

Unit 4: Historical Context of Performance

Unit code:	Y/502/5358
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

This unit invites learners to appreciate how the performing arts come to be created within a given context. This unit requires the study of a performance piece or genre from any period and exploring its potential for a contemporary audience.

● Unit introduction

Performance work does not just happen in a vacuum. Plays, concerts, gigs, exhibitions – in fact all artistic or creative events have a context. They came from somewhere and their staging and presentation style are determined and influenced by a range of external parties – perhaps governments, religions, pressure groups. Performances are designed for specific audiences. These may be of particular socio-economic groups, age, gender or race. Technological advances can also affect the presentation of the performing arts.

This unit is about gaining a working knowledge of the historical, social, political, economic, technical and cultural contexts of the performing arts. It will give background and meaning to the way contemporary working practice has been influenced and shaped into its current form. An understanding of the background of performance material can present a foundation for creative ideas. These can enrich the process of interpretation, revealing insights and ideas with which learners can engage.

This is not intended to be a wholly theoretical unit. It should place learners' own practical work and interests into a context. The unit will offer insights into current practical work and related professional practice and provide some foundation(s) to learners' own exploration of ideas, discussions and creative problem solving. There will be an opportunity to present individual ideas for the performance, direction or interpretation of existing material. Performers, designers, budding directors and technicians will find a real chance to explore and create, through this unit.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know the historical context of performance material
- 2 Know how to contextualise current practical work
- 3 Be able to communicate research findings.

Unit content

1 Know the historical context of performance material

Performance material: eg plays, dances, ballets, musical theatre, circus acts

Historical: eg historical events, performance conditions, influences, practitioners

Social: eg audience, media, values, fashion

Political: eg censorship, legislation, propaganda, current events, satire

Economic: eg private/public funding, resource costs

Technical: eg digital technologies, industry standards, communication technologies, stage technology

Cultural: eg minority groups, world influence, communities, other art forms

2 Know how to contextualise current practical work

Performance material: eg plays, dances, ballet, musical theatre, circus acts

Context: eg relationship between historical contexts and own practice, director's concept, choreographic concept, presentation concept

Knowledge: eg conventions, practitioners, events, venues, technology

3 Be able to communicate research findings

Primary sources: eg personal observation, visits to sites and venues, interviews

Secondary sources: eg books, articles, videotape, audiotape, internet, broadcast programmes, class notes

Research skills: eg note taking, visual recording, editing, analysis, compiling, structuring

Presentation: medium and format eg written document, lecture, demonstration, audio/video presentation, performance, CD ROM, website/blog; references and sources; supporting evidence; conclusions

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 outline the background context of performance material, providing some research findings [IE, SM]	M1 explain the background context of performance material, providing detailed research findings	D1 provide a comprehensive account of the background context of performance material, providing detailed research findings
P2 describe how performance material is contextualised for contemporary use [CT, TW, SM]	M2 explain how performance material is contextualised for contemporary use	D2 comprehensively explain how performance material is contextualised for contemporary use
P3 communicate the results of research. [IE SM]	M3 communicate the results of research effectively in an imaginative and coherent manner.	D3 communicate the results of research in an informed, highly articulate and creative manner.

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 requires learners to appreciate the need to understand the way that performance material written in the past can be offered, in production, to a modern audience. There are two sets of activities needed to satisfy this requirement. The first is to gain an understanding of the original purpose of the material and how it would be presented to a contemporary audience and what meaning it would have had for that audience. The second is a creative act that explores the material to see how it may be performed to a twenty first century audience.

The performance material can be chosen from any period of history, including the 20th century. Tutors should ensure that the choice offers learners the opportunity to conduct research without undue difficulty so it is probably best that the work is not too obscure. A good library and the internet should give learners access to historical information. Where the choice is made to focus on drama, then a suitable play should be chosen. Learners focusing on dance might choose a specific ballet or a dance performance. Musical Theatre can also be a rich source for work on this unit.

Throughout the process of working on this unit learners should be consistently aware of how and why professional practitioners would indulge in this kind of work. It should add depth of understanding that, in turn, inspires creative ideas in a modern context. Although there is an academic element to this unit it should still focus on a creative and imaginative purpose. The initial process of learner research will be devoted to the historical context of the material. This should be considered in its academic context but it is important for learners to explore the style and practices of the original conditions in a practical sense. This will lead to further practical exploration where learners can gain depth of understanding by putting the performance material through a series of in depth activities to test the validity of the material in a modern form. For example, an Ancient Greek play might be placed in a modern setting with the application of a naturalistic style. Or, a section of classical ballet choreography could be re-worked in a contemporary form. It is suggested that at least half the time spent on this unit is devoted to this kind of practical work.

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

Introduction to scope of unit.

Choice of performance material.

Assignment 1: Background Research of Historical Performance Material – P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3

'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

Read chosen performance material.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Undertake research on:

- themes of performance material
- social, political, cultural content of performance material
- narrative and plot of performance material
- original staging conditions
- visit local theatre/s.

Create and present a research folder.

Assignment 2: Exploration of Performance Material for 'The Dream' P2, M2, D2

Explore the following:

- character
- themes of performance material
- original style of performance material
- potential contemporary style of performance material
- contemporary design potential of performance material
- workshop performances of scenes (also uses grading criteria from other relevant unit/s).

Take part in discussions regarding development of performance material.

Collate exploration ideas and findings in a logbook.

Assignment 3: Presentation of research into Performance material P3, M3, D3

'Past, Present and Future Dreams'

Preparation of chosen format for presentation of research and ideas:

- presentation to group including slides and handouts
- written/recorded document
- performance/demonstration
- exhibition.

Assessment

Evidence for learning outcome 1 could be a portfolio that reports on learners' research into the historical context of the chosen performance material. It should outline the themes – social, cultural and political – as well as explain the original staging and performance conditions. The evidence may include relevant drawings, diagrams and photos.

Evidence for learning outcome 2 can be through a portfolio or log book recording activities conducted through the exploration process. These should include reference to how the activities deepened understanding of the performance material in both its historic context and the modern creative application. Tutor and peer observation records can also form an important part of the assessment for this outcome.

Learning outcome 3 can be evidenced through presentation materials in any form. These might be a formal written essay or document, PowerPoint slides, an exhibition of historic documentation, a demonstration of performance practice or a formal lecture. This might be an opportunity for learners to direct others in a short performance, or for learners to perform their own interpretation of the extract, or for design/technical learners to apply their ideas to a short performance. This performance should develop the knowledge and understanding of the material derived from the original research project.

Work for this unit will sit happily alongside other units where work is being prepared and developed for final performance.

Learners achieving P1 will have conducted research into the chosen performance material and have developed a broad view of the original staging conditions. There will be little reference to the social, political and cultural implications and understanding of the historic context of the work. Exploration activities will be superficial with little understanding of how the original might have been performed. Any creative work will be superficial with no more than a literal interpretation of the performance conventions.

Learners achieving M1 will have conducted research into the chosen performance material and can demonstrate understanding of the original contexts and staging conditions. Their research will have explored the material, practically and theoretically, including the impact that a production may have had on its audience. There will be some reference to the social, political and cultural contexts, noting the relevance of the performance material to the audience.

Learners achieving D1 will have conducted research into the chosen performance material demonstrating a detailed account of how the material would have been presented according to the staging conventions of the time. An explanation of staging practice will detail visual elements and their implications for design of set, costume, props, etc. There will be reference to the likely performance style, for example the acting or dance style. The practical explorative work will demonstrate understanding of the performance potential of the material. Practical explorations into the themes, character and style of the piece will be far-reaching and comprehensive.

For P2 and P3, learners will present their research findings showing superficial understanding of the performance material in its historic context. There will be some reference to the original staging conditions, style of performing, eg acting, dancing or singing, inherent in the performance.

For M2 and M3, there will be clear evidence that work conducted in the explorative activities has deepened learners' understanding of the nature of the material including, for example, character, themes and structure. The explorative work may have also inspired clear ideas about interpreting the performance material for a modern audience. There will be clear appreciation of the original staging conditions. The presentation of research findings will demonstrate that there is a clear understanding of the historical context. The presentation of the research might include a written document complete with relevant documentation such as drawing and diagrams, an oral exposition with appropriate PowerPoint slides, or a practical demonstration of understanding and ideas in a workshop.

For D2 and D3, the presentation of the research ideas will show comprehensive understanding of the context of the historical material. There might be considerable clarity in the development of ideas for a contemporary production as well. This might include general staging ideas and an explanation of design ideas for both set and costume. There will be distinct ideas concerning the style of the original performance, with particular attention paid to acting or dance styles. The presentation of research findings will include a comprehensive explanation of the historical context and it will be supported by detailed documentation such as drawings, diagrams and Powerpoint sides, or practical exposition through a workshop demonstration. This will be the final stage of the process, where learners have taken a piece of historical performance material, researched its contexts and the way it was originally performed, then applied their learning to show how a practical performance for an audience today might be mounted. There will be high quality explanation and justification provided for the performance, in the form of notes, drawings, annotated sketches and designs.

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	1: Background Research of Historical Performance Material 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'	Learners are given an example of historic performance material for the purposes of creating a production.	Portfolio of evidence consisting of collated research findings to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reference to major themes of the material original staging conditions profile of original audience.
P2, M2, D2	2: Exploration of Performance Material 'The Dream'	Learners to explore performance material for production purposes.	A log book recording techniques and findings of practical exploration to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> explorative strategies used insight into character insight into themes potential for production style.
P3, M3, D3	3: Presentation of research into Performance material 'Past, Present and Future Dreams'	Learners to present research findings for a planned production.	Presentation materials to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> written document relevant drawings and diagrams as handouts PowerPoint slides.

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	Classical Theatre Performance
Exploring Dance Skills	The Development of Dance	The Practice of Directing Theatre
Exploring Design Skills for the Performing Arts	The Development of Music	Choreographic Principles

Essential resources

Learners will need a library, access to the internet and a range of historical materials for research and re-working. Design and technical facilities will be required for learners wishing to pursue these areas. Texts, journals and articles, DVD/video and audio tapes, CD ROMs, broadcast programmes, and visits to sites and performances will also prove useful resources for the unit. Learners should be given guidance on how to make best use of these varied resources to develop research methodology and project presentation skills.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Meetings with professional directors, designers and choreographers, etc might help provide insight into how professionals research performance material.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

The range of topics that could be selected for specialist study is so wide that any specific recommended reading list will be inadequate. More general performing arts texts may offer some useful guidance however. Reference should be made to relevant specialist units for further reading.

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

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 performance material presenting research into historical performance material
Creative thinkers	exploring performance material
Team workers	interpreting historical material for contemporary performance
Self-managers	researching performance material presenting research into historical performance material interpreting historical material for contemporary performance.

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 historical performance material in a contemporary context
Team workers	exploring performance material with others
Self-managers	organising an approach to research planning for, and mounting a performance.