

TSSMTM
Creating VCE Success

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“Cosi”

SAMPLE

Text guide by: Anna Purcell

Copyright © TSSM 2010

TSSM

ACN 099 422 670

ABN 54 099 422 670

A: Level 14, 474 Flinders Street Melbourne VIC 3000

T: 1300 134 518

F: 03 97084354

W: tssm.com.au

E: info@tssm.com.au

SAMPLE

Contents

AUTHOR NOTES.....	4
HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	5
GENRE.....	6
Audience.....	6
STRUCTURE.....	7
STYLE.....	8
Comedy.....	8
Pathos.....	10
Symbols.....	10
SETTINGS.....	12
CHAPTER SUMMARIES.....	13
CHARACTER PROFILES.....	20
Protagonists and Antagonists.....	20
Construction of Character.....	20
Major Characters:.....	22
Minor Characters:.....	32
Relationships Between Characters.....	32
THEMES AND ISSUES.....	33
Fear and Distrust.....	33
Mental Illness.....	33
Love and Pathos.....	34
Reason versus Emotion.....	34
Hope versus despair.....	34
Fantasy versus Reality.....	35
IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS.....	36
SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS.....	40
Sample Part 1 Questions.....	40
Sample Part 2 Questions.....	40
FINAL EXAMINATION TIPS.....	41
REFERENCES.....	42
References Used.....	42
References for Students.....	42

Note: All page numbers provided throughout this piece are taken from *Cosi*, (1992) Currency Press: Sydney, the 1996 reprint.

AUTHOR NOTES

Louis Nowra is an Australian writer who was born in Melbourne under the name Mark Doyle. He changed his name in the mid 1970s. He attended La Trobe University but did not attain a degree there, instead he's led an itinerant lifestyle until his plays began to gain recognition in the seventies. He has written plays, radio plays, non-fiction, tele-movies and a screenplay. He has also translated works and written the libretti for two pieces. His plays include *Inner Voices*, *Visions*, *Inside the Island*, *The Precious Woman*, *Sunrise*, *The Golden Age*, *Capricornia*, *Byzantine Flowers*, *The Watchtower*, *Summer of the Aliens*, *Radiance*, *The Temple* and *Crow*. In 2007 he completed the *The Boyce Trilogy* for [Griffin Theatre Company](#), consisting of [The Woman with Dog's Eyes](#), [The Marvellous Boy](#) and [The Emperor of Sydney](#)

Nowra had experienced growing up with the theme of mental illness as explored in the play *Cosi* as both of his grandmothers were placed in a mental home at the end of their lives. Nowra also chose to work in the same mental institutions that his grandmothers had occupied and it was this experience that largely influenced his work on *Cosi*. The piece *Summer of the Aliens*, which also has the protagonist Lewis, can be considered a precursor to this work. In *Summer* Lewis is merely fourteen years old, however Nowra claims that he chose the ages of fourteen and twenty one as they were formative years for him in changing the way he perceived the world around him and the people in it.

Nowra's work is considered very dark, though his later works leading up to *Cosi* take on lighter elements, using humour to alleviate, yet also add depth to some of his darker themes. His plays tease with the autobiographical nature of his work but there is never a strict parallel. He is happy to confess, however, to the personal experiences that have influenced him. Nowra now resides in Sydney with his wife.

For references on Nowra's life and works see:

- Veronica Kelly's work *The Theatre of Louis Nowra*.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Nowra
- 'Frankenstein's Mozart: The Making of *Cosi*' by Gerry Turcotte and 'Trial by Madmen' by Louis Nowra in the Currency Press: Sydney addition of *Cosi*, 1994, 1995, 1996 editions.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nowra's play is set in 1971 in a Melbourne mental institution. The political context is the Vietnam War, when citizens around the globe were beginning to learn about the atrocities being committed in the name of democracy by soldiers who were supposed to be the 'good guys'. Lewis is condemned by his girlfriend for 'doing an opera about love and fidelity while thousands of Vietnamese are being killed by American troops'. The political backdrop of the Vietnam War is designed to highlight the madness not only of the inmates, whose rationality is often shown to be eccentric if not utterly flawed, but also of the human heart in general, which is not 'constant' but rather fickle and fluctuating. There are agendas rife throughout the text that represent the same kind of schemes and biases that warp the political process and cause pain and suffering to people all over the world.

The sixties saw the rise of the hippies promoting values of free love, peace, harmony and a throwing off of all of the rigid moralising that characterised the fifties. There were many movements prior to the sixties that embraced ideas of 'free love' as a rebellion against the strictly defined gender roles within marriage, however the 60s embraced a huge counter-cultural movement that was epitomised in 'The Summer of Love' in 1967. It might be worth investigating such things as the My Lai (pronounced Mee-Lie) Massacre in Vietnam and the protest movement against the Vietnam war, the values of the 60s embodied in free love and drug-taking, de-institutionalisation of the mentally ill in Victoria during the early 1990s, as well as the Gough Whitlam era of Australian politics.