

Unit 13: Contemporary Theatre Performance

Unit code:	D/502/5359
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

This unit looks at the movements in dramatic writing from 1930 to the present with specific interest in how they may be interpreted and performed. The application of modern acting techniques such as those developed by Stanislavski and Brecht allows learners to experiment with performance style.

● Unit introduction

The art of the playwright has been in existence for at least 2500 years. During that time there has been a steady development in the style and content of work written for the theatre. New forms come into existence, sometimes as innovations, sometimes returning to a forgotten form that is thereafter given a new treatment.

The work of the masters of the nineteenth century, such as Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov, has inspired a sea change in the theatre. Not only has their influence been obvious throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries but a number of writers have moved the art on and created a robust and vigorous series of movements that have become established in the world theatre scene. From the works of Bertolt Brecht to John Osborne, Caryl Churchill to Mark Ravenhill and beyond can be found a rich and varied range of examples of contemporary theatre.

Learners will be given the opportunity to study contemporary theatre scripts and then apply their acting skills from a fully creative and imaginative standpoint. Consequently, most of this unit has a practical focus while still paying attention to relevant research into the chosen performance material. This research will be the basis of practical work conducted in the workshop and in rehearsals leading to the performance of two contemporary texts. Attention will be paid to character interpretation within a relevant acting style. Learners might also challenge the received conventional style of any chosen work by experimenting with a text in a variety of styles.

For the purposes of this unit a contemporary text will be deemed to be any play written since 1930.

Learners must work on at least two contrasting texts. The performances may be an extract from the texts, lasting a minimum of 10 minutes each.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to research contemporary texts
- 2 Be able to interpret and realise contemporary texts
- 3 Be able to rehearse contemporary texts for performance
- 4 Be able to perform contemporary texts.

Unit content

1 Be able to research contemporary texts

Contextual research: eg political, social, cultural, economic, moral; entertainment; subject matter; theme

Aesthetic research: treatment of themes and issues; stylistic and structural aspects; design and specialist requirements for set, properties, costumes, etc; specific techniques of movement/voice required by the style of the text

2 Be able to interpret and realise contemporary texts

Analysis: language; imagery; psychological insight; thematic awareness; interpretation and dramatic coherence; character analysis; consideration of author's intentions

Styles: form and structure eg act divisions, scene structure, plot, sub-plot, imagery, symbol, lyricism, rhythm, metre, relationship between sound and meaning, naturalism, realism, expressionism, surrealism

3 Be able to rehearse contemporary texts for performance

Personal management: eg time management, rehearsal schedules, physical preparation, mental preparation, actor's log, costume and props, healthy and safe working practices, concentration and discipline, trust and cooperation, communication

Listening and response: taking direction; creative flexibility and generosity; use of rehearsal exercises and technique; group interaction; responding positively to feedback

Growth and development: experiment and risk; engagement with the role; character decisions; extension and refinement; learning and memorising; sustained spontaneity

4 Be able to perform contemporary texts

Physical expression: posture; gesture; tempo-rhythm; range; appropriateness of energy

Vocal expression: range and use of vocal instrument; tone; pace; pitch; control; inflection; projection; register; idiosyncrasy; dialect and accent (if appropriate)

Emotional investment: commitment on stage; interaction and response; playing the moment; public solitude; appropriateness and use of emotional range; coherence and consistency of role; character journey; nature of relationship with an audience

Learners must work on at least two contrasting texts. The performances may be an extract from the texts, lasting a minimum of 10 minutes each.

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 research contemporary texts to provide ideas for their interpretation [IE]	M1 research contemporary texts, selecting features for their interpretation	D1 research contemporary texts, selecting detailed features for their interpretation
P2 realise characters and meet demands of the texts in relation to the interpretations	M2 realise characters with skill and imagination, meeting the demands of the texts in relation to the interpretations	D2 realise characters with discipline, skill and imagination, meeting the demands of the texts in relation to the interpretation
P3 develop performance through rehearsal, with guidance [CT]	M3 develop performance through rehearsal, with independent application of direction and creative autonomy	D3 develop performance through rehearsal, with imaginative and independent direction and highly creative autonomy
P4 perform roles from contrasting contemporary texts, showing differences in characterisation. [EP]	M4 perform roles from contrasting contemporary texts, showing effective and distinctive differences in characterisation.	D4 perform roles from contrasting contemporary texts, showing expressive and imaginative differences in characterisation.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This unit can be supported by work for other units. Prominent among these are *Developing Voice for the Actor*, *Principles of Acting* and *Applying Acting Styles*.

The choice of appropriate performance material should be made with the abilities and interests of learners in mind. Since work is based on two contrasting plays, it is advisable to set separate assignments. The first might relate to performance material that is familiar to learners and not too challenging as far as research is concerned. For example, the first text might be naturalistic in style and the second expressionistic or surreal. However, tutors might consider that successful naturalistic acting is very demanding and these could then be reversed.

Although the performance only demands delivery of an extract learners must be aware of the entire play text, so that they can relate their characterisation to the complete piece. A considerable amount of time should be spent exploring the text and character using a range of strategies. For example, these might include the use of the Stanislavski system, or Brecht's rehearsal practice as applicable. It should be stressed that the practical application of the explorative strategies is more important than an academic study of potential theories.

Early rehearsals should be focused on the creative development of characterisation while later work can deal with polishing character and developing the necessary techniques of voice and movement. Learners must take a careful approach to the skills of cueing and pace. Learners should understand that performance develops through rehearsal and not assume that perfection can be reached easily. Repeated practice, as well as creative and explorative exercises should be approached with vigour and energy.

Having completed the performance of the first chosen text a thorough analysis of the entire process can greatly assist the approach to the second. Careful scrutiny of the rehearsal process, the disciplines of exploration and the rehearsal period will help to continually develop and support learners' progress.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Assignment 1 part 1: Road Research – P1, M1, D1

Group reading of text.

Discussion of initial response to theme of text.

Research activity into the following:

- the theme of the text
- the historical context of the text
- the structure of the text
- characterisation.

Preparation and presentation of research, eg notes, practical demonstration, presentation.

Assignment 1 part 2: Road Rehearsals and Performance – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4

Exploration workshops.

Auditioning and casting for performance.

Exploration scenes.

Rehearse scenes.

Run through scenes off book.

Organise props/costumes/staging.

Tech/dress rehearsals.

Performances to invited audience.

Assignment 2 part 1: The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol Research – P1, M1, D1

Group reading of text.

Discussions and practical explorations of themes.

Research activity into the following:

- the structure of the text, characterisation and potential design elements
- present research, eg notes, practical demonstration, presentation.

Assignment 2 part 2: The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol Preparation – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3

Exploration workshops.

Auditioning and casting for performance.

Rehearse scenes.

Run through scenes off book.

Tech/dress rehearsals.

Assignment 2 part 3: The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol Performance – P4, M4, D4

Prepare performance space including recording equipment.

Perform play text.

Strike all setting, costume, props.

Assessment

Evidence for learning outcome 1 can be a series of research notes that reflect the practical activities used for exploring the essential themes of the play text in question. These notes should include references to the structure and style of each play and exploration of design implications. References should be made to the characters and plot lines. Learners may present their research findings to the other members of the group. The separate elements of research can be divided between the group to enable it to function more readily as an ensemble.

Evidence for learning outcome 2 may also take the form of a series of workshops that explores the potential of the text as a vehicle for performance. The use of a range of explorative strategies will serve to deepen understanding of the style, structure and characters in the play being studied. Evidence can be offered through video/DVD recordings of workshop sessions, tutor observation records and learner notes.

Evidence for learning outcome 3 will largely take the form of the rehearsal process itself. This is likely to develop from the exploratory work conducted for learning outcome 2. Sample recorded rehearsals, tutor and peer observation notes will also provide good evidence. Learners might create an actor's log where clear evidence of character development and research can be recorded along with applicable rehearsal exercises.

Learning outcome 4 must be in the form of video/DVD recordings of the final performances.

Learners achieving P1 will have conducted some research into the two play texts, noting the main themes and style of the plays. There will be little evidence of any concerns over the relevance for interpretation for the audience. For P2, practical explorations of the creative potential of the texts will lack rigour. For P3, development of characters through rehearsal will have only emerged through considerable advice from the tutor/director with little personal input from learners. For P4, learners will have offered an adequate presentation of characters but with a lack of depth or commitment in performance. There are some minor identifiable differences in style between the two chosen texts.

To achieve M1, evidence of practical research will demonstrate that learners have understood the relevance of the themes of each of the plays to their audience, along with their cultural, social and political content. Learners will have understood the style of the plays and its implications for acting style and design potential. For M2, learners will have appreciated how explorative work has informed their understanding of the plays and the characters that they are playing. For M3, the learners are able to progress through the rehearsal process developing characterisation in an effective manner. For M4, learners will be able to communicate character effectively and demonstrate a clear understanding of the style and content of the plays in performance. There is a distinctive difference between the two styles of the chosen plays.

To achieve D1 there will be full understanding of the social and/or political purpose embedded in the themes of the plays; ideas for interpretation will cover all aspects of the aesthetics of the work in great detail. For D2, there will be full understanding of how the style of each of the plays supports their thematic material. The processes of exploration will show that learners have developed their understanding of character and theme. For D3, the rehearsal process will demonstrate creative development of characterisation with a high level of originality and little need for directorial support. To achieve D4, the performance will clearly express characters and be successfully executed in the intended style.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	Assignment 1: Road Research	Working in a production company learners research a chosen contemporary text practically for a specified target audience.	A portfolio of evidence including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> notes focusing on the history of the chosen text major themes, style and structure.
P2, M2, D2 P3, M3, D3 P4, M4, D4	Assignment 1 part 2: Road Rehearsals and Performance	Working in a production company learners research a role in a contemporary text practically and explore performance potential through a rehearsal series. Learners perform a contemporary text to an identified target audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actor's log. Recorded examples of rehearsal activity. Peer observation notes. A video/DVD of the final performance. Tutor observation notes.
P1, M1, D1	Assignment 2 part 1: The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol – Research	Working in a production company learners research a chosen contemporary text practically for a specified target audience.	A portfolio of evidence including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> notes focusing on the history of the chosen text major themes, style and structure.
P2, M2, D2 P3, M3, D3	Assignment 2 part 2: The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol – Preparation	Working in a production company learners practically research a role in a contemporary text and explore performance potential through a rehearsal series.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actor's log. Recorded examples of rehearsal activity. Peer observation notes.
P4, M4, D4	Assignment 2 part 3: The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol – Performance	Learners perform a contemporary text to an identified target audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A video/DVD of the final performance. Tutor observation notes.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Exploring Acting Skills	The Development of Drama	Developing Voice for the Actor
	Acting Skills and Techniques	Applying Acting Styles
		Auditions for Actors
		Classical Theatre Performance

Essential resources

Centres will need a suitable rehearsal and performance space. There should be resources for research, including a relevant library, and access to the internet would be advantageous. Equipment for video/DVD play back and recording equipment will be useful for rehearsal purposes.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

The advice of a professional actor can prove helpful for gaining understanding of research into character and the rehearsal process.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Jewers S, Carnaghan C and Webster P – *BTEC National Performing Arts Student Book* (Pearson Education, 2010) ISBN 9781846906787

Jewers S, Carnaghan C and Webster P – *BTEC National Teacher Resource Pack* (Pearson Education, 2010) ISBN 9781846906794

Artaud A – *The Theater and its Double* (Grove Press, 2000) ISBN 9780802150301

Bentley E – *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (Penguin Classics, 2008) ISBN 9780141189185

Berry C – *The Actor and the Text* (Virgin, 2000) ISBN 9780863697050

Brook P – *The Empty Space* (Penguin, 2008) ISBN 9780141189222

Eyre R and Wright N – *Changing Stages: A View of British and American Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (BBC, 2000) (and accompanying video series) ISBN 9780375412035

Grotowski J – *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Routledge, 2002) ISBN 9780878301553

Hodge A – *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (Routledge, 1999) ISBN 9780415194525

Innes C – *Modern British Drama 1890 to 1990* (Cambridge, 1992) ISBN 9780521315555

Kalb J – *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge, 1989) ISBN 9780521365499

Shellard D – *British Theatre Since the War* (Yale University Press, 2000) ISBN 9780300087376

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	researching the play text and characterisation
Creative thinkers	exploring and rehearsing characterisation
Reflective learners	developing characterisation, improving performance technique
Self-managers	learning lines, ensuring punctual attendance at rehearsals and meeting deadlines
Effective participators	performing in a company to a target audience.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Reflective learners	considering production style in the light of research
Team workers	rehearsing in a company
Self-managers	creating an actor's log and learning lines.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Find and select information	
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	using the internet for research purposes
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	discussing text interpretation and performing lines
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	researching historical and contextual aspects of the play text.