD 4059 (07) 3007 8600 // info@laboite.com.au