



# Set Text Guide: Equus

**AS and A Drama and Theatre**

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**Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in Drama and Theatre (9DR0)**

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**Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE in  
Drama and Theatre (9DR0)**

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# GCE Drama 2016: Equus

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## Characters

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### Dr Martin Dysart

Dysart is a psychiatrist in a 'provincial hospital' who describes himself as overworked. His practice is clearly rooted in the ideas and methods of Freud, as much of his conversation with Alan centres around Alan revisiting his childhood, dreams and early memories. Dysart is married to Margaret, who the audience never meet, but their marriage is presented in a negative and dispassionate manner. Shaffer uses the case of Alan as a vehicle for Dysart to question his own personal and professional morals and attitudes. The focus of the play is as much Dysart the man as it is Dysart the psychiatrist. In many ways he is the narrator. *Equus* essentially considers the human condition and psyche, and Dysart's inner conflict adds to the overall debate and dilemma: 'Passion you see can be cured by a Doctor. It cannot be created.' Dysart's lack of fulfilment is as tangible as Alan's sense of worship, and this creates one of the most striking juxtapositions in the play. To a great extent it is Dysart who is on trial in this play.

### Alan Strang

Alan is a strang(e) and troubled young man. The play examines his behaviour and attempts to reveal why has 'blinded six horses'. He is 17 years old and has been raised in a world of contradiction. His parents present opposite views, which govern much of his behaviour. Alan is not allowed to watch television at the request of his Dad. As a result, he sneaks off to watch cowboy films with a neighbour and initially will only speak to Dysart through the language of jingles and TV adverts. Alan becomes fascinated with horses from an early age, and encounters a series of complex religious, psychological and sexual awakenings. He first works in an electrical store and later at the local stables. Through a series of flashbacks and therapy sessions, Alan is encouraged to discuss his behaviour, and this cathartic approach allows him to understand and acknowledge his terrible actions.

### Frank and Dora Strang

Alan's parents. They come from different backgrounds (the suggestion is that Frank is working class and Dora is middle class). Frank is a printer and Dora tells Dysart that she was a schoolteacher. Dora is religious and has raised Alan on stories from the Bible. She declares that 'our home wasn't loveless' and is keen for the doctor to know that Alan's behaviour is not a result of his upbringing. In a moment of rage and desperation, Dora strikes Alan across the face on a visit to the hospital. She is clearly heartbroken and ashamed of his behaviour, and blames it on the devil. Frank is an atheist and strongly disapproves of religion. He has several key phrases that Alan picks up on, and this supports the dominant negative attitude in the Strang household. Frank is caught out by Alan and Jill during their trip to the adult film. His parents' contradicting views help fuel Alan's confusion, yet it is clear that they are both highly disturbed by his behaviour.

### Hesther Salomon

A magistrate and a friend to Dysart: the only person in the play who knows him and offers him advice. It is clear they have worked on various cases in the past and respect each other. The function of her role is to keep Dysart grounded on what matters: 'I suppose one of the few things one can do is hold on to priorities ... children before grown-ups. Things like that.' Hesther introduces Alan to Dysart as a patient, and through this arrangement she is able to avoid giving a custodial sentence. It is clear she is a progressive thinker who supports the idea of rehabilitation. She does not think that prison is the answer to Alan's problems, and puts an enormous amount of faith in Dysart's abilities to help him.

## Summary

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### Act One

#### Scene 1

Introductory speech from Dysart about Alan Strang. It is clear that this opening speech is a flashback. Alan stands in a spotlight with Nugget in a position of 'great tenderness'. During the monologue the audience are introduced to some of the key questions, themes and ideas that are central to the play – normality, mental health, faith, worship and passion. What is key to this speech is that it is directly addressed to the audience. Dysart's speech takes the audience back in time to the moment he was first introduced to Alan. Dysart is the only character to talk directly to the audience.

#### Scene 2

*Dysart's office, Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital.*

The Nurse enters and introduces Hesther Salomon, a local magistrate, who has come to visit Dr Dysart. It is clear that they are old acquaintances and have discussed both professional and personal matters with each other in the past. In this scene, Hesther asks Dysart to take on the case of Alan Strang. Hesther informs Dysart that Alan has 'blinded six horses with a metal spike'. The language in this scene changes from casual/familiar to professional/urgent. The quick exchange of dialogue between the two characters supports the danger and intrigue surrounding this particular case. Shaffer uses a similar technique to stichomythia (a common language device used in Greek tragedy) to build pace and tension. Dysart agrees to see the boy and Hesther exits. The Nurse returns at the end of the scene with Alan Strang.

#### Scenes 3 & 4

Alan and Dysart meet for the first time. The scene is dominated by Dysart and his questions. Alan remains silent for some time until he communicates through a series of television adverts and jingles. Dysart instructs the Nurse to put Alan in a private bedroom. It becomes apparent from Dysart's questions that Alan is forbidden to watch television. The Nurse escorts Alan to his room. Alan swears at the Nurse.

#### Scene 5

Dysart addresses the audience through another impressive monologue. The subject matter is his analysis of a dream he has had. The dream involves him acting as a chief priest in Homeric Greece. The psychiatrist attempts to make sense of the images in his dream.

#### Scene 6

Hesther interrupts the monologue and it is now clear that she too has been listening to the confession. The exchange highlights the professional doubts that haunt Dysart. Dysart goes on to explain that Alan suffers from nightmares, and the Nurse confirms his odd behaviour at night. It becomes clear that he screams one particular word in his sleep: 'Ek'. The staging of this scene offers various possibilities, as Shaffer deliberately plays with time, location, form and structure. This deliberate attempt to layer scenes, settings and moments from time helps to add pace and fluidity to the narrative. Alan speaks to Dysart for the first time and informs him that it is his father who 'hates telly'. Dysart ends the scene by informing Hesther that he has invited himself to the Strang house.

## Scene 7

Dysart visits Mr and Mrs Strang. The scene begins between Dysart and Dora, and she introduces religion as a major idea in the play. She informs the Doctor that she allowed Alan to watch television with a neighbour in secret. He enjoyed watching Westerns. Frank enters the scene and it is apparent that he and his wife have extreme views on various issues: religion, sex, parenting. The audience are informed that Alan worked in an electrical shop. The scene ends with Dora upset and Frank attempting to comfort her.

## Scenes 8 & 9

The stage directions introduce the concept of the 'strange noise' which builds and involves Alan shouting "Ek". Dysart observes him having a nightmare. Alan and Dysart begin to discuss Alan's first memory of a horse. Alan is resistant and tension grows between the two characters. It is only when Alan is asked to leave that he begins to open up.

## Scene 10

In this scene Alan relives his first encounter with a horse 'On a beach'. The Horseman is the central focus of the memory. The 'chorus noise' helps to build the memory. Frank and Dora appear, and it is clear that Alan is embarrassed at the confrontation between the Horseman and his Dad. The issue of class is introduced through Frank's attitude towards the Horseman. The memory dissolves and Alan finishes the scene talking to Dysart. Dysart offers Alan a tape recorder as a method of documenting his thoughts.

## Scene 11

Dora visits the Doctor. She does not want to see Alan but informs Dysart about a religious picture that Alan was fascinated by as a child: 'You very rarely see a horse taken from that angle ... it comes out all eyes.'

## Scene 12

Harry Dalton, the stable owner, visits Dr Dysart. He has strong views on Alan's mental health. Dalton tells Dysart about Jill Mason, the girl who befriended Alan when he worked at the stables.

## Scene 13

Alan gives Dysart the machine and he sits with the tape recorder as Alan speaks his thoughts. The scene is interrupted by the Nurse, who informs the Doctor that Mr Strang has unexpectedly arrived.

## Scene 14

An embarrassed Mr Strang informs the Doctor about what he witnessed Alan doing in his room one night. 'He took a piece of string out of his pocket...' The scene moves in and out of the present situation with Dysart and Frank and the flashback of Alan in his bedroom. The scene ends with Mr Strang informing Dysart that on the night of the tragedy, Alan was out with a girl.

## Scene 15

Dysart thanks Alan for the tape. Alan is questioned about his experience of working in the electrical shop. The shop is created by the actors, who take on customer dialogue to build the world of the electrical store. Jill Mason enters the scene and invites Alan to the stables.

## Scene 16

*'An exultant humming from the chorus'*

Several important stage directions help to guide the entrance of the horses and the setting of the stable. In this scene Jill and Dalton introduce Alan to the horses and the work that they do in the stable. Jill demonstrates how Alan should groom and brush the horses and the audience are introduced to the horse, Nugget. Dysart questions Alan on how he felt touching the horse. He also questions Alan about his feelings towards Jill.

### Scene 17

The scene continues and Dysart attempts to calm Alan down. Alan begins to question the Doctor to see if he can make him feel uncomfortable. He succeeds.

### Scene 18

Hesther attempts to calm Dysart and reassure him that his work with Alan is making a difference. In this scene Dysart discloses several personal details about his marriage and the lack of passion in his life. Again the structure of the scene resonates with the language and format of Greek tragedy, and the audience are asked important questions about the concept of normal behaviour.

### Scenes 19, 20 & 21

Alan and Dysart apologise to each other. Dysart tries a new form of treatment – hypnotherapy. This scene helps to place the play in its original historical context. It is disguised as a game called 'blink'. In this and the following scene, Dysart asks Alan to retrace his steps to the time on the beach and the night he took Nugget riding in secret. The 'Equus noise' features heavily in Scene 20, and helps to build the mood and atmosphere of worship throughout. It is evident that Alan has formed his own unique horse vocabulary, as words such as 'chinkle-chankle' and terms such as 'straw-law' are introduced. Under hypnosis, Alan shares his deepest thoughts and feelings. The themes of the play, worship, religion, passion and sex are all thrown in together and force the audience to question the appropriateness of Alan's behaviour.

## Act Two

### Scene 22

Act Two begins with a return to the opening line from Act One. Dysart addresses the audience in a similar way and again asks himself questions to help the audience to understand his own personal and professional crisis of faith. The Nurse interrupts and it becomes clear that Mrs Strang has lost control during her visit with Alan.

### Scene 23

Mrs Strang and Dysart discuss Alan's treatment and vulnerability in private. Mrs Strang challenges the Doctor and his approach and is highly defensive: 'We're not criminals. We've done nothing wrong.' The subjects of parenting and religion are once again raised.

### Scene 24

Dysart offers Alan a truth drug, a placebo, to help him talk more freely.

### Scene 25

Hesther and Dysart discuss the 'truth drug' and the complexities of the case. The theme of worship dominates much of the dialogue. Dysart also acknowledges the envy he feels towards Alan and his passion.

### Scene 26

Dysart asks the Nurse to bring Alan to him. He intends to work late.

## Scenes 27 & 28

*Evening therapy session.*

Dysart offers Alan a 'truth drug'. It is clear from their dialogue that their relationship has developed and they are much more open with one another. Alan is questioned about Jill. Jill flirts with Alan and asks him various questions about himself, her and horses. They discuss going on a secret date to the cinema. They agree to watch an adult film.

## Scene 29

Jill and Alan enter the cinema auditorium. Rock music plays. The scene is a flashback as Alan moves in and out of dialogue with Jill, whilst continuing to talk to Dysart in the present. It becomes apparent that Frank Strang is also watching the adult film.

## Scenes 30 & 31

On the street. Frank is embarrassed and tries to make excuses for being at the cinema. He quickly leaves and Alan offers to walk Jill home. Alan is angry with his Dad but calms down after he and Jill walk out into the countryside. Alan and Jill hold hands and Alan is embarrassed to talk about his feelings in front of the Doctor. He is encouraged to go on and the scene ends with Jill and Alan entering the stables.

## Scenes 32 & 33

Chorus humming is central to the mood and overall tone. Alan wants to leave the stables; Jill insists that they stay. Alan is shaking with fear as he enters his temple, 'The Holy of Holies'. Alan and Jill kiss and remove some of their clothes. The scene is seen from Alan's perspective. The horses respond with movement and sound. Alan lies to Dysart and pretends that he had sex with Jill. When confronted he declares: 'I couldn't ... see her'. In a fit of rage and fear he shouts at Jill and orders her to leave. He picks up a hoof pick and continues to shout and hiss at Jill. Jill is frightened and, despite trying to calm him down, leaves.

## Scene 34

The dramatic climax of the play. Alan begs the horses for forgiveness but cannot get rid of the mental image of them staring at him and judging his betrayal. The stage directions are clear and help to explain the blinding sequence in great detail. The scene ends with Alan hysterical and collapsing to the ground.

## Scene 35

Dysart comforts a fragile and broken Alan. The play ends with Dysart talking to the audience. He offers the dilemma that whilst Alan will be cured from pain, he will of course be without passion or worship.

## A word from the playwright

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Before emerging as one of Britain's foremost contemporary dramatists, Shaffer wrote various detective stories and TV dramas, and in many ways the narrative of *Equus* unfolds in a similar style. This is a story about motivation. The crime and perpetrator are known from the start, but it is the unravelling of Alan Strang's behaviour that captivates the interest of psychiatrist Martin Dysart and intrigues the audience.

It is evident in several of his plays that, as a writer, Shaffer is preoccupied with the concept of worship, faith and religion. His plays are often described as a 'reaction to the dreariness and lack of passion that he sees in much drama'.

Shaffer states: 'It is my object to tell tales; to conjure the spectres of horror and happiness, and fill other heads with the images which have haunted my own. My desire, I suppose, is to perturb and make gasp; to please and make laugh.'

Macmillan Drama describes *Equus* as 'a new, innovative voice in the theatre', and one of the major reasons why this text plays such an important feature in modern theatrical landscape is because it is an excellent example of what Shaffer describes as 'Total Theatre'. Total Theatre as a theatrical form uses extreme design, staging and production elements to communicate ideas to an audience. Total Theatre is closely associated with leading practitioners and contemporary companies, and much of their work will have been influenced by the theatrical ideas presented in Shaffer's plays. *Equus* uses both naturalistic and non-naturalistic theatre to create impact. The play uses a broad theatrical language and mixes naturalism, expressionism, choral work, masks, physical theatre and other non-naturalistic devices to present what is essentially a detective story. The language is both epic and everyday. There is a broad range of opportunities to think creatively when responding to this text, and students and teachers will no doubt enjoy exploring this text practically in order to consider various challenges that face potential theatre makers.

Through *Equus*, Shaffer challenges his audience's expectations about the theatre. He also asks them to question their own morals, attitudes and beliefs. He states: 'Tragedy obviously does not lie in a conflict of Right and Wrong, but in a collision between two different kinds of Right.'

'In this case it is Dysart's professional obligation to treat a terrified boy who has committed a dreadful crime, and Alan's passionate capacity for worship ... the doctor cannot but know that he is in some clear sense the destroyer of a passion he must forever, and rightly, envy.'

## Social, cultural and historical context

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Peter Shaffer (1926–2016) was inspired to write *Equus* by the chance remark of a friend at the BBC. The friend recounted to Shaffer a news story about a British youth who blinded 26 horses in a stable, seemingly without cause. Shaffer never confirmed the event or discovered more of the details, but the story fascinated him, provoking him 'to interpret it in some entirely personal way' (Shaffer). His dramatic goal, he wrote in a note to the play, was 'to create a mental world in which the deed could be made comprehensible.'

*Equus* was first produced in 1973, while the National Theatre Company was based at the Old Vic Theatre. The production, directed by John Dexter, was intensely theatrical. A section of the audience sat at the rear of the stage, close to the action, which took place in an area likened to a boxing ring or a bullfight arena. Actors remained on stage, becoming witnesses to events as well as participants. Stylised metal masks and hooves turned actors into terrifying horses. Shaffer created a memorable central role for the tormented psychiatrist, played in London by Alec McCowen, and on Broadway by Anthony Hopkins and Richard Burton. Other notable productions include the 2007 revival, which starred Daniel Radcliffe as Alan.

The play follows the structure of a 'case history' and *Equus* has been labelled by some critics as a 'psychodrama'. *Equus* premiered in London at the Old Vic Theatre on 26 July 1973. The production was a huge success, impressing both audiences and critics alike and securing Shaffer's reputation as an important contemporary dramatist. *Equus* had its American premiere at New York's Plymouth Theatre on 24 October 1974, and later received the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award.

The play was adapted for the cinema in 1977, starring Richard Burton as Dysart. In an interview, Burton stated that 'Dysart is someone who can articulate very well on the special privacy of pain ... because he, like Alan, is grieving'.

## Themes

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The themes and ideas in *Equus* are both challenging and shocking, and no doubt this play will ask theatre makers, teachers and students to think in a mature and adult way that will develop both their intrigue and engagement with the complex subject matter that Shaffer presents.

The play deals not only with universal themes such as faith, religion, ritual and worship, but also with the use of psychiatry and the role it can play in mental-health rehabilitation and the justice system.

Shaffer combines psychological realism with expressionistic theatrical techniques, employing such devices as masks, mime, and stylised movement. The ongoing dialogue between Alan and Dysart illustrates Shaffer's theme of contrary human impulses towards rationality and irrationality. Michael Billington reviewed the original production in 1973 and commented on Shaffer's ability to explore the 'conflict between reason and passion' and the 'direct confrontation' between 'reason and instinct'.

Freudian analysis is present through the voice of Dysart's questions: Is Alan mad? Evil? Or a product of his own environment? Sexual repression, the relationship with the mother, a moment from his past – all are key aspects of Freudian methodology. Freud argues that the human psyche is the root of most problems: impulses in the back of the mind. Dark memories from childhood. Dysart asks Alan: 'when was your first memory of a horse?' Psychoanalysis emerged as an increasingly popular form of treatment during the 1970s. Freudian psychoanalysis peered into patients' inner lives, viewing their symptoms as personal stresses or social dysfunction stemming from the negative influences of childhood events. Much of this definition could be applied to the way Dysart approaches Alan's case.

In many ways the play acts as a social commentary on mental illness, and Shaffer examines the different social perspectives regarding Alan and his crime. Shaffer asks the audience to consider Alan's sanity, his normality, as well the ignorance of family, friends and other professionals working in the health and legal system. Each character presents a different extreme viewpoint and as a result, Shaffer encourages the audience to become critical, jury-like. There is a deliberately unsatisfactory resolution to the play, and this supports the idea that Shaffer intends the audience to reach a verdict.

## Resources

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### Recommended edition

*Equus* by Peter Shaffer

Penguin Edition: 978-0-141-18890-4

This is the recommended edition for the Pearson Specification

### Further reading

*Peter Shaffer: Macmillan Modern Dramatists*

ISBN: 978-0333413739

*Peter Shaffer: Theatre & Drama* by M.K. MacMurrough-Kavanagh

ISBN: 978-0-312-21183-7

*Peter Shaffer* by Dennis A. Klein

ISBN 978-0805770247

### Online resources

Peter Shaffer obituary

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2016/06/06/sir-peter-shaffer-playwright--obituary/>

Critical analysis of *Equus*: 'Unmasking the gods of psychiatry'

<http://www.aheckofakerfuffle.com/2012/06/unmasking-the-gods-of-psychiatry-a-critical-analysis-of-shaffers-equus/>

Two interviews with Richard Griffiths and Daniel Radcliffe on their production of *Equus*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0bWhc5iqCQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISvf3oRon5Q>

There is also a series of design-based tutorials offered by the National Theatre. These are available by visiting

[www.youtube.com/user/ntdiscovertheatre](http://www.youtube.com/user/ntdiscovertheatre)

### Useful soundtracks to use in the classroom

*The Passion of The Christ* by John Denby / Sony Music

*Gladiator* by Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard / Decca Music Group Ltd

## Practical exploration activities

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### Actors

The following exercises are designed to help theatre makers practically explore some of the key characters, themes and ideas that are central to *Equus*. Some of the exercises may help actors to consider how key roles might be communicated and realised from 'page to stage'.

**Off-text improvisation** is a useful explorative technique to consider the 'before and after' life of the play. For example, a useful exercise would be to create a news report that interviews a range of characters from the play. Each character will have a different viewpoint towards Alan and his behaviour. This is particularly useful to develop the ideas of Dalton, Jill, Hesther and Alan's parents. Perhaps other minor characters in the play who do not actually feature could be considered – *customers, the manager of the cinema, Bennet & Thoroughgood, members of the original jury*, other people who work at the stables, a local priest?

**Hot-seating** is a valuable and exciting method to develop characterisation. It helps actors to 'flesh out' their understanding of the characters. Using their imagination and the information provided in the given circumstances will allow the actors to consider the voice, attitude and physicality of the character they are exploring. A more theatrical way to explore hot-seating might be to combine this exercise with an off-text improvisation. For example, visiting Alan in hospital, or a marriage-guidance improvisation between Frank and Dora.

**Gestic props and multi-role** are also effective ways of developing details of character. For example, it might be useful in practical workshops to collect a series of props that students and actors associate with particular characters. A simple flat cap or newspaper for Frank, or a crucifix for Dora, might help the actors to develop subtext through physical action. A pencil or tie for Dysart, a lipstick or hairbrush for Jill. Encourage your students to explore a range of characters, as this will allow them first-hand experience of how each character might stand, use space, behave in silence, etc.

**Exploring accent and dialect** can also help actors to consider character choices. For example, a voice workshop that explores a range of accents might help to stress a particular attitude of a specific character. Does it make a difference if Dysart speaks with a regional or RP accent? Does it help to explore a working-class voice for Frank and a regional or RP accent for Dora? If so, what accent could Alan use? What is the theatrical impact of specific accent choices for the characters in the play? It is sometimes useful to explore a vocal mantra for each character. Finding a particular line or phrase that is said by each character can help to define their attitudes and emotions.

**Exploring the vocal placement** of each character can also help to define detail and bring a role to life. Key vocal resonators to explore include the nose, the throat, the stomach, the chest and the head. What quality is explored when the voice of the character is placed in a different resonator? It might be useful to explore different resonators with a key monologue or speech, for example the opening speech from Dysart or Dora's speech about Alan.

**Non-verbal communication** is often a highly effective way to explore character, subtext, tension and silence. How does each character behave in moments of silence? It might be interesting to consider what happens in the moment of silence between Hesther and Dysart when she announces Alan's crime in Scene 2, or how non-verbal communication can communicate subtext and detail in the first meeting between Alan and Dysart. Non-verbal details can also change the mood and atmosphere of a scene. Consider how Alan picks up and handles the 'imaginary' hoof pick in the final scenes of the play.

**Stage directions** often give insight into the non-verbal details of a character's behaviour, and this again would be interesting to explore in a practical workshop. For

example, Dora in Scene 7 is described as being 'very nervous'. How might an actor create this sense of nervousness and anxiety without words?

**The role of the chorus** is paramount in *Equus* and therefore it would be wise to invest time exploring how an actor might approach this important role. Shaffer offers important stage directions and notes in the introduction to the text, which might help actors to explore performance style. For example, he states that any 'literalism ... should be avoided', and therefore workshop activities might involve exploring the physicality of the horses. It might be useful to explore the horse in a neutral mask or a blindfold, as this often helps the actor to focus their expression on the body. The aim of the mask is to encourage the development of a physical language, and by removing the face, the actor will invest more emotion and energy into the physical communication of the horse. It might be useful to research clips and images of previous productions with your students, to ensure that they understand the control and precision that is required. It might also be advisable to start with small details and explore the physicality from toe to head. Where is the emphasis on the body? Perhaps a leading exercise could help to isolate different section of the horse. Once the physicality of the horse has been explored, it might be appropriate to consider the choral humming that is referenced throughout the play. The noise helps to create a sense of mood and atmosphere, ritual and worship. Exploring different vowel sounds is a useful starting point, or even exploring the word 'Equus' itself. What happens when the word or sound is sung, chanted, staccato, loud or soft? Perhaps a soundscape using Alan's horse language might help to explore the noise of the chorus.

### Key scene work / alternative viewpoints

Another useful exercise for an actor to consider involves staging and rehearsing a key scene with a particular focus and then trying it in an alternative style. For example, it might be useful to stage the moment Dalton meets Dysart (Scene 12). Try exploring the scene with different levels of status. What happens when Dalton is strong and overpowering compared to a meek and modest Dysart? How does the scene change when the dynamic is reversed? This exercise will encourage actors to think about appropriate interpretations of characters within the context of the whole play.

### Choral work

One of the key themes in the play is ritual, and the chorus features heavily in the creation of Alan's worship. It might be interesting for a director to consider how a ritual or worship might be staged. What theatrical ingredients are required in order to make an impact on an audience? The ritual could be based on a key scene from the play (Scene 21) or on something completely different like a key image or prop. Perhaps you could use music, masks or material to develop the sense of ritual and total theatre. Choral speech and movement are also effective ways to build the world of worship. Perhaps the director could conduct the choral hum and explore how different vocal and aural dynamics create theatrical impact?

It might be an interesting exercise for your students to lead a **movement sequence** that explores the entrance of the Customers in Scene 15. How might a theatre maker create the electrical shop? How will the chorus approach the role of customers? Through movement? By creating a machine? Using soundscapes? It might be useful to take on the objects that are being sold and use personification mime to quickly establish the goods that are sold in the shop. It is important that students are able to shape and develop practical ideas from their workshops, so that their aims and intentions are clear. If they are not clear to the actors, they will certainly not be clear to the audience.

### Designers

The following exercises and ideas are designed to help theatre makers explore some of the opportunities, themes and ideas that are central to *Equus*. Some of the suggestions

may help designers to consider how key aspects of the play might be communicated and realised and from 'page to stage'.

It might be useful to set up a **production meeting** and pitch for your student designers, as this will help them to consider the play as a whole and root their practical ideas in aims and intentions. Remember that audience impact is key, and that setting up small groups of potential theatre makers might help students to consider the text in a holistic way. For example, a group could consist of a set, costume, sound and lighting designer. Smaller groups simply take on more than one area of responsibility. It is important that each designer questions the aims and intentions of the others, so that each member of the production team is able to think in a holistic and collaborative way. The design 'pitch' could then be offered to the teacher (producer!). This is a useful discussion exercise that also lends itself to research, images and presentations. It can work at the start of a scheme of work to initiate ideas/contextualise themes and key moments, or at the end of a scheme of work as a way of ensuring all aspects of production are considered. It would also make an excellent 'active' revision session in time for the exam. TIP – each member of the production team should justify their ideas with key moments from the play.

**Creating a model box of a potential set design** is a useful exercise and can be as simple or as elaborate as required. It is often useful for students to see how each scene will be played in a potential space, and by creating a model box they will be able to refer more easily to their ideas in a specific space. *Equus* refers to several different locations, and a model box design might help students to consider how each space could be created on stage.

**Making masks** could also feature as part of your teaching. The horses' masks are abstract and therefore it is not important that the finer details of the horses' faces are captured in the mask, but that the mask represents the power and strength of the Equus, the god. One of the most simple and cost-effective ways of exploring the mask is through the use of wire coat hangers. (Health and safety!) Once the masks have been made, encourage students to wear them and explore the physicality of the horses. They will then have first-hand experience of what it is like to perform in a mask.

**Exploring different music and sound effects** for key scenes is another effective way of considering how design can play an important role in the development of a key idea of theme. For example, what are the sounds of the provincial hospital? What sounds help to create the Strang household or the electrical shop? What theatrical impact is created when you explore the use of different horse sound effects at different volumes? Do music or sound effects underscore the key speeches about Homeric Greece?

If you have access to **different lighting effects**, it might be useful to explore key scenes in different lighting states. There are several different locations in the play, and lighting might help to create a sense of contrast. For example, how might lighting be used in the scenes that involve the horses, and how does this compare to the lighting used in the more naturalistic scenes between Dysart and Hesther? How can lighting help to create shadow and suspense? Have a look at previous productions and lighting designs to see how other theatre makers have used lighting to create impact. If you don't have access to lighting, you might want to consider the effect of torches or candles. (Safety first!)

Another useful exercise that helps to build the world of the play and develop ideas for performance is **sourcing and designing potential costumes**. Research is key, and will help students who are initially daunted about the thought of 'designing'. They don't have to be great artists to create great designs. The main thing is that they approach the design of the production in a holistic way. Is their costume design expressionistic, representational, or more naturalistic? What is their aim and intention? Does their costume design root the production and performance in a particular time period or style? How does the performance of an actor playing Dora change when she wears a small heel or character shoes? A coat or a cardigan? It is interesting for designers to interview actors and discover how costume can reveal insight into characterisation and interpretation.

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