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# A Guide to Interpreting Texts for Performance at AS and A Level

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# 1. Introduction

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This guide is designed to support you with interpreting texts for performance. It is designed to support you with teaching AS Components 1 and 2 and A level Components 2 and 3.

## Overview of text requirement for AS and A level

### **AS:**

Students will have opportunity to explore three different texts from the perspective of performer or designer during their AS level course.

- Component 1: An extract from a text presented as a monologue or duologue. Another extract from a different text influenced by a practitioner performed as a group.
- Component 2: The Page to Stage section of the written exam requires students to write about how they would use theatrical conventions and dramatic elements as performers and designers to realise a performance of a text from List A (see below).

### **A Level:**

Students will have opportunity to explore five different texts from the perspective of performer, director or designer during their A level course. A text will feature in all three components, but they will be used to achieve different outcomes.

- Component 1: A centre choice of text used as a stimulus for devised work inspired by a centre-chosen practitioner style.
- Component 2: An extract from a text presented as a monologue or duologue. A second extract from a different text performed as a group.
- Component 3: The Page to Stage section of the written exam (Section B) requires students to write about how they would use theatrical conventions and dramatic elements as performers and designers to realise a performance of a text from List A. The Interpreting a Performance Text section (Section C) requires students to present their ideas for a production of a text from List B for a contemporary audience in the light of one practitioner from a set list.

You cannot use any of the texts on List A or List B as your performance texts (for Component 1 in the AS and Components 1 or 2 in the A level). Furthermore, no two texts explored can be the same across the whole course. They must differ in terms of:

- time period
- theatrical convention/genre
- thematic content, form/structure and style
- playwright
- social, historical and cultural contexts.

You will need to carefully plan your text choices. Start with what you intend to teach from List A and List B and then work backwards.

## List A (used in AS and A level)

| Performance text (List A)  | Prescribed edition used for exam extracts                      |
|--|--|
| <i>Accidental Death Of An Anarchist</i> , Dario Fo (adapted by Gavin Richards) | Methuen Drama<br>ISBN 9780413156105                            |
| <i>Colder Than Here</i> , Laura Wade   | Oberon Modern Plays<br>ISBN 9781840024715                      |
| <i>Equus</i> , Peter Shaffer   | Penguin Classics<br>ISBN 9780141188904                         |
| <i>Fences</i> , August Wilson  | Penguin Books Ltd (reissue edition 1991)<br>ISBN 9780452264014 |
| <i>Machinal</i> , Sophie Treadwell   | Nick Hern Books<br>ISBN 9781854592118                          |
| <i>That Face</i> , Polly Stenham   | Faber & Faber<br>ISBN 9780571244218                            |

## List B (used in A level only)

| Performance text (List B)  | Recommended edition                             |
|--|---|
| <i>Antigone</i> , Sophocles (adapted by Don Taylor)                  | Methuen<br>ISBN 9780413776044                   |
| <i>Doctor Faustus</i> , Christopher Marlowe*                         | Norton & Company<br>ISBN 9780393977547          |
| <i>Hedda Gabler</i> , Henrik Ibsen (adapted by Richard Eyre)         | Nick Hern Books<br>ISBN 9781854598424           |
| <i>Lysistrata</i> , Aristophanes (translated by Alan H. Sommerstein) | Penguin Classics<br>ISBN 9780140448146          |
| <i>The Maids</i> , Jean Genet (translated by Bernard Frechtman)      | Avalon Travel Publishing<br>ISBN 9780802150561  |
| <i>The School for Scandal</i> , Richard Brinsley Sheridan            | Dover Thrift<br>ISBN 9780486266879              |
| <i>The Tempest</i> , William Shakespeare                             | Cambridge Schools Edition<br>ISBN 9780521618786 |
| <i>Waiting for Godot</i> , Samuel Beckett                            | Faber & Faber<br>ISBN 9780571229116             |
| <i>Woyzeck</i> , Georg Büchner (translated by John Mackendrick)      | Berg Publishing<br>ISBN 9780413388209           |

This guide will give you a variety of practical exercises that you can use to explore and interpret texts for performance. These exercises will be grouped so that they cover the skills, knowledge and understanding that is required for both Component 2 and Component 3.

This guide will give you a variety of practical exercises that you can use to explore and interpret texts for performance. These exercises will cover the knowledge and understanding that is required for all three components. Building in a culture of timed written reflection in direct response to practical exercises will be essential for ensuring the course remains practical throughout. The exercises are in an order that is designed to engage students, but you can pick and choose exercises that will complement your own practice. The A Level guide is designed to have continuity with the GCSE guide so the same areas covered. The exercises in the GCSE guide are perfectly applicable to the A Level, so a cross-reference guide is included at the start of each section. The practical work in this guide will offer advanced ways to explore the skills, knowledge and understanding linked to the following areas:

- The world of the play
- Performance and theatre conventions
- Themes and issues
- Characters
- Structure
- Genre
- Style
- Language
- Interpretation and artistic intentions.

Each practical exercise will be applicable to exploration and interpretation of text in any of the components. However, they will be rooted in the ideas of the practitioners featured in component 3 of the A level and these connections will be listed at the end of each exercise.

## 2. The world of the play

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### **Exercises in the GCSE guide:**

Exercise 1: Identify locations

Exercise 2: Research locations

Exercise 3: Create locations:

- Exercise 3a: Mime
- Exercise 3b: Actor-as-object
- Exercise 3c: Soundscape
- Exercise 3d: Improvisation.

### **Exercise 1: Building a ritual of the text**

This exercise requires high levels of trust between the group. Criticism should be discouraged and collective creativity encouraged. Students should feel free from the constraints of the perfection associated with traditional ideas of performance.

After reading the whole text, ask each student to create an abstract movement in response to the text. This should be a simple and repeatable movement.

Select one of the student's movements and ask all the other students to recreate the movement for themselves. Encourage each individual to discover the movement for themselves. This movement can then be repeated as a collective, and a shared rhythm may begin to emerge.

Ask the students to pause and stand still. Then ask them to call out what or who they think the characters of the play worship. Encourage them to call out abstract nouns and concrete nouns. Once these words have been shared, ask the students to create a movement that helps them worship one of those words. How can they move in a way that worships justice or bravery or money or God, etc.? Again, select one student's movement and ask all others to recreate the movement.

There should now be two non-representational abstract movements that are shared as a collective.

Finally, ask the students to stop still again and call out a characteristic that they associate with one of the characters. Once again, movements are created, one selected and then replicated by the whole collective.

Now get the group to return to the first movement and repeat it. Ask them to feel for the rhythms of the group and for any changes. Encourage them to bring in the other two movements whenever they feel the need to transform. Again, they should respond to each other by being open to the collective. This movement should continue for 4 or 5 minutes with the students focussing only on the present moment of the group.

They have now created a ritual in response to different aspects of the text. Get them to discuss what rhythms or feelings they discovered that they felt connected with the text.

### **Discussion questions**

Performer:

- Could elements of the ritual be built into an approach to character?

Designer:

- Did the ritual reveal anything about the world of the play?
- Was there a particular pace or rhythm that would influence design choices?

Director:

- How can elements of ritual be used to tie elements of the text together?
- Can elements of ritual be used in transitions?
- How might ritual influence the relationship between characters or actor and audience?

Practitioner link:

- Antonin Artaud was heavily influenced by his visit to Mexico and his experience of the Tarahumara Indians and a touring company of Balinese dancers.

### **Exercise 2: The charged space**

Ask the students to select a moment from the text where an object is of particular significance.

Perform the selected moment but move the position of the object in the space. Discuss which position has the most impact on the relationship between characters and the relationship between actor and audience.

## Discussion questions

Director:

- List the objects in the play and carefully consider how each impact the relationships in the play.

Designer:

- Consider how you can draw attention to the object in your design. Would you want this to be subtle emphasis or obvious?

Performer:

- How does the object create subtext to your character and their relationship?
- How will the object influence your voice and physicality choices?

Practitioner link:

- Kneehigh focuses on communicating the story, themes and ideas through playful acts of community. They believe the success of this communication is only possible in an engaging and charged space.

## Exercise 3: The space as a character

Ask the students to find a space and lie on their backs with their eyes closed. Read a description of the location from the stage directions, if one is available; if not, improvise a description of the space by asking the students to imagine the details. Get the students to consider how the location impacts their senses. Discuss anything interesting that struck them as they explored the space in their imagination.

Ask volunteers to perform one of the scenes while the rest of the group sits in the round. As the scene is being performed the audience must speak the thoughts of the space. They must carefully consider tone and volume as they react to the scene that is happening in their space. The actors should not interact with the space verbally but they can improvise changes to the way they deliver the lines and their physicality in response to the audience.

Discuss what moments stood out in the scene. What was the personality and characteristics of the space? Who had the higher status the space or the characters?

## Discussion questions

Director:

- How will you direct the actors to interact with the space so that it becomes a full part of your production?

Designer:

- How will the personification of space be created in your design?
- Will the set be dynamic and ever-changing in response to the characters and the scenes?
- How can the status of the characters in relation to the space be reinforced by your design?

Performer:

- How will the location and energy of the space impact your characterisation choices?
- How does the space fit with the character's backstory?

Practitioner link:

- Punchdrunk – Space is essential to Punchdrunk’s style and they give the design of the space and movement in the space more weight and importance than traditional text. However, their work is usually inspired by classic texts.

### Exercise 4: Tempo

Ask students to choose any scene from the text and identify the location of the scene. Get them to discuss the natural pace of this location.

Perform the scene at a pace that fits the location. Then get them to repeat the scene but every character thought, speech and action must be completed in fast-motion. Discuss what impact the fast-pace had on mood and atmosphere.

Now get the students to do a slow-motion version. Discuss what impact the slow pace had on mood and atmosphere.

Ask the students to decide on different paces for different characters and encourage them to maintain these different paces throughout the scene. Discuss how the different paces created a complex world of the play.

#### Discussion questions

Directors:

- How will you oversee the pace of the different elements of the production to create an appropriate mood and atmosphere?

Designers:

- How will your design choices support and reinforce the tempo of the production?

Performers:

- How is the pace of character affected by their location?
- Will you choose to complement or contrast the world of the play?

Practitioner link:

- Konstantin Stanislavski wanted his performances to be entertaining and emotionally engaging. He wanted to replicate the pace and tempo of real life, so as to be loyal to the cause and effect of his text choices. He developed his early ideas directing the premieres of Anton Chekhov.

## 3. Performance and theatre conventions

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### Exercises in the GCSE guide:

Exercise 1: Research the original performance conditions

Exercise 2: Identify conventions in the text

Exercise 3: Explore conventions:

- Exercise 3a: Realistic dialogue
- Exercise 3b: Direct address
- Exercise 3c: Heightened or poetic language
- Exercise 3d: Flashbacks
- Exercise 3e: Multi-roling

- Exercise 3f: Chorus
- Exercise 3g: Cross-cutting
- Exercise 3h: Monologues

## Exercise 1: Stylised movement

Ask students to choose an animal that represents each character. Get the students to research the animals and how they move in preparation for the lesson.

Begin the lesson by asking the students to move in the space as their animals. As they move around, encourage them to morph into more human versions of their animals, thinking carefully about what qualities of movement to keep. They should eventually be moving in the space as an animalised human. Ask them to exaggerate the qualities of movement to create a stylised form of movement:

- pace – from fast to slow
- size – from big to small
- flow – from free to restricted
- control – from stable to unstable.

Get the students to apply their choices to a chosen scene. They should experiment with how the convention of stylised movement could complement the scene.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How will you oversee the pace of the different elements of the production to create an appropriate mood and atmosphere?

Designer:

- How will your design choices support and reinforce the tempo of the production?

Performer:

- How is the pace of character affected by their location?
- Will you choose to complement or contrast the world of the play?

Practitioner link:

- Steven Berkoff and Simon McBurney of Complicite root their work in the ideas of Jacques Lecoq. Both practitioners place an emphasis on improvisation activities to explore characterisation. Nature is a source used to inspire these activities.

## Exercise 2: Collaboration

Ask students to select a monologue from the text and divide it up into different thoughts. Punctuation can be a good clue to breaks in thought.

The group should then collaborate to discover how the different thoughts could be spoken. They could try each individual speaking a thought or they could choose to highlight certain thoughts with choral speech.

Get the students to work as a group to create a tableau that represents the character at this moment of the play. They should make sure there is no space left between their bodies when creating the representation of the character.

Ask the students to bring the tableau to life and have its parts move in response to the lines spoken. They should always try to remain an organic whole, with the movement of one individual part impacting the movement of another. Perform and discuss how the collaborative approach to character revealed new ideas.

Ask one individual to perform the monologue but using vocal and physical choices discovered during the collaboration.

This exercise could be repeated with multiple characters in a scene with dialogue.

### **Discussion questions**

Director:

- How can collaboration and unity be used to reinforce key themes and ideas for the audience?

Designer:

- How will your design choices allow for moments of collaboration on the stage?
- Are there any moments where groups of actors are on stage that need special design considerations?

Performer:

- What moments of the text require the most collaboration and awareness of others?

Practitioner link:

- Complicite – Simon McBurney gathers a team of theatre makers around him for each new project. Complicite is a forever-changing group of people and so their work is always new and fresh in response to the different collaborators.

### **Exercise 3: Performing community**

Ask the students to select a duologue from the text. In threes, standing in a triangle, two perform the duologue. The two performers should orientate themselves so that their bodies are open to the third person. As the pair perform the duologue, they should use physicality and non-verbal communication to get the third person's support for their character. While speaking the lines as they are written, the performers will have to consider tactics they can use to get the third person on side.

Repeat the exercise but ask the third person to begin moving around the space. The pair of performers have to try to keep the three of them in an equilateral triangle. This final stage will only be possible if the pair is off script.

Explain that this exercise is meant to be difficult. Encourage students to remain playful throughout while being loyal to the text.

### **Discussion questions**

Director:

- How will you direct your performers to consider the community around them? This could be their literal position in the community gathered on the stage, or their reputation and position in society.
- Do the performers need to play to the audience?

Designer:

- Every character is a part of a group in society. How will you reinforce their position in that community through your design?

Performer:

- How important is community to your character?
- How does their community perceive them?
- How can different characters use the community of the audience to give them strength?

Practitioner link:

- Joan Littlewood wanted to merge the highbrow and lowbrow to appeal to working class communities. Littlewood established Theatre Workshops at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, after she had developed a craft touring the country and responding to many different communities.

## 4. Themes and issues

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### **Exercises in the GCSE guide:**

Exercise 1: Identify the themes and issues

Exercise 2: Research the themes and issues

Exercise 3: Explore the themes and issues:

- Exercise 3a: Tableaux
- Exercise 3b: Choral speech
- Exercise 3c: Key scenes

### **Exercise 1: Satisfying the senses**

Ask the students to use a list of themes and issues from the play and find moments from the text that capture them. Get the students to rehearse the scenes. Students should then perform their scenes for each other.

During the performance invite the audience to change the sensory world of the play to highlight the chosen theme or issue. They should pause the performance and instruct the sensory change. These changes could be general: "It smells damp" or specific: "Everything booms in Antigone's hearing". Use the lists below to guide your students.

Observe and discuss how scenes change when the senses are fully explored. Ask students to return to rehearsing their scenes to consider the sensory world for their characters in this scene.

### **Discussion questions**

Director:

- The characters' senses can have a huge impact on how they portray relationships and this will highlight key themes and issues. How will you use the senses to direct relationships that capture the themes and issues while being appropriate to the playwright's intentions?

Designer:

- How will your design choices satisfy the senses of the audience in a way that communicates themes and issues?

Performer:

- How can the sensory world of the characters be used to reinforce themes and issues for the audience?

Practitioner link:

- Antonin Artaud wanted a theatre that appealed to all the senses and proposed radical ideas for audience configuration and lighting. Unfortunately, he barely tried any of them out. They have gone on to influence theatre makers of the 20th and 21st centuries.

| <b>Sensory words</b> |                    |              |              |              |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Hear (loud)</b>   | <b>Hear (soft)</b> | <b>Smell</b> | <b>Taste</b> | <b>Touch</b> |
| blare                | buzz               | burnt        | bitter       | cold         |
| bleat                | clink              | damp         | bittersweet  | cool         |
| bluster              | crackle            | dank         | bland        | damp         |
| boom                 | faint              | earthy       | burnt        | dry          |
| clap                 | gurgle             | fishy        | buttery      | feathery     |
| clash                | hiss               | fresh        | crisp        | firm         |
| crash                | hum                | mouldy       | fruity       | gritty       |
| grate                | hush               | musty        | hearty       | hard         |
| jangle               | inaudible          | perfumed     | hot          | hot          |
| piercing             | lilting            | pungent      | oily         | icy          |
| racket               | murmur             | putrid       | overripe     | oily         |
| rage                 | mutter             | rancid       | peppery      | prickly      |
| raucous              | patter             | rotten       | raw          | rough        |
| roar                 | peep               | sharp        | salty        | silky        |
| rumble               | purr               | sickly       | sour         | slimy        |
| scream               | rustle             | sour         | spicy        | slippery     |
| screech              | sigh               | spicy        | spoiled      | smooth       |
| slam                 | snap               | spoiled      | sugary       | soft         |
| smash                | speechless         | stagnant     | sweet        | tough        |
| thud                 | still              | stench       | tangy        | velvety      |
| whine                | swish              | sweet        | unripe       | warm         |
| whistle              | tinkle             | tempting     | vinegary     | wet          |

## Exercise 2: Chorus and ensemble

Ask the students to choose a moment from the text that captures a particular theme or issue. Get the students into groups to explore the moment from the text.

Ask one group to perform the scene while all other students become a chorus that represents the key theme. They should simply stand in a group and position themselves in the space with the characters. Ask them to

choose their position based on where they feel that theme or issue has a presence in the space. This is not an exact science and there is no right or wrong answer.

Get the performers to move in response to the chorus's position. The chorus then move again to try to re-balance the stage. The performers should continue to respond to the chorus position. Discuss how the presence of a group/chorus on stage influences the performance. This can be extended to create a dynamic and engaging chorus group using mime and stylised movement.

### **Discussion questions**

Director:

- How can chorus and ensemble work clearly communicate the key themes and ideas of your text?

Designer:

- How will your design ideas accommodate the presence of a chorus?
- How can your design support the themes that the chorus represents?

Performer:

- What vocal and physical choices need to be made individually and what choices need to be collective when working as a chorus?
- How will you use levels and proxemics to strengthen or weaken the chorus?

Practitioner link:

- Steven Berkoff's use of chorus and ensemble was influenced by his education with Jacques Lecoq. The use of chorus and ensemble allows for meaning to be communicated, through focus and emphasis on the mood and atmosphere.

## **5. Characters**

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### **Exercises in the GCSE guide:**

Exercise 1: Research similar people

Exercise 2: Role-on-the-wall

Exercise 3: Explore characters:

- Exercise 3a: Sculpting
- Exercise 3b: Back-story improvisations
- Exercise 3c: Hot-seating
- Exercise 3d: Thoughts aloud
- Exercise 3e: Conscience corridor
- Exercise 3f: Inner and outer still images
- Exercise 3g: Experimenting with emotions
- Exercise 3h: Character journey

## Exercise 1: Gestus

Gestus is the essence of the text captured in aspect of the production or performance. This exercise focuses on gestic acting: outward physical characteristics.

Ask the students to go out into the streets for homework. Encourage them to go to shops, cafes or offices and observe someone at work that reminds them of a character from their chosen text. Here are some questions to help guide the students' observations:

- How are their bodies affected by tasks?
- How are people affected by continued repetition?
- How are they worn down by time?
- What are the tools of their job? How do they handle them and make them their own?
- What shows their economic position?
- What status do they have in their group?
- How do they feel society values them?

Ask the students to imitate the person they observed precisely while avoiding cliché.

Once perfected get the students to apply these outward physical characteristics to the character in the play. This could be through improvisations or moments of text. Ensure that this work is not completed through mime but using objects and costume suitable to the characters and the moment.

Get the students to explore the details of the scenes and their outward physical characteristics by applying adverbs that are near in meaning but subtly different. Here is a list that can get students started:

- strongly and crudely
- quickly and hurriedly
- imaginatively and digressively
- contradictorily and nonsensically
- clearly and emphatically
- usefully and profitably
- ceremoniously and pompously
- delicately and feebly
- passionately and uncontrollably
- naturally and accidentally.

Discuss how outward physical characteristics can communicate social type and attitude rather than psychology.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How can you define the social types and attitudes of your characters in the way that they relate to one another and the audience?

Designer:

- How will you capture the essence of the characters in your design ideas?

Performer:

- How can you use outward physical characteristics or gestus to capture the social type and attitude of your character?
- How are your vocal and physical choices particularly relevant to the now?

Practitioner link:

- Bertolt Brecht's ideas of observation and memory in acting are not miles away from Stanislavski's, but the end product differs. Brecht's use of the observation of reality led to the presentation of social types and attitudes that served the political or social message of the performance.

## Exercise 2: Physicality – the seven levels of tension

Ask the students to move around the space being aware of the tension in their bodies. Introduce the idea of levels of tension and give the following descriptions:

- 1 Catatonic
- 2 Relaxed/Californian
- 3 Neutral/Economic
- 4 Alert
- 5 Suspense
- 6 Passionate
- 7 Tragic

(A simpler version is: 1 Lifeless, 2 Carefree, 3 Neutral, 4 Alert, 5 Uncertain, 6 Passionate, 7 Despairing.)

Ask the students to explore the two extremes of tension first. Tragic will only be able to be held for a few seconds. Call out different levels of tension and ask the students to adopt that tension as they move around the space.

Ask the students to get into groups and find a scene from the play to rehearse. Get the students to rehearse the scenes but find the tension in their bodies. Experiment with opposite choices. Perform and discuss how the tension choices illuminated character.

### Discussion questions

Directors:

- How can you map out the journey of tension for the characters of the play?
- How can the tension of one character connect with the tension of another character?

Designers:

- How will you replicate or illuminate the physical tension of the actors in your design choices?

Performers:

- How can you use the levels of tension to present a complex subtext for your character?
- What are the physical mannerisms and characteristics that come out of tension work?

Practitioner link:

- Complicite – Simon McBurney was educated in France under Jacques Lecoq. There was an emphasis on physicality, mime and mask work alongside a focus on the great traditions of theatre. His education led him to become a detailed physical performer, equally adept at creating original characters as more abstract physical theatre.

### Exercise 3: Physical actions

Ask students to create a string of physical (external) actions for a moment in the play or the whole play. These should be actions and tasks that are carried out by the character during the scenes. Get the students to repeat and rehearse the string of actions considering how one physical action leads on to another.

Ask the students to begin improvising versions of the scenes using their own words alongside the precise physical actions. Slowly, introduce the playwright's text when the physical actions begin to run naturally one to another. Perform and discuss how a continuous string of actions captures a sense of reality.

#### Discussion questions

Director:

- How can you ensure continuity of character through their choice of actions?
- How will map the relationship between characters through physical actions?

Designer:

- How will your design choices support the reality of the world of natural physical actions created by the actors?

Performer:

- How will you ensure every action is truthful?

Practitioner link:

- Konstantin Stanislavski's theories went through many shifts and developments. He influenced people at different stages in his development, which has led to some confusion and misunderstanding. Stanislavski finished his career placing great emphasis on off-text physical actions as the starting point for text work.

### Exercise 4: Actor training – 'Given circumstances', 'Magic if', 'Emotion memory'

These are exercises to help students when their discovery of physical actions is blocked or doesn't seem truthful.

- 'Given circumstances' – Ask students to answer the following questions: Who am I? Where am I? When is it? Where have I just come from? What do I want? (Objectives) How will I get what I want?
- 'Magic if' – Ask students to answer the following question: What would I do if I was in this situation?
- 'Emotion memory' – Get students to consider their answer to the following question: When have I felt a similar emotion to the character?

## Exercise 5: Mixing Stanislavski and Laban

Ask the students to use the string of actions they created in the physical actions exercise (Exercise 3 above). Get them to apply one of Laban's eight basic efforts (see table below) to every action. Ask the students to begin to speak the texts of the scenes once they are comfortable with their physical choices.

Perform and discuss how Laban's basic efforts support characterisation.

| Laban's Movement Analysis Terms |   |  |   |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|
|                                 | Quality of movement   |  |   |
| 8 basic efforts                 | Space =<br>direct – straight line in direction<br>flexible – wavy line in direction | Time =<br>sudden – quick speed<br>sustained – slow speed | Weight =<br>strong – strong resistance to weight<br>light – weak resistance to weight |
| Pressing                        | direct  | sustained  | strong  |
| Flicking                        | flexible  | sudden   | light   |
| Wringing                        | flexible  | sustained  | strong  |
| Dabbing                         | direct  | sudden   | light   |
| Slashing                        | flexible  | sudden   | strong  |
| Gliding                         | direct  | sustained  | light   |
| Thrusting or punching           | direct  | sudden   | strong  |
| Floating                        | flexible  | sustained  | light   |

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How will the use of Laban's basic efforts support the psychological depth of your characters and their relationships?

Designer:

- How can the basic efforts and qualities of movement be used as a starting point for your design choices?

Performer:

- What basic element most captures your character? Does the basic effort of your character change with particular actions?

Practitioner link:

- Joan Littlewood was a theatrical innovator that took her knowledge of Stanislavski's early theories of psychological accuracy and combined them with the physical approach of Laban. She developed her ideas of a physical approach to action before Stanislavski's later ideas of physical action were translated in to English.

## Exercise 6: One-on-ones

Ask your students to select a scene between two or more characters from the text. Get them to rehearse and get to know the scene.

Once they feel they know the scene ask them to create a one-on-one scene before the moment from the text. A one-on-one scene is where an individual character interacts with one spectator. The performer must improvise in response to the spectator. The performer must carefully consider how the character feels before the scene from the text. They could let the spectator in on a secret or give them something to look out for in their interaction with the next character.

Give the students time to consider their one-on-one and then perform it. The one-on-one should be completed by all performers in the scene at the same time and should come to an end when the scene from the text begins.

Next, get the students to create a second one-on-one scene that immediately follows the scene from the text. Performers could go and pick a spectator each and improvise their character's reaction to what just happened in the scene.

Discuss how these one-on-ones affected the audience's perception of the scene.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How could the use of one-on-one improvisations inform a sense of continuity throughout the performance of the text?

Designer:

- Can you incorporate elements of promenade or immersive performance into your design ideas?

Performer:

- How could one-on-one inform your ideas about the character's place in a scene?
- Did you feel anything vocal or physical changed in your performance of the text after the improvisations?

Practitioner link:

- Punchdrunk's immersive style relies upon one-on-one encounters that give each audience member a different incentive for exploring the space they have created.

## 6. Structure

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### Exercises in the GCSE guide:

Exercise 1: Explore structure:

- Exercise 1a: Order of scenes
- Exercise 1b: Sub-plots
- Exercise 1c: Pace of the plot
- Exercise 1d: Transitions and juxtapositions (contrast)
- Exercise 1e: Expectation and surprise

## Exercise 1: Bits, tasks and the 'supertask'

Ask the students to divide the play into bits. These are simply chunks of the text that make the whole play more accessible for them. These could be written as a list with a brief title: for example, 'The bit where...'

Ask students to identify the task in every bit. Each bit will have at least one task. A task is anything that involves overcoming an obstacle. What the students define as an obstacle can be as broad as they like.

Get the students to look for themes that connect all the bits and tasks. Ask them to pick one central theme that they think best captures all their ideas. The 'supertask' is simply the single major theme of the play.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How can you ensure that the supertask is communicated in every individual bit of the play?

Designer:

- How will your design support the bits and tasks while communicating the overall supertask?

Performer:

- How will your physicality and voice change with what you know about the position of that bit within the context of the whole play and the supertask?

Practitioner link:

- Konstantin Stanislavski – The latest translations of Stanislavski's writing by Jean Benedetti refer to units and objectives as bits and tasks. Benedetti explains that early translations lost the simplicity and playfulness of Stanislavski's approach and replaced it with a colder, scientific approach.

## Exercise 2: Dreams and memory

This exercise should work in a similar way to 'Chinese whispers'.

Divide the students in to groups. Ask one group to prepare a performance of one significant moment from the text. During this time the other groups should be occupied with a task: creating a series of still images that capture the whole play without referring to the text. They can check how correct they are at the end of the session.

Get the first performance group to show their scene to the second group. The second group then has to create an exact copy of the scene they have just watched once. They must choose to exaggerate one element of the scene but they cannot use scripts.

Get the second group to perform to a third group. The third group then have to create an exact copy but exaggerate one element. Again this is without scripts. This continues until all groups have copied the group before them.

The final group performs for the whole class.

Discuss how the scene became distorted. Ask students to consider why certain aspects of the original survived. What was the exaggerated element in the final performance and does it highlight anything about the original?

## Discussion questions

Director:

- Could the idea of dreams and memory be used in to support your overall artistic intention?
- Does the idea of dreams and memory connect with the playwright's original intentions?

Designer:

- How can the idea of dreams and memory influence your design ideas?
- How will you ensure your ideas remain loyal to the playwright's intentions?

Performers:

- How can the idea of dreams and memory influence your voice and physicality when performing?
- Can this style of performance be used to highlight the characters as the playwright intended them?

Practitioner link:

- Complicite – dreams and memory are recurring themes in Complicite's work and can lead to interesting ways of experimenting with the theatre form.

## Exercise 3: Superstructure

The superstructure is the combination of the major themes and the overall narrative arc.

Split the students into two groups. One group has to create a series of still images that capture the narrative arc of the play. The other group has to create a series of tableaux that communicate the major theme of the play and how it subtly shifts during the course of the play.

Once the two groups have developed their sequences, get them to work together to synchronise the sequence. Students then perform the synchronised sequence of narrative arc and theme. Discuss patterns and contrasts between the two sets of images.

## Discussion questions

Director:

- How will you marry the communication of the overall narrative arc with a clear idea of the major themes?

Designer:

- How will your design choices complement and support the superstructure?

Performer:

- How do your performance choices clearly communicate the story and the major themes?

Practitioner link:

- Kneehigh use the superstructure to inform all their design and performance ideas. If they feel they are moving away from it they regularly realign. Everything serves the story. Kneehigh's idea is similar to Stanislavski's supertask.

## Exercise 4: Movement and rhythm

Use the sequence of still images that show the narrative arc of the play. This time ask the other group to beat out a rhythm they feel captures this moment in the play. They can use drums or simply beat the rhythm on their laps. They can change the volume as well as the pace of the beats. They should listen to each other but they don't need to exactly match each other. Choose a moment that had a distinctive rhythm and ask groups to rehearse text from that moment. Keep drawing the students' attention back to the rhythm they initially identified. You could ask the group to beat it out again to illustrate. Ask the students to try and capture the rhythm in clear, precise and economical movements.

Perform and discuss the scenes and how rhythm was captured in the physicality. Did the physicality influence the voice?

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How does the movement and rhythm of the production support your overall artistic intentions?

Designer:

- Does the movement and rhythm of the performance lead your design choices?
- How can your design choices support the rhythm of the play?

Performer:

- What vocal and physical choices can be made to support the rhythm of the play?
- Do different characters have different rhythms?

Practitioner link:

- Joan Littlewood and Konstantin Stanislavski – Movement and rhythm were integral to both of these practitioners. Vsevolod Meyerhold and his theories of movement heavily influenced Stanislavski.

## 7. Genre

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### Exercises in the GCSE guide:

Exercise 1: Research genre conventions

Exercise 2: Explore genre

- Exercise 2a: Key genre scenes
- Exercise 2b: Scenes that don't fit the genre

### Exercise 1: Spass (fun)

This exercise will work best with tragic texts, but can work with any genre.

Ask the students to rehearse and perform a moment from a text. Then ask them to redo the scene but this time do it in the opposite genre: so, for example, a tragedy becomes a comedy. Encourage the students to consider the characteristics of opposite genre that can be found in the text and to exaggerate them.

This exercise could be taken further with a tragic text by playing the scene with tragic intensity. Each tragic climax should be swiftly followed by an improvised comical moment, whether physical or verbal, before returning to the tragic intensity. The inverse of this can also be achieved.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- A modern audience will perceive genre differently to the original audience. How will you use the audience's knowledge of genre to cause surprise or intrigue in your performance of the text?

Designers:

- How can the design support the shifts in tone that are caused by shifts in genre?

Performers:

- Does an awareness of genre help you when developing the voice and physicality of your character?
- How will you connect audience for different genres?

Practitioner link:

- Bertolt Brecht's theories can sometimes be gathered together and applied to a performance with quite dry results. Brecht placed great emphasis on the importance of theatre that is entertaining in order to achieve his social and political goals.

## Exercise 2: Wondertales

Get the students to perform key moments from the play as if they were fairy tales being told to children.

### Discussion questions

Directors:

- How would you direct the relationship between actor and audience differently if the audience were children? (If students choose to direct a production in this way, they don't need to think of it as being for children. This exercise just encourages students to explore the wonder that a child experiences.)

Designers:

- How will your design be exaggerated to attract the interest and wonder of children?

Performers:

- How does your physicality and voice change when trying to capture the wonder of children in a fairy tale version of your text?

Practitioner link:

- Kneehigh's Emma Rice refers to their stories as 'wondertales'. This term is rooted in the kind of reaction they want from their audiences. Kneehigh do tour work but they are always rooted in the wonder they feel for their Cornish surroundings.

## Exercise 3: Play the adjectives

Ask the students to give every scene of the play a simple title that communicates who the people in the scene are, for example, friends,

enemies, family, colleagues, leader and followers, master and servants. Get the students to put an appropriate adjective before the nouns in their title, for example, suspicious friends, blushing enemies, complicated family, disloyal colleagues, flimsy leader and joyous followers, kind-hearted master and evil servants. Choose a selection of scenes and ask groups to perform the scenes with the adjectives in mind.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How do the adjectives chosen influence your overall artistic intention for the performance?

Designer:

- How can you use the adjectives to develop your designs?

Performer:

- How will you capture the types dictated by the adjectives while maintaining the meaning of the text?

Practitioner link:

- Bertolt Brecht wanted a theatre that communicated social types and attitudes. He wanted a gestic performance that captured the essence of broader themes. Using adjectives in this way can begin to shape a gestic style of acting.

## 8. Style

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### Exercises in the GCSE guide:

Exercise 1: Research original performance style

### Exercise 1: Experiment with different styles

#### Exercise 1a: Mask

Ask your students to create mask versions of key scenes. Physical action and character should be exaggerated in the mask work.

#### Exercise 1b: Mime

Ask your students to create mime versions of key scenes. They should put emphasis on exaggerated gesture, facial expression, proxemics, levels and body language

#### Exercise 1c: Promenade

Ask your students to create promenade versions of key scenes. They should guide their audience through a variety of different spaces and invite them to witness the action unfolding.

#### Exercise 1d: Naturalism/realism

Ask your students to create naturalistic/realistic versions of key scenes. They should be realistic performances that focus on the detail of human behaviour and psychology.

### **Exercise 1e: Expressionism**

Ask your students to create expressionistic versions of key scenes. They should highlight the subjective perspective of an individual character by distorting voice and movement appropriately. The performance should prioritise mood and key ideas over communication of plot.

### **Exercise 1f: Symbolism**

Ask your students to create symbolic versions of key scenes. They should emphasise the deeper meaning of the play and focus on mood and atmosphere. Movement and vocal choices should be metaphorical and representative.

### **Exercise 1g: Agitprop**

Ask your students to create agitprop versions of key scenes. They should aim to aggressively challenge the audience and continually reinforce an overt political message of the play. If the political message is not obvious they must decide upon the best fit. Slogans should be used to introduce the scenes.

### **Exercise 1h: Epic theatre**

Ask your students to create 'epic theatre' versions of key scenes. They should come out of role, use third person narration and placards. They should multi-role where possible and use minimal but essential props, set and costume. There should be a sense of fun ('spass') about the performance. Every aspect of the performance should be gestic and communicate the overall essence of the production.

### **Exercise 1i: Theatre of the oppressed**

Ask your students to create theatre of the oppressed versions of key scenes. They should incorporate forum theatre techniques and invite the spectators to change the course of the action.

### **Exercise 1j: Theatre of cruelty**

Ask your students to create theatre of cruelty versions of key scenes. The words should be retained but the emphasis should be on abstract vocal delivery that communicates meaning beyond intellectual semantics. Physicality should be rooted in the rhythms and repetitions of ritual. There should be no divide between actor and audience.

### **Exercise 1k: Site-specific theatre**

Ask your students to create site-specific versions of key scenes. This could be completed as homework and filmed on locations around your school. The performance should respond directly to the space in which it is being performed; the space should become like a character in the performance.

### **Exercise 1l: Immersive**

Ask your students to create immersive versions of key scenes. Your chosen moment should be split into small bits that can be short moments of interaction with the audience. The audience should be free to explore these moments as they choose. Each individual audience member determines meaning and narrative.

### Exercise 1m: Physical theatre

Ask your students to create physical theatre versions of key scenes. The lines of text should be delivered realistically, but physicality and movement should be choreographed and dance-like.

#### Discussion questions

Director:

- How will you select a style of performance that supports the intentions of the playwright?
- Can you mix the styles to communicate more effectively with the audience?

Designer:

- How will your design be influenced by the style chosen?

Performer:

- How will you adapt your physicality and voice to fit different styles?

## 9. Language

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### Exercises in the GCSE guide:

Exercise 1: Character names

Exercise 2: Stage directions

Exercise 3: Monologues and punctuation

Exercise 4: Dialogue – duologues

Exercise 5: Dialogue – more than three performers

Exercise 6: Word choice

### Exercise 1: Irregular voice

Get half the class to focus on the beginning of the play and the other half to focus on the end of the play. Ask the students to experiment with the meaning of the words. Encourage them to capture the meaning of the word in the way it is spoken. They can vary any of the following qualities of voice:

- articulation – emphasis on consonants or vowels
- pitch – continuum of high to low quality
- pace – continuum of fast to slow delivery
- pause – choice of breaks in speech and their length
- tone – choice of the mood or emotion of delivery
- inflection – choice of stress or emphasis
- volume – continuum of loud to quiet.

Ask the students to capture the main themes of the play in the way they deliver the lines instead of focusing on their individual meaning.

Perform and discuss contrasts between the language of the opening scene and the ending scene.

## Discussion questions

Director:

- How do the specific language choices of the playwright inform your overall artistic intentions?

Designer:

- Are their patterns in the language that inspire your design ideas?

Performer:

- What physical and vocal choices do you feel best support the overall performance of the text?

Practitioner link:

- Steven Berkoff combined stylised movement and mime with spoken text and used irregular vocal choices to place emphasis on theme, mood and atmosphere over traditional word meaning.

## Exercise 2: Gibberish

Ask the students to rehearse a key scene from the play. Get them to translate the words into a gibberish language. They should try to maintain the same qualities of voice as the English version.

Perform and discuss what meaning is retained and what is lost. Were there any particular words or phrases that were difficult to translate?

## Discussion questions

Director:

- How will you ensure that meaning is clear for your audience?

Designer:

- Can the design choice support the clarity of meaning for an audience when it comes to specific dialogue?

Performer:

- How does your physicality support the clear communication of the meaning of the text?

Practitioner link:

- Antonin Artaud believed that traditional texts should be abolished. He argued that words should be replaced with more guttural sounds, like those he experienced from Tarahumara Indians and Balinese Dancers.

## Exercise 3: Shared lines

Ask the students to select a key scene from the text. Allocate characters to students and get them to read the script aloud. The audience should concentrate on the quality of vocal delivery.

Get the students to stand in a circle and speak the lines together, one word at a time. They should try to retain the same vocal delivery as before.

Discuss which words were difficult and identify phrases that stood out. Discuss why these words and phrases are perhaps significant.

## Discussion questions

Director:

- How will you make the most of every word written by the playwright when constructing your final production?

Designer:

- Are there any repetitions of words or patterns that could inform your design choices?

Performer:

- How can you highlight key words and phrases while maintaining the integrity of the character?

Practitioner link:

- Joan Littlewood wanted the community spirit of the ensemble to be embedded in rehearsal so that it lived on in performance. Collaboration and community were at the heart of the Theatre Workshop's ideas.

## 10. Interpretation and artistic intentions

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### Exercises in the GCSE guide:

Exercise 1: Changing the size of the space

Exercise 2: Non-verbal communication (NVC)

Exercise 3: Audience configuration

Exercise 4: Social, historical, political and cultural interpretations

### Exercise 1: Substitution

Ask students to rehearse and perform key scenes. As the scenes are performed, force the audience members to substitute in for one of the characters. The person coming into the scene must change one aspect of the performance: vocal, physical or non-verbal. For example, they could instantly change the proxemics of the scene.

Keep adding in substitutes and repeat for all the key scenes. Discuss after each performance how the meaning changed with each different substitution. The students should be encouraged to understand that while a text stays the same, there can be many different interpretations.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- What interpretation do you think best communicates the playwright's intentions to a modern audience?

Designer:

- What atmosphere is created by the performance choices?
- How will you reinforce these in your design ideas?

Performer:

- What impact do your performance choices have on the trajectory of your character?
- How will you ensure that your performance choices clarify meaning for an audience rather than confuse them?

Practitioner link:

- Joan Littlewood used improvisation and surprise when directing with the Theatre Workshop, as she believed it created a freshness in the performers.

## Exercise 2: Performing the plague – infecting the audience

Ask students to rehearse a key scene of the text. They should identify the key moments of climax and anti-climax.

Get the students to exaggerate the moments of anti-climax by becoming very weak and feeble in voice and physicality. They should then exaggerate the moments of climax by shifting suddenly to erratic and irregular fast paced voice and physicality. Get the students to experiment with the inverse.

Perform and discuss how the two states affect the audience. Is there an element of surprise at a moment of shift?

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How do you intend to capture the audience's attention with your direction of climax and anti-climax?

Designer:

- Can your design help to engage and energise the audience?

Performer:

- How will your vocal and physical choices infect the audience and bring them into the world of the play?

Practitioner link:

- Antonin Artaud believed that the performer should perform with the intensity of plague-like symptoms and that their energy should be communicated with the audience, infecting them with a trance-like state.

## Exercise 3: *Verfremdungseffekt*

Ask your students to create versions of key scenes that continually move the audience from identification to detachment. You could allocate each group one of the following or you could ask them to combine more than one:

- come out of role
- use direct address
- change costume in front of the audience
- multi-role
- use third-person narration, e.g. "[Character] said..."
- use placards with the title of the scene.

Perform and discuss how the audience felt as they were moved from identification to detachment. What did the experience of detachment lead them to think about the scene?

### Discussion questions

Director:

- What do you hope your audience will think about in response to your production?
- How will your style of performance and use of conventions support your intended meaning?

Designer:

- How do your design considerations support your intention for the audience to identify with what is happening in the performance but then feel distant from it?

Performer:

- How will your vocal and physical choices allow your audience to identify with the character? How will you choose contrast voice and physicality when you intend to detach the audience from the scene?

Practitioner link:

- Bertolt Brecht – *verfremdungseffekt* is one of the dominant ideas that Brecht used in his theatre. It is often awkwardly translated as 'alienation', but this has unclear connotations. V-effect is the process of moving the audience from identification with something they are watching to a feeling of detachment and reflection.

## Exercise 4: The event

Ask your students to come up with a pre-show event that draws your audience into the world of the play and establishes the interpretation and the artistic intentions. Get your students to perform the pre-show before moving directly into the first scene.

You could encourage the students to develop different pre-shows and see how they impact on the meaning of the text. Perform and discuss how a pre-show event can clarify your interpretation.

### Discussion questions

Director:

- How would you want performers to interact with audience members during the pre-show in order to capture the artistic intentions of the piece?

Designer:

- How can your design ideas spill out into the audience and create a truly engaging event?

Performer:

- How will you engage and relate with the audience in a way that supports the overall interpretation of the play?

Practitioner link:

- Kneehigh's early work was often site-specific and had a sense of an 'event' for the audience. They have continued this in their later work by having the performance spill out from the traditional confines of traditional theatre space and play structures.