

THE CHASE FOR MOONDYNE JOE – 1865

READERS THEATRE

Students are on the raised platform of the York Courthouse and have their scripts in folders. The students do not need to know their parts but should be well rehearsed in reading them. Even though the parts are read, students should still make eye contact with the audience. The performers do not look at each other. Students may take on different roles.

Suitable Years: 5 to 10

Number of Students: 8 or 9

Cast:

Young Woman
Mrs Bardon
Moondyne Joe
Evans (*a prisoner*)
Native Assistant Fred
Native Assistant Harry
Trooper (Police Constable) Hayden
Native Assistant Jemmy Mungaroo
Native Assistant Tommy Windich
Shepherd
Thomas Reynolds

Venue:

York Courthouse Complex, 1874 Courtroom
The play can be performed in the 1874 Courtroom but is not presented as a court case. Other spaces in the Complex may also suit. Choose a space with enough room for the actors to stand to face their audience.

Synopsis:

In 1865 Moondyne Joe escaped while working with a road gang and was caught by the York police. This is the story of the chase and eventual capture of Western Australia's most notorious convict of the era.

Costume:

York Courthouse Complex has some costumes available for student use. Ask at time of booking.



THE CHASE FOR MOONDYNE JOE AND HIS GANG –1865

YOUNG WOMAN Moondyne Joe is the most notorious prisoner in this colony and he was in the York gaol and courthouse twice! It was all very exciting!

MRS BARDON Moondyne Joe was most famous for his escapes from prison but he didn't escape from York.

MOONDYNE JOE Last July 1864, at the Supreme Court in Perth, I was wrongfully sentenced to ten years imprisonment for killing an ox with felonious intent.

I was completely innocent and I wasn't staying in no prison. Not if I could help it. I played it right and behaved myself. Before too long I was sent to a road gang at Canning.

EVANS Joe bragged that he was going to escape. He reckoned that if he had a gun and a kangaroo dog he would be fine. One night Joe said the time was right. I was ready to go with him.

TROOPER
HAYDEN *(reading from his notebook)* Moondyne Joe, um... Prisoner 8189, and another prisoner Evans, slipped away in the night from the Canning River road gang. There was no one to go after them. Another prisoner had to be sent to report the escape. *(looks sheepish and embarrassed)*.

FRED My name is Fred and this here is Harry. We are called Native Police Assistants. They called to us to track those prisoners.

MOONDYNE JOE I went straight to where I had been living before. We collected some rations, a pannikin, a tomahawk, my kangaroo skin cloak, some nails and a chart.

EVANS Joe said that this was the best time of the year to escape. It was hard going but Joe knew exactly what he was doing. There was heavy rain to wash out the tracks and plenty of water to drink. He had learned a lot from the Aborigines. He could find his way without leaving tracks and knew how to live off the land.

HARRY That Moondyne Joe, he was clever all right. After a long time, Fred found some tracks but those men, they knew what to do. We soon lost them again. We kept on after them but the horses couldn't keep going. They had to stop for food and they needed new horseshoes too.



- FRED We could have found those men by ourselves but those horses slowed us right down.
- EVANS We managed to get some guns and some shot. Even better Joe got a big black kangaroo dog from one farm we went by. Joe had it all planned. We were on our way to Adelaide and freedom!
- YOUNG WOMAN The Police party was checking at all the homesteads. A very nice looking young officer called Hayden came by our place. They stayed for tea and then left. A few weeks later, our shepherd came by. He was most upset.
- SHEPHERD I was out alone in the bush. Two men came up to me and demanded that I make them a damper. I was all-alone and there were two of them. When the damper was done the men cut it in two halves. They took one half with them and left the other for me. As they left, one of them called out that I should say I'd been cooking for Moondyne Joe!
- MRS BARDON Months went by. It seemed as if Moondyne Joe had disappeared into thin air. Then one of our shepherds sent word that he had seen two strange men and they were carrying guns!
- THOMAS REYNOLDS I heard a shot. When I looked out I saw two men. The tallest one had a double-barrelled gun. There was a kangaroo dog with them. I called to one of the Aboriginal men who sometimes take messages for me. I wrote a note which he took to the Police station at York
- TROOPER HAYDEN It was the 29th of November 1865 and by this time I was stationed at York. As soon as we got the news about the escaped convicts, myself and my assistants Jemmy Mungaroo and Tommy Windich prepared to chase the runaways. We left York at 6am and proceeded to Thomas Reynolds' place on the Salt River.
- THOMAS REYNOLDS When they got to my place, I showed them the direction the escapees had gone
- JEMMY I found their tracks, which we followed until we came between Mrs Burges and Mr Lott's places. Then we lost the tracks and camped at Mrs Burges' sheep station for the night. It was hot and dry and there was no water for the horses that night.
- TOMMY Moondyne Joe was very good at hiding his tracks for a *wadjulla*. They were sticking to hard rock on their walk so as not to leave any marks. It was very hard for the horses.

- TROOPER HAYDEN The next day we went about two miles down the dried up Salt River before Tommy and Jemmy found the tracks again. We were able to follow these until sundown. There was still no water for the horses.
- JEMMY The next day we found a little bit of water and gave it to them in a pannikin. We kept going on the tracks again until the sun was high but it was not easy.
- TROOPER HAYDEN After that things got a bit better. The tracks became more visible and fresh. They led us to a place called Tipperary where Mr Hunt's party had sunk a well. I urged the men to keep on.
- JEMMY I could see though that we were getting closer to those runaway men and they were tired too. We went very quietly all three of us. Police Constable Hayden was learning our ways.
- We were so quiet that we found those men asleep. That dog though, he jumped up and started barking and barking. We moved in quickly. There was a big gun lying beside Evans.
- MOONDYNE JOE I was in such a state of despair. I said to Hayden that if the gun had been beside me I would have shot him with it. But we were so tired from the heat and lack of water that I was quite ready to surrender.
- The return trip was even more exhausting. Some distance out of York I just dropped to the ground. We refused to walk any further.
- TROOPER HAYDEN As their distress was genuine, I sent for a spring cart to fetch them.
- TOMMY That Joe was a clever one. He had sheepskin wrapped around his boots, with the wool on the outside. Makes no tracks.
- YOUNG WOMAN PC Hayden is a hero. He succeeded in capturing the two escaped convicts Johns and Evans. There was a double-barrelled gun lying on the ground near the prisoner Evans. Both barrels loaded and the gun was ready to fire. Moondyne Joe also had a small axe, a quantity of gunpowder and a single shotgun left full of shot. PC Hayden is very brave.
- TROOPER HAYDEN We brought the prisoners to York. Joseph Johns RCI 8189 and David Evans PP 8258 and also the kangaroo dog and articles found in possession of the prisoners.

MRS BARDON

They were charged with absconding from a public works party on the Canning River and with being in possession of firearms. Before too long, Moondyne Joe escaped again and was captured again by the York police. ...But that is another story.

