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# A Guide to Interpreting Texts for Performance at GCSE

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# 1. Introduction

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This Getting Started guide is designed to support you with interpreting texts for performance, with a particular focus on Components 2 and 3.

The required outcomes and assessment for each component will be different, but the process should always be practical. In component 2 you will work with students to help them produce two key extracts from a chosen text (which must contrast with the set text chosen for Component 3) in preparation for a performance for a visiting examiner. In order to get the most out of the course, the teaching of Component 2 will have a direct impact on the students' understanding of the Component 3 written exam. In practical exploration you must make the approach to directing, performing and designing as open and explicit as possible. Developing your student's knowledge and understanding of these roles at this stage will mean you should reap the rewards when it comes to the Component 3 written exam.

In Component 3, 45 of the total 60 marks in the written exam will be available for section A – 'Bringing Texts to Life'. Students will be asked questions about how they will approach one of the set texts from the perspective of performer, designer and director. Questions will be linked to an unseen extract from the set text that will be printed with the exam materials. A practical approach to teaching these lessons, with plenty of guided written reflection, will be great preparation for the written exam.

Discussion questions are included throughout; these will be most helpful to students if teachers adapt these questions in terms of the specific performance text chosen and the extract and characters being explored, as well as adapting the language and vocabulary to support their students as needed.

## Set texts for Component 3 Section A

List A (pre-1954)		
Performance text	Genre	Prescribed edition
<i>An Inspector Calls</i> , J.B. Priestley	Social thriller/ mystery	Heinemann ISBN 9780435232825
<i>The Crucible</i> , Arthur Miller	Historical drama	Methuen (student edition) ISBN 9781408108390
<i>Government Inspector</i> , Nikolai Gogol (adapted by David Harrower)	Black comedy	Faber & Faber ISBN 9780571280490
<i>Twelfth Night</i> , William Shakespeare	Romantic comedy	New Longman Shakespeare ISBN 9780582365780

<b>List B (post-2000)</b>		
<b>Performance text</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Prescribed edition</b>
<i>1984</i> , George Orwell, Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan	Political satire	Oberon Plays ISBN 9781783190614
<i>Blue Stockings</i> , Jessica Swale	Historical drama	Nick Hern Books ISBN 9781848423299
<i>DNA</i> , Dennis Kelly	Black comedy	Oberon Plays (school edition) ISBN 9781840029529
<i>Dr Korczak's Example</i> , David Greig	Historical drama	Capercaillie Books ISBN 9780954520618

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 they cover the skills, knowledge and understanding that is required for both Component 2 and Component 3.

- 1 The World of the Play
- 2 Performance and Theatre Conventions
- 3 Themes and Issues
- 4 Characters
- 5 Structure
- 6 Genre
- 7 Style
- 8 Language
- 9 Interpretation and Artistic Intentions
- 10 Exam style questions

Try to get in the habit of using the vocabulary of the headings above, as they are an integral part of the specification and the assessment criteria. Each section is followed by discussion questions that are directed at directors, designers and performers. The students will only take the role of director in the Component 3 written exam, but it is important that the director's perspective is considered throughout the course. Similarly, you may not have any design candidates but the students must still have an understanding of this for Component 3.

Examples of Component 3 written exam questions are included at the end of this guide. Try to build the language and phrasing of the written exam into your lesson objectives and class discussions, so that they are ingrained into your practical approach to the course. 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 and fit with your department's timing.

## 2. The world of the play

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With both components, having a complete understanding of the play overall will provide students with a good foundation for practical exploration. It is not necessary for students to have read the whole script before they start exploring. There are a number of ways of getting students familiar with the whole play, these include, reading sections and interspersing them with practical activities, watching a live or recorded performance, or using supporting resources of your choice to ensure students are familiar with key elements, such as plot, character, location, etc.

As such exploration of the social, historical, political and cultural context is a good starting point for interpreting play texts. You can encourage connections between these explorations and mood and atmosphere, as well as the key themes of the play. Understanding the world of the play will give the students a point of reference for all their other interpretative decisions. Furthermore, an understanding of the world of the play allows for clarity in performance whatever the facilities at your disposal. Knowledge of the world of the play can link to an understanding of a character's given circumstances that supports an accomplished performance or the creation of dynamic ensemble mimes and soundscapes to show setting.

### Exercise 1: Identify locations

Ask the students to identify every location in the play text and create a tableau of each one. To support students, this could be done as a whole class activity first, or locations could be listed by students as they read through the script. The first tableau should always be the broadest setting; for example, the period and the country. Subsequent locations must be any that are mentioned in the stage directions and those implied in the text. Ask the students to link the tableaux transitions. Each tableau should capture the mood and atmosphere of each location as well as specific people or objects that are associated with the location.

To get students used to thinking of themselves as designers/directors, teachers could ask students to take turns in directing other students to create the tableau, being responsible for the choices made in terms of space, levels, posture, gesture and facial expression. When feeding back/evaluating, ask students to consider each location from the point of view of a designer: how might lighting/sound/set heighten the mood and atmosphere of each location.

### Exercise 2: Research locations

This can be completed as class discussion or as a homework task. Ask students to discuss or find out extra details about each of the locations. The emphasis should be on details that could inform performance or design.

Here is a selection of starting points for the research.

- objects – popular, every day and important inventions
- colours
- fashion – clothing and decorative
- music
- food and drink
- routines
- common jobs.

## Exercise 3: Create locations

These practical exercises should be completed in response to the students' research.

### Exercise 3a: Mime

Ask students to create individual mimes that clearly communicate one of the locations in the play. The mime shouldn't attempt to recreate a scene from the play but rather be a neutral mime focused on location. Group students together based on the locations they have chosen and ask them to create group mimes that communicate the location. The groups could use synchronisation or more random improvised mimes that give a sense of the location. Ask the students to vary the quality of their movements:

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

Ask the students to describe the different mood and atmosphere created by the changes in the quality of their movement. Ask them to decide on a movement that creates an appropriate mood and atmosphere for the location from the play.

### Exercise 3b: Actor-as-object

Ask the students to create a character's routine within one of the locations in the play, using actor-as-object. A routine or ritual may well feature in their chosen text, but if it doesn't they must imagine and create one. Effective actor-as-object focuses on the details of the chosen object rather than attempting to realistically replicate it. Encourage the students to create the details and allow the audience's imagination to follow.

Students creating the objects should move and create more than one object, but always considering how they transition between them. Try putting the actor as object routines to different types of music and see how the students' change the quality of their movements. Alternatively, you could give students the same qualities of movement as above to change.

This exercise will help the students to understand how the characters exist in the world of the play. How the character interacts with space could inform decisions about the character's physicality. Identifying key objects could also support the set designer as they choose objects that are crucial to the different scenes.

### Exercise 3c: Soundscape

Ask the students to create sounds with their voice that they associate with the different locations. These soundscapes can be combined with the mime or actor as object. Sounds should be clear and distinctive. They should be the abstract sounds that are heard in the locations but could also be moments of conversations or dialogue that would be heard at that location.

Ask the students to experiment with the quality of vocal delivery:

- articulation – emphasis on consonants or vowels
- pitch – from high to low quality
- pace – from fast to slow delivery
- volume – from loud to quiet.

Ask the students to identify how mood and atmosphere are affected when they change their vocal delivery. These sounds could be used by performers to set the scene for an audience during a transition. They could also be recorded by a sound designer and used as a sound effect in the performance.

### **Exercise 3d: Improvisation**

Ask students to improvise the character's actions within the location before a scene in the play begins. Ask the students to justify their decisions about the character's behaviour in the space by referring to the text of the play. This should encourage students as directors and actors to be aware of the way a character's actions in a location before a scene can influence performance choices in that scene.

### **Discussion questions**

Performer:

- How can the setting and locations of a play influence your vocal choices as a performer?
- How can the setting and locations of a play influence your physical choices as a performer?
- How might a character's behaviour change in different locations?

Designer:

- How will the different design skills contribute to the creation of locations for the audience?
- What mood and atmosphere would your designs create for each location?
- How will the different design skills support the different changes in location but remain practical for performance?

Director:

- What are the key ideas that you want to communicate with the audience through the locations in the play?
- How will you get the performers and designers to combine to communicate location to the audience?
- How does the location of the play influence your overall vision of the play?

## **3. Performance and theatre conventions**

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A performance and theatre convention is any technique that is a feature of play. These conventions can be linked to the style or genre of theatre as well as the performance era. An awareness of performance and theatre conventions that are linked with the text chosen can greatly inform interpretation. These can be used directly in the performance or they can be adapted so as to get the most out of a text.

## Exercise 1: Research the original performance conditions

Ask students to research the original performance conditions from when the chosen play was written. Ask them to discover what audiences expected from the theatre and what was popular at the time.

## Exercise 2: Identify conventions in the text

Ask students to pick out the conventions that feature in their chosen text. Get them to discuss why these conventions feature and other popular conventions of the original performance conditions are left out.

Use the list below to tick off conventions and make comparisons.

	Original performance conditions	Text
Convention	<i>Tick if a convention features</i>	
realistic dialogue		
direct address		
heightened or poetic language		
flashbacks		
multi-roling		
chorus		
cross-cutting		
monologues including soliloquy		
<i>add your own below</i>		

## Exercise 3: Explore conventions

### Exercise 3a: Realistic dialogue

Ask the students to pick a moment of realistic dialogue from the text and rehearse that moment. Ask them to present their scenes and discuss why these moments use realistic dialogue. This convention is often considered the norm, but it is worth discussing what impact it has on an audience. Try adding techniques that break the realism, such as third person narration before each line or orientating the bodies to face the audience. Use these experiments to compare and discover reasons why realistic dialogue works for the chosen play.

### **Exercise 3b: Direct address**

Ask the students to find a moment in the play that features a character directly addressing the audience. Ask the students to perform the lines of direct address as well as the lines leading up to them and after. Discuss how the performer changed their voice and movement during the direct address lines. Experiment with exaggerating qualities of voice and movement as well as non-verbal variations during the direct address:

Quality of voice:

- articulation – emphasis on consonants or vowels
- pitch – from high to low quality
- pace – from fast to slow delivery
- volume – from loud to quiet.

Quality of movement:

- pace – from fast to slow
- size – from big to small
- flow – from free to restricted
- control – from stable to unstable
- orientation – choice of where the body is facing.

Non-verbal variations:

- spatial behaviour (proxemics)
- facial expression
- gesture
- gaze
- non-verbal vocalisations
- posture.

Perform and discuss how the relationship between the character and the audience changes with the students' different choices.

### **Exercise 3c: Heightened or poetic language**

Ask students, in pairs, to identify as many contrasts in the text as possible. Keep this quick and instinctive. The pairs then lead two groups in creating tableaux based on the contrasting words. These tableaux are performed opposite each other. The students must then decide on the resolution of these opposites: for example, love and hate could be harmony or it could be death. The two groups unite to create one tableau based on the chosen resolution word. They could then work out an appropriate way of moving from the two contrasting tableaux to a merged resolution tableau. These contrasts can be used by performers when making vocal and physical decisions about performance. Contrasting performance choices can support the contrasting imagery of the text.

Ask students to explore the punctuation rhythm of the language. Get them to walk in the space with purpose, reading aloud the section of the text that they have been given (a speech or a page; whatever you feel will work best). They must make a definite change of direction on every punctuation mark. This will get the students physicalizing the rhythms in the text. Lots of changes of direction or few will give a shape to the performance. Ask students to identify moments that stand out and discuss the reasons why this may link to the meaning of the text.



### **Exercise 3d: Flashbacks**

Get the students to identify any shifts in time during the play. Encourage them to perform the lines around the transition moment. Ask the students to create an effective transition to the flashback. They could use sound and lighting if facilities are available, otherwise they could discuss how design could be used to create the transitions.

Discussion questions:

- Why is a flashback used at this particular moment?
- What impact does the flashback have on the audience?
- How could they use voice and physicality to reinforce the differences in time? How would the flashback fit into their overall vision for the production?

### **Exercise 3e: Multi-roling**

This may be explicit in the text chosen, a convention of the original performance conditions, or a necessity because of numbers. Whatever the reason for using multi-roling, it is one that must be executed with great skill and clarity. Ask students to assign each of their characters a number. Get the students to walk around the space and change their physicality every time you call out a character. Coach them if changes are not clear enough. Ask them to explore which body part leads each different character. Once the body part is chosen, ask them to play with different qualities of movement:

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

Each variation can subtly change a character and instantly communicate the shift with the audience.

Once the physicality of the character has been determined, introduce voice by asking the students to speak a key line for each of their chosen characters. Each time they shift key line they should change their physicality. They may find that the physicality leads to a voice. Get them to experiment with the different qualities of voice and discover which voice fits the physicality:

- articulation – emphasis on consonants or vowels
- pitch – from high to low quality
- pace – from 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 – from loud to quiet.

Ask each student to create a mini-performance that combines the characters they have created. This is so the students can show shifts in voice and physicality that can be the starting point of characterisation choices.

Discussion questions:

- How would multi-roling have an impact on design choices, especially for costume designers?
- Consider how imposing multi-roling on a performance as a director could communicate key themes and ideas with the audience.

### **Exercise 3f: Chorus**

This is likely to be explicit in the performance text, but students could consider how choral speech could be used in the performance to emphasise key lines or moments. If there is a chorus in your play, ask your students to consider what the purpose and function of it is; for example, is it a literal group or a symbolic group; does it represent a particular group in society? Ask the group to create a tableau that represents the group and how they fit in society. Ask them to create the tableau in the corner of the room with all the gaps between them closed. Get them to move to the opposite corner as a group. They should consider how they might move as an organic whole that fits the social group of the chorus. Finally, ask them to add lines from the chorus experimenting with different vocal delivery. The director and designer should consider how they would incorporate the chorus into their overall vision. The director should carefully consider how the position of the audience on the stage could affect the meaning of a scene.

### **Exercise 3g: Cross-cutting**

Cross-cutting is often written in to texts, especially modern texts that respond to the way an audience consumes other media. However, cross-cutting can be added to a play to highlight contrasts or similarities between two moments. Tension can be increased if these moments are perceived to be running at the same time.

Ask your students to choose key scenes that are about a similar theme or issue. Get them to run the scenes separately, marking important moments with a freeze-frame. Next, get the students to place the first section of one scene immediately after the first section of the other. Ask them to repeat this throughout the scenes, continuing to mark the cross-cutting with a freeze-frame. Get them to consider how the two scenes could be placed in the space at the same time, to further enhance the links between the scenes – as one scene plays the other scene freezes. Students should be encouraged to discuss the pros and cons of approaching moments of the play like this. Does it make themes and issues more clear?

### **Exercise 3h: Monologues**

A convention of some plays is the use of monologues; these can be delivering a speech to other characters or they could be a character alone on the stage speaking their thoughts aloud (soliloquy). A monologue is an option for the performance of text extracts in Component 2 and could be a part of the unseen extract from one of the set texts for Component 3. There are many exercises for exploring monologues physically but a good starting point is to look at the structure. Ask students to divide the speech into a clear beginning/introduction, a middle section and an ending/conclusion. Get the students to present each section from one end of the room without using any physicality. They should rely only on their voice. Ask them to discuss how the voice changed to clearly communicate meaning. Then ask the students to remove the speech and only use physicality to communicate meaning. Get them to discuss the elements of physicality that stood out. Finally, perform with a combination of the vocal choice and the physicality choices. Directors and designers should consider how they would highlight this moment for the audience.

Component 2 also gives the option for students to perform within a duologue; the skills from this exercise can be applied in order to prepare for a duologue performance too.

### Discussion questions:

Performer:

- Will the use of conventions change your approach to voice for your character/s?
- Will the use of conventions change your approach to physicality for your character/s?
- How might your rapport with other performers be influenced by the use of different conventions?

Designer:

- How will your approaches to design change because of the use of conventions?
- How might mood and atmosphere be affected by the use of different conventions?
- How will the different design skills help to highlight the conventions of the performance?

Director:

- Will you add conventions to the play to enhance the meaning? (Remember: you can't change the words of the play.)
- How will you combine conventions to support your overall artistic intention?
- How will the use of conventions influence the relationship between actor and audience?

## 4. Themes and issues

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The identification of themes and issues can be tricky but it is important that the students understand the broader ideas behind the play. This understanding will help performers articulate their aims and intentions for a character or a performance as a whole. The themes and issues will also inform the design choices and what the director will choose to emphasise for an audience.

### Exercise 1: Identify the themes and issues

Ask students to describe the key events in the play. Ask them to notice any patterns or repetitions of events. If similar events or moments are repeated then it is more than likely they will represent a key theme or issue. Ask the students to pick out any words or phrases that are repeated and try to label them under a particular theme. Students could also consider how the title can imply a theme or issue.

### Exercise 2: Research the themes and issues

This could be class discussion or research but the students should take time to gain knowledge and understanding of the different themes separate from the play. This kind of research could inform characterisation choices, design ideas or inspire a director's overall vision for a production.

## Exercise 3: Explore the themes and issues

### Exercise 3a: Tableaux

Ask students to create tableaux for each of the themes and issues. Get them to exaggerate the physicality of the tableaux to emphasise the themes and issues. Encourage the students to reflect on how elements of a tableau may remind them of particular moments in the play. Ask them to create those moments with the element of the tableau as a starting point.

### Exercise 3b: Choral speech

Ask students to create choral speech versions of key lines that they identified as representing the key themes and issues. The choral speech could be used to speak a whole line or may be used to emphasise a word or phase in the line. Get the students to exaggerate their vocal choices to support the clear communication of the theme or issue. These choral speech lines could be added to the tableaux created.

### Exercise 3c: Key scenes

Ask students to select a sequence of 3–5 short moments or scenes for each theme or issue identified. Ask a different group to focus on the different thematic sequences or you could give each group one scene and all explore one key theme or issue. Once the students have run their scenes a couple of times ask them to run the scenes focusing on spatial relationships and levels. Encourage them to try to capture the essence of the scenes in how the characters interact with the space and at different levels. Get them to exaggerate their choices. Finally, add the lines back into the spatial scene and get the students to alter their vocal choices based on their position in the space. This will inevitably lead students to have discussions about the status of different characters. Designers should consider how their choices can reinforce these relationships for the audience. Directors should consider how the position of the performers in the space can support the clarity of meaning for an audience.

### Discussion questions:

Performer:

- How will your use of voice highlight and enhance the communication of themes and issues?
- How will your use of physicality highlight and enhance the communication of themes and issues?
- How might your non-verbal communication contrast with your vocal and physical choices to support themes and issues?

Designer:

- How will your design choices symbolise the different themes and issues?
- What mood and atmosphere needs to be created to support the themes and issues?
- How will the different design skills ensure that key thematic moments are highlighted for the audience?

Director:

- Is there one theme or issue that you want to highlight over all others for your overall artistic intention?

- What type of performance space would suit the clear communication of the themes and issues with the audience?
- Will you emphasise particular characters that support the themes and issues of the play?

## 5. Characters

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Developing detailed and in-depth understanding of the characters in a play will often be key to unlocking the students' interest and consequently the audience's interest. Keeping the students as active as possible whilst they explore and experiment with the complexities of character is crucial. A practical approach that is detailed and rigorous will maintain energy levels and lead to engaging performances. Performers will be the focus of these exercises, but the discoveries made will be crucial for director and designer decisions. A good way of determining whether a character has been fully explored is to establish its given circumstances.

- 1 Who am I?
- 2 Where am I?
- 3 When is it?
- 4 Where have I just come from?
- 5 What do I want? (Objectives)
- 6 How will I get what I want?

These questions can be answered at the end of character work in order to record your discoveries. If any of these questions are left unanswered then more character exploration is needed.

The completion of this exercise may be of benefit to performance students when they are preparing their written pieces to communicate their artistic intention to the examiner for Component 2. The questions that students will respond to for this are listed at the end of this document.

### Exercise 1: Research similar people

Ask students to create and maintain a photo collage of people that are similar to characters from the play. Students should start with people that they know and then look further afield: people from culture such as celebrities, musicians, actors and even other characters; people from history; political figures. This collection of people will give the students a framework of vocal and physical traits on which to build their own characters.

### Exercise 2: Role-on-the-wall

These can be extensions of the character collages. Ask students to put these on the wall and add comments and ideas as they explore characters. These provide a good reference point when revisiting ideas and details discovered during exploration.

### Exercise 3: Explore characters

#### Exercise 3a: Sculpting

In pairs, ask the students to sculpt their partner into the physicality of the chosen character. The sculptor can ask the character to speak particular

lines from the text and get them to move in the space. The sculptor should continually be shaping the character's physicality. Performers should note how the physicality of the character influences vocal choices. Costume designers should consider how the physicality of the character needs to be accommodated and reinforced by the costume.

### **Exercise 3b: Back-story improvisations**

Ask small groups to develop prepared improvisations of every character's back-story. This should include significant moments in their lives. Students must be able to justify their decisions by referring to the text. Ask them to improvise the moment directly before a scene. These improvisations will help to understand and communicate a character's motivations. Directors should consider how these back-stories could influence their interpretation of different scenes. Designers can use the details of the back-story to develop costumes or identify the mood and atmosphere they want to create.

### **Exercise 3c: Hot-seating**

This is a great way to get the students immersed in their characters. It is a group effort and they will share the responsibility for developing detailed characters. This will mean that everyone has a clear understanding of all the characters.

The basic hot-seating method is:

- One person remains in role throughout a series of questions asked by the other members of the group. The commitment to remaining in role and thinking as the character is crucial. This requires some preparation time to ensure success.
- The people asking the questions are integral to the success of hot-seating. While closed questions can clarify facts, it is open questions that allow for the development of detail through effective improvisation.
- Questions that build on from previous responses provide the person in the 'hot seat' with opportunities to grow a coherent character.

Here is a selection of questions that can be used as an effective starting point for hot-seating:

- 1 What do you like about yourself?
- 2 What don't you like about yourself?
- 3 What is your greatest fear?
- 4 What is the trait in others that you dislike?
- 5 What is your greatest regret?
- 6 What is your idea of perfect happiness?
- 7 What would most improve the quality of your life?
- 8 How would you like to be remembered?

Variations of hot-seating:

- hot-seat multiple characters together
- raise the stakes of the questioning by setting it up as an interrogation
- swap characters and get students to question their 'own' character
- pause improvisations and get other characters to hot-seat one of the characters, all in role. (This is an adaptation of Boal's Forum Theatre.)

Details that come up in hot-seating can influence a performer's decisions, but they will also give ideas to designers with regard to costume, mood and atmosphere. Directors will be able to consider how characters will relate to each other to maximise impact on the audience.

### **Exercise 3d: Thoughts aloud**

Ask students to select a key scene of a character. Get the students to rehearse the scene and repeat. Ask the students to speak their character's brief thoughts before each line is spoken. Encourage students to consider how the character feels about: themselves; the other character/s; the situation. Make sure that each thought is concise but detailed. The most interesting thoughts are ones that contrast the spoken language. Ask students how the spoken thoughts influenced their physicality and non-verbal communication. You could introduce the term subtext at this point. Directors must consider how the subtext can influence their overall concept for the production. Subtext can also be reinforced by the decisions of the designers.

### **Exercise 3e: Conscience corridor**

Ask the students to choose a moment in the play where a character has an important decision to make. Get the students to form two lines facing each other. One student physicalizes their character and walks through the corridor created by the two lines. As they pass by, one side of the corridor will give the positive side of the character's conscience and persuade them to make the right decision, while the other side will give the negative side. The students can then run the scene immediately after the conscience corridor and identify ways that they can communicate their conscience through non-verbal and physical decisions. The scene can be paused and repeated, with people giving the character directions in the style of Boal's Forum theatre technique. Directors and designers can consider how these moments of key decisions can be highlighted for the audience.

### **Exercise 3f: Inner and outer still images**

Ask students, in pairs, to choose key moments for their chosen character. Get the pairs to create an individual still image each: one communicating the character's inner feelings and the other creating the outer feelings. This will get students to consider how characters may well present themselves differently to how they feel inside. This will lead to an awareness of the complexity of characters that will influence the physical and non-verbal decisions made by performers. Directors will have to oversee how much of the inner character is revealed to the audience. Designers can develop ideas that represent and symbolise the inner character so that the performance of the outer character is made more complex for the audience.

### **Exercise 3g: Experimenting with emotions**

Ask the students to perform a key scene for their chosen character. Get them to use Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion to identify which emotions the character experiences in the scene. The Wheel of Emotion can then be used to identify the opposite emotion. Ask the students to experiment with playing the opposite emotion to their original choice. Students should discuss whether playing the opposite emotion clarifies and intensifies the meaning of the scene or detracts from it. Directors should consider how they will control emotion so as to draw the audience in and engage them in the performance. Designers can use emotions as a trigger for their design decisions, especially when considering colour and tone.

### **Exercise 3h: Character journey**

Ask students to explore the first introduction of a character and then explore the final moments of that character on stage. Get the students to consider how the language of the text changes between the scenes. They should consider what these changes communicate about the character. Next, get the students to create a sequence of still or moving images that link the beginning and end moment for the character. These sequences can include improvised ideas as well as moments directly from the play. The aim is to map the journey that the character goes on from the moment they enter to their final moment on the stage. Students can return to these character journey maps when they approach their performance of an extract in Component 2 or as they prepare for Section A of the Component 3 written exam. Directors should consider how each character's journey complements the overall vision for the production. Designers must consider how their designs will change and evolve with the character journeys.

#### **Discussion questions:**

Performer:

- How will your use of voice highlight and enhance the communication of character?
- How will your use of physicality highlight and enhance the communication of character?
- How might your non-verbal communication contrast with your vocal and physical choices to support complexity of character?

Designer:

- How will your design choices symbolise the different characters?
- What mood and atmosphere needs to be created to support the emotions and journeys of the different characters?
- How will the different design skills ensure that character development is highlighted for the audience?

Director:

- Is there one character that you want to highlight above all others for your overall artistic intention?
- If one character stands out compared to the other characters, how will their perspective on the world be built into your overall vision for the production?
- How do you want your characters to relate to the audience?

## **6. Structure**

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It is crucial that students show that they are aware of where the extract fits within the play as a whole. This is the case for both Component 2 and Component 3. Decisions that you make should fit with the spirit of the overall text.



## Exercise 1: Explore structure

### Exercise 1a: Order of scenes

Ask the students to create a sequence of still images that represent every scene in the play. Get the students to join these images together with transitions that support and connect the scenes. The students should rehearse this sequence so that transitions are smooth and seamless. Finally, the students should develop 3–5 key moments in more depth. This could be a physical theatre movement sequence that captures the moment or it could be that the moment is acted out in full. Ask the students to perform their sequence of events. If you have multiple groups doing this they can compare and contrast their performances. Get them to come to a shared understanding of why the playwright chose to show these moments. Performers can consider how their character changes throughout the text. Designers can consider any shifts and changes that need to be built into their design ideas. Directors should begin to consider how their overall concept for the production would bring these events together.

### Exercise 1b: Sub-plots

Ask students to identify any piece of the action that is less important than the main plot. Get the students to create a performance of the whole sub-plot or to select a key moment from the sub-plot to explore in full. Ask them to discuss how the sub-plot links to the main plot: are there characters or themes that connect the two? Directors and designers should consider how the sub-plot can be used to reinforce the main plot. Performers should consider similarities and differences in performance style between plot and sub-plot: for example, is the sub-plot comical?

### Exercise 1c: Pace of the plot

Ask students to write titles for each scene on individual sheets of paper. Arrange these in order on the floor. Get the students to identify which are short and which are long scenes. Alternatively, the students could narrate this over a series of still images. Ask them to be specific about the length of a scene in terms of lines or pages. Half the group should then be allocated a long scene to rehearse while the other half rehearses several shorter scenes. It would be best to select scenes that are close to each other in the play. Instruct the students in the long scene group to take a 'leisurely' approach to the pace of the scene. Ask the group with shorter scenes to take a 'hectic' approach to the pace of the scenes. Perform and discuss what contrasts are revealed: why are particular scenes slower while others are faster? Directors must consider how this fits in with the overall interpretation of the play. Designers must consider how these contrasts in pace can be reinforced in their designs. Performers must consider how vocal and physical choices can contribute to the pace of the plot. All students must consider every scene in its context within the overall play.

### Exercise 1d: Transitions and juxtapositions (contrast)

Ask students to run every transition in the play. This will involve running the end and the beginning of each scene. Get them to work out how the performers and designers could support these transitions. As they explore these transitions the students should consider what two scenes have been joined together and whether these scenes juxtapose (contrast) each other. The scenes that do juxtapose will need careful transitions, as the fact that these two contrasting scenes have been placed one after the other is no

accident. Directors should consider how transitions and juxtaposing scenes can be highlighted to communicate key themes and character developments. Performers must consider how they will instantly establish the characters in each scene. Designers must consider the practicalities of the transitions and how their designs will support the contrasts between scenes.

### **Exercise 1e: Expectation and surprise**

Ask the students to perform the opening of the play and to identify what expectations are raised by the action: what does the audience think will happen to the characters? Get students to improvise short scenes that show what they think the audience expects to happen. Discuss how these are similar or different to the actual play. Directors should consider how these expectations are highlighted and marked for the audience. Designers should consider the clues that their designs can give to future events. Performers should consider what the character expects and how this is different or similar to the audience's expectations. Ask students to identify where expectations are not met in the play and how this causes surprise for the audience. Get them to explore and rehearse these scenes in detail and to discuss why they are such a surprise and what impact these scenes have on the tone and atmosphere of the play.

### **Discussion questions**

Performer:

- How will your use of voice clearly establish character in each new scene?
- How will your use of physicality clearly establish character in each new scene?
- How might your non-verbal communication change with each new scene?

Designer:

- How will your design choices capture juxtaposing scenes?
- What mood and atmosphere needs to be created during the transitions between scenes?
- How will the different design skills complement the overall structure and telling of the play's story?

Director:

- Will you change the order of the scenes to support your overall artistic intention?
- What is the story that you want to be told through the play's structure?
- How will you control the pace and rhythm of the overall play to ensure the audience is engaged?

## **7. Genre**

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Genre is a way of classifying a play based on the features of plot and character that are similar with other plays.

## Exercise 1: Research genre conventions

Ask the students to research the conventions of the genre for your chosen play. (The genres for the set texts of Component 3 are listed in the introduction to this guide.) Get the students to identify features of the plot and particular character types that fit the genre.

## Exercise 2: Explore genre

### Exercise 2a: Key genre scenes

Ask students to select key scenes that fit the genre best. Rehearse the scene and experiment with ways that voice and movement can be changed to fit the character and plot conventions of the genre.

#### Qualities of movement

- Pace – from fast to slow
- Size – from big to small
- Flow – from free to restricted
- Control – from stable to unstable

#### Qualities of voice

- Articulation – emphasis on consonants or vowels
- Pitch – from high to low quality
- Pace – from 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 – from loud to quiet

Get students to discuss why their voice and movement choices fit the genre. They should also discuss why genre could be an important way of communicating with an audience.

### Exercise 2b: Scenes that don't fit the genre

Playwrights often play with the idea of genre and mix them up. Do the same exercise as above to explore scenes that don't seem to fit the genre. The voice and movement choices may well contrast with the scenes that fitted the genre. Get the students to discuss why these scenes don't fit and why they might be important for an audience.

### Discussion questions

Performer:

- How will your use of voice support or contrast the genre of the play?
- How will your use of physicality support or contrast the genre of the play?
- How will your non-verbal communication support or contrast the genre of the play?

Designer:

- How will your design choices support the genre of the play?

- What mood and atmosphere needs to be created for the play's genre?
- How will the different design skills compliment the communication of genre to the audience?

Director:

- Will you choose to emphasise or play down the genre of the play?
- How can genre support your artistic intentions for the performance?
- How will you play on the audience's expectations of the genre to communicate complex meaning to the audience?

## 8. Style

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In Components 2 and 3, ideas should be rooted in the original performance conditions and the intentions of the playwright. The writers of the texts would have been influenced by styles of theatre, and students should have an opportunity to explore these styles in depth. Their knowledge of the original style can then inform performance ideas. The GCSE course requires students to understand the text and the original intentions. The time for reinterpretation and reinvention is during the A level.

### Exercise 1: Research original performance style

Encourage the students to identify the style of the original performance. Historical plays will most likely be rooted in genre conventions and with distinctive stylistic elements. Terms such as naturalism and expressionism did not come into use until the 19th century. It may be interesting to ask students where there are similarities between genre and style conventions in the text they are exploring.

Here are some questions to help students identify the style:

#### **Mask:**

- Are lines of text, physical action and character reinforced by masks as the primary form of communication?

#### **Naturalism:**

- Is your text realistic?
- Is there a focus on human behaviour?
- Are the character motivations and actions influenced by their setting and situation?
- Do the conflicts in the work lead to life-changing significance?
- Is there an emphasis on everyday speech and movement?

**Realism** (similar to Naturalism except characters are not seen to be influenced by their environment but possess individual choice instead):

- Are the characters' motivations and actions rooted in individual choice?

#### **Symbolism:**

- Is your text fantastical or mythological?
- Is mood and atmosphere central to the communication of meaning?
- Is there a clear sense of connection between the images and ideas in your text but a lack of precise meaning?

**Agitprop:**

- Does your text challenge your audience?
- Are the persuasive techniques of propaganda common in your text?
- Is there an overt political message in your text?
- Are slogans important in your text?

**Site-specific theatre:**

- Does your text respond directly to the space in which it will be performed?
- Is the performance space an important 'character' in the text?

**Verbatim or documentary theatre:**

- Are the words used in your work only taken from real life stories?

**Grand Guignol:**

- Are the conventions of horror used to terrify your audience?

**Physical theatre:**

- Is physicality and movement used to complement more naturalistic/realistic scenes?

## Exercise 2: Style that communicates meaning

Ask your students to choose a key moment in the text that has clear conventions of the performance style. Tell students that the purpose of the exercise is to explore how the performance style communicates meaning to an audience. Ask groups to rehearse and develop their chosen scene with an emphasis on the style that is in the text. Then get them to create a second version with an imposed style. Ask the students to perform and discuss how the meaning changes with a change in style.

## Exercise 3: Clarity through performance style

Ask students to select a scene that they feel least comfortable with. Encourage them to look for any opportunities to use the performance style of the writer's original intentions, to see whether the meaning becomes clearer. This should be experimental but remain within the boundaries of the original performance style.

**Discussion questions**

Performer:

- How will the style of performance change how you use your voice?
- How will the style of performance change how you use your physicality?
- How will your non-verbal communication change because of the chosen style?
- How can the conventions of the style inform or reinforce your characterisation choices?

Designer:

- How will your design choices fit the chosen style?
- What mood and atmosphere fits the original performance style?
- How is design used as a convention of the style?

Director:

- What conventions of the original style will you use in your performance?
- How will the conventions of the style reinforce meaning and your artistic intentions?
- How will the style affect the pace and tension of your performance?

## 9. Language

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The language of play texts offers students a wealth of opportunities for exploration and interpretation. They must develop a knowledge and understanding of how playwrights use the different elements of plays to build something for performance. The students must explore this language physically and vocally. They must consider how meaning comes through performance choices as much as it does through the literary meaning they word learn in English.

### Exercise 1: Character names

Get the students to create group improvisations inspired by a character's name from your chosen text. Keep the content free and open as long as it is a response to the name. Perform and discuss. Performers can discuss how this could impact characterisation choices. Directors consider how names will impact how relationships are presented. Designers can use the names to trigger research into design choices, particularly costume.

### Exercise 2: Stage directions

Stage directions give guidance to the director, designers and performers. Ask students to rehearse the scenes with all the stage directions spoken aloud. Perform and discuss. Extended sections of stage directions could inform imagination exercises or tableaux. Students could also run scenes and exaggerate the lengths of pauses.

### Exercise 3: Monologues and punctuation

Students can choose to do a monologue for Component 2. This exercise will get the students to consider how spoken thoughts develop through a monologue as if it is the character speaking them fresh for the first time.

Ask each student to choose a monologue. Each student should have two chairs that they place a couple of meters apart facing the 'audience'. They should sit in the first chair and speak the character's first thought (as written in the text and expressed through speech). This will more than likely be up to the first punctuation mark. Once they get to the end of a thought they must stop talking, stand and walk to the other seat. Sitting in the other seat they then speak the next thought. They should repeat and move between seats, only speaking a thought when sitting. Perform and discuss variations. Performers should consider the shifts in pace and urgency from one thought to the next: does the pause jar because the next thought runs quickly from the previous thought? Directors can consider the impact of a monologue on the relationship between that character and the audience. Designers must consider how their design choices impact on these moments of extended speech.

## Exercise 4: Dialogue – duologues

Dialogue is anything spoken by more than two characters. Students can perform as a pair, as a group of three, and up to a group of six for Component 2. Ask duologue students to learn their lines. Get them to hold a one-metre stick together between each of their index fingers. The stick will be precariously balanced and they should have a go at moving in the space together without letting the stick drop. They should then start speaking their duologue and move in the space. They should consider how each character tries to assert themselves through their language. If they feel one character is being more assertive then they should move forward. The interesting moments will be when both students move towards each other or move apart at the same time. These are moments of conflict in the language that should be explored further. Performers can use this to inform vocal and physical choices that reflect their characters shifting status. Directors can consider how the two performers can use the stick movements to develop spatial relationships in a scene. Designers should consider how design choices could reinforce the language and status battle.

## Exercise 5: Dialogue – more than three performers

Get the group in the scene to choose a space in the room that represents the start of their scene. The students will then begin speaking their dialogue. The character that is speaking must remain still but the others can choose another position in the room. Keep these movements simple – varying proxemics, depth and orientation. Perform and discuss how language causes other characters to react. Performers can consider how they might build these reactions into non-verbal communication choices for their character. Directors should consider ideas for the overall stage image and how subtle movements of non-speaking characters can reinforce the words that are spoken by others. Designers should consider how their design is impacted by the shifting non-verbal communication of the characters.

## Exercise 6: Word choice

Ask students to read a key section from the text. As selected readers speak, the others in the group must listen with their eyes shut and speak any words that stand out for them. There is no right or wrong answer here. Get the students to discuss which words were chosen and why. Ask students to create short scenes where only those words can be spoken. Perform and discuss.

An alternative to this is to read a scene then get students to reduce the scene so they are only speaking one key word from each section of speech. Perform and discuss. Performers can consider how vocal and physical choices can highlight key words. Directors can consider how key words may link to and influence the overall theme of the performance. Designers could use key words to stimulate their design ideas.

# 10. Interpretation and artistic intentions

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In Components 2 and 3, the focus should be a straightforward interpretation of the text, reflecting the original intentions and context provided by the playwright.

In both components, students will need to make decisions about the staging of the play. In Component 2, it is recommended that students will perform end-on/proscenium arch due to the nature of external assessment.

In Component 3, students are able to make decisions about the type of staging used e.g. proscenium arch, traverse, in the round, etc.

There is no requirement for students to re-imagine, or re-position, the play in a different context or that the performance style might reflect a particular practitioner's work. For instance, *The Crucible* can remain as a naturalistic historical drama in its original 17th century setting rather than any sizeable changes such as a contemporary setting or different context.

There are many possible variations that will require you and the students to make interpretative decisions about character and relationships. All students should be able to articulate their artistic intentions for the audience regardless of whether they are a performer, designer or director. Any artistic choices must be well-justified and clearly considered in terms of both the whole play and the extract, if students are to access the full range of marks.

### **Exercise 1: Changing the size of the space**

Ask the students to perform key scenes from the text. Define different size spaces using tape on the floor or chairs. Ask the students to consider how their voice and physicality changes in each different space. Directors should be able to convert the spirit of these experiments to the space they have chosen for the performance. The lighting designer can consider whether they can restrict the space using defined areas of light to support the clarity of a scene.

### **Exercise 2: Non-verbal communication (NVC)**

Non-verbal communication (NVC) can be implied in the language of the text or it can be explicitly referred to in the stage directions. However, NVC is one area where performer and director have a wide variety of possible interpretations. Ask students to experiment by repeating the same line or short scene but change elements of NVC:

- spatial behaviour (proxemics)
- facial expression
- gesture
- gaze
- non-verbal vocalisations
- posture.

Get the students to discuss how the meaning of these lines can be altered through different non-verbal communication choices. Once the students have made choices that they think fit, ask them to play the opposite NVC. Discuss how this changes the scene.

### **Exercise 3: Audience configuration**

Ask the students to perform key scenes in different audience configurations, to explore how the relationship with the audience can change the meaning of the scenes. Try:

- end-on-stage
- thrust stage
- in-the-round
- traverse stage.



Performers should consider how they would have to move and relate to other characters in the different spaces. Directors will have to consider what impact the stage has on the actor/audience relationship and how that affects meaning. Designers will need to consider the practical challenges that come with each different space.

### **Exercise 4: Social, historical and cultural interpretations**

Ask the students to identify the social, historical and cultural (SHC) contexts of the play. Get them to discuss their knowledge about and feelings towards these contexts. Encourage students to use their knowledge and feelings as a lens through which to interpret the intentions of the playwright. This will influence where they place stress in their performance ideas, whether they are a director, designer or performer. Their sympathy may lie with the rich or poor, the men or women. Get the students to work in groups and select a scene that is interesting/important to them socially, historically or culturally. There is no right or wrong answer here. Ask each group to perform their chosen moment, placing particular stress on their area of interest. Ask them to perform and discuss how their choice of stress impacted the meaning of the play as intended by the playwright. Get the groups to consider how their interests and ideas adapted to highlight an issue while maintaining the integrity of the playwright's intentions.

#### **Discussion questions**

Performer:

- How will your use of voice change within the chosen stage space?
- How will your use of physicality change within the chosen stage space?
- How will your non-verbal communication show your relationship with other characters in the space?
- What are your artistic intentions for each character?

Designer:

- How will your design choices fit the chosen stage space?
- What mood and atmosphere will be needed to support the non-verbal decisions of the performers?
- How can lighting change the dynamics of the space to support the meaning of a scene?
- What are your artistic intentions for your design?

Director:

- Which stage space best suits your interpretations?
- How will you control the actors in the space in order to maximise tension for the audience?
- What are your artistic intentions for the overall performance?

## **11. Exam-style questions**

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### **Component 3**

These are neutral questions that can be applied to any of the set texts, but you may want to adapt them slightly to fit the extract that your practical session focused on. Try to build one or two of these questions into the lesson, but aim to spend no more than 15 minutes of any one lesson on

written reflection. Longer responses can be done for homework during the early stages of exploration. It is worth keeping in mind that students will get one and a half minutes per mark in the exam.

**(a)** (i) You are going to play [character's name]. Explain **two** ways you would use **vocal skills** to play this character in this extract. (4 marks, 6 mins)

**(a)** (ii) You are going to play [character's name]. He/she is [...description of character]. As a performer, give **three** suggestions of how you would use **performance skills** from his/her entrance at the start of the extract to the end. You must provide a reason for each suggestion. (6 marks, 9 mins)

**(b)** (i) As a director, discuss how you would use **one** of the **production elements below** to bring this extract to life for your audience. You should make reference to the context in which the text was created and performed. (9 marks, 14 mins)

Choose **one** of the following:

- costume
- staging
- props/stage furniture.

**(b)** (ii) [Description of one character's status role in the extract.] As a director, discuss how he/she might demonstrate his/her status to the audience in this extract and the complete play. (12 marks, 18 mins)

You must consider:

- voice
- physicality
- stage directions and stage space.

**(c)** There are specific choices in this extract for designers. Discuss how you would use **one** design element to enhance the production of this extract for the audience. (14 marks, 21 mins)

Choose **one** of the following:

- set
- costume
- sound.

## 12. Artistic intention questions

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### Component 2

Students will complete 100-200 words **per extract** answering the following questions. Although the written piece does not receive a discreet mark, it is a compulsory element of the assessment. Their answers are their opportunity to communicate their artistic intentions to the examiner and must be sent in advance of the assessment.

For performance students:

- what role(s) are you playing?
- what is happening to your character(s) in the key extract?
- what are your character's objectives/motivations/feelings?
- how are you interpreting this character(s) in performance? (i.e. vocal, physical, communication of intent).

For design students:

- what design role are you fulfilling?
- what is your central design concept in the key extract?
- how have you interpreted this key extract through your design?
- what are you hoping to communicate to the audience?