

THIRD EDITION

MATHEW CLAUSEN

CENTRE STAGE





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THIRD EDITION

MATHEW CLAUSEN

CENTRE STAGE



Centre Stage
3rd Edition
Mathew Clausen

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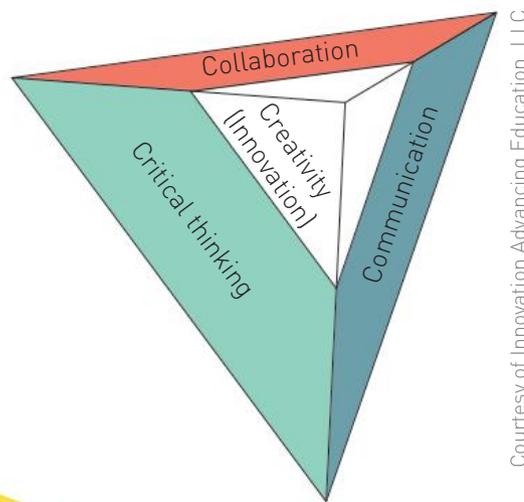
WELCOME TO DRAMA

How and what will I learn in Drama?

Drama is a performing arts subject with its own distinct terminology, practices and history. Research into the educational benefits of studying arts subjects at school shows learning in the arts increases student engagement, improves achievement in a range of areas and contributes to building highly effective relationships with others. Drama is one of the five art forms in the Australian Curriculum, the others being Music, Visual Arts, Dance and Media Arts. Through making, performing and responding to your Drama class work, you will develop skills and knowledge as playwrights, directors, actors and production designers. Learning in Drama happens through creating and making drama, and reflecting critically on your practice. This is important because as you create, perform and reflect on your Drama work, you are developing a deeper knowledge about this art form, and this empowers you to make choices that are effective and engaging for an audience.

The 4Cs

Creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking are important fundamental skills for all students as they provide you with the capacity to achieve your potential, whatever career path you choose. The 4Cs can be looked at individually, but they are integrated concepts. One theory about these skill areas is that, for creativity to happen, collaboration, critical thinking and communication need to be happening in the best way possible. The pyramid diagram below is a representation of how collaboration, creativity and critical thinking are the foundations on which creativity is built.



How will I develop creativity in Drama?

Creativity happens when you are:

- highly motivated, inquisitive and so engaged in your learning that you lose track of time
- very alert to possibilities all around you
- taking risks and trying new ideas
- collaborating with others to ask questions and share and test ideas
- persistent, even when things get difficult
- using critical reflection for problem solving and skill development
- using your imagination to discover and create possibilities not yet thought of.

How will I develop communication skills in Drama?

There are two aspects to communication in Drama: communicating to an audience and communicating with each other. The core of Drama is about communicating ideas to an audience using the skills and techniques of performance. As you master the ability to manipulate the elements of drama and the elements of production, you will find ways to engage audiences with your ideas and intentions. Your ability to communicate effectively with others in the making of performance work will develop as you learn to listen effectively, to read cues such as body language, to express your point of view, and to use language, technology, discussion, writing and imagery to share ideas, perspectives and experiences with those that you collaborate with.

How will I develop collaboration skills in Drama?

Collaboration is essential in Drama because all performance work requires the effective contribution of many people to achieve an end result. Through group work in Drama you will learn to effectively collaborate by setting shared goals, listening effectively, being flexible and open to the ideas of others, giving critical but encouraging feedback, negotiating and effectively dealing with conflict, developing resilience in dealing with disappointment and frustration, sharing responsibilities fairly, and contributing both individually and collectively to building positive energy and motivation in the group.

How will I develop critical thinking skills in Drama?

Critical thinking underpins all your Drama work, as it is your ability to make links between theory and practice. Participating in making performance work and watching performance work will require the use of many different types of critical thinking skills including analysing, evaluating, explaining, sequencing, reasoning, comparing, questioning, inferring, hypothesising, appraising and interpreting. These thinking skills will help you to create performance work, develop points of view about performance work, use evidence to support your point of view, come to conclusions, and to use information to make decisions and solve problems.

PART ONE



CREATING AND PERFORMING DRAMA



- Chapter 1** The performer's tools: body and voice
- Chapter 2** Improvisation: spontaneous performance
- Chapter 3** The elements of drama: a framework
- Chapter 4** Playbuilding: devised performance



1

THE PERFORMER'S TOOLS: BODY AND VOICE

WHY STUDY BODY AND VOICE?

Theatre communicates meaning in many ways, through language, dramatic action, set, costume and lighting design. The actor or performer is the primary method through which meaning is created. In this chapter you will begin to develop your knowledge, understanding and skills in using body and voice to create character, show character relationships, and establish situation, time and place. You will also begin to make decisions as a director to create and manipulate still and moving images that have a specific point of focus for the audience.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 1.1 Warm-ups
- 1.2 Mime: communicating story through the body
- 1.3 Body language: communicating character through facial expression and gesture
- 1.4 Communicating through voice
- 1.5 Performance task: images of Australia

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- explore and identify the expressive potential of the body and voice to create role and character
- use your skills as a director to manipulate space, spatial arrangements, gesture, contrast and movement to communicate situation and create a point of focus for the dramatic action
- respond by thinking critically about performance work using questions to build understanding and communicate your thinking to others.





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1.1 Warm-ups

THE PURPOSE OF WARM-UPS

Warm-ups have several purposes:

- to prevent injury such as strained muscles or ligaments
- to help the performer relax; to relieve mental and physical tension
- to help the performer prepare both mentally and physically for performance work
- to maximise the expressive potential of the body by drawing on the energy of the performer.

The following warm-up exercises will help you prepare for class work and performance work. You do not need to practise all these exercises. You may try only one or two and come back to the others at another time. The exercises are divided into two categories:

- **Physical exercises.** These are good for encouraging alertness, building a sense of working as a team, and creating energy.
- **Centring exercises.** These are good for posture, releasing tension, and developing the ability to create and sustain concentration, belief and focus.

EXERCISE

PHYSICAL EXERCISES

1 Stretch

Stretch different parts of your body by trying the following exercises. For each exercise you must stretch as hard as you can, without straining yourself.

- Stand between two imaginary pillars and try to push them over.
- Reach for a \$50 note stuck to the ceiling. Imagine that your feet are glued to the floor.
- Lie on the floor. Imagine you have ropes tied to your wrists and ankles, and you are being stretched in four directions.
- Hug yourself as hard as you can.

2 Roll, stretch, jump and electric shock

First, the class practises each of the following movements: a roll, a stretch, a jump and an 'electric shock' which involves you pretending your body has been given a blast of electricity. On the signal from the teacher, the class begins to walk through the space, maintaining an equal distance between group members.

The group explores different ways of moving through the space; for example, on toes, backward, sideways or leaping. At any point the teacher may call 'roll', 'stretch', 'jump' or 'electric shock'. The group responds instantly to the request and then returns to moving through the room, maintaining an equal distance between group members. You can play this as an elimination game in which the last person to complete either a roll, stretch, jump or electric shock is required to sit down.





3 Everybody do this!

Each person in the group takes a turn at giving the group a warm-up exercise. For example, a student may run backward or perform a stretch or star jumps. As they perform their exercise the student calls out 'Everybody do this!' and the remainder of the group copies that person.

4 Move as though ...

Find a place in the room to stand on your own. Your teacher will call out the following instructions. You are to respond to the instructions as quickly as you can. Don't interact with others.

- Move as though you are made of jelly.
- Move as though you are made of molten metal.
- Move as though you are made of crystal.
- Move as though you are made of snow.
- Move as though you are made of fire.
- Move as though you are made of sloppy mud.
- Move as though you are made of mist.
- Move as though you are made of brittle twigs.

5 No walking

In this exercise you have to find ways of moving through the room without walking. Once you have tried ways of moving through the room on your own, find a partner and explore how two people can work together to move through the room without walking. Some ways of moving include crawling, sliding, tiptoeing, running, rolling, leaping, spinning and jumping.



CHALLENGE

In groups of four, five or six, continue to explore moving through the room without walking. Create a way of moving from one side of the room to the other by combining a series of different ways of moving.

Developing skills to work as an ensemble

When working in rehearsals, it is important to develop a strong collaborative relationship among group members. This will help make all aspects of the performance more effective. By undertaking lots of improvisation work and practical activities together, you will learn to collaborate and establish a strong ensemble.

EXERCISE

ESTABLISHING ENSEMBLE FOCUS

1 The first step

As a group, spread out evenly around the space. The whole group is to take a first step together at the same time. There are no cues or signals for this. Try to focus on sensing the exact moment for taking the step.

2 Controlling pace

As a group, spread out evenly around the space. As in the previous exercise, the group is to take a first step together. The group continues walking and builds pace until everyone breaks into a run. The group then reduces the pace until reaching a standstill all at the same time.





3 Rhythm and peripheral cues

Imagine a public location that will allow each member of the class to have a specific role. Each performer creates a character to suit the location. Each character has their own private activity that will move them from one point in the space to another. All characters start performing their activities at the same time. The activities start slowly, with a low level of energy, then build in intensity and pace, and finally slow until the performers all freeze at the same time. Try the following variations:

- Each person in the group is given a number. The characters start performing their activities as their number is called, either in sequence or randomly. Repeat.
- Individual characters choose when to start and finish.

4 Three up, two down

Five performers stand in a line, leaving a gap between each person. Each performer remains focused throughout the exercise—finding a spot to look at can help establish this. When the exercise commences, any person can crouch down or stand when they feel the impulse to. There can be only three people standing and two crouching at any moment. Try not to develop a pattern or pre-empt what the group is going to do. Remain focused, trust your instincts and respond accordingly.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What benefit do you feel the warm-ups have in preparing you for drama work?
- 2 Write down one or two other exercises that you think would be beneficial in preparing a performer for physical work. Explain why.
- 3 Make up your own warm-up activity. Your activity can be for an individual, a small group or the whole class. Describe your warm-up in your logbook and justify its purpose and benefits. Be prepared to teach it to your class.
- 4 How can groups of performers develop their ensemble skills? Why are these skills important?

EXERCISE

CENTRING EXERCISES

Centring involves aligning the posture of the body so that we are standing straight and feel balanced. We all have our own personal way of standing that makes us feel comfortable. It may be putting our weight on one leg or folding our arms across our chest. In performance, because we are pretending to be other people and things, we need to be able to find a starting point that prepares us for performing. Centring helps our bodies to obtain a neutral starting point for acting work. It also creates a sense of stability because our weight is balanced over a central point. Once we are centred we are:

- physically prepared for any movement work
- mentally prepared because we are more focused, which allows us to be more engaged with the character and the performance.



HINT

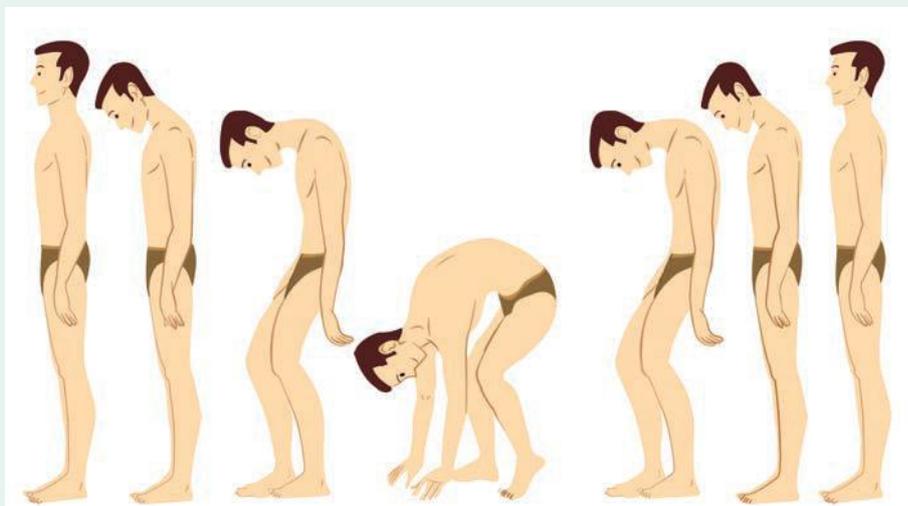
Being focused means we are able to concentrate without being distracted.

1 Spine roll

To achieve a sense of 'centre' it is helpful to use the spine as an indicator of where our centre is located. This exercise helps to prepare the performer by removing tension from the neck and shoulders, as well as correcting posture. Unbalanced posture can create unnecessary tension in the body.

The group stands in a circle. Stand with your feet under your hips. Look straight ahead and keep your arms by your sides. Count to seven and, as you do, slowly drop your head forward onto your chest. Feel the weight of your head and allow this weight to 'unroll' your spine as you slowly bend towards the floor. It is very important that you bend your knees when you are halfway down so that you don't strain your lower back. Once you have reached the hanging position, swing your torso gently from side to side to make sure your neck, head and arms are completely relaxed.

Once you have checked how relaxed you are, reverse the process and roll upwards, starting with the tailbone of your spine. Your head should remain hanging until your body is in a standing position. Then, let your head drift up over seven counts. Once you come to a standing position, hold this final position before you relax.



2 Pendulum

Stand with your feet slightly apart and with your arms hanging by your sides. Begin a very gentle rocking motion. Rock forward onto your toes and backward onto your heels. It is important that you only rock forward and backward as far as is comfortable without stumbling or falling. Increase the size of the forward and backward rocking motion. Once you reach a comfortable angle, begin to reduce the size of the rocking motion until the movement has almost stopped. It is useful to close your eyes at this point to gain a sense of where your centre of balance is. Once you come to a complete stop, hold the stillness for a moment.



CHALLENGE

Stand in a circle as a group. Stand in the way you feel most comfortable. Close your eyes and make mental notes regarding the way you stand. Complete the 'spine roll' exercise. When finished, hold the final position. Make mental notes and compare the differences between your own way of standing and the way you stand once you have completed a spine roll.

1.2 Mime: communicating story through the body

The ultimate goal of performers' movement training is the integration of mind, body and spirit.

Jean Sabatine – Dance and movement teacher



WikiHow – How to Mime
The Art of Mime – Skills and Techniques
BBC Bitesize – Movement, Mime and Gesture
Rowan Atkinson – The Invisible Drum Kit (Mime)
ET the Mime – The Car (Mime)

WHAT IS MIME?

Mime is a form of performance that uses body language, gesture and movement to create the illusion of objects, people and locations in an empty space. It is usually performed without the use of voice. A mime artist may train solely in the art form of mime for several years, developing skills that help their ability to create illusion.

EXERCISE

MIME

The following exercises explore some of the basic skills of effective mime. When practising mime, be aware of maintaining a strong level of focus, energy and control over your movements. This will make your mime work more engaging.

1 Isolation of body parts

In preparation for this exercise it is a good idea to undertake some relaxation and stretching exercises. This exercise involves exploring the movement potential of each body part, including your ability to bend, stretch, rotate and tense.

2 Pulling faces

Facial expression is an important part of communicating in mime. Pull faces and explore the movement potential of your facial muscles. Use your jaw, eyes and eyebrows to create as many expressions as you can. Work with a partner and stand opposite them. Take turns in mirroring each other's facial expressions.

3 Eye-hand coordination

One of the keys to creating the illusion of smaller objects in mime is the use of eye-hand coordination. We tend to look at an object before we pick it up.

Imagine you have a hand-sized object in front of you. Pick up and use the object, imagining its weight, shape and texture. Make sure your hands accurately represent the shape of the object. Imaginary objects you might explore are a matchbox, a yo-yo or a calculator.

4 Showing weight and quality

Imagine you have three boxes in front of you. One is neatly packed and filled with clothes; one is badly packed and filled with crystal; and one is falling apart and filled with books. Pick up each box and put it back down again. Make sure you clearly communicate the relative weight and quality of each box.

5 Showing length

Work with a partner. Imagine you are both picking up a lengthy object, such as oars from a rowing shed, or a ladder. With your partner, carry the object around the room. You will need to pay close attention to maintaining the distance between you and your partner to achieve the illusion of a set length.





6 Maintaining the illusion

Whenever you establish an object or item of furniture in mime, remember the position of the object and how it is used.

Establish the positions of the following. Everyone should take a turn using the mimed window and curtains to see if the positions of the objects and how they are used is maintained.

- Mime opening a door that slides to the left, then walk through it and close it behind you.
- Open a set of curtains, and then open the window behind the curtains. Leave the position of the curtains and the window for the next person to adjust. The skill required here is to closely observe the position of the curtains and the window so that when you enter the scene you maintain the illusion.

7 Mime role-plays

Work with a partner and mime the following exercises. Consider how you can manipulate the elements of movement in your mimed role-plays to help achieve effect.

- **Two house painters.** One is on the roof and one is on the ground. A pulley system carries up heavy cans of paint and lowers empty cans of paint.
- **Two landscape gardeners.** You each have a wheelbarrow that you fill with bricks and then push from one end of the garden to the other. The path you use winds and twists.
- **Two kite flyers.** It is a very windy day. The wind threatens to blow the kites away, and eventually they get tangled in the air.
- **Two vets.** You are holding down an angry cat and trying to administer an injection.



HINT

Vocal sound effects can be an entertaining addition to your mime performance.

EXERCISE

MIME ROLE-PLAY

In groups of three, devise your own mime situation to show to the class. This is a good opportunity for you to revise your understanding of the following elements of drama: character/role, situation, space and time. With your group, create original characters, a situation, the place and the time. This is also the first time you are preparing a short scene and it is a good opportunity to talk about one of the key structures of story in drama—the linear narrative.

WHAT IS A NARRATIVE?

A narrative is a story. A simple way of explaining a narrative is to think about what you know of narratives from films, novels and from your study of this text type in English.

Narrative basics:

- All narratives (stories) have a beginning, a middle and an end.
- The action of the narrative changes as a result of the events that happen. As one event happens, this causes another event to happen. This is known as cause and effect.
- Narratives usually introduce characters and situation at the beginning. The middle is when a problem presents itself and the problem usually gets worse. The ending resolves the problem.



HINT

When developing your mime role-play, make sure you include a range of mimed objects that explore your ability to use space, to show size, weight and length, and to maintain the illusion.

Use the following example narrative as a model for developing your mime role-play.
Beginning: The flight attendant welcomes passengers aboard a crowded flight. They close the very full overhead luggage locker for take-off.

Middle: The number of bags in the locker causes it to jam shut. Because it can't be opened, a passenger who urgently needs their relaxation music becomes more anxious.

End: The plane jolts suddenly during turbulence, which causes the locker to open. The passenger gets their bag, takes out their music device, sits down and relaxes.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Outline the steps that you and your partners took to prepare the mime role-play.
- 2 Evaluate one group's presentation, discussing how they made their story clear through the use of mime.
- 3 Describe how one performer used mime to portray the various qualities of an object such as its size, weight and moving parts. In your description, include examples of how they used movement and facial expression to add and enhance effective communication in mime.
- 4 Evaluate your own performance. Discuss your ability to mime weight and size, and to maintain the illusion.
- 5 Comment on how others in your group assisted you in maintaining the illusion.

1.3 Body language: communicating character through facial expression and gesture

WHAT IS BODY LANGUAGE?

Human communication involves the whole body, not just words. Experts believe that verbal communication accounts for only 25 per cent of communication between humans. The message we give through physical poses, gestures and facial expressions is called 'body language'. A performer's body language not only gives us information about their character's personality, it also provides us with information about their character's relationships with other characters.

A gesture is a significant movement of part of the body, such as a limb, that is intended to gain a response from one or more people. Some gestures have a universal meaning; others have a meaning that is specific to a culture. A single gesture may or may not mean anything—it is the general sequence of signals and the situation in which they occur that is informative.



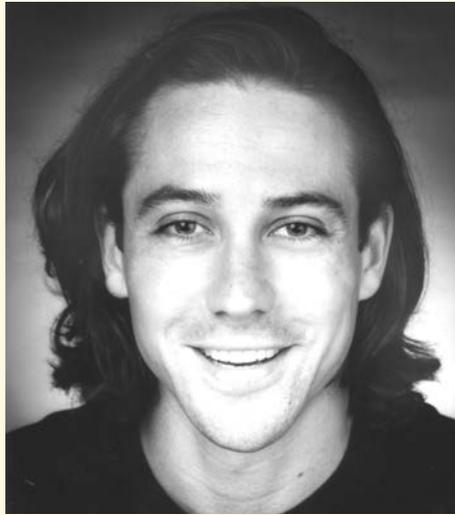
National Theatre –
Movement Direction:
Creating Character
Internationale de
Théâtre – Jacques Lecoq
{subtitled}

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

SHANE ANTHONY

Performer

Shane Anthony is a graduate of the Directing Program at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), studied Screenwriting at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and has also completed a BA in Theatre Studies at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). He was a company member of Australian Physical Theatre Company Zen Zen Zo from 1999–2008, training extensively in contemporary Asian performing arts. In 2007 Shane travelled to New York to continue training with Anne Bogart and the Saratoga International Theatre Institute in Viewpoints and the Suzuki Method of Actor Training. Shane received a Mike Walsh Fellowship to attend the New York Film Academy in 2012.



Courtesy Shane Anthony

Shane Anthony

Shane says the most arresting and valuable piece of advice he's been given as an artist is to 'Be curious', and he passes this on to any aspiring theatre or filmmaker. Shane writes, 'I firmly believe that the role of an artist in society is an important one that we are forced to fight for to be seen as valid. Artists provide a crucial service; be it to help heal, to uplift, to provide catharsis or to make people laugh. All of these experiences are part of the human experience and so it's important that all artists are curious about the world in which they live, that they are passionately interested to reflect and make their work meaningful and relevant. Be curious!'



BBC Bitesize – Describing
Body Language
Zen Zen Zo

EXERCISE

BODY LANGUAGE

1 Body signals

Find frozen poses and/or gestures to communicate the following emotions:

- boredom
- nervousness
- victory
- confusion.

2 Body messages

Use movements that finish in a frozen position to indicate the meaning of each of the following statements:

- 'Come here quickly.'
- 'Something isn't right.'
- 'I don't know.'
- 'I think I'm lost.'
- 'Get away from me.'
- 'I'm not quite sure, but I think I smell gas.'
- 'Sit next to me.'





3 Creating a point of focus

Work in small groups and create a frozen position to communicate the following characters in the following situations. Choose one group member to act as a director. Their job is to stand outside the image and arrange the group members so that every image has a clear point of focus for the audience to look at.

- A young child looks enviously at another child's toy.
- A scientist makes an amazing breakthrough in the laboratory.
- An Olympic athlete at the end of a sprint realises he or she has just missed out on first place.
- A scuba diver sees a shark in the distance.
- A shop assistant is caught stealing money by the manager.
- A teenager gets on a fast and furious ride at the amusement park.
- The same teenager gets off the ride at the amusement park.
- An elderly person finds their new seedlings have been trampled.
- A teenager pretends to like a disappointing birthday present.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Using your own words, write a definition of 'body language'.
- 2 Draw or describe what your body language may be if you were feeling a moment of great success.
- 3 Undertake research using your library, the Internet and your family and friends to see if you can find one example of how body language and/or gesture is used to communicate meaning in a culture different to your own.
- 4 Give one example from your class workshop that you thought had a very clear point of focus. In your explanation, describe the positions of the actors and explain how the audience was encouraged to focus on one thing.

EXERCISE

INTERPRETING BODY LANGUAGE

Use the following photo, or a group photo of your own, to prepare a short, mimed role-play in groups. Your performance will show the characters in the moments before the photo was taken. In your preparations, explore the body language of the different characters and the way the characters relate to one another. Your role-play must start with a tableau that you devise. It must finish with a tableau showing the positions of the characters in the photo.



Agefotostock/ Jeff Greenberg



HINT

In a tableau, participants make still images with their bodies to represent a scene. It is arranged in a way that is visually appealing and communicates information about the characters and the story. The plural of the word 'tableau' is 'tableaux'.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Pick three characters from the photo provided or from your own photo. Interpret the predominant emotion or reaction of each character. Explain how each character's body language and facial expression helped you with your interpretation.
- 2 Describe how you used body language, levels and space to convey your character's relationship to other characters.
- 3 Describe any discoveries you made about the character you played while you explored their way of walking and using gestures.
- 4 Choose one group's tableau. Give your interpretation of two characters and describe their personality types. Base your interpretation on the body language of the characters in the tableau.
- 5 Choose the group that performed the most visually appealing tableau. Discuss how this group used levels and space to make their tableau appealing.
- 6 Complete the following sentence reflecting on your learning about body language and the use of space to create meaning.
'When I heard about body language in acting I used to think _____ but now I think _____.'
Share your sentence with others in the class.

1.4

Communicating through voice

Make what you say remarkable to the hearer.

Cicely Berry – Head of Voice, National Theatre, London

TRAINING THE VOICE

You have completed exercises that focus on the expressive potential of the performer's body, and now you will explore the expressive potential of the voice. Although some of the following exercises will focus purely on warming up the voice and exploring its expressive ability, most will include a combination of the use of movement and vocal dynamics.

There are four areas of vocal dynamics that a performer needs to consider and develop. You can be assessed on these in performance so it is wise to ensure you understand what each involves.

The exercises below will explore each of the following areas:

- **Articulation** – using the mouth, tongue and lips to create and shape sounds; a performer with good articulation speaks clearly and is easily understood
- **Projection** – projecting the voice, without straining, so that you can be heard easily from a distance
- **Delivery** – making your voice varied and expressive
- **Breathing** – the ability to inhale deeply and control exhalation.



HINT

You will explore the area of delivery in chapter 5, p. 120 in the 'building your character' exercise.



Write-Out-Loud – Diction Exercises
National Theatre – Vocal Warm-up #1: Breathing
National Theatre – Vocal Warm-up #4: Articulation

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

KATERINA MORAITIS

Head of Voice, NIDA

Katerina Moraitis is Head of Voice at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney. Katerina was previously Course Leader of the world-renowned MA Voice Studies course at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, as well as Head of the International Centre for Voice (ICV), a professional international forum established to serve the development of teachers of voice and speech around the globe. Katerina is an associate editor of *The International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA)*, an online archive of primary source dialect and accent recordings for the performing arts.

Katerina is currently one of the world's leading acting, voice and speech professionals, and has been responsible for training many actors and voice practitioners now working in Europe, Australia and the USA. Graduates of her training are currently working at The Royal Shakespeare Company, Sydney Theatre Company, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Guildhall School of the Arts and many more.

Katerina's advice is to put quality first, and everything else will follow. Be aware of the power of language and voice to transform and inspire performance. It is through the integration of voice, speech and movement that communication deepens, including human behaviour and creativity. This connection between voice, language and the imagination creates interesting, expressive and engaging performance.



Courtesy Katerina Moraitis

Katerina Moraitis

EXERCISE

BREATHING

1 Finding the diaphragm muscle

Lie on your back on the floor. Place your hands on your stomach and consciously breathe in to the lowest part of your lungs. Exhale. Breathe in again, and then exhale. See if you can feel your diaphragm muscle working to bring in air and to control the release of air.

2 Controlling the release of breath

Stare at a spot on the ceiling. Take in a deep breath, and then blow a steady stream of air towards that spot. Take another breath. Slowly release air towards the same spot, but see if you can control the release of air over 10 counts.



HINT

If you feel dizzy or lightheaded, rest for a moment—you have probably absorbed too much oxygen too quickly.





By gently pulling in your stomach muscles you will be able to control how quickly your diaphragm relaxes. This allows you to control the release of air.

3 Increasing lung capacity

Stand with your arms in front of you, palms together. Take in a deep breath. Concentrate on drawing air to the very bottom of your lungs. As you inhale, raise both arms out to either side until they are up above your head. Let your arms cross each other and continue down to either side. Exhale as you do this.

PROJECTING, NOT SHOUTING

Developing the ability to project your voice means developing your ability to be heard *without* having to shout. The voice needs a lot of air to create a full sound and to carry a sound for a period of time, so your ability to breathe deeply is very important. This is especially valuable if you need to deliver long sentences and don't want to run out of breath. Projecting the voice involves a combination of:

- thoughts that help you 'send' your voice to the point you wish it to go
- physical exercises that help develop your ability to project
- the use of resonators to help give the voice volume.

EXERCISE

PROJECTION

Exercises 1 and 2 prepare the voice for projection. Exercises 3–5 explore the ability of the voice to project.

1 Bear's yawn and stretch

Imagine you are a huge bear waking from a deep hibernation. Have a yawn and stretch. Yawn and stretch again, but this time exaggerate the stretching and yawning sound.

2 Sighing

- Imagine you are feeling unhappy. Breathe in, and then sigh without using your voice to create a sigh sound. Repeat the sigh, but this time add a little voice to the sigh sound.
- Imagine you have just seen a baby perform a 'cute' trick. Repeat the sigh and add full voice to the sigh sound.
- Imagine you are a wildlife officer demonstrating calls of nocturnal animals. Repeat the full-voiced sigh and make the sigh sound slide up and down in pitch.

3 Projecting to a point

Lie on your back and find a spot on the ceiling on which to focus. Breathe in, and then sigh. Repeat this, adding more sound to each sigh. Imagine the sound you will create is like a torch beam that you will shine on a specific point on the ceiling. Turn the sigh sound into an 'aaah' sound. Always aim your voice at the same spot. With each 'aaah' sound, slide up and down the scale.



CHALLENGE

When your arms are above your head, hold them there for a second and take in a little more air in a couple of breaths. Hold the air for a second and then release the air quickly while lowering your arms to your sides.



HINT

A resonator is a hollow cavity in the body that helps amplify sound such as the nasal cavities and the mouth. Imagine going into a big empty hall and talking—often you will hear your voice echo as the hard surfaces bounce soundwaves back to you. Our resonators use hard surfaces in the body to amplify sound. If we warm up physically, relax, and breathe before voice work, we help open the resonators and encourage better sound quality.



CHALLENGE

Explore different vowel sounds. Time how long you can project each vowel sound before you run out of breath.



HINT

Shouting is NOT projecting. If your throat tickles or is sore during these exercises, you are straining your throat. Stop and check that you are relaxed.



CHALLENGE

The class repeats the 'pillar of sound' exercise but experiments with different pitches to create harmonies. In this exercise, closing your eyes helps you to focus on pitch.



CHALLENGE

On a given signal, turn to a new spot in the room and deliver a different gunshot sound. Repeat this until you have completed a 360-degree turn. Stand in a circle and send gunshots around the circle as quickly as you can. Everyone MUST send sounds to the centre of the circle.



4 Pillar of sound

As a class, stand in a circle and focus all attention on an imaginary cylinder in the centre of the circle that reaches from the floor to the ceiling. All class members will direct any sound towards the cylinder.

- The class begins by taking three slow, deep breaths.
- The class takes another breath, and then sighs.
- The class takes a breath, and then begins to hum.
- Concentrate on making the sound resonate on your lips and cheekbones.
- The class finds its own pitch.
- On the given signal from your teacher, all class members drop their jaws open to send an 'aaah' sound to the imaginary cylinder. Imagine that the energy of your voice is rushing up the cylinder to the ceiling. Maintain the sound for a period of three minutes, and then let the class find its own finishing point.

5 Projecting sound

Stand and place your hand on your stomach to detect the movement of the diaphragm muscle as it helps to create this sound. Find a fixed point in the room to which you will 'send' your voice. Practise saying the following sounds but use the 'jumping' action of your diaphragm muscle to help push the sound to a fixed point in the room. The sounds are 'hey', 'ho', 'ha' and 'hee'. Using the 'h' sound also helps to work the diaphragm muscle. Imagine that each sound is like a ball that you throw to a particular point in the room.

ARTICULATION, VOCAL DYNAMICS AND THE SHAPING OF SOUND

Articulation exercises help work the muscles of the mouth, tongue and throat. If these muscles are not strengthened, our ability to articulate is hampered because the voice becomes muffled and unclear. Vocal dynamics can also be manipulated by:

- **pace** – how fast or slow sound is
- **rhythm** – the pattern in which sounds, or qualities of sounds, are repeated
- **pitch** – how high or low sound is
- **volume** – how loud or soft sound is
- **pauses** – breaks or silences between sounds
- **emphasis** – the stress placed on certain words or syllables
- **tone** – the emotion or attitude behind the meaning of words.

EXERCISE

VOICE

1 Mirror facial

Stand opposite a partner and mirror the following:

- Open your mouth as wide as you can.
- Stretch your tongue to your nose, to either side of your mouth and to your chin. See if you can make your tongue touch all four points in a circular motion.
- Stick out your tongue and curl it.





2 Vowels and consonants

- Vowel sounds are created by altering the shape of the mouth. Roll through the vowel sounds in this sequence: 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o' and 'u'. Try each vowel sound and alternate between a short sound and a long sound; for example, 'ah' (short) and 'aaaah' (long).
- Sounds that are created by the lips and by using a push of air are called 'plosives'. Sounds that use the back of the throat are called 'gutturals'. Explore the sounds 'puh', 'buh', 'tuh', 'duh', 'kuh' and 'guh'. Consider how your lips, tongue and teeth are used to create these sounds.

3 Sound and action

As a class, create the following sounds simultaneously. Your teacher will give you the signal to make each sound.

- an explosion
- a motorbike racing
- a clock ticking and then chiming 12
- a modem connecting to a server
- a circular saw cutting through wood
- a respirator or a heart monitor in a hospital.

4 Soundscapes

As a class, create a soundscape of a particular environment. Each member of the class finds somewhere to sit or lie in the space. He or she then contributes sounds to create a particular location or environment. It is helpful to close your eyes for this exercise and listen to the sounds of others. Start with only a few sounds; the group leader may choose individuals one at a time. Other individuals are added as the soundscape takes shape. Some examples of soundscapes are a rainforest, ocean depths, a busy street corner, a farmyard, a building site and an orchestra tuning their instruments before a recital.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Describe your experiences in trying each of the voice exercises. Identify the exercises you found most challenging. Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 Make four suggestions for how you could improve your use of voice in performance.
- 3 List and explain the seven aspects of vocal dynamics.
- 4 Think of two possible soundscapes you could create; for example, a busy restaurant or the zoo at feeding time. Explain how you could manipulate vocal dynamics to create your soundscape.



EXERCISE

LIVING OBJECTS

An abstract quality is something we cannot feel, see or touch. By heightening the abstract qualities of objects, we are able to make an object more distinctive and interesting in performance. For example, a group of three people may be a couch and use their bodies to look slumped and heavy. They may move from side to side in a slow rhythm and pause occasionally. The group could also use their voices to make groaning sounds and sighs. Through the use of physical and vocal dynamics we gain a clear picture of a couch, and through the communication of its abstract qualities we know it is old and worn.

Complete a table in your logbook listing a range of landmarks and objects. Indicate the main quality of each, and indicate how you could use movement and sound to help portray the object and its quality. The table below gives some examples to help you get started.

OBJECT	DEFINING QUALITY	USE OF MOVEMENT	USE OF SOUND
Clock tower	Eerie	Swaying, regular, rhythmic movements to indicate the hands of the clock; be mechanical figures.	Whispering; ticking; wind blowing; slow and heavy clock chime.
Automatic teller machine	Faulty	Stiff, mechanical movements, some out of time and erratic.	Sound words such as 'buzz', 'whirr', 'click', 'boing', 'plink' and 'klunk'.

Form groups of six and share your lists of objects. Choose one object from each person's list in your group to present to the class. Although you will have some idea of what to do in terms of sound and movement, you will discover more as you rehearse your presentation. Consider how you can manipulate movement and vocal dynamics to heighten your representation of the defining qualities of your chosen objects.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Pick two objects presented by two different groups. Be clear in your description of what you saw. Identify and describe the strengths of these presentations. Consider how movement was used to clearly represent the object, the interaction of group members, the use of levels and space, and the use of sound. Make any suggestions for improvement. Be specific with your advice. For example:

The group that performed the eerie clock tower worked well together. They used people as gargoyles, and they used people and levels to create the height of the tower. They made the hands of the clock look bent and broken by holding their arms at odd angles. Some group members needed to stretch their arms up more fully to create the height of the tower. I think they needed to make the sound of wind blowing more intense because it was too soft and it seemed gentle rather than frightening.

- 2 Share your answer to question 1 with another student. Read each other's work and tell your partner what you think is clear about their description and one thing they might do to make their description and evaluation even better.

PERFORMANCE TASK



1.5 Performance task: images of Australia

The task

In this task you will work with a group to create a series of no more than eight tableaux to tell a story about one character and their experience of Australia. For example, the tableaux might show a journey, or show events over a lifetime. The tableaux will represent different ideas that you and your group have about life in Australia. Tableau suggestions include:

- a tableau of people at a famous location in Australia
- a tableau showing what people who have not been to Australia think Australia might be like
- a tableau to show Australia on an important day
- a tableau to show a particular suburb or area in Sydney.

Each tableau can include the use of people as objects, and a limited use of voice and movement to show different characters in different situations. The sequence of tableaux must tell a narrative or story, but only one character can appear in all eight of the tableaux. The voice and movement might be repeated two or three times to make it clear to the audience. Each tableau must have a specific point of focus for the audience to look at. When you present your tableaux, your group will start frozen and when your teacher gives you a signal, you will add your movement and sound.

Each performance will need to include planned use of the staging (the arrangement of the performers in the stage space) to create a strong point of focus for the dramatic action. Create original characters, places and situations, and the use of vocal dynamics to create atmospheric sound and sound effects including consideration of rhythm and repetition.



iStockphoto.com/yellowsarah

What does it mean to be Australian? Does this image fit your experience of being Australian?

Rehearsing, making images and responding

EXERCISE

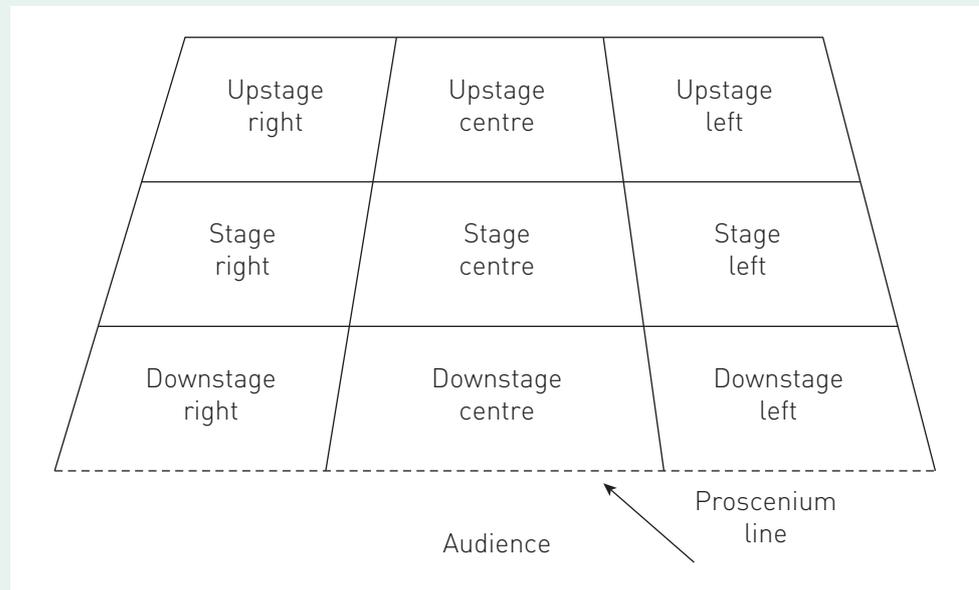
PRESENTATION PREPARATION

The following activities will help you to prepare for your presentation. Use these exercises to develop your creativity in coming up with ideas for situations and in using your skills of voice, body and staging to communicate ideas.

1 The stage spaces game

This game is designed to help you learn the theatre terminology used to make the direction of actors efficient. It is much better and clearer to communicate if you are specific in your directions to each other about where to stand or move to in the stage space. You will also use this terminology in your writing about class work.

The standard stage space is divided into a grid of nine areas, as shown in the diagram below. It is important to remember that this code for direction is always from the actor's point of view as they are the ones being asked to move or stand in certain areas of the stage space.



In this game, a small group of about five students begin standing centre stage. The teacher or another student randomly calls out different areas of the stage space; for example, 'upstage left!'. The group must run to the stage space called and the last person to arrive is then eliminated. The game continues until only one person is left. The game repeats with a new group of players.

2 Directing to create tableaux

In groups of four, devise three of your own tableaux. Use the terminology of the stage space to direct each other into positions on the tableau. Each pose should show four characters in a particular situation. Show your tableaux to the class and see if they can interpret the characters and situations you are trying to communicate.

Performance preparation

Look at the following images. The first is *Australian Beach Pattern* by painter Charles Meere, and the second is *The New Bathers, 2013* by Australian photographer Anne Zahalka. Zahalka's photograph is an adaptation of the work by Charles Meere.



AGNSW. © Charles Meere Estate. Licensed by Viscopy, 2016, Sydney

Australian Beach Pattern by Charles Meere



© Anne Zahalka/Arc One Gallery Licensed by Viscopy, 2016

The New Bathers, 2013 © Anne Zahalka/Arc One Gallery. Licenced by Viscopy, 2016

With your group, look at the images and answer the following questions:

- 1 Who are the characters in each image and what is the situation?
- 2 What do you think is the point of focus in each image and why is your attention drawn to this?
- 3 What might the focus of the photo be in terms of what the image is capturing of Australian life?
- 4 How might you use this image to create your own stage frozen images?

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- create no more than eight effective tableaux, including powerful use of space and levels
- incorporate movement and mime to effectively communicate character and/or object
- incorporate rhythm and repetition in voice and/or movement for effect
- integrate movement and vocal sound to portray objects and their qualities
- work effectively as part of an ensemble
- select, modify and link aspects of your drama into a coherent and polished performance.



Effective tableaux create visually interesting stage images with a strong point of focus for the audience.

Shutterstock.com/Igor Bulgarin

Performance task: images of Australia

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- explore and identify the expressive potential of the body and voice to create role and character
- use your skills as a director to manipulate space, spatial arrangements, gesture, contrast and movement to communicate situation and create a point of focus for the dramatic action
- respond by thinking critically about performance work using questions to build understanding and communicate your thinking to others.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes</p> <p>Have you prepared for your performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incorporating in your performance your ideas about life in Australia? • including resources from your own research? • recording all planning, rehearsals and decisions in writing? • completing critical thinking questions as required? <p>Have you selected and included the skills of voice and movement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively communicating character and/or object through the use of body language, movement and mime? • incorporating voice to suit character and to create mood? • effectively incorporating rhythm and repetition in voice and/or movement? <p>Have you planned, selected and modified your presentation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considering the available space and how it can be used to suit your purpose? • using direction to help arrange actors in the stage space to represent a situation with a clear point of focus? 				
<p>Responding</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively reflect on the development, rehearsal and shaping of performance work? • think deeply about the use of voice and movement in your responses to questions? • share ideas and perspectives on class workshops to show a developing understanding of the use of voice and movement? • describe and explain the use of the stage space in a clear and succinct manner? 				

Comments



2

IMPROVISATION: COLLABORATING TO CREATE SPONTANEOUS PERFORMANCE

WHY STUDY IMPROVISATION?

Improvisation is both an entertaining form of performance and a valuable tool for exploring and developing drama work. Improvisation requires a performer to think quickly and to be inventive and imaginative. It can also make an invaluable contribution to the process of playbuilding because it allows you and other group members to explore character and ideas through action. The improvisation activities in this chapter are excellent preparation for the playbuilding tasks in chapter 4.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 2.1 An overview of improvisation
- 2.2 The skills of improvisation
- 2.3 Character types and status in improvisation
- 2.4 Improvisation exercises
- 2.5 Playback Theatre
- 2.6 Performance task: improvisation

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- explore and utilise the skills of improvisation
- identify the elements of drama and incorporate them in improvisations
- create and sustain character types in improvisations
- contribute and incorporate your own ideas to create improvised performance work
- utilise skills of listening, interpretation and improvisation to 'playback' personal stories.





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Theatresports was created by Keith Johnstone.

2.1 An overview of improvisation

Switch off the nagging intellect and welcome the unconscious as a friend: it will lead you to places you never dreamed of, and produce results more “original” than anything you could achieve by aiming at originality.

Irving Wardle – Theatre writer



HINT

Improvisation has been used as a training tool in health, employment and education to help participants gain a greater understanding of people and the way they behave.

IMPROVISATION IN PERFORMANCE

Becoming a successful improvisation performer requires the development of skills to create powerful, entertaining and interesting improvisations. Regular practice and evaluation will also encourage:

- the ability to be creative and imaginative spontaneously
- the ability to work cooperatively with other performers
- an understanding of how the elements of drama work together in performance.

Improvisation has been an aspect of many forms of Western and non-Western performance for centuries. During the mid 1960s, improvisation became a very popular tool for training performers and creating performance work. This loose, informal style of theatre reflected the changes in society's attitudes and values at the time. The Pram Factory in Melbourne and the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney produced plays that reflected the influence of these changes in society and the arts. Writers, performers and directors began to experiment with new forms of theatre. Famous Australian playwrights, such as Jack Hibberd and David Williamson, refined plays that had been developed in workshop improvisations.

When engaged in improvisation, the performer is very 'audience aware'. Although the performer is focused on being a character in a situation, he or she is constantly aware of audience reactions; these help the performer make the best decisions for the outcome of the performance. An Italian form of comic, improvised performance, known as *commedia dell'arte*, relies on stock character types and improvisation to develop comic moments. *Commedia dell'arte* performers encourage audience reaction by directly playing to the audience.



HINT

Lyn Pierse's book *Theatresports Down Under* is an excellent reference for improvisation work.

2.2 The skills of improvisation

THE SKILLS OF IMPROVISATION

You can develop a number of skills to improve your effectiveness as an improvisation performer. Although each skill is looked at separately, in performance, all skills are drawn on simultaneously.

As you practise the exercises for each skill, be prepared for your teacher to 'side coach' you. Your teacher may encourage you to accept an offer, or to extend or advance a situation. Try to incorporate your teacher's advice without dropping character or stopping the action. You may find your teacher offers a lot of side coaching when you first try these exercises. As you gain confidence with each skill your teacher will reduce the amount of side coaching.



Improv Encyclopedia –
Improv Games
Unexpected Productions –
The Living Playbook

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

BRIDIE CONNELL

Performer

Bridie joined her primary school's performing arts club when she was 11 years old, and thoroughly enjoyed dressing up in silly costumes and putting on skits every week. She writes, 'One week, our teacher introduced us to a specialist tutor, who was joining us to talk about something called "improvisation". Well, after getting over my initial fears (there were NO SCRIPTS!) I was hooked. This improv thing was hilarious, challenging and wonderful all at the same time, and I couldn't wait for the next class.'

Although her primary school performing arts club was a long time ago, she still uses improv every day in her life as an actor.

She writes, 'The skills I learnt and continue to develop help performers be fully present, as well as great listeners and problem solvers. I also use improv when I'm trying to write a script—improv is a wonderful starting point for devising a performance, or figuring out a character.'

Improv can be applied to so many situations off stage. Bridie writes, 'My first ever Theatresports coach used to say, "people who learn improv are better at life", and it's true! Improv equips you with skills that are useful in all areas of life. Throughout my time learning improv, I have grown not only as a performer, but a person. My co-performers and I have learnt to work in group situations, to think on our feet (which has definitely come in useful getting out of trouble at school!), to develop our imaginations and confidence and to find the fun in anything!'



Bridie Connell

Photography by Victoria Baldwin

Skill 1: spontaneity

Spontaneity is the ability to 'act on the spot', without hesitation. It requires the performer to provide ideas during performance that help the drama to move forward. The ability to be spontaneous in performance, to act without hesitation, helps maintain the pace and tension of the improvisation.



HINT

Keith Johnstone, author of the well-known book *Improv: Improvisation and the Theatre*, believes that when we improvise, our fears of being rejected or failing make us 'edit' many of our good ideas. This makes us hesitate, therefore interrupting the flow of the performance. He suggests that you 'do' before you think. This is being spontaneous; it will give the most honest and often the most appropriate response.



CHALLENGE

Stand and physically represent the words as you say them by creating a shape with your body. Try increasing the number of people working together. Each person in the group takes a turn calling out a word, and the entire group creates a statue or tableau to represent the word called.



HINT

Reminiscing is fondly remembering the past.

EXERCISE

SPONTANEITY

1 Word association

In pairs, sit opposite each other. In turn, each person says a word in quick succession. The aim is to keep going for as long as possible without laughing or hesitating.

2 Instant *Romeo and Juliet*

In this exercise, a well-known Shakespearean play has been chosen as the basis for some improvised situations. The use of known characters from a known story helps you 'do' without thinking and hesitating. You will act as specific characters from the play in particular situations. Sometimes you will be asked to be an object. You may be required to use voice and sound. Try not to discuss what you do, and aim to complete the task as quickly as possible. Your teacher will give you a time limit of five or ten seconds to complete each activity.

- In pairs, become a chef and assistant chef preparing the food for the Capulet ball. Discuss the menu.
- In groups of eight, create a tableau that shows the opposing families in Verona: the Capulets and Montagues. Two people must represent Juliet (a Capulet) and Romeo (a Montague) showing their opposition to the feud.
- In groups of three, become Mr Montague and two palace cleaners. It is the morning after the ball, and Mr Montague is coping with the mess. The cleaners gossip about Romeo and Juliet.
- In pairs, become Juliet and the nurse. The nurse is reminiscing and giving Juliet advice on love.
- In groups of six, become the balcony on which Juliet stood when talking with Romeo.
- In pairs, become Romeo and Juliet in the balcony scene. Romeo is on the balcony and Juliet has a new and different speech to deliver to Romeo.
- In groups of four, come up with five titles of 'advice' books for Romeo and Juliet.
- Become the friar in his chambers, making his medicines. He tries some medicines on himself, with incredible results.
- In groups of ten, create the interior of the Capulet family tomb. Use sound to heighten the atmosphere.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Talk with your group. Which situations worked best for you? Why?
- 2 Which situations did not work well for you? Why?
- 3 Reflect individually. When did you find it difficult to be spontaneous? Can you remember the sorts of thoughts you had when you hesitated? Can you think of ways to counter the hesitant thoughts?
- 4 Did you tend to initiate in an improvisation or did you wait for others to contribute first? Why?
- 5 Is it more important to lead or to follow? Why?

Skill 2: making offers

Making offers is the ability of the actor to be imaginative, make positive and active contributions to the development of the plot, and establish characters, location and time. An offer may be verbal or physical. An example of a verbal offer is to say, 'Quickly, I think they're on the window ledge!' A physical offer may be a performer using mime to signal to another performer to follow them and walk quietly. Alternatively, a physical offer could be to become an inanimate object that another performer can use.



HINT

A good improvisation actor is always looking for opportunities to make offers that will benefit the overall improvisation.

EXERCISE

MAKING OFFERS

1 Physical offers

In pairs, improvise short scenes in which one partner makes a physical offer without dialogue. The other person accepts the offer, using speech if they choose, and the scene is quickly brought to a resolution. For example, the first person may make a physical offer by putting their hands over their eyes. Their partner accepts the offer by saying, 'don't open your eyes until I tell you, it's a surprise!' Then the second person makes a new physical offer to start a new situation.

2 World adventure

In pairs, pretend you are exploring the globe. Take it in turns to make suggestions about the next step in your adventure. You can make verbal or physical offers.

For example:

A Let's go to the Taj Mahal in India by submarine!

The pair improvises getting to and being at the Taj Mahal. B then mimes hopping on a dog sled.

A Some healthy looking huskies you've got there.

B I only train the best. Let's get to the glacier before sunset!

The action then moves to the new location.

Skill 3: yielding

Yielding is the ability of the performer to 'give way' to another performer's offer without blocking. In a sense it is like saying 'yes' to your fellow performers.



HINT

Improvising can be intimidating, especially when you don't know what is going to happen next. Be open to new possibilities and opportunities. Take risks. Resist the desire to control what is happening. Trust your fellow performers.

EXERCISE

YIELDING

1 Word by word

Work with a partner. You are going to work together to create one character. You will do this by taking turns to say words that, when joined together, create sentences. Stand shoulder to shoulder and put your inside arm around your partner's waist. You are only allowed to speak one word at a time. For example, the two of you could say, 'The - window - is - dirty - and - needs - cleaning'. You must speak in first person. For example, you should say, 'I - like - that - chair' not 'We - like - that - chair'. Move through the room together, describing objects and furnishings.





CHALLENGE

Try this word-by-word exercise with four people. The four people divide into pairs to create two characters. Put these characters in a situation; for example, they could act out a job interview or perhaps a shop assistant serving a customer. The challenge in this exercise is for the four performers to yield to each other to create conversation that flows smoothly between the two characters.



2 Word-at-a-time messaging

This exercise works best when the group watches one pair at a time. Working with a partner, stand shoulder to shoulder as you did in the previous exercise. The character receives and sends messages on a digital device. They must read the messages, describe pictures they are sent and then send replies—all said out loud, one word at a time.

3 Knock-knock, ring-ring, yoo-hoo

This is an exercise to be performed in front of the class. A central character is at home. He or she deals with the interruptions of people who knock at the front door or telephone, and with neighbours who call over the back fence. One volunteer stands to one side of the performing area as one of the characters who will knock at the door. Another volunteer stands to the other side as one of the characters who will make a phone call. A third volunteer becomes one of the neighbours who calls 'yoo-hoo' over the fence.

The challenge is for the central character to yield to the offers made by those who knock, ring or call over the back fence. The volunteers can be as many different characters as they like. It is wise to start slowly, but to increase the frequency of interruptions as the person in the centre becomes more confident in yielding to the offers presented. It is also possible for each character to knock, ring or call 'yoo-hoo' more than once. This helps to build up several plot lines.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Define 'yielding' and explain its purpose in improvisation.
- 2 In what ways did you yield to or cooperate with your partner?
- 3 Did you have difficulty in yielding to your partner? How could you improve in this area? Support your answer with examples.

Skill 4: focus

The skill of focus is the same as the element of drama focus, highlighting a dramatic moment, and is demonstrated when a performer or performers concentrate their attention on a person, object or event. This helps the audience direct their attention to a particular point in the performance space. Often the point of focus is indicated to the audience through the performer's use of their eyes. A strong use of focus on the dramatic action helps to determine what the improvisation is about (see also chapter 3, p. 60).

- The subject of the focus can vary; for example, it may be an object, a person or a group of people.
- The position of the focus can also vary; for example, it may be close to you, slightly distant or far away.

EXERCISE

FOCUS

1 Focus using objects

You will need a collection of assorted props for this exercise. Work with a partner and choose one object. Improvise a situation that uses the object as the point of focus. You can pick up the object and use it in a variety of ways, but it must always remain the point of focus.

2 Changing focus

Sometimes the focus of a situation will change during the improvisation. A performer in improvisation needs to be able to yield to the change of focus.

- Divide into groups of three. Choose an object.
- One member of the group begins to improvise a situation in which the object is the focus.
- The second performer joins the situation. The first performer widens their focus to include the second performer. Both performers focus on the object.
- The third performer enters the scene and stands at a distance from the pair.
- The first two performers shift their focus away from the object to the third performer.
- The scene continues with a focus on the third performer and is then brought to a conclusion.



CHALLENGE

Once the focus has included the third performer, reverse the order of focus by going back to two performers and the object, and finishing with one performer and the object.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Explain how the improvisation games you played today have helped you understand the importance of the skill of focus. Comment on any discoveries you made regarding strong offers and effective use of focus. Give examples from your own improvisation work to support your answers.

Skill 5: extending and advancing the action

The skill of 'extending' requires the performer to embellish, elaborate and fill out information. The skill of 'advancing' pushes the story along to the next stage. Extending and advancing can be achieved both physically and verbally. For example, in an improvisation, a murderer sharpens a knife. The murderer repeatedly holds up the knife to the light, testing its razor edge. Here the performer is extending the moment by making the knife seem more dangerous and threatening. The victim then advances the narrative by saying, 'I'll tell you everything. Just untie these ropes and take me to the warehouse'. The murderer cannot refuse this offer, and the story moves on to the next stage.



CHALLENGE

Create some of your own situations where you demonstrate the skills of advancing and extending. Present these to the class.



CHALLENGE

With a partner, follow the 'extending and advancing stories' exercise as described, but this time perform as much of the story as you can by including physical reactions, and by using sound and mime.

EXERCISE

EXTENDING AND ADVANCING

1 Extending and advancing actions

Individually, begin to mime a simple action; for example, opening a can of pet food. When you hear your teacher call the command 'Extend', you must continue with your activity but focus on making more of the particular moment. In the example of opening the can of pet food, you could extend the moment by focusing your attention on the action of attaching the can opener to the can. When you hear 'Advance' called out, you progress the opening of the can to its next stage; for example, turning the handle on the can opener. When you hear 'Extend', the turning of the handle of the can opener becomes more difficult. Repeat both 'Extend' and 'Advance' alternately until the activity is finished.

2 Extending and advancing stories

Divide into pairs and choose to be person A or person B. A begins by telling an imaginary story. B interrupts the story at points and asks for more information. Once A has extended the story by giving more information, A then proceeds with the story. For example, A may say, 'One day I was walking along the beach and found a chain'. B asks questions to extend the information, such as 'What did it look like?', 'What was it made of?' or 'Did it have any special markings?' A responds by yielding to the question. A then advances the story. For example, A may say, 'As I picked up the chain, someone grabbed my wrist'. B then asks another question to extend the narrative, and so on.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Write the skills of improvisation down the left-hand side of a blank page. Leave a gap of about 10 lines between each skill. Explain how you felt you achieved in each skill. Reflect on the exercises in which you participated.
- 2 Which skill areas do you feel best demonstrate your strengths in improvisation?
- 3 Which skill areas do you feel are challenges for you? Offer suggestions for how you could improve in these areas.
- 4 Explain the importance of each skill in creating a successful improvisation. Give examples from your class work to justify your response. Here is a sample logbook entry to help you:

I have just realised how important advancing and extending are as improvisation skills. We have practised these skills over two lessons. Extending allows the performer to make the most of the moment. Joe and I were improvising a struggle to get his character's pet dog into the back of a car. The more we struggled the more the audience laughed. When we felt the joke was over, we advanced by deciding to walk the dog to the vet.

2.3 Character types and status in improvisation

CHARACTER TYPES AND STATUS

In certain types of improvisations you may be given information about a character, while at other times you may be asked to create a character on the spot. To make improvisations interesting it is important to stretch the imagination to create a range of character types rather than relying on predictable characters. This approach gives characters greater complexity, or dimension. For example, a mum who is cooking in the kitchen could be changed to a mum who is packing to fly to China to oversee the building of a single-span bridge. A dad sitting in his chair not saying much and reading the paper could be changed to a dad who illustrates children's storybooks and is also practising to be an opera singer.

In improvisation you also need to be aware of the status relationship between your character and other characters. A character's status, or sense of power, often influences the way they behave. For example, a person who feels they are in charge may be more of a leader and may give instructions to other characters. A character of low status may be unsure in a situation and ask for assistance or advice. Audiences especially enjoy watching situations where the status of a character changes.

EXERCISE

CHARACTER TYPES AND STATUS

1 Character brainstorm

NAME AND AGE	OCCUPATION	HOBBIES	ACHIEVEMENTS	STATUS
Karol Kana, 38 years	Stockbroker	Surf-lifesaving	Mother of five happy children	High
Steve Nguyen, 20 years	Demolition expert	Raising Persian cats	Invented the 'safe' explosive	Low

Divide into groups of four. Create six interesting and unusual character types. Use the table above as an example.

- Choose four character types from the lists you created. Stand in a line, shoulder to shoulder, in front of the class.
- Each person must introduce themselves to the class as their character by telling their name, age, occupation, hobbies and achievements.

2 Status pairs

Divide into pairs and choose one of the following status relationships:

- parent and child
- teacher and student
- employer and employee
- pop star and fan.

With your partner, improvise a situation that explores the expected status relationship between the two characters. Although these are familiar situations, remember to try to devise characters that are interesting types rather than predictable stereotypes. Once you have performed in one of the listed situations, choose another and swap the status role that each person played. This will provide each performer with an opportunity to experience being characters of high and low status.





3 Reversing status

Divide into pairs and choose two characters. In this exercise, the expected status relationship of characters is reversed. For example, a parent character is low status and the child is high status. The child takes on high status responsibilities, such as giving advice and permission to go out.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 How did you use your body language to communicate your character's relative status?
- 2 Describe one character you played in the exercises you have just completed. Identify the features of your character that you felt made them unusual and interesting.
- 3 Why is it important to create complex characters in improvisation?

2.4 Improvisation exercises

The following improvisation exercises are designed to test and challenge your improvisation skills. They also require you to demonstrate an understanding of the elements of drama, because you will need to spontaneously establish characters, situation, tension, focus, and place and time. The meaning of your improvisation will be communicated through your use of imagination, body language, gesture and voice. This may seem a little daunting at first, but after practising these exercises you will find your level of skill will improve, as will your improvisations.

EXERCISE

IMPROVISE!

Work carefully through each of the following exercises over an extended period of time. This will allow you to focus on improving your incorporation of improvisation skills and the elements of drama. It is also recommended that you revisit different improvisation exercises in later lessons alongside your use of improvisation as part of the process of creating and making performance work.

1 Improvisation tag

- One person stands in front of the group and mimes an activity. When it is clear what the person is doing, your teacher calls 'Freeze'.
- Another volunteer joins that person and makes an offer to introduce an entirely new situation, using the frozen position of the first person as the starting point.
- After the pair have improvised for a while, your teacher calls 'Freeze' and the pair freeze the action.
- Another volunteer from the group taps one of the frozen pair on the shoulder and that person sits down.
- The frozen position of the remaining person is the stimulus for a new situation. The volunteer observes the frozen position and creates a new situation by making a verbal or physical offer.
- The scene continues until your teacher calls 'Freeze', then a new volunteer is chosen.



HINT

Don't expect that all situations will work well straight away. Be patient—the more you practise, the more skilled you become.



HINT

Be prepared for side coaching from your teacher. The side coaching will help improve the improvisation and requires you to listen to the coaching tips while still performing.





2 Hidden objective

The group is given a situation. Each performer is given a hidden objective on a slip of paper. They must attempt to achieve their objective in the least obvious way by the end of the improvisation. The audience is then asked to identify each character's objective.

3 Whose line is it?

Each class member writes down lines on slips of paper. They can be statements or questions. These lines are only to be revealed during the performance. Two performers select two or three slips of paper each and are given a location. During the improvisation, the performers must include the lines on the slips of paper they selected. They must yield to the content and implications of each line, and extend and advance the action accordingly. It is good to warn your fellow performer that you are about to include a line by introducing it somehow. For instance, you might precede the line with 'So I said to her/him ...' or 'I asked for a newspaper and he replied ...'

IMPROVISATION LOCATIONS, SITUATIONS AND CHARACTERS

The following table gives some sample places, situations and characters that you can use in your improvisation practice. Choose from across the three categories.

PLACES	SITUATIONS	CHARACTERS
Singles' dinner for six	Solving a riddle	Overweight politician
Teachers' self-defence class	Looking for love	Radio announcer who specialises in 'love song dedications'
Hens' night	Selling a new product	Clairvoyant
Ferry captain's birthday party	Revealing a secret	Footballer
Duck pond at the botanical gardens	Chasing a criminal	Scientist
The wrong room	Spying on a foreign agent	Sailor
Customs at London Airport	Building a house	University student
Photographer's darkroom	Creating a fragrance	Bachelor
Change room at a swimming pool	Planning a holiday	Music video host
An ostrich farm	Learning a hobby	Goldminer
On the deck of the <i>Titanic</i>	Auditioning for a television show	Survivor of a shipwreck
Fireworks factory	Speaking to the deceased	Eskimo
Climbing a bridge	Shearing sheep	Eccentric artist
Feathers, sequins and football convention	Painting a mural	Matchmaker
Crocodile farm	Repairing a car	Cowardly rebel
	Diving for treasure	



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Which exercises did you enjoy the most? Why?
- 2 Did you have difficulty finding ways to end improvisations confidently? Make suggestions for how you could improve in this area.
- 3 Describe two characters you found unusual and interesting from one of the exercises you observed.
- 4 Explain how you feel you have improved in any of the skill areas of improvisation.
- 5 Is teamwork important in improvisation? Explain your reasoning.



2.5 Playback Theatre

THE POWER OF PERSONAL STORIES

Playback Theatre is an original form of improvisational theatre. It was first created in 1975 by Jonathan Fox, Jo Salas, and the original Playback Theatre Company in the Hudson Valley of New York. In a Playback Theatre performance, audience members tell stories from their lives, and watch them enacted on the spot.

As a Playback Theatre performance progresses, the audience becomes involved in sharing stories. This experience of sharing creates an atmosphere of recognition and understanding because participants relate to each other's experiences. The performance does not seek to solve people's problems by giving answers; rather, it provides an opportunity to reflect. Some of the conventions of a Playback Theatre performance are shown in the following diagram.

Non-realistic acting techniques are used to help heighten particular moments; for example, to portray an audience member's (storyteller's) dreams or to draw out deeper issues in the stories.

An open performance space is used. There are no special sets. The conductor sits with the storyteller to one side of the performance space. The actors sit on chairs in a line against the back wall of the performance space.

Realistic acting techniques are used to help portray characters and real life situations truthfully.

Non-realistic acting techniques are used to help heighten particular moments; for example, to portray an audience member's (storyteller's) dreams or to draw out deeper issues in the stories.

A 'conductor' acts as master of ceremonies. The conductor's role is to guide the proceedings and establish an atmosphere of trust to encourage audience members to share their stories.

All performance is improvised from the stories told by audience members. The performers aim to represent the stories accurately and provide some insight by 'playing back' the stories to the audience.



The stories can include simple events, events from the past and dreams. The story must belong to the storyteller because this makes the Playback Theatre performance more engaging for the storyteller and the audience.

The performers incorporate transformation of objects to help suggest locations and objects, as well as to create symbols.

A percussionist or other musician is included to add atmosphere and sound effects during performances.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 List some of your favourite family stories and share them with a partner.
- 2 Imagine you had to pick people in your class to play the characters in your story. Who would you choose? Why?
- 3 Who would you choose to play you? Why?
- 4 Imagine you have been chosen to play the role of another class member in their story. What acting skills would you need to utilise to perform the character truthfully and sensitively?

PLAYBACK THEATRE ACTOR TRAINING

Playback Theatre requires the performer to listen to, interpret and perform the stories of others with little or no preparation. Playback Theatre performers undertake regular and extensive training. They need to be:

- careful and sensitive listeners
- creative and skilled improvisers
- versatile performers
- physically strong and flexible.

PLAYBACK THEATRE EXERCISES

The following exercises are divided into three sections:

- 1 Representing feelings.** These exercises help explore how movement and voice can be used to portray feelings. They also help develop a sense of unity and trust within the group.
- 2 Telling stories.** These exercises help you practise listening to and retelling stories both in words and in performance.
- 3 Non-realistic acting techniques.** In these exercises you will explore how non-realistic acting techniques can be incorporated into Playback Theatre performance work.



HINT

Take time working with the Playback Theatre exercises. Your teacher will work as a conductor and will offer side coaching and advice to help you in your work.

EXERCISE

REPRESENTING FEELINGS

1 Recalling and reflecting feelings

As a group, stand in a circle. On a signal from your teacher, everyone makes a sound and movement that expresses how they feel in the following situations. Each response must be truthful:

- breaking up for holidays at the end of last year
- waking up on your last birthday
- getting your school report at the end of last semester
- a sporting match that your team lost
- how you felt when you came into the room.

2 Mixed feelings

In this exercise, you and a partner will represent conflicting emotions. For example, you may feel happy that your friend won a scholarship to study overseas, but also feel disappointed that they will be leaving. To represent these two emotions, stand one behind the other. The person in front completes a movement, sound, word and/or phrase to represent one of the two emotions. Once the person in front has completed their representation, they crouch down. Then the person behind reveals themselves and uses movement and sound to portray the other emotion.

3 Multiple emotion machines

As a group, choose two of the given situations. Discuss the range of emotions you may experience in these situations. Create a group machine that represents



HINT

In these exercises you need to be spontaneous and trust your instincts about the best decisions to make in your performance work.



HINT

Feelings are abstract. Using sound, words and movement can help give physical representation to how we may be feeling in a situation. Be creative and imaginative in the ways you represent feelings.



these emotions. Each person who joins the machine contributes a repeated movement, sound, word and/or phrase to help sum up the experience. The situations to choose from are:

- being called to the principal's office
- winning the lottery
- being asked out on a date
- seeing your best friend trip and fall just before the finish line in a race.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Describe how one pair used body language, movement and sound to portray the conflicting emotions they represented.
- 2 Imagine you are teaching a drama group how to make an emotion machine that uses rhythm and movement. List five reminders you would give to the group to help make the machine work effectively.

EXERCISE

TELLING STORIES

1 Telling and listening

Divide into pairs and take it in turns to tell a personal story to your partner. The story must be true and can be about any situation at any time. Listen to your partner's story. Once they have finished, repeat the story to your partner; try to recall all the details as accurately as possible. Once you have retold your partner's story, check with your partner to see how accurate you were. Some ideas for stories are embarrassing moments, a memorable holiday, the greatest achievement or the biggest disappointment.

2 Telling, listening and performing

Find a new partner. Each person will tell the other a story. Once you have heard your partner's story, you will playback their story by acting out the story in mime. In the playback of the story, aim to be as accurate as possible. Once you have finished, check with your partner to see how accurate you were.

3 Machine playback

Your teacher will guide you through this exercise so that all elements of an actual story are represented in a 'machine'.

One person tells a personal story to the group. Your teacher discusses with the group the different aspects of the story. Each group member contributes a repeated movement, sound, word and/or phrase to the machine to help represent an aspect of the story. For example, if the story is about dropping a bottle of drink in the supermarket, the machine will show the dropping of the bottle, the feeling of embarrassment, the giggles of onlookers, the repeated sound of crashing glass, and so on.

Volunteers continue to add to the machine until the group senses instinctively when the machine is complete, at which point the group must simultaneously



HINT

It is important to remember that, as a Playback Theatre performer, you are looking for the key moments and issues in each story. These should be highlighted in your playback of the story.



HINT

Listening is easier if you actively engage yourself in the story by imagining what it would be like to 'be in the shoes' of the storyteller. This requires an effort of concentration. Do not interrupt your partner when they tell their story. If you want to ask questions for clarification, do this once your partner has finished the story.



stop the action of the machine. Once the machine has stopped, the participants look to the teller of the story. The conductor checks with the storyteller that the machine is an accurate representation of the story.

4 Story playback

For this exercise you will need to work in groups of six. Each person takes a turn telling a short personal story. They then pick the members of their group whom they would like to play the essential characters. The group members then playback the story as truthfully and accurately as possible.



HINT

Not everyone needs to be part of the machines in exercise 3. Sometimes it is helpful to observe so that you develop a sense of when a machine seems complete.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What did you enjoy most about seeing your story performed?
- 2 What skills did you feel were tested when you listened to and performed others' stories?

EXERCISE

NON-REALISTIC ACTING TECHNIQUES

1 Incorporating non-realistic acting techniques

When playing back a story, sometimes it is important to magnify the important moments. These are usually the climactic moments or moments of greatest tension in the story. You can use some non-realistic acting techniques to help draw out these moments for the storyteller and the audience. These techniques can include slow motion, exaggerated movement, exaggerated sound, mechanical movements and the transformation of objects. Try each of the following:

- work with a partner and represent the fear that someone may be feeling as they search for an intruder
- work with a partner and represent the disappointment someone feels when their date fails to turn up
- work in groups of three and show the anxiety someone may be feeling as they realise they have been caught lying.

2 Non-realistic techniques and playing back stories

Form groups of six. Each person needs to share a personal story that is a dream, daydream, eerie occurrence or bizarre situation. The group chooses one group member's story to playback. The group must use one or more of the following non-realistic acting techniques in the playing back of the story: slow motion, exaggerated movement, exaggerated sound, mechanical movements or transformation of objects.

3 Character thoughts

Form groups of four. Devise a fictional situation in which we hear the thoughts of two characters. The situation may be someone plucking up the courage to ask another person out on a date or it may be a couple having an argument at a restaurant and then refusing to talk to each other for the rest of the meal. The performers playing the characters' thoughts 'shadow' the character by standing just behind them and speaking the character's thoughts aloud at suitable moments.



HINT

As a group, share actual moments from personal stories and re-enact them, incorporating non-realistic acting techniques.



HINT

For exercise 3, use an actual story from your group. Choose volunteers and spend 20 minutes rehearsing a playback of the situation, which you will then perform to the class. Include the use of character thoughts.



HINT

The improvisation skill of yielding is particularly important to the success of exercise 3.



HINT

Although your stories may contain more characters than you have people, it is a good challenge for the performers to find ways of picking the important characters and moments rather than including every small detail.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Explain how non-realistic techniques can draw out aspects of a personal story. Provide an example to illustrate your ideas.
- 2 Evaluate your group's ability to incorporate characters' thoughts into the performance. What skills are needed to include this technique successfully?
- 3 What impact do characters' thoughts have on the audience?

STEPS IN A PLAYBACK THEATRE PERFORMANCE

- The conductor welcomes the audience and explains Playback Theatre, including the procedure of a Playback Theatre performance.
- The conductor starts a warm-up activity to encourage the audience to share their personal experiences. The audience is asked to share, for example, their feelings about their day, and words that sum up a particular event.
- Performers create a machine, using repeated sound and movement that incorporates the suggestions of the audience.
- The conductor invites an audience member (storyteller) to share a story. The storyteller sits with the conductor to one side of the performing area.
- The storyteller tells their story to the audience. The type of story can vary. For example, it may be simple or complex, humorous or moving.
- The Playback Theatre performers listen carefully to the details of the story.
- The conductor asks the storyteller questions to help them express all the important aspects of the story, especially feelings and reactions.
- The conductor invites the storyteller to choose performers to play the characters in the story.
- The performers who are not selected are free to participate as background characters or as a chorus using abstract movement and sound to portray feelings, mood and atmosphere.
- The performers then playback the story.
- At the end of the story the performers look at the storyteller to 'give back' the story.
- The conductor then asks the storyteller their opinion of the playback, including its accuracy and any insights they had.
- The storyteller is thanked for their contribution and a new volunteer is chosen.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Invite an audience to a Playback Theatre performance by your class. Your audience may be another Drama class. Your teacher or a student in your class can act as conductor of the performance. As a class, follow the steps for a Playback Theatre performance.

- 1 Recount your experiences of the Playback Theatre performance.
- 2 Describe two moments you found important or valuable in the performance.
- 3 Reflect on the performance and list three or four points that you feel are important to remember for your next Playback Theatre performance.
- 4 What dramatic techniques and/or performance styles do playback performers have available to them when performing in front of an audience? Discuss how some of the performers in your class effectively used these strategies.

PERFORMANCE TASK



2.6 Performance task: improvisation

The task

In this task, you and your teacher will evaluate your ability as an improvisation performer. You will need to draw on the skills of spontaneity, making offers, yielding, focus, and extending and advancing.

Performance preparation

Complete the following steps to prepare for the improvisation performance task. The preparation tasks will provide a list of ideas to use for the performance task. Your teacher will choose ideas from this list for you to use as the basis for your improvisation.

Step 1 Divide into groups of four.

Step 2 Each group is given one of the following elements of drama:

- characters
- situation
- focus
- time and place.

Step 3 Each group is to create and write six options for their element of drama. The options need to be written down so they are not forgotten. Use the following table of examples to help in your preparation.

ELEMENT OF DRAMA	POSSIBLE OPTION
CHARACTERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two deep-sea divers• A family of ants• Three backpackers in India
SITUATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Travelling on an overseas holiday• Moving into a new house• Donating blood
FOCUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To crack the secret code• To reveal a secret• To ask someone on a date
TIME AND PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early morning on a mountain top• Under a spaceship in 2100• In a well at night

Step 4 Share your ideas with the members of your class or write all the ideas on a whiteboard or blackboard to create one central table.



HINT

You will learn about the elements of drama in more depth in chapter 3.

Improvisation performance

Your teacher will now give your group of four a selection of ideas chosen from the table generated by the class.

During the improvisation you are to:

- include all the ideas that your teacher has selected
- establish a clear situation
- establish and build tension
- use appropriate language and movement.



Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually, using a list of criteria.

These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of the chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- create an interesting character type
- be spontaneous and make useful and appropriate offers
- yield
- advance and extend the action
- manipulate vocal dynamics and movement effectively to suit character and/or object
- work successfully as an ensemble
- build tension in your improvisation
- bring the improvisation to a conclusion.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Write an evaluation of your achievement in your improvisation. Use the performance checklist (above) to help you identify your strengths and the areas in which you could improve.
- 2 Write an evaluation of one other member of your group using the performance checklist. Let the person read and respond to your comments.
- 3 Write an evaluation of a group whose improvisation you felt was strong. Discuss the development of plot, characters and tension, and how the focus was maintained. Did the group arrive at an effective ending? Why was the ending effective?
- 4 Offer three reasons that you feel explain why improvisation is seen as an essential component of a performer's training. In your answer, consider the benefits of utilising improvisation both in rehearsal and in performance.

Performance task: improvisation

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- explore and utilise the skills of improvisation
- incorporate the elements of drama in improvisations
- create and sustain character types in improvisations
- contribute and incorporate your own ideas to create improvised performance work
- utilise skills of listening, interpretation and improvisation to 'playback' personal stories.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you prepared for your performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributing your own ideas? • completing 'collaborate and think critically' questions as required? <p>Have you selected and included the skills of improvisation, vocal dynamics and movement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively communicating role/character and/or object through the use of movement and mime? • incorporating effective use of vocal dynamics? • being spontaneous and making useful and appropriate offers? • yielding to the offers of other performers? • extending and advancing the action? • bringing the improvisation to an appropriate conclusion? 				
<p>Responding</p> <p>Have you demonstrated knowledge of skills by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describing and explaining how the skills of improvisation create a coherent performance? • explaining how improvisers can make effective offers to build tension? 				

Comments



3

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA: A FRAMEWORK

WHY STUDY THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA?

The elements of drama are the essential, integrated ingredients of drama, and help actors, directors, playwrights, designers and students of Drama to make engaging performance work and to respond to performance work. You have already begun to work with the elements of drama in chapters 1 and 2, and in this chapter you will look closely at each element and complete activities to communicate your understanding.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 3.1 What are the elements of drama?
- 3.2 The human context: characters, roles and relationships, and situation
- 3.3 Tension and focus
- 3.4 Communicating through the elements of drama and staging
- 3.5 Performance task: creating dramatic meaning

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- list and define each of the elements of drama
- collaborate to ask and answer questions about the elements of drama in both the making and performance of drama
- communicate dramatic meaning by effectively integrating the elements of drama in a short performance.





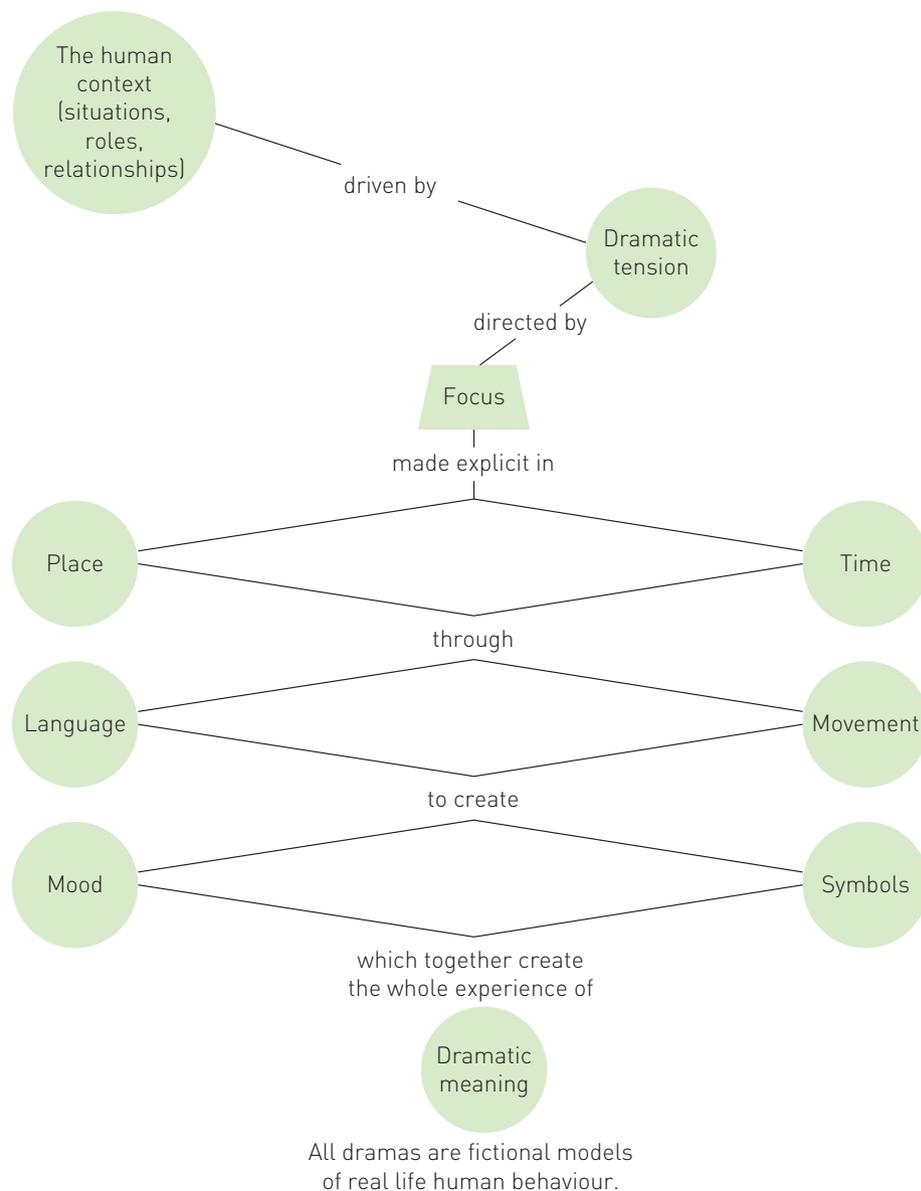
iStockphoto.com/eltkor

3.1 What are the elements of drama?

For a long time, many thinkers tried to find ways to define drama and theatre, and literary scholars used the written script as the only basis for understanding drama. To others this was a problem because these studies ignored many of the aspects of drama and theatre that make it unique as a live performance.

Two Australian researchers and teachers of Drama, Professor John O’Toole and Professor Brad Haseman, created their own model of the elements of drama to try to capture and explain what might be common to all drama and theatre. Over time, this model has been very helpful to students of Drama and has been adapted and included in the Australian Curriculum for the Arts: Drama.

The elements of drama referred to in *Centre Stage* help to define what drama is in contrast to other art forms such as film, dance, music or visual arts. While there are some similarities across art forms, drama is unique in that the making and performing of drama and theatre is a collaborative process and performances are dynamic, happening at a specific moment in time, affecting the audience and the participants in many complex ways.



Haseman and O’Toole’s model of the elements of drama has been adapted and used by Drama teachers to help students understand the components of drama and theatre in performance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY AND STAGING

All performance work relies on telling a story, be it realistic, non-realistic, comic or dramatic. The staging of stories relies on all the elements of drama working dynamically together to focus dramatic action and create dramatic meaning. All Drama students need to develop skills in constructing narratives and skills in staging stories. By developing a knowledge and understanding of the features of narrative (story) and the elements of drama, you will create powerful and engaging performance work.

Directors, playwrights and the elements of drama

The best way to understand the features of creating narratives and the use of the elements of drama is to actually make drama and theatre. While it is very important that you learn how to act, it is also very useful to develop skills as directors and playwrights, as these practitioners in particular see the play from the audience's perspective. When you are working with the material in *Centre Stage*, you will need to work not only as actor but also as director and playwright. This will mean switching 'hats' during rehearsal and in reflection time so that you can see the development of your play from many different perspectives. By becoming more aware of these practitioner perspectives and how these practitioners manipulate the elements of drama, you will make your own decisions as playwrights and directors more effectively.

WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA?

The following activities will help you as a class to work out what you already know about this topic. This is helpful because gaps in knowledge or skill can be identified and existing knowledge can be built on. This helps challenge you and keeps your learning interesting.

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COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Think individually about what you consider to be the essential ingredients of drama and theatre. You might like to conduct an Internet search for images and/or pages under the heading 'the elements of drama'. It does not matter if you have extensive experience in drama and theatre or not. Jot some of your ideas down.
- 2 Work with a partner and share your ideas.
- 3 As a class, write up all the ideas that came to mind. If someone shares an idea that lots of other people have, mark this idea as a popular one.
- 4 Group the ideas into categories and eliminate items that you feel are not as important as others. Debate why some ideas are more essential than others.
- 5 In groups, choose one element of drama and talk about how this element might be an aspect of a live theatre performance. Use an imaginary performance or a performance everyone in the group might have seen to help you.
- 6 In groups, using large sheets of paper or giant sticky notes and pens, draw diagrams to show all of the elements of drama and how you think they might be connected to each other.

..

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HINT

As you work through the elements in this chapter and in other chapters, you'll notice that the elements overlap. For example, character and relationship conflict creates tension. This affects how actors use voice and movement and also creates a certain mood and atmosphere.

3.2 The human context: characters, roles and relationships, and situation

WHAT IS THE HUMAN CONTEXT?

Learning about how the elements of drama can be grouped together points out the importance of seeing the elements of drama as a dynamic integrated, moving framework rather than a list. The human context is the combination of one element of drama, characters, roles and relationships with another element of drama: situation. Read the following explanations and the performance examples. Complete the exercises that follow to develop your understanding.

CHARACTERS, ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Humans have always watched each other represent stories as live performance. The heart of any story lies with the characters, the ‘who?’ of the plays. Just as important are the characters’ relationships with each other, with their environment and their relationship with ideas and beliefs.

Actors, playwrights and directors think critically and creatively to know as much as they can about characters and/or roles in terms of their values, attitudes, intentions, and actions and relationships. Thinking about relationships is important because it is the connections and interactions between people, ideas, places and situations that affect the dramatic action. Here are some questions you might ask to help you create or understand character/role and relationships.

Context and status

- Who are the characters and roles in this play?
- Who are the protagonist/s and antagonist/s?
- How are the characters/roles connected to each other?
- How much or how little power (status) do they have?
- What are the characters’ relationships with each other and/or with the ideas at hand and/or with the situation and/or with the environment?
- How do they feel about what is happening?

Objectives and motivations

- What do they want?
- Why do they want this?

Beliefs, values and attitudes

- What are their values, attitudes and beliefs?

EXAMPLE

The main characters in this imaginary play are three scientists. They are different to each other in age, gender and cultural background. Each has very different scientific knowledge to contribute to the task, and this influences their relationships with each other.



Unsure about their ability to achieve the task. Believes their location is a constant threat to success.

Wants to improve the environment. Loves working in danger.

Wants fame for their achievements. Has great respect for the environment.



HINT

The difference between a role and a character is that a role focuses on type and stereotype; characters are detailed and specific.

SITUATION

Added to the ‘characters, roles and relationships’ element of drama is another important element, ‘situation’.

Situation includes the characters, setting and circumstances. Circumstances can include where, when, what has happened, what might happen and what is happening. Dramatic action is created through the combining of circumstances, character wants, needs, values and relationships. Some questions you can ask to create or to understand the situation are:

- What is happening?
- Where is it happening?
- When is it happening?
- Why is it happening?

See if you can find the answers to these questions by looking at the example.

EXAMPLE

Three scientists are on a remote volcano searching for a small, almost-extinct creature. The creature’s saliva is believed to contain incredible medicinal properties that could help save the lives of many thousands of people who have become ill with a mysterious and highly contagious disease.



EXERCISE

THE HUMAN CONTEXT

- Divide into small groups. Each group member individually creates three original characters and three original situations. Write down ideas for character details including age, occupation, social status and your ideas for situations. What is happening? Where is it happening? Why is it happening? When is it happening?
- From the collection of characters and situations created by the group, randomly select one character for each group member and one situation for the group. Group members cannot play a character they created. Spend some time discussing how these characters might be connected and how they might show their status, beliefs, values and attitudes in the situation. You can also do this visually by placing the situation in the centre of a page or your screen and the characters around this. Draw lines of connection similar to a family tree and write brief notes to explain the links.
- When you have finalised your ideas, create and rehearse a short three-minute role-play, making sure that each character has a moment of focus. Present the role-plays to the class.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

When each group presents their role-play, each class member is to choose one character and respond to the following questions:

- Who is the character? How do you know?
- What is their status and why do they have this relationship with the characters in the scene? Give an example as evidence to support your opinion.
- What is the main relationship the character has with a belief, value or idea? Give an example to show how you know this.

An example of a student's reflection:

I chose to write about the character of the language translator. They were connected to the ambassador as a new employee and the other workers at the embassy seemed to not like them. Their status was low because they were needed to help translate at an important meeting, but did not have the skills to do this. In fact, in the end, they had a lot of power because you realised that they didn't have a motivation to do the job well so it didn't matter if they made a mistake or not. From my viewpoint, I thought that they seemed incompetent because you should be motivated to do a job well. You could see the translator's lack of enthusiasm in their use of body language. They slouched, and from the way they rolled their eyes and turned their head away from what they were meant to listen to, they seemed disinterested. This made me think their objective was to get the job done as quickly as possible. This objective was in conflict with their employer, who wanted to have a highly successful meeting. I am wondering if the boss had a strong connection to developing relationships between the two countries but the translator was not so connected to this idea. I wonder why he felt this way?

3.3 Tension and focus

TENSION: THE ENGINE OF DRAMA

Tension is the engine of drama as it drives the dramatic action forward. A simple example is an action movie where the audience is engaged by the battle between good and evil. Even though they know that good will probably win, it is still exciting to watch the battles. Usually, action films contain a series of battles starting with smaller confrontations and gradually leading to the biggest confrontation towards the end of the story. Each battle is its own little narrative in itself, containing a beginning, middle and end. Tension is built by the sequencing of the dramatic action to show two opposing forces in competition with each other—sometimes it seems like one side will win and then it seems like the other side will. This leads to the audience feeling anticipation and excitement as they wonder, 'Who will win? What will happen?'



DRIVEN BY

Some points about tension:

- 1 Tension is responsible for how the audience engages with the performance and how they emotionally respond to and think about the dramatic action.
- 2 Tension is not only in serious dramas—tension is also an important aspect of comedy.
- 3 The level or degree of tension is not fixed and changes constantly during a performance.
- 4 Usually, tension increases as the dramatic action progresses to a climactic point somewhere near the conclusion; this is referred to as ‘rising tension’.

Tension can be created through:

- conflict **within** characters
- conflict **in** character relationships
- a **mystery**
- **tasks** that need to be achieved
- moments of **surprise** when the unexpected happens
- **dramatic irony** where the audience is aware of things that the characters are not, which gives the audience a different understanding to that of the characters
- the individual audience members’ **connections** between the performance and their own lives.

Some questions you might ask yourself to create or understand tension are:

- What was at stake for the characters in this play? What did they lose or gain and why?
- How did I feel at different times during the performance? (For example, hopeful, excited, nervous, fearful, curious, surprised.) Why did I feel this way?
- Why did the choices of the characters and the action of the drama contribute to me feeling this way?
- If I was making my own play, how might I manipulate the elements of drama to create a feeling of tension for an audience?
- What questions do I want the audience to ask themselves, or what questions about the characters/plot/ideas/messages will help to create tension?
- What problems do or did the characters face?
- What made or would make the problems more difficult to overcome?

EXAMPLE

The task for the three scientists is to search and find an almost-extinct creature at a remote volcano. The volcano is threatening to erupt, which may prevent the scientists from safely capturing the creature and saving it from extinction. The audience anticipates a disastrous moment as time runs out for the scientists to complete this task. This tension pushes the characters and the situation to the climax.



HINT

Dramatic irony is a literary device used in theatre and film to heighten tension. When dramatic irony is used, the audience knows more about the causes and circumstances of the dramatic action than the characters do. An example of this might be that the audience sees a character alone in a room secretly hiding a knife under their coat. When another character arrives in the scene, the audience feels suspense as they wonder what the character with the knife will do to the other character.



HINT

The actor's focus, rather than the element of drama focus, is their ability to show conviction through their use of imagination and concentration to pretend to be in the world of the play. By committing to the moment of acting in this way the actor helps the audience believe in the world being created in performance.

FOCUS

In the elements of drama, focus has two interpretations:

- 1 Framing the action
- 2 Highlighting a dramatic moment.

Framing the action

Choosing a central question or statement that the play is asking the audience creates a particular viewpoint. For example, a play about a crime might ask the big question, 'Is crime ever justifiable?' What you and your fellow collaborators think about this question is informed by who you are, where you live, what your culture is and what your experiences are. Your thoughts and ideas in relation to your play are your viewpoints, and it is likely that these viewpoints will be communicated through how you manipulate the elements of drama in conjunction with your ability to create a narrative or story.

Selecting what is shown to the audience in the dramatic action or narrative (story) and how it is sequenced is referred to as 'framing the action', and this communicates your viewpoints to the audience. Framing the action is also essential in creating tension as it directs the audience to consider, anticipate and wonder about what will happen in the performance. Here are some possibilities for framing the action in a play about a crime:

- 1 The plot of the play could focus and frame the action around the criminals to explore a viewpoint and idea about how our upbringing can affect our choices
- 2 Tension directed by focus: A focus on the consequences of the criminal's upbringing might direct the audience to feel a sense of dread and concern as they know the criminal cannot escape their past without help.
- 3 The dramatic action could focus on the crime as it happens and explore viewpoints and ideas about how different genders respond in a crisis.
- 4 A focus on the crime as it happens might direct the audience to feel fear for the bystanders' safety and to wonder who will be able to escape.
- 5 The play might focus and frame the action around only those people who know the criminals, exploring viewpoints and ideas about how communities can contribute to people's actions and behaviours.
- 6 A focus on the communities connected to the criminals might direct the audience to feel concern for society's responsibility for others and to wonder how this might be avoided.

Each of these options presents a different viewpoint and focuses, and 'frames the action' in a different way. Some questions you might ask to create a focus to frame the action are:

- What was the question that the audience was asked to consider?
- What are our ideas and viewpoints about this question?
- How did the moments and situations in the dramatic action create tension and maintain a focus on our core question, express our viewpoints and ideas, and challenge the audience to think more deeply about the issues?

EXAMPLE OF FOCUS: FRAMING THE ACTION

Our play example of the three scientists frames the action using the question 'How can we work together to save the environment and prevent disease?' This focus question frames the action to emphasise the relationships between the scientists and their ideas

and values. By making the focus of the play a question about how to cooperate with each other in difficult circumstances and the importance of sharing knowledge and skills, the dramatic action is then centred on the scientists and the choices they make. The audience wants the scientists to cooperate but is directed to wonder if this is possible given the difficult circumstances. This framing of the action creates messages about how people can work together to find good solutions in the face of danger, and how humankind needs to understand and foster the natural environment for everyone's benefit



Highlighting a dramatic moment

This second meaning for focus refers to how directors, playwrights, performers and designers manipulate staging to draw the audience's attention to a particular point of focus in a dramatic moment. This can be achieved in a number of ways including the use of:

- the actor's gaze
- gesture
- contrast; for example, one actor moving while the others are still
- proxemics, such as spatial arrangement and levels
- production elements, such as lighting, sound, set, properties and costume.

It is also important to remember that unlike a point of focus in a photograph or painting, in theatre (and in film) the point of focus can be moving as well as still. Some questions you might ask to create a focus to highlight a dramatic moment are:

- Where was the audience's attention at key moments in the play?
- How did the actors' use of body, voice and ensemble focus the audience's attention?
- How were the stage space and spatial relationships used to create points of focus for the audience?
- Why were these moments important for the audience?



HINT

'Proxemics' is a term used to cover how spatial relationships between characters and objects in an environment or space create meaning. For example, if someone stands very close to someone else, this might be interpreted as closeness, but could also be seen as intimidation depending on other messages we read such as body language.

EXAMPLE OF FOCUS: HIGHLIGHTING A DRAMATIC MOMENT

Let's continue with our play of the three scientists and their search for the creature. Just as the tension of the play increases, the volcano begins to erupt and the scientists feel they will not find the creature, they discover the creature has secretly climbed into one of the scientist's backpacks to escape the danger of the volcano. This is a moment of surprise and changes the tension as the scientists are no longer under pressure and can escape. The mood shifts from a fearful feeling to a hopeful feeling as this moment of discovery heightens the scientists'



excitement that their plan may be realised. This moment is made clear to the audience through the placement of the actors in the stage space and their use of gaze, body language and gesture to draw the audience's attention to the moment of finding the creature in the backpack. The proxemics of the placement of the scientists on stage shows their individual status has changed from the start of the play. Now they are standing close together and on roughly equal levels.

EXERCISE

TENSION AND FOCUS ACTING EXERCISE

Work in small groups. Choose one of the following ways to create tension. Create a question to focus and frame the action, and end the scene using focus to highlight a dramatic moment. Collaborate to create, prepare and rehearse a three to five minute scene. Some examples are provided in the following table. You might like to use and adapt these examples for your performance.

WAY TO CREATE TENSION	EXAMPLE	QUESTION TO FOCUS AND FRAME THE ACTION	END SCENE USING FOCUS TO HIGHLIGHT A DRAMATIC MOMENT
1 CONFLICT WITHIN CHARACTERS	Some friends insist that one friend lies to their parents so they can go out. The friend is not sure about doing this but does not want to be rejected by the group.	Who has more influence, parents or friends?	In the last moment of the scene, the friend is forced to make a choice. They are placed centre stage facing the audience. As the other friends exit upstage left, the lights dim except for the light on the remaining actor. They pause, thinking about what has been said to them and then make a decision.
2 CONFLICT IN CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS	A relative is asked to babysit their nieces and nephews, and the children don't respect their authority.	Why won't children respect their elders?	At the last moment of the scene, the relative faints from exhaustion down stage left. The children, who should be in bed, are standing upstage of the relative one behind the other. The parents open the door and their gaze increases the focus on the relative who has fainted.





3 A MYSTERY	A man has gone missing and no one can contact him.	What happens when you break trust?	At the last moment of the scene, the detective solves the crime. A gun is discovered in the desk drawer located down stage right. Everyone on stage looks in this direction and the gun is held up high to give it more focus, emphasising its importance.
4 TASKS THAT NEED TO BE ACHIEVED	A husband and wife renovation team are desperate to win the 'renovate your dog kennel' competition	What is the cost of ambition?	At the last moment of the scene, the couple are fighting over choices of design for the dog kennel and they destroy what they have built so far.
5 MOMENTS OF SURPRISE WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS	Backpackers are camping on a mountaintop. When they go to leave, the rope bridge suddenly gives way.	Where does courage come from?	At the last moment of the scene, one backpacker leaps onto a dangling, frayed rope and saves the group by swinging to the other side of the mountain.
6 DRAMATIC IRONY	A young shop worker, who has been fighting with their boss, decides to steal money as revenge. Before the boss arrives, we see the worker taking money and hiding it under the bench. The boss arrives and, unexpectedly, apologises and thanks the shop worker for all their hard work and then leaves.	Can revenge be justified?	At the last moment of the scene, the shop worker pulls out the money from under the bench, hesitates for a moment, and then decides to put the money in their bag.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Watch each group's performance and respond using the following questions.

- 1 What type of tension was used in the scene? Was there more than one type used?
- 2 How did the tension change and why?
- 3 What are you wondering after watching the scene? Find answers to these questions.
- 4 How did the group use the stage space, levels, movement and voice to create a strong final moment of focus on the dramatic action?
- 5 To help the group improve, what feedback can you give them?



3.4 Communicating through the elements of drama and staging

During playwriting and collaborative rehearsals, the creators of drama experiment with the materials of theatre. These include voice, movement, facial expression, gesture, posture and the elements of production including props, costumes, lighting, sound, multimedia, staging equipment and performance spaces to create dramatic meaning. The following elements of drama make use of these materials to help tell the story on stage. As an audience of theatre and drama, we are engaged not only by what we know in terms of ideas and viewpoints but by what we see, hear and feel. The manipulation of these materials shapes language, movement, symbol, space and mood to suit a performance intention, usually linked to the focus question and what needs to be communicated in terms of viewpoints, beliefs and values.

SPACE AND TIME

Space is an essential element of drama to consider as how the space is manipulated suggests location and place, and this contributes to the mood and atmosphere. Plays can be performed in a variety of spaces, which directly affects how the audience engages with the performance. Some spaces are very small and require the audience to sit facing a certain area, while others might ask the audience to move through a variety of different spaces. Space also refers to the setting and proxemics. Setting can be created through the use of set, props, lighting or multimedia, and by the placement actions of the performers. The setting includes the past, present, future, indoor/outdoor, time of day and season.

Time can be the year in which the play is set. It can also refer to how time in the world of the play is shaped by the playwright or by the performers to develop the dramatic action. Sometimes this can affect the structure of the play with the use of flashbacks, leaps in time, looping of time, and so on. Some questions you can ask to help you interpret space and time include:

- What was the performance space and how did this space affect the way the audience engages with the play?
- How were various locations and settings represented in the performance space?
- How do the spatial distances between characters convey meaning about relationships?
- When was the play set?
- How was time manipulated to create narrative or to contribute to the pace, rhythm and flow of the performance?
- How did the flow of the performance use pace and rhythm to add tension and/or create mood?

EXAMPLE

The play involving the three scientists follows a linear narrative within the time frame of four days. The last hours of the first day are shown in the first scene, followed by jumps in time of several hours to key moments of dramatic action. The whole stage area is used by the performers to suggest travelling distances. Ramps and boxes are used to create the edge of the crater. The performers also use the boxes to suggest that the scientists scale the side of the volcano, which helps to build tension. As the play gets closer to the climax, the scenes become much shorter and the scientists increase the pace of their search, which builds energy and excitement.



LANGUAGE, VOCAL SOUND AND MOVEMENT

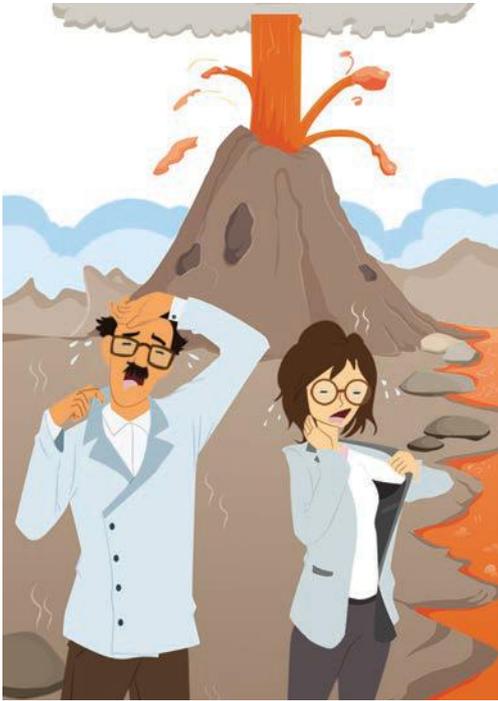
How performers express the characters and story involves the use of verbal language, vocal sounds, body language and movement. Some questions you might ask to create or interpret the use of voice and movement include:

- How did the performers use voice to create personality, location and add to tension through vocal delivery and/or sounds?
- How did the language (words) used by the characters create ideas, show their personality/background and reveal subtext (the thoughts underlying ideas)?
- What type of mood/feeling did the sound of voice create?
- How did the performers use movement to create personality, create locations, add tension and show emotional responses to situations?
- What type of mood/feeling did the movement create?

EXAMPLE

The scientists in the play use scientific jargon to show their knowledge. Their body language shows how they feel about each situation and the status relationship between the scientists. The scientists' movements are often hurried, and the delivery of lines is loud and rapid to indicate the urgency of the task.





MOOD AND ATMOSPHERE

This element of drama refers to the emotional feeling associated with a situation. Mood and atmosphere can be created in a number of ways, such as through the movement and voice of the actors, through colour, texture and shape used in lighting, set and costume design, and through live and/or recorded sound. Mood and atmosphere adds much to the element of drama tension. Some questions you can ask to create or interpret mood and atmosphere include:

- What was the mood and atmosphere of the dramatic action?
- How was this created?

EXAMPLE

As the scientists' task becomes more difficult the lighting illuminates less of the stage area to create an oppressive and claustrophobic feeling. The lighting is also very intense using 'hot' colours such as orange and red to suggest heat. This oppressive mood and atmosphere is added to by the weariness in the sound of the characters' voices and the atmospheric background sound of steam escaping from the volcano.



SYMBOLS

Symbols can be created using objects, language, performers and design elements to represent ideas or meanings beyond the literal interpretation. For example, the Australian flag might represent great pride in our country in a scene involving courage and risk, or it might represent grief at the loss of many soldiers during the First World War. Some questions you might ask to interpret or create symbols include:

- What are the ideas, themes and messages of the play?
- What symbols were included to communicate these ideas, themes and messages?
- How did the symbols used during the performance add to the dramatic meaning?
- How might a symbol's meaning change or evolve during the performance?

EXAMPLE

In the play with the three scientists, the set design creates a suggestion of a volcano that threatens to erupt. The volcano could symbolise the conflict between the scientists and the danger that humankind faces if the scientists do not succeed in making the wonder drug.

EXERCISE

LANGUAGE, MOVEMENT, SYMBOL, PLACE AND MOOD

Work in groups of three or four. Create a short role-play using the title 'A day of celebration'. The role-play must include the following:

- Three different characters with clear status levels and objectives, which are to be communicated through the words they choose to speak and their body movement. Each character can only say two complete sentences. These do not have to be in sequence.
- The mood of the scene must be very clear; for example, happy, sad, tense, relaxed or threatening.
- The stage space must be used to create a clear location that engages the audience.
- Rhythm and pace are to be explicitly used to influence the mood of the scene or a moment in the scene.
- A piece of coloured fabric must be used to represent or symbolise how a character feels at one moment in the scene.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Watch the group presentations. Choose one of the following elements of drama to identify and reflect on: *language, movement, symbol, place, mood*.

- 1 Describe how the group manipulated the element of drama and what meaning this created for the audience.
- 2 What are you wondering about this element of drama?
- 3 What was effective about the group's manipulation of the element of drama?

DRAMATIC MEANING

Dramatic meaning is like the '=' symbol in maths. It is the combination of all the elements of drama that creates dramatic meaning. As we noticed as an aspect of tension, what the audience brings to the performance in terms of their life experience and culture generates an individual response, sometimes intended but sometimes not. Often some of the most rewarding performances create powerful and positive reactions that were unexpected. Some questions you might ask about dramatic meaning are:

- What are the messages of the play?
- How has the focusing to frame the action contributed to communicating this meaning?
- Were there any unexpected audience responses to the play? Why?

EXAMPLE

In the story of the scientists, the dramatic meaning may be interpreted as the potential of people to work together to overcome difficulties. This is how the performer manipulates the actor-audience relationship to achieve a specific response. The performers act using a 'fourth wall' approach to help the audience believe in the characters and the situation.





PERFORMANCE TASK

3.5 Performance task: creating dramatic meaning

The task

The audience should be engaged by the way that an effective narrative communicated through acting, design and staging creates messages for them to consider. In this task you will create a short role-play to explore and show your understanding of the elements of drama and how they can create dramatic meaning.

You will create an original play with a clear narrative by choosing one image and one quote from the options below. Use these as inspiration for your role-play by combining ideas and viewpoints from the group. Use these to create the narrative of your role-play. The story needs to be simple and brief so that you can identify and explain each element of drama after you perform.

Inspiration photos

Inspiration quotes

'Better three hours too soon than a minute too late.'

'Throw kindness like confetti.'

'Nothing will come of nothing.'



Shutterstock/suhendri



Shutterstock/Oleksiy Mark



Shutterstock/Federico Rostagno

Using the elements of narrative story and the elements of drama

The elements of a narrative are:

Beginning – Introduction of characters, situation, place and time; establishing the focus and the tension

Middle – Tension rises as problems interfere with objectives, usually in a series of events that are connected by cause and effect one thing happening ‘causes’ an effect possibly a change of action, beliefs, knowledge or behaviour

End – The tension has reached its peak; the worst problem or confrontation or issue is resolved.

In your preparation for rehearsal, decide on the statement you will use and create ideas for narratives. It is better to do this individually first, and then share your ideas with the group. Once all ideas have been shared, choose one to stage for your performance. Show your knowledge and manipulation of the elements of drama using the table below as you rehearse.

..

..



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Creating story and applying the elements of drama

- 1 Work with a partner or individually. Using the elements of drama template below, respond to the questions to help you define, create and describe the drama elements in your performance work. In the first phase of your planning you will only be able to write about characters, situation and tension. Once you are happy with your choices, begin rehearsing and complete the table as you go. Be prepared for changes!

ELEMENT OF DRAMA	SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS	YOUR RESPONSES
Characters, roles and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the characters in this play and how do they feel about each other? • What do they want and why? • What is their relationship to the place they are in? 	
Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is happening? • Where and when is it happening? • Why is it happening? 	
Tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type/s of tension are used in the performance? • How did I feel or how do I want the audience to feel at different points in the performance? • How are the use of the elements of drama contributing to me feeling this way? • What problems do the characters face? • What is at stake? What are the risks? 	
Focus: framing the action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the question that the audience is asked to consider? • How will the moments and situations in the dramatic action contribute to this focus? 	





ELEMENT OF DRAMA	SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS	YOUR RESPONSES
Focus: highlighting a dramatic moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might the actors' use of body and voice focus the audience's attention? How will the stage space be used to create points of focus for the audience? 	
Language, voice and movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might the performers use voice to create personality, location, and add to tension through vocal delivery and/or sounds? How might the performers use movement to create personality, create locations, add tension and show emotional responses to situations? 	
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the performance space and how will this space affect the way the audience engages with the play? How will various time periods, locations and settings be represented in the performance space? 	
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will time in the world of the play be manipulated? How will the flow of the performance use pace and rhythm to add tension and/or create mood? 	
Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the mood and atmosphere of the dramatic action? How might this be created? 	
Symbol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What symbols might be included to communicate ideas, themes and messages? How will the symbols used during the performance add to the dramatic meaning? 	
Dramatic meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the messages of the play? How has the focusing to frame the action contributed to communicating this meaning? 	

2 Complete the following sentence reflecting on your learning about the elements of drama.

'Before we started working on the elements of drama I used to think _____ but now I know that _____.'



Performance task: creating dramatic meaning

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- list and define each of the elements of drama
- collaborate to ask and answer questions about the elements of drama in both the making and performance of drama
- communicate dramatic meaning by effectively integrating the elements of drama in a short performance.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes</p> <p>Have you prepared for your performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using the images and quotes to find a specific viewpoint that your play is exploring? • demonstrating that you can define and manipulate the elements of drama to suit your purpose? • recording all planning, rehearsals and decisions in writing? <p>Have you selected and included the skills of voice and movement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively communicating character through the use of body language, movement and mime? • incorporating voice to suit character and to create mood? <p>Have you planned, selected and modified your presentation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considering the available space and how it can be used to suit your purpose? • using direction to help arrange actors in the stage space to create stage action and provide a clear point of focus when required? 				
<p>Responding</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively reflect on the development, rehearsal and shaping of performance work with reference to the elements of drama? • describe and explain the use of the elements of drama in a clear and succinct manner? 				

Comments



4

PLAYBUILDING: DEvised PERFORMANCE

WHY STUDY PLAYBUILDING?

Playbuilding is a collaborative and creative process whereby a group devise an original play over a period of time, which is then performed for a specific audience. The rehearsal process of playbuilding involves being creative in generating original ideas, as well as when refining the plot, themes, characters, acting skills and staging. In this chapter you will further develop your knowledge and skills in vocal dynamics, movement, character types, improvisation and the elements of drama as you work collaboratively and creatively as actors, directors and playwrights.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 4.1 The playbuilding process
- 4.2 Playbuilding structures
- 4.3 Highlighting dramatic moments using focus
- 4.4 Scene transitions
- 4.5 Creating a character
- 4.6 Stage spaces and the audience
- 4.7 Gothic drama
- 4.8 Performance task: creating a Gothic play
- 4.9 Performance task: the journey
- 4.10 Performance task: a new beginning

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- apply the skills of collaboration and a creative process to create performance work
- draw on a range of starting points for playbuilding
- contribute ideas, feelings and experiences to the process of playbuilding
- consider the actor–audience relationship and select stage spaces to suit playbuilding tasks
- create and develop characters using character biographies
- include and manipulate selected theatrical techniques in performance tasks
- create effective scene transitions.



Students performing
on stage



iStockphoto/siobo

4.1 The playbuilding process

Playbuilt plays are powerful. Each member of the group contributes in some way to the development of the presentation; the final performance reflects the creativity and energy of all its members.

Carole Tarlington and Wendy Michaels

Building Plays: Simple Playbuilding Techniques at Work

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

ANGELA BETZIEN

Playwright, Real TV

Angela Betzien is a playwright and a member of the Melbourne-based theatre company Real TV. Her plays include *Children of the Black Skirt*, *Hoods*, *War Crimes*, *Girl Who Cried Wolf*, *Helicopter*, *The Dark Room*, *Where in the World is Frank Sparrow?*, *Mortido* and *The Hanging*. Several of her plays have been translated into other languages and have toured widely across Australia and internationally.

The motif of the lost child features in many of her plays prominently and the landscape is very much an antagonist. Her plays are often described as Australian Gothic, which is a way of viewing the atrocities of the past and their impact on the present. She writes, 'As an Anglo-Australian playwright, every time I sit down to write a story set in Australia, I do so with an understanding that this country always was and always will be Aboriginal land.'

She writes, 'I would encourage young artists to think deeply about their own history and where they are from. What are the stories of your birthplace? How do these stories impact upon the present? This knowledge will deeply influence the kind of art you make and why you make it.'



Angela Betzien

Angela Betzien

COLLABORATING AND CREATING AS ACTORS, PLAYWRIGHTS AND DIRECTORS

Collaborating effectively, as well as applying and developing your skills and knowledge as actors, directors and playwrights, are the main activities of playbuilding. Playbuilding does not happen suddenly—it requires extended periods of preparation time called 'rehearsal'. Some important research into creativity and collaboration can help you make the most of the rehearsal time you have to prepare. Through trial and error, you will manipulate and experiment with the elements of drama to develop the dramatic action of your play. Improvisation is an essential and effective rehearsal method by which you can explore and develop ideas.

While you will spend most of your rehearsal time collaborating, you will also need to work individually. It is important to spend time outside of rehearsals developing the ideas discovered in group rehearsals to build characters, and to refine and polish dialogue, timing, movement and the staging of scenes. In playbuilding, all of the participants might change from acting, to directing, to playwriting, and then back again many times during rehearsals. This is no easy task as each of these theatre practices requires particular skills and knowledge to contribute to a performance. You will acquire more knowledge and skills as directors and playwrights in later chapters. Before you begin working together as a group, respond to the following questions to begin developing your knowledge about these practices.



Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What do you know about playbuilding? What questions do you have?
- 2 What are the key responsibilities of an actor during the playbuilding process?
- 3 What questions might an actor ask about their acting to improve their performance work and communicate character, mood, time and place to the audience?
- 4 What are the key responsibilities of a director during the playbuilding process?
- 5 What questions might a director ask to improve the staging of the play to more effectively engage the audience and communicate dramatic meaning?
- 6 What are the key responsibilities of the playwright during the playbuilding process?
- 7 What questions might a playwright ask to improve focus and action of a scene and/or the way the main ideas are best communicated to the audience?

THE CREATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS OF PLAYBUILDING

Creativity and rehearsing

One of the most enjoyable aspects of playbuilding is the creation of an original performance that will communicate ideas to an audience. To be original and innovative requires you to be creative. Being creative has many interpretations. You are being creative when you solve problems or come up with a new way of doing things. But being creative is more than just solving a problem. Researchers in the area of creativity believe that creativity is not a one-off moment, but that it occurs in action over a period of time. This is because the individual is working with their materials, and trialling and testing ideas. In playbuilding, your teacher will give you some guidelines and structures to follow, but you will soon discover that there can be many original and different types of plays that emerge from the same starting point.

The flow state

In 1975, creativity researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi found that when people are experiencing what he termed 'the flow state', they are at their most creative. This creative flow state usually occurs when the people are in an experiential activity, and has some identifying features including:

- clear goals
- a high degree of concentration on the task
- a balance of skills with the challenge of the task
- a feeling that the work is personally rewarding, which creates a positive mood
- a loss of a sense of time when working as they are so involved in the task.



TED Talks – Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: Flow, the secret to happiness

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What might be the personality traits of very creative people?
- 2 Look back at Csikszentmihalyi's features of creative flow state. How might you build your own ability to be creative?
- 3 What do you believe prevents you from being creative?
- 4 Recall a time when you were working on a project and felt you were in the flow state. What aspects of Csikszentmihalyi's features of flow state did you experience?

The following table outlines eight stages in the creative process. Dr Keith Sawyer, a researcher into creativity, collaboration and learning, compared the work of researchers into the creative process with his own eight-stage process. The column on the left lists Dr Sawyer's eight-stage creative process. The column on the right shows how the playbuilding rehearsal process might match with the creative process. Although the stages are listed in order, the reality of creating a playbuilt performance process means that while there is generally a progression forward through the stages, you may move back and forth between the eight stages many times as you rehearse. Dr Sawyer's process can be applied to any creative task in Drama including designing, directing and scriptwriting.



Keith Sawyer on Creating Spaces for Creativity

The Eight Stages of the Creative Process

(adapted from Keith R. Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*, ed. 2, Oxford University Press, 2012. By permission of Oxford University Press.)

STAGE	PLAYBUILDING PROCESS
Find the problem	<p>The search for a main theme, issue, idea or question in this stage of the playbuilding process is a development of the element of drama 'focus: framing the action'.</p> <p>Finding the focus for your play is important to help the audience engage with a particular perspective, idea or question that you and your fellow performers might be exploring. Some questions to ask are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is our main focus question (or questions)? • What is our intention as performers/directors/playwrights? • Why does this particular focus matter?
Acquire the knowledge	<p>This stage requires you to learn as much as you can about the focus of your play, the drama topic, the dramatic form and the required skills and knowledge. This might be through practical workshops, research and reading. Some questions to ask are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we know about this dramatic form or performance style? • What do we want to know more about? • What practice do I need to develop specific acting/performance skills? • How can I develop greater curiosity and interest as a learner in Drama? • How are we challenging and extending ourselves by learning and mastering new performance skills and knowledge for our play? • How effectively are we reflecting on our rehearsals (practice) to deepen our knowledge?

Gather related information	<p>In this stage, you are constantly looking for opportunities to link new information into the building of your play. Some questions to ask are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How alert are we to unexpected or unusual information that might help develop our play? • How good are we at spotting difficulties in the development of characters, scenes and staging? • What categories can we create to group information from rehearsals to link relevant information together?
Incubation (time off)	<p>This stage is about time out from rehearsals. It is referred to as 'an unguided, unconscious process' where you are engaged in a very different activity but fresh and exciting ideas about your play might suddenly come to mind. Some questions to ask as you rehearse your play are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often are we taking breaks from working on our play? • What unexpected ideas or new approaches come to mind during breaks in the rehearsal process?
Generate ideas	<p>As you come across problems in your play, you will need to draw on your previous experience and 'think outside the box' to solve these problems. This is a process that happens over time as you work towards solutions. Some questions to ask are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might this problem be solved using our existing knowledge of drama, playbuilding and the dramatic form? • Is the problem too difficult to solve because of a lack of knowledge and/or experience? • How can our teacher or another expert help us by giving us some advice and hints to solve problems?
Combine ideas (in unexpected ways)	<p>In this stage, with the help of incubation, your mind is making links between all aspects of your play. Some questions to help you combine ideas are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are moments of 'insight' from incubation contributing to the building of our play? • What information or experiences are we combining in new and unusual ways? • In what ways have we put our ideas together to create exciting and engaging dramatic action?
Select the best ideas	<p>This stage is seen as a crucial part of being creative. It occurs in all steps of the playbuilding process, not just at the end. Some questions to ask are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the criteria that are we using to select the best ideas for our performance? • How might our own evaluation of our performance work differ from the evaluation of others?
Externalise the ideas	<p>This stage is not just about a final performance. Externalising ideas is an essential part of the playbuilding process and is about turning ideas into staged scenes and moments of action during rehearsal. Some questions to ask are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How frequently are we actually performing to test our ideas and to solve problems? • How have our ideas been communicated to an audience? • How have these experiences of performing in rehearsal or to an audience changed or altered our play?



HINT

Using any resource as a starting point requires you to use your imagination. It also requires research—going to the library or using the Internet to find out more information. Allow yourself ample time to conduct research that will assist you to create people, events and locations.



HINT

It is important to record and reflect on all of your rehearsals. This not only helps you to find your focus, but also provides you with a record of decisions to reflect on as the piece develops.



HINT

Some theatre practitioners such as Robert Lepage believe that each performance is still, in essence, a rehearsal. Each live performance is unique, and provides opportunities for the actors, director and production team to change or alter aspects of the performance in response to the audience's engagement.



Monkey Baa Theatre Company – Playbuilding

Collaborating and rehearsals

One of the unique features of the subject of Drama is the way in which you collaborate with others to create performance work. Collaborating is a powerful way to learn, and it is important to develop skills and understanding about what makes effective collaboration. Collaborating effectively and building on your skills and knowledge as actors, directors and playwrights is the main activity in this stage of your playbuilding. Through trial and error, you will manipulate and experiment with the elements of drama to develop the dramatic action of your play.

Research has revealed some interesting facts about effective collaboration:

- When there is shared understanding of the goals of the group for each rehearsal and the overall production, the workload is shared more effectively and fairly. This builds group cohesion.
- When groups are working at their peak, they create more innovative, unpredictable and suitable solutions to the problem than any one group member could.
- Brainstorming ideas is more effective when done individually and then shared with the group later. This leads to more original and creative ideas than brainstorming as a group, which inhibits creativity.
- Brainstorming ideas is much more effective when goals for the task are specific.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What are some of the best experiences you have had in collaborative group work at school?
- 2 Why were these experiences successful?
- 3 How might learning about improvisation help you to be a more effective collaborator?
- 4 What are some examples of goals that you might have for a rehearsal?
- 5 How might you check on the progress of achieving your goals?
- 6 What strategies can a group use to make the best use of rehearsal time?
- 7 How might differences between group members and differences of opinion be a positive thing for playbuilding?

4.2 Playbuilding structures

SELECTING A PLAYBUILDING STRUCTURE

Playbuilding is your opportunity to create an original performance. Before you begin rehearsing, it is important to consider the options you have for creating the structure of your performance. The structure of your performance is the framework through which the content of the drama is presented. For example, some traditional plays have a three-act structure and each act is divided into scenes. Each scene can be broken into smaller sections called 'units of action'. Preparing an effective dramatic structure will help make the intention of your piece clear to the audience.

As a group, you should consider the type of playbuilding structure you wish to adopt as the basis of your performance. There are two types of playbuilt structures to choose from: narrative and montage.

Linear narrative

A linear narrative tells a story in chronological order. It has a plot line that carries the action forward. A standard plot line will have one or more protagonists, an antagonist, a distinct climactic moment and a resolution.

Create a short three-stage story or use an existing fairytale, folktale or actual story to self-test your understanding of how a linear narrative uses cause and effect to move the story forward.

Consider the following example:

- The girl was born wealthy
- She lived a long time
- Everyone loved her.

The example does not include causes to explain the effects of actions, decisions and choices. A clearer explanation of cause and effect for this story might be:

Cause The girl was born wealthy.

Effect Because of this, she could pay for whatever she needed.

Cause She chose to spend her money on healthy food and good doctors.

Effect Because of this she lived a long time.

Cause Every day from her window high above the street she could see people suffering, and she wondered why everyone was not healthy and happy like her.

Effect Because of this, she felt guilty and her conscience made her see that it was important for everyone to have healthy food and good doctors.

Cause She used her money to build hospitals, and farms that produced cheap, healthy food.

Effect Because of this, everyone had access to good food and medical help, and everyone loved her.



HINT

A 'protagonist' is the central character in a play. There may be more than one protagonist. An 'antagonist' is the character who forces the protagonist into action.

EXERCISE

ANALYSING NARRATIVE

Divide into groups of three or four. As a group, create a list of three or four linear narratives from plays, novels or films. Identify the protagonist/s and the antagonist/s. Choose one narrative. Break the narrative into the following three sections:

- an 'exposition' in which the characters, place and time, and tension are established
- a 'crisis' or 'complication' in which conflict and tension are heightened
- a 'resolution' in which an outcome is reached.

Now identify one moment of cause and effect from each of the narrative stages: exposition, the crisis and the resolution.

Non-linear narrative

Similar to a linear narrative, a non-linear narrative also tells a story but in this case the events are not presented in chronological order. The non-linear narrative employs flashbacks or flashforwards to tell the story.

EXERCISE

NON-LINEAR ROLE-PLAY

Divide into groups of four. Devise a short role-play that incorporates the use of flashback and/or flashforward techniques. Your plot should still have a narrative structure—although you flash forward and backward in time, there should still be a central narrative that moves to a climactic moment. Some ideas for role-plays are:

- A deep-sea diver recalls diving on a dangerous shipwreck.
- A group is having a party on the beach. The role-play then flashes forward to the present day; at the same beach an important discovery is made.
- A child and their grandparent are trapped temporarily in a location of your choice. The role-play flashes back and forward at various points.



HINT

Whether you choose a narrative or a montage structure for your playbuilt performance, it is important for the playbuilt performance to progress from a starting point to a climactic moment. A consideration of how you manipulate the elements of drama will help you achieve this.



National Theatre –
Creating Chorus: Building
Choreography
Chorus Work – School of
Jacques Lecoq (in French)

MONTAGE PLAYBUILDING

The montage playbuilt performance explores a central theme, issue or subject through the use of short, self-contained scenes. These scenes, or ‘episodes’, give the montage playbuilt performance an episodic quality. Each scene is independent of the others; however, the scenes are unified by their exploration of a theme, issue or subject. Each scene in a montage playbuilt piece has its own timing and thrust, but the pace and energy of the overall performance works towards a clear climactic moment.

Montage role-play

In preparation for this role-play, you will need to create a mind map in your logbook. Choose one of the following words: *oxygen, reflectio, egg, camouflage, balloons, desert, honesty, black, seasons, opposites, voyage, community, plots, hunger*. Brainstorm as many images, situations and characters as you can related to the word you’ve chosen. Then, using stylised movement, soundscapes or tableaux, create a series of short scenes of contrasting styles to represent your ideas.

DRAMATIC FORMS, CONVENTIONS AND PERFORMANCE STYLE

Dramatic forms

In the history of drama and theatre there have been many different dramatic forms. These include realism, expressionism, commedia dell’arte, melodrama, epic theatre, Ancient Greek drama, absurdism, mime, Restoration comedy and physical theatre. During your study of Drama you will examine many of these dramatic forms in detail.

Each dramatic form springs from a particular place and time. The form is unique because it is based upon a specific structure, subject matter, acting style, actor–audience relationship or use of production elements.

Dramatic conventions

Within each dramatic form you will find particular dramatic conventions. These are the typical features of the form, and you will see these conventions used repeatedly in theatre and drama of the same form. For example, a Shakespearian play will contain a ‘soliloquy’, in which a character talks to themselves, or reveals their thoughts without addressing a listener. A soliloquy is a dramatic convention typical of the Shakespearian form of drama. In the commedia dell’arte form of theatre, performers wear comic half-masks to portray stock characters. This is a dramatic convention typical of the commedia form.

DEVELOPING A PLAYBUILT PERFORMANCE

*What are you passionate about? What questions are you asking? What statements would you like to make?
What is your performance intention?*

Choose from

NARRATIVE (LINEAR OR NON-LINEAR) or MONTAGE



Consider

DRAMATIC FORM

Commedia dell'arte, Pantomime, Mime, Epic theatre, Ancient Greek drama, Restoration comedy, Symbolism, Melodrama, Kabuki, Realism, Absurdism, Aboriginal ritual, Expressionism, Vaudeville, Shakespearian drama, Puppetry, etc.



Select and incorporate

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES AND CONVENTIONS

Narration, Exaggerated movement, Asides, Soliloquy, Projected signs, Mime, Actors moving amongst the audience, Mask, Playing to the audience, Political song, Transformation, Tableaux, Extended silences, Changing character in view of the audience, Slow motion, Stock characters, Fourth wall, etc.



Consider/Remember

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

Role and character, plus situation, are directed by focus, driven by tension, made explicit in place and time, through the use of language, sound and movement to evoke symbol and atmosphere, which together create dramatic meaning and audience engagement.



Create your

PERFORMANCE STYLE

Performance style

The final polished theatrical performance has its own performance style. This style is a result of the many decisions made regarding the use of dramatic forms and conventions. Your own ideas also affect the performance style. For example, you may choose to use the conventions of melodrama—asides, music to accompany the entrance of characters, cheers and boos from the audience—but perform your playbuilt piece in the style of a parody of a contemporary television soap opera.

The form or style you adopt for your playbuilt piece will depend on a variety of factors. You do not need to limit yourself to one form or style of performance. It is likely you will borrow from a range of dramatic forms and performance styles to create your playbuilt piece.

4.3 Highlighting dramatic moments using focus

ESTABLISHING FOCUS IN PERFORMANCE

In terms of the overall dramatic action being presented, an effective use of focus directs the audience's attention to specific moments in the action. When rehearsing, it is important to plan the focus of the dramatic action, especially at key moments. This will prevent the action from becoming unclear.

There are many ways that focus on dramatic moments might be established in performance. Examples include:

- **Space** – focus can be established according to where performers are positioned in the space (for example, upstage, downstage, centre stage, on levels, in groups or individually)
- **Gesture** – a gesture can concentrate attention (for example, pointing, facing a particular direction, touching, waving, putting your hand up or wiping your brow)
- **Eye contact** – focus can be established using eye contact (for example, one performer looks at another, one performer is looked at by all the others, two groups of performers look at each other, or one performer looks at an audience member)
- **Contrast** – focus can be achieved by contrasting images (for example, all performers are in darkness except one who is in light, all performers move except one who is still, or all performers move in slow motion except one who moves quickly)
- **Language and voice** – focus can be achieved through the selection of who is speaking, what they say and how it is delivered (for example, a tour guide speaks in a serious tone to a tour group, warning them of the dangers of an unstable cliff edge)

EXERCISE

DIRECTING AND CREATING A FOCUS ROLE-PLAY

Work groups of five or six. Each group must choose two group members to act as director. Collaboratively, prepare a short role-play of five minutes in length incorporating three of the methods of establishing focus. The directors must provide feedback to the group to help ensure the use of space and the creation of focus on a moment of dramatic action is clear for the audience. Present your role-play to the class.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Using examples from your own performance work, explain the possible meanings of the term 'focus'.
- 2 Choose two of the following means of creating focus: *space*, *gesture*, *eye contact*, *contrast*, *language*, *voice*. For each of the two methods you have chosen, outline in point form a dramatic moment that illustrates the use of this method. Share your ideas with the class. Choose three or four examples and perform them.

4.4 Scene transitions

Scene transitions should not be seen as a break in a performance but as an integral way of adding to the performance. Scene changes can be achieved in a variety of ways depending on the dramatic form of the performance, the performance space and the availability of technology. A poor scene transition interrupts the flow of the performance. The following lists describe some techniques that can be used for scene transitions.

Performer-based scene transitions

- A narrator addresses the audience while set and/or actors are changed.
- Actors remain on the stage and transform their physical shapes and positions to create new characters in a new place and time.
- Actors enter the stage area or exit to the offstage area.
- Actors change costume in front of the audience.

Elements of production scene transitions

- Blackout of lights – scenery is changed and performers move while lights are out.
- Cross-fade of lights – one lighting state fades down while another fades up.
- Curtains open or close.
- Change of scenery (for example, flying in backdrops, flats, revolves, trucking of sets, changes in projected imagery or use of film footage)

TRANSFORMATION

Most classroom performances require students to remain in the performance space and not exit from the room. For this reason, classroom performances require you to create imaginative and original scene changes. Transformation is a theatrical technique that can be employed to make scene changes effective.

The technique of transformation has evolved from the work of many theatre practitioners. One key practitioner was the Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999). His theatre sought to create plays that had strong social and political messages. He devised the term ‘poor theatre’ to describe what he thought was true theatre, focused on actors in a space using their skills to create the world of the drama without expensive sets, lighting or costumes.

Transformation is an effective dramatic technique for creating scene transitions. The technique requires the performer to use his or her expressive movement and voice skills, and to manipulate energy, rhythm, timing and space. Using transformation for scene transitions often requires a group of performers to work as an ensemble. There are endless ways of creating scene transitions using transformation, for example:

- snap transformations – in which all performers change position instantaneously
- cross-fade transformations – in which performers use slow and controlled movements to merge from one character and setting to another
- transformations accompanied by a regular or irregular rhythm
- transformations with or without sound.



HINT

‘Flying in’ a backdrop means the backdrop is lowered from the fly tower above the stage. A ‘revolve’ is a mechanised, circular area built into the stage floor that revolves to change the scene of a play. ‘Trucking’ sets involves moving them onstage from the wings by placing them on special mechanised platforms with wheels.



HINT

The ‘improvisation tag’ exercise in chapter 2 on p. 42 is a good improvisation game for developing skills in transformation.



HINT

At their best, transformations are ingenious and entertaining for audiences. They seem to magically create new characters and places even though the performers have not left the stage.

EXERCISE

TRANSFORMATION

1 Transforming objects in a circle

Sit in a circle as a class. Your teacher will give you an object, such as a piece of fabric or rope, to pass around the circle. Each person transforms the object by reshaping it and using it in a way that indicates a new object.

2 Transforming objects in groups

Divide into groups of three. Each group requires one chair and one piece of fabric. Using people and objects, each group is to create a tableau to illustrate the following themes:

- victory
- peak hour
- drought
- adrift.

Your teacher will give you 10 counts to transform from the first tableau to the next tableau. It is important that members of the group make and yield to offers from one another so that the tableau is transformed without discussion.

3 Transformation using sound and rhythm

Devise two short, self-contained scenes that explore one of the following words:

- trust
- balance
- pressure
- escape.

Consider how you will use a combination of sound and rhythm to create transitions from one scene to another. The choice of rhythm and sound will need to have some relationship to the overall subject, or to the scene that has just ended or is just about to be shown.

4 Scene transitions using transformation

Divide into groups of five or more. Choose one of the following situations to practice transformation in creating scene changes.

- One performer plays a girl getting ready for her school dance. Other performers are items of furniture in the girl's bedroom. As the girl gets up from her chair and moves downstage, the other performers establish the rhythm of the music at the dance and transform their positions to become new characters.
- A scene in an office. All performers freeze. One character takes off a jacket and puts on a windcheater. As the character makes this costume change, the other performers create a soundscape of wind and waves. They also snap transform, one at a time, into surfers at a beach.
- Four supporters at the football are cheering for their team. When a goal is scored, they freeze. Using vocal sound and movement, they snap transform from the football to a building site.

MOTIFS

A motif is an image or moment of action that is repeated throughout a performance. Although a pattern is established, the nature of the motif may change slightly each time it occurs. A motif reinforces a symbol or message, and is a powerful tool for creating focus. Motifs can be used effectively as playbuilding scene transitions. For example, a play that explores the issue of refugees may have scenes set in two countries; these scenes could be linked by scene transformations using a recurring motif of a refugee boat on its journey.

EXERCISE

DEVISING THREE SCENES LINKED BY MOTIF

Divide into groups of four. Create a short linear narrative that uses a standard three-scene format. In other words, include a beginning to establish characters and situation, a middle in which a problem or conflict is encountered, and a resolution. Link the three scenes by moments of transformation. Experiment with any of the types of transformation you have explored in the previous exercises, including the use of motif.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What is transformation?
- 2 Describe and evaluate two examples of successful transformation that you have observed in your classwork. Identify how space, rhythm, timing, and physical and vocal skills were used to achieve the transformation. Here is an example of how you might respond:

Today we watched all the group performances. Each group was given the title “Circus” as a starting point. Adrian, Sally, Courtenay and Lily showed the best use of transformation. Their scene transitions moved smoothly between scenes in the big top and scenes in the clown’s caravan. The group used slow-motion movement, and humming and whispering, to help show that the scenes in the big top were in the clown’s imagination. He wants to be the star of the show and dreams of how he can become famous. The group’s use of timing and control of movement was excellent, especially as they synchronised the slow motion. The scene transitions and use of transformation were as enjoyable to watch as the scenes themselves.
- 3 What is a motif? Provide your own example of a motif and explain how it could be used in scene transformations. Alternatively, explain how you have observed the use of motifs in others’ work.
- 4 Research the work of Grotowski. Summarise his beliefs on theatre and performance. Discuss his aims, perceptions of successful performance and the desired actor–audience relationship.

4.5 Creating a character

ROLE AND CHARACTER

In your drama performance work you will play both roles and characters. To play a role, you need only have basic information about it. For example, a role may be defined simply as 'the mother', 'the policewoman', 'the politician' or 'the citizen of the town'. Roles can be important in performance because they help the audience to focus on themes and issues. Roles also help to move the plot forward by being vehicles for providing important information, advice or points of view. A role may be small, but the performer still needs to apply a skilled use of vocal dynamics, movement, energy and focus to play the role well.

Characterisation is the development of a role into a character. The performer will have much more knowledge about the personality and life experiences of a character they play. The performer can discover information about a character by engaging in written exercises, drawing on personal experiences and analysing the script.



HINT

A character biography provides the performer with all the important information about the character. The information includes who the character is and why they behave the way they do.

THE CHARACTER BIOGRAPHY

In the performance tasks at the end of this chapter you will be required to develop characters over a period of time. This provides an excellent opportunity to create more complex and detailed characters.

The following exercises explore how to create an original character using a character biography. The character you create may be based on someone you observe or may come from a picture you have seen in a book or magazine. The character needs to be original, so avoid choosing a famous identity or someone you know. Use the character biography writing exercises below to begin your creation of an original character.



HINT

The more you know about your character, the more interesting and truthful your character will be in performance.

EXERCISE

CREATING A CHARACTER

1 Character details

Write down all the essential details about your character. Include the following:

- personal details – for example, age, occupation, nationality, star sign, address, languages spoken, education, hobbies and family details
- physical description – for example, weight, height, colouring, distinguishing features, clothing and accessories.

2 Asking questions

Ask questions of the character to learn more about their personality and how they may behave in certain situations. Often the way we behave is due to what we believe about the world, about ourselves and about others. Write answers to the following questions. As you write your answers, you will need to think as the character to gain the best responses.

- In social situations I am _____ because I _____.
- My relationship with my parents is _____ because _____.
- My favourite film is _____ because _____.
- I would never _____ because _____.





- I used to _____ but now I _____ because _____.
- The most frightening experience I ever had was _____.
- My ambition in life is to _____.
- I think the world is a _____ place because _____.
- I believe true happiness is _____.



HINT

In your playbuilt performance you may play a number of roles. These roles are important as they can represent different points of view. They can also establish relationships between the people, ideas and environment being presented in the performance.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Write your own questions for your character to answer. Write questions that you feel will help you develop a deeper understanding of your character. Answer your questions as though you are the character and share your responses with a classmate.
- 2 Ask classmates to suggest other questions. Write down the questions that you feel would be useful in the development of your character.

EXERCISE

BEING THE CHARACTER

In the following exercises you will need to use the character that you established in the previous 'creating a character' exercise. These exercises will help you to sustain and develop your character. They will also help you to establish a strong sense of belief.

1 A day in the life

Start with a relaxation exercise and imagine your character clearly. Find a position to show your character in bed in the early hours of the morning. On the signal from the teacher you are to wake as the character. Begin by acting out the character's morning routine. If you need to, include imaginary family members who are part of the morning routine. On a given signal, your teacher will ask you to freeze and move the character forward in time by a few hours. Take up a new position and show the character in a new situation performing a new activity. This continues until the character returns to bed at the end of the day.

2 Character phone call

Begin by acting as the character and give the character an activity in which they are involved. After working for a short time on the activity, the character makes a telephone call. The performer must use the character's voice when speaking to the imaginary caller, as they improvise the conversation out loud. Once the conversation is finished, the character returns to their activity. On a given signal, the character hears the phone ring, answers the call and improvises another conversation.

3 Hot seat

One volunteer sits in front of the class as their character. The class asks questions about the character's life and past experiences. The aim of this exercise is to help the performer learn more about their character, not to intimidate the character or point out inconsistencies in their answers.



HINT

The skill of spontaneity is needed for the character-building 'hot seat' exercise. You may be asked questions that surprise you because they may involve providing information about your character that you have not considered before. Answer the questions as quickly as you can. If you hesitate, you will drop out of character.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Describe any new information you discovered about your character after completing the exercises.
- 2 Write several diary entries for your character. Describe particular events and explore your character's reactions to them.
- 3 What is a role? Why are roles important?
- 4 How does a performer establish a strong sense of belief when playing a character?

4.6 Stage spaces and the audience

CONSIDERING THE AUDIENCE

When devising performances it is necessary to consider two important factors:

- 1 **Stage spaces** – where is the play to be performed?
- 2 **Audience arrangement** – where will the audience be placed in relation to the performance?

To answer these questions you will need to consider:

- the type of play to be performed
- the availability and suitability of a venue
- audience comfort and their ability to see; also known as consideration of sightlines.

CHOOSING AUDIENCE SEATING ARRANGEMENTS FOR A PURPOSE

The way you seat the audience has a direct impact on their appreciation of the performance. Some of the earliest performances had the audience sit in an arena format, which is in a full circle around the performers. No scenery was used. The seating of an audience in an arena format focuses the attention of the audience to a central point. Being able to see other audience members encourages a stronger sense of 'sharing' an experience. This awareness of other audience members encourages energy and excitement.

Playwrights of tragedies and comedies in Ancient Greece explored the power of 'background' and began to add basic scenery to enhance the action in their plays. The semicircular shape of the tiered amphitheatres gave a perfect view of the actors, but also allowed the audience to look beyond the acting area to the views of the mountains and countryside. The once-complete circle had been broken to allow for the inclusion of scenery. It is thought that the view of the mountains and countryside helped the audience imagine battles, the gods on Mount Olympus and the relevance of the play to their own homeland.

Today, theatre groups still experiment with audience seating to achieve certain effects. Many outdoor performances use an environment performer–audience arrangement where the performers are among the audience and/or the audience moves to different locations for different scenes.

An interesting use of audience in modern performance was in a production devised by Urban Theatre Projects, a theatre company based in Western Sydney. *The Tribe* is a play performed in a backyard in Western Sydney featuring actor Hazem Shammass, and is based on Michael Mohammed Ahmad's novella. It is an Arab–Australian story of belonging. The focus or 'framing of the action' is created through the character

Bani, who, as a small boy, finds his way living in Australia by recounting tales of an older country. The focus is sharpened even further through the references to Bani's grandmother. She is a significant influence in Bani's life as she carries the stories, history and truths of 'The Tribe'—a small Muslim sect who fled to Australia from Lebanon.



Photo by Catherine Cranston

The Tribe by Urban Theatre Projects

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Why might performers choose to stage their play in a backyard in Western Sydney? What impact would this decision have on the relationship between the audience and the performers?

TYPES OF THEATRE SPACES

Proscenium

The proscenium stage is rectangular in shape and is divided into nine areas. Each area is given a name and labelled with an abbreviation or identification code as shown in the table. USC stands for upstage centre, DSL for downstage left, CS for centre stage, and so on. These codes are a useful form of shorthand for performers, directors and stage crew. The areas above and to the sides of the stage are hidden by the proscenium arch and the wings.

STAGE AREA	ABBREVIATION
Upstage right	USR
Upstage centre	USC
Upstage left	USL
Centre stage right	CSR
Centre stage (or stage centre)	CS
Centre stage left	CSL
Downstage right	DSR
Downstage centre	DSC
Downstage left	DSL



HINT

Remember that stage left and stage right are from the actor's point of view.



HINT

A proscenium stage often slopes upwards from front to back, which explains the terms 'upstage' and 'downstage'.



iStockphoto/BeautifulLotus

A traditional, proscenium stage

Environment

This type of audience arrangement varies depending on the requirements. Raised platforms, rostra, wagons, gangways, catwalks and other performance areas are arranged in a performance space so the audience feels within or surrounded by the action. This arrangement also allows for movement of the audience from one location to another.



iStockphoto/Bernhard Richter

An example of an environment-style stage

Theatre-in-the-round

This type of stage is divided into 13 areas—similar to the hours on a clock dial with the centre being the thirteenth area. This audience arrangement focuses the attention of the audience to the centre of the arena and encourages the audience to 'share' the experience.



Peter Pan 360 Photo by Jeremy Daniel, courtesy of AT&T Performing Arts Center

Theatre-in-the-round

Thrust

A thrust stage takes the action into the audience by using an extension to the proscenium stage, which makes the audience feel closer to the action.



Stewart Hemley © RSC

A thrust stage

••



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Draw audience arrangements for the performances listed below. Be imaginative in your ideas for where the play is performed and how the audience are seated. Explain why you think your choice would be effective.
 - a performance for primary school students about road safety
 - a serious, realistic drama set in a living room
 - a rock musical about the French Revolution
 - a Shakespearian play set in a forest.
- 2 Explain how you think your choices for audience arrangement would suit the purpose of each performance and make it more interesting for the audience.

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eHow – 10 Elements of Gothic Literature



HINT

Research the work of English actor, playwright and director, Steven Berkoff. He is known for the use of transformational acting, strong mood and atmosphere created with minimal props and set, and the development of Gothic performances based on the work of Edgar Allan Poe.



HINT

Children of the Black Skirt, by Angela Betzien, is a play in the Gothic style. It explores the impact of the past on children who were placed in institutions.



Steven Berkoff



CHALLENGE

Read the book or play version of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* or view the film *The Others*. Why might these stories/films be described as Gothic?

4.7 Gothic drama

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The words Goth and Gothic describe the Germanic tribes that sacked Rome and also ravaged the rest of Europe in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries. By the 18th century in England, Gothic had become associated with the Middle Ages (500–1500 ce), a period that has been seen as the ‘dark ages’, when people were superstitious.

Gothic architecture can be seen in many European cathedrals with the use of pointed arches and vaults, flying buttresses, gargoyles, narrow spires and stained-glass windows. It is also a style of architecture that English nobility appreciated in the 1800s because it suggested power and authority, hence many of their homes were designed with Gothic architectural features.

Gothic novels have similar plot features and settings including castles, mansions and supernatural experiences.

GOTHIC LOCATIONS

The setting is greatly influential in Gothic novels. The location is always very isolated and the protagonists are usually unable to leave of their own free will. It not only evokes the atmosphere of mystery but also portrays the deterioration of its world. The building itself almost becomes another character in the story.

POSSIBLE GOTHIC CHARACTER TYPES

- Protagonist – usually isolated either voluntarily or involuntarily, who is the hero/heroine of the play
- Villain (antagonist) – who, by his or her own actions, has fallen from grace
- Relatives and friends of the antagonist or protagonist
- Servants, clairvoyants (people who believe they can speak to spirits), gardeners
- Spirits

EXERCISE

GOTHIC WORKSHOP EXERCISES

1 Creating Gothic settings

In groups, use movement and sound to create the following:

- a rusty entrance gate to an old mansion
- a hall of whispering portraits
- a secret sliding panel to a chamber
- gargoyles on the roof of a castle
- gnarled and blackened trees.

2 Supernatural transformation

Work with a partner. Firstly, become a candelabra (a richly carved candlestick holder with many arms for candles). Show the movement of the candle flames flickering. Now become a spirit trapped within the candelabra. Make the spirit





beckon to a passer-by. Rehearse using controlled movement and vocal sound, transforming from candelabra to spirit and back again. As a class, watch others become candelabras and spirits. Give feedback on effective use of voice, facial expression, movement and sound to create the right mood and atmosphere.

3 Gothic scene transitions

In groups of about five or six, use transformation to show a change of location. The first location is a corridor of mirrors. Choose one person from the group to walk past the mirrors—at times they see their own reflection, but at other times they might get a glimpse of something other than their own reflection. As the person reaches the end of the hall of mirrors, the group transforms the location to create a circular stairwell that the person descends. The transformation needs to be as seamless as possible. Use your collaborative skills to work out the best way to achieve this.

4 Using transformation to show past and present

As a class, use body shape and minimal sound and movement to create objects in a Gothic garden such as iron gates, fountains, statues and a door to an abandoned Gothic building. Choose one class member to be the protagonist who comes across this place by chance. When the scene begins, they enter the garden and it is overgrown, the gates are rusted, and the fountain no longer works. There is an eerie mood and atmosphere. As the protagonist reaches the main doors to the house, they turn back to look at the garden. For a moment it transforms into a place that was lush, happy and inviting, but then slowly decays again back to its original state. Once it is back in its decayed state, the protagonist turns back to the door to the house, which slowly and eerily opens.

5 Gothic sounds using voice

As a class, create the following vocal sounds to build mood and atmosphere for a drama:

- gentle wind blowing
- doors creaking
- clocks ticking
- tree branches brushing against windows
- footsteps.

Sit in a circle and have each class member say one person's name in a ghostly whisper. Overlap the saying of the name to create an echo effect. Next, create the sound of rain approaching and fading away by gently patting your hands against the top of your thighs, slowly at first then building in tempo and then fading away until there are only a few drops of rain.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Describe how one group used movement and sound to create an effective transformation.
- 2 Why does the use of actors as objects and other physical features of a Gothic play add to the mood and atmosphere? How does this acting technique help to create a world that seems to have supernatural qualities?





PERFORMANCE TASK

4.8 Performance task: creating a Gothic play



HINT

Gothic plays are more mystery plays—they are not horror. There are no monsters, brutal murders or evil possessions. The tension is built through the suggestion that spirits and hauntings are just out of reach, hidden, elusive and secretive.



Shutterstock/Zacarias Pereira da Mata

Atmosphere is critical in Gothic drama.

The task

In this task you will work collaboratively to create a short Gothic drama, exploring what ‘drama’ is (in contrast to a comedy). You will also explore how the Gothic genre employs plot conventions, character types, mood and atmosphere, and theatrical techniques to create ‘supernatural’ moments to address themes about past actions and their impact on the present.

The key question you are exploring that will create a focus to frame the dramatic action is:

How might the mistakes of the past affect the present if there is no reconciliation with those who have been hurt?

Performance requirements

Your group must comprise five or six people, and all actors *must* remain onstage during the performance and use transformation to become characters, objects, etc. in the play. Characters must be developed using character biographies.

The central themes of acknowledging past mistakes and the power of forgiveness to reconcile must be explored and will be the focus of the dramatic meaning of the piece. The performance must demonstrate a strong control of tension and the ability to establish an appropriate mood and atmosphere.

The play must be set in Australia in the past, in an imagined location. An outsider arrives at an isolated house or building. This person is the *protagonist*, who uncovers a mystery linked to an unresolved past incident.

A house/building is inhabited by one or more characters who are connected in some way to the past incident. As the plot unfolds, supernatural forces reveal themselves to the outsider to help them solve the mystery. The inhabitant acts as the *antagonist*, who tries to prevent the uncovering of the mystery. This builds *tension* for the audience.

At some point in the play, the discovery of an object that holds great power and significance must be included to heighten the tension of the drama. This object will also act as a *symbol* that is tied to the message of the play.

The performance intention

Always be clear about your intentions and goal, as this helps to maintain the focus of your play. Keep the following questions in mind as you begin to make and shape your play:

- What is the central theme, subject or idea that we are exploring?
- What is the one question about the central theme, subject or idea that the audience is asked to consider?



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Use the following questions to help you with the beginning of your creative process:

- 1 Who are the characters in your play?
- 2 Where does the action of your play take place?
- 3 Which character is the protagonist? Is there more than one? What do they want and why?
- 4 Which character is the antagonist? Is there more than one? What do they want and why?
- 5 Define the tension of your play as questions the audience might want answered. This will build the mystery of your play. For example, what happened to the locket? Why is the door always locked? What happened here in the past?
- 6 What is the climactic moment of your play? How is the mystery uncovered? What is forgiven?
- 7 List the potential scenes of your play using a table similar to the following format:

SCENE NO.	CHARACTERS	LOCATION	ACTION/SITUATION	STAGING (USE OF SPACE, PROPS, ETC.)
1	Robert Molly	Underground tunnel	Robert and Molly are looking for Molly's wedding ring, which was washed down the sink. Climax of scene – they find a package of old letters.	Actors use DSC – crawling on hands and knees to show size of tunnel. Robert has a torch with a strong beam of light.
2				

- 8 How will the moments and situations in the dramatic action maintain a focus on our core question and challenge the audience to think more deeply about the issues?



HINT

It is also helpful to keep track of how you and your group are using the elements of drama in the development of your piece.



HINT

You may show the characters travelling from one location to another. Find a way to 'compress' the travelling time so that the bulk of the play's action occurs at each location.

4.9 Performance task: the journey

The task

Devise a performance that uses the theme of 'journey' as a starting point. Your play will be about one or more characters on a journey. The journey could be one of exploration, escape or discovery. Your performance will show three different locations and the way the characters travel to each location. It will also show how your characters are affected by their experiences on the journey. Some characters may change significantly because of their experiences; some may not change at all.

Incorporate the following in your playbuilding:

- a journey set in Australia
- a group of original characters who may or may not know each other
- for each character, a 'hidden' objective that they reveal by the end of the play
- the use of contrasting locations
- a theatre space or audience arrangement that you devise, such as those on pp. 89–91
- the dramatic technique of slow motion to highlight an important moment.

The following resources are provided as assistance. You can decide whether to use them directly or indirectly in your performance.



Shutterstock/gmstockstudio

Tips for Americans – how to function Down Under

1. No one calls it 'Down Under'. You might as well carry a sign saying 'I'm a tourist' if you call it this.
2. Always keep in mind the saying 'She'll be right', which basically means 'Don't worry, it'll be fine, so don't bother whining'. Go with the flow, and leave your anxiety and neuroticism behind. Try to blend in with the locals. They'll be the ones looking completely chilled.
3. Everything is opposite ... the seasons, the side of the road to drive on, the side of the escalator to stand on. It's totally bizarre, but just go along with it (see point 2).



Tourists of Australia

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE



Dreamstime/© konart

The key to finding Australian tourists is always water. Check waterfalls, rivers, and of course, beaches. Those in search of young tourists should not stray far from coastal southern Australia and rarely far from major urban centres ...

Key identification aids: any vehicle towing a caravan, any vehicle towing or carrying a boat, any fully-equipped 4WD vehicle, any bus that looks like it is lived in, generally anyone making a lot of noise.

Where to find tourists in Australia

4.10 Performance task: a new beginning

The task

Work in groups to devise a performance that incorporates the theme of 'a new beginning'. It may be set in any place and in any time, but a character or a group of characters must face 'a new beginning'.

The new beginning may have:

- happened suddenly, or may have been known about for some time
- been eagerly anticipated
- been anticipated with fear.

In your play, the characters are at the start of the new beginning and set about dealing with the change to their lives. As the play progresses, we learn more about how each character copes with the adjustment to the new beginning. In the course of your play, we also learn more about the characters' past experiences.

Incorporate the following in your playbuilding:

- a group of characters who are affected by the new beginning
- the use of recorded music at the beginning and end of your play to help establish mood and atmosphere
- a theatre space or audience arrangement that you devise, such as those on pp. 89–91
- the theatrical technique of flashback; include no more than four flashbacks to help explain each character's past.

Performance technique: flashback

In a flashback, we step back in time momentarily and learn about an incident in the past that helps us understand what is happening in the present. In your performance, you will need to consider how you make the transition from the present to the past in a way that does not interrupt the performance's flow.

Here are three examples of how you can incorporate flashbacks in your performance:

- Freeze the action and quickly take up a new position showing the characters in the past situation; then continue performing. Repeat this procedure to return to the present.
- Have characters walk from one area of the stage to another to indicate a different place and time.
- If you have access to technical equipment, use lighting changes or music to bridge the changes between flashbacks and the present time.

The following resources are provided as assistance. You can decide whether to use them directly or indirectly in your performance.



Courtesy of Green Bug Theatre

The play *Boy Overboard* by Green Bug Theatre explores a family's incredible journey to Australia.

NEWS

600 MILLION SEE TWO MEN WALK INTO HISTORY

In two hours, 14 minutes, yesterday, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin opened a new world before the wondering eyes of the estimated 600 million people watching them from Earth.

The watchers saw the shadowy figure of Armstrong make the first step on to the moon's surface—perhaps the most significant single event of the century—and Edwin Aldrin follow him soon after.

160 Years of the *Sydney Morning Herald*: Major News Stories, 1831–1990

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Identify the purpose or intention of your performance.
- 2 Brainstorm ideas for climactic moments, points of tension and conflict.
- 3 Brainstorm ideas for the characters and develop your character by completing a character biography.
- 4 Brainstorm ideas for situations. Consider the elements of drama in your notes and discussions.
- 5 Brainstorm ideas for how you can incorporate the required dramatic technique in your performance.
- 6 Consider how you may seat your audience to achieve your purpose.

Exploring, developing and selecting

- Use improvisation to explore characters and situations.
- Develop your character using the character biography and the character exercises outlined on pp. 86–87.
- Explore the use of space, considering your chosen audience arrangement.
- Explore how the use of focus on a dramatic moment, transformation and transitions can add impact to your performance.
- Refine and rehearse the scenes, and the scene transitions, to achieve a coherent and polished performance.

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually, using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- portray character/role through considered use of voice and movement
- sustain and develop character in performance
- research and prepare a playbuilt performance
- include any required dramatic technique
- evaluate your own work and the work of others
- structure and link aspects of your drama into a coherent and polished performance.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Choose one character from another group's play that you feel was particularly convincing. Identify the reasons why you feel the performance was convincing.
- 2 Did your performance demonstrate the use of effective scene transitions? Give reasons for your success or lack of success in this area. Offer suggestions for how you could improve your creation of scene transitions.
- 3 What was the climactic moment of your piece? How did you make this moment stand out for the audience?
- 4 Describe how you incorporated the required theatrical technique in your performance. What effect did you want to achieve through the inclusion of this technique?
- 5 Make suggestions you feel would improve your use of rehearsal time in future playbuilding tasks.
- 6 Imagine you are redirecting one group. Outline the difficulties you observed in the staging of their performance. Offer suggestions for improvement.
- 7 Evaluate one group and their use of scene transitions. Using drama terminology, explain how they achieved their transitions and whether or not the transitions were effective.
- 8 Imagine you are a performer working with people who have no previous drama experience. Outline how improvisation has been used in the past as a tool for playbuilding. Use examples from your own playbuilding to explain how improvisation is valuable in rehearsals.
- 9 Research a form of theatre or style of performance that uses a non-proscenium stage space for a specific purpose. For example, you might look at the theatre of Urban Theatre Projects, Jerzy Grotowski, Augusto Boal or Circus Oz. Report your findings to the class.



Performance task

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- apply the skills of collaboration and a creative process to create performance work
- draw on a range of starting points for playbuilding
- contribute ideas, feelings and experiences to the process of playbuilding
- consider the actor–audience relationship and select stage spaces to suit playbuilding tasks
- create and develop characters using character biographies
- include and manipulate selected dramatic techniques in performance tasks
- create effective scene transitions.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you prepared for your performance by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvising with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama? • practising and refining the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces? • structuring drama to engage an audience through manipulation of dramatic action, forms and performance styles, and by using design elements? • performing devised and scripted drama making deliberate artistic choices and shaping design elements to unify dramatic meaning for an audience? • creating and performing a range of convincing characters and roles effectively using voice and movement? 				
<p>Responding:</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect on the development, rehearsal and shaping of performance? • use questioning to interrogate the purpose of particular acting and staging techniques? • evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect? • analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making? 				

Comments

PART TWO



DIRECTING, DESIGNING, PLAYWRITING AND REVIEWING THEATRE

-
- Chapter 5** Directing and designing: staging and performing play scripts
 - Chapter 6** Playwriting: creating and writing play scripts
 - Chapter 7** Theatre criticism: analysing and evaluating performances



Shutterstock/Pavel L. Photo and Video

5

DIRECTING AND DESIGNING: STAGING AND PERFORMING PLAY SCRIPTS

WHY STUDY DIRECTING AND DESIGNING?

Two of the key practices in theatre are the roles of the director and designer. In previous chapters you have focused on the roles of the actor and the playwright in your work on playbuilding. This chapter looks at working with pre-written scripts as a collaborative process of discovery. A polished performance of a script is the end product of analysis and rehearsals involving directors, designers, production crew and performers. The process of creating a directorial concept and communicating this to everyone involved helps the director, the performers and the production team develop an understanding of the script and explore creative opportunities for its presentation. Studying the methods of script interpretation and presentation will develop our ability to read, interpret and perform scripts.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 5.1 The director
- 5.2 The designers
- 5.3 The stage manager
- 5.4 Directorial concept and the elements of production
- 5.5 Script detective work and Stanislavski's System
- 5.6 Rehearsing and performing scripts
- 5.7 Performance task: interpreting a play script

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- explore and consider the collaborative roles of the director, the designers, the production team and the actors in the interpretation and performance of scripts
- create a prompt copy for use in rehearsals and performance
- explore and apply a method of analysing a script for meaning, character development and effective presentation
- explore and apply a method for creating a directorial concept with design elements
- apply an understanding of the elements of drama to interpret and present a scripted performance.





Sydney Theatre Company/Brett Boardman

Macbeth as performed
by the Sydney Theatre
Company, directed by
Kip Williams

5.1 The director

Actors are in the habit of putting their attention only on the roles assigned to them ... This is a mistake ... It is very important that the performer senses the production as a whole, its entire intent ... Then, by itself, the part given to you will become clear.

Constantin Stanislavski – Russian performer and director

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

KIP WILLIAMS

Director, Sydney Theatre Company

Kip Williams is one of Australia's most exciting young directors of theatre, opera and film, and is currently Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company.

While at STC Kip directed Caryl Churchill's new play *Love and Information*, in a co-production with Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre. Kip's previous productions for STC include *The Golden Age*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Macbeth*, *Children of the Sun*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Under Milk Wood* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, as Associate Director with Andrew Upton.

In addition to directing numerous drama productions, Kip has also directed several productions for Sydney Chamber Opera. These include *I Have Had Enough* (double bill of *Ich Habe Genug* and *Nunc Dimittis*), the song cycle *Through the Gates* (also for the 18th Biennale of Sydney), and the acclaimed production of *The Lighthouse*. Kip also directed a radical staging of Romitelli's *An Index Of Metals*.

Kip has worked on a number of screen projects, including the short films *B, Bee & Mee* and *Walk*; and music videos *Little Fingers* and *Botanist* for the band Guineafowl, the latter of which was listed in ABC's *rage* top 50 music videos for 2009.



Getty Images/Brendon Thorne

Kip Williams



HINT

A good director leads, directs and instructs the performers, but also allows the performers to make their own discoveries.

THE DIRECTOR'S ROLE

The role of the director is a relatively 'new' occupation. Prior to the end of the 19th century, the director in theatre was virtually non-existent. The term 'actor-manager' or 'stage manager' was given to the person or actor who was responsible for organising the performance.

Today, some of the director's tasks and responsibilities are as follows:

- Negotiate with producers and theatre companies about the choice of production, the possible casting and the selection of the production team.
- Interpret the script and develop a directorial concept, which is recorded in the director's production brief. The concept explains the director's overall vision of the play and will include consideration of themes, issues, characters, lighting, costume, sound, set and style of performance. It will also contain a copy of the script with explanatory notes, sketches and ideas.
- Complete a detailed unit breakdown and analysis of script, including careful consideration of the elements of drama.
- Lead a group of actors and the production team through a process to performance.
- Block the action of the play.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Individually, write down what you know about directing and what questions you have. Share these with the class.
- 2 What kind of leader do you think a director should be? To answer this question, use your recollections of previous performances where you have been directed.
- 3 Communication is an essential aspect of the director's role. What are four key ways a director might communicate effectively with actors and the production team?
- 4 Research directing by interviewing a theatre director. He or she may be the director of a school production, amateur theatre production or a professional production. Ask questions that will help you understand the role and responsibilities of the director. Also ask questions about the director's approach to working with actors, and the process they apply to create their directorial concept.



HINT

Staging is the 'putting on stage' of all the aspects of the performance including the movement of actors, props, set pieces, lighting and sound. Blocking involves making decisions about how each scene appears on stage, and directing actors to assist them with their positions, entrances, exits and moves.



The Guardian – *Want to be a Theatre Director?* (Article)

5.2

The designers

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Although each area contributes its own creative ideas, all areas are united by the directorial concept. This collaboration between the director and the designers helps to ensure the final production has a sense of unity and cohesion. The main responsibilities of each role are listed under each production area.

SET DESIGNER

The set designer must consider the following:

- the appearance and style of the set, taking into account the requirements of the directorial concept
- the use of colour, texture and shape, and how they will work with the designs for costume and lighting
- practical issues, such as the venue, the size of the performing area, the entrances and exits of actors and the ease of scene changes.

It is also the set designer's job to provide 1:25 scale drawings and a three-dimensional model of the set.



HINT

Professional directors rarely make decisions about set, costume, lighting and sound in isolation. Often the development of the directorial concept is a collaborative effort, involving all the designers.

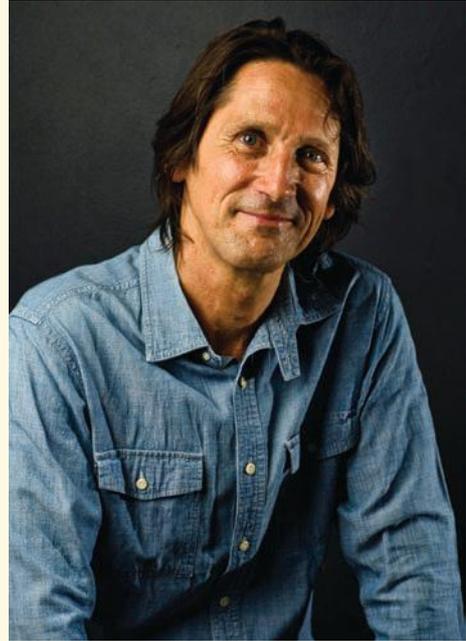
PRACTITIONER PROFILE

STEPHEN CURTIS

Designer

Over a career of more than 30 years Stephen Curtis has worked extensively as both a production designer for film and costume and set designer for drama, opera and dance. His book *Staging Ideas: set and costume design for theatre* is widely used as an inspirational guide to the design process.

Stephen writes, 'How will this production feel? How will it work? What will it mean? As designer, I set out together with my director to find answers to these questions. This is often the very first step in getting the production off the page and giving it a tangible, real shape. Through discussion, research and experimentation, the design becomes a brilliant tool for actually seeing what kind of production it is going to be, and communicating this to everyone else involved in bringing the production to life: the performers, the set and costume-makers ... and ultimately the audience.'



Courtesy of Stephen Curtis

Stephen Curtis

LIGHTING AND SOUND DESIGNER

A lighting and sound designer must design both lighting and sound to suit the requirements of the directorial concept. To do this they must consider the following:

- practical lighting issues, such as whether the actors can be seen and whether special effects are achievable
- practical sound issues, such as the coordination of technical equipment and the use of microphones.

It is also the set designer's job to:

- find and record all the necessary music, sounds and sound effects using digital software to assemble and edit what is required
- select lanterns and colours of gels, and consider how they contribute to mood and atmosphere
- assess the effect of lighting on set and costume design
- assist the director to make artistic decisions about lighting states and lighting changes
- use lighting software to program and operate lighting.

Similar to the set designer's drawings, the lighting designer must prepare a 1:25 scale drawing of all lamps and their positions, as well as providing a running cue sheet of all lighting cues.



HINT

A lighting state contains particular lamps that are set at certain levels. There can be several lighting states within one scene.

COSTUME DESIGNER

The costume designer's role is to design the costumes to suit the requirements of the directorial concept, such as the period and the style of performance. To do this, the costume designer needs to:

- consider practical issues, such as fitting of costumes, costume changes and whether the actors can move freely in the costumes
- make artistic decisions in consultation with the director, such as choice of fabric, fabric colours and style of costumes
- prepares and present renderings of all costumes for all characters
- construct costumes that need to be specially made.

5.3 The stage manager

MANAGING A PERFORMANCE

The stage manager plays a central role in the presentation of performance work. They oversee and coordinate all the various elements of a production. Some of the stage manager's duties are to:

- attend all rehearsals and assemble the prompt copy
- include in the prompt copy a full copy of the script, including detailed notes on actors' movements, scene changes, and sound and lighting cues
- record details of blocking, set changes, lighting and sound cues in columns on the opposite page of the script
- use a code to ensure the efficient recording of sound and lighting cues, movements of actors and the positions of set items
- use the prompt copy during the performances to call cues and to ensure all the elements of the production run smoothly.

The prompt copy example on page 110 shows how the cues are written to correspond with the dialogue and stage directions in the script. The use of aerial diagrams in the action column shows the movements of actors in the scene.

The following information will be found on pages in the front or back of the prompt copy:

- **costume breakdown** – a list of all the actors/characters and the costumes they wear
- **props list** – a list of all the props used in the performance, where they are to be placed, who uses them, and in which act and scene they are used
- **pre-show setting list** – outlines what needs to be checked and in place before the show can start
- **scene chart** – charts which actors are in which scenes
- **contact list** – a list of the names and addresses of all people involved in the performance.



American Theatre Wing
– Working in the Theatre:
Scenic Design



HINT

A costume 'rendering' is an illustration of a costume design. The rendering can be presented as a sketch, collage, watercolour or computer-aided design. The rendering will include annotations on how the costume is constructed, and may be accompanied with samples of fabrics and colours.



HINT

During rehearsals, notes on blocking are made in the action column of the prompt copy. Lighting, sound and technical cues are added during the final weeks of rehearsal when the theatre is available and the set and equipment have been installed.



HINT

Letters and arrows can be used to indicate set items as well as actors' positions and moves.

PROPS	SOUND = SFX	LIGHT = LFX	ACTION
<p>CISSY: BOUQUET DSR MARGARET: CAMERA USL LISA, HELENA: CONFETTI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standby SFX cue 17 (<i>Wedding March and cheering</i>) SFX 17 cue GO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standby, followspot CS Standby LFX cue 24 (full light) Followspot GO: follow Cissy to DSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actors in position at doors to stairs USR and USL Cissy Onstage DSR
<p>Scene 13 <i>Sound of The Wedding March and cheering. A spotlight comes up CS. Cissy dives into the spotlight and catches bouquet. As she clutches it to her chest, full lights come up to reveal Margaret, Jeanette, Lisa, Helena and Kat waving and yelling to the departing couple.</i></p> <p>Margaret (<i>Taking photos</i>) Oh Jeanette! Look at Cissy, she's so excited. <i>Need to remember that Margaret seems excited but her subtext is disappointment as it is not her daughter getting married.</i></p> <p>Jeanette Yes, always a bridesmaid though. <i>(Jeanette and Margaret exit. Kat goes to Cissy.)</i></p> <p>Kat Good catch, Ciss. <i>Need to work out how to block this action.</i></p> <p>Cissy Sarah said she'd aim for me. <i>(Felix enters.)</i></p> <p>Felix Hi. <i>He is nervous, need to show this more effectively.</i></p> <p>Kat Hi.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SFX cue 17 FADE OUT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LFX cue 24 GO X-fade (full light up, followspot down) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jean and Marg. exit USL; Kat to CS Felix enters USR
			<p>Audience</p>

5.4 Directorial concept and the elements of production

DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT

The 'directorial concept' is the director's vision for the play. The concept will include consideration of:

- characters, setting and era of the play
- message, themes and issues of the play
- performance space
- target audience
- elements of production.

The designers of costume, set, lighting and sound work closely with the director to realise the directorial concept in the staging of a production. The designers use the directorial concept as the basis for their designs.

THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

The ‘elements of production’ in a performance are lighting, sound, set and costume.

These serve an important function in the performance of a play. Through the power of symbol, they help to convey information about atmosphere, themes and character.

The designers of set and costume will consider the following basic design elements and principles when formulating their ideas:

- **design elements** – line and its direction, shape, texture, proportion, colour, tone and size
- **design principles** – dominance, balance, harmony, contrast, variety, radiation, gradation, repetition, symmetry and asymmetry.

Each designer will consider their own particular requirements in their initial planning. The factors to be considered as part of each design discipline are as follows:

- **costume design** – costumes required, types of garments, colours, textures, accessories, patterns on fabric, comfort and practicality for the performers
- **set design** – the stage space, use of vertical and horizontal lines, use of angles, use of shapes (circles, squares, and so on), colour, texture, levels, furniture, entrances and exits, locations of the action and symbolic images
- **lighting design** – use of light and shadow, sense of warmth or coolness, colour, pattern, highlight, silhouette, spotlighting and washes
- **sound design** – use of recorded music, sound effects soundscapes, voice-overs, live music and percussion.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Visit some theatre design websites and select one costume or set design that is illustrated. Copy the image and evaluate your chosen design. Although you may not know the play for which the design is intended, comment on the designer’s use of the design elements and principles. Explain how the design may help establish atmosphere, communicate character or work symbolically.



TEDx Talks – What is Theatre Capable of?

THE DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT: *SUMMER OF THE ALIENS* BY LOUIS NOWRA

The following example provides a description of a production and demonstrates how the elements of production evolve from the directorial concept.

Synopsis of *Summer of the Aliens*

The play is mostly a heart-warming comedy, but also has many serious issues that give the play its drama. The play will open with the older Lewis as the narrator. He takes us back into his memories as a boy growing up in Broadmeadows, Victoria. The young Lewis has an active imagination and indulges his obsession with flying saucers to escape from the harsher realities of his world. He befriends a young Indigenous girl, Dulcie, who, like Lewis, escapes from the troubles in her life through ideas about angels.



HINT

Broadmeadows is a northern suburb of Melbourne. In the 1960s it was largely made up of paddocks with a few housing estates.

Social, historical and political context

The play is set in Australia in the early 1960s. This was a frightening time for the world as the United States of America, believing in the threat of Communism, was on the verge of bombing Cuba during what was known as the Cuban missile crisis. Australia was also dealing with the impact of the many new immigrants who were arriving from Europe during this period to begin a new life. Despite its dark background and some disturbing moments, the play will be funny, provocative and moving; it will appeal to a broad audience.

Intention and performance style

The play is about a rite of passage from youth to adulthood. The use of a realistic acting style will encourage the audience to consider the issues of racism, sexuality, and abuse, as believable characters will encourage empathy. At points in the action, the older Lewis will speak to his younger self. This dramatic technique will help the audience identify with the changes Lewis goes through.

Although the play will be realistic in acting style, the set will be symbolic to show that what we see on stage are the memories of the older Lewis. The performances of some of the other characters will be exaggerated slightly, and stylised to create comedy and to help convey to the audience young Lewis's perspective.



Shutterstock.com/Jack Q.

Performance space

The play will be performed in a 250-seat auditorium with a thrust stage.

Set design

The set is intended to look artificial. The stage floor is raised and will be covered in dry grass to represent the paddocks of Broadmeadows. A large cyclorama will be lit in certain colours to show times of day. At its base will be three miniature houses to suggest the rest of the housing estate. The housing estate where the young Lewis lives must seem vast, empty, dull and monotonous. The people who live there seem out of place. Three clouds will be painted on the cyclorama and are intended to look artificial. It is summer, so everything must look hot and dry. Lewis's house is represented by only one room: the kitchen. It will be decorated in the style of the 1960s. The colours of lemon yellow and pastel pink will give it a homely feel.

Costume design

The period is important. The costumes will be researched and designed to be as suggestive of the early 1960s as possible. Hairstyles should also be typical of the period. Performers will have their hair styled or wear wigs as appropriate. Research will be conducted to see how make-up was applied during this period. Each character will be distinguished by the colour and tone of their costume. The costumes will have a hint of roughness about them to indicate the characters' economic situations. The angel costumes will look impressive but homemade. They will look more powerful under certain lighting.

Lighting design

The general lighting will be composed of strong washes in straw colour and in blue. Lewis's house will be lit by profile spots to isolate scenes in that location. Other areas will also be isolated for certain scenes. There will be two shades of blue gels used for the floods on the cyclorama to indicate day and night. The fading of lights on the cyclorama will be very important for establishing mood. Special lighting effects include the flying saucer effect, fibre optic lights for the miniature houses, and a fire effect for the final scene of the play.

Sound design

The play includes a few radio announcements from the period; these will have to be researched. Sound effects include budgie noises, wind, rain, thunder, crickets and cicadas. Music from the era is required in some scenes. Some atmospheric sounds and music will be specially composed by the designer for certain scenes. The atmosphere at certain moments should be gripping.



HINT

A cyclorama is sometimes used at the rear of a stage to create a large, neutral surface for lighting and projections. It can be used to suggest exteriors and to create the illusion of distance, but can also be used to create interiors. Traditionally, the cyclorama is made of fabric and is hung near the upstage wall from a bar above the stage. It can also be stretched between bars located in the wings of the stage to create a smooth surface that is slightly curved.

EXERCISE

THEATRE DESIGN PROJECT

Create a set and/or costume design. Choose a play to design for. If designing a set, focus on two particular scenes in the play. If designing a costume, focus on two characters. If you do not have time to read a full-length play, choose a one-act play or a play you have studied in another subject.

Before you choose particular scenes or characters to design for, create a directorial concept for your play. Use the following questions to help you.

- **Performance style** – What style will the play be performed in? Why?
- **Themes and issues** – What are the themes and messages of the play?
- **Target audience** – Who is the target audience? Why is this play appropriate for them?
- **Performance space** – Where will the play be performed? Why is this an appropriate space for your performance?
- **Set design** – Which scenes will you design a set for? What are the locations of the scenes? What is the predominant mood or atmosphere of the play? How can colour, shape, scale of set pieces, etc. help establish symbol and atmosphere?
- **Costume design** – Which characters will you design costumes for? What are the features of each character's personality? How will colour, garment and texture portray personality? What are the dramatic needs of the characters in each scene and how will the costume design support these? How will you convey time period, season or occupation?

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Visit the website of a theatre company of your choosing. View images or video clips of the performances and read the descriptions of the productions. Identify some of the features of set, costume and multimedia used in a performance. Who is the target audience for this company?

5.5 Script detective work and Stanislavski's System

LOOKING FOR CLUES

In this unit you will undertake exercises that are the first steps in preparing a script for rehearsal and performance. You will:

- read and rehearse a script
- prepare a prompt copy
- develop your understanding of character, incorporating aspects of Stanislavski's System for actors
- work as both director and performer.

THE BIRTH OF REALISM

A number of developments at the end of the 19th century encouraged a change in the way people thought about theatre and acting. One important influence that encouraged change was the development of psychology as a field of study. This branch of science aimed to create a better understanding of the human mind and of personality. This greater understanding influenced the way characters were written about and performed.

Constantin Stanislavski was a Russian performer–director who worked with the Moscow Art Theatre in the early 1900s. He reacted against the ‘artificial’ acting of the 19th century. Stanislavski believed that actors should achieve psychological truth in their performances. He devised a series of techniques to help performers create believable characters. These techniques are known as ‘the System’. Stanislavski is also known as the founder of the dramatic form termed ‘realism’. Realism attempts to re–create life on stage using realistic settings, lighting, sounds and characters. The theatre term ‘the fourth wall’ comes from the style of realism and refers to a proscenium arch stage and the ‘invisible’ fourth wall the audience looks through to observe the lives of the characters on stage.

To study the whole System in depth would take a very long time. We will only look at some important aspects of the System as part of your script detective work. You will be able to develop your understanding in later years of study.

SCRIPT DETECTIVE

The exercises that follow will take you through the initial exploration and analysis of a script. They incorporate the following aspects of Stanislavski’s System: given circumstances, character objectives and building character.

The script that has been selected is realistic in style. In your script detective work you will look for clues to help you understand the characters and the scene. Clues can be found in:

- **stage directions** – the written instructions to the actor and director; usually appear in italics
- **dialogue** – the main source of information that helps provide information about the story of the play, characters, setting, themes and issues.

To complete the script detective work successfully you must carry out all the exercises and complete them in the sequence presented. Completing all these exercises will take more than one session.



HINT

The proscenium arch is the ‘picture frame’ around the proscenium arch stage. The arch and wings hide the backstage area and heighten the illusion of real life on stage.

Getty Images/Hill Street Studios



Working with scripts requires you to think critically about the many ways in which dialogue and stage directions can be interpreted.



HINT

Although a script is provided, you can use the following exercises to work with any script.

Creating a prompt copy

To prepare for these exercises, photocopy the script provided and paste it into your logbook. Paste the page of script on the left-hand side of an open double page. Divide the right-hand page into three columns: action and staging, light cues, and sound cues. Leave a few blank pages before or after your script to write your responses to questions after some of the exercises.

DANA AND LEE

(LEE drops his backpack, sits down and checks his phone for messages. DANA approaches from behind. She is eating and quickly finishes the last mouthful. She wipes any stray crumbs from her lips and then wipes her hand on her pants. She hesitates for a moment. She approaches LEE and sits at the far end of the bench. LEE is aware of DANA's presence but does not look up from his phone.)

Unit 1

Title: The First Try

Sub-objectives:

Lee: To be left alone.

Dana: To get Lee's attention.

DANA Did you get my message?
LEE What?
DANA I sent it during English. Almost got caught.
LEE I didn't get it. *(Pause.)* I'm sort of busy. Do you mind?
DANA Sorry!

..

Unit 2

Title: The Second Attempt

Sub-objectives:

Lee: To be left alone.

Dana: To get Lee to talk to her.

DANA *(Silence. She moves closer to LEE and pulls out a stick of gum from her pocket. She offers a piece to LEE.)*
 Do you want some?
(He shakes his head. DANA moves closer again.)
 Are you going to Vic's on Saturday?
LEE No.
(He turns away from her. DANA moves away momentarily. Silence.)

..

DANA *(She moves closer to him and looks over his shoulder at the phone screen.)*
 Who are you talking to?
LEE Can't you take a hint? Listen! Stop hassling me.
DANA What?
LEE You've been hanging around like a bad smell for days. Everywhere I go, you're there. It's giving me the creeps.
DANA I'm not stalking you, if that's what you're implying. It's just coincidence. It's not as though this place is big enough to get lost in. What's your problem anyway ... you're acting a bit paranoid.
(She moves away from him.)
 I only wanted to talk.

LEE Yeah, right!
(He puts his phone in his pocket, picks up his backpack and goes to leave.)

DANA Where are you going?

LEE Anywhere you're not.

DANA Lee ...

LEE Look, I don't want you to come near me, look at me or speak to me. Get it?

DANA What did you just say? Listen Lee, you're not that special. Do you think I'd purposely waste my time trying to get a bit of attention from Mr Freeze? You're so arrogant. Typical boy's reaction. Maybe I'm trying to do you a favour. It's not as though you couldn't do with a few friends at the moment.
(There is a long, uncomfortable silence. DANA tries a different approach.)
 How long do you think you can keep avoiding me?

LEE What?

DANA I know all about it. It's not such a big deal.

LEE Everyone knows about it. It went viral didn't it?

DANA But I spoke to your mum.

LEE Mum?

DANA Yeah, she rang me. I know what really happened. Said she was worried about you. She said not to mention it, but I reckon the sooner you realise people care about you and are worried about you the better. She thought I could help. We were good friends once, remember?

LEE I wish she'd mind her own business.

DANA She only means well.

LEE I know, but she doesn't understand that it just makes things worse. I can deal with it on my own.

DANA I don't think you can. *(Pause.)* What's the big deal ... people make stuff up all the time. The world is full of fakers and haters, and once it gets out there, well, you know ... who doesn't love a bit of scandal and gossip? They'll forget about it sooner or later.

LEE You don't get it, do you? They won't! There'll always be questions, annoying posts and those stupid whispers. People look at me like I'm a freak. Sometimes I wish I could get as far away from here as possible.

DANA And what use would that be? *(Pause.)* You already give out the 'back off' messages, the way you keep hanging out on your own and dwelling on it. You need to get out more. Losing it all the time doesn't help either. It lets people see how touchy you are. If you keep fighting back you give them ammunition. I know what it's like. *(Pause.)* Everyone makes mistakes. *(Pause.)* I've watched you clinging to that 'mood' all term like you want it to be part of you, and I know you're not like that. *(A long pause. Silence.)* Okay, I'll go. I'm obviously annoying you.
(DANA goes to leave.)

Step 1 – Finding the given circumstances

EXERCISE

THE FIRST READING

Divide into pairs and read through the *Dana and Lee* script. Alternatively, you could have two volunteers read the parts to the class. Use this first reading to gain an overview of the characters and the situation. As well as playing one particular part, for the purposes of this exercise you also need to think as the director of the script, so you need to use your imagination to try to picture what this script may look like in performance.

After you have read the *Dana and Lee* script, use the following questions to help determine the given circumstances associated with the character you are playing: 'Where am I?', 'What time of day is it?', 'What is the season?', 'Who is here with me?' and 'Why am I here?'.

Write your responses in your prompt copy.

FINDING UNITS OF ACTION, SUBTEXT AND SUB-OBJECTIVES

A unit breakdown shows the building blocks of a script. Each unit contains a distinct moment of action, an idea, a point or an issue being discussed. The building blocks give an overview of the way tension is developed in the script and can also be used to help identify character objectives. By looking closely at small sections of the script, the director and actor are able to 'read between the lines' to determine the underlying motivations and intentions of the character/s.

Step 2 – Unit breakdown: finding character objectives

The 'objective' is what the character wants to achieve. Sometimes the character can have more than one objective, and sometimes the character does not achieve their objectives. Objectives can be explicit or hidden. A character's objective is what motivates them to behave the way they do. Examples of objectives are to win the game, to marry, to keep things the way they have always been, to get the job, to persuade and to deceive.

Stanislavski believed that each character in a play aims to achieve their 'super objective'. To achieve their super objective, the character needs to achieve sub-objectives in each scene of the play. The steps a character takes to achieve sub-objectives can be found in script units.



HINT

The beginning and end of a unit is indicated by entrances and exits of characters, by changes in conversation, or by changes in action, mood or tension.

EXERCISE

ANALYSING THE UNITS

Follow the steps below to complete a unit breakdown of the *Dana and Lee* script. The first two units have been done in the script margin for you.

- Using a pencil, draw a line after the line of dialogue or stage direction that you feel ends a unit.
- Label the unit with a title that you feel sums up what the unit is about; for example 'You Don't Love Me', 'The Plan' or 'Mum's Worries'.
- Identify your character's objective in each unit (the sub-objective) and identify the character's overall objective in the scene.
- Identify the precise moment or 'beat' of the rhythm in one unit in the script that you feel contains the climactic moment; justify your choice.

BUILDING CHARACTERS

Step 3 – Second reading: building your character



HINT

The sort of language the character uses can provide you with information about the character's personality, situation and background.

EXERCISE

ACTING AND READING

Read the *Dana and Lee* script a second time, and then begin to perform as the characters in the situation. This requires the partial adoption of the characters by considering the use of body language and voice, delivery of lines and staging. In this second reading, also consider how the progression of units helps to build tension and leads to the climactic moment.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Once you have finished a performed reading, complete the following questions and tasks to help develop your understanding of your character. Record your responses in your prompt copy.

- 1 What sort of language does your character use? For example, does the character use formal or informal language? Are there any particular lines that you feel say something about who your character is and what they want?
- 2 What does the rhythm of the character's speech tell you about the energy of the character? Can you find examples from the script?
- 3 Subtext is the meaning behind a line. Sometimes the meaning is obvious, and at other times it is more subtle. In performance, our selective use of body language and timing helps to make the subtext more apparent to the audience. What thoughts lie behind your character's lines? What body language, gestures, pose and mannerisms will you use to communicate the character's subtext?
- 4 Are there any pauses in the character's dialogue? If so, what thoughts lie behind the pauses? How long should the pauses be held? Why? What impact do the pauses have on the mood and atmosphere of the script?
- 5 What do other characters say about each other? What does this information tell you about the characters?
- 6 What is your character's status in relation to the other characters? What evidence from the script can you find to support your opinion?
- 7 Complete a detailed character biography. Begin the biography by using the information about your character that is contained in the script, and then add information of your own.

5.6 Rehearsing and performing scripts

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

ANNE-LOUISE SARKS

Theatre maker

Anne-Louise Sarks is an award-winning theatre maker whose work has been performed around the world. Anne-Louise is one of Australia's most exciting theatre makers, and her style is best characterised by her intelligent and deeply playful refocusing of classic works into the present day. She has created a series of remarkable productions that combine the full force of ancient myth with the confronting familiarity of modern life.



Fairfax Syndication/Jamie Barrett

Anne-Louise Sarks

Anne-Louise writes, 'When I am beginning to develop a new theatrical project, I start by asking myself a few important questions. Firstly, why does this story need to be told? Secondly, how does it speak to the present moment in time? And finally, what form would best support the telling of this story? These questions ensure that I'm clear about what the story means to me and how and why I'm creating it. As you get further into your process of making theatre, these initial answers can also be useful to refocus and clarify the direction of the story. There are many personal and political motivations that drive me to tell stories, and to reimagine myths in new ways. What drives you to tell a story?'



AustralianPlays.org

REHEARSING AND PERFORMING

So far we have looked at the three steps you need to complete before you rehearse and perform scripts. To refresh your memory, they are:

Step 1 – Finding the given circumstances

Step 2 – Unit breakdown: finding character objectives

Step 3 – Second reading: building your character.

The remaining steps are:

Step 4 – Rehearsals: exploring the elements of drama and testing ideas

Step 5 – Performance: being the character

Step 6 – Evaluation: looking for improvement.

You can see some similarities in this process with the stages of the creative process and the process of playbuilding. In steps 4 to 6 you will explore the following aspects of Stanislavski's System: relaxation, emotion memory, 'the magic if' and concentration.



HINT

It is important to develop the habit of writing notes during rehearsals. These notes can be used to reflect on your character work and the general interpretation of the script. Often asking questions about character choices or acting decisions can contribute to the creative process stage 3: gathering a broad range of potentially related information, and stages 5 and 6: generating ideas and combining ideas. You should use a pencil for notations on your script so that corrections and alterations can be made easily.



HINT

It is best to leave the memorising of lines until last because the way you deliver a line depends on your interaction with other actors. It also depends on consideration of important factors. If you learn your lines too soon, it is difficult to change the way a line is said later.



HINT

Repetition is the best way to memorise lines. You should only memorise small chunks of script at a time. It is also helpful to imagine the situation the character is in as you memorise the line.

Step 4 – Rehearsals: exploring the elements of drama and testing ideas

The rehearsal process involves the following stages:

- Continue to read and rehearse the script referring to the elements of drama. Record all blocking in the action column of your prompt copy. Include decisions for hand props, movements, positions of actors, delivery of dialogue, character objectives, the building of tension to the climactic moment, and so on.
- Explore how the use of space and levels can add meaning to your performance. For example, how can the status of the characters be emphasised by using levels and/or distances from other characters?
- Improvise situations that show the characters ‘outside’ the time and place indicated in the script.
- Continue to develop your character by adding to the character biography. You can also incorporate the following techniques from Stanislavski’s System: emotion memory, ‘the magic if’ and relaxation (see below).
- Memorise lines once all decisions have been made.
- Make final refinements to blocking, lighting, sound and performance work.
- Complete a technical rehearsal. This is where the focus is placed on the movement of scene changes, and the light and sound cues. Finalise cues in the prompt copy.
- Complete a dress rehearsal. This is where you perform with all the required elements and without interruption, as though it is the actual performance.

EXERCISE

EXERCISES FROM STANISLAVSKI’S SYSTEM

Emotion memory

Emotion memory requires you to recall memories of the emotions you felt when you were in a situation that is similar to the situation the character is in. For example, you may be playing the role of a character who is lost in a strange city. In this instance you should recall a time when you were lost to help evoke the feelings associated with the experience of being lost.

‘The magic if’

You may have to play a character in a situation that is outside your own life experience. The question ‘What if ...?’ helps you to play your character truthfully by utilising the power of the imagination to vividly create experiences and feelings. By asking this question, you are putting yourself in an imaginary situation and determining how you would react. For example, you may never have been first in a race. Asking yourself ‘What if I won a race?’ leads you to ask questions such as ‘How would I feel?’ or ‘What would I do at the moment I crossed the finish line?’

Relaxation

Relaxation is an ideal technique to use in conjunction with ‘The magic if’ and ‘Emotion memory’ exercises to develop character. When we are relaxed, our imagination is heightened, helping us recall and create feelings and sensations.

Lie on the floor and progressively tense and release different body parts. Breathe in as you tense the muscles, and exhale as you relax them. When you are completely relaxed, imagine you are the character in various situations. Use your imagination to explore the character’s feelings and thoughts.

Step 5 – Performance: being the character

In the script work in this chapter, you have looked at the style of realism. This style attempts to re-create life on stage. The performers in a realistic play need to use their skills of concentration and focus to become absorbed in the character and reduce their awareness of the audience. Use of imagination is an essential aspect of being focused and concentrating when rehearsing and performing. Through your imagination, you ‘see’ the world of the play and experience the thoughts and feelings of the characters and roles that you play. Stanislavski believed that, in realistic acting, the performer is 90 per cent being the character and 10 per cent aware as the performer. Stanislavski believed that, to achieve this, the performer needed to concentrate and focus their attention to help them become more deeply involved in their character.

EXERCISE

CONCENTRATION

Concentration is the ability of the performer to maintain their involvement in their character and the performance by ignoring external and internal distractions. An external distraction may be a distant noise outside the performing area or an unexpected event that happens on stage. An internal distraction is where the mind wanders from pretending to be the character in the situation and instead thinks about other things. If the performer is totally engaged in the performance and the character, and resists being distracted, the audience will be more convinced that the performance is truthful.

Stanislavski used an exercise called ‘Circles of attention’ to explain how concentration is maintained in performance.

Circles of attention

Work with a partner. Create two characters and set them in an improvised situation within a room of your choosing. At the beginning of the improvisation, their circle of attention should encompass the whole of the performance area. The performers utilise the skill of concentration to limit their awareness of the audience and to maintain focus. On a given signal from the group leader, the circle of attention becomes smaller until it is only a small area around the two actors.

Example: The circle of attention encompasses the whole performance space. Two people are inside an art gallery. The circle of attention reduces. The two visitors examine a large glass cabinet of pottery work. The circle of attention reduces even further. The two visitors examine a program of art works, looking for the name of an artist.

Step 6 – Evaluation: looking for improvement

After you have performed, it is important to evaluate the performance. In theatre jargon, this is sometimes known as the ‘post mortem’. Evaluation is an opportunity for the director, the performers and the production team to consider the strengths of the performance and the areas for improvement. Often the evaluation helps to build a deeper understanding of the play and its message.



HINT

Methods of relaxation have been used for centuries to help people not only relieve tension but achieve in particular areas. Today many professional sporting clubs employ sports psychologists who use relaxation and visualisation techniques to help players perform well. Relaxation has the same benefits for performers who would like to improve their performance work.



CHALLENGE

During the ‘Circles of attention’ exercise, audience members can occasionally cough, stand or move to a different seat. The performers are to ignore these distractions and maintain their concentration by focusing on the situation.



HINT

Memorise all your lines. This will make your performance of the script more enjoyable to watch. Reading a script limits the performer's ability to use body language and be absorbed in the character.



WICKED The Musical – Costumes: Design/Build
National Theatre – Medea's Dress: Making Blood and Mud
Royal Opera House – Design Challenge: Designing and Making a Set
National Theatre – Designing *Emil and the Detectives*
Practical Technical Theatre – Demo: Lighting Design
The Guardian – Russia's Stage Revolution: When Theatre was a Hotbed for Impossibly Space-Age Design (Article)

EXERCISE

MINI TASK: PERFORMING *DANA AND LEE*

Continue developing the *Dana and Lee* script (pp. 116–118) to performance by completing the requirements for steps 4 to 6. You will need to:

- rehearse the script with your partner; based on the information you have discovered, incorporate decisions about character, setting and how the scene is played
- include the use of sound and lighting, if you have access to equipment
- write all your cues in your prompt copy so that the lighting and sound operators are able to follow your instructions
- present your interpretation to the class.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Use the following tasks to evaluate your work and the work of others.

- 1 Briefly describe the process you went through to gain an understanding of the *Dana and Lee* script.
- 2 Outline any discoveries you made about the characters or the situation.
- 3 Compare your interpretation of the script with one other interpretation. What were the similarities and differences? Can you offer an explanation for the differences in interpretation?
- 4 Compare your character interpretation with a class member who played the same character as you. What were the similarities and differences? Can you offer an explanation for the differences in interpretation?
- 5 Describe how one interpretation of *Dana and Lee* best demonstrated an understanding of the building of tension to the climactic moment. How was this achieved? In your discussion, refer to the use of rhythm, pace, timing and energy.



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Effective collaboration when working with scripts requires everyone to remain focused on the aims of the rehearsal.

PERFORMANCE TASK



5.7 Performance task: interpreting a play script

The task

In pairs or small groups, you are to prepare a script and perform it for an audience. You are to find your own script or use one of the scripts provided. Performing arts bookshops and script websites are good sources for finding scripts. Try to avoid using film scripts as these often need to be adapted substantially to make them appropriate for live performance. For successful completion of this performance task you are required to:

- choose a script
- prepare a prompt copy
- include, in the front of the prompt copy, written answers to script detective work (see pp. 114–120)
- clearly describe your directorial concept; this will include a discussion of how the elements of production—set, lighting, costume and sound—will be unified
- use sketches and include samples (such as colours and fabrics) to help illustrate your ideas
- follow the steps in rehearsing and performing a scene (see pp. 121–124)
- record all your responses in your prompt copy
- give a short, verbal presentation to the class that summarises your directorial concept for the script and how you would perform it if you had access to a full production team.

Rehearsing and performing scripts

Follow the steps below to prepare for the performance task.

- 1 Choose a script and cast the roles.
- 2 Paste a copy of the script into your logbook and create a prompt copy. Even if you do not have access to sound and lighting equipment, you can record your creative ideas for sound effects and lighting cues. Remember to leave pages for the written responses.
- 3 Follow the script detective steps (pp. 114–120).
- 4 Follow the rehearsing and performing scripts steps (pp. 121–124).
- 5 Write a character biography for your character.
- 6 Write a point-form directorial concept for the extract you choose to perform. Your concept will identify themes and issues, as well as the predominant atmosphere. Your concept will also explain how costume, set, lighting and sound will help to communicate themes and issues.



HINT

You may like to think of how your set or costume designs could be used in a symbolic way to help establish mood and atmosphere, and to convey some of the broader issues of the script.



HINT

When rehearsing, it is important to remain focused as the character. Consciously engage yourself as the character in the scene and with the other character. This will encourage more truthful interaction between you and the other performer.

The prompt copy will be assessed in terms of:

- presentation and layout
- inclusion of required elements
- degree of sophistication in interpretation of the script.

Evaluate using a performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria.

These criteria relate to your achievements in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- sustain and develop character in performance
- select and incorporate voice that is suitable for character
- select and incorporate effective body language and movement
- effectively use the performance space
- develop a script into a coherent performance
- make suitable choices for lighting, sound and costume.

Sample scripts

THE LONG WAY HOME (EXTRACT)

Characters: 1 man, 1 woman

Created from first-hand accounts, *The Long Way Home* captures the experiences of members of the Defence Force who have served in combat zones internationally. While the script is based on actual interviews and testimonies, the playwright, Daniel Keene, did not want to create a piece of 'verbatim theatre' but to craft the interviews into scenes that capture the often traumatic and damaging experience of serving in a conflict zone. In the following scene, Anna and Nick are trying to find normality in their lives after his return from Afghanistan. Nick is severely traumatised and possibly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.



Fairfax Syndication/Elesa Kurtz

The Long Way Home by Sydney Theatre Company

THE LONG WAY HOME

5. TWO LIVES

NICK approaches the front of the stage.

NICK When you first get back, the smell of shampoo or the scent of perfume on a woman's skin ... just floors you. You stand on the street and breathe it in.

Pause.

Out on patrol you might not wash for a couple of weeks. You're sweating like a pig all day. You don't change your clothes.

Pause.

One day and the next just blur into one another. There's a lot of time, but there aren't any days. Every step you take could be your last. You push the fear down, way down. You learn how to live with it. But here ...

He turns from the audience.

Lights rise on the living room of a suburban house.

Night.

NICK *sits at one end of the sofa, staring at a blank TV screen.*

His wife, ANNA, comes into the doorway and stands watching him; NICK is unaware of her.

After a pause:

ANNA Where are you?

NICK *(Startled, spins around to face her)* What?

ANNA You were ... off somewhere.

NICK Was I?

ANNA Where were you?

NICK Nowhere in particular.

Pause.

ANNA Some days you're not really here at all.

NICK Then where am I?

ANNA I don't know.

Pause.

NICK I don't know either.

Pause.

ANNA *approaches and sits at the other end of the sofa.*

ANNA We need to talk.

NICK We talk all the time.

ANNA But we don't talk about anything.

NICK We must talk about something.
ANNA Maybe you don't need to talk, but I need to.
NICK I'm not stopping you, am I?
Pause.
ANNA I want you back.
Pause.
NICK I don't know what you mean.
ANNA You do know.
NICK No. I don't.
ANNA You don't want to know.
Pause.
I don't think that you want to be here.
NICK *stands up and moves across the room.*
NICK I can't do this.
ANNA What?
NICK I can't have this conversation.
ANNA You're going to have to.
NICK No. I don't have to.
Pause.
ANNA I love you.
Pause.
NICK Don't say that.
ANNA You used to like me saying it.
NICK Just don't say it.
ANNA I love you.
Pause.
Nick?
NICK What?
ANNA Do you know that?
NICK Yes.
She stands and approaches him; he moves away.
ANNA Nothing's changed. I haven't changed.
NICK I have.
Pause.
When I look in the mirror, do you know what I see?
Nothing. Because that's all I'm good for now. Nothing at all.
Pause.
My war's over. I know that. I'm not goin' back to Afghan.
ANNA Is that what you want to do?
Pause.

NICK I can fight. I'm good at it. Is anyone going to pay me to fight? That's what I can do. I'm good for nothing else. I'm useless. I'm a blank space.

ANNA Nick ...

NICK I can't be what I used to be. I am my job. Now there's no job.

ANNA But there's here ... there's home. You're home now.
Pause.

NICK Every time I was in Afghan I had to forget about you and about coming home. I might not come home. I had to forget about it. So I did.
Pause.

ANNA I never stopped thinking about you.

NICK Maybe you should have.

ANNA Some women do.
Pause.

NICK Did you?

ANNA You just said I should have.

NICK Did you?
Pause.

ANNA After you left I didn't touch anything. I left your shirt on the end of the bed, I left your towel in the bathroom. I left the cup you'd drunk out of on the table. I didn't touch anything, not for a week. It took me that long to admit that you were gone. I expected you to walk in the door any time. I think that I was waiting for you to walk in the door, as if nothing was any different, for you to be home again as if you'd never been away. Then I began to expect it a little less each day. Then finally I put away your things and I knew that you were gone.
Pause.

I think that part of me is still expecting you to come home any day.
Pause.

But there you are.
Pause.

I think that now I'm just waiting for you to be gone for good. And I expect that a little more each day.
Pause.

NICK When my last tour was almost up, I kept imagining all the things that would happen when I got home. I'd kept you out of my mind, but then I let you back in. I kept trying to imagine what it would be like the first time I touched you again.

Pause.

Then I touched you ... and I just felt numb.

She turns away from him.

When I walk down the street I look the same as everybody else. I don't have any injuries that you can see. I look like everybody else. But I'm not there. I'm a ghost.

Pause.

I'm a soldier. That's how I think of myself. There isn't anything else.

Pause.

I can't be a soldier anymore. That part of my life is over.

Pause.

But there isn't any other part. I can't be who I think I am.

Pause.

I don't know who I am.

Pause.

ANNA *leaves the room.*

HOME (EXTRACT)

Characters: 1 female, 2 male

The play *Home* was commissioned by Shopfront Youth Theatre for Young People; it was written by P. P. Cranney. The play explores the concept of 'home' through two story-lines: that of a girl who runs away from her home and that of two refugees to Australia.

Merinda and Ali are brother and sister; they have escaped their war-torn country without their parents and family. They are staying with their uncle in Australia. Ali is having difficulty adjusting to his new home and is still affected by memories of war. His sister Merinda has adapted more quickly and wants to belong to her new country. In this scene, Ali and Merinda come into conflict over Sammy, a boy Merinda has met.

HOME

SCENE 13 – HOMELANDS #5: UNCLE'S PLACE

(In a bedroom in their uncle's flat, ALI and MERINDA are sleeping in separate single beds. We can hear traffic noise—one particularly loud backfire causes ALI to start thrashing about in his bed as if in a nightmare. MERINDA gets up, crosses to his bedside and tries to soothe him.)

MERINDA It's all right, Ali, it's all right! It's only the traffic. Sleep, my brother, sleep. Everything's all right.

(ALI drifts back to a more peaceful sleep.)

(To audience) Our mother writes to us—finally! The situation has not improved back home. Stay in Australia

as long as you can, she says. She gives us an address of an uncle who we have never met. He lets us move into his tiny flat in a block of redbrick units near a busy road. I'd become used to the silence of the bush that surrounded the barracks, and here the noise of the traffic, night and day, makes it difficult for me to sleep. At least I don't suffer the nightmares that torture Ali more and more.

*(She leaves her sleeping brother, and begins to quietly get ready for the day. It is now morning: as **MERINDA** energetically prepares for school and work, **ALI** rises sluggishly, without enthusiasm for the new day. He turns on the TV and slumps down in front of it.)*

MERINDA What will you do today, Ali?

ALI The same as I did yesterday and the day before that: I'll wait.

MERINDA But we have no idea when the war might end. *(No response)* Mum wouldn't say that it is too dangerous to come home if it wasn't true.

ALI She says that to protect us—we should be there to protect her.

MERINDA There's nothing we can do. If you would accept that, if you would try to learn English, or get a job, instead of just sitting all day watching *(TV)*.

ALI Watching our homeland being destroyed—bombed and burnt to the ground. Our people being killed.

MERINDA We can do nothing.

ALI Then that's all I'm doing. Leave me alone.

MERINDA But it's not good for you to just sit and—

ALI I'm sick of your nagging and whining.

MERINDA Ali, please ...

ALI Shut up!

*(Maybe he kicks or throws something. **MERINDA** is silenced by the depth of his anger. She continues to prepare to go out.)*

MERINDA I'll be going straight from school to work tonight. I'm on the late shift, you and uncle will have to feed yourselves.

*(**ALI** doesn't reply.)*

There is plenty in the fridge ... *(Still no reply)* See you later.

*(**MERINDA** leaves. **ALI** flicks the remote control at the TV.)*

NEWS REPORT NATO continued its air strikes against the besieged city overnight despite growing concerns about mounting civilian casualties ...

A passenger train carrying up to three hundred civilian commuters, including children ...

Outside the capital, Government forces clashed with Liberation Army rebels in a bloody confrontation ...

[The news fades out [or under] the sounds of the battle we have heard before in the earlier 'War Zone' scene. The room becomes a battlefield; we are in the War Zone again. Perhaps among the other images there is the image of ALI and MERINDA's MOTHER being pushed around and assaulted by soldiers. The War Zone sound effects crescendo, ALI hurls the remote control at the TV, goes into his bedroom and throws himself on his bed. The War Zone effects fade out.]

[Later that night, MERINDA enters the flat with a boy, SAMMY.]

SAMMY waits by the entrance. MERINDA enters the bedroom. ALI stirs in his bed.]

ALI Merinda?

MERINDA Sorry to wake you. Have you eaten yet?

ALI I'm not hungry.

MERINDA Uncle?

ALI Probably at the club. Poker machines! ... What are you doing? It's late. Who's that out there with you?

MERINDA I have no class in the morning. I'm going to the movies with a friend.

ALI You brought someone here?

MERINDA Yes, I've brought a friend home. We're going to see a film.

ALI You think so, eh? If it's one of those Australian girls, I don't think you'll be going anywhere.

[ALI sees SAMMY waiting. MERINDA follows him out.]

MERINDA Ali, Sammy's not a girl ...

SAMMY Not the last time I looked anyway.

MERINDA Ali, this is Sammy.

SAMMY Hello, Ali, nice to meet you.

[SAMMY puts out his hand, but ALI does not take it. ALI directs most of the following to MERINDA.]

ALI He speaks—

MERINDA Our language, yes. And his English is good too.

SAMMY 'How are you going, mate.'

[SAMMY and MERINDA laugh.]

MERINDA Sammy works with me at McDonald's.

SAMMY Yeah, take my word for it: don't eat there unless it's an emergency—and even then think twice!

ALI Why have you brought him here—into our home?

MERINDA So this is your home now—good, you must be feeling better.

ALI I'm not joking. Why have you brought him here?

MERINDA He's taking me to the movies. *[To SAMMY]* I'm ready, let's go.

SAMMY Listen, Ali, it's really ... *[all right]*

ALI That's not our language he speaks.

MERINDA Yes, it is—it's the same as ours.

ALI Where are you from?

MERINDA Ali, he's been in Australia five years ...

ALI I asked where is he from? That accent—from the North.

SAMMY Originally, my people—(*came from*)

ALI Your people are slaughtering our people.

MERINDA Ali, don't say such stupid things.

ALI We are exiled in this stupid country because your people are killing our people—my father, my family.

MERINDA No, Ali, please, don't talk like this.

SAMMY Our family came to Australia, too, because we were driven out by war.

ALI A war that your people started.

MERINDA Sammy didn't start the war. People like us don't make wars. Governments make the wars.

ALI How could you bring this person to this house. If you don't care about my feelings—

MERINDA I do care about—

ALI (*Over her*) If you don't care about my feelings, think of your uncle—you know he lost his family, his homeland, because of these people ...

SAMMY Merinda, I'd better go—

MERINDA Wait, we're going together, to the movies.
(*ALI pulls his sister back.*)

ALI You're not going anywhere with scum like this.

MERINDA Ali!

SAMMY Ali, you better take it easy.

ALI Get out of here—get out of here now!
(*ALI pushes SAMMY back toward the door. SAMMY would like to retaliate, but doesn't for MERINDA's sake.*)

SAMMY I'll go now, Merinda. This was a mistake.

MERINDA No, please, wait—

SAMMY I'll see you at work tomorrow.

ALI Merinda will not be returning to work.
(*SAMMY goes. MERINDA pulls away from ALI.*)

MERINDA Ali, how could you? You are not my father! You can't do this to me!

ALI I'm glad your father is not here to be shamed by you like this.

MERINDA My father shamed?

ALI Yes, to see you become friends—become lovers maybe—with people who want to kill us, drive us from our own land.

MERINDA Sammy and his family came here before this war. They were driven out of their homeland by another war. Sammy has nothing to do with what is happening to us.

ALI His people—his people right now are waging war on us.

MERINDA Sammy is not waging war on us. We are in Australia now. We are not at war in Australia.

ALI I am telling you—you will not have anything to do with his kind—is that clear?

MERINDA And you say I shame our father? My father's soul was never as bitter and poisoned as yours. You're the one who shames our father's memory.

(ALI hits her across the face, shocking himself as he does so. MERINDA does not retaliate—she picks up her things and leaves the flat, perhaps chasing after SAMMY. ALI does not attempt to stop her or follow her.)

(ALI stands alone. The sound effects of the War Zone fade up and out.)

THE LIGHT BURNS BLUE (EXTRACT)

Characters: 2 women

Set in London, England during the First World War, this play by Silva Semerciyan dramatises fictional events around the publication of photos of fairies, known as the Cottingley Fairies, taken by a young girl. These photos caused a sensation at the time because they seemed to capture fairies in a garden on film. The playwright has suggested that the devastating impacts of the war and the loss of lives created the conditions for people of the time to want to believe in something that gave them hope. In this scene, two friends confront each other. Elsie is the girl who took the photos, and her friend Winifred is an ambitious journalist who seeks to expose Elsie as a fraud.

THE LIGHT BURNS BLUE

3. THE NEGATIVE

Optional slide: August 1917

*Saturday, 25 August 1917, 7.50 p.m. At a hotel **ELSIE** is standing on a raised platform. **WINIFRED** stands below her, dressed in the professional skirt and blouse of a journalist. **WINIFRED** withdraws a camera from her satchel and points it at **ELSIE**.*

WINIFRED Smile, Elsie.
She takes the photograph.

ELSIE It's you.
ELSIE *stares at WINIFRED in disbelief.*
I can't believe it. What are you doing here? And why are you dressed like that?

WINIFRED I'm here in my official capacity.

ELSIE Your official capacity? What does that mean?

WINIFRED I mean my own particular—

ELSIE I know what official means. Why did you leave like that? So suddenly? We looked everywhere for you. We even asked Constable Warren to help us. He said, 'What's one missing girl when there are millions of missing men?' And now, here you are.

WINIFRED I know how you did it, Elsie.

ELSIE Did what?

WINIFRED The photographs.
A pause

ELSIE Winifred? Is that even your name?

WINIFRED Yes.

ELSIE I thought you were my friend.

WINIFRED Another person would have done this long ago.

ELSIE Done what? What are you going to do?
A pause

WINIFRED I'm a journalist for the newspaper called *The Dispatch*.

ELSIE A journalist?

WINIFRED My editor has instructed me to denounce you as a hoax and report back on the reaction of the other guests.

ELSIE *(Taken aback)* You wouldn't do that, would you? All the girls are here— Vivie, Flossie, Mags— even Viv's mum. It's our first ever trip to London. Please don't spoil it for them. My mother has never been so happy.

WINIFRED You're not. Happy. Are you?

ELSIE You don't speak for me. You don't know me. You were in Cottingley for two days and then disappeared without a trace.

WINIFRED You'll tell everyone the truth because you *want* to tell them. You are going to stop this before it goes any further.

ELSIE You lied to me. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to the lobby to wait for the others.

ELSIE *begins to go out.* **WINIFRED** *moves towards her and speaks with urgency.*

WINIFRED Elsie, in less than an hour, reporters from all the major London newspapers are going to descend on this hotel. They will have one purpose—to learn the truth of the Cottingley Fairies. My editor wanted a major press event to launch the story. Of course, we'll be first to go to print—most of the story is finished. It only remains for me to describe the outcome of our discussion tonight.

ELSIE What discussion? There is not going to be any discussion. You've obviously made up your mind. There's nothing more to say.

ELSIE *begins to go off again.*

WINIFRED Wait. Elsie, wait. My editor wants a story. She's sure you're a fraud, but she's never met you. I have. And it's not as easy for me ... because I saw something last month that made me think there was more to this than I first believed.

ELSIE What? What is there?

WINIFRED You told me yourself it's your dream to go to art school. The truth about fairies will be revealed tonight. But if you convince me that you are an artist and not a fraud I will defend you—against the world if necessary. If you don't, I will be the first to tear you down.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Discuss how successful you felt you were in using the six steps in rehearsing and performing scripts. In which steps did you feel you made the most progress? Why?
- 2 Identify the strengths of your prompt copy. In which areas could you improve?
- 3 Evaluate your performance, considering the performance criteria listed on the evaluation sheet on p. 137.
- 4 Describe one performance you enjoyed. Select key moments that you remember and explain why you felt those moments were successful. Consider the performers' use of voice, body language, focus, timing and character portrayal.
- 5 If you have seen several different pairs performing the same script extract, compare one strong performance with another. Discuss the similarities and differences between the performances, and the effectiveness of the choices made.
- 6 Describe how the exercises from Stanislavski's System assisted you in preparing your script. In your discussion, explain the value and purpose of Stanislavski's System both for the performer and the audience.
- 7 Imagine you are a director. Choose a play, novel or film you will stage. Explain in point form your directorial concept including ideas for costume, lighting, set and sound. Include concept board images, sketches and diagrams where possible.



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Performance task: interpreting a play script

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- create a prompt copy for use in rehearsals and performance
- articulate a directorial concept for your script performance
- explore a method of analysing a script for meaning, character development and effective presentation
- apply an understanding of the elements of drama to interpret and present a scripted performance
- explore the use of the elements of production in the interpretation of a script.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Collaborating, creating and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you prepared for your performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completing a legible prompt copy that is annotated and divided into units, and shows blocking, lighting and sound cues? • recording all research and rehearsal notes? • completing a character biography? <p>Have you selected and incorporated the skills of voice, movement and character work by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustaining and developing character in performance? • using vocal dynamics that are suitable for the character? • using body language and movement in a way that helps to communicate the character? <p>Have you planned, selected and modified your presentation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making effective decisions regarding the design of set, costume, lighting and sound? • making effective decisions regarding stage action and the use of space? • presenting a performance that is coherent and well-rehearsed? • presenting an original and insightful directorial concept that includes consideration of all the elements of production? 				
<p>Responding:</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a deep understanding of the aspects of directing script and working with the elements of drama through reflections and explanations of your own work and the work of others? • establish links in your explanations and ideas between your own ideas about directing, designing and working with script and your knowledge of directors, directing, theatre design and dramatic forms and styles like realism? 				

Comments

6

PLAYWRITING: CREATING AND WRITING PLAY SCRIPTS

WHY LEARN ABOUT PLAYWRITING?

This chapter explores the role of the Australian playwright in creating scripted drama. By exploring and discussing the work of the playwright, you will appreciate and understand the ways in which this theatre practitioner uses skills of written communication to create drama that examines and reflects our society. As well, you will practise exercises and activities to help you write your own Australian script.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 6.1 Playwriting
- 6.2 Approaches to playwriting
- 6.3 Contemporary Indigenous Australian drama
- 6.4 Writing your own Australian scripted drama
- 6.5 Playwriting task: Australian drama

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- recognise how theatre and drama reflect and explore aspects of Australian society and human experience
- apply a process to create, write, edit and publish a script that explores aspects of Australian society, politics and history
- identify and explain how the playwright incorporates dramatic form, dramatic techniques and dramatic conventions for a specific purpose.





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6.1 Playwriting

A play script is the written record of a theatre performance. This is the playwright's way of communicating their creativity and ideas with directors, actors, designers and audience. Some plays that were written a long time ago have been performed many times over many hundreds of years. Each time a script is performed, the director, actors and designers approach rehearsals and staging with a new approach or interpretation. This is called a directorial concept. Play scripts do not have to be written by only one playwright—they can be written in collaboration with other writers. Some theatre companies work with a playwright to record and develop the stage action that they see in rehearsal.



Playwriting Australia
Wikihow – How to Write
a Play

THE PLAYWRITER'S VIEWPOINT – THEATRE AS A MIRROR

Theatre and drama are integral parts of society. They not only provide entertainment, but also encourage us to reflect on life experiences that are familiar and not so familiar. The playwright hopes that the shared experience of theatre provides us with a valuable opportunity to examine ourselves, so theatre can lead to powerful changes both for individuals and for the community.

Theatre and drama reflect the significant changes occurring in society, politics and history. Through their work, playwrights can explore one or more of the following viewpoints:

Social concerns – The play may invite the audience to examine and explore individuals, communities, groups, the way we interact, social classes, racial tension, youth, the elderly, interpersonal relationships or living conditions.

Political concerns – The play may invite the audience to examine and explore the ways in which power in society is exercised. For instance, the play may comment upon the politics of gender, issues of equality, human rights, our laws, economics or our interaction with other countries of the world.

Historical concerns – The play may invite the audience to examine and explore the ways in which our past has shaped us. For instance, the play may focus upon significant historical events, or consider what we can learn from our history and how it might help us shape our future.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What are some important social or political issues that concern you at the present time? Write these down and explain your concern. Share your work with a partner.
- 2 Recall one Australian play or performance you have seen or studied recently. Consider the social, historical and political concerns listed above. Identify which of these was the most dominant concern of the performance.
- 3 Visit the Australian Bureau of Statistics website. Gather information about population distribution, racial groupings, family structures, and so on. Choose one piece of information you find particularly interesting or that you feel challenges people's preconceptions about Australia. Share this information with the class.



Australian Bureau of
Statistics

THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND THE BENEFITS OF WRITING SCRIPTS

If you refer back to the stages of the creative process in chapter 4, you will recall that at some point the creator needs to let ideas incubate before they generate, select and combine ideas in fresh and innovative ways. Through a more focused approach to writing play scripts, you will think more deeply about your choices of language to communicate how you are framing the action, character, character relationships, stage design, staging, rhythm, tempo, symbol and mood in more effective ways. This can be very useful, especially when you are working on collaborative projects in Drama classes where you only have short periods of time to work with your group. By writing scripts individually, you can provide more developed and refined scenes for your group to rehearse.

The three interrelated areas of skill for the playwright are:

- 1 **Concept** – If you refer back to focus: framing the action (chapter 3, p. 60), you will recall that this element of drama is tied to your intention as a playwright and is often framed by the question you are asking the audience to consider. The concept for your play must have a clear focus in terms of the ideas and viewpoints you are exploring.
- 2 **Dramatic action** – This is where the playwright uses their skills of imagination and creativity combined with their knowledge of the elements of drama, theatrical techniques, elements of production and performance style to visualise the play in action on the stage. They make choices about how the play is structured, and what the audience will see, feel, hear and experience. In many ways, when the playwright is writing their play, they are simultaneously working as a director—staging their ideas for dramatic action using their imagination.
- 3 **Dramatic language** – In this skill area, the playwright uses the power of language to communicate. Through language choices, playwrights create character voices, convey ideas in the play, build tension through subtext, create and describe metaphor and imagery, and build mood and atmosphere.

Areas of skill for the playwright

CONCEPT	TO WHAT EXTENT ...
Originality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created a fresh or authentic 'take' on the subject matter, style or form? • What is the 'focus' that frames the dramatic action? • What is the particular perspective or point of view?
Clarity of purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I clearly communicated what I am expecting the audience to experience? • Will the audience be taken on a clear and satisfying journey, appropriate to subject matter, style and form?
Sustained theatrical concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created and sustained a clear 'vision' or 'world' on and for the stage? • Can the world be visualised/realised on the stage? • Have I achieved/met/realised my dramatic intention and articulated theatrical concept?
Stylistic and thematic coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the choice of 'style' of the play serve the purpose? • Am I making choices that reflect a sophisticated understanding of theatre? • Is there a clear connection/relationship between thematic concerns and chosen performance style? • Are the ideas realised by the choice of performance style?





CONCEPT	TO WHAT EXTENT ...
Structural cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I used the structure of the play (sequence of dramatic action/manipulation of time/space) to give the theatrical world form and dramatic meaning? • Does the development of thematic concerns of the play form a coherent whole/theatrical experience?
Effective choice and shaping of elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I effectively manipulated all of the elements of drama to shape and create a convincing 'world' and a coherent journey?
Development of clear and purposeful dramatic action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I written for the stage and not for film or television? Is the action able to be staged? Is the action theatrical? • Is the temporal frame (how time is shaped and manipulated) developed and clear? Is it immediate and forward-looking, or does it allow for moments of reflection to flesh out ideas and action? • Have I manipulated the dramatic action effectively and with a definite purpose? • Have I made effective structural choices to take the audience on a particular dramatic journey (linear/non-linear narrative, montage, emotional, etc.) that fulfils my intention?
Effectiveness in engaging the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I considered the actor/audience relationship and shown an effective use of theatrical devices and techniques such as dramatic irony, direct address and proxemics?
Create characters and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created convincing and engaging characters/roles appropriate to the chosen style? • Do the characters have distinct/individual/clear/original 'voices' appropriate to the style? • Are the characters/roles created and their relationships consistent with the chosen style and the demands of the dramatic action? • Do the characters and their relationships have depth/complexity/belief?
Describe visual and/or aural imagery and effects appropriate to style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I effectively communicated the staging and stage directions? • Have I clearly communicated any action based on non-dialogue? • Have I created effective visual and/or aural imagery, within both the dialogue and the stage business, consistent with style and the demands of the chosen dramatic action?
Create subtextual, symbolic and thematic meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I created motifs, symbols and metaphors to develop subtextual/thematic meaning? • Have I written rich and layered dialogue, appropriate to style, that develops subtextual/thematic meaning? • Have I used dialogue to communicate action and style to enhance the realisation of the vision?

6.2 Approaches to playwriting

[Some playwrights] talk as if the power of one's own personal experience and imaginings is enough. It rarely is.

Hannie Rayson – Australian playwright

AUSTRALIAN PLAYWRIGHTS

Australia has many successful playwrights whose work has been produced both nationally and internationally. Australian playwrights have written plays in a variety of dramatic forms. One example is to use realism as the core dramatic form but to

incorporate dramatic techniques that are not conventions of traditional realism, such as direct address, symbolism and moments of fantasy, absurdity or the supernatural. These plays are sometimes defined as ‘magical realism’.

Looking closely at some Australian playwrights in this unit will provide you with an opportunity to examine contemporary Australian theatre in more depth. You will read about some different approaches to scriptwriting, the use of dramatic form, and the incorporation of dramatic conventions and techniques. Script extracts have been provided to help illustrate the playwrights’ intentions. You can also read, discuss and perform these extracts.

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

SUZIE MILLER

Playwright

Suzie Miller is a multi-award winning Australian/international playwright. She is a NIDA graduate, has an MA from UNSW in Theatre, an Honours degree in Science and a Masters of Law.

Suzie has had over 30 productions of her works in theatres and festivals around the world in Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth), UK, Ireland, Canada and New York. Very recent shows include *Dust*, Black Swan Theatre Company, Perth (2014); *Driving into Walls*, PIAF, Sydney Opera House (2013); *Caress/Ache*, Griffin Theatre, Sydney, (2015); *The Sacrifice Zone* (text and physical theatre), Theatre Gargantua, Toronto (2013); *Overexposed* (dance/theatre work), WA State Theatre (2014); *Medea*, La Boite Theatre, Brisbane (2015).



Courtesy Suzie Miller

Suzie Miller



Barking Gecko Theatre Company – *Driving into Walls* by Suzie Miller (Highlights)

ONEFIVEZEROSEVEN BY SUZIE MILLER

Researching a play

Working in conjunction with Barking Gecko Theatre Company in Perth, Suzie was commissioned to write a play that answered questions about Western Australian young people. The Artistic Director of Barking Gecko wanted to know: Who are they? What do they think? What are their aspirations? Where will this lead the country? This led to the production of a play *Driving into Walls*. The success of this play led to the writing of *onefi ezeroseven*, a broader look at the youth of Australia. *onefi ezeroseven* is an excellent example of a contemporary dramatic form that integrates chorus, dance, physical theatre, projected imagery, movement and direct address in a powerful way to capture what it is like to live as a young person in Australia. The play takes actual interviews and responses to questions from young people and presents a series of ‘events’ or episodes that capture thoughts and feelings about growing up, sexuality, divorce, education, fame, parental stress, housing issues, terrorism, religion, politics, cyberspace, globalism, community, culture, subculture and cyberspace.

Dramatic structure and dramatic form

In *onefi ezeroseven* there are six main characters:

- Matilda/Tilly (an Anglo-Australian) from Altona, Melbourne
- Hayden (an Indigenous Australian) from Parramatta, Sydney and the Northern Territory
- Grace (an Asian-Australian) from Adelaide
- Jesse (an Anglo-Australian) from Queensland
- Jordan (an Anglo-Australian) from Tasmania
- Mo (an Arabic-Australian) from Western Australia.

This play is a strong example of the ways in which contemporary theatre fuses many art forms to create multi-layered, metaphoric expressions of human experience. A multi-discipline theatre performance, *onefi ezeroseven* combines physical movement, dance, acting, projected imagery and recorded sound to convey the preoccupations and concerns of Australian youth. Rather than a more conventional linear narrative, *onezerofi eseven* is a montage of discrete scenes that explore themes about life as a teenager.

Extract from *onefivezeroseven*

The following scene is a monologue. As a playwright, this is often a good place to begin your practice of writing dialogue, as you are able to develop your knowledge and understanding of one character more fully. Even though only one character is speaking, Suzie Miller wanted the cast of the play to use physical movement to illustrate and add to the performance of each event.

The playwright intended for Mo to perform this monologue in Arabic with Jordan standing beside him interpreting into English. For our purposes, only the translated version is given below. Work in groups to rehearse and perform the following extract and then complete the tasks that follow.

ONEFIVEZEROSEVEN (EXTRACT)

EVENT 9

MO – A STORY

Mo speaks in Arabic. JORDAN stands beside him and interprets all of this into English—line by line.

My name is Mohammad and this is my story

I was 12 when I finally came to live in Western Australia

Before then I had no idea where Australia was, but my father kept saying we would be safe there, so I always thought of it as a special place, with people who were very very kind.

I remember Lebanon before the bombs came. But most of my memories were about toys I had and the street in Beirut where I lived.

Playing at school. Things like that.
At first me and my friends thought the war was really exciting
And then the bombs started to fall.
The day before we left, my mother was crying and crying.
The area at the end of our street was flattened by bombs.
I remember Dad packing lots of things and getting Mum,
my brother and me in the car.
We had to drive towards the border.
But we hadn't gone far when I saw it.
That I saw him.
Driving past an area of just bricks and rocks, the left over part
from a bomb, Mum telling us not to look out.
But of course I did.
I saw him lying there
It was our neighbour Mr Abdul
With his wife and his boy rocking over him
Weeping
Mr Abdul's face was covered in blood, but his eyes were open
His leg was separated from his body and one arm was twisted in a
weird position
His wife was trying to grab parts of him
And his son looked afraid.
I just stared at Mr Abdul's face.
It's so strange how I just knew he was dead
Even though I had never seen a body before
We didn't stop, we just drove past
But it felt like I was there just looking at him
For ages
He was from my neighbourhood
I had known him all my life
And in that moment I promised myself
Made a promise in my heart and to Mr Abdul
That I would always be kind to people
No matter who they were
I would always find the good
That was my promise
And we just drove onwards and left the land I was born in.
My first year in Australia was really lonely, no one else at my school spoke
Arabic, and it took me a long time to understand English.
By the time I got to High school, I had lots of friends—Anglo kids,

My brother and I have been in Australia all these years, and
we're still called:

'Terrorists'

'Osama Bin Laden spawn'

'9/11 murderers'

People tell us to 'go home'

But Australia is my home. My place is here

At the train station I've been told I'm a "terrorist"

"A refugee who doesn't belong here".

I've had food thrown at me, and—

Been spat on.

Beat.

I think of my neighbour's dead face

I think of the promise I made that day

I might have only been 9 when I made it, but—

It was the biggest thing that has ever happened to me

Beat.

And I need you to hear this

Beat.

I belong here now

Beat.

(Slowly and in English) I AM a young Australian

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

HANNIE RAYSON

Playwright

Hannie Rayson has established a reputation for topical, complex dramas written with wit and humour. A graduate of Melbourne University and the Victorian College of the Arts, she has an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from La Trobe University and is a Fellow of the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne. Her plays have been extensively performed around Australia and internationally. They include *Please Return to Sender*, *Mary*, *Leave It Till Monday*, *Room to Move*, *Hotel Sorrento*, *Falling From Grace*, *Competitive Tenderness*, *Life After George*, *Inheritance* and *Two Brothers*. She has been awarded two Australian Writers' Guild Awards, four Helpmann Awards, two NSW Premier's Literary Awards and a





Victorian Premier's Literary Award as well as *The Age* Performing Arts Award. She also wrote *Scenes from a Separation* with Andrew Bovell.

For television she has written *Sloth* (ABC, *Seven Deadly Sins*) and co-written two episodes of *SeaChange* (ABC/Artists Services). A feature film of *Hotel Sorrento*, produced in 1995, was nominated for 10 Australian Film Institute Awards. In 1999 she received the Magazine Publishers' Society of Australia's Columnist of the Year Award for her regular contributions to HQ magazine.



Newspix/Pat Scala

Hannie Rayson

Hannie made playwriting history when *Life After George* was the first play to be nominated for the Miles Franklin Award. In 2006 she was nominated for the Melbourne Prize for Literature, a prize for a Victoria-based writer whose body of published or produced work has made an outstanding contribution to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.

INHERITANCE BY HANNIE RAYSON

Researching a play

As a playwright, Hannie Rayson believes that research is essential. As preparation for writing the play *Inheritance*, Hannie travelled to the Mallee region of Victoria 15 times to meet the people who lived there and to listen to their stories. She wanted to get to the heart of the discontent that was a feature of life at this time for many people living in regional Australia. The director and cast of *Inheritance* also travelled to the Mallee region with Hannie to help develop their understanding of the characters and the issues of the play.

Here are some statements from Hannie about what she discovered during her research in the Mallee:

- 'I went into these country towns and talked to these people in pubs, libraries, everywhere, and asked: "What's on your mind? What are the key things?" And they usually said, "Inheritance. Who gets the farm?"'
- 'Such tensions become worse as society changes. The recognition of women and minority groups disrupts the traditional lines of succession. For some time now wives and daughters have demanded their fare share.'
- 'Other challenges confront the owners of farms. Farming methods are changing; there are still the threats of drought, flood, fire, disease and pests, not to mention the decline of small towns and their essential services.'

Plot and story

Inheritance was first performed by the Melbourne Theatre Company at the Playhouse theatre in the Victorian Arts Centre on 1 March 2003. The play is set in the Mallee region of Victoria. In the play, the Myrtle twins, Dibs Hamilton and Girlie Delaney, are

turning 80. As the family gathers to celebrate, speculation grows as to who will inherit the family property Allandale when the ageing Farley Hamilton, Dibs's husband, is gone. Lyle Delaney and his wife Maureen live and work on the Hamilton farm. Although they are related to the Hamiltons, they do not have ownership of the land. William Hamilton, his sister Julia and her son Felix, who have arrived from the city, provide an opportunity for the divide between bush and city to be explored.

After Farley Hamilton dies, there are rumours that he has left the farm to his adopted son, Nugget, who is an Indigenous Australian. Although a loved member of the Hamilton family, Nugget is viewed as an outsider. The tension in the play increases as various family members vie for their share of the farm.

Characters

The characters in *Inheritance* are:

The Hamiltons

- Dibs Hamilton, aged 80
- Farley Hamilton, aged 83
- William Hamilton, aged 52 (Dibs and Farley's eldest son)
- Julia Hamilton, aged 44 (William's sister)
- Felix, aged 19 (Julia's son)
- Nugget Hamilton, aged 38 (Dibs and Farley's adopted Indigenous Australian son)

The Delaneys

- Girlie Delaney, aged 80 (Dibs's twin sister)
- Lyle Delaney, aged 48 (Girlie's son)
- Maureen Delaney (Lyle's wife)
- Ashleigh Delaney, aged 16 (Lyle and Maureen's daughter)
- Brianna Delaney, aged 15 (Ashleigh's sister)

Themes and issues

Inheritance comments upon many topical issues. It is structured and written to encourage us to consider not only the actions of individual characters, but also the concerns, fears, problems and joys of our Australian society. Some of the themes and issues in the play are family loyalty, land ownership, reconciliation, the Stolen Generation, the divide between the city and country, greed, suicide and intolerance.

Dramatic form and dramatic techniques

Although *Inheritance* is realistic in style, certain dramatic techniques are used to create memories of the past. The use of direct narration to the audience and the appearance of characters from the past help the audience understand the family history of the Myrtle twins and how ownership of the farm came to be in Dibs's hands. In one significant scene, the character of Nugget interacts with the spirit of his deceased adoptive father, Farley. Nugget reveals how as a youth he was torn between being with his white adoptive family and his own people. In this scene, breaking the style of realism allows the audience to learn more about the characters, particularly as we are able to hear their private thoughts.

Elements of production

The Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *Inheritance* was performed on a proscenium stage. The set was suggestive of the farmhouses belonging to the two families, the Hamiltons and the Delaneys. Upright wooden beams, floorboards and rustic furniture were used to represent the interiors of the two houses. A floodlit cyclorama was used to create a distant, changing skyline. Moments of flashback were created with the use of lighting and sound. At certain moments in the play, a wooden wall with two central doors was moved from the wings to centre stage. These doors helped to add an element of surprise to certain moments, such as when the hanging of Norm Delaney (who was the father of Girlie and Dibs) is revealed. A moving track in the upstage and downstage floor allowed large set items such as cars and trucks to be moved onstage and offstage.

Costumes were designed to represent the characters in a realistic style. Differences in costume design were made to establish the past and present, the city and the bush, and the different generations. Recorded music was incorporated to establish atmosphere.

Extracts from *Inheritance*

The following scenes are from the play *Inheritance*. Work in groups to prepare a rehearsed performance of one or more script extracts.

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COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Read through the following script extracts. Identify the social, political and/or historical concerns in each extract.
- 2 Identify the objective and motivation of the character you will play.
- 3 Identify the tension and climactic moment of each scene by dividing the script into units of action (see chapter 5, p. 119).
- 4 Highlight three or four words, phrases or actions used by the character you will play. Explain why these are important to your understanding of your character.
- 5 Prepare a character biography for the character you will play.

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HINT

When rehearsing a script, it is important to identify the subtext behind the words of the character. By doing this you will more easily identify character motivation and objective. This understanding will add dimension to your character.

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INHERITANCE (EXTRACTS)

INHERITANCE

ACT ONE, SCENE 19

Characters: Lyle, Maureen, Brianna, Ashleigh and William

In this scene, Lyle and his wife Maureen discover that their cousins, the Hamiltons, intend to sell the farm that Lyle has spent his life working on but does not own. The scene begins with Lyle talking to his two daughters, Ashleigh and Brianna. They have heard rumours that the farm they live on is to be sold.

(LYLE enters the kitchen. ASHLEIGH is doing her homework.)

ASHLEIGH Dad. My friend Anne Cogsley told me that the Hamiltons are going to sell their farm.

(BRIANNA enters.)

LYLE Isn't she a sticky-beak.

ASHLEIGH Her Dad's their financial counsellor.

LYLE Cougar Cogsley. Jesus Christ.

ASHLEIGH She told me not to tell.

LYLE That's crook. Spreading your private business all over the district. Bloody hell.

BRIANNA Would we be able to buy it off them?

LYLE You wouldn't get me within a hundred mile of one of them, financial counsellors.

BRIANNA Would we?

(He laughs sourly.)

LYLE Got three million dollars, have you? No. If they sell Allandale we're up the creek.

BRIANNA But it's our farm.

LYLE Our farm, Bri. But their land.

BRIANNA What about Cromies'? That's ours, isn't it?

LYLE It's only fifteen hundred acres. You can't feed a family on fifteen hundred acres.

(MAUREEN enters.)

MAUREEN Get a wriggle on, girls. You'll be late for choir.

ASHLEIGH It's at St Mary's tonight.

MAUREEN Can you take them? I've got a Progress meeting, then I've got to get down to the CFA to get signatures for the petition.

LYLE The Hamiltons are puttin' Allandale on the market.

(Beat.)

MAUREEN I knew this'd bloody happen. I'm going to the solicitor.

LYLE I said no.

MAUREEN They're walking all over you, Lyle. It's not fair.

LYLE Who says life is fair? Life is not fair.

WILLIAM *(offstage)* Yoo-hoo.

MAUREEN Oh, Christ. It's the Pansy Boy.

LYLE He's come for the trestle tables.

WILLIAM *(offstage)* Hello?

LYLE We're in here.

WILLIAM *(entering)* G'day, Maureen. Lyle.

(LYLE goes to the fridge and gets out two tinnies. He pulls the tops off and hands one to WILLIAM.)

LYLE Hear you're selling the farm.

MAUREEN I just wrote you people a cheque for six thousand dollars—to run our sheep on land which should be ours.

WILLIAM What land is that, Maureen?

MAUREEN You know damn well.

LYLE Maur—when Nanna Myrtle gave the farm to Auntie Dibs, she gave Mum and Dad ten thousand quid to set them up in the pub.

MAUREEN Big deal.

LYLE That was a lot of money sixty years ago.

MAUREEN The farm is worth two million dollars.

LYLE And the rest. What with the two houses and the machinery ...

MAUREEN Three million, then.

WILLIAM Maureen, what has this got to do with you—?

MAUREEN Lyle has put in more tractor hours than all of youse put together. Every school holiday, every Christmas, every weekend. And you walk back here after thirty years expecting just to clean up.

WILLIAM Maureen. It's my family's farm.

MAUREEN Mate, the land belongs to the people who work it. Not to the banks. Not to the multinationals. And certainly not to a pampered city boy who turned tail because he couldn't hack it.

ACT ONE, SCENE 26

Characters: Girlie and Maureen Delaney, Julia, William and Felix

In this scene, William Hamilton and his sister Julia and her son Felix, who are visiting from the city, bump into Girlie and Maureen Delaney in town. Maureen and Girlie are seeking signatures for a petition to open a rural transaction centre in the local milk bar as the bank and post office have been closed down. They are suspicious of Julia, her brother William and her teenage son Felix, because they believe the three are trying to persuade Dibs Hamilton, Girlie's sister, to sell the farm.

JULIA Hey, is that Maureen up there?

WILLIAM Quick. Nip down here.

JULIA No! We can't. She's seen us.

WILLIAM Shit!

JULIA *(waving)* Hi, Maureen!

MAUREEN Hi! *(To GIRLIE)* It's whining Julia and the Pansy Boy.

GIRLIE Is that Felix? He's a weedy-looking bloke, isn't he? I see what you mean. He does look like a fairy.

JULIA Hi, Auntie Girl. How are you? Felix, you remember Auntie Girl, don't you?

FELIX Hey.

MAUREEN Hello, youse. Come to sign our petition, have you?

JULIA What is it?

MAUREEN We're trying to get a rural transaction centre in the milk bar.

GIRLIE Since we've lost the bank and the post office. How are you, Will?

WILLIAM Well, thanks, Aunty Girlie.

MAUREEN They reckon we're too small, but we'll see about that.

GIRLIE They all go into Swan Hill o' course. Do their business in there.

MAUREEN *(pointing)* Poor ol' Archie here.

GIRLIE Everyone shops at Safeway in Swan Hill.

MAUREEN And on the way home, with two hundred bucks worth of groceries in the boot, they realise they've forgotten bread or milk or something—so they stop at Archie's and put it on the tab. It's not right.

GIRLIE He can't keep going.

FELIX That's globalisation for you.

GIRLIE She's going into politics, you know.

JULIA Mum said.

GIRLIE Can't be any more stupid than Roly Pigget.

FELIX Who's he? Your local member?

GIRLIE There was a time when you could've put a chook in the National Party and people round here woulda voted for it. But not anymore.

MAUREEN So what's happening about Allandale? Any more news?

JULIA What about?

MAUREEN Doesn't she know?

GIRLIE What?

MAUREEN William?

WILLIAM I don't know any more than you do, Maureen.

JULIA What's this?

MAUREEN It's all over town.

JULIA What?

MAUREEN Your mother's putting Allandale on the market.

GIRLIE Over my dead body she is.

JULIA I think you might have got the wrong end of the stick.

MAUREEN I hope so. I really hope so. Otherwise things might get very nasty around here.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

Characters: Maureen Delaney

Maureen Delaney gathers support for her political campaign. In this scene, she arrives on the back of a ute at an agricultural show to give a speech.

(The Rushton Agricultural and Pastoral Show [A & P Society Show]. There are all the sound effects of fairground music, children squealing on the ferris wheel and a muffled loudspeaker announcing missing children, the results of the sheepdog trials and the preserves display in the pavilion. The Grand Parade will be at 3 p.m.)

PUBLIC ADDRESS *(voice-over)* Could someone please bring the results of the showjumping to the stewards' stand in the middle of the arena. Thank you. And now, ladies and gentlemen, here's a little lady with a lot to say for herself. They're calling her the 'Mouth of the Mallee'. Please welcome the Independent candidate for Murray—Maureen Delaney.

(The back doors roll open. Accompanied by triumphant music, her campaign song, MAUREEN DELANEY rides in on the back of a ute which rolls down the stage towards the audience. She is waving to the crowd of enthusiastic supporters who clap and whistle and stamp their feet [on the sound track]. A large banner reads: 'Vote One Maureen Delaney Putting the Mallee First'.)

(MAUREEN addresses the assembled crowd.)

MAUREEN Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen. I was born in the Mallee. I went to school here. I got my first job at Dobsons' in Swan Hill. This is where I've raised my family. And I know what it means to work my guts out. I know Mallee people and I'm telling you right now, we've got a problem.

Do you know why some of us can't get the phone to work? Why we drive every day on roads that are not safe? Why our children are being educated in second-rate schools? Do you? I'll tell you why. We're too bloody nice. That's why. We're too decent. Let's get one thing straight. You deserve—your kids deserve—the same basic facilities as city people take for granted. But have you got a problem sticking up for yourself, or what?

Let me tell you a true story. One night, a gang of bikies come hooning into Rushton. Stirring up trouble, making a helluva racket. I had this young fella working with me in the pub and he says to me, 'Maureen,' he says, 'they're gonna trash this place.' And I thought, 'Bugger that. I am not going to be intimidated by a band of thugs.' So I march over to this big hairy bloke in a leather vest with tats all over him and I say 'Out!' I say, 'You heard me. On yer bike.

Now!’ He stares at me long and hard, this creep, and then he says, ‘Yes, ma’am.’ And he gives me a little bow and they get on their bikes and ride out of town. True story.

My friends, we made this country. And we’re not about to be bullied by foreign interests who are no different to those bikies. I’m talking about the multinationals. I’m talking about the foreign-owned banks. And I’m talking about every Asian, Moslem and Hottentot who come here and refuse to sign up to the Australian Way of Life. There are women who come to this country who are not prepared to show their faces. Well I say, ‘Don’t show your face around here.’ My friends, this is Australia, where people say g’day to each other in the street and lend a hand when they see a mate in trouble.

You know me. I’m Maureen Delaney. On Election Day—put the Mallee first. Put a ‘1’ beside Maureen Delaney.

ACT TWO, SCENE 6

Characters: Dibs, William and Nugget

In this scene, William and his mother are in the bedroom of her deceased husband. They discuss the will he has left behind and who will inherit the farm. They are interrupted unexpectedly by the arrival of Nugget, who is also looking for the will. He believes that his adoptive father has left the farm to him.

(The Hamiltons’ bedroom.)

(DIBS enters to find WILLIAM rifling through his father’s writing desk.)

DIBS What are you doing?

WILLIAM I’m looking for the will.

DIBS It’s with the solicitor.

WILLIAM Uh-huh.

DIBS We made one about ten years ago.

WILLIAM Mm-hmm.

DIBS I can tell you what’s in it.

(WILLIAM seizes upon an envelope. He opens it deftly with a letter opener.)

DIBS William! Please!

(WILLIAM examines the contents carefully.)

WILLIAM *(reading)* ‘I hereby revoke all former wills and testamentary dispositions *(made by me)* and declare this to be my last Will and Testament.’

(He turns the pages to note the date and the witnesses.)

(Reading) ‘Dated this day Monday 26th April 1999.

Witnessed by Frederick Barnard and Frank Scott.’ *(Pause.)*

Who are they? Mum?

DIBS *(quietly)* Airforce chums. Bunty Barnard and Wing-Commander Scott.

WILLIAM He must have gone down to Melbourne. Did you know about this?

DIBS Must have been Anzac Day.

WILLIAM *(reading)* 'After payment of my just debts, testamentary and funeral expenses, and any taxes or duties payable as a result of my death, I give my entire remaining estate to my son Neville Hamilton, known as Nugget.'

DIBS Let me look at that.

WILLIAM *(reading)* 'I do hereby devise and bequeath the old house block ... matrimonial home and garden ... motor vehicle ... money held in my name, Commonwealth Bank, Swan Hill, to my spouse Elizabeth Hamilton, known as Dibs.'

DIBS Give me that.

WILLIAM My son, Neville Hamilton. Known as Nugget.
(Silence.)
What are we to understand from this?

DIBS He didn't have anywhere else to go. So we adopted him.

WILLIAM But who's his father? Who is Nugget's father?

DIBS Unknown. It was 'Unknown' on his birth certificate. Give me that.
(WILLIAM hands her the will. DIBS rips it up.)
This is not Farley's farm. This is my farm. And I will decide how it's to be operated from now on. No-one gets anything until I say so.
(NUGGET enters.)

WILLIAM Haven't you heard of knocking?

NUGGET Get real.

DIBS What is it, Nugget?

WILLIAM Did you want something?
(Pause.)

NUGGET Farley reckoned there was something in his desk.

WILLIAM What sort of something?

NUGGET None of your business.

WILLIAM If my father said there was something in his desk for you, then I'd like to know what it is.

NUGGET It wasn't for you, mate. It was for me.

WILLIAM What is it?
(Pause.)

NUGGET His will.

WILLIAM His will is with the solicitors in Swan Hill.

NUGGET It's in the third drawer.

WILLIAM Take a look.
(WILLIAM and NUGGET stare at each other.)

NUGGET Farley left me the farm.
DIBS We've done everything we can for you, Nugget.
NUGGET He left it to me.
DIBS You don't seem very grateful for what we've done.
NUGGET Grateful?
WILLIAM Yes.
NUGGET Grateful.
WILLIAM Frankly, this fantasy you've dreamt up—I find it quite an affront. I mean, who do you think you are?
NUGGET Farley's son.
WILLIAM That's a lie. Your father was a rabbito.
NUGGET That's bull, mate.
WILLIAM You conniving little cheat.
NUGGET I'm not taking the farm off you.
WILLIAM You're dead right, you're not.
NUGGET I'm keeping it in the family.
DIBS You're not family. I'm sorry. But you're not.
(WILLIAM pulls the drawer out to show NUGGET.)
WILLIAM There's nothing in here for you.
(NUGGET exits, slamming the door behind him.)
DIBS He's not family. He's not.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Break into small groups and choose two elements of drama (other than tension). Analyse and explain how these elements of drama contribute to dramatic meaning in one or more of the scene extracts. Share your thinking with the class.
- 2 Discuss the reasons why you think the playwright has chosen dramatic form for their play. In your answer, consider how realism might impact on the actor–audience relationship.
- 3 Evaluate one group's performance of their script extract. Comment on their interpretation of the extract including use of space, control of tension, and the effectiveness of character interpretation through the use of movement and vocal dynamics.
- 4 Identify two key moments from the script extracts and explain how the playwright has used dramatic action and language to create tension.
- 5 Write your own character monologue. Plan your monologue first by creating a character biography. When you have written a draft, work with a partner and ask them to perform your draft monologue. What did you see? What did you think about what you saw? What questions do you have? What changes will you make because of this new information?

6.3 Contemporary Indigenous Australian drama

These experiences (intercultural drama) can help develop cultural sensitivity and bring into sharp relief the cultural and social attitudes and beliefs of the participants.

Kate Donelan and Anne Marshall – Drama educators

Indigenous Australian performance and ritual began many thousands of years ago. Indigenous Australians use dance, singing, chanting and storytelling as a means of sharing and passing on experiences, knowledge and culture. Over the last 30 years, a new form of Australian theatre has evolved that combines aspects of traditional Indigenous Australian culture with Western dramatic forms.

During the 1960s and 1970s, many Western societies experienced a significant change in attitudes to issues of equality and human rights. In Australia, the influence of this social change encouraged Indigenous Australians to express their concerns about how their own people lived in a post-colonial era. Jack Davis is a famous Indigenous Australian playwright from this period. Jack was born in Perth in 1917 and is a descendant of the Nyoongarah people of south-west Western Australia. He became an activist on behalf of his people, and from 1967 to 1971 he was director of the Aboriginal Centre in Perth. Jack's plays include *The Dreamers* (1983), *No Sugar* (1985) and *The Honey Spot* (1986). The plays are largely set in the past and are written to show the world from an Aboriginal perspective. Although they deal with oppression and conflict between 'whites' and 'blacks', they also encourage Indigenous people to be self-empowered.

Some current Indigenous Australian playwrights include Leah Purcell (*Black Chicks Talking*, 2002); Wesley Enoch (*The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table*, 2004); Kylie Coolwell (*Battle of Waterloo*, 2015); and Jada Alberts—whose work we will explore in greater detail later in this unit.

The following table outlines some of the features of contemporary Indigenous Australian theatre.

Contemporary Indigenous Australian theatre

DRAMATIC FORM	THEMATIC CONCERNS	DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES AND CONVENTIONS
Non-linear narrative Eclectic and fragmented A combination of the styles and traditions of Western performance with aspects of Indigenous language and culture	Grief Kinship/family Relationships Identity The Stolen Generation Assimilation Racism Reconciliation Connection with the land Interactions with the law Effects of the past on the present	Direct audience address Symbolism Visual metaphor Storytelling Dance and music Multimedia Indigenous language Political oratory Presentational acting Stand-up comedy Realism

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

JADA ALBERTS

Writer, Director and Actor

Jada Alberts was born and raised on her grandfather's country (Larrakia) and has family ties to the Yanyuwa, Bardi and Wardaman peoples. She studied and practised performing arts from a young age and, in 2006, graduated from the Adelaide Centre of the Arts. She is currently an Associate Artist at Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney and has many stage credits to her name. Jada's film credits include feature film *Red Hill* and on television in *Rush*, *Redfern Now*, and *Wentworth*. Jada plays the role of Nerida in ABC's drama, *Cleverman*, set to screen in 2016.

Jada is also a director, dramaturge and playwright. Her debut work, *Brothers Wreck*, received critical acclaim and a nomination at the 2014 Sydney Theatre Awards (for Best New Australian Work). *Brothers Wreck* also received a nomination for the Nick Enright Prize for Playwriting at the 2015 NSW Premier's Literary Awards.



Courtesy Jada Alberts

Jada Alberts

ISSUES OF REPRESENTATION AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Questions about representation in acting

It is the ethical responsibility of directors, playwrights and actors to represent people and groups in ways that are authentic, respectful and culturally sensitive. In comedies, satire and parody are sometimes used. This can seem disrespectful, but clever comedy writers often are making important points about power structures and attitudes in society that need to be challenged.

Indigenous Australian theatre practitioners encourage young Australians to engage with the works of Indigenous Australian playwrights. The intention of the student in performing these works is important. According to Bain Attwood, a leading scholar of Australian cross-cultural history, some key questions to consider before engaging in performing work by Indigenous Australians are:

- Who produces this knowledge?
- When and where?
- About and for whom is this knowledge?
- For what purpose?
- How and in what form is it produced?
- What are the effects

Avoiding generalisations

One of the most important understandings to have when working with Indigenous Australian plays is that the play is the playwright's expression of their individual understanding and experiences. As actors, playwrights, directors and designers of theatre, it is important to avoid generalising the events and experiences of characters in a play as a representation of Aboriginality. For further guidelines about working with Indigenous Australian plays, refer to the Drama Australia guidelines.



Drama Australia

The power of knowing yourself

To alleviate some of the problems of representation, it is important that you have thought deeply about your own cultural background, your history, your family's history in this country, and the circumstances and conditions that have created the social and political contexts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians today. If possible, direct contact with Indigenous Australians is especially important as you can ask questions, be asked questions, and develop an understanding based on experience rather than information from the media or school lessons. This can be challenging, but your school and your teacher may be able to help with this.

BROTHERS WRECK BY JADA ALBERTS

Plot and story

Brothers Wreck follows the inner struggles of Ruben as he tries to deal with the tragic suicide of his cousin Joe. During the play Ruben visits a counsellor, David, a requirement of the courts due to Ruben's recent violent behaviour. Ruben's cousin and sister Adele and her boyfriend Jarrod try to help Ruben avoid trouble but struggle to help him effectively. Adele is also worried about her mother, who is unwell in hospital. Later in the play, Ruben and Adele's aunty, Petra, arrives to help. From her we learn that when Ruben was a very young boy, he suffered another tragedy when his mother's car lost control and crashed during a heavy storm. The play begins six months prior to the present day with the shocking discovery of Joe's body.

Characters

- **Ruben**, early-20s, seemingly untouchable. Ruben is impulsive, quick-witted and sometimes aggressive. He thinks he has figured out the world and his place in it. Ruben's mum died when he was young so he was raised by one of his aunts, Adele's mum.
- **Adele**, mid-20s, Ruben's cousin and sister. Adele is dedicated, sure of herself, mostly calm and always loyal. She has a tendency to worry.
- **Jarrod**, mid-20s, Adele's boyfriend. He's cheeky, thoughtful and quietly confident. Good with his hands, Jarrod loves to make or fix things – mostly engines.
- **David**, late-30s, Ruben's counsellor. David is a former teacher who has worked in the Darwin area most of his life.
- **Petra**, 40s, the youngest of three sisters. She is Adele and Ruben's aunty.

Themes and issues

In the notes for the 2015 Belvoir production of *Brothers Wreck*, Jada Alberts talks about how her personal experiences informed her writing. She refers to the inherent responsibility for each other that Indigenous people feel—‘our skin-ship system’. *Brothers Wreck* aims to give strong messages about the importance of family and supportive familial relationships, particularly during times of crisis. The play also addresses the troubling issue of youth suicide, a national problem that can have devastating consequences for many people.

Dramatic form and elements of production

Brothers Wreck uses realism to effectively create a powerful relationship between the performers and the audience. The use of the ‘fourth wall’ gives the audience a window into the lives of Ruben and his family, and creates an intimacy that builds our empathy for the characters. In the Belvoir production, set, lighting and sound meticulously created a realistic representation of an indoor/outdoor space of a home in Darwin.

Brothers Wreck script extracts

The following scenes show how, despite Reuben’s anger and grief, his family are able to reach out to him and help him to find his way to a form of acceptance.

BROTHERS WRECK (EXTRACTS)

BROTHERS WRECK

SCENE SEVEN

- RUBEN** Hey Aunty.
He gives PETRA a hug, trying to act as sober as possible.
- PETRA** Ruben Thomas Kelly, you’ve lost weight, ya bag of bones. Where’ve you been?
- RUBEN** Just at Beach Front.
- PETRA** You stink of grog, boy. You gonna go visit your mother like this?
- RUBEN** My mother’s dead.
Beat.
- PETRA** What did you say? [*Beat.*] Don’t tell me you just said what I think you said. You wanna watch your mouth, boy, you hear me? Who do you think you’re talkin to? [*Beat.*] You’d be dead too if it wasn’t for my sister layin up there in that hospital. Now you have some respect and think about what you’re sayin before you say it, you hear me? Don’t think I’m gonna put up with your bull, boy. [*Beat.*] Get in

the shower and wash yourself off. I don't care who you are, you're not goin to see my sister like that.

RUBEN *starts to exit.*

Wait there.

RUBEN *stops.*

Del, we'll go, ay. Jarrod, can you drive? You mob jump in the car.

ADELE Grab that bag there. Jarrod.

JARROD *grabs the bag of supplies.*

ADELE and **JARROD** *exit. PETRA* *sits.*

PETRA You think it's right to mess your sister round like this, you know she's been waitin for you. Not too important for you to get to the hospital, is it? Wanna mess around down the pub instead? Is that even where you were? These mob aren't stupid, you know, don't think you can pull the rug. *[Pause.]* You need to take a good hard look at yourself, boy.

Who took your sorry arse in after we lost your mum. When your father took off, who took care of you then? Treated you no different then, Del, worked her arse off to put food on the table, a roof over your head, sounds like a friggin cliché, don't it, boy?—but that's what she gave you. Free a' charge.

And here we are, one time in your 21 years of livin when she needs you and you can't even stand up straight.

She waits for RUBEN to respond. He doesn't.

Suit yourself then, boy. You can stand there lookin at your belly button all night ... better that I suppose, then come to the hospital and get on my friggin nerves. *[Beat.]* You hear what I said?

RUBEN Yeah.

PETRA You know why? You wanna take a guess? *[Beat.]* Izzy'd take one look at you and it'd break her heart. *[Pause.]* You know that, don't you? *[Beat.]* We'll be back in the morning. Have a shower, sleep it off.

She grabs her bag and heads for the door.

RUBEN Aunty?

He unzips his backpack. He pulls out a bunch of frangipani stems, pulled off a tree—they're inside a plastic bag. He hasn't done it quite right but he's tried. It's beautiful.

Mum's favourite.

PETRA *takes them. She feels a little as though she's been too harsh on him. She takes the stems from the bag and wraps them in an old newspaper that's on the table.*

PETRA Flowers, and a crossword.

She nods and smiles at her nephew.

I love you, Rue. I wouldn't say nuthin if I didn't. I'll see you tomorrow.

She exits.

As she leaves, RUBEN notices a letter on the table. He takes it, shoves it in his backpack.

SCENE EIGHT

DAVID is in his office, writing at his desk. There's a knock at the door.

DAVID Come in.

ADELE enters. *She stands at the door.*

ADELE Hi, Mr Wills?

Beat.

DAVID Hi. Sorry, you surprised me, no-one's called me that in a while.

ADELE Sorry.

DAVID No no, it's fine.

ADELE You never taught me, we never met, I just, know of you. I was in Year Eight when you left. I'm a Kelly. Adele. I'm Ruben's sister.

DAVID Oh, hi. Of course, please, take a seat.

ADELE Ah nah, it's okay, I'll stand.

DAVID You sure?

ADELE Yeah.

DAVID Okay. *[Beat.]* So, Ruben.

ADELE Yeah.

DAVID He's okay, isn't he?

ADELE Yeah, well. Yeah, just the usual. It's funny, I came here to ask you the same thing, but, um ... *[Beat.]* So you work here now?

DAVID Yeah. Been here for the last couple years.

ADELE Didn't wanna teach anymore? *[Beat.]* Sorry ... sorry, too personal. *[Beat.]* Guess we all have that in common, hey.

DAVID What's that?

Beat.

ADELE Never mind. *[Beat.]* Sorry ... I don't really know why I'm even here, I just thought you might ... *[Beat.]* Maybe, help me.

DAVID Sure, whatever I can.

ADELE Does it ever go away?

DAVID I'm sorry?

ADELE Does it ever go away, the picture in your head? *[Beat.]* I don't mean to be rude but, I know what happened, the whole school was talking about it. I mean, when you found him in the bathroom. The picture of him in your head,

is it ... is he always there? I'm prying, I know, I'm sorry, I know you're s'pose to talk about other people's problems, not your own. I know the last thing you probably need is some random askin you personal stuff, but I just thought it might, help ... is all. 'Cause that picture, for me, it plays over and over in this sick kind of slow motion and it's quiet but screaming all at once and I can't ... I just can't get it to go. *[Beat.]* It's always with me, everywhere I go.

DAVID *steps closer to ADELE. She objects.*

No, it's okay, it's okay. I'm okay.

Pause.

DAVID Maybe it never does. Go, I mean. I think it changes, I think. Somehow it becomes, bearable. *[Beat.]* He was a student of mine. For a long time I felt like I should have somehow known. I guess I've found a way to live with that, that helplessness, to live with what he left.

Beat.

ADELE There's this spot the boys used to fish at. Jarrod, Joe and Rue. Couple of years back they rescued this tinny from the dump. It sat on the front lawn busted and full of holes so long, they nicknamed it the *Front Yard Challenge*. Eventually they patched the holes. Joey found an old motor. They'd fish all the time, the three of them. All night and all day if they could. They found this spot on the harbour with three sunken ships all in a clump. Brothers Wreck they named it, best spot on the harbour. Place is teeming with fish, get the salmon schools coming in on a high, couple of barra if you're lucky. *[Beat.]* Since Joey's gone it's like ... I can't help but think we'll all end up down there, sunk. At the bottom of the ocean, clumped together. *[Pause.]* Maybe you can't talk about it, patient confidentiality or whatever, that's okay, I just ... I just want to know if he's moving, not sinking, you know, I'm his big sister, it's weird for me to talk to him about this stuff. I mean I try but ... I just want to know ... if he's going to be okay, I guess.

DAVID I'm sorry, Adele, I ... *[Beat.]* Ruben's missed his last two appointments. I've called and called, I've sent letters to the house, I haven't been able to get in touch with him for weeks.

ADELE What?

DAVID He's breached bail conditions. I'm sorry, I didn't realise you didn't know.

ADELE Why didn't you ... *[Beat.]* I gotta go.

ADELE *wipes her face, grabs her bag and starts to leave.*

DAVID Adele, wait.

ADELE *exits.*

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Evaluate one group's performance of a selection of script extracts. Focus your discussion on the use of effective scene transitions. Include consideration of how the transitions added to the atmosphere of the performance.
- 2 Evaluate one group's performance of their script extract. Comment on the ways in which the group effectively incorporated dramatic techniques in the performance.
- 3 Evaluate one performer who portrayed a character both in the past and present, or a performer who played more than one character. Discuss the ways in which the performer manipulated vocal dynamics, body language, energy and focus to effectively present two or more different characters.

6.4 Writing your own Australian scripted drama

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PLAYWRIGHT?

When we go to the theatre and see a scripted drama performed, it is important to remind ourselves that what we see is the end product of a long and rewarding process. A playwright is unlikely to be happy with the first draft of a script. It is a process of refining ideas exploring them in rehearsal and re-drafting the script that creates the best work.

So, where do you start? When writing a script it can be helpful to follow certain important steps. It may be helpful to also refer back to the steps in the creative process provided in chapter 4 on playbuilding.

Step 1 Define your idea

Defining our idea is the most important step in creating a script. It is the creation of your concept and is the first stage of the creative process, known as 'problem finding'. You need to be clear about the intention of your script. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my intention?
- How will I frame the action through the questions I am exploring in my script about aspects of life, philosophy, love, spirituality, history, art, relationships, society, politics or power?
- What is the most effective style to communicate my ideas? Will I use a dramatic, comedic, realistic or non-realistic style?
- How long do I want the performance to be?
- What type of performance space will the script be performed in?



National Theatre
Discover – David Hare on
Playwriting
National Theatre
Discover – How to Create
Characters

Step 2 Research your idea

It is crucial to research the ideas for your play. In the creative process, these stages are gathering knowledge and being open to a broad range of information. Without substantial research, your situations and characters can become clichéd or stereotyped. Often interviewing people or finding true stories can help give your writing a freshness and originality. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I need to know about my topic?
- Where can I access information?
- How do I record the information so it is useful to me when I write?
- How do I interpret the information?
- How open am I to finding information and ideas from unexpected places?

Step 3 Decide on your characters and roles

Each character needs to have a crucial part in the telling of the story. Remember that both roles and characters are important. A good place to start creating character is through character biographies (see chapter 4, p. 86). Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the roles and characters in my play?
- Why is each role or character important?
- Who is/are the protagonist/s and antagonist/s?
- What is it about each role or character that gives it dimension and complexity?
- What message do the actions of the roles or characters give to the audience?
- What are the character's objectives and motivations?

Each character or role needs to have a unique voice. The language they use will reflect their social class, personality and status. Finding character voice requires consideration of not only how the characters sound, but also how the characters move. Their physical appearance and use of body language will influence the use of vocal dynamics by the performer.

Step 4 Plot the journey

Once you have researched your idea, you can begin to establish your dramatic structure and the dramatic action of your script. In the creative process, this is where you are generating ideas for the dramatic action. At this stage you can record your dramatic structure and dramatic action as a brief written description, or synopsis. You may also choose to prepare your synopsis as a storyboard with some explanatory notes rather than full descriptions. Be prepared to take some risks. Today, many contemporary plays are breaking away from traditional linear narratives and are using staging, performance spaces, dramatic structure, technology and language in more poetic, symbolic and unexpected ways. Initially, you will need to decide on your dramatic form and the focus of your play, as this will determine how you shape the dramatic action. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What form or style will my play be performed in? Will it be realistic or melodramatic, or will it perhaps be realistic but with influences from other forms?
- What impact will the choice of form and style have on the actor–audience relationship?



HINT

Visualise your play as you write. See the characters, costume, lighting, and setting. Hear the sounds. Sketch any strong images or record them on your script draft as stage directions. This helps establish the world of the play and defines the atmosphere you wish to create.



CHALLENGE

Create three characters of your own imagining. Make each character distinctly different from the others. The differences might be in background, status, confidence, education, country of birth or personality. Imagine each character must give the first three minutes of a speech, for example at a 21st birthday, a funeral or a wedding. As you write the speech, try to adopt the character's voice. Present your speeches to the class.



HINT

In the creative process of playwriting, allow yourself time away from working on your play to let the ideas for your play 'incubate'. This is when your mind continues to pull ideas together, link your playwriting to other projects you may be working on, and problem solve.

- What are the ideas I want to explore in my play and how might the dramatic action communicate these ideas to an audience? For example, 'I want to explore an idea about how love can be healing. I will show this through a short, non-realistic scene where many different characters give their perspectives before exploring one aspect of this idea more deeply in a longer, more realistic dialogue.'
- Is the dramatic structure that of a linear narrative or a non-linear narrative, or is it a montage structure? What is the best way to tell the story and present the ideas?
- Who is/are the protagonist/s? Who is/are the antagonist/s?
- How will the tension of the piece be established and built? What is the climactic moment of the piece? Will there be one or more climactic moments? When will they occur?
- What locations will be used? How will the locations be established using performers and the elements of production?



HINT

Dramatic structure is the term used to describe the order and placement of scenes and acts.

Step 5 Develop the scenes

In step 4 you completed your dramatic structure and synopsis. Your scenes then spring from this overview. In this stage of the creative process, you are not only generating ideas but also combining and selecting them based on your understanding of what will be effective in performance. Each scene explores a new development of plot or idea, like paragraphs in an essay. Each scene has its own particular point. All the scenes are linked together in a particular order to help establish the intention of the play. As the play has a climactic moment, so will each scene. Make sure you are clear about the significant moment or line in each scene, and how each scene contributes to the whole script. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are all the scenes necessary?
- What is the climactic moment in each scene and is this moment clear?
- What is each scene's relationship to other scenes?



HINT

Once you have developed your dramatic structure and have a synopsis of the dramatic action, it is possible to use performers to help develop scenes through improvisation. This approach may assist you in refining both plot and characters.

Step 6 Workshop the script

After a period of writing, it is a good idea to have your script workshopped. Having actors read and perform your script will help you discover new ideas. In the creative process, this is externalising your ideas, which then helps you to continue generating, selecting and combining new ideas based on what you see when the script draft is performed. The actors do not need to rehearse for the workshop. A reading of the script will help you work out the overall running time, develop the build of tension, improve scene transitions and fine-tune characters. It is also a good idea to invite a few people to see your script performed for the first time. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What were the strengths of my script?
- What did the performers enjoy?
- What improvements can I make?
- What did the performers find difficult to follow or understand?



HINT

Make sure you bring a copy of your script and a pencil to your script workshop. Make annotations and notes as your script is read or performed by the performers.

Step 7 Edit the script

Using the material you have gathered throughout the workshopping process, edit your script. Make adjustments, delete lines, add lines, and so on.

Step 8 Perform a reading of the script

It is now time to revisit the rehearsal room. This time you will give your performers time to read the script and prepare their characters before a rehearsal. You may also give the performers some specific directions in terms of character interpretation, movement, entrances and exits. You might ask a friend who likes directing to rehearse with the performers. Invite a small audience to your performance. Sometimes it is helpful to invite some of the same audience members from your workshop reading, as they will have comments about the changes you have made. Once again, you are looking not only for flaws but also for ways to improve your script.

Step 9 Produce a final script

Once your play has been written up as a final draft it is ready to be performed. A director will create his or her interpretation of your play and bring a directorial concept to the work. This is often an interesting time for the playwright as they are seeing their work interpreted by others.

EXERCISE

EXPLORING AUSTRALIAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY

The following exercises are preparation for the end-of-chapter playwriting task, and allow you to collaborate with others to explore your own perceptions of Australian society, politics, history and culture. This will help you to define your concept and point of view before writing your script. It is important to remember that all opinions and ideas are useful. Our society is diverse so there will be many different points of view. Keep logbook entries of your work in these exercises, as they will provide a useful resource for the performance task.

True blue?

Work in groups of three. List as many things you can think of that are distinctly Australian. These might be particular examples of people, places, events, objects, animals or expressions. There is no need to edit or alter your list. Include everything you can think of. Try to group your words and ideas into categories. Share your ideas with the class.

Map of Australia

As a class, use the entire area of the classroom to create a map of Australia incorporating movement, vocal dynamics and levels. On your map, include cities, natural landmarks and other features you feel are important. As you become a city, landmark or feature, consider how you might use your physical shape and vocal dynamics to express the idea or object you are representing.

Tableaux of Australian society

Divide into groups of six. Prepare two or three tableaux that represent an issue of concern you have about Australian society or politics. Present your tableaux to the class. Make sure each tableau represents as many aspects of the issue as possible.





HINT

Refer to p. 80 for an explanation of a montage performance.



Australia and the world

In this exercise you will create a brief performance that comments on how Australia is shaped by global ideas, movements and events. Use the following perspectives as a starting point for your play:

- how Australians think they are seen by others
- how Australians would like to be seen by others
- how Australians really are.

Divide into groups of five. Brainstorm ideas about the three different perspectives and then prepare a montage presentation that shows the three viewpoints. Incorporate an inventive use of movement, vocal dynamics, repetition and space. Also consider how you can control movement and timing to transform from one scene to another so there are no breaks in your performance.

Mateship

The concept of mateship is a significant aspect of Australian culture. Mateship embodies certain values, including equality, loyalty and determination. Divide into groups of four and prepare a short performance that examines the strengths and weaknesses of this code of loyalty. Spend some time in your group discussing the positive and negative aspects of mateship. Your performance may be linear or montage in structure, and include the use of narration, tableaux, symbols or freeze frames. Present your performance to the class.

The Australian natural environment

The Australian landscape has a powerful influence on our perception of our country and what it means to be Australian. Our relationship with the environment has been explored in many Australian plays and films.

- In large groups, prepare a movement-and-sound-scape that shows two contrasting landscapes or seasons we experience in Australia.
- Prepare a role-play in which the natural environment is a central feature. Two or three people should play characters who respond to the environment; the others should create the environment. Some suggested environments to present are an ocean beach, the bush, the desert, a rainforest, the mountains or the underwater world.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Write a logbook entry that discusses your perception of what it means to be an Australian in the 21st century. In your entry, refer to the performance work you have seen in class.
- 2 Research and create a list of four Australian plays or films in which the Australian landscape has been a dominant feature. Discuss the ways in which the environment is symbolic in the play or film.
- 3 Choose one of the exercises you participated in. Evaluate the ways in which you and your group used body language, movement, vocal dynamics and the elements of drama to achieve an effective performance.

PERFORMANCE TASK



6.5 Playwriting task: Australian drama

The task

You are to write a fifteen-minute scripted drama for two to four characters that explores an aspect of Australian society, politics or history. You are encouraged to experiment with a range of dramatic forms, techniques and conventions in the writing of your piece.

You will present a final published version as a typed script that incorporates the following script conventions:

- title and title page
- cast list, with brief role and character descriptions
- scene descriptions, including information about set, lighting and sound where appropriate
- role or character names in the left-hand margin of the page
- indented dialogue lines
- stage directions where appropriate
- double-spacing of the print.

You will also include a statement of 300 words that explains your intentions as a playwright, the themes and issues you wish to explore, and the reasons for your choice of dramatic form, techniques and conventions.

You and your teacher will decide on whether or not to rehearse and perform the final script.

You may choose one of the following suggestions as a starting point for your script.

- The Lucky Country
- Island
- ‘The strength of a nation lies with its people.’

You may also choose to set the action of your play against the background of a significant Australian day, or event, such as one of the following. This can add symbolic meaning to your script.

- Australia Day
- Sorry Day
- A protest march
- Anzac Day
- New Year’s Eve
- Christmas Day
- The Melbourne Cup

Creating and making Australian drama

- Research aspects of Australian society, politics and history that are of interest to you.
- Decide on a central focus and intention for your scripted drama.
- Choose a narrative structure to frame your scripted drama.
- Devise characters or roles.
- Consider how dramatic techniques such as narration, projected images or mime can be incorporated into your scripted drama.
- Consider integral and efficient ways of creating scene transitions.
- Use improvisation in rehearsal to workshop your script with other members of the class.
- Make notes of your observations of your scripted drama in performance. Adjust the draft of your script accordingly.

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- establish an effective, original and clear intention as a playwright
- devise an effective and engaging setting and situation
- create interesting and appropriate characters or roles
- establish tension
- establish an appropriate atmosphere
- incorporate dramatic techniques appropriate to the style and purpose of the scripted drama
- publish a final script that incorporates formatting conventions
- explore an aspect of Australian society, politics or history.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Recount the process of developing your scripted drama. What problems did you encounter and how did you overcome them?
- 2 Evaluate the reading of your scripted drama. In your evaluation, comment on the ways in which the weaker aspects of your script could be strengthened.
- 3 Evaluate one other class member's script. In your evaluation, discuss the playwright's intention. Consider how effectively they chose dramatic form to suit their intention.
- 4 Research one of the key periods in Australian theatre history. Present a short talk that outlines the features of the chosen period. In your presentation, include the performance of a script extract from a play written during the period.
- 5 Imagine you are running a course in writing Australian drama. Explain the important steps you would take in the process of writing an Australian play.



Playwriting task: Australian drama

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- recognise how theatre and drama reflect and explore aspects of Australian society and of human experience
- create, write, edit and publish a scripted drama that explores aspects of Australian society, politics or history.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you prepared your scripted drama by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • researching an aspect of Australian society, politics or history of interest to you? • establishing an effective, original and clear intention? • preparing written drafts of your scripted drama? <p>Have you incorporated dramatic form, techniques and conventions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choosing the most appropriate dramatic form(s) for the intention of your piece? • selecting dramatic techniques and conventions for a specific purpose? • manipulating the elements of drama to establish tension and atmosphere? • incorporating improvisation to explore and develop role or character, and dramatic action? • presenting an appropriately formatted and published copy of your scripted drama? • creating an appropriate actor–audience relationship? 				
<p>Responding</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • question and interrogate the choices you have made in terms of concept, dramatic action and dramatic language? • reflect on the process of structuring moments of your scripted drama into a coherent and polished performance incorporating effective scene transitions? • reflect on the feedback of your teacher and others to make changes and build your creativity? 				

Comments

7

THEATRE CRITICISM: ANALYSING AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCES

WHY STUDY REVIEW WRITING?

In this chapter you will focus on writing a review of a performance. You have already begun to develop skills as a critical thinker about performance through your reflection on your own performance work and the performance work of others. When you review a performance and make evaluations about its strengths and weaknesses, you are challenging, confirming and clarifying your understanding and appreciation of performance. You are also developing your skills as a communicator of ideas and opinions about drama and theatre. This knowledge and understanding can then be applied to improve your own performance work.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 7.1 Steps in reviewing a live performance
- 7.2 Evaluating the components of a live performance
- 7.3 Written task: review of a performance

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- identify aspects of a performance for evaluation
- evaluate and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a performance
- appreciate how the elements of a production work together in a performance
- incorporate examples from a performance to support judgements
- select and incorporate appropriate language to discuss ideas
- use digital technology to publish a review of a performance.





Performers in Melbourne
Theatre Company's *Queen
Lear* from 2012



HINT

It is a good idea to make notes about a performance either during the performance or shortly after you have seen it. This will help you to remember the points you want to include in your review.



HINT

Some theatre groups offer discussion time with the audience after the performance. If you are writing a review, this is an excellent opportunity to clarify any questions you may have about the performance.

7.1 Steps in reviewing a live performance

STEP 1 WATCH A PERFORMANCE

To write a review you need to choose a performance to attend. Performances to see could include:

- a local school or community production
- a visiting performer or theatre group
- your own school production
- a professional theatre production.

STEP 2 NOTE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND CREATE QUESTIONS

After watching a performance, you will have quite a strong sense of whether or not it was effective. This is usually reinforced through your feelings of whether or not you were engaged, moved, excited or disinterested in the performance. Sometimes, starting your review by using a rating scale can help you to determine your overall initial impression. You can then be more specific about where the strengths and weaknesses are. For example, you may give a performance a rating of 7 out of 10. You then need to explain why you could not give the performance a rating of 10 out of 10. It might have been the acting, the overall flow of the performance, the script and/or the use of sound and lighting. Create a list of questions that you have about any aspect of the production. Collaborate with others who have seen the performance. Discuss and respond to each other's questions and record your ideas. These questions will help to form the ideas for your paragraphs in your review.

STEP 3 THINKING CRITICALLY AND MAKING JUDGEMENTS

Whatever your feelings about a performance, it is important to articulate your opinions clearly and to support your point of view with evidence. Writing a more detailed analysis of a performance gives you the opportunity to be specific about the particular elements of a performance and whether you thought they were strong or weak. The elements of a performance to consider in your review are:

- plot
- acting
- the manipulation of the elements of drama through direction and staging
- interpretation of the script (directorial concept)
- set design
- costume design
- lighting
- sound
- use and choice of performance space.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Imagine you are a theatre reviewer for an online magazine and answer the following questions:

- 1 What criteria would you use to determine the success of each element in a performance?
- 2 What criteria would you use to determine how well each element complemented the overall performance?
- 3 List and explain three qualities that you feel a good reviewer needs to have to be successful.



HINT

When writing your review, avoid using the first person 'I'. By using the third person, your review seems more objective. For example, instead of writing 'I thought the lighting helped to create the sombre mood', rephrase your sentence to read 'The lighting helped to create the sombre mood'.

7.2

Evaluating the components of a live performance

STRUCTURING A REVIEW

When writing your review, use the PEEL structure for each paragraph: Point, Elaborate, Example and Link. Use the following points as a guideline for what you may include in your review.

Write an introduction

In your opening paragraph you need to include:

- the name of the play you are reviewing
- the name of the playwright and director
- your general overall impression of the play using language that helps the reader to understand that you will explain reasons for your impression in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Summarise the plot and story; identify the performance style

Briefly summarise the plot and story. The skill in this section of your review lies in your ability to reduce the whole story to a brief, summarised version. This is usually only one paragraph in length, so do not include all the details—just the main events. The following example is for a linear narrative performed in a realistic style.

Plot – This is the actual action that happens on stage. For example:

The play is set in a Tasmanian coastal town over one evening. A couple, who lost one of their sons in a boating accident some years ago, are visited by a mysterious survivor of the boating accident. The survivor has important news about the death of the son.

Story – This involves more than what happens on stage. The story includes information about the characters and the situation that has occurred *outside* the actual action on stage, and is often revealed in the exposition. For example:

During the play, the couple reveal that their son was involved in gambling and crime. They also give information about the aftermath of the boating accident—the effect it had on the town and that confidential documents about the investigation into the accident went missing.



Australian Stage
Stagewhispers
AussieTheatre.com
The Guardian – Stage +
Reviews
Kevin Jackson's Theatre
Diary



HINT

Some performances you see may not use a linear narrative or be performed in a realistic style. For these performances you should summarise the key moments of the performance rather than providing a summary of the plot.



HINT

The 'exposition' is the information that is given through character dialogue and action at the beginning of the play; it helps to tell the story.

Discuss the themes and issues, and direction

Outline the themes and issues that you feel were important in the play. The themes and issues create the focus that frames the action of the play to help create meaning for the audience. For example:

The couple learn to accept the death of their son through the visit of the boating accident survivor. The themes and issues of the play are guilt, accepting loss, injustice and confronting the past.

You should also discuss your impression of the directorial concept in your review. Comment on the director's interpretation of the play, and how the use of the elements of drama, the choice of dramatic form and the performance style help to communicate the play's themes and issues. For example:

This play is written in a realist style to effectively capture the experiences of grief and loss that the couple experience. The director and production designers create a sombre yet soothing environment through the use of set and lighting, and this symbolically conveys the couple's journey towards acceptance.

Evaluate the performers

Evaluate the success of the performers in playing their characters. You should be familiar with the sorts of areas to comment on because you have been assessed in these areas yourself. Choose two performers to evaluate and ask yourself the following questions for each performer:

- How well did they use body language to express their character? Give two examples.
- Were their movements and gestures appropriate for their character?
- How well did they use their voice to express their character and deliver lines? Was their use of voice appropriate for their character?
- Were there any key moments in the performance that were good examples of the performer's ability to portray character/role? Identify one or two key moments.
- Did they seem to blend with the action of the performance or did they stand out? Was this a positive or negative in the performance? Why?
- How focused did they seem during their performance?
- How convincing did the performer seem in their portrayal of their character?

Comment on the use of the elements of production

Discuss how effective you think the use of sound, lighting, set and costume were in the performance. You may also comment on how these production elements were used symbolically in the performance. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Were the costumes suitable for the characters? How did the choice of colours and designs convey time period and mood, and symbolise individual characters' purpose in the play or aspects of their personality?
- Was the set an effective use of the space? Why? Was the set easy for actors to manoeuvre around? In terms of colour and layout, did its design enhance the performance by creating symbolic meaning? How?
- Were the visual elements of costume and set unified in any way? Was contrast used for effect?
- How did the elements of production support the directorial concept?
- How did the lighting create points of focus and mood?

- Was special lighting used at any time for particular effect? How did this special lighting add to the success of the performance?
- Did the use of live or recorded sound enhance the performance? How?
- How did lighting and sound establish location and create atmosphere?

Sum up the overall success of the play

In the concluding paragraph, you need to do more than just repeat what you have already written. You need to look at all the elements you have previously analysed and come to a decision about the overall success of the production. Often it is helpful to read a copy of the script of the play you have seen. This helps you to understand and comment on the way in which the play has been interpreted by the director and performers.

Before you write the conclusion, consider the following:

- Refer to the rating out of 10 that you gave the performance. After consideration of each of the performance elements, do you still feel that this is a fair rating? Why or why not?
- Which aspects of the performance were strongest? Why?
- Which aspects of the performance were weakest? Why?
- Did any particular performance element seem to overshadow others? How?
- Can you make any suggestions for improvement?
- Create a title that sums up your impression of the play, as well as the comments and tone of your review. Your title needs to be engaging, so consider the use of puns or alliteration.



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PERFORMANCE TASK

7.3 Written task: review of a performance

The task

You are to write, edit and publish a review of a live performance. This may be as a printed hard copy, or you might create a blog post or website page. The review will explore and discuss the components of a performance. Your teacher will set the word length of the review.

Creating and making a review

Reviewing the steps listed in this chapter and reading the sample review will help your planning for this task.

In your review, include a discussion of:

- plot and story
- themes and issues
- actors' performances of their characters
- elements of production and how they contribute to dramatic meaning.

Remember to conclude your discussion with an overall opinion and evaluation.

Review checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually, using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. These criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- respond to each of the areas of a performance that need to be evaluated
- write a detailed and analytical response
- include examples from the production to illustrate and support your judgements
- write in an articulate and sophisticated manner appropriate for theatre criticism
- present ideas using a coherent and clear structure
- draft, edit and publish your review incorporating a headline and graphics.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Once you have written your review, reread it. Look for ways to improve the communication of your ideas. Write a second draft.
- 2 Read another person's review. Write comments about the strength of the review. Discuss your responses with the person who wrote the review.
- 3 Give your review to someone else to read and ask them to make notes on your review. Discuss their comments. Write a final draft.

Three Delicious Courses

Sydney Theatre Company revives Andrew Bovell's *After Dinner*

by Jessica Lyons

Andrew Bovell's first major play success has been revived in Sydney Theatre Company's lively production of *After Dinner*. Detailing the events of a typical 1980s Aussie Friday night, the audience is transported back in time to when big hair and shoulder pads were all the rage and carnations were found on every restaurant table. Aided by alcohol, inhibition quickly disappears as the characters begin to 'cut footloose'.

First performed in 1988, *After Dinner* was the play that launched Bovell's epic career and put his work on the Australian theatre map. A departure in tone and style from his later work, such as *When The Rain Stops Falling* and *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?*, the play begins in a pub bistro, where Dympie (Rebecca Massey), an uptight spinster, and Paula (Anita Hegh), forever single, invite a recently widowed work colleague, Monika (Helen Thomson) to share dinner. At another table sit some awkward prospects, Gordon (Glenn Hazeldine), the recently abandoned husband, and Stephen (Josh McConville), the single bloke who wants a woman, but not a commitment. As the night progresses and wine bottles are emptied, the oddities of each character expose a deep sense of loneliness.

Directed by Imara Savage, this retrospective piece presents audiences with a hilarious and at times painfully familiar take on the 1980s night out. The laughter and nods of recognition suggest that this is a show connecting with both memory and

nostalgia. However, while the play is so iconically '80s, Bovell's script holds a timelessness about it, which engages both those who lived the decade and those who, like this reviewer, were but a distant thought.

Greeted with the classic pub bistro scene of plastic plants, vinyl chairs and painted feature walls, the audience was welcomed by an all too familiar scene. Alicia Clement's mission to '*recapture the intimacy of small theatre spaces*' was vital in amplifying the awkward traits of the characters and building the dramatic tension. Not only was the audience positioned in intimate proximity, but the characters were thrust into various awkward social moments, made more so because of the tight use of space.

Clement's costume design also paid homage to the era's fabulously loud and cringe-worthy garments. Emerging in a pink parachute hoodie, Paula's fashion statement suited her eccentric naivety, while Gordon's gaudy patterned shirt screamed his desire for a fun night out. Armed with an overly stuffed bosom, Dympie was quite literally a frumpy woman, desperately seeking a good time, but not at the expense of 'holding the table'.

Clement's bold costume choices supported Savage's decision to direct her actors in a heightened style. There was a vulnerability and sensitivity in each performance, however,

crucially, there were also moments of heightened comedy that paid homage to the almost farcical portions of the script. This was supported by the soundtrack of epic rock ballads and pop melodies.

One of the more memorable examples of this stylistic shift happens after dinner, in the second act, when Monika (Thomson) launches into a tale of Shakespearean proportions. Monika describes her waltz through open green fields (the pool table), the puffy clouds that surrounded her (the smokers' area) and her swim through a mysterious lake (the ladies' bathroom). Monika's drunken recall of her trip to the bar and back was remarkably well played by Thomson, sending the audience into rapturous laughter. Thomson's performance reflects the worthiness of her many accolades, and is worth the ticket price alone.

Massey is exceptional in her role as Dympie: stubborn and lonely. Her expressions and reactions are as tight as the control she tries to

wield over her companions. Later in the second act, tension builds between Dympie's dedication to holding the table (despite there being another two free) and Paula's need to get closer to the music and dance the night away. This boiling conflict causes Dympie to mount the very table she has guarded all night. The moment acts as a turning point, highlighting Bovell's key idea about the great clash between the objectives of friendship and singledom.

Sydney Theatre Company brings the embarrassing trends of the '80s back to life, and the convincingly accurate portrayals of the characters provided a light-hearted trip down memory lane. The play struck a perfect balance between good fun and poignancy, while the revitalisation of familiar memories encouraged the audience to remember that every Friday night calls for 'dancing on the ceiling'.



Written task: review of a performance

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- identify aspects of a performance for evaluation
- evaluate and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a performance
- appreciate how the elements of a performance work together
- use examples from a performance to support opinions
- use appropriate language to discuss ideas
- use computer technology to publish a review of a performance.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and exploring ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Responding</p> <p>Have you communicated an understanding of the overall play by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • summarising the plot and story? • describing and explaining the themes and issues? • describing the directorial concept, its appropriateness and effectiveness? • using examples to support your opinions? <p>Have you considered the actors' interpretation of character by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluating the actors' performances of their characters? • using examples to support your judgements? <p>Have you considered the impact of the production elements on the overall performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commenting on the impact of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – set? – costume? – lighting? – sound? • using examples to support your opinions? <p>Have you expressed your ideas well by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using appropriate language and terminology? • creating a well-structured review that is clear, sophisticated and articulate? • presenting a review in a clear format that includes a title and graphic? 				

Comments

PART THREE



DRAMATIC FORMS AND PERFORMANCE STYLES



- Chapter 8 Melodrama: just for the thrill
- Chapter 9 Comedy: it's all in the ... timing
- Chapter 10 Political theatre: raising awareness
- Chapter 11 Physical theatre: Roll up! Roll up!
- Chapter 12 Non-realistic theatre: visions, dreams and symbols



8

MELODRAMA: JUST FOR THE THRILL

WHY STUDY MELODRAMA?

Melodrama was once one of the most popular forms of theatrical entertainment and reached the peak of its popularity in the mid-to-late 19th century. Melodrama has its own particular types of plots, characters and situations. Studying melodrama helps us to identify and understand how popular theatre reinforced the social values of the time. We can still see the influences of melodrama plots and characters in popular entertainment today, including action and adventure films, and television dramas, which are sometimes called 'soap operas'. Studying melodrama also helps improve our understanding of the history of theatre and equips us with more skills to use in performance work.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 8.1 An overview of melodrama
- 8.2 Plot and dramatic structure in melodrama
- 8.3 Characters in melodrama
- 8.4 The melodrama acting style
- 8.5 Staging in melodrama
- 8.6 Performance task: time running out

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- investigate the origins and conventions of melodrama in Australia
- understand how melodramas reflected and reinforced the social values of the time
- explore and express a range of stock characters from traditional melodrama
- select and explore the use of vocal dynamics and movement to portray melodrama characters
- explore and practise the acting conventions of traditional melodrama
- create and manipulate tension through the melodrama plot device of 'time running out'.





Alamy/© Yvette Cardozo

8.1 An overview of melodrama

[When studying nineteenth-century theatre] it is necessary to start with melodrama and the means of production because they defined and contained all nineteenth-century theatre; for a century melodrama remained the most popular form of entertainment.

Michael R. Booth – Theatre academic

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MELODRAMA

Melodrama developed into a theatrical form in about 1800, thanks to the French playwright René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt. It was a reaction against the theatre of the Restoration period of the late 1600s.

Melodrama was also influenced by the development of a new style in art, music and literature, called romanticism, through which people began to express their feelings in art. Melodrama was emotional theatre, and the melodrama plays of this period were tales of suffering, suspense, romance and evil deeds.

Live music was incorporated in melodrama performances to heighten the emotions of scenes, and was also used to indicate character entrances. Melodrama relied on full use of theatrical devices, special effects and dramatic scene changes all aimed at thrilling and moving an audience.

MELODRAMA IN AUSTRALIA

The first Australian melodrama was written in Tasmania in 1834 and was called *The Bushrangers*. This play reflects our early convict history and romanticises the escape of a convict, Matthew Brady, and a number of other prisoners from the Macquarie Harbour penal settlement in Tasmania.

Most early Australian melodramas were adaptations of European plays. Later, in the 19th century, clearly identifiable Australian settings and characters were established. Typical characters included:

- bushrangers
- gold prospectors (also known as ‘diggers’)
- currency lads and lasses—young male and female characters who were notable for being born in Australia and reflected a freshness and independence that differed from their European counterparts, especially the currency lasses; the Australian heroine could ride, shoot and swim—she was a complete departure from the vulnerable, sweet, weak heroines of European melodrama
- bumbling Irish policemen for comic relief
- Indigenous Australian companions
- new chums—immigrants to Australia, usually from England, who were seen as being naïve about the way of life in Australia.

THE ACTOR-MANAGER

Actor-managers were in charge of their theatre companies and usually played the lead male role. The most famous Australian actor-managers were George Darrell, Alfred Dampier and Dan Barry. These actor-managers included some Australian stories in the



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plays they performed, although plays from overseas playwrights were considered more popular than Australian plays.

The most popular Australian melodramas used the legend of Ned Kelly as the basis for the plot. One notable Australian melodrama is *Robbery Under Arms*, by Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch, which blends a little of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* with the Ned Kelly story. It was produced in 1890, and although Kelly was hanged in 1881, the memory of his death was still fresh in the audience's minds. By 1914, the popularity of melodramas had faded due to the invention of motion pictures. In the period from 1834 to 1914, Australia had produced some 600 melodramas.

WHAT IS A MELODRAMA CONVENTION?

Identifying the conventions of a theatre style involves highlighting the distinctive aspects that make it different from other styles. The conventions of melodrama cover:

- plot and dramatic structure (how the play is put together)
- characters
- acting style
- staging.

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COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Research theatre entertainment in Australia during the period 1850–1900 with a partner or in small groups. Report your findings to the class.
- 2 What kinds of stories appealed to audiences in this time period? Why?
- 3 Imagine that you are an actor–manager. Write a diary entry in which you describe a scene from a melodrama you have performed in.

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8.2 Plot and dramatic structure in melodrama

THE MELODRAMA PLOT AND DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

The main purpose of melodramas was not credibility, but the capacity to ignite the audience's reactions. The basic moral behind melodramas was the struggle between good and evil, and the re-establishment of a morally correct and just society. Each play relied on extreme situations and extreme states of being; for example, justice versus revenge, honesty versus dishonesty, or innocence versus corruption. A traditional melodrama plot would include the following three elements:

- **Provocation** – the initial cause for setting the action in motion, often the jealousy or greed of a wicked character; for example, the evil landowner wants to marry the innocent daughter; if she refuses, he will evict her poor family from the property.
- **Pangs** – the sufferings of the good and innocent characters who are in conflict with the evil; for example, the distressed daughter reluctantly agrees to marry the evil landowner to help save her family.



HINT

Melodramas also incorporated the use of topical jokes, comic interludes and slapstick to attract audiences.



HINT

Slapstick is an energetic and physical form of comedy that can include falling, tripping, hiding, dropping things, bumping and chasing for comic effect.



HINT

Melodrama actors often played the same character type in all melodrama plays. In Australia, the actor-manager would often play the role of the hero.

- **Penalty** – that suffered by the wicked character for his or her evil ways in a last-minute reversal of fortune; for example, the hero arrives to save the day and reveals that the evil landowner had originally taken ownership of the land by deceiving the daughter's drunken father, who is in fact the rightful owner.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 To get an idea of the impact that melodramas had on 19th-century audiences, consider some of your favourite action or adventure films. Which features of them do you like in particular? Discuss and record these features.
- 2 What similarities are there between your favourite action and adventure films, and melodrama?

8.3 Characters in melodrama

MELODRAMA 'STOCK CHARACTERS'

The characters in melodramas were not supposed to be lifelike, but they had to be identifiable types. These sorts of characters were standard and audiences expected to see types with which they were familiar. These are often referred to as 'stock characters'.

The stock melodrama characters were:

- **Hero** – handsome, strong, brave, honest and reliable; status: middle class or higher
- **Heroine** – beautiful, courageous, innocent and vulnerable; status: middle class or higher
- **Villain** – cunning, without morals, dishonest, cruel and evil; status: middle class or higher
- **Villain's accomplice** – usually provides comic relief because they are the bumbling sidekick; status: lower class
- **Faithful servant** – also provides comic relief, does the dirty work, usually discovers evidence against the villain; status: lower class
- **Maid servant** – traditionally a female character, lively, flirts with the faithful servant; status: lower class.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Find two pictures of characters from an adventure, superhero or action film that you think are good examples of melodrama stock characters. Use movie magazines, the Internet and your library to help in your research.
- 2 Underneath each picture, write a list of the personal qualities you feel best describe the character. Share your findings with the class.
- 3 Working with a partner or in a small group, identify how melodramas reinforced social values that discriminated against certain groups in society. Why did melodramas do this?
- 4 What are some of the limitations in terms of how men and women are represented in melodramas? Do you think these limitations still apply to actors today? Why or why not?
- 5 How and why should we challenge representations of groups of people that are limiting or discriminatory?

8.4 The melodrama acting style



Superstock/ClassicStock

MELODRAMA ACTING STYLE

The melodrama acting style requires the use of strong facial expressions, large movements and gestures, and a clear and well-projected delivery of lines. This was considered the norm for actors in 19th-century melodramas. This style of acting seems unusual today, but audiences of this period took this form of theatre seriously, and would see the highly dramatic and meaningful gesture as part of a great actor's success.

Melodrama actors concentrated on 'showing' emotions more than feeling them. They were skilled in the use of facial expression and heightened body language to show particular emotions. Inflections in the voice and the use of gestures also gave the audience cues to react by either booing or cheering. Remember that there were no microphones at this time, so the actors felt that big gestures, exaggerated expressions and the use of full voice were needed to reach the back corners of the large theatres as well as rise above the noise of the audience.

MELODRAMA AND THE AUSTRALIAN AUDIENCE

By the end of the 19th century, Australia's population was concentrated largely in city centres. The discovery of gold encouraged an increase in population and an expansion of the major cities. New theatres were built and these could hold large audiences.

In Australia, theatres were initially operated under strong government control because they were regarded as dangerous places that encouraged crime. Performances attracted large audiences. The audiences were unruly and reflected a mixture of upper, middle and lower classes. The upper section of the theatre seating was often full of drunken young men who delighted in calling out to the actors on stage. It was not uncommon for most of the audience to be under the influence of alcohol as they watched the performance. Spectators hissed, threw fruit, and rioted when actors forgot lines. Actors encouraged audience interaction by often ad-libbing lines and telling bawdy jokes. They also encouraged audience members to cheer the hero, and to boo and hiss the villain. Audible gasps of shock, horror and surprise would be heard at moments of excitement and tension in the performance.



Cinemateca – *The Mothering Heart* (1913):
Drama Silent Film

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Explain how being aware of the audience and playing to the audience may influence the melodrama actor's use of vocal dynamics and movement.
- 2 Use the Internet to find melodrama music of the period. Share this with the class and discuss how it might add to the audience's enjoyment of the performance.



CHALLENGE

Repeat the exercise and, each time you hold a pose, include a sound or word that you feel adds to your interpretation.

EXERCISE

MELODRAMA ACTING STYLE: DEMONSTRATING EMOTION

Walk through the room and, on the signal from your teacher, hold a pose for one of the following emotional states: evilness, innocence, courage, laziness, vulnerability, defiance, repentance, haughtiness, desperation, grief, lovesickness, territoriality and cruelty. Do not use sound. Focus your energy on communicating the emotional state through every part of your body, including your face. Repeat the exercise until you have practised all of the emotional states. Divide into two groups and show each person in your group four emotional states.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Identify those who you feel portrayed particular emotional states in the exercise well. Describe how they used body language to make their demonstration effective.
- 2 Explain three ways you could use body language to demonstrate emotion.

EXERCISE

MORROCHESI'S ACTING EXERCISES

The 19th-century actor Antonio Morrochesi believed that there was a mimed action corresponding to every word in a performance. Morrochesi was one of the first people to write a handbook for actors. He gave instructions for how actors should play various emotions and psychological states, such as love, jealousy, rage, anger, passion and insanity. Often an actor would use these gestures without even thinking. The following examples are from Morrochesi's book on acting.

Rage

Take off your hat, put it on, press it down in place, throw it on the ground, pick it up and tear it to pieces. Stride up and down restlessly: sometimes in a straight line, sometimes turning sharply. Every now and then run your hands through your hair. Unbutton your shirt and pause for a moment here and there. Bang hard with your fist on the furniture. Turn chairs upside down. Smash vases and crockery. Bang your fist against the back of your neck. Open and close doors. Throw yourself into a chair, bounce up and down on it, and then jump to your feet again.

Pride

Set one arm crossways over the breast; the other resting with the back of the hand on the hip and the elbow thrust forward. Hold your head high.

MELODRAMA CHARACTER TYPES

Now you have begun to explore body language and movement in the melodrama acting style, it is time to explore some stock melodrama character types.

EXERCISE

MELODRAMA CHARACTER ADDITION

As covered earlier in this chapter, three of the common melodrama character types are:

- **Hero** – brave, honest, fair-minded and strong
- **Villain** – deceitful, evil, cruel, sneaky, sly and untrustworthy
- **Heroine** – virtuous, sweet, innocent, vulnerable, honest and trustworthy.

1 Creating melodrama character types

Work through the following steps:

- Adopt a frozen pose.
- Add a walk or stride that clearly represents the character's personality.
- Add a mannerism or gesture that is representative of the character's personality.
- Add a sound, word or phrase that you feel represents the character's personality.

2 Creating Australian melodrama character types

Explore how these Australian melodrama characters might be portrayed differently to the European version of stock melodrama characters. Explore physical and vocal portrayals of the following Australian melodrama characters. Use the steps listed to build each character.

- **The digger (a gold prospector)** – rough, loyal, fair-minded and honest
- **The Australian heroine** – strong, feminine, confident and outspoken
- **The evil bushranger** – rough, cunning, ruthless and cruel.

3 Playing to the audience

Each person in the class chooses a melodrama character they enjoyed playing. Each person presents his or her character in front of the class. The class cheers or boos the character accordingly. The performer should be aware of the audience's reactions and improvise the character's response.

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COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Pick two characters that you felt were strong representations of the character types. Describe how the performers used the drama skills of body language, gesture, vocal dynamics and focus to create an effective character type.

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HINT

Undertake voice warm-up exercises (chapter 1, pp. 21–24) before you start the following exercises.

MELODRAMA CHARACTER AND VOCAL DYNAMICS

Saying lines in the melodrama acting style requires very strong vocal projection and the use of emphasis. This can be achieved by using your breath to create a more powerful delivery and by choosing certain words or syllables to say in a special way. Emphasis can also be achieved through consideration of the elements of vocal dynamics: pace, rhythm, pitch, volume and pauses. The following exercises will help you practise this.

EXERCISE

MELODRAMA CHARACTER LINES

Try saying the following lines, adding special emphasis where letters are in upper case. As you practise, find a mimed action for the words you emphasise. The lines should be said with full emotion and at full voice.

HEROINE I am INnocent. You are so crOOOEL (*cruel*).

HERO YOU have entered this home like a WOOLF (*wolf*) and TORN from her mother's arms the HOPE of her old age. I should SEEEZ (*seize*) you by the throat, and DASH you PROSTRATE to the earth, as TOO FOWEL (*foul*) a carcass to walk erect and MOCK the name of man.

HEROINE No mother, I canNOT marry Charles. It would BREAK my heart to do so and I would surely DIE!

HERO I STER-RUCK (*struck*) him down.



HINT

Repeat these lines, but add a 'roll' to all the underlined 'R' sounds.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Identify the dominant emotion that each character is feeling in each line they say.
- 2 Describe the body gestures and facial expressions you used to help communicate the emotion of each line.
- 3 Describe how one other group member delivered their line in a way that you felt met the requirements of the melodrama acting style. Comment specifically on their use of body language and vocal dynamics.
- 4 Why did melodrama performers use stylised voice and movement to portray their characters?

EXERCISE

ASIDES

In an aside, a character speaks directly to the audience to reveal a thought or plan that is kept secret from the other characters. The performer's delivery of an aside should establish a feeling of secrecy and draw the audience's focus from the general action to the performer delivering the aside.

Try performing the following villain's aside, which reveals his secret thoughts. To add to the feeling of secrecy, put a hand to one side of your mouth, with the fingers together and the palm cupped and facing down. Try to pick the words that need to be emphasised.





The villain's aside precedes a line where he pretends he is sorry for what he has done and refuses to kill the defenceless hero. This will require a swift change of body language, vocal delivery and facial expression: from the delivery of the aside to the delivery of the line.

VILLAIN *(Aside)* First I shall gain his confidence, and then I shall take what is rightly mine!

The actor playing the villain changes the emotion that is portrayed by altering body language and vocal delivery.

(To the hero) No! Too much of your blood is upon my head! Be justly revenged: take mine!



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 When delivering the aside, how did you use body language and voice to create a feeling of secrecy and to manipulate the character's relationship with the audience?
- 2 How did you change your use of body language and voice from the delivery of the aside to the delivery of the line to the hero?



EXERCISE

MELODRAMA CHARACTER LINES

Divide into pairs. Write one line for each of the following stock characters: hero, villain and heroine. On a piece of paper, indicate which character says the line and whether or not it is an aside, and underline any words or syllables for emphasis. Put all the lines written by all pairs into a hat or box. Everyone takes a line from the hat and is given a couple of minutes to practise their line. Each person then delivers his or her line with appropriate character body language, gesture and use of emphasis.

EXERCISE

MODERN MELODRAMA PARODY

In pairs or in small groups, choose one of the following situations to devise and present to the class.

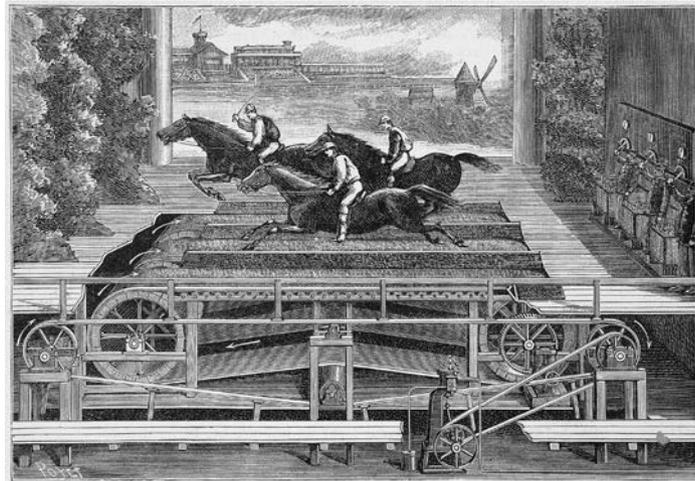
- Trying to persuade a parent to let you go out.
- Being caught by a teacher and punished.
- Two lovers on a date telling each other how in love they are.
- A bully caught picking on a student who is then saved by the school sports hero or heroine.

The situation should be short. You are encouraged to use your acting skills and to manipulate the elements of drama to make fun of the limitations of this style of theatre. Using the element of drama focus to frame the action, you might choose to emphasise in your melodrama how the representation of women was stereotyped. The emphasis in this exercise is the use of melodramatic body language and the use of melodramatic delivery set in a contemporary situation. Plan and rehearse your scene before you present it to the class.

8.5 Staging in melodrama

WHAT DID MELODRAMAS LOOK LIKE?

Melodramas in the late 1800s had the benefit of being staged in theatres with the machinery and equipment to create the required elaborate settings and effects. Fly towers and counterweight systems allowed backdrops and scenery to be hidden and revealed from the area above the stage. Scenic artists created familiar, local settings for Australian melodramas. Their aim was to re-create settings as accurately as possible. The increased use of electric stage lighting, rather than gas lighting, also added to the visual effects.



Cross-section of a stage showing the treadmills and moving panorama used to stage a horse race

SENSATION MELODRAMAS

By the late 1800s, a particular type of melodrama called ‘sensation melodrama’ had gained popularity. In sensation melodramas, the highlight of the performance was the moment of sensation when some disaster or catastrophe would occur—be it a flood, avalanche, fire, earthquake, explosion, death or murder along with other general mayhem. The originator of sensation melodrama, Dion Boucicault, had real fire engines extinguish a real fire set in an apartment building in his production of *The Poor of New York*.

Australian melodramas reflected this trend. In *The Sunny South*, by George Darrell, a train is derailed on stage. In *Robbery Under Arms*, by Alfred Dampier, a stagecoach is driven onto the stage and is hijacked by bushrangers. Another performance in Melbourne re-created a horse race by having horses run across the stage, out one side door of the theatre, up the lane behind the theatre and in through the other side door—all to give the realistic impression of a horse race at high speed.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 List three famous, popular blockbuster films or stage musicals that use spectacular effects.
- 2 Describe the spectacular effects used in the performances you listed. What did they add to the dramatic impact of the performance?
- 3 What is a sensation melodrama?

PERFORMANCE TASK



8.6 Performance task: time running out

The task

In groups, devise a climactic scene from a melodrama. The scene should be a climactic moment where the hero rescues the heroine from the evil clutches of the villain. The moment should use the device of 'time running out' to add tension to the scene. You could use a stopwatch or a visible clock with a second hand to give you a genuine feeling of having to rescue someone quickly. Do not rush the action. Sometimes it is better to slow the action almost completely at the climactic moment so it seems that time hangs in the air. This is usually the moment when we think the hero is about to die and all is lost.

Here are some ideas of climactic scenes involving a heroine being rescued:

- The heroine is tied to the train track. The hero and the villain struggle as the train approaches.
- The heroine dangles from a frayed rope over a cliff edge. The flame of a burning candle threatens to break the rope.
- The heroine is trapped in a burning house and the door is locked from the outside.

You must also include the use of asides in your performance, as well as the use of distinct poses and gestures to express the emotion of the character's lines. In performance, you must play to the audience and encourage their reactions to particular events on stage.



HINT

Melodramas used live music to heighten the atmosphere of the performance. You may like to incorporate an appropriate piece of music to accompany your performance. Melodrama music can be easily sourced online.



HINT

It is helpful for the audience to boo or cheer appropriately during the performance. This will encourage the performers to play to the audience.



Shutterstock/Timothy O'Leary

What are some typical characteristics of a melodrama villain?

Creating and making a melodrama

- Brainstorm the characters and situations for your climactic scene. You may think of examples from adventure or action films
- Consider how dialogue can use emphasis to suit the melodrama acting style.
- Identify the climactic moment.
- Consider ways you can build tension through the use of sound effects
- Consider ways you can control the building of tension through the action of the scene.

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group.

The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- select and incorporate body language and movement in the melodrama acting style
- select and incorporate voice in a melodrama acting style
- sustain and develop character in performance
- select and incorporate stylised body language to express the emotion of character lines
- include and deliver asides
- manipulate the actor–audience relationship to encourage the audience’s involvement
- create and control tension
- highlight the climactic moment
- incorporate your knowledge and understanding of melodrama into your own performance work.



HINT

Building tension works best if you start your performance at a moderate pace and with a moderate level of intensity, and build the pace and intensity as you move towards the climactic moment.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Evaluate one group’s performance. Describe their strengths in the use of body language.
- 2 How did the group create and maintain tension in their performance?
- 3 Evaluate your own presentation. Outline your strengths in the melodrama acting style. Use examples from your own performance to support your evaluation.
- 4 Evaluate your ability to include awareness of your audience into your melodrama performance. Describe examples where you or another performer interacted with the audience to heighten the performance.
- 5 Give two examples of how melodrama has influenced popular entertainment today. Draw a table that shows a comparison between melodrama and your examples. In the table, include comparisons of character, plot, settings and acting style.
- 6 What made Australian melodrama different to European melodrama?
- 7 Describe the kind of actor–audience relationship you would expect at a melodrama performance.
- 8 Why were melodramas so popular in the late 19th century? Research the social beliefs, politics and entertainment of this period to help write your answer.



Performance task: time running out

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- investigate the origins and conventions of melodrama in Australia
- understand how melodramas reflected and reinforced the social values of the time
- explore and express a range of stock characters from traditional melodrama
- select and explore the use of vocal dynamics and movement to portray melodrama characters
- explore and practise the acting conventions of traditional melodrama
- create and manipulate tension through the melodrama plot device of 'time running out'.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you incorporated melodrama acting conventions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a stock melodrama character type? • delivering lines with appropriate emphasis on certain words? • using asides to communicate your character's thoughts? • playing to the audience to encourage their involvement? • representing your character's personality through appropriate choice of body language and movement? • incorporating suitable body language to show the emotion of your character's lines? • sustaining and developing character in performance? <p>Have you rehearsed and presented a performance for a specific audience by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incorporating the conventions of melodrama? • structuring the drama into a coherent and polished performance using effective scene transitions? • manipulating and maintaining tension? 				
<p>Responding:</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively reflect on the development, rehearsal and shaping of a melodrama performance? • question and interrogate the social purpose of melodramas in terms of characters and plot? • show strong knowledge of the history and development of melodrama as a popular form of entertainment? 				

Comments

9

COMEDY: IT'S ALL IN THE ... TIMING

WHY STUDY COMEDY?

Comedy is a unique and distinctive genre with an extensive history. It has evolved into a wide range of forms and styles. By studying comedy, we are able to appreciate the skills and techniques that help create comedy. We can then employ these skills in the creation of performance work.

This chapter explores two styles of comedy—slapstick and parody—and is divided into the following units:

- 9.1 An overview of comedy in performance
- 9.2 Slapstick: physical comedy
- 9.3 Character in slapstick comedy
- 9.4 Parody: imitation and exaggeration
- 9.5 Performance task: don't slip on the soap!

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- perform physical comedy, including a slip, a trip and a fall
- explore and demonstrate how status relationships between characters create comedy
- utilise the skills of imitation and exaggeration to create parody
- explore and discuss ways in which comedy can contribute to performance work.



Alan Lao and Effie Nkrumah in Drew Fairley's Ama & Chan, by Urban Theatre Projects



Photo Heidrun Lohr.

9780170385381

9.1 An overview of comedy in performance

The joke of life is the fall of dignity.

Mack Sennett – American silent movie producer



HINT

Black comedy is a dramatic form that can include taboo topics and shocking or confronting action such as violence, but for comic effect. Often the intention of black comedies is to make important points about serious issues through laughter.

COMEDY IN PERFORMANCE

Although the intention of comedies is to amuse, they often use serious issues to explore the lighter side of human experience. All great comedy contains an element of tragedy. It is our weaknesses that become the subject of humour. Some famous comic plays have included plots about war, people being unfaithful to their partner, or people not telling the truth.

Comedies are often about trivial and day-to-day matters. In these comedies, characters create problems for themselves and others through their own foolishness. It is also fairly common for comedies to have a happy ending, in which all wrongs are made right. Comedies have been written in a wide variety of performance styles. Some of these include Restoration comedy, commedia dell'arte, black comedy, farce and satire.

The benefits of comedy

Comedies have a positive psychological benefit for the audience. The laughter created by comedy not only releases tension, but also helps us to view awkward and difficult situations less seriously. In a sense, it is almost a relief that someone else is in the predicament, and not us. Television situation comedies (sitcoms) exploit the fact that we gain immense enjoyment from identifying with and observing others in difficult situations.

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

CHRIS LILLEY

Comedy Writer, Actor, Stand-up Comedian and Voice Artist

As a writer, performer, producer, director and composer, Chris Lilley is one of Australia's most prolific artists and the creator of five critically acclaimed television series.

Chris's series *Jonah from Tonga* (2014), *Ja'mie: Private School Girl* (2013), *Angry Boys* (2011), *Summer Heights High* (2008) and *We Can Be Heroes* (2005) have received numerous awards including Most Outstanding Actor and Most Popular Actor at the Logies, AFI Awards for Best Comedy Series and Best Performance in a Television Comedy, and the Byron Kennedy Award for *Summer Heights High*. Chris also won the international Rose d'Or Award for Best Male Comedy Performance.

Chris began his career as a stand-up comedian and voiceover artist. He expanded to television and gained a cult following for his characters 'Extreme Darren' and 'Mr G' in the sketch comedy television series *Big Bite* and *Hamish & Andy*.



Courtesy of Chris Lilley

Chris Lilley



Courtesy of Chris Lilley

Chris Lilley as his character, Mr G

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 List some of your favourite comic films and television programs.
- 2 Describe two characters from the films and television programs you have selected. Find one or two reasons why they are comedic that supports the theory that it is the weaknesses and flaws of comic characters that make us laugh.

9.2 Slapstick: physical comedy

AN OVERVIEW OF SLAPSTICK

‘Slapstick’ is a term used to describe a style of comedy that incorporates falling, hitting, tripping, balancing, breaking, chasing and hiding to create humour. It places emphasis on showing comedy rather than creating comedy through dialogue. Television programs or online shared videos of people in situations where accidents occur are a good example of how slapstick humour still appeals to audiences today. As the audience watches someone trip or fall, they are both laughing at and identifying with the individual’s loss of dignity. The audience also responds to the timing, or the surprise and shock of the moment. Where home videos are usually about real mishaps, slapstick is about creating the illusion of mishaps.



Newspix/Bob Barker

The Umbilical Brothers (Shane Dundas and David Collins) use plenty of slapstick in their performances.



HINT

A 'slapstick' is literally a prop bat made of two hinged sticks that slap sharply together when the bat is used to hit someone. This gives the illusion of hitting someone with a stick, without actually hurting the actor. The slapstick is a staple gag of the Italian masked comedy form, *commedia dell'arte*.

The term 'timing' refers to the ability of the performer to incorporate an underlying rhythm that governs when particular events best occur in a comic routine. If you have ever had the experience of telling a joke well, you have used timing effectively. If you pause unnecessarily long before the punchline, you lose the momentum of the joke and consequently the humour 'falls flat'.



HINT

Complete an extensive physical warm-up (chapter 1, p. 12) before you undertake slapstick exercises.

• • • • •

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 List any television comedy programs you have seen that include the use of slapstick humour.
 - 2 Describe three slapstick moments from one of these programs that you particularly enjoyed.
 - 3 Explain why you enjoyed these moments.
- • • • •



CHALLENGE

Try tripping over several objects of different sizes one after the other. Leave variations in the distance between each trip. For example, you may start with one trip, walk a few metres, and then complete three trips in quick succession. This challenge will test your use of timing.

EXERCISE

SLAPSTICK COMEDY

Timing is 'sensed' during the improvising of situations, and is developed and rehearsed once a successful comic moment is discovered. During these exercises, be aware of the timing of the comic moments and how this can influence your work. After you have completed all the slapstick exercises, select and show examples of slapstick work to the class.

1 Trip

Walk through the room. At a given signal from your teacher, quickly push off the ball of either foot into the floor, and use this point as the imaginary object you are tripping over. As you push the ball of your foot into the floor, you need to stumble forward and then regain your composure. The size of the stumble will indicate to the audience the size of the object. After you have tripped, continue walking and look behind you with a confused expression, as if trying to see what it was you tripped over.





2 Slip

Walk through the room. At a given signal from your teacher, allow either the right or the left leg to suddenly rise up, almost like a soft kick. You should wobble slightly, and lean backward to give a sense of losing your balance. Continue walking and look behind you to see the imaginary item you slipped on.



3 Side fall

Stand upright in a space free of furniture. If you have mats, use these as you practise this exercise. A fall to the side involves several steps:

- Bend your knees together while leaning slightly to the side you want to fall to.
- Allow your body to completely relax, as if you are about to faint.
- As you begin the fall, continue to deepen the bend of your knees and increase the lean to one side.
- As you fall, begin to bring both arms up above your head so that they will lie along the floor above your head when you complete the fall.
- The first body parts to make contact with the fall should be the upper thigh and the side of the buttock. Your head should rest against the arm that is outstretched along the floor.



CHALLENGE

As in the Challenge for the previous exercise, complete a series of slips, varying the distances between them.



HINT

Do not try 'dead falls', which are falls directly face down or backward. These are highly skilled falls and require special training. They can be dangerous without proper supervision.



HINT

The reaction of the character immediately after the moment of collision is highly important to the potential humour of the moment.



4 Collide

Working with a partner, try the following collisions between two people. To create the illusion of a full-force collision, determine with your partner beforehand the precise moment of collision. In rehearsal, walk towards your partner at normal speed; at the point of contact, 'pull back' so the physical contact with your partner is not delivered with full force. The illusion of a real collision is dependent on your sense of timing and the way in which you both react to the collision.

- **Surprise back and front collision** – Creep backward towards your partner, pretending you are sneaking through a house at night. First, count the number of steps it would take to reach each other. When you practise, count each step out loud until you are confident. The characters need to react in fright and shock at the moment of collision. You could also try a surprise front collision by having two characters absorbed in reading a newspaper as they walk towards each other. Use your peripheral vision to judge the distance from each other and the right moment for the point of collision.
- **Collide and drop** – Use two trays with plastic cups and bowls. Pretend to be two busy waiters serving customers. Find a moment where the two waiters have a front collision while holding their trays. As the collision occurs, you can add the catching of cups or an exaggerated letting go of the tray and its contents to make the moment more powerful.

5 Stuck

Pretend to get your hand or foot stuck in a bucket, biscuit jar, or some other container. You may be painting a room and accidentally step into the bucket, or be stealing lollies from a jar. Try to remove the container, showing enormous effort and strain but no success.

6 Double take

A double take involves looking at an object or other characters twice—the first time quickly and with less notice taken, and the second time for longer and with more notice taken. Pretend you are walking down a street and see a very surprising sight. Maybe it is a large spider or a magnificent pair of shoes that you have always wanted. Walk past the imaginary object or character and look once quickly, but don't pay much attention to what you see. In the split second following the first look, it dawns on you that what you have seen is worth looking at a second time. Look at the object again, but for longer and with an appropriate reaction.



HINT

The double take is performed very quickly. Practise slowly at first and then increase the speed of the reactions.



The Silent Years of Slapstick Comedy

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Which exercises did you feel worked most effectively for you? Why?
- 2 Describe one good example of the use of timing.
- 3 Make suggestions for how you could improve your work in each of the exercises.

EXERCISE

LAZZI

'Lazzi', or 'comic accidents', originated in the improvised performances of commedia dell'arte. Lazzi (plural of 'lazzo') are comic moments that use physical, visual humour, and utilise the improvisation skill of extending (see chapter 2, p. 39). Practise the following lazzi. Present your favourite lazzo to the class once you have tried them all.

- Accidentally sit on a basket of eggs.
- Squirt water in your eye at the drinking fountain.
- Carry a pie and fall into it.
- Drop ice-cream on your lap.
- Spill hot coffee on your lap.
- Sit on a cactus.
- Accidentally rinse your mouth with shaving lotion.
- Get your tie caught in an electric beater.
- Hold sour milk in your cheeks while you look for a place to spit.
- Kick yourself in the shin while dancing.
- Miss the nail while hammering and hit your thumb.
- Step on a drawing pin.
- Have soap in your eyes while you search for a towel.
- Pour fuel on a smouldering barbecue and deal with the explosion of flames.
- Kick a soccer ball that turns out to be a bowling ball.
- Walk into a pole as you turn your head to flirt with someone attractive.



CHALLENGE

Have individuals devise and present their own lazzo to the class.



HINT

If you have juggling or acrobatic skills, you can include these in your development of comic scenes to add both excitement and humour.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Give two examples of how you incorporated the skills you learnt in the set of slapstick exercises into the practice of lazzi.
- 2 Describe how you felt you used timing well in one lazzo.
- 3 Use examples of the lazzi you saw and comment on what you felt contributed to a successful lazzo; for example, clear mime, facial expression and timing.



Shutterstock.com/David Franklin

9.3 Character in slapstick comedy



Newspix/Brett Faulkner

Lano & Woodley are a modern-day version of the classic slapstick duo—'straight man' and 'funny man'.

COMIC CHARACTERS

Characters in comedy can be represented in a variety of ways, from highly stylised to naturalistic. The circus clown often uses slapstick comedy and is an excellent example of a highly stylised character. In this unit we will look at creating stylised characters by using exaggerated movement, voice and costume.

In the following two sets of exercises you are required to adopt a character and improvise scenes as high-status and low-status characters. The first set of exercises explores how you may develop a comic character. The second set of exercises then looks at how humour can be created by establishing clear status relationships between characters. Your skills of improvisation will be required in these exercises (see chapter 2, p. 34).

EXERCISE

CREATING COMIC CHARACTERS

1 Personality traits

Comic characters often have a dominant personality trait that is generally seen as a failing. Choose one of the following personality traits that you find appealing: greediness, silliness, laziness, clumsiness, cheekiness, bossiness, selfishness, vanity or enviousness. There may be other traits you can think of.

Walk through the room and find a way of communicating your trait through the way your character walks. As you walk, pause occasionally and find a pose that incorporates use of the arms, hands and facial expressions to communicate the character's personality trait.

Find a word or sound that expresses your character's personality and repeat this as you walk. Occasionally hold a pose.



HINT

It is best to practise the exercises before performing some for the class.



2 Costume

The ability of a comic character to amuse can be enhanced through the choice of costume. Find items of costume to dress your character. Take into consideration their dominant personality trait. Mismatched items and ill-fitting clothes often add to a character's potential to amuse. For example, your character may wear a pair of pants that are too big, a very tight-fitting waistcoat and an enormous hat. You do not need to find a complete costume; sometimes just a hat or scarf will give enough indication.



CHALLENGE

Continue exploring your character by including a slip, trip, fall or combination of these, and explore the character's response.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Think of one or two of your favourite comic characters from film or television. Your comic characters may be real or animated. Write a short list of their main personality traits. Can you suggest why these traits make each character amusing?
- 2 Using the characters you have chosen, describe the costume they wear most often. Suggest how it adds to their comic potential.

NewsPix/Adam Taylor



Episodes of Australian comedies such as *Kath & Kim* are excellent examples of how the use of costume and status relationships between characters create comedy.



HINT

Status is the relative amount of power a character has or believes they have in relation to other characters. A character's status may be established through wealth or lack of wealth, or through occupation, level of knowledge, experience or strength.



HINT

The term 'master' can apply to either a male or female character.



HINT

In exercise 3 it is important to balance the deliberate or accidental mistakes of the low-status character with moments where the master's wishes are met successfully. The low-status character tends to show their 'naughty' side when the master is not around or is unaware of the servant's actions.

EXERCISE

PLAYING WITH STATUS

1 Status

The entire class moves through the room as though they are high status. It helps to imagine that you are the most important person in the room. You may look at other class members to convey your status, but you are not to speak or physically interact with them.

On the signal from your teacher, everyone becomes low status. It helps to pretend you are the least important person in the room. Once again, only eye contact is allowed as a form of communication.

Your teacher now divides the class into two: half will be high status and half will be low status. Both groups move through the room and use only eye contact to communicate their status. On a given signal, the groups swap their status positions and continue moving through the room.

2 Master and servant 1: establishing status

Divide into pairs. One person is high status (the master) and the other is low status (the servant); for example, coach and athlete, builder and apprentice, employer and employee, or shop assistant and customer. In this exercise, it is important that the low-status character always yields to the high-status character.

Improvise a situation in which the high-status character wants the low-status character to complete a task. Both characters should display a dominant personality trait. The high-status character may be a pompous explorer who wants to use a teaspoon to dig a tunnel through a mountain range, or a wealthy socialite who wants a huge banquet prepared to impress important guests. The low-status character is always willing to fulfill the high-status character's wishes. The high-status character does not necessarily have to be nasty or bossy; they may display other personality traits such as being benevolent or patronising.

Once you have completed the exercise, swap over so that each person has a turn at being either high status or low status.

3 Master and servant 2: undermining status

In this improvisation, the master instructs the servant to undertake an activity, which the master will supervise. The servant makes mistakes (either deliberately or accidentally) and this complicates the situation; for example, the servant may deliberately drop things, break the only spade available, mis-hear information, or creep away and fall asleep on the job only to be discovered by the master. When these accidents happen, the master's status is lowered momentarily because the servant is hindering progress. The master may then re-establish their status by reprimanding the servant or giving the servant a ridiculous punishment.

4 Masters and servants meet

In this improvisation, two masters and two servants meet for a reason of your choosing; for example, they may meet to discuss a merger of companies or to watch a football game. The two masters speak to each other, but instruct their servants to complete the range of activities required. The humour in this situation is the inevitable status competition that develops between the two masters. Their competition to be 'top' master is usually played out through their servants. The comedy arises, for example, from the servants' failure to complete tasks properly and their attempts to be the 'best' servant.





5 Status line

In this improvisation, divide into groups of five and number the members of the group 1 to 5. Number 1 is highest status, number 2 is next in line, and so on. Numbers 2 to 5 can only speak to the character either immediately above them or below them. Number 1 is the foreperson (leader) and can speak directly to any of the other participants. The participants all respect the status of number 1 and the number immediately above them, but can be less courteous to the number below them.

The group completes a task; for example, packing highly sensitive scientific equipment or canisters of smelly gas. As the work is passed down the line, number 1 supervises proceedings and attempts to keep the others in line. Of course, accidents and problems occur and blame is passed down the line, with number 5 always being blamed for everything. If the leader wishes, he or she can sack participants and move them down the line. Participants can plead for mercy or bribe the leader to stay in their current position.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What body language was used to communicate high status in the 'status' exercise? What body language was used to communicate low status? Among other things, consider posture, mannerisms, eye contact, personal space and walk.
- 2 What improvisation skills do you need to employ in the 'status line' exercise?
- 3 In what ways can the focus be maintained during an improvisation that has many participants? Did this occur in the scenes you improvised for exercises 4 and 5? What could be done to improve focus?



EXERCISE

PREPARE AND PERFORM A COMIC SKIT

Divide into pairs or into groups of four. Prepare a short skit that shows characters of different status in a situation of your choosing. You must include examples of some of the slapstick exercises covered in this chapter, and use costumes to help make each character comic.



HINT

A 'skit' is a short, comic performance.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 In your skit, how was the status relationship between characters established through the use of body language?
- 2 What slapstick skills were included in your presentation? What impact did these skills have on the success of the performance?
- 3 Imagine you are the director of one other group's skit. Make suggestions for how you could heighten the humour of their presentation. In your discussion, consider character, costume, timing and slapstick skills.
- 4 Choose one character from any of the skits you observed, or from your own. Comment on how their use of costume helped to add to their character's comic qualities.



The Cheeky Monkey – *How to Create Comedy Characters* by Tim Ferguson (Article)

9.4 Parody: imitation and exaggeration



HINT

In 'parody', the characteristics of a chosen person or group of people, or a written work or form of entertainment, is imitated for amusement.



HINT

It is helpful to work with a mirror when you practise imitating your chosen personality. By observing your use of body language, you can make your imitation more accurate.



CHALLENGE

Prepare a solo presentation in which your chosen personality is exaggerated in ways you choose. Examples of presentations include a short speech, a news announcement, an advertisement for a product, or an interview.

AN OVERVIEW OF PARODY

Parody is a form of comedy that uses imitation to create humour. The intention of parody is to make fun of identifiable situations and people we may normally take seriously. For example, a parody of an advertisement for a beauty product and its potential benefits may highlight the false claims being made and the amusing aspects of vanity. You will have seen many other examples of the use of parody in television comedy programs. People often use parody when they tell personal stories. They may act out people by imitating voices and gestures to increase the humour for the listener. It is important to use parody selectively in performance so that it does not judge or ridicule people unfairly.

EXERCISE

PARODY

1 Imitating character through observation

Choose a famous personality to imitate. They may be a movie star, politician, pop star or television personality. Before you begin to practise, use the table below to make precise notes about how your chosen personality uses voice, stance, mannerisms and body language.

Practise being your personality exactly as the media presents them. Do not try to exaggerate their movements or voice.

NAME OF PERSONALITY:	DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF HOW TO IMITATE
Use of voice	Deep tone, speaks slowly, a bit posh, sounds educated. I would need to deepen my voice and speak more slowly. I would also have to get used to adding long pauses and the occasional 'little' cough.
Facial expressions	
Standing posture	
Seated posture	
Mannerisms	
Walk	
Hair and clothing	
Other important features	

2 Using imitation and exaggeration

Use the same personality that you prepared in the previous exercise. Now exaggerate some or all aspects of the use of voice and body language. For example, you may:

- emphasise some words they say in a certain way
- exaggerate a particular mannerism
- use repetition to heighten the effect of a physical movement or facial expression.



PERFORMANCE TASK

9.5 Performance task: don't slip on the soap!

The task

'Soap opera' is a term that was once used to describe a very popular form of television drama that uses predictable character types and plots to engage audiences. The name soap opera was given to these programs because they became popular during the 1950s, when they were daytime dramas watched mainly by women. Washing powder companies would advertise during the television drama. The word 'opera' was given to these programs because of the association of extreme emotion, drama and events that are often part of operas.

The popularity of television soap operas relies on the inclusion of highly dramatic and emotionally charged situations, with some shows deliberately stretching the boundaries of reality to create extreme and sometimes ridiculous scenarios, often with the traditional good-versus-evil plotline (see chapter 3, p. 58). Dramatic tension is the key to soap opera episodes, and characters lurch from one emotional trauma to another to keep us on the edge of our seats. Although soap operas are written to create tension and excitement, they stretch the realms of possibility to achieve this goal.

In this task, you will parody soap operas by imitating the stock characters, situations and conventions of this form of television entertainment. By creating a parody of a soap opera episode, you will highlight how the situations and characters in soap operas are often stereotypical and exaggerated.

In groups, you are to devise a parody of a soap opera episode. Your episode will include:

- a range of stock soap opera characters
- two or three story-lines that are emotionally charged
- three locations
- the convention of close-ups at the ends of scenes
- the convention of a cliffhanger ending
- exaggeration to add humour to character portrayal
- slapstick, including trips, slips, falls and collisions.

Creating and making a soap opera episode

Outline two or three exaggerated story-lines you would like to include in your episode.

In your preparation, consider the following:

- typical soap opera characters, locations and situations
- how slapstick and lazzi can be included to highlight and enhance comic moments
- how you may encourage the audience to focus on the character close-ups at the ends of your scenes, in the same way a camera draws our attention to close-ups at the ends of scenes on television
- how you can use recorded music to help add atmosphere to your performance.

Use the playbuilding steps in chapter 4, pp. 76–77 as a guide for your rehearsal process.



HINT

The close-up at the end of scenes in soap operas helps the audience read the reactions of the character. Although you will not be using a camera, you can create the effect of a close-up by making the reactions of the characters more powerful and exaggerating facial expression.



HINT

You can create the impression of a television close-up at the end of your soap opera parody scenes by incorporating the technique of the tableau. On the last line, or in the last moment of the scene, all performers freeze and simultaneously turn their faces to the audience. Facial expressions and body language should be exaggerated to show the characters' reactions in the final moment of the scene.

Creating and making a soap opera character

Create characters that are imitations of soap opera character types by using discussion and improvisation. Through improvisation, determine the status of each character and their status relationship to other characters.

Consider the use of costume to help highlight the humour of your character, and the use of exaggeration, body language and voice to portray your character in a comic way.



This magazine cover highlights how soap opera story-lines appeal to audiences through shock and sensation.

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- include imitation, status and exaggeration in the representation of your soap opera character
- include an appropriate and effective character voice for your character
- select and incorporate body language and movement to portray character
- sustain and develop character in performance
- research and prepare for your comedy performance
- effectively select and incorporate slapstick and lazzi to heighten comic moments
- select and link elements of your parody to create a coherent and polished performance
- include close-ups at the ends of scenes and a cliffhanger ending



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Was your performance coherent? Give reasons for your success or lack of success. Offer suggestions for how you could improve in this area.
- 2 What was the climactic moment of your performance? How did you make this moment humorous for the audience?
- 3 Describe how well you felt you used imitation, status and exaggeration to portray your character.
- 4 Describe the moments where you felt you used slapstick well. Can you explain how timing or the reversal of status may have influenced this moment?
- 5 Did you manage your rehearsal time well? Explain how you followed a creative process and how you might improve your time management in future playbuilding activities.
- 6 Choose one group's performance and evaluate how they used imitation, exaggeration and status to portray their characters.
- 7 Discuss one group's use of slapstick moments. Pick two slapstick moments you felt were particularly good and explain why.
- 8 Explain your understanding of the value and importance of comedy in performance. Include in your discussion examples of how comedy can be both entertaining and provocative. Your examples may come from your own work or the work of others—past and present.

Performance task: don't slip on the soap!

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- perform physical comedy, including a slip, a trip and a fall
- explore and demonstrate how the status relationships between characters create comedy
- utilise the skills of imitation and exaggeration to create parody
- explore and discuss ways in which comedy can contribute to performance work.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you used skills, techniques and processes to structure a comedy performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively incorporating imitation, status and exaggeration in the representation of your soap opera character? • including an effective and appropriate character voice? • incorporating appropriate body language and movement to portray character? • including exaggeration to add humour to character portrayal? • incorporating slapstick and lazzi to heighten comic moments? • sustaining and developing character? <p>Have you rehearsed and presented a performance for a specific audience by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structuring the drama into a coherent and polished performance incorporating effective scene transitions? • incorporating close-ups at the ends of scenes? • finishing your play with a cliffhanger ending? 				
<p>Responding:</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect on the development, rehearsal and shaping of your performance? • effectively use questioning to interrogate how comedy is created through character and situations? • show strong knowledge of the various types of comedy and the historical and social influences? • record all planning, rehearsals and decisions in your logbook? • record your observations about soap opera character types? 				

Comments



10 |

POLITICAL THEATRE: RAISING AWARENESS

WHY STUDY POLITICAL THEATRE?

This chapter explores how theatre can raise awareness about social and political issues. Theatre has an extensive history of playwrights and theatre practitioners creating plays and performance work to challenge the status quo and bring about change. While many forms of theatre can be defined as having a political message or aim, this chapter looks at some types of political theatre and their common characteristics in terms of staging, theatrical techniques, acting style and actor–audience relationship. Through the activities in this chapter, you will learn about some of these dramatic forms and develop skills, knowledge and understanding to help you create your own political theatre performance.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 10.1 The purpose of political theatre
- 10.2 Exploring politics, power and justice
- 10.3 Documentary drama and verbatim theatre
- 10.4 Performance task: political theatre

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- draw on personal stories and historical events as the basis for performance work
- learn about the aims and techniques of Brecht’s epic theatre, and Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and his use of image theatre
- investigate and explore how documentary drama and verbatim theatre plays are created and performed
- devise a political performance using theatrical techniques to engage the audience with questions about social and political issues.





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HINT

'Dialectic' means investigating the truth of opinions through dialogue, debate and discussion. 'Dogma' means a set of principles set out by an authority as true that cannot be questioned.

10.1 The purpose of political theatre

Art that wants to matter struggles to exist ... is threatened ... Dialectic has been usurped by dogma ... fixed opinion for opinion's sake has replaced the individual's ability to reason, and ... this condition of national life has the tendency to stifle the essence of art.

Robyn Archer – Australian performer

'The Myth and the Mainstream: Politics and Performing Arts in Australia Today' (2005)

So far you have explored and experimented with dramatic forms, the practices of playwriting, directing, designing and acting, and watched and thought about the performance work of others. In your performance tasks you have used the elements of drama (in particular the element of focus to frame the action) to find key questions that you wish to explore and a performance intention that you wish to achieve. In this unit you will focus on building your capacity to create theatre that challenges injustice. You will do this through questioning that encourages you to interrogate and to think deeply about issues of power, politics and privilege.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Read the quote at the start of this unit. Write down two or three questions you have about this quote. Share your questions with the class.
- 2 What opinions do you feel you are required to accept? What issues are you prevented from debating and discussing?
- 3 Work in small groups and think about ways in which other art forms such as television, film or literature might discourage dialectic.
- 4 What are your political beliefs? Why do you hold these beliefs?
- 5 What is capitalism, and what are its benefits and its costs?
- 6 Are we born to behave a certain way or do the circumstances of our lives dictate our behaviour?
- 7 Who has the most power in our society? What is your evidence for this? Where does this power come from? How is this power used?
- 8 Who has the least power in our society? Can this be changed? How?

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THEATRE?

Philosophers and theatre practitioners have raised questions about the purpose of theatre and its value for thousands of years. Is its purpose to entertain, to educate, to organise, or some other purpose? Some believe that theatre is a valuable tool for reinforcing social order. Some believe that tragedies serve this purpose as the audience identifies with and feels pity and fear in response to the decisions made by the protagonist. Political theatre practitioners object to this aim as they feel it removes power and freedom to make decisions from the people watching the play.

The influence of context

In your study of drama, you need to become more aware of the influences that help to shape the development of societies and consequently art forms. Studying political theatre is a good opportunity to develop a stronger knowledge and understanding about contexts. This awareness helps you to understand the tensions, needs, aims and intentions of theatre makers. The following table gives examples of some of the contextual background you might consider when making and learning about drama and theatre.

Example of a play's contextual background

SOCIAL CONTEXT	POLITICAL CONTEXT	HISTORICAL CONTEXT	CULTURAL CONTEXT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In this country, many people work in urban centres.• Most families have more than three children.• There is a large working class population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The country is run by a military government.• Voting is not compulsory.• Certain groups and their interests are not represented by this government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Events important in this play happened during the 1950s.• For this country, it was a time of economic prosperity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The population has a strong commitment to a religious faith.• There is a long history of people from nearby countries settling and bringing with them diverse ideas and beliefs.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, significant changes in all aspects of life created certain conditions. During this time, some European theatre practitioners found that realism was not an effective dramatic form to encourage audience members to take action—the fourth wall only allowed for a passive response, and did not encourage critical thinking. These creative and radical theatre-makers wanted their audiences to respond to and take action against issues of injustice, discrimination, intimidation and prejudice.

In the social and political context of this time, many people were facing significant challenges and threats. In particular, the First and Second World Wars had led to incredible losses of life and property. The status quo and a desire for power and control by some led to situations where individual and personal freedoms and liberties were severely threatened.



HINT

'Status quo' means the existing way things are, socially and politically.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Complete the following tasks in small groups. First, think about the questions individually and record your ideas, and then work with a partner to continue developing your ideas. Share your ideas in a way that is visible, for everyone to see.

- 1 What is the purpose of theatre?
- 2 Think of a theatre performance you have seen. Identify and explain the purpose of this performance. What evidence do you have for your opinions?
- 3 Imagine you are teaching students about theatre. One of your students asks 'Why is theatre an important art form?' How would you respond?
- 4 Complete a table that identifies some of the features of the social, political and cultural contextual factors that influence you and your life.

EPIC THEATRE

What does epic mean?

In literature, the term 'epic' is associated with poems about heroes of importance, and their journeys and great deeds. An epic film also suggests a focus on a heroic character who journeys through visually spectacular landscapes on a particular quest.

In terms of political theatre, German director Erwin Piscator used the word 'epic' in reference to the way that his productions focused on contemporary issues through the use of projection of still and moving images, and through staging that rejected realistic sets and instead used platforms and scaffolding. This was very unusual for its time.

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Bertolt Brecht

Brecht was a Marxist and questioned ideas about how individuals are influenced by social and economic forces rather than our choices and actions simply being the result of who we are. He was a creative rebel who believed that people are able to change and be changed. In Berlin, before the Nazis came to power in the 1930s, he and other playwrights staged a new style of theatre that was very different to what people were used to at the time. Many of his plays are still performed today including *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt Brecht was a German playwright of the 20th century and is credited with bringing many of the common features of political theatre together. He termed his style of theatre 'epic theatre', although later in his career he used the term 'dialectical theatre'. As Brecht's theatre was a reaction against realism, he wanted to avoid the techniques that would allow the audience to become passive spectators to the action. He would leave the house lights on and use non-realistic sets so it was clear to the audience that they were in a performance space watching actors representing life and people.

Brecht was born in Germany in 1898. He was a very curious young man who loved to read, think and talk about ideas, and started creating theatre works when he was just 16.



HINT

In the late-19th and early-20th century, theatre had a more powerful influence as this was a time before television and computer technology.



The Drama Teacher – Epic Theatre Conventions
Universal Teacher – Studying Bertolt Brecht

Conventions of epic theatre

PLAY STRUCTURE

- Many scenes have self-contained episodes, each of which is linked to the same subject. This creates the impression of a journey that covers a long period of time. It is also a device to prevent the audience from becoming too emotionally involved in the performance.
- Brecht wanted his audiences to feel emotions but not without the audience thinking about and understanding the forces that have aroused their responses. He believed that knowledge and reason are the forces that drive the spectator to action.
- Brecht wrote some plays where the dramatic action comes from contradictions of economic and political forces rather than from a protagonist's free will.
- A narrator speaks directly to the audience at times rather than the dramatic action happening in the present (as in realism). This convention links scenes and breaks the fourth-wall barrier between actor and audience. The narrator also reflects on the action and presents questions to the audience.
- Songs that carry a political message are included. Often scene changes are bridged with songs. Songs in epic theatre often comment on the action and provoke the audience to question the issues being presented in the performance.
- Conflict is left unresolved, which makes the problems and faults in society clearer to the audience.

STAGING

- Signs, placards and graffiti (for example) are used to give each scene a title.
- Historical film footage is projected to point out the current relevance of the issues to the audience. This is also known as the technique of 'historification'.
- Sets are non-realistic. Platforms, scaffolding, film slides and half curtains are used.
- On the stage, in view of the audience, characters change costume to become different characters.
- There is the occasional use of masks.
- Minimal props and furniture are used. This allows locations to be suggested, rather than re-created.

EXERCISE

DRAMATIC THEATRE AND EPIC THEATRE COMPARISON

Work in small groups to rehearse the following dramatic and epic versions of two scenes. After you have rehearsed the scenes, choose groups to present their versions to the class.

IN THE STYLE OF DRAMATIC THEATRE

SCENE 1

(The houselights fade. The curtain opens to reveal a lounge room. It is late afternoon and the stage light coming through the window mimics the change of light from afternoon to twilight. The sounds of army aircraft can be heard flying overhead. A young woman enters the room.)

TRACY *(She hears the front door open and close and she calls out.)*

I'm in here.

(Her mother enters the living room. She is clearly troubled and finds it difficult to speak.)

ALICE I didn't think you would be home.

TRACY Why what is it? Is there something wrong?

ALICE Ever since the war began, your father and brother promised they would send whatever they could to help us keep going.

TRACY And they have.

ALICE Yes, but not recently. Tracy, I have to make a difficult decision.

TRACY What?

ALICE I'm going to have to ask you to move out.

TRACY Move out? But where will David and I go?

ALICE I know this is difficult, but I have a business to run and with the rations and demands from the government for me to give more, I just can't make ends meet.

TRACY But what about me? I don't have a job. I can't look after David on my own.

ALICE You will find a way. I'm sorry but I have to do this.

SCENE 2

(The following morning. ALICE is seated on the couch. The sound of the television is a news report about soldiers invading a nearby border. She turns off the television and goes to the mantelpiece. She picks up a photo of Tracy. As TRACY enters the room she quickly puts the photo back on the mantelpiece.)

ALICE Good morning.

(TRACY doesn't respond. She is gathering belongings.)

ALICE I didn't sleep well. I just want you to know that if I could ...

TRACY I'll be gone soon.

ALICE Please, there was no other choice.

IN THE STYLE OF EPIC THEATRE

SCENE 1

(The houselights remain on and there are no curtains or wings. The stage walls are bare brick. A few scaffolding platforms are placed against the upstage wall. The actors sit on the platforms. Suddenly one of them stands. A slide is projected onto a screen—it reads 'A Mother Abandons Her Child'. The actor steps forward and announces the scene. A musician begins to play a melancholy tune. The actor who announced the scene takes a jacket from a coat rack and puts it on. They walk downstage to the audience.)

ACTOR 1 Tracy is the daughter of Alice. She is at home one afternoon.

*(The actor becomes **TRACY** and busies herself. She hears a person arriving home. Another actor takes a different jacket and puts it on.)*

ACTOR 2 I play Alice, Tracy's mother.
*(She becomes **ALICE** and walks into the stage space.)*
I didn't think you would be home.

TRACY Why what is it? Is there something wrong?

ALICE Ever since the war began, your father and brother promised they would send whatever they could to help us keep going.

TRACY And they have.

ALICE Yes, but not recently. Tracy, I have to make a difficult decision.

TRACY What?

ALICE I'm going to have to ask you and David to move out.

TRACY Move out? But where will I go? David is sick.

ALICE I know this is difficult, but I have a business to run and with the rations and demands from the government for me to give more, I just can't make ends meet.

TRACY But what about me? I don't have a job. I can't look after David on my own.

ALICE You will find a way. I'm sorry but I have to do this.

*(Another actor moves downstage as the actors playing **TRACY** and **ALICE** remove their jackets and become soldiers. They join a line of other actors on the scaffolding platform who also represent soldiers.)*

NARRATOR And so a mother's heart must break. A daughter and grandson sent far away. Who is right? Who is to say? In times of war these choices must be made.

SCENE 2

(The soldiers begin to march. A title is projected: 'The Daughter Must Give Up Her Child'. The soldiers chant the title in unison.)

NARRATOR And so for three years the war raged, and the daughter and her son travelled far and wide.



HINT

Brecht wanted his actors to understand their characters rather than emotionally connect with them. He required his actors to represent character types and their feelings, rather than adopt a Stanislavskian approach, which requires actors to become emotionally absorbed in the characters.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Complete the following 'connect–extend–challenge' thinking routine.

- 1 How are the ideas and information about epic theatre *connected* to what you already knew?
- 2 What new ideas did you get that *extended* or pushed your thinking in new directions?
- 3 What is still *challenging* or confusing for you to understand? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have?



Getty Images/ullstein bild

Brecht's play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, questions greed, materialism and abuse of power.

POLITICAL THEATRE IN THE FUTURE

Political theatre has evolved over time into many other forms, and will continue to do so into the future. This style of theatre has many branches, but the plays and performance works have some features in common, in terms of the presentation of the performance and how the actor–audience relationship is manipulated for a particular effect

In many of these plays and in contemporary theatre, you can see how the work of early Western political theatre practitioners still has purpose for theatre makers today. For example, contemporary Indigenous Australian plays are political in their aim as they seek to point out issues about race, discrimination and prejudice, and the consequences. The play *Stolen*, by Jane Harrison, uses the acting and staging theories and techniques of epic theatre to encourage the audience to question and consider the consequences of the forced removal of Indigenous Australians from their families, now referred to as The Stolen Generation.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Research one of the following political theatre practitioners: Dario Fo, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bola Agbaje or Adam Brace.
- 2 What films, television programs, blogs, websites and plays are strongly political in their intentions? Why do you think this is?



Cardboard Citizens –
Untold Stories: Cardboard
Citizens' Forum Theatre
at Homeless Hostels
Cardboard Citizens

10.2 Exploring politics, power and justice

In this unit, you will use some of the techniques of Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal to work collaboratively and create images that explore and express ideas about politics, power and justice.

AUGUSTO BOAL AND THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Augusto Boal (1931–2009) was a Brazilian actor and director who believed in a democratic theatre that would challenge social injustice and inequity. Boal had a strong social conscience and felt passionate about injustice, and used theatre in his home country of Brazil to help many who lived in poverty and who had not received a basic education. He found that theatre was powerful as a form of communication, and used it to address current social and political issues.

Like Brecht, Boal created new forms of theatre that changed the way the audience interacted with the performance to empower them to be agents of change. Initially, Boal encouraged audience members to discuss plays after the performance. Later, he began to ask audience members to make suggestions for how characters might resolve problems they face in the play. The actors would then apply the audience suggestions to their performance.

According to Boal, he changed his thinking about what a political theatre performance could be when something unexpected happened during a performance. An audience member, frustrated by the way an actor had interpreted her suggestions for how a wife should deal with mistreatment from her husband, suddenly went onto the stage and took the place of the actor to show what she would do in this situation. This moment was very powerful for the audience and revealed to Boal how theatre could empower, educate and transform through the involvement of the spectators. Boal called this theatrical form ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’, and named the participants the ‘spect-actors’ in reference to the ability of audience to both observe and participate in the performance.



© Laura Turley

Concrete Justice, a troupe of New Yorkers with experience of homelessness, performing *It Could Happen to You*, 2011. Produced by Theatre of the Oppressed, NYC.



International Theatre
of the Oppressed
Organisation

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Research one of the following forms: Theatre of the Oppressed, forum theatre, invisible theatre or image theatre. Report your findings to the class.
- 2 What are the similarities and differences between Brecht's epic theatre and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed?

IMAGE THEATRE: EXPLORING POLITICS, POWER AND JUSTICE

One of Boal's main forms of theatre is image theatre, which explores forms of injustice and oppression through the use of actors in frozen images or tableaux. Boal liked this way of communicating as he felt that everyone was capable of contributing and could express their ideas and feelings through their body. When looking at the images, Boal thought it was important that the spectator was able to observe both subjectively and objectively. This means that sometimes, when we view an image, we see things a certain way because of our experiences, our background or our culture. Boal wanted his participants to develop the ability to be aware of these influences on our interpretation, and to be open to other possible meanings.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Research definitions of the word 'justice' and consider the following questions:

- 1 What does justice mean to you?
- 2 What issues of injustice in society concern you at the moment?
- 3 Where is there evidence of injustice in our society?
- 4 What are the causes of this injustice?
- 5 Is the justice that is given in the end truly justice for those who are oppressed?

EXERCISE

POLITICS, POWER AND JUSTICE

1 Who is the most powerful?

In this activity everyone, including the teacher, begins seated in the space in a way that everyone agrees represents the most balanced and even distribution of power. Once this has been achieved, one person volunteers to take a new position in the space to make themselves the most powerful. This is then followed by another volunteer who attempts to be even more powerful. The game continues until all participants have had a turn. After the game, reflect on the ways in which power was established and communicated.

2 Great game of power

Augusto Boal developed an exercise that explores how power and status can be exercised through body language, and the use of space and levels. This exercise also explores how performers and their use of levels and space can be visually striking.

- Place six chairs, one table and a bottle in the centre of the room. Individuals volunteer to arrange the furniture to make the bottle the most powerful object in the tableau.





- Next, include six volunteers in the tableau. A seventh volunteer arranges the chairs, table, bottle and participants to make one volunteer appear more powerful than the others. This step can be repeated several times by choosing different volunteers to create new arrangements.

3 Who is Justitia?

From your knowledge of the elements of drama, you are aware of the power of symbol to communicate many messages through one image or object. Look at the following images of the statue of Justitia—the Roman goddess of Justice. Find 10 words or phrases that come to mind on the first viewing. On the second viewing find 10 more words or phrases. Share these with the class.



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Brandon Bourdages; Audrey Flack

Three versions of Justitia

In small groups create a group image of multiple versions of Justitia. The various figures might be arranged to show interaction with each other. Create a 'headline' that sums up the image of justice. Show your image to the class and ask the class to 'read' what they see in your image. After the class has discussed the image, tell the class your headline.

4 Images of injustice and oppression

Individually, think about an area of oppression or injustice that you feel passionate about. Share your ideas with your group. Choose one issue of injustice and create an image to represent the oppression. Make sure you create a clear point of focus for the audience, and use body shape, levels and space to illustrate power relationships.

5 Justice and oppression

- Create a new image that includes the statue of Justitia as represented by one group member. You can adjust the pose and position of the statue in any way you like to further comment on and highlight the issue of injustice. Present your image to the class.
- Create a headline to sum up the essence of your image and write it on A3 paper. The headline can be a question, statement or a title. Re-stage your image and decide whether to show the written headline to the audience before or after you show the image.



HINT

Augusto Boal's handbook, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, contains an excellent range of physical exercises.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

As you watch the presentation of the images, use the following 'see-think-wonder' thinking routine. Write your ideas on sticky notes and place them on a wall or whiteboard afterwards to share everyone's thoughts and ideas.

- 1 What did I *see*? Describe what you saw.
- 2 What did I *think* about what I saw? Begin to interpret the image—be aware that your own background and who you are will influence how you interpret the image.
- 3 What am I *wondering* or what questions do I have? Maybe the image is unclear, or maybe it is very clear to you but makes you ask questions about society or people's behaviour.

10.3 Documentary drama and verbatim theatre

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Documentary drama evolved in Germany in the 1960s. It re-enacts historic events by incorporating the techniques and conventions of epic theatre, and aims to provoke audiences to think about important issues. When devising documentary drama performances, writers use transcripts, letters, oral histories and other documents as material for the performance.

Verbatim theatre, which began during the 1990s, is an evolution of documentary drama. It arose particularly through the work of American theatre companies who used interview and direct testimonies to create theatre performances that gave multiple perspectives on a significant event. *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufmann and Tectonic Theatre Project is one of the more famous verbatim theatre plays. The members of the theatre company travelled to Laramie, Wyoming to interview people about the homophobic bashing and murder of a young gay man, Matthew Shepard, in 1998.

Both documentary drama and verbatim theatre use distinct theatrical techniques and conventions to establish a non-realistic style. The performances incorporate techniques and conventions of epic theatre to achieve the purpose of 'distancing' the audience so they can think critically about the issues in the performance. Although the performance is about a true incident, the performers want to remind audiences that what they are watching is a play in a theatre, not a real-life situation. This approach encourages the audience to be more objective about the issues in the performance.

Often the script uses the actual words of real people, which gives the performance a particular impact as the audience knows that these are the words and thoughts of actual people. The actors in a verbatim performance must be able to draw on their skills of acting to create believable and authentic characters. Often actors will change characters many times in a performance, and each character will need to be equally convincing and believable.

DOCUMENTARY DRAMA PERFORMANCE SKILLS

An actor needs to be energetic and versatile in a documentary drama performance. They must be able to:

- play a variety of characters
- work effectively as part of an ensemble to strengthen the impact of chorus work and background characters
- use heightened movement and voice to represent characters and their responses.

EXERCISE

PERFORMING IN DOCUMENTARY DRAMA

1 Character movement

Performers in documentary drama are not restricted to realistic movements. Try the following character types:

- a soldier carrying a weapon – walk in a menacing way, with heavy, slow, rhythmic steps
- a dishonest, no-good drunk – you are trying to get money from passers-by as they flee from an invading army
- a member of a greedy and selfish royal family – use stylised gestures and mannerisms to convey your high status
- a simple, honest person struggling to get by – you are on a long journey through a war-torn country and are carrying a weak and injured person; as you move through the room, try to convey the illusion of travelling a great distance over a long period of time.

2 Chorus work

The use of a chorus is a powerful technique as it can create atmosphere, establish location, and represent points of view. The chorus may perform synchronised, controlled or stylised movements, or may play various roles, in order to background the main action.

In groups, prepare a performance of the following script extract from the play *Wild Rice*. Consider ways in which the techniques of narration and chorus can be used effectively.

***Wild Rice* (EXTRACT)**

This extract is from the play *Wild Rice* by Huong Nguyen, Phi Hai, Pat Rix and Geoff Crowhurst. In this play, a rebellious teenage boy named Sonny runs away from home to escape the strict rules of his father. The play is a documentary drama as it draws on the stories of Vietnamese Australians, and also employs the techniques and conventions of epic theatre.

The following scene is a re-enactment of the memories of Sonny's sister, Phuong. Sonny is recalling his family's perilous journey from Vietnam to Australia. The memories are heightened due to Sonny being very young at the time the family escaped. Toan, Long, Anne, David, Kim, Dale and Craig are the names of some of the performers who made up the chorus.

WILD RICE

BANNER 4: 'PRECIOUS JADE'

(SONNY enters.)

SONNY Escaping was the best part. It was really exciting. It was around midnight, I think ...

(The rest of the CHORUS come on one by one as if secretly meeting at night. Throughout this escape sequence they show us the story with their movements.)

TOAN Ten o'clock ...

LONG Two a.m. ...

ANNE Four in the morning ...

SONNY ... when Mum woke me up. She started putting three to four pantses on me along with four or five jumpers. Man, I thought she was going nuts. Then out of the blue she gave me a hug, kissed me on the cheek ... strange ... and I was dragged away by my older sister.

The moon was high, the night quiet. I mistook the little river that ran behind our house as a path and stepped into it, pulling my sister along with me. She screamed.

DAVID Ssssh!

KIM Shut up!

ANNE Do you want us to get caught?

TOAN Giu su Maria Giu se. Cái gì đó *(Jesus, Maria, Jesus. What is it?)*

DALE I thought it was the Communists.

CRAIG Here! Grab my hand.

DALE They're all wet!

LONG Sssssh!

(LONG gives DALE a clip around the ears.)

Sorry!

SONNY Man, I was cold! We climbed onto this fishing boat and were led down under the deck of the boat and told to sit down and be quiet.

DALE There's not enough room in here.

ANNE It's too dark. How long do we have to stay in here?

TOAN Two days? Where's my children?

DALE What reeks?

KIM Get off my foot.

LONG Who farted?

DALE I wanna go up on deck for a pee.

TOAN You can't. We've got to stay below. We don't want to look suspicious.

DAVID Who's been eating garlic?

CRAIG How long? Two days.

KIM Two days!

DALE Hey! We're moving.

ALL At last.

SONNY As the night wore on I began to miss my mum and dad and cried.

LONG Shut that kid up!

SONNY I must have annoyed a hell of a lot of people but my sister was so gentle with me. She cradled me in her arms and put me to sleep soon afterwards. The next morning she told me that Mum and Dad were still at home and that we had managed to escape. It was two days and nights under the deck until we were supposedly out of danger and were allowed to go up on top.

ANNE I can stretch at last.

DAVID Fresh air at last.

DALE I can have a pee at last.

LONG Look. Dolphins!

DALE I feel sick.

CRAIG Finally.

KIM It's too bright!

TOAN It's all water.

SONNY Bloody hell. By that time my body was covered in rashes from the sea water so my sister took all my clothes off to ease the pain. Man. Stark naked at six.

On the fourth day we ran out of water, food and petrol. We just drifted for two days. I was so thirsty ... and hot. My sister put me in a cooking pot full of sea water to keep me cool. Maybe that's how I ended up this colour!

Just kidding. Anyway, one kid, my age, started to scull sea water. He died. We found him in the morning all bloated like a puffer fish. His sister went crazy.

(Some of the CHORUS begin to pray while others pick up the dead boy.)

The older men wrapped him up and threw him overboard.

(He is thrown overboard.)

But there wasn't much we could do for his sister.

(The prayer stops.)

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What is the mood or atmosphere of this extract? How did your group establish an appropriate atmosphere in performance?
- 2 Describe how you used acting skills to portray your characters in a way that was authentic, but also captured the mood of the piece.
- 3 Describe how your group used the performance space to engage the audience.
- 4 How did your group establish a strong and effective actor–audience relationship?
- 5 What aspects of this play make it political? Can you identify any techniques or aspects of the performance style that suggest the influence of earlier political theatre forms?

EXERCISE

VERBATIM THEATRE PERFORMANCE SKILLS

The particular challenge of this form of theatre is to portray the character with authenticity.

Being, not mimicking

Record a family member or friend of the family. Ask them to tell you about a short incident or event that has some significance to them. Once you have recorded the story, play it back to the person and check they are happy with what they have said, and get their permission for you to use it as a Drama exercise.

In class, listen to the story once while seated. On a second listen, try to speak as the person telling the story, using their words. Use your acting skills to develop a connection with the storyteller's mood, personality and feelings they experience as they re-tell the event. On a third listen, adopt the physicality of the character and try to speak along with them as though you are this person. When everyone in the class has rehearsed, present some examples to the class.



HINT

As verbatim theatre asks you to interview people, it is good to be well prepared. Always prepare your questions beforehand. You must also ask the interviewee for permission to use their words for Drama class work.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What challenges did you find in this activity?
- 2 What parts of this activity did you enjoy? Why?
- 3 Research verbatim theatre using the Internet. What do you think about this dramatic form? What questions do you have? How might you explore this dramatic form further?

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

LINDEN WILKINSON

Actor and writer

Linden Wilkinson graduated from NIDA as an actor in 1976. Since then she has performed with theatre companies across the country and in New Zealand. Linden began writing and publishing plays in the late 1980s, then moved into television series, writing and editing while continuing to perform.

Inspired by the energy generated through cross-cultural performance in a New Zealand drama classroom, as a dramatist and researcher she initiated an investigation on cross-cultural verbatim theatre in the Australian context, using the Myall Creek massacre and memorial as a case study.



Photographer: Sally Flegg

Linden Wilkinson

PERFORMING IN VERBATIM THEATRE

The following extract is from the verbatim play *Today We're Alive*. The playwright, Linden Wilkinson, explains the process and the outcomes in her introduction to the play.

Today We're Alive (EXTRACT)

Introduction

This play is the heart of a doctoral thesis. I wanted to find a reconciliation narrative and so I chose to explore Myall Creek's history, because I knew about the 1838 massacre and I had seen television coverage of the annual memorial ceremony. I wanted to know how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people could come to together and, in their words, share this history.

I approached the Myall Creek Memorial Committee for permission to devise a verbatim play about the Myall Creek story. I explained that verbatim meant I would be using their words and documentary material in the public domain. The members at that meeting gave me permission but wanted the story to be a positive one; they wanted the play to be about healing.

I began the interviews after the memorial service in June, 2011, on a misty, cold and rainy day and from the very beginning I knew this was a wonderful story; I knew from a terrible history something remarkable has happened, not just with the whistle-blowers in 1838 but now, today. Almost like a story from *The Dreaming*, all the participants, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who came forward to be interviewed, held part of the story. This play is testimony edited from those twenty hours of interviews.



HINT

As some of the characters are Indigenous Australians, you need to be conscious of appropriate and culturally sensitive interpretation of the material. Refer back to chapter 6, p. 158 for advice.

When I was interweaving the interviews to create the verbatim text, I focused on the chronology of events—the massacre, the court case, Len Payne and finally the memorial. When I saw and heard the actors perform it for the first time as a reading, it was about much more than history. I heard a story about survival and resilience; I saw on their faces and through their bodies, a story about courage, determination and forgiveness.

This play and Myall Creek, I believe, is only part of another much bigger story about reconciliation. This is, I concluded in my thesis, an acknowledgement narrative. It brings us, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians to the table. We know, because of Myall Creek, how to share a history. We don't know yet how to share an equal future. That will come.

Characters

The playwright describes the characters in *Today We're Alive* as follows:

- **Sally** A Kamilaroi Elder, descendant of a massacre survivor; insightful, gentle, instigator of the Memorial.
- **Patrick** A history teacher, non-Aboriginal; reserved, tries not to be emotional but doesn't always succeed.
- **Jayson** An Aboriginal activist, an intellectual, an artist; re-connecting with his culture, his anger sits just below the surface.
- **Peggy** A Bingara resident, non-Aboriginal; vibrant, engaging, passionate about her involvement with the memorial.
- **Jim** A Uniting Church minister, non-Aboriginal; has the calm of understated authority.

TODAY WE'RE ALIVE

SALLY We did a cairn first.

PEGGY I was horrified ... that something as small as that was going to be erected ... I certainly wasn't going to let it pass with just a cairn of stones ... what are you going to do with those stones? ... I said: I'll look after them ... till you need them ... We packed them in the car ... we had them in the boot, under our feet—

JIM So those stones were kept with a view to erecting some sort of permanent memorial.

PEGGY Some people drew attention to the fact that they could have a memorial to World War I but not the massacre.

SALLY Then we called the Elders together. We talked about it, all the other Elders, I asked their permission first. And they gave me the go-ahead and they said they wanted something big.

JAYSON *(Laughs)* Something as big as the hall.

SALLY So we formed a committee.

JAYSON When I got involved I said we have to convince the people of Bingara that there was no people in Bingara, when the massacre took place, and so they've got no need to worry that they're going to be criticised about it. I did it through the press.

JIM In January we decided to push forward the proposal to erect a memorial. We decided a number of significant things at that meeting.

1. We owe it to all Australia to tell the truth of our history, the hard parts and the bad parts, as well as the proud episodes and the good parts of our history. We must tell the truth of our history. We need it to be a part of the national consciousness to know that there were widespread massacres.

2. We want to work together as a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, we have the Aboriginal people who were related to this ... an opportunity to say: look, we want to do this ourselves. Um ... and they were absolutely unanimous ...

SALLY No, this must be something we do together.

PEGGY We decided that as the Committee we would discuss stuff but we would never make any decision until we went back to the big group.

JIM We met several times—I don't know it might have been six public meetings over the next year ... Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together.

PEGGY We agreed to meet in February—at that time I had a very old house, a huge old federation house, a big dining table that seated twelve and we just expected a committee meeting. And the next thing we've got people come knocking at the front door, we've got people coming in the french doors, and I'm saying to my kids: quick! Here! Take my purse *(laughs)*—go over to the shop, get me some more fruit, get me some more tea, get me some this and they'd get back with a supply of food and I'd say: you've got to go again! People kept streaming in and so that was the day we decided that we were going to put a memorial up and where. And that was really wonderful. And we had to ask Sally, because they had a claim over that land and we had to ask permission. And the Reverend said:

JIM Well, Sally, can we have permission to put a memorial on that site?

PEGGY And Sally says:

SALLY Yes.

PEGGY A woman of few words.

SALLY We wanted a memorial. We didn't think it would happen straight away.

PEGGY And it just took off from there and we decided we wanted to have the opening in June, 2000, and I think the Saturday happened to be the anniversary of the massacre ... and we decided who wanted there and no-one wanted John Howard there (*laughs*).

JAYSON We always met at Myall Creek at the hall.

PATRICK February and that's the first meeting that I went up to. And I had one of the most *um* ... interesting *um* ... spiritual experiences of my life. We were having a ceremony in the memorial hall itself. And it had been sort of grey and overcast all day but there had been absolutely no rain whatsoever. And they started *um* they started ah praying and they're very good the way they pray in terms of Byami, *um* it's a very inclusive sort of ceremony *um* and it's *um* and they had, I think, a couple of children, a couple of Aboriginal children, I think, lighting these candles and *um* the moment these children lit these candles as part of the prayer, it absolutely started bucketing down out of the heavens, absolutely bucketing down and you couldn't hear people over the noise in the roof. And *um* I was absolutely staggered and *um* every time I tell this story I get emotional like I am now. *Um* I was sitting there thinking: this is absolutely amazing. And I said: the test is going to be what happens when they blow these candles out. And they finished this prayer (*laughs*) as loudly as they could, given the noise of the rain on the roof—and then sure enough when they finished the prayer, they then blew the candles out and literally within ten to fifteen seconds, that rain stopped completely. And I walked outside and I was talking to one of the Aboriginal women Elders and I said to her: how amazing was that?! With the rain, while those candles were alight ... And *um* she said to me, she said: that was just the spirit ancestors weeping tears of joy that something is finally going to be done about this. And *um* that certainly stuck with me. It's now what? Fourteen years ago, I remember those words perfectly. And I've a lousy memory (*tears*). So that was fantastic.

SFX: Sound of rain.

SALLY I remember sitting in the hall and the rain bucketed down.

JAYSON I mean it was one of those meetings when there was really some spiritual dimension going on there that was almost palpable. I mean Aboriginal people have no trouble with this—talking in these terms—



PERFORMANCE TASK

10.4 Performance task: political theatre

The task

Divide into groups and devise a political theatre performance that explores an issue. An example has been provided for you. Your performance can borrow techniques, processes, acting styles and staging ideas from epic theatre, image theatre, documentary drama and verbatim theatre.

Your performance will aim to encourage the audience to think about an issue. Your group must research and incorporate testimony, factual information about actual historic events and statistics to help create scenes in your play. These can be intertwined with fictional scenes that are set at other times and involve other characters or roles. You will incorporate and utilise a selection of non-realistic epic theatre techniques and conventions to highlight the main issues and concerns.

Your performance must include:

- an actual Australian or world historic event
- narration
- projected film or slides it may also include songs to make political points
- acting styles to suit the intention of the scenes, including realism or heightened voice and movement, as well as chorus work
- signs to title scenes and to point out issues in your performance, such as projected signs, graffiti or placards; for example, you may write a famous quote on a banner and hang it above your performance space or reveal it at a point in your performance
- minimal use of props, furniture and costumes—changes to role or character are to be made in view of the audience
- consideration of interacting with and addressing the audience to highlight the issues of your drama.

Example of creating and making political theatre

The following examples show how you and your group might apply the steps in the creative process (see chapter 4, pp. 76–77) to the development of your political theatre performance. The first steps in this process are problem finding and acquiring knowledge. Asking questions about the issue or topic you wish to explore, and finding your focus by clearly stating a performance intention will help achieve this.

Focus question: Why are some Australians opposed to accepting refugees and asylum seekers in Australia?

Dramatic intention: To explore reasons why some people have prejudice against refugees and asylum seekers.

EXERCISE

HOW TO ASK GREAT QUESTIONS

Socrates was a philosopher who encouraged his students to think deeply and critically. So that your political theatre performance does not become one sided or seem lacking in authenticity, you need to work hard using your research and thinking skills. Use the following six types of Socratic questions as you work through the development of your play. As you create questions, select the best questions and use these to focus and frame the action of your scenes.

SOCRATIC QUESTION TYPES	POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR THIS EXAMPLE
1 Questions for clarification:	What is the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker?
2 Questions that probe assumptions:	How can I find out if most Australians are prejudiced against refugees?
3 Questions that probe reasons and evidence:	Why are some people more prejudiced than others? What causes this?
4 Questions about viewpoints and perspectives:	How might someone's beliefs be shaped by their social context?
5 Questions that probe implications and consequences:	If people are allowed to say anything they think about refugees, what might be the impact of this?
6 Questions about the question:	What percentage of Australians are opposed to accepting refugees and asylum seekers in Australia?

Dramatic structure

After problem finding through questioning and identifying your intention, you will need to gather information, generate ideas and allow some 'incubation' time between rehearsals for your ideas to take shape. In the following example, the group has begun to list possible ideas for scenes and discussed a possible order to the scenes—otherwise known as the dramatic structure. As you read through the following scene examples, see if you can identify a question for each scene that might have been used to focus and frame the action of the scene.

SCENE NO.	USE OF POLITICAL THEATRE TECHNIQUES AND EXPLANATION OF INTENTION	DRAMATIC ACTION
1	Use of satirical song to highlight weaknesses in Australians' sense of patriotism. Flag is a symbol.	A chorus holding Australian flag singing in an overly enthusiastic style to make the scene comic.
2	Direct address intended to engage the audience by creating feelings of empathy. Actor shows 'becoming' refugee by adding costume—this reminds the audience of the issues facing refugees. Projection illustrates the extent of the journey.	Direct testimony of a refugee from Afghanistan and his attempt to find safety for his family. #1 Projection of map showing the journey to Australia.





SCENE NO.	USE OF POLITICAL THEATRE TECHNIQUES AND EXPLANATION OF INTENTION	DRAMATIC ACTION
3	Not strictly speaking a political theatre scene in style, but we want to use realism to help the audience identify with the day-to-day conversations about these issues. The use of the flag is symbolic of how we struggle as a nation to deal with this, and the projections represent the voice of the public.	A realist scene where a mother and daughter fold clothing using the Australian flag. As the scene progresses, projections of survey question responses about refugees and asylum seekers appear.
4	As for scene #2.	Direct testimony of a refugee from Afghanistan and his attempt to find safety for his family. #2 Projection of moving waves to show the dangers of the boat journey.
5	Use of direct address also engages the audience in a different perspective. We might use tableaux where performers become friends and family, or maybe actors approach the worker and interact briefly as these characters to challenge them. Provide some comedy—show how viewpoints/perceptions can be very different between people.	A volunteer worker addresses the audience about their work with refugees and how the casual racism and discrimination they hear from their family and friends bothers them.
6	A didactic scene. The use of a classroom allows for the 'teaching' of facts to the audience about the issues. The audience becomes part of the class.	School students in class being instructed by a teacher about the difference between refugees and asylum seekers. Some students care and others don't.
7	As for scenes #2 and #4.	Direct testimony of a refugee from Afghanistan and his attempt to find safety for his family. #3 After some time in detention.
8	The performers become generic people in society. Although each performer uses voice and movement differently to show age, gender, and so on, the intention is to show that most people are concerned about injustice and discrimination.	Chorus line up as voices of the public. Different perspectives given on causes of prejudice.
9	A contrast to the opening scene. The flag now represents how we all share this problem and we all have a responsibility to help make our country the best it can be.	Chorus work to fold and hold out the Australian flag to the audience while singing the National Anthem in a much slower and sadder way than in scene #1.

Use of the elements of drama and theatrical techniques

The final phases of our creative process involve rehearsals where you combine ideas in unexpected ways and select the best ideas to perform. The following script extracts may give you some ideas of how you might use the elements of drama and the techniques of political theatre to make your ideas and questions engaging as political theatre scenes.

THE GREEDY CHILD

(Shouting from a very high window in a big house.)

ACTOR Oi! You down there. Get out of my garden! You're standing on mummy's roses. What? I can't hear you? Speak up! Do you speak ENGLISH? You know there's a storm out there, you'll have to speak up. What? What was that? You're hungry, really? Well maybe you should go next door. They might have some food for you.

(To audience) But I doubt it.

(Sniggers, then annoyed.)

Why do they always come to my house? It's so bloody annoying *(burps)* and I haven't finished eating yet.

Who cares about them anyway? What was that ... ?

Come in? COME IN? Are you serious?

(To mother in forced whisper) Close the curtains!

Close the curtains! They can see inside!

(Back to the hungry people) Sorry we are completely full here ... FULL, I SAID FULL ... No room ... move on, move on.

REFUGEE CAMP VOLUNTEER

ACTOR They don't tell you about what it's like ... I mean they do ... but I guess you can't convey the scale of what you see the first time you arrive. Miles and miles and miles of white tents in the blazing sun. There are 115 000 refugees here ... I mean, can you imagine that? 115 000 men, women and children. How do you get a sense of the number of people in just this one camp? What would that be in Australia? I mean, the people in this camp would fill an Olympic stadium. And despite the attacks, the shelling, the stealing, the traumas, the death ... they still smile, they draw suns, they carry on with their lives ... it's incredible, how they manage to find dignity, dignity in all of this.

Inspiration: Mallawa, S. 'I work in a refugee camp on the Syria-Jordan border – any questions?', *The Guardian*, 19 September 2013

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your:

- degree of focus and commitment
- ability to use vocal dynamics appropriately and effectively
- ability to use movement appropriately and effectively
- successful inclusion of the techniques and conventions of epic theatre
- effective adaptation and interpretation of the historic event
- ability to establish an appropriate mood and atmosphere
- presentation of a well-rehearsed and polished performance
- effective manipulation of the actor–audience relationship to highlight the issues of the drama.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Outline the strengths of your group's performance. Explain why you felt these aspects of your performance were effective.
- 2 Outline the strengths of your own performance. You may comment on your use of movement or vocal dynamics, your ability to play a variety of characters or your ability to work effectively as part of an ensemble.
- 3 What areas of your own performance did you feel needed improvement? Why?
- 4 Choose another group's performance and discuss the overall flow and cohesion, making special reference to how scene changes were achieved, and the effective use of epic theatre techniques and conventions.
- 5 Choose playback theatre or documentary drama. Discuss the value and purpose of this form. In your discussion, include examples of the ways in which particular performance techniques and conventions are incorporated to influence the audience's perception of the characters and the story.
- 6 Find out more about Bertolt Brecht and about epic theatre.
- 7 Choose one other group's performance. Identify the main question that one group's play used to frame and focus their play and then choose two scenes and identify the question that each scene was addressing.

Performance task: political theatre

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- draw on personal stories and historic events as the basis for performance work
- devise a performance using the techniques and conventions of documentary drama and epic theatre.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</p> <p>Have you prepared for your performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • researching a social or political issue, or a historic event, that is of interest to you? • including in your performance testimonies, interviews and/or actual historical events? • using improvisation to explore and develop character or role? <p>Have you incorporated a political theatre acting style by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting and incorporating appropriate body language and movement? • using voice to effectively communicate character or role? <p>Have you used skills, techniques and processes to structure a political theatre performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incorporating narration to the audience? • incorporating signs for title scenes and to point out issues in your performance? • using minimal props and furniture to suggest locations? • making costume changes in view of the audience? • sustaining and developing character or role? 				
<p>Responding:</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively interpret and adapt an issue and historic event? • effectively use questioning to explore perspectives related to the issue? • show strong knowledge of the purposes and intentions of political theatre performance techniques and the origins of these? 				

Comments



11

PHYSICAL THEATRE: ROLL UP! ROLL UP!

WHY STUDY PHYSICAL THEATRE?

This chapter explores the techniques and conventions of physical theatre. Physical theatre is a unique dramatic form in which the performers focus upon the movement of their bodies to create meaning. Physical theatre is often visually powerful, and may rely upon the power of symbolism to achieve a dramatic effect. By exploring and discussing physical theatre, you will appreciate and understand the ways in which this dramatic form can create powerful and engaging theatre.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 11.1 Legs On The Wall: a physical theatre company
- 11.2 Physical theatre exercises
- 11.3 Performing a physical theatre script
- 11.4 Performance task: physical theatre

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- identify the techniques and conventions of a physical theatre performance
- develop movement skills to create counterbalances and contact roles
- apply a process to create, record and perform a physical theatre performance
- create, perform and evaluate a physical theatre performance.





Newspix/Stephen Cooper

Performers from the
Legs On The Wall theatre
company

11.1 Legs On The Wall: a physical theatre company

Our whole body must adapt to every movement no matter how small. If we pick up a piece of ice from the ground, our whole body must react to this movement and the cold.

Jerzy Grotowski – Polish theatre director



HINT

In the 'metaphoric narrative' of a performance, the dramatic action works symbolically to establish atmosphere and communicate themes and issues. For example, a performance features an actor who uses a suitcase as a prop. The suitcase contains heavy and dark objects. The character never speaks and is very attached to the suitcase, taking it everywhere, sleeping on it and refusing to let others take it away. The metaphoric narrative of the dramatic action is that the character is unable to let go of their 'emotional baggage'.

COMPANY HISTORY

The Legs On The Wall theatre company began in 1986 with the primary aim of creating a performance style that uses circus skills to tell stories as emotional journeys. The company also wanted to understand how visual images affect people emotionally, and how 'intention' adds meaning to a physical skill.

The group has evolved from performing cabaret in a community hall to being recognised as a world-renowned performing arts company, which today receives continuing invitations to perform. Legs On The Wall has regularly toured Australia and has consistently been part of the international circuit, touring to Scotland to perform in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, as well as to Germany, Brazil, New Zealand, Columbia, the Netherlands and Brussels.

CREATING AUSTRALIAN PERFORMANCE WORK

The work of Legs On The Wall is characterised by the willingness of the company to take risks—both in the physical performance of the actors and in the look, style and design of performances. The company's aim is to communicate Australian stories to a broad audience using ideas and feelings in radical yet accessible theatrical contexts. Legs On The Wall achieves this by making theatre that breaks down the barriers between circus, theatre and dance, as well as between literal and metaphoric narrative.

Beginning with a thematic, text, physical or site-based idea, the company uses strong physical language as a primary source for the building of narrative. Each production is a reaction to what is happening in the world at a personal or global level. The company regularly works with new directors, which allows for fresh perspectives and approaches to physical theatre performance.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Visit the Legs On The Wall website and view images and descriptions of past productions. Choose one production and explain how the choreography helped to communicate the themes and issues of the performance.
- 2 Research circus as a performance form: its origins, features and history. Your research may examine the circuses of China, Russia and Canada, as well as those of Australia. As part of your research, focus on the development of acrobatics as a form of entertainment.
- 3 Using your research on circus and your knowledge of Legs On The Wall, list the similarities and differences between a Legs On The Wall performance and a circus performance.



Legs On The Wall
Legs On The Wall –
Performance Compilation



AAP Image/Katja Ogrin

Aerial performers from Legs On The Wall perform in a scene from *Homeland*.

11.2 Physical theatre exercises

Before undertaking physical exercises, you should make sure you adequately stretch and relax your muscles. Refer back to chapter 1 for other exercises that may be useful in your study of the physical theatre form.

EXERCISE

WARMING UP

1 Align posture

Stand with your eyes closed. Check your posture so that your stomach is pulled in slightly, your shoulders are relaxed, and your feet are under your hips and are parallel. Check your head is not tipped forward or backward.

2 Spine rolls

Complete four spine rolls—one over eight counts, one over four counts, one over two counts, and one in one count. Repeat three times. Remember to keep your shoulders and neck loose. (See chapter 1, p. 15 if you need a reminder of how to perform a spine roll.)

3 Neck stretch

Stand with a relaxed and aligned posture. Bring one arm up above your head. Drop the arm from the elbow so that the hand is on one side of your head. Leave your other arm by your side but push down with the heel of the hand while raising the fingers upwards. As you push down with the heel of one hand, simultaneously pull your head gently to one side to stretch your neck. Relax, and repeat using the opposite side.



HINT

Connecting the inhalation and exhalation of breath with your stretches helps to extend the stretch and establish focus. Inhale when you stretch, and exhale when you relax.



4 Wrist and shoulder warm-up

Begin by waving both hands from the wrist so they are loose and floppy. Place your left hand on your left shoulder and your right hand on your right shoulder so that your elbows point forward. In this position, loosen your shoulders by rotating your arms five times in each direction.

Now hold both arms out to either side. Raise your hands from the wrists, and then relax them. Drop your hands even further so that they hang down lower. Repeat this sequence quickly six times, and then relax.

5 Cat stretch

On all fours, form a table shape. Make sure your wrists are under your shoulders and that your middle fingers are pointing forward. Turn the inside of your elbows slightly to face each other. Keep your hands flat and push down into the floor with your fingertips. Make sure your thighs are under your hips and your knees are not too close together. Keep your stomach firm. Using the full motion of your spine, slowly arch your back up like a cat and hold for a moment. Return to the table position. Now arch down by dropping your stomach and raising your head to look at the ceiling. Hold for a moment and return to the table position. Slowly look over your left shoulder behind you and repeat on the right-hand side. Relax.

6 Claw

Staying on all fours, stretch one arm out to one side and form your fingers into a claw position with the fingertips digging into the floor. Rest your other arm on the elbow with the forearm out along the floor. Simultaneously push the elbow into the floor and attempt to draw the clawed hand towards you. Relax. Swap sides and repeat.

7 Downward dog

From your position on all fours, push your toes and hands into the floor while lifting your hips high into the air. Keep your chin to your chest and relax the neck. Simultaneously press your heels down while pushing your hands into the floor.

8 Touching toes

Sitting down, stretch your legs out in front of you. Flex your feet towards the body and away from the body. Lean forward from the hips. Relax the upper body. Gently slide your arms down your legs to a stretch that is comfortable for you. Gently grasp your lower legs. Breathe in and exhale as you count to five. Breathe in and then gently reach forward. Only reach as far as you find comfortable.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

While attempting the following exercises, focus on the shapes that are being created. What do these shapes remind you of? How do they make you feel, both as an audience member and a participant? While executing and analysing these exercises, try to remain open to the feelings or stories that the shapes evoke.

EXERCISE

COUNTERBALANCES

The basic principles of counterbalance can be applied in a wide variety of contexts such as partner balance, acrobatics, contact improvisation and the creation of controlled movement.



1 Leaning in

Leaning sit

Stand back-to-back with a partner, with your hips and shoulders touching. Lean into each other, and while maintaining contact with your hips and shoulders, walk your feet outwards so that you arrive in a sitting position supported by your partner. It is important here that you maintain pressure between the contacting points of the body. Remember that this is a 'counterbalance'—your partner should be in balance with you and the weight should be evenly distributed between both of you. The angle of balance will vary slightly for different couples.

From this seated position, try lowering yourselves to the floor by bending your knees and pressing into each other. Then, while maintaining contact with your partner, try standing up.

Variations on leaning in

Following on from the standing up position described above, try to shift the point of contact to a different part of the body, while staying in contact with your partner.

Try rolling sideways onto your shoulder so that you and your partner are both facing the same direction. Continue rolling onto your fronts so that your chests are touching, with your heads on each other's shoulders.

From this position, change the point of contact to the hands, so that you are leaning into your partner hand-to-hand with straight arms (you may need to walk your feet out further to achieve this). Now try shifting your hands to different parts of your partner's body while still leaning into your partner (you may have to bend your arms and legs, or alter the height and angle of your body).

From this position you can also change the points of the body that are in contact. Try locking shoulders and pushing against each other (as in a rugby scrum). Finally, try returning to the back-to-back position without using your hands.



HINT

In counterbalances, always move slowly so that your partner can anticipate your movement and respond accordingly. Always stay in complete control of your movements to protect yourself and your partner. Try to breathe in unison with your partner to establish a common rhythm. This will also help you and your partner to sustain focus.



HINT

In these exercises, it is important that you maintain complete focus. This will create a safe environment for you and those you work with.





HINT

It is best not to talk during your practice of these exercises. Learn to negotiate the changes in position in silence.



2 Contact rolling in kneeling position

In this exercise, you and your partner begin kneeling on all fours next to each other. You take turns to contact roll across each other's backs.

- Kneel on all fours side-by-side next to a partner who is in the same position. Make sure that your wrists are directly beneath your shoulders and that the insides of your elbows are turned to face each other. Check your knees are directly beneath your hips (hip-width apart), and that you are in contact with your partner (hips, sides, shoulders and arms touching). You should also lean slightly into your partner's body, so that there is pressure between you. Keep your back straight—don't arch it. The shape you make should feel very solid.
- Push your toes into the floor and straighten your legs while maintaining contact with your partner, who remains in the original position. Keep your hands and feet on the ground for a moment.
- Lift your outside arm and roll onto your partner's back so that you are looking at the ceiling and lying on your back.
- Continue to roll to the other side of your partner's body, ending in the kneeling position from which you started, but on the opposite side. Your partner then repeats the contact roll over your body, and the movement travels across the space.



Variations on contact rolling in a kneeling position

- Roll onto your partner's back so that you are lying facing the ceiling. Sit up so that you are positioned on their hips (as if you are sitting on a chair). Now carefully experiment with different ways of balancing your body on your partner's back. Try lying on your side in a foetal position, so that your head is near your partner's and your hips are on their hips. Try sliding slowly off your partner's back, feet first onto the floor.
- As you contact roll across the space, make the last point of contact with your partner into the place from which the next roll is initiated. For example, if your partner ends up kneeling next to you with only their arm touching you, try a contact roll that begins from the arm. While exploring this exercise, you may find that you do not end up kneeling in full contact with your partner. This is fine as long as some part of your body is in contact. You should also try to finish each roll on all fours in a stable position for your partner to then roll across.





3 Arena

Work with a partner. Imagine you have a circular performance area to work in. When you stand outside the circle you are 'offstage'. When you step into the circle you are 'onstage', and need to provide the appropriate level of focus and energy. One of you enters the arena and creates a strong shape. The other person enters the arena and connects with their partner by creating a gentle lean or a counterbalance. Hold this for a moment and then, finding your own weight, exit the arena. Repeat with each person alternately offering a starting shape.

4 Mirror or complement

Using the concept of the arena, the class sits in a circle. One person enters the arena and creates a strong shape. One at a time, four or five others enter the arena and create a shape that either mirrors or complements the shape of the first person. Look for ways to create interesting tableaux using physical shape, space and levels.

5 Moving as text

In a physical theatre, process text can act as a starting point for creating action. Here are some methods for devising movement from a text. The text can be anything, such as a monologue in a play, a passage in a novel or an article in a newspaper.

- Read the text first. Look for the rhythm of the text, including pauses. Also identify significant images and metaphors.
- Underline the verbs in the text. Create a physical movement for each verb (for instance, a star jump for the word 'catch', or a swinging of the arms for the word 'write').
- Link the movements together to form a sequence. Consider how you will create transitions from one movement to the next.
- Now analyse the sequence in view of the text from which it was created. What does the sequence express? Is it similar or completely different to the themes of the text?
- Choose an aspect of your chosen text that appeals to you and use this as the basis for creating a short sequence. For instance, how does the text make you feel? If it fills you with wonder, create some movement based on this sense of wonder. Try to be lateral in your thinking. For example, you could create a movement for each letter of the word 'wonder' and link the movements into a sequence.
- Memorise your chosen text. Devise a counterbalance sequence using one of the suggested methods listed above. Now recite your text while performing your counterbalance sequence, allowing the physicality of your sequence to affect the way in which you recite your text. What does the movement do to the text? Is it easier or harder to speak text while moving? What new meaning, if any, does this combination of exercises create?



HINT

A 'metaphor' is a figure of speech in which one thing is identified with another. For example, 'She was a tower of strength during the crisis'. In drama, an object or effect can be a metaphor, or symbol, representing something other than itself.



HINT

As you rehearse your text interpretation, be aware of how the use of breath, pauses and silences affects the rhythm of your performance.



National Theatre Discover
– Frantic Assembly
Masterclass: Building
Blocks for Devising
National Theatre Discover
– Frantic Assembly
Masterclass: Learning
To Fly
KAGE – Contemporary
Dance Theatre

11.3 Performing a physical theatre script

INTERPRETING TEXT USING PHYSICAL THEATRE

Use the following poem as the basis for a physical theatre performance. You may choose to perform all or only part of the poem. Use the guidelines for interpreting text outlined in the ‘moving as text’ exercise. In your preparation, consider how your performance might incorporate an effective use of space, levels, movement, counter-balances, contact rolls, dialogue and vocal dynamics.

SONG FOR AN EXILE IN AUSTRALIA

in a loveless season in Australia
the body is passing through the sun of spring
decaying gradually disconnected with life
so I cover up every face of clocks
to forget time
to forget every face that lifts up
from under the white shroud of corpses
the spring has lost its power of medium
and the body can't understand its own meaning
woodenly I wait for the coming of dusk
knowing very well that nothing will come out of it
like every disappearing season
that will not leave her shadows

in a poemless season in Australia
I read my poems of the past
like a stranger in hundreds of years
reading books left to him by his ancestors
I see thousands of lines
shoot past the edge of dreams
but my paralysed brain can't pull itself out of
the wheel-chair of imagination
like my decayed body

in a riverless season in Australia
the boundless grass land drives me crazy
for my skin is thirsty for the baptism by murky rivers
and my train of thoughts is chasing waves
that can rush a thousand miles a second
listen! the lawn-mower next door starts its routine

cutting hair for the spring mourning for the season
hoping to find a fault in the ground
where there is a fault there is life running

in a season without language in Australia
I have lost my weight in undeveloped no-person's land
like a wild devil roaming
I sow my language into the alien soil
where it sends forth strange flowers that no one recognizes
and all of a sudden I find my tongue held
between two languages like a vice

in a season of self-exile in Australia
I feel doubly alienated
the death of the old world has such weird attractions
while the light of the new world has somehow darkened

in a season without love in Australia
my body my poetry
in a season without language in Australia
my interference, my waves of electricity
in a season without death in Australia
I see the black cat acquiring an eternal existence
in the afternoon sun and I see
the reflection of a car above the distant trees

in a season without imagination
in a desireless season
in Australia
in Australia

in Australia

Ouyang Yu, Moon over Melbourne

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COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Evaluate one group's performance of the poem *Song for an Exile in Australia*. Comment on their use of movement, space and vocal dynamics to realise the intention of the poem. In your evaluation, describe two specific moments that helped establish tension for the audience.

••

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PRACTITIONER PROFILE

CONRAD PAGE

Physical Theatre Teacher, Director and Actor

Conrad Page studied a Bachelor of Arts (Performance) at the Victorian College of the Arts and later completed a Diploma of Education. He also trained with Circus Oz and the Fruit Fly Circus. Conrad has performed with the Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir Company B and State of Play; he has toured the world with self-devised physical theatre shows. Conrad has taught theatre skills at the Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre in Darwin, the Australian Theatre for Young People, Theatre Nepean at the University of Western Sydney and the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA). As senior Drama teacher at Saint Ignatius' College in Riverview, Sydney, Conrad manages the co-curricular Drama and productions.

Conrad writes, 'I believe that the use of physical movement is an essential tool for every performer when exploring character, text and ensemble work. The performer learns to explore text from a "visceral" (emotional) base by grounding the body and connecting to the action. This allows the performer to push boundaries and welcome new possibilities. A connected body means a connected audience.'



Courtesy of Conrad Page

Conrad Page

PHYSICAL THEATRE SCRIPT EXTRACT

A physical theatre script extract has been provided as an example of how you might record a physical theatre performance. The extract is from the *Legs On The Wall* performance of *Runners Up*. It contains examples of the techniques and conventions used in physical theatre. As you read through the extract, identify the techniques and conventions that have been used; for example, the use of minimal dialogue. To do this, ask yourself the following questions:

- How does a physical theatre performer use movement, body language and gesture? Is the use of movement realistic or non-realistic? In your evaluation, consider rhythm, energy, control and facial expression. How is this use of movement different to a performer's use of movement in other dramatic forms?
- What is the actor–audience relationship in a physical theatre performance?
- Have you seen any forms of theatre that are similar in performance style to *Runners Up*? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

It is recommended that you do not perform the *Runners Up* script without the appropriate training, rehearsal and precautions.

RUNNERS UP (EXTRACT)

In the following scene from *Runners Up*, the central character is an 'armchair athlete', whose fantasy, to become his sporting hero, is played out on and around his armchair. The three other characters are his mates, real and imagined. They are dressed in singlets (which have individual colours, like jockey silks) and black shorts.

After a hard Saturday morning at work, the main character comes home to watch the football final. He is glued to the television, as are his mates. As they watch the game,



Theatre Links – Physical Theatre
Devising Physical Theatre
BBC Bitesize – Physical Theatre

their passion for sport and the highs and lows of the competition are symbolically represented and heightened through physical theatre.

The players use their own names: Kerry (KY) is the main character, and the others are Telford (T), Rowan (R) and Kirk (K). In the production, the armchair was reinforced to support the choreography and protect the performers. It was located in a central pool of light, and at points in the performance the players would disappear into the surrounding shadows.



RUNNERS UP – ARMCHAIR ATHLETE

KY *(Brings out the armchair as he enters from upstage centre; he is muttering but becoming clearer.)*

This is it ... Today's the day ... the big one.

(He places the chair in the centre of the stage, walks forward toward the audience and mimes pushing the button on the television.)

That trophy's ours ...

(Walks backward to the chair.)

Yes ...

(He takes off his suit jacket, swings it around his head and throws it behind the chair as he says ...)

... Eighty minutes of ecstasy ...

(Loosens tie, sits and sings ...)

Hear the barrackers shouting, like all barrackers should ...

(He moves through three sitting positions, never taking his eyes off the television. On the third position he leans forward.)

Enough of the dancing girls—bring on the men!

Gird the loins for battle, boys ...

**KY, T, K
AND R** *(together)* Gird the loins for battle!

PLAY #1

- (KY leans back in the chair.)*
- T** *(Runs in front of chair right to left; stepping off arm of chair.)*
- KY** Kicks off ...
- K** *(Runs in front of chair left to right.)*
- KY** ... takes it up ...
- R** *(Dive rolls over front of chair.)*
- KY** ... bunnies ...
- (T runs diagonally downstage to upstage; steps on arm of chair; then places one foot on KY's head and leaps over the back of the chair.)*
- KY** ... like a ballerina.
- (R steps off KY's head too.)*
- KY** Elegant.
- (K steps on arm of chair, balances as KY grabs his leg in a frozen running shape.)*
- KY** Hold the line.

PLAY #2

- KY** In there.
- (T and K run from behind to jump on arms of the chair in a squat; T comes from right side, K from left side. R runs in to stand behind chair.)*
- KY** Get in there.
- T** Get in there.
- (R supports T around the belly. T reaches behind KY and turns upside down.)*
- KY** Get in there.
- T** Get in there *(one leg bent, one leg diagonally up).*
- K** Get in there *(holds T's leg, stands on arm of chair).*
- (R is supporting T around the belly; T's legs frame his face.)*
- KY** Get in there.
- T** Get in there.
- (Getting faster and more intense.)*
- K** Get in there.
- R** Get in there.
- ALL** Get in there.
- (Pause, hold the moment, then melt down in disappointment.)*
- Aagggghhhh ...
- (Return to original position.)*

T ... aagggghhh ...
(KY, K and R all look at T who stops the extended 'aghh'.)

KY *(exploding after returning to television) Noooo (his arms hit the others).*
(T, R and K leap off the chair.)

PLAY #3

KY *(Stands on the chair.)*
Bring him down ... Go for the legs ... he can't run without his legs ... round the ankles ... take his ...
(He sits into the back of the chair. T runs from downstage, body slams KY and chair is tipped over backwards.)
... head off!
(KY is on his back with T on top with chair under both on its back.)

R Stacks on. *(Runs in leaps and dives on top. K steps on R's back, then onto chair, standing it up.)*

PLAY #4

K *(Sitting in chair) Make a decision, mate. If you can't think 'n' chew, spit it out.*

KY *(Dive rolls over K, steps to television, then backward shoulder rolls and sits on top of K.)*
Pin him down.

K *(pushes KY to one side) Get off him. (Wiggles in front of KY.)*

KY *(pushes K back behind him) Pin him down.*
(T and R do 'the whizzer' behind the chair.)

R *(chanting the nickname of a footballer) Telf, Telf, Telf.*

T Round, round, round.

R AND T Down, down, down.

K Off him.

KY Down.

K Nooo *(as KY pushes K out of the chair to left, reclaiming his territory).*

T AND R Oooohhhh *(like a crowd noise, with hands around mouths)*



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

After reading through the script extract from the Legs On The Wall performance of *Runners Up*, choose one scene that you enjoyed. Use a pencil to sketch a storyboard of the action in your logbook. You will need to divide the scene into key moments. You only need to draw simple shapes and figures.

EXERCISE

UNPACKING *RUNNERS UP*

1 Interpreting role

After you have read the script extract, choose one role you like and one line that belongs to this role. On the signal from your teacher, adopt a pose showing your interpretation of the role. Make sure the shape you create and the energy conveyed are both strong. On the next signal from your teacher, make a substantial change of physical shape and say the line belonging to the role. Divide the class into thirds. Each group performs their role interpretations for the rest of the class.

2 Comic strip

Divide into groups of four. Allocate the roles of Kerry, Telford, Rowan and Kirk. Using one group member's storyboard from the 'collaborate and think critically' task, re-create a tableau for each frame of one scene. If the scene you have chosen contains any inversions (in which a performer is upside down), change this position so that the performer is safer. Control your use of movement, rhythm and timing to find smooth transitions from one frame to another. Once you have completed your tableaux, add a moment of sound or dialogue to each one.

3 Adapting *Runners Up*

If there are a large number of girls in your class or you are in an all-girls school, convert *Runners Up* into a version where all the characters are female. You might want to continue with the football references or use a different competitive sport as the situation for the stage action. Adapting the script will require you to think about possibilities for keeping or changing colloquial references and terms.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What messages and ideas about people and sport are communicated through the action of the script?
- 2 Explain how the style of physical theatre performance is effective in communicating the messages and ideas of *Runners Up*.
- 3 What messages about the character Kerry (KY) are conveyed through the performer's use of physical shapes and actions?
- 4 Imagine you are a physical theatre company performer. Outline the steps you would take to prepare for and devise a physical theatre performance.

PERFORMANCE TASK



11.4 Performance task: physical theatre

The task

You are to prepare a four- to six-minute physical theatre performance exploring one day in the life of a character you create. Your performance may be comic or dramatic. You may choose to start the performance at a particular point in the day or from when the character wakes up. The events of the day need to be part of an overall journey for the character. The style of this performance allows for group members to represent objects, feelings or thoughts, as well as other characters. Some ideas for performances are:

- Murphy's law
- wedding day
- moving house
- 21st birthday
- blind date
- waterskiing lesson
- job interview
- animal farm
- detective.

Your performance can include:

- dialogue
- music (live or recorded)
- projected images
- sound effects (live or recorded)
- dance.

You are also required to script your physical theatre performance. Your script can be made up of illustrations or sentences, or a combination of both.

Creating and making a physical theatre performance

- Research ideas for your physical theatre performance—you will need to create an interesting central character.
- Decide on a central focus and intention for your performance.
- Devise the events in the character's day.
- Consider how dramatic techniques such as minimal dialogue, projected images and mime can be incorporated into your performance.
- Consider integral and efficient ways of creating scene transitions.
- Use improvisation in rehearsal to workshop your performance.
- Use appropriate preparation and safety procedures for all physical work.

Performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievement in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- create an original and engaging physical theatre performance
- incorporate physical theatre techniques and conventions
- demonstrate a high level of energy and control in the use of movement
- incorporate effective and appropriate use of vocal dynamics
- create interesting and appropriate characters
- manipulate the elements of drama to establish tension and to create atmosphere
- incorporate the use of symbol where appropriate.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Recount the process of developing your physical theatre performance. What problems did you encounter and how did you overcome them?
- 2 Evaluate your physical theatre performance. In your evaluation, comment on the ways in which your piece effectively incorporated the techniques and conventions of physical theatre. For example, an evaluation might read:

Our physical theatre performance was great fun to do. We decided to only use four lines – one for the start of each scene. We also worked on our timing so our synchronised movements were perfect. We incorporated lots of energy in our movement to make the performance exciting. In the running scene, we controlled pace and rhythm to build tension.
- 3 Evaluate one other group's physical theatre performances. In your evaluation, discuss how successful the group was in using movement to communicate character and role. Consider how effectively they chose dramatic form to suit their intention.
- 4 Research the work of the Canadian theatre company Cirque du Soleil. Compare their work with the work of Legs On The Wall. Look for similarities and differences between the two companies.
- 5 Visit the Circus Oz website and prepare a brief report on the company. In your report, identify the key features of the company.



Cirque du Soleil
Circus Oz

Performance task: physical theatre

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- identify the techniques and conventions of a physical theatre performance
- develop movement skills to create counterbalances and contact rolls
- apply a process to create, record and perform a physical theatre performance
- create, perform and evaluate a physical theatre performance.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, exploring and presenting ideas using skills, techniques and processes</p> <p>Have you prepared for your physical theatre performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • researching ideas for your performance? • selecting a central focus and intention for your performance? • using appropriate preparation and safety procedures for all physical work? <p>Have you incorporated elements of dramatic form, techniques and conventions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incorporating physical theatre techniques and conventions? • demonstrating a high level of energy and control in the use of movement? • incorporating an effective and appropriate use of vocal dynamics? • creating interesting and engaging characters through an effective use of focus, energy and belief? • manipulating the elements of drama to establish tension and to create atmosphere? • incorporating the use of symbol where appropriate? <p>Have you completed your physical theatre performance task by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structuring moments of your physical theatre performance into a coherent and polished performance incorporating effective scene transitions? • establishing an appropriate actor–audience relationship? 				
<p>Responding</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively convey your understanding of the skills and precautions needed for physical theatre? • effectively communicate a creative process that shows evidence of testing ideas in rehearsal and effectively selecting and shaping a performance in rehearsal? 				

Comments



12

NON-REALISTIC THEATRE: VISIONS, DREAMS AND SYMBOLS

WHY STUDY NON-REALISTIC THEATRE?

Non-realistic theatre covers a variety of early 20th century styles, including expressionism, symbolism, absurdism and epic theatre. The influence of non-realistic theatre can be found in performance work today. By studying non-realistic theatre, you will learn and acquire performance skills and theatrical techniques to help you create abstract, strange, symbolic and dreamlike performance works.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 12.1 An overview of non-realistic theatre
- 12.2 Dreams and the subconscious
- 12.3 Expressionist theatre
- 12.4 Performance task: non-realistic theatre

OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- explore the influences that encouraged the development of non-realistic theatre
- select and incorporate stylised movement and voice in non-realistic performance work
- explore the origins, purpose and conventions of expressionist theatre
- devise and present a non-realistic theatre performance.





12.1 An overview of non-realistic theatre

MODERNISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-REALISTIC THEATRE

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, changes in industry, society and thinking led to artists questioning accepted traditional views associated with religion, class, daily life and the arts. This 'modern view' led to experimentation. In painting, artists challenged ideas about perspective. In literature, ideas about narrative were questioned, with some writers experimenting with stream-of-consciousness writing. Theatre also responded to these changes by creating theatre that encouraged freedom of expression and experimentation with dramatic structure, narrative, acting style and staging design.

You have already explored one form of non-realistic theatre, epic theatre (see chapter 10), and how this dramatic form changed the way stories were told on the stage and the influence this has had on theatre today.

There were many attempts to define these emerging dramatic forms including symbolism, expressionism and surrealism, but theorists have found it easier to refer to these dramatic forms with the umbrella term 'non-realistic theatre'. These new and experimental forms developed in reaction to the style of realism (see chapter 5, p. 115). Non-realistic theatre is not confined to re-creating life on stage—it also seeks to explore the more elusive and intangible qualities of human existence. As well as heightened use of movement and voice, non-realistic theatre experiments with non-realistic sets, sound effects and coloured lighting to create effect.

Some of the major developments of non-realistic theatre are listed below:

- During the 1890s, artists, poets and theatre practitioners reacted against realism and developed a style known as symbolism. Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck wrote plays that included the use of non-realistic characters, sounds interspersed with long static silences, and dreamlike colour combinations of lighting.
- In 1896, Alfred Jarry wrote *Ubu Roi*, a highly comic and physical play that explores the abuse of power. The production of this play caused great scandal for its unconventional performance style and use of vulgarity.
- The development of the study of psychology, and an increasing interest in the power of dreams and the subconscious, inspired artists, musicians, poets and theatre practitioners to explore human experience beyond day-to-day living.
- Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold (a collaborator with Constantin Stanislavski) broke from the Moscow Art Theatre to create a non-realistic acting style known as biomechanic acting. This style was highly theatrical and incorporated abstract design and innovative use of the performance space.
- In 1911, Swedish playwright August Strindberg wrote *A Dream Play*, which incorporated memory, fantasy, absurdity and improvisation.
- Scenic designers, lighting designers and musicians designed sets, lighting and music to help create fantasy worlds.
- Increased use of machines in the workplace and the introduction of automated machinery were seen as a threat to the human spirit. Artists in Germany reacted to this change in society with a movement known as expressionism.
- Antonin Artaud developed the Theatre of Cruelty between 1926 and 1933. Theatre of Cruelty is an often-misunderstood term for performance work that



HINT

Although Stanislavski is remembered for his contribution to the development of realism, he also experimented with non-realistic forms of theatre later in his career.

abolished traditional actor–audience boundaries. Artaud was greatly influenced by the ritualistic and disciplined dance–drama work of Cambodia and Bali. Artaud promoted a theatre of the senses. The audience was to be shocked and moved by images of great power and beauty.

- In the late 1940s, the impact of two World Wars and increasing questioning about the philosophy of human existence encouraged the development of absurdism. Samuel Beckett’s absurdist play *Waiting for Godot* caused outrage when it was first performed in 1953.



HINT

Changes in theatre at the turn of the century closely mirrored changes in visual arts, music and literature.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Research one of the following non-realistic theatre practitioners: Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Robert Wilson or Edward Gordon Craig.
- 2 Make point-form notes on the distinctive conventions of their performance styles. Present your findings to the class.



Theatre Links – Symbolism
Robert Wilson – Avant-garde Theatre Director

12.2 Dreams and the subconscious

DREAMS AND INTERPRETATION

In this unit you will undertake exercises that help create theatrical representations of dreams and the subconscious. There are many theories regarding dreams and the subconscious. Some theorists have suggested that dreams are an expression of our subconscious and are a process of ‘sorting out’ our issues and concerns. Others believe that dreams hold symbolic significance and that we need to interpret our dreams to understand their meaning. Another group of theorists believe that dreams are merely erratic electrical activity in the brain that triggers disconnected and unrelated memories and images as we sleep. These theorists maintain that dreams have no particular meaning.

Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud suggested that our concerns and anxieties come from a conflict between our conscious and the needs of the subconscious. Freudian psychologists believe that the subconscious is connected to our primitive and instinctive needs and urges. It is believed our conscious mind is often unaware of the influence of the subconscious.

These discoveries and theories influenced the art world and the ways in which characters and situations were expressed in theatre. Writers and directors played with characters, time and space, and created non-realistic stories that were often disjointed and disconnected.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Research artworks from the surrealist painters or expressionist painters. Look for images that you feel express dreams and the subconscious. Find one painting to show to the class. Some artists from this period are Paul Klee, Salvador Dali and Edvard Munch.

DREAMS AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS

1 Slow motion, high speed and exaggeration

Manipulating movement is a very effective way to create non-realistic performance work.

Choose one of the activities below:

- eating large quantities of very soft and sticky toffee
- being trapped in a room with a venomous spider
- leaving the premiere of a movie you star in, to meet hundreds of your fans.

You will perform the chosen activity and explore the use of the following movement styles:

- **Slow motion** – This requires the performer to give the impression that movement has been slowed to a minimum. The performer still needs to communicate effort and reactions, for example, but all in slow motion. Strong discipline and control are required for this exercise. Each time your teacher gives the signal, halve the speed at which you perform the activity until you have reached slow motion. Do not exaggerate the movements—only slow them down.
- **High speed** – Begin performing the chosen activity at normal speed. Each time your teacher gives the signal, double the speed at which you complete the activity until you reach high speed.
- **Exaggeration** – This requires the performer to amplify the size of their movements. Repeat the chosen activity. Begin with normal movements. On a signal from your teacher, exaggerate your movements slightly. On each subsequent signal, continue to enlarge your movements until they take on giant proportions. Do not increase the pace of your actions as you exaggerate the movements.

2 Transformation

You will need coloured pieces of fabric for this exercise. Performers can use transformation as an effective technique in non-realistic performance. When you are practising this exercise, it is important to complete the transformations slowly. You can complete 'snap' transformations when you have gained confidence in this technique.

Try the following exercises in groups of four:

- Choose a piece of fabric. Each person in the group must take a turn using the fabric as an object. The first person turns the fabric into an object, which is then passed to the second person. They transform the object that has been passed to them into a new object.
- Choose a piece of fabric and decide on three objects. The group will use their bodies and the fabric to create these objects. Examples include a piece of furniture, a musical instrument and an antique clock. On a signal from your teacher, the whole group becomes the first object. On the next signal, the group transforms into the next object, and so on.

3 Sounds and language

Sounds and language in dreamlike performances are heightened and stylised to add to the symbolism and atmosphere. The use of percussion instruments,



CHALLENGE

Explore different combinations of high speed, slow motion and exaggerated movement in situations you devise.



recorded sound effects, atmospheric music, vocal sounds and stylised language adds to the non-realistic quality of the performance.

Divide into small groups and use the following extract from *A Dream Play* by August Strindberg to create a short movement and sound presentation. Be creative in the way you use movement and deliver the dialogue. Consider the use of multiple voices, repetition, long pauses, volume and pace to add impact to your presentation. Also consider how you may convey the contrast of fire and water in your performance work. If possible, include the use of percussion to enhance your performance work.

***A Dream Play* BY AUGUST STRINDBERG**

SCENE 3

It is we, we, the waves,
that rock the winds
to rest!

Green cradles, we the waves.

We are wet and salt;
we are like flames of fire,
we are wet flames.

Quenching, burning,
washing, bathing,
breeding, bearing.

We, we the waves
that rock the winds
to sleep!

4 Recreating aspects of dreams

Find a space in the room in which to work on your own. Explore how you may use your body in performance to represent the following common dream states:

- running but not getting anywhere
- screaming but not being heard
- floating
- falling but not hitting the ground.



CHALLENGE

The class divides into groups of five. Each group presents two of the listed dream states to the class.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1** Describe how you incorporated the techniques you learnt in the exercises into your interpretation of the extract *A Dream Play*.
- 2** What choices did your group make when deciding how to deliver the lines? Did you incorporate any special techniques for effect? Why?
- 3** Comment on the use of movement by two different groups to represent dream states. Discuss how their use of movement helped to make their presentation successful.



EXERCISE

RECALLING AND INTERPRETING DREAMS

Divide into pairs or small groups. Each person is to share a memorable dream they can recall. Although you can ask each other questions about your dreams, allow the person time to tell their dream fully before you ask questions. When you tell your dream, make sure you include details that describe the characters, time and place, focus, tension, atmosphere and mood.

Once each person has shared their dream, use the elements of drama table in the following 'collaborate and think critically' task to help identify certain aspects of your dream. You are to make suggestions for how you may represent these aspects of your dream in a performance.

COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

An example of a dream has been provided in the table below. Use the table as a guide to help identify how the elements of drama will work together to communicate your own dream.

SELECTED ELEMENT OF DRAMA	DESCRIPTION	HOW DO I SHOW THIS IN PERFORMANCE?
Characters and situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a teenage boy• he is surfing to escape his problems• later in the play he attempts to escape a tsunami	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the boy awakes on the beach and does not know where he is• the only actual prop is a surfboard• other performers represent the ocean, the beach and other objects in the play
Tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• bizarre• hint of danger	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• as the boy attempts to surf, he confronts things from his life more frequently than he is trying to forget• create tension and anticipation with vocal sound and rhythm of actors' movements
Focus to frame the action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• how can we accept messages from our subconscious?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• as the play progresses, the boy learns to face his fears as the messages cannot be avoided
Time and place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a deserted and alien beach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• use lengths of fabric to create waves/water• use boxes to create cliffs and rocks
Language and movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• need to communicate the issues the boy is facing• need to communicate, through dialogue, information about his recent past	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the performers transform from waves and trees on the beach into aspects of the boy's subconscious that he tries to ignore
Symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the tsunami = facing your worst fears• lighthouse = wisdom• colours: red (danger), black (fear), yellow (success)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• use red lights as the tsunami approaches• people under a cloth, beneath chairs, represent fears• the surfboard is the boy's capacity to make the right choices

EXERCISE

DREAMLIKE PERFORMANCE

Divide into groups. Each person will need to share the dream that they recalled in the previous exercise. Choose one group member's dream to present in performance. As a group, document the breakdown of the aspects of the dream and how you will realise these in performance.

Performing dreams opens exciting possibilities for physical work. Include balances, carrying and lifts into your work if you can. Include the use of sound, lighting (if possible) and material, for example, to heighten the dreamlike quality of your performance. Consider how you can manipulate voice and movement to add to the non-realistic effect.



HINT

If you are attempting any physical work, make sure you first complete a physical warm-up. Check with your teacher that you are completing any heavy lifting or physical work safely.

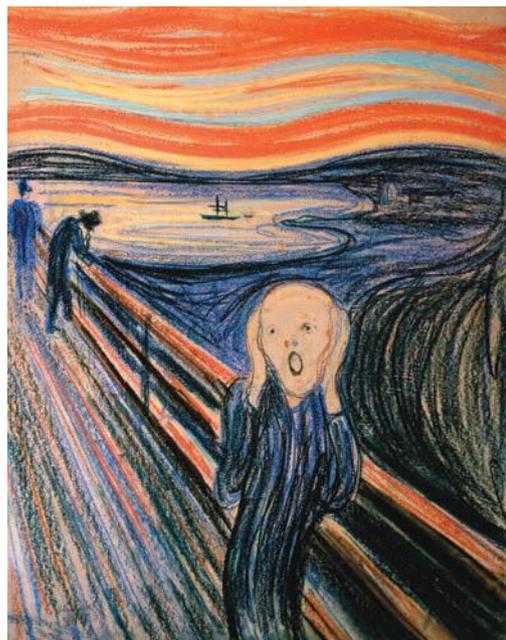
COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 How have the exercises in this unit helped you to make decisions about the ways in which you can present dreams in performance?
- 2 Describe one other group's presentation. In your description, highlight one aspect of the performance you felt was effective and explain how the group made the moment effective.
- 3 Based on your knowledge, research and experience, discuss why you feel non-realistic theatre is a valuable style of performance work.

12.3 Expressionist theatre

TRANSFORMING REALITY

Expressionism is an art movement that originated in Germany in the early 1900s. Artists and writers reacted to what they saw as the mechanisation of human society, and produced non-realistic artwork to challenge the changes in society. Although this movement was short-lived, it had an enormous influence on modern art forms. Expressionism is directly linked to the development of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. The function and purpose of epic theatre are quite different from those of expressionist theatre; however, they do have a few similar features.



Agefotostock/interfoto Scans

Edvard Munch's *The Scream*

The creators of expressionist theatre wanted to convey a heightened interpretation of the world through the use of stylised acting, including controlled physical movement and the use of concise and direct language. The features of expressionist theatre are:

- transformation of reality as we know it into a dreamlike and fantasy world
- use of many varied characters and locations that build to a powerful climax
- communication of a political or social message
- use of fantasy and symbolism, with moments of realism
- use of generalised character names, such as mother, father and worker, to make characters representative of all mothers, fathers and workers, for example
- use of symbolic props and sets—the sets are often abstract and vast
- in some productions, use of slides to help show the many locations and to help create mood and atmosphere
- use of coloured lights and shadows to create spectacle
- integration into the performance of music and sound effects often at very loud levels
- use of masks and stylised make-up
- generally non-realistic movements that are, for example, rhythmic, slow, graceful or mechanical
- change of characters during performance; for example, a character appearing as a robot in one scene and then moving realistically in a later scene.

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

ADENA JACOBS

Theatre Director

Adena Jacobs is a theatre director and the Artistic Director of independent company Fraught Outfit. In addition to her role as Resident Director at Belvoir in 2014–15, Adena has directed at Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne International Theatre Festival, Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Chamber Opera, Red Stitch and at various independent venues across Australia. She is known for her radical, image-led versions of canonical myths, most notably, *The Bacchae*, *Antigone*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Persona*.



Courtesy Adena Jacobs

Adena Jacobs

When interviewed for *Time Out* magazine in December 2013, Adena said, 'One of the biggest driving forces for me in making theatre is that idea of expressing the inexpressible – finding some shape or form for what we can't speak about, what is buried underneath. I see theatre—and all art—as a way of expressing individual perception. Each of us experiences the world in a very different way, and if we can somehow try to communicate that – then we can start to bridge those gaps.'



Theatre Works presents –
The Bacchae (Interview
With Adena Jacobs)

EXERCISE

EXPRESSIONIST THEATRE

1 Humans become robots

Your teacher will need a whistle for this exercise. As a class, walk through the room, maintaining an even distance from each other. On the first sound of the whistle, freeze and hold the freeze for about thirty seconds. On the second sound of the whistle, transform your character from human to robot. Alter your walk and movements so they become rigid and sharp. When the whistle sounds again, freeze and hold the freeze for about thirty seconds. Then, one by one, unfreeze and revert to your normal walk. On the final whistle, freeze and remain completely frozen for one minute. Repeat these steps.

2 Puppets

Divide into pairs. You will take turns at being both puppet and puppet controller. The puppet controller coordinates the puppet's movements by pulling on invisible strings that are connected to the puppet's limbs, head and body. The puppet yields to the pulling of the invisible strings and can be made to walk, sit down, pick up items and perform other movements. The controller can also control emotional responses from the puppet through verbal instructions.

3 Paper chase

Divide into medium-sized groups. Improvise a short play in which a human is seeking approval for an important and urgent matter. For example, it may be a loan, a traveller's visa or an insurance claim. The human character must get the correct form signed in order to get approval.

During the improvisation, the human approaches an inhuman and impersonal world of machines and robots or puppets, and seeks their advice as to how to get the matter approved. Each robot or puppet tries to thwart the attempts of the human by creating diversions, extra charges, more forms, and so on.



HINT

If you choose to act as puppets for the paper chase exercise, you may wish to include human controllers in the improvisation. The human controllers should appear to be invisible to the human character seeking approval.



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What kind of mood and atmosphere was created in the exercises where you played robots and puppets?
- 2 Describe the differences between your use of body language and movement in human form and your use of body language and movement in either robot or puppet form.
- 3 What reactions did you experience as you observed the human character and their dilemma in the paper chase exercise? Why?
- 4 Describe an incident from your own personal experience that reflects the issues presented by the actions of the characters in the paper chase exercise.

WORKING WITH AN EXPRESSIONIST SCRIPT

The following extracts are from *The Hairy Ape* by US playwright Eugene O'Neill. Once you have read both extracts and completed the written tasks, choose one of the extracts to present to the class.

Synopsis of *The Hairy Ape*

Written in the 1920s, *The Hairy Ape* is a strong example of expressionist theatre and explores the dehumanising of ordinary workers as they become slaves to industry. O'Neill's message is reinforced through the title of the play and the repeated use of the symbolic image of humans as primates in captivity.

The central character, Yank, who is tough and aggressive, works shovelling coal on a ship. He is attracted to and rejected by Mildred, who is the pale and pampered daughter of 'a captain of industry'. Yank seeks revenge for being rejected. His subsequent futile and violent search for Mildred symbolises the hopelessness of his existence. Despite his physical strength, he will always be a slave to industry. He is arrested, escapes, and eventually goes mad and dies in a gorilla cage at the zoo.

The Hairy Ape conveys a lot of power and energy, and has an important social message, even though it may seem a little peculiar to us today.

Extract A

Extract A gives the opening stage directions for Scene 3, where Yank first sees Mildred in the furnace room of the ship. The directions establish the atmosphere of the scene. Before Mildred arrives, Yank and the others are working stoking the furnaces. Yank's anger builds as he is provoked by his superiors. The tension is heightened by the use of the shrill sounds of whistles and other loud noises. As the scene builds to a climax, Mildred enters and sees Yank at the peak of his anger. This terrifies her and she hurries away under protection, referring to Yank as 'a filthy beast'. Note the ways in which lighting and sound are incorporated to add impact to the opening of this scene.

THE HAIRY APE

SCENE 3

(Scene. The stokehole. In the rear, the dimly-outlined bulks of the furnaces and boilers. High overhead one hanging electric bulb sheds just enough light through the murky air laden with coal-dust to pile up masses of shadows everywhere. A line of men, stripped to the waist, is before the furnace doors. They bend over, looking neither to right nor left, handling their shovels as if they were part of their bodies, with a strange, awkward, swinging rhythm. They use the shovels to throw open the furnace doors. Then from these fiery round holes in the black a flood of terrific light and heat pours full upon the men who are outlined in silhouette in the crouching, inhuman attitudes of chained gorillas. The men shovel with a rhythmic motion, swinging as on a pivot from the coal which lies in heaps on the floor behind to hurl it into the flaming mouths before them. There is a tumult of noise—the brazen clang of the furnace doors as they are flung open or slammed shut, the grating, teeth-gritting grind of steel against steel, of crunching coal. This clash of sounds stuns one's ears with its rending dissonance. But there is order in it, rhythm, a mechanical regulated recurrence, a tempo. And rising above all, making the air hum with the quiver of liberated energy, the roar of leaping flames in the furnaces, the monotonous throbbing beat of the engines.)



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Describe how O'Neill creates mood and atmosphere using the following elements: lighting, sound, movement and rhythm.
- 2 Describe how the performers in this scene of *The Hairy Ape* would need to use movement and body language to communicate their status as well as the atmosphere of the location.

Extract B

Extract B is from Scene 5. Yank is on Fifth Avenue in New York. O'Neill indicates an abstract setting of shops selling overpriced jewels and furs. His stage directions indicate, 'The effect is of a back round of magnificence cheapened y commercialism.'

The selected extract occurs at the end of the scene. A crowd of wealthy people is leaving a church and Yank attempts to accost them to avenge his wounded pride at being rejected by Mildred. In Yank's mind, all wealthy women represent Mildred and all wealthy people represent those who keep him working in subhuman conditions. The wealthy people's desire to buy monkey fur in this scene symbolises how Yank and others like him are regarded as products rather than people. This particular moment further infuriates Yank and reminds him of how Mildred rejected him.

O'Neill used masks for the wealthy characters in performance and described them as moving like 'A procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein's in their detached, mechanical unawareness'.



HINT

If you choose to perform extract B of *The Hairy Ape*, use the script detective steps outlined in chapter 5, p. 114 to assist in your preparation.



HINT

In extract B, Yank punches a gentleman but the punch has no effect. To achieve this in performance you should practise 'pulling punches'. This means you deliver a punch with full effort to make it appear real, but 'pull' the force of the punch away from the object you are punching just before you make contact. It is suggested you practise pulling punches before you perform this extract.

THE HAIRY APE

SCENE 5

(Yank is in the middle of abusing the wealthy men and women as they leave the church.)

YANK *(He turns in a rage on the men, bumping viciously into them but not jarring them the least bit. Rather it is he who recoils after each collision. He keeps growling.)*

Get off de oith! G'wan! Look where yuh're goin', can't yuh? Git out a-here! Fight, why don't yuh? Put up yer mits! Don't be a dog! Fight, or I'll knock yuh dead!

THE PEOPLE *(But, without seeming to see him, they all answer with mechanical affected politeness.)* I beg your pardon.

(Then at a cry from one of the women, they all scurry to the furrier's window.)

THE WOMAN *(Ecstatically, with a gasp of delight.)* Monkey fur!
(The whole crowd of men and women chorus after her in the same tone of affected delight.) Monkey fur!

YANK

(With a jerk of his head back on his shoulders, as if he had received a punch full in the face—raging.)

I see yuh, all in white! I see yuh, yuh white-faced tart, yuh! Hairy ape, huh? I'll hairy ape yuh!

(He bends down and grips at the street kerbing as if to pluck it out and hurl it. Foiled in this, snarling with passion, he leaps to the lamp-post on the corner and tries to pull it up for a club. Just at that moment a bus is heard rumbling up. A fat, high-hatted, spatted gentleman runs out from the side street. He calls out plaintively: 'Bus! Bus! Stop there!' and runs full tilt into the bending, straining Yank, who is bowled off his balance.)

YANK

(Seeing a fight—with a roar of joy he springs to his feet.)

At last! Bus, huh? I'll bust yuh!

(He lets drive a terrific swing, his fist landing full on the fat gentleman's face. But the gentleman stands unmoved as if nothing had happened.)

GENTLEMAN

I beg your pardon. *(Then irritably.)* You have made me lose my bus. *(He claps his hands and begins to scream.)* Officer! Officer!

(Many police whistles shrill out on the instant, and a whole platoon of policemen rush in on Yank from all sides. He tries to fight, but is clubbed to the pavement and fallen upon. The crowd at the window have not moved or noticed this disturbance. The clanging gong of the patrol wagon approaches with a clamouring din.)

(Curtain.)



COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 What does Yank's inability to affect the passers-by symbolise?
- 2 Describe how you could incorporate skills you have learnt in the expressionist theatre exercises to achieve O'Neill's description of the wealthy people.
- 3 How would you create the impression of Yank bumping into and hitting the wealthy people without them being affected?
- 4 Why does Yank react as though he has been punched when the crowd choruses 'Monkey fur!'? How would the actor playing Yank perform this moment?
- 5 What sounds could you incorporate into this scene to heighten particular moments? How do you create these sounds?

PERFORMANCE TASK



12.4 Performance task: non-realistic theatre

The task

Devise a non-realistic theatre performance. Divide into groups and appoint one person as stage manager/technical operator. Your group must choose option A or B (see below) as the basis for your playbuilding.

In your performance you must use:

- a variety of non-realistic locations
- realistic and non-realistic characters
- stylised movement and voice
- effective and appropriate scene transitions
- recorded sound and/or lighting to establish mood and create effect
- at least one distinct symbol
- extended moments of stillness
- mask and/or stylised make-up for some of the non-realistic characters.

Option A – ‘To sleep, perchance to dream’

Create a dream story in which one or more characters move from one dreamlike location to another. During the dream, the central characters confront aspects of themselves, experience memories, confront hidden fears or phobias, are tested, witness a prophetic event, or are given advice.

Option B – Humans, machines and technology

Create a story in which one or more characters show the effects (positive and/or negative) of a world that is run by machines and technology. Your performance should resemble our world but incorporate some of the features of non-realistic and expressionist theatre to accentuate the issues and concerns of your performance.

Creating and making a non-realistic expressionist performance

- Research dreams or the impact of technology to provide material for your performance.
- Use improvisation and movement to explore bizarre, odd, dreamlike and ridiculous situations.
- Consider how voice and language can be used to create atmosphere. Consider the sort of language that characters may use; for example, poetic, colloquial, informal or formal. Can you incorporate repetition, chanting or multiple voices?
- Explore how the use of transformation of objects and fabric, for example, can help to create different environments.



Performance task: non-realistic theatre

Student Teacher

Group names

By completing this task you should be able to:

- select and incorporate conventions of non-realistic theatre
- select and incorporate stylised movement and voice in non-realistic performance work
- devise and present a non-realistic theatre performance.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes</p> <p>Have you prepared for your performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using improvisation and movement to explore bizarre dreamlike situations? • considering how vocal dynamics and recorded sound can be used to create atmosphere? • exploring how the use of transformation of objects and fabric can help create different environments? • preparing a prompt copy with action, sound and lighting cues? <p>Have you used the elements of drama, skills, techniques and processes to structure a non-realistic performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting a variety of non-realistic locations and characters? • incorporating stylised movement and voice? • incorporating recorded sound and/or lighting to establish mood and atmosphere? • including at least one distinct symbol? • incorporating extended moments of stillness? • remaining focused in performance? <p>Have you rehearsed and presented a performance for a specific audience by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing an appropriate mood and atmosphere for the topic? • effectively manipulating the actor–audience relationship through consideration of the performance space? • structuring the drama into a coherent and polished performance incorporating effective scene transitions? 				
<p>Responding</p> <p>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect on the development, rehearsal and shaping of a non-realistic performance? • use questioning to interrogate the purpose of particular acting and staging techniques? • show strong knowledge of the purposes and intentions of non-realistic theatre and their social and political contexts? 				

Comments

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OVERVIEW

- Comprehensively updated two-year drama course book
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