Year 10 Drama

BRIDGING COURSE

Student Booklet

Name: ________________________________
Preparing for Senior Drama

Electing to study Drama as part of your senior schooling is a great choice! It is a subject where you will learn about yourself, about the world you live in and how to express different ideas about society.

To prepare for Preliminary studies, you will need to make sure you know about the following:

- Elements of Drama
- Elements of Production
- Breaking down a script
- Developing characters
- Various theatrical styles and techniques
- Developing a directorial concept
- Writing about theatrical concepts and styles

If you are new to Drama, that’s okay! This Bridging Course has been designed to revise all of the key skills and concepts that you will need in order to succeed next year. It is vital that you approach this course with a positive and productive attitude in order to gain all that you can from it.

As well has covering essential skills, this course also follows a similar structure to what you will experience in Year 11. Over the four week Bridging Course you will work as a group to read and stage parts of a play and learn about the development of the Australian theatre industry over the last century and how it has adapted to suit societal changes.

Drama lessons can be different to many of your other lessons. At any point in time you might be working with partner, participating in a huge group workshop, viewing a performance, staging a script, improvising a scene or writing about what you have done.

For each lesson, you will need:

- A workbook/logbook
- Your copy of this student booklet
- A positive attitude
- Pens
- Copy of the script you are working on
- Willingness to participate in all practical workshops and discussions
Role and Character. The who?
Example: Three scientists.

Focus. The focus is the central event, theme, issue or problem. Example: The scientists safely capture the small creature and help it to survive. This allows its saliva to be used to make a wonder drug, which will save humankind.

Language, Sound and Movement. How the characters and story are expressed, including the use of verbal language, vocal sounds, body language and movement. Example: The scientists use medical jargon to show their knowledge. Their body language shows the status relationship between the scientists. Their movements are hurried to indicate the urgency of the task.

Moment. Key moments in the performance help to punctuate the tempo. This helps to build dramatic tension. Example: Just as the scientists feel they will not find the creature, they discover evidence in the bushes at the bottom of the volcano that it is somewhere nearby. This moment heightens their excitement that their plan may be realised.

Symbol and Atmosphere. Symbols include objects, signs, flags, settings, gestures and language. They are used in drama to represent issues and themes, and to help establish atmosphere.
Example: The volcano that threatens to erupt could symbolise the danger that humankind faces if the scientists do not succeed in making the wonder drug.
Tension. Tension is created when the characters overcome obstacles. This drives the situation and is directed by the focus. The tension can create comic moments as well as serious moments. Example: The scientists search for the creature at a volcano. It threatens to erupt, which may prevent the scientists from safely capturing the creature and saving it from extinction. We anticipate a disastrous moment as time runs out. This tension pushes the characters and the situation to the climax.

Place and Time. The where? This includes the past, present, future, setting, indoors or outdoors, time of day and season. Example: A volcanic crater that is steamy, hot, noisy, uncomfortable and dangerous, and that threatens to erupt.

Dramatic Structure. The framework through which the content is presented. Example: The story of the scientists is presented with a linear narrative that is performed in a realistic style.

Space. How the space and spatial design is used to visually communicate relationships between characters, and between characters and the environment. Example: The performers travel around the whole stage area to communicate the journey to the volcano. Ramps and boxes are used to create the edge of the crater.

Rhythm. The manipulation of timing through pace and tempo. Example: The scientists slow the pace of their movements as they scale the side of the volcano; this helps to build tension. Or the scientists increase the pace of their search to build energy and excitement.

Dramatic Meaning. All the elements of drama combined create dramatic meaning. Example: In the story of the scientists the dramatic meaning may be interpreted as people’s potential to work together to overcome difficulties.

Audience Engagement. This is how the performer manipulates the actor-audience relationship to achieve a specific response. Example: The performers act using a ‘fourth wall’ approach to help the audience believe in the characters and the situation.
All dramatic activity is made up of key elements, which are used like building blocks to shape and develop the drama. This is just as true of the improvisations we do in the classroom as it is of major plays performed in theatres. By learning to use the elements of drama effectively, we can greatly improve the quality of our own dramatic work, and also develop our understanding and appreciation of all forms of drama performance.

In Unit 1 we explored in-depth the fundamental dramatic activities of improvisation and characterisation, and discovered how we can create and express dramatic situations and characters in our own dramas. In Unit 2 we look at the particular elements which make all dramas more exciting and powerful. We begin in Chapters 5 and 6 with Focus and Tension, the forces that drive the drama. Next, in Chapter 7, we examine how to create a range of dramatic environments, and also how this is done in the theatre. Chapter 8 explains the elements of Ritual and Symbol, and looks at how they give extra meaning and depth to all drama.
Chapter 5
Focus

Introduction

Every improvised drama and every play performed on stage needs focus and tension to function effectively. Focus is essential to the creation and performance of any drama because it is the way we direct attention to the most important and exciting or amusing aspects of the work. All the people involved in a piece of theatre—the playwright, director, actors, designer and audience—make use of focus in different ways. In Chapter 5 we explore each of the essential types of focus and learn how to use them more effectively.

Key Content
5.1 Focus
5.2 Points of Focus

Outcomes
In this chapter you will:
• use the element of tension to enhance the improvised dramas you create
• apply the skilled use of focus to scripted performance.
• identify and analyse the use of focus in the drama work you see in the classroom and on stage

Cate Blanchett in Charlotte Gray provides a focus for the audience as she focuses as an actor.
Focus

Developing and Directing Focus

Whenever a drama is created, we begin with an idea, a story, a group of characters, or an issue. In other words, we focus on something that interests or concerns us and we build our drama around this focus.

Throughout the performance of any piece of drama, our attention is focused on different situations and characters, and in theatre the director decides this focus. Of course, the actors in drama focus their attention on their own performances and also direct their focus to the most important actions and characters in each scene.

As an audience watching a drama we also focus on particular characters or actions or situations in a play, concentrating intensely on the parts that interest or amuse us most. Focus in drama therefore means directing our concentration and making particular facets of the work the centre of our attention.

In film and television the focus of attention is dictated by the camera, which shows only particular scenes, certain characters and chosen shots.

Cameras create and direct focus in a number of different ways, according to the story, the action and the characters. Sometimes the camera will have a really wide focus, showing a whole landscape or city, and it can pan or move slowly across the scene to show everything. The camera can also give an extremely wide focus by filming from a great height, using a crane or even a helicopter to give a bird’s eye view of a scene. At other times the camera will zoom in to a close-up of an object or a person, or even an extreme close-up of just a person’s eyes. It can also focus very clearly on something important like a person crying, leaving the rest of the screen hazy and out of focus. Finally, the camera helps the audience to focus by only showing them images that are important to the story, leaving out or cutting everything else.

In the classroom and the theatre, we do not have a camera to provide the focus for us, so we need to learn how to do it for ourselves. Although this is a real challenge, it also gives us the freedom to create focus in any way we choose, whereas the use of a camera limits the focus in a filmed drama. This chapter will explore some of the key techniques for creating focus in the classroom and on stage.

Key Term

Focus is the way we direct our attention or concentration.

Journal Writing

Make a sketch of a play being performed on stage and draw arrows and label them to show the direction and location of the focus being used.
### 3.2 Points of Focus

Although we talk about focus as though it is just one element, in fact there are four separate and important types or points of focus in drama. We use these four points of focus in different ways at different times in a dramatic work.

**Focus Point 1: Creating the Drama—the Playwright's Focus**

When we first begin to make a play, we try out different ideas, stories, characters and issues. Which one of these we choose to be the main focus of our work depends on our interests and the purpose of the drama.

Once we have chosen the focus of our drama, we can begin to build our play around it. For example, we might come up with the idea of being a group of teenagers on holiday who take temporary jobs at Warner Bros. Movie World on the Gold Coast. The focus we have created for our drama is the story of this particular group of characters working in a particular situation. On the other hand, we could take the same situation but make our focus a mystery character working at Movie World who comes in contact with the group of teenagers. If we wanted to explore the issue of friendship we could have one of the group get into trouble at Movie World and explore the reactions of her friends.

As you can see, we can use the same characters, stories, ideas and issues to create a range of different dramas, all depending on which aspect becomes our focus or centre of attention. Whether we write down these dramas as a play or express them in improvisation, we are all working as playwrights to create plays that each have a special focus. We must therefore learn how to select the right focus for our work as playwrights and become skilled at using it effectively.

![Image](image-url)
One effective way to do this is to think of our drama as a series of pictures that need to be put in the right frames to make the drama work. Just as the camera operator on a film or video chooses the right frame for each shot, so we need to choose the right dramatic frame as playwrights in order to bring the drama to life.

**The playwright's frames**

For a start, we can choose when and where to locate our drama. This gives us a time frame and a place frame to focus on when we create our play.

In the Movie World improvisation, for example, the time frame is now, and the place frame is Movie World theme park on the Gold Coast. This place frame in particular is the main focus of the story, and it really decides what happens with the characters and the action. If we wanted to create a drama about the discovery of Australia by Captain Cook, the time frame of 1770 would be the most important focus. It is therefore essential for us as playwrights to put our dramas in a time frame and a place frame which focus our work clearly.

Michael Gow's play *Away*, which we looked at in Unit 1, uses a beach somewhere in Australia as its main place frame. It doesn't really matter which beach—just the general location is important because the characters are all on holiday, and in Australia holidays often mean the beach. However, the specific time frame is very important to *Away*. The year is 1968—Australia is involved in the Vietnam War, and the protest era of hippies, free love and anti-conscription demonstrations is changing the face of Australia forever. In a way this time frame of 1968 is the central focus of the play, because the characters and events are part of, and are affected by, what happened in that year, in particular the Vietnam War.

Can you identify the time and place frames here?
Another important way to use frames when focusing our dramas involves focusing the action. We can do this as playwrights by choosing different frames for the story according to what is happening and who is involved. This helps to give us different angles or perspectives, making the work more interesting and effective.

**Journal Writing**

Make lists of the plays you know where the time and place frames are absolutely central to the play. Can you identify the key time and place frame for each play?

**Frame 1—in the action**

We use this frame when we want to focus on something important happening to particular characters. For example, if our drama involves a rock band winning a ‘Battle of the Bands’ talent quest, we would create a scene showing them actually winning the prize. In other words, the frame for this scene would be the talent quest and the characters would be the band actually winning it—right in the action!

**Frame 2—on the edge of the action**

This frame still uses the same time and place frames, but concentrates on characters who are less central to the action. In our rock band drama, we would still be at the talent quest, but this time we would be other characters there, such as another band or friends of the winners. The scene would explore the reactions and experiences of these characters, to give a different slant or perspective on the story (and on talent quests!).

**Frame 3—outside the action**

This involves moving to another time frame, before or after the talent quest, and it can also involve a different place frame as well. The members of our rock band could be shown the next day, at home with their families, telling them that the ‘Battle of the Bands’ prize includes a major overseas tour. We would then use this frame to explore the reactions of the families to the news.

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**Workshop 1: The Playwright’s Frames**

**Warming up**

1. **Mirroring Exercise.** Working in pairs, take it in turn to mirror your partner’s movements; first just hands moving then whole body movements. Focus intently on your partner’s movements and try to synchronise your actions until it really looks like a person in front of a mirror.

2. **Freeze-frames.** Working in groups, create a series of three freeze-frames.
   - **Freeze 1:** A band rehearsing for a talent quest (perhaps arguing, or working at different activities, or exhausted at the end of a long rehearsal).
- Freeze 2: Actually performing in the quest, with the focus on the energy and intense commitment of the whole band.
- Freeze 3: The reaction of the band members when they are announced as the winners.

Core Assessment Task

For this task, work to develop an interesting drama that clearly and effectively uses characters and situations to frame the focus; first of all actually in the action, and then to move the focus in the second scene to the edge of the action.

Forming

Work in the same groups as for the second warm up in Workshop 1. Imagine you are the band that has just won the quest. You are on your first major overseas tour when one of the members of the band suddenly disappears a few hours before the concert. Discuss and improvise the situation, exploring how and why that person vanished and what happened to them. Shape the drama into two frames or scenes. The first will be right in the action of the band itself, revealing the cause of the disappearance. The second scene will show how someone on the edge of the action actually witnessed the disappearance. To create this second scene some of you might need to take on roles different from the ones you portrayed in Scene 1.

Performing

Join your group with another group in the class and perform your two scenes for them. Then take your turn to be an audience for their performance. This can be done with a number of groups performing in different parts of the room at the same time, or with groups performing in different spaces in possible.

Reflecting

Discuss with the other group the development of their narrative and also their use of focus. Now in your own group, use the story and the characters from the other group’s performance, and see if you can resolve the mystery of the band member’s disappearance in a way which is true to the two scenes you watched. Meanwhile, the other group you perform for will do the same with your play, developing a third scene, which ends the play effectively.

Perform your final scenes for each other and discuss the results.
Journal Writing

Write an individual reflection on the other group's play, discussing how effective and appropriate their plot and characters were in completing the drama your group had created.

In the frame: the band

Focusing on issues

Aside from the use of frames, there is a further important way of focusing the drama as a playwright, and this involves focusing on the meaning or message of the drama.

All playwrights have particular ideas or interests or concerns that are expressed in their plays. Whenever we write a play, or read one written by someone else, it is this focus on ideas or issues which is the meaning of the play.

The story of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* describes the witch trials in the town of Salem in Massachusetts in 1692 in a powerful, dramatic way. However, the play was also deliberately written by Miller to focus on a very important modern issue, which is the way people in power persecute and even kill people who disagree with them, which makes it a modern classic of the theatre.

Miller wrote the play in 1949, when the House Un-American Activities Committee was questioning people and blacklisting them because they were suspected of being communists. Many Americans lost their jobs and their freedom because of this powerful political committee, and Miller used the story of the Salem witch trials as a metaphor, an illustration of the kind of hysteria and cruelty that was happening to people he knew—and to himself!

Amnesty International releases details of thousands of people every year who are imprisoned, tortured and even murdered throughout the world simply because they disagree with those in

Key Term

An issue is the main idea, theme, concern or aspect of human behaviour that the playwright wants the audience to understand.
power in their countries. This kind of persecution is the true focus of *The Crucible*, and the story of the witch trials is used to make this focus really clear. We will work with a scene from this play at the end of this chapter.

Throughout the whole history of theatre, playwrights have created dramas focusing on particular issues that were important to them, just as Arthur Miller did. Because these issues deal with the way people live and behave, they are still relevant to us today. This is one of the main reasons why Greek plays written 2,500 years ago are still staged and still have meaning for us.

Shakespeare’s plays may be difficult to understand at first because of the language, but they deal with issues we all know and feel strongly about—war and peace, friendship and betrayal, love and hate, power and courage. The issues they focus on are just as important to us as they were to the Elizabethans 400 years ago.

Whether we are creating our own plays or working from a text, the playwright’s focus is the first, vital starting point for the drama, and demands our attention and skill in developing the use of frames and issues to give power and meaning to our work.

**Core Assessment: Task**

**Journal Writing**

Write an outline of a play you would like to script about an issue that is important to you. It may be a world issue, like terrorism or the destruction of the environment, a national issue such as the stolen generation or refugees, or a personal issue, such as being true to your own beliefs. Give a brief description of the characters and plot of the play, and describe how you would focus on the particular issue you have chosen.

**Note**

Metaphors are ideas or images which convey a message, and in drama we use them all the time to give meaning to our work. For example, Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* uses that image as a metaphor for the way Nora, the play’s protagonist, is kept like a doll in her husband’s house. In the musical *Cats*, all the different cats are actually metaphors for types of human behaviour.
Focus Point 2: The Director's Focus

Once a drama has been created by a group (ensemble) or written by a playwright, the next stage is to actually make it into a dramatic work. This involves devising or learning it, and then rehearsing it to prepare it for performance.

At this stage the drama needs to be directed to bring all the elements together and make the play work, and this can be done by a single director, or cooperatively by the whole ensemble.

However the direction is handled, a vital element of it is the use and control of a number of important forms of focus, including the use of the performance space, the design and costuming of the play, the interactions between the characters, and the flow of the scenes.

To direct focus effectively, we need to be aware of the possibilities available, and to develop our ability to use them.

Wide focus

Wide focus makes use of all or most of the performance space to stage the action or show the interactions between characters. Just as a movie or video camera uses a wide-angle lens to focus on a whole scene, we can create a wide focus by using staging, the placing of actors and movement around the stage to give the effect of big or high-action scenes.

For example, a factory scene is created by filling the performance space with actors miming machine movements and making machine sounds and working together to present an image of a huge, busy factory. Party and disco scenes also need a wide focus, with lights, music and people talking and dancing to fill in the scene. Lighting, sound and, particularly, movement are needed for battle scenes and busy street scenes.

We can also create a completely different kind of wide focus by having a completely bare stage. This empty space in drama generates a kind of tension as we wait for something to happen and fill the space. It is a very effective way to begin a drama. We can then fill the space with characters and action, still providing a wide focus.

Alternatively, we could have just one character enter and have the lights dim to just one spot, narrowing the focus right down. This shift from wide to narrow focus at the start is a favourite technique of film-makers, who use a really wide-focus shot of a whole town or landscape during the credits of the film, then zoom right in to one house or one person as the film begins.

Journal Writing

Make up a brief scenario for a play that would begin with a very wide focus. Describe what performance and stagecraft techniques you would use to create this wide focus for the audience when the play opens.
Narrow focus

Narrow focus involves directing attention to just one spot or one character in the space, and can be done in a number of ways.

We can use a platform or rostrum block to make someone stand out above the rest of the characters, or use a single spotlight or a different colour to highlight a person or an object.

Narrow focus can also be directed through the use of movement. This can be done by having one person move while everyone else is still, or a character frozen still when everyone else is moving.

Sound effects and speech are other obvious ways of directing the focus to a particular place or person.

Significant objects, which have a special or symbolic meaning, are also effective for creating an intense, narrow focus. A knife or gun, both symbolising violence, always draw our attention and build up tension, while a goldfish bowl stuck on someone’s head would certainly be the focus of a comedy scene!

Contrasting focus

One very effective way to make a drama work is by using contrasting focus, where we suddenly switch from wide to narrow focus and back again. We saw how this can be done at the start of a play or film to build tension, but it is a technique that can be used at any time in a drama.

Bertolt Brecht, the influential German playwright and director, used contrasting focus to powerful effect in the staging of his plays. All Brecht’s plays deal with important issues, like the causes of war and the consequences of human greed. He directed his plays to focus on these issues. A wide focus scene like a battle would suddenly end with a freeze or the stage emptying, and all the focus would narrow down to just one actor who would sing a song or talk directly to the audience.

This happens at the end of his play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, which is about the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany in the 1930s. After all the violent action of the play, it finishes with the actor playing Hitler stepping forward and warning the audience that what they have seen could all happen again, and that another Hitler could easily come to power if people allow it to happen.

As you can see, we need to think carefully about the direction of focus in our dramas, and to make full use of wide, narrow and contrasting focus whenever possible.

What effect does this combination of wide and narrow focus have?
Workshop 2: The Director's Focus

Warming up

Same sequence groups: Each member of the class is given a number from one up to ten by the teacher. You then form same groups with all the number ones in a group, all the number twos in a group and so on, making ten groups. The same groups try making different shapes. For instance, make a circle where you all hold hands facing inwards, a star where you hold hands facing outwards and stretch out to make the point of a star, a scrum with arms around each other's shoulders, and a stretch where you crowd together in a tight huddle and all stretch both arms up as high as possible.

Now form sequence groups so that there is a one, a two, a three and so on up to ten in each group. Now make the different shapes again as quickly as possible.

Finally, the teacher or a student can call out types of group and the shapes and the group to do it first each time is the winner—for example, same star, sequence circle, sequence scrum, or same stretch.

Once you are all warmed up, stay in your last group so that there are two or three working groups of ten students each.

We will explore the issue of people displaced from their homes by conflict through the use of director's focus.

Forming: wide focus

In your large group, create a series of five dramatic freeze-frames of war, each one showing an aspect of the battle and its impact on individual people. In each freeze-frame one person should be the focus of the image—the protagonist. For each freeze-frame add a caption. This can be a word, a phrase or a sound.

Performing

Each group then presents their sequence of freeze-frames to the rest of the class.

Reflecting

The audience for each freeze-frame responds with observations and questions about the meaning of the image. Individual students can be invited to go and change an aspect of the image to increase this impact—by removing someone from the freeze, or changing the protagonist's position, or altering the composition of the whole freeze-frame. Again, these changes can be discussed and analysed.

Forming: narrow focus

The class chooses one of the most interesting protagonists from one of the freeze-frames to explore their story. Working in your small same groups,
develop a drama about this person, establishing their relationships with
the people closest to them and forming the story of how they became
trapped in a war zone or fled to become a refugee. One of your groups
should function as a storyteller, either in the action as a character or
outside it as a narrator.

Focus Point 3: The Actor’s Focus

When we are actually performing in a drama there are two more
types of focus which we need to be aware of and to use. These are
focusing the performance and focusing the character.

Focusing the performance

To really concentrate and be fully focused in drama, we need to
learn and practise some important focusing techniques.

The first and most basic way of focusing is to control our
breathing so that we are completely relaxed and unstressed, ready
to work with real concentration and commitment.

Breathing

Deep, slow, controlled breathing is the easiest and one of the
most effective means of building and strengthening our powers
of concentration. Before beginning work on a drama, and at
important moments in your dramatic work, you need to take the
time to be completely still, silent and relaxed, and to focus on your
own breathing.

One way to do this is to stand, sit or lie still with your eyes
closed and count up to five, taking in a long deep breath evenly
during the count, and then breathing out as quietly and softly as
possible. Repeat this exercise at least five times, counting more
slowly each time until you feel yourself become fully relaxed and
ready to focus.
Visualisation

Visualisation is the next step, using the concentration you have built up during the breathing.

Still standing, sitting or lying, with your eyes closed, imagine the character and the story you are about to dramatise, seeing them unfold like a movie inside your head.

When we imagine or visualise in this way, our attention becomes fully focused and we are completely committed to the drama. For example, if you were creating the character of a scientist visiting Antarctica, you might begin by filling out a character analysis sheet, to get some ideas about your character. The next step would be to do some slow, deep breathing to a count, and then to visualise your character, picturing the person at work and at home, and imagining your character’s personality and relationships with other people. Finally, you would try to visualise the Antarctic base at Mawson, building up a picture of the ice and snow and the incredible cold, and imagine your character there. This use of breathing and visualisation prepares you as a performer to be fully focused on the drama.

Focusing the character

Once you are fully in character and focused on the drama, it is important to make sure that your character is fully focused on stage. There are three types of focus we can use when we are actually acting in character to help our drama work more effectively: direct focus, indirect focus and counter-focus.

Direct focus

Direct focus involves everyone on stage directing their attention towards the most important character or action in the scene.

This can be done by having all the other characters move towards or cluster around a central character or object.

We can also use our character’s body language to face and lean towards, or point at, the centre of focus in the scene, or simply have our character watch the main character or action at all times.

In a scene involving a serious argument between two friends who are part of a larger group, the argument would be the centre of focus, and the other characters on stage would be either involved in the argument or at least watching it intently.

Indirect focus

Sometimes we do not want to focus on the centre of attention in a scene, either because our character is more interested in someone else in the scene or because the character needs to conceal their interest. In this case we focus on something or someone else, and they in turn direct focus to the centre of attention.

Imagining a scene where a girl is waiting for a very important telephone call, and the phone begins to ring. Everyone in the scene would focus on the ringing telephone. If our character is the girl’s parent, and we know the call is really bad news, our attention
would be focused on her, and all our concern would be for her feelings. In the end, our focus still relates to the telephone call, but indirectly, through the character of the girl. This use of indirect focus can make dramas both more interesting and more true-to-life when it is done effectively and appropriately.

**Counter-focus**

Sometimes the characters we portray want nothing to do with the main character or action in a scene, or else they are too busy to focus on the centre of attention. In this case we need to use our character to create a counter-focus to the main one.

If we are angry or hurt, we might go and sit with our back turned as far away as possible from everyone else. This creates a silent, still counter-focus to the central action, and is a very effective way of showing our character's feelings and building tension in the scene.

If our character is busy doing something else or talking to someone outside the main focus of the scene, we can go on doing this, but moving quietly and miming our conversation so that we do not draw too much concentration away from the centre of focus. We need to work to make the scene appear real and believable without distracting too much from the main focus. Only completely selfish and mediocre actors on stage and in the classroom deliberately use their characters to steal focus from the most important characters and action in a drama.

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**Workshop 3: The Actor's Focus**

**Warming up**

Spread out to fill up the space and then stand still. Look around and choose two other people in the space who will be your points of focus. What you must do is to move around the space always keeping the same distance from both of those other people, so that you are in the centre and they are at equal distances from you.

**Forming: direct focus**

Working in groups, devise a drama involving a teenager who is a complete stranger being brought into a family for the first time. They could be adopted, or being fostered, or could be a distant cousin or someone whose parents have gone overseas for a long time. Improvise what might happen when the teenager is first introduced, making sure all the focus is on the character of the teenager.

**Performing**

Perform the scene for one other group, and then discuss the reactions of the various members of the family to the new arrival.
Reflecting: indirect focus

With your group, choose one member of the family who had a strong reaction to the new arrival in the other group’s drama. The other group will structure their response to your drama in a similar way. Each group develops a new scene from the other group’s play, placing a strong, indirect focus on the actions and reactions of the family member they have chosen. Act as audiences for each other’s scenes and discuss your responses to each other’s work.

Focus Point 4: The Audience’s Focus

Whenever we perform a drama for an audience, it is vital to think about focusing their attention on the key aspects of our work so that they fully appreciate the drama. In a way, the audience’s focus should mirror the playwright’s focus, concentrating on the most important issues, characters, events and actions that the playwright has created.

Everyone involved in a performance therefore needs to concentrate on catching the audience’s attention and directing it to the heart of the drama. To do this, we must first study and interpret the dramatic text we are performing, regardless of whether we created it or it was written by someone else.

When we are sure we fully understand the text and know how to perform it to bring out the drama and the meaning, we must choose the best ways of directing the focus of the audience towards the key features of the play.

To do this we can make full use of all the focusing techniques already described in this chapter, but this time from the point of view of the audience.

Our choice of frames (wide, narrow and counter-focus) and our use of performers’ and characters’ focus, which were all part of creating, making and expressing the drama, can be altered or developed according to the impact we wish to have on the audience. This should really be just a matter of fine-tuning our work to the audience’s focus.

If our work has been really focused in the first place, and we have used the techniques effectively in creating the drama, it should catch the attention and direct the focus of any audience seeing it.

In turn, when we are watching someone else’s drama as a member of an audience, we can use our understanding of the nature and types of focus to fully appreciate their play.

One of the most exciting aspects of being a theatre audience lies in having our interest and focus fully captured by a play, so that we are drawn into the story and the lives of the characters and lose all sense of time and reality. If we can later identify and analyse how this was done, not only does it increase our appreciation of the play, but it also inspires us to use focus in similar ways to make our own drama work more interesting and exciting.
Choose a play you saw as a member of an audience, either on stage or in the classroom, which made effective use of focus. Describe the different forms of focus that were used and analyse why they were so successful.

In this performance task, you need to concentrate first of all on making effective use of contrasting focus between the actor and the narrator in your own play. Once you have achieved this, the challenge is then to choose a character you found interesting from another play and introduce this character into your own play, using contrasting focus to show the result of this character’s appearance in your play.

**Performing**

Rehearse and perform the drama you created about refugees for the rest of the class, but have the narrator standing or sitting on a different level, telling the story while the rest of the group present it. At key moments, the group will be frozen, while all the focus is on the narrator setting the scene or giving essential information. Sometimes the narrator will be still and silent while others perform, and at other times both the narrator and the actors will control the focus.

**Reflecting**

In your groups, choose the protagonist you found most interesting and relevant from the plays by the other groups about refugees, and improvise a scene where this character encounters your protagonist and their stories combine. Your narrator can take on the role of this new character. Use contrasting focus as effectively as possible to highlight the interaction between the two protagonists and with the other characters in the play.

Write a diary entry as one of the displaced people or refugees in your drama. Try to convey the nature of the experience your group explored as well as the personality and feelings of the character you chose.
Introduction

Now that we have examined focus in drama, we will switch our attention to tension, that is, the energy driving any drama. We discover how it is possible to control and direct the different forms of tension in ways to give our dramas more power and energy, and to appreciate how the element of tension works in the performance of plays on stage.

We begin by seeing how tension is created right from the beginning of the drama, and then how the energy level can be built and intensified throughout, and finally how tension is resolved at the end.
Tension is actually a type of energy, and in drama it is the energy, or power, which drives every kind of performance. However, it doesn't just happen in the classroom or on stage.

Like pulling back a bowstring until it is vibrating with tension ready to fire the arrow, we need to develop and build tension in our drama work. This means controlling the level of tension, and tightening and loosening the flow until we are ready to let it explode. Just as the bowstring finally releases its tension in energy, which fires the arrow, the tension in drama explodes in excitement, penetrating the actors and any audience watching.

There are a number of ways of using tension effectively in drama, right from the beginning of a play through to the very end. We need to make use of all the techniques we have learnt in the first five chapters—in particular the skills of characterisation and movement. Stagecraft elements, such as lighting, sound, sets and props, are also valuable in developing and building tension.

In the Beginning—Developing Tension

With any drama activity, there is already some creative energy or tension available to us just because we are about to start dramatising new characters and situations. We are excited in anticipation of the chance to work creatively and imaginatively. What we need to do is build this tension to give power and excitement to the drama as it unfolds. In the theatre there is always a buzz of excitement in an audience before a play begins, and the staging and acting of the play needs to build on this anticipation to increase the flow of energy or tension as the play is performed.

Key Term

In drama, anticipation is when we expect, or hope, or are afraid something is about to happen. It involves imagining or predicting what might come next, and increases our excitement and involvement in the drama.
Space

One exciting way to develop tension is to begin a drama with a completely empty space or stage, and then fill it with action and movement. This could be done with the actors all streaming on at once, accompanied by sound effects and voices. On the other hand, the space could be empty except for one dramatic object, such as a knife lying on the floor. We could use a single spot to light this object, increasing the focus on it and developing tension as we anticipate how it might be used.

Just light and sound alone can be used to fill the empty space. Flashing lights and loud music could create the atmosphere of a disco and build anticipation before the actors enter. Conversely, soft gold light and the sound of waves breaking could lead us to anticipate a play about the beach or the ocean. The sudden sound effect of a wave crashing or a single scream would then develop a very high level of tension before the action began.

Movement

Both violent action and complete stillness are powerful ways of developing tension at the beginning of a drama. We can start a play with a freeze-frame of some dramatic interaction between a group of characters and hold the freeze, stretching out the anticipation for the actors and for any audience. The freeze can then come to life, changing the level of tension to suit the drama.

In the same way, we can begin with controlled mime but no sound, building up the movement and tightening the tension as the energy mounts. We then anticipate what the characters will do, and say, as the play develops. We could also make this mime strange and mysterious, and then the tension comes from trying to anticipate what it means and what might happen next.

Relationships

Because relationships between people are the heart of drama, it is important to develop the tensions between characters right from the beginning of any drama. This can be done through the use of body language, as we saw in Chapter 3.

From the moment different characters appear in a drama, we can focus on their body language in relation to each other to build the tension of their relationships.

We can also begin a drama by showing the characters together, strongly emphasising their physical interactions through mime and body language. This is an effective way to begin a drama even if it is not in the original script.
Workshop 1: Developing Tension

Earlier we looked at the possibility of creating a drama based with the focus of a group of teenagers working during the holidays at Movie World on the Gold Coast. Let us take this idea and explore how we could develop tension in a number of ways at the beginning of the drama.

Warming up

Working in pairs, take it in turns to mime using a common object. Your partner must try to guess what the object is and what you are doing.

Now mime being trapped or involved in an exciting or dangerous activity, and then freeze at the most dramatic moment. Your partner must anticipate what might happen next and continue the mime.

Forming

Working in groups, create a freeze-frame involving a group of teenagers working as cartoon characters at Movie World. Select one of the cartoon characters featured in the picture on page 88 and act in the role of that character.
1. In the first frame, make a dramatic freeze-frame which creates tension through frozen action happening between the cartoon characters.
2. In the second frame, show their encounter with a mysterious stranger.
3. In the third frame, form an image of one of the cartoon characters getting into trouble.

As you work on each frame, try to develop tension through the placement of the actors and the shapes they make. In each, see how much frozen energy there is in the freeze, and also what clues you can give as to what will happen next.

Choose the most exciting freeze-frame and bring it to life, exploding into action and conversation and filling the space with movement and character interaction.

Performing

Perform this scene to one other group. If you can, make them part of the scene as other teenagers or visitors to Movie World. Build the tension in the scene through the performance and through stagecraft elements such as lighting, sound and props.

Reflecting

Act as an audience for the other group, again becoming involved as characters in their scene if possible.

After the groups have performed for each other, discuss and reflect on the different approaches you took to the creating and developing the original idea of teenagers working at Movie World. Analyse the tension that was developed in each case and discuss how effective it was in the drama.
Think about the use of focus as well as tension in the Movie World drama you created with your group. Can you identify the ways in which different forms of focus worked with the tension you developed? Write down the connections you observed between the elements of focus and tension in drama.

Choose one of these Movie World characters to develop a freeze-frame

6.2 Building the Tension

Once you have developed an effective level of tension at the beginning of your drama, the challenge is to build the tension throughout to make it work really well. This doesn't just mean stretching the tension tighter and tighter until it explodes.

Archers will tighten and relax their bowstrings a number of times until the tension has finally built to its maximum and they are completely ready to fire. In the same way, it is essential to control the flow of tension throughout a drama, building and lowering the energy at the right times.

Again, there are a number of ways to do this, using both performance and stagecraft techniques.

Characterisation

Because characters and their relationships are the very essence of drama, we can build and control tension most effectively by the skilled performance of the different roles we take, and particularly by the way we develop the relationships between different characters.
We have already seen how movement and body language can develop anticipation about role relationships at the beginning of a drama. The same techniques can be used throughout a play to focus the way different characters relate to each other. More powerfully still, the emotions that the characters feel can be used to heighten and reduce the levels of tension during a play.

Have another look at Chapter 2, and work how to use the characterisation techniques you have discovered in your studies to build tension in a drama. For example, in a serious play about family relationships, such as Hotel Sorrento, the characters of the three sisters all have very strong emotions driving them, and they clash again and again. The tension here is extremely high and intense at times, but at other times the sisters relax and remember their happy childhood, and the tension relaxes for a moment.

However, we are always anticipating another conflict, so there is always an underlying thread of tension driving the drama. To achieve this flow of tension successfully, an actor would need to use Stanislavski’s system to create real and believable characters with genuine emotions, and these feelings would need to be strong and clear on stage.

In comedy such as commedia dell’arte, you would create very lively caricatures who are full of energy and exaggerated feelings that are expressed loudly and physically. However, there would also be times when the energy and excitement quiets down, and the tension relaxes before building even higher than before. Again, the quiet sequences actually encourage us to anticipate the next outrageous comedy sequence, so when it does come, the tension really explodes in excitement and laughter.

\[Note\]
For more information on commedia dell’arte, turn to Chapter 9: The Nature of Theatre, page 145.

\[Rhythm\]
Every drama has a rhythm of its own, which is made up of the pace of the action and also the overall flow of the story. Even the fastest, high-paced drama has changes of pace and quiet moments, and these different levels of action and energy form a pattern, just like the rhythm of a piece of music or a poem.

Making effective use of the rhythm of a drama is one of the most effective ways of building and controlling the tension of the play. Sudden changes of pace from stillness to violent action increases the energy and excitement, while moving from frantic activity to a quiet, reflective scene relaxes the tension and re-focuses the drama.

Most dramatic of all is if we can give our work a clear rhythm, so that the action moves in rhythm, like moving to music or the beat of a drum. In this way, tension is maintained at a steady rate or can be built and built to a powerful climax.

One of the reasons stage musicals are so successful is the way the music and lyrics of the songs give a real rhythm to the whole play, particularly musicals that are sung throughout like Les Misérables, The Phantom of the Opera and Miss Saigon.
Staging

All stagecraft components are important in building tension, and the actual physical appearance of the space is vital. We discussed how a single object, such as a knife lit by a spotlight, could develop enormous tension at start of a play. In the same way, a staging object in view the whole time, such as a prison door with bars or a gallows with a hanging noose, can build tension throughout a play as we anticipate its use.

Just having different levels in the space is invaluable for building tension. Characters standing on a higher level dominate and threaten those below. The levels can also represent something that has to be climbed, and the tension mounts as a character struggles up to the height.
Workshop 2: Building Tension

Warming up

1. Working in pairs, create a freeze-frame showing an argument between two people. Now take it in turns to change your freeze position so that each of you is building the freeze-frame of the argument and the tension. Do this three times each until you end with a really dramatic final freeze.

2. Repeat the process making exactly the same changes to each freeze, but this time quickly and evenly to the sound of a clap or drum to provide a rhythm.

Forming

Create a whole class drama in three scenes about a small town caught in a natural disaster—a bushfire or a flood. Focus on the three components for building tension, developing interesting characters who are in conflict, perhaps over running away or trying to save the town. Play with the rhythm of the drama to build and relax the tension, and use staging to enhance the flow of energy and excitement.

Working in groups, each group chooses a different scene or incident from the whole class drama to develop further, making full and conscious use of the techniques for building tension.

Performing

Stage the dramas in sequence, with each group performing their drama and being the audience for the other groups.

Reflecting

Analyse in writing the scene you worked on in your group, clearly identifying the type of tension that was built and how it was controlled through the use of performance and staging techniques.
The way we resolve the tension at the end of a drama is very important, both for audiences watching and for the actors who have been involved. For the audience, the end of the play and their response to it is the memory they will take away with them. If we have been deep inside a very intense drama ourselves, then the way we resolve the situation will be important to us in terms of the whole experience. More important still, the ending of a drama expresses the understanding we have achieved about the characters and the situation we have been exploring.

In terms of tension, a drama can end in one of two ways. It can reach a climax, where the tension builds until it reaches a climax in a violent or hilarious conclusion. On the other hand, the tension, and the action, can reach a peak but then slowly drain away again in a quiet, sad or peaceful anticlimax. We use one of these two contrasting ways of resolving the tension in a play depending on the nature of the drama.

**Climax**

One of the most exciting experiences in drama is to be part of a serious or funny play where the energy and excitement just keep building until the tension explodes and the drama is over. The great tragedies throughout history have done this, each ending in violence where the protagonist is killed (and often most of the other characters as well).

In Shakespeare's tragedies the stage is usually littered with bodies when the curtain comes down, and the audience is reduced to silence by the tension that has been generated and resolved in violence. The Greeks called overpowering tension and its release in tragedy *catharsis* and believed it was a positive experience for an audience, both physically and psychologically.

In broad comedy such as commedia dell'arte, slapstick and farce, the situations and the action on stage grow wilder and wilder until they end in hilarious and outrageous ways, which leave us laughing aloud. Being really amused and laughing our heads off is definitely a healthy experience!

**Key Term**

*Catharsis* is the feeling of pity and terror inspired by tragedy. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that the experience of catharsis actually made people healthier.

**Journal Writing**

Have you ever seen a drama—in the classroom, on stage or on film or television—which ended with a powerful climax that had a really strong effect on you? Briefly describe the drama and its impact, and then see if you can analyse how and why the climax was so effective. Think particularly about the way tension was built throughout the drama to that climax.


Anticlimax

In many dramas, a violent or hilarious climax would not be appropriate. This is true of many modern realistic plays, where the focus is on the experience of everyday life, which does not normally end in overwhelming tragedy or comedy but simply continues. Often a realistic drama does not so much end as simply come to a stop, and we are left anticipating what might happen to the characters the next day.

Even in genuinely tragic or comic plays, there is sometimes a final scene after the climax where order and normal life are restored, and the actors and the audience have time to absorb what had happened and return to the real world. In romantic plays and many stage musicals, the final scene shows everything ending happily after the dramatic events of the story. This kind of anticlimax resolves the tension in an appropriate way for the style of drama.

Workshop 3: The End

Warming up

Play Dragon’s Treasure. Someone sits with their back to the class with ‘treasure’ (some small objects) on the floor behind them. Try to creep up and steal one piece of the treasure. If the dragon turns around and sees you, you are turned to stone. The game is over when all the treasure is stolen or everyone is turned to stone.

Forming

Choose any one of the dramas you have created during this chapter and focus on the ending. Experiment with finishing the drama with both dramatic climaxes and a range of anticlimaxes.

Reflecting

Discuss which ways of resolving the tension worked best. Now write your own analytical account of the climax or anticlimax you felt was most effective of all, and explain why it resolved the tension of the drama so well.
Focus and Tension

The Crucible by Arthur Miller is one of the most important works of theatre of the twentieth century. It is set in 1692 in Salem in America, and tells the story of the witch trials in that town. However, its theme is the unfair persecution of people anywhere, at any time, because they are different or because those in power are afraid of anyone questioning their authority. As well as being a powerful example of the playwright's focus, The Crucible also uses all the other forms of dramatic focus and tension in a range of effective ways. We can therefore use this scene to further develop and also demonstrate the outcomes of our study of the elements of focus and tension.

Forming

Working in groups, rehearse the following scene from The Crucible, concentrating on the use of focus and the development and building of tension as keys to your work.

Before you begin rehearsing, use some of the focusing techniques for actors in order to create your character and intensify your work, and begin with the deliberate creation of tension through movement and stagecraft elements.

Performing

Perform the scene for an audience, working to create all the forms of focus and tension developed in this chapter to direct and intensify the audience's focus to the meaning of the play.

Reflecting

In your journal or workbook, plan how you would stage this scene in a theatre, using all the different forms of focus and tension as effectively as possible. Remember that the playwright's focus, the director's focus, and the actor's focus are all part of the making of meaning. It is therefore important to explain how you are using a particular focusing technique, such as counter-focus, to make the meaning of the scene clearer and stronger for the audience.

Make sure you describe what performance and stagecraft techniques you would use to develop tension at the opening of the scene, and how you would build that tension throughout. Also discuss whether you would end the scene with a dramatic climax as Hale storms out of the court, or let the tension drain away by lowering the energy and excitement levels after Mary surrenders and rejoins the girls.
John Proctor challenges the court

Set in the small town of Salem on the American frontier in 1692, *The Crucible* begins when a group of teenage girls are caught in the woods at midnight by the Reverend Parris. The girls—Abigail, Susanna, Betty, Mercy and Mary Warren—are casting spells taught to them by the black slave, Tituba. The whole town begins talking about witchcraft and, to protect themselves from punishment, the girls, led by Abigail, claim that the devil forced them to do it, and that they saw people from the town with the devil.

A witch-hunter, John Hale, is brought in, and a court is set up with two judges, Danforth and Hathorne. Every person the girls name is dragged before the court by the marshals, Cheever and Herrick, and forced under threat of torture and execution to confess that they have practised witchcraft. Some townspeople, particularly Putnam, also begin to accuse people and, when those people are executed, their accusers buy up land from their widows. By the time the witch trials finally end, over 100 people have been executed as witches.

Abigail is in love with John Proctor, and names his wife, Elizabeth, as a witch, hoping to get rid of her and take her place. Proctor convinces one of the girls, Mary Warren, who works as servant in his house, to go to the court with him and tell the truth about the accusations of witchcraft. When she tries to do this, Abigail and the others pretend she is trying to put a spell on them.

The Crucible

Act 3

[ABIGAIL, with a weird, wild, chilling cry, screams up to the ceiling.]

ABIGAIL: You will not! Begone! Begone, I say!

DANFORTH: What is it, child?

[But ABIGAIL, pointing with fear, is now raising up her frightened eyes, her awed face, toward the ceiling—THE GIRLS are doing the same—and now HATHORNE, HALE, PUTNAM, CHEEVER, HERRICK, and DANFORTH do the same.]

What's there? [He lowers his eyes from the ceiling, and now he is frightened; there is real tension in his voice.] Child!

[She is transfixed—with all THE GIRLS, she is whimpering open-mouthed, agape at the ceiling.]

Girls! Why do you—?

MERCY LEWIS [pointing]: It's on the beam! Behind the rafter!

DANFORTH [looking up]: Where?

ABIGAIL: Why—? [She gulps.] Why do you come, yellow bird?

PROCTOR: Where's a bird? I see no bird!

ABIGAIL [to the ceiling]: My face? My face?
PROCTOR: Mr Hale—
DANFORTH: Be quiet!
PROCTOR [to HALE]: Do you see a bird?
DANFORTH: Be quiet!!
ABIGAIL [to the ceiling, in a genuine conversation with the 'bird', as though trying to talk it out of attacking her]: But God made my face; you cannot want to tear my face. Envy is a deadly sin, Mary.
MARY WARREN [on her feet with a spring, and horrified, pleading]: Abby!
ABIGAIL [unperturbed, continuing to the 'bird']; Oh, Mary, this is a black art to change your shape. No, I cannot, I cannot stop my mouth; it's God's work I do.
MARY WARREN: Abby, I'm here!
PROCTOR [frantically]: They're pretending, Mr Danforth!
ABIGAIL [now she takes a backward step, as though in fear the bird will swoop down momentarily]: Oh, please, Mary! Don't come down.
SUSANNA WALSOTT: Her claws, she's stretching her claws!
PROCTOR: Lies, lies.
ABIGAIL [backing farther, eyes still fixed above]: Mary, please don't hurt me!
MARY WARREN [to DANFORTH]: I'm not hurting her!
DANFORTH [to MARY WARREN]: Why does she see this vision?
MARY WARREN: She sees nothin'!
ABIGAIL [now staring full front as though hypnotised, and mimicking the exact tone of MARY WARREN's cry]: She sees nothin'!
MARY WARREN [pleading]: Abby, you mustn't!
ABIGAIL AND ALL THE GIRLS [all transfixed]: Abby, you mustn't!
MARY WARREN [to all THE GIRLS]: I'm here, I'm here!
GIRLS: I'm here, I'm here!
DANFORTH [horrified]: Mary Warren! Draw back your spirit out of them!
MARY WARREN: Mr Danforth!
GIRLS [cutting her off]: Mr Danforth!
DANFORTH: Have you compacted with the Devil? Have you?
MARY WARREN: Never, never!
GIRLS: Never, never!
DANFORTH [growing hysterical]: Why can they only repeat you?
PROCTOR: Give me a whip—I'll stop it!
MARY WARREN: They're sporting. They—!
GIRLS: They're sporting!
MARY WARREN [turning on them all hysterically and stamping her feet]: Abby, stop it!
GIRLS [stamping their feet]: Abby, stop it!
MARY WARREN: Stop it!
GIRLS: Stop it!
MARY WARREN [screaming it out at the top of her lungs, and raising her fists]: Stop it!!
GIRLS [raising their fists]: Stop it!!
[MARY WARREN, utterly confounded and becoming overwhelmed by ABIGAIL's—and THE GIRLS'-utter conviction, starts to whimper, hands half raised, powerless, and all the girls begin whimpering exactly as she does.]

DANFORTH: A little while ago you were afflicted. Now it seems you afflict others; where did you find this power?

MARY WARREN [staring at ABIGAIL.]: I—have no power.

GIRLS: I have no power.

PROCTOR: They're gulling you, Mister!

DANFORTH: Why did you turn about this past two weeks? You have seen the Devil, have you not?

HALE [indicating ABIGAIL and THE GIRLS]: You cannot believe them!

MARY WARREN: I—

PROCTOR [sensing her weakening]: Mary, God damns all liars!

DANFORTH [pounding it into her]: You have seen the Devil, you have made compact with Lucifer, have you not?

PROCTOR: God damns liars, Mary!

MARY utters something unintelligible, staring at ABIGAIL, who keeps watching the 'bird' above.

DANFORTH: I cannot hear you. What do you say?

MARY utters again unintelligibly.

You will confess yourself or you will hang! [He turns her roughly to face him.] Do you know who I am? I say you will hang if you do not open with me!

PROCTOR: Mary, remember the angel Raphael—do that which is good and—

ABIGAIL [pointing upward]: The wings! Her wings are spreading! Mary, please, don't, don't—!

HALE: I see nothing, Your Honour!

DANFORTH: Do you confess this power! [He is an inch from her face.] Speak!

ABIGAIL: She's going to come down! She's walking the beam!

DANFORTH: Will you speak!

MARY WARREN [staring in horror]: I cannot!

GIRLS: I cannot!

PARRIS: Cast the Devil out. Look him in the face! Trample him! We'll save you, Mary, only stand fast against him and—

ABIGAIL [looking up]: Look out! She's coming down!

[She and all the girls run to one wall, shielding their eyes. And now, as though cornered, they let out a gigantic scream, and MARY, as though infected, opens her mouth and screams with them. Gradually ABIGAIL and THE GIRLS leave off, until only MARY is left there, staring up at the 'bird', screaming madly. All watch her, horrified by this evident fit. PROCTOR strides to her.]

PROCTOR: Mary, tell the Governor what they—[He has hardly got a word out, when, seeing him coming for her, she rushes out of his reach, screaming in horror.]
MARY WARREN: Don’t touch me—don’t touch me!
    [At which THE GIRLS halt at the door.]
PROCTOR [astonished]: Mary!
MARY WARREN [pointing at PROCTOR]: You’re the Devil’s man!
    [He is stopped in his tracks.]
PARRIS: Praise God!
GIRLS: Praise God!
PROCTOR [numbed]: Mary, how—?
MARY WARREN: I’ll not hang with you! I love God, I love God.
DANFORTH [to MARY]: He bid you do the Devil’s work?
MARY WARREN [hysterically, indicating PROCTOR]: He came at me by
    night and every day to sign, to sign, to—
DANFORTH: Sign what?
PARRIS: The Devil’s book? He came with a book?
MARY WARREN [hysterically, pointing at PROCTOR, fearful of him]:
    My name, he want my name. ‘I’ll murder you’, he says, ‘if my wife
    hangs! We must go and overthrow the court,’ he says!
    [DANFORTH’S head jerks toward PROCTOR, shock and horror
    in his face.]
PROCTOR [turning, appealing to HALE]: Mr Hale!
MARY WARREN [her sobs beginning]: He wake me every night, his eyes
    were like coals and his fingers claw my neck, and I sign, I sign ...  
HALE: Excellency, this child’s gone wild!
PROCTOR [as DANFORTH’S wide eyes pour on him]: Mary, Mary!
MARY WARREN [screaming at him]: No, I love God; I go your way no
    more. I love God, I bless God. [Sobbing, she rushes to ABIGAIL.]
    Abby, Abby, I’ll never hurt you more!
    [They all watch, as ABIGAIL, out of her infinite charity, reaches
    out and draws the sobbing MARY to her, and then looks up to
    DANFORTH.]
DANFORTH [to PROCTOR]: What are you? [PROCTOR is beyond speech
    in his anger.] You are combined with anti-Christ, are you not? I
    have seen your power; you will not deny it! What say you, Mister?
HALE: Excellency—
DANFORTH: I will have nothing from you, Mr Hale! [To PROCTOR] Will
    you confess yourself befouled with Hell, or do you keep that black
    allegiance yet? What say you?
PROCTOR [his mind wild, breathless]: I say—I say—God is dead!
PARRIS: Hear it, hear it!
PROCTOR [laughs insanely, then]: A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of
    Lucifer, I see his filthy face! And it is my face, and yours, Danforth!
    For them that quail to bring men out of ignorance, as I have quailed,
    and as you quail now when you know in all your black hearts that
    this be fraud—God darns our kind especially, and we will burn,
    we will burn together!
DANFORTH: Marshall! Take him and Corey with him to jail!
HALE [starting across to the door]: I denounce these proceedings!
PROCTOR: You are pulling Heaven down and raising up a whore!
HALE: I denounce these proceedings, I quit this court! [He slams the door to the outside behind him.]
DANFORTH [calling to him in a fury]: Mr Hale! Mr Hale!

John Proctor is found guilty of witchcraft and finally executed. His wife Elizabeth is saved only because she is pregnant.

Forming

Can you identify how the theme of this play explores the way the persecution of innocent people can happen through hatred, hysteria and prejudice?

Do you know of any other plays that deal with the same theme?

Can you think of any recent events in our history where something similar happened or is still happening?

Performing

Working in groups, create and improvise a play which focuses on how people are persecuted or mistreated for being different in some way. Once you have formed the situation and the characters, have each member of the group take responsibility for scripting one scene or episode of the play.

Rehearse the play, continuing to develop and improve the script as well as adding stagecraft elements to the work. In particular, make full use of all the forms of focus explored in this unit.

Perform your play to an outside audience, if possible holding a discussion session afterwards to hear their opinions and to answer their questions about your play.
Chapter 7
Creating Dramatic Environments

Introduction

Whenever we create a drama, we use our imagination to transform ourselves and the drama space, forming a whole range of different times, places and locations or environments for our dramas. This form of transformation is just as important as changing into different characters. In this chapter we will explore a range of techniques which help us to create interesting and effective dramatic environments for our work.

The elements of time and place allow us to locate our drama when and where we want, while transformation helps us to actually create the environments we are imagining.

Two major twentieth-century theatre directors developed a whole form of theatre that relies on transformation to make drama. Jerzy Grotowski worked in Poland between 1959 and 1976, and Trevor Nunn has worked in England from 1970 to the present day. By studying and applying the transformational work of these two directors, we can become skilled at using transformation to create dramatic environments.
In our drama work, time and place always go together, because every drama happens somewhere and some when. To learn how to use these elements effectively however, it is useful to look at how they operate separately.

**Time**

Let's begin with the element of time, and look at the different time frames we can place our dramas in—past, present and future. We will also look at the different ways we can use time within each frame. As well, we can move freely between different time frames and different types of time. After all, the only limit on our drama work is our own imagination.

**Time past**

Choosing a time frame from the past allows us to explore the whole history of our world, from the time of the dinosaurs through to something that happened only a few seconds ago.

Using a frame from the past involves using our imagination to go back in time and act as though we really are in a different time frame. This means that we can bring history to life and relive the people and events from any period since time began. To give an interesting perspective on historical events, we can pretend to travel back and see another time frame through modern eyes.

**Time present**

We use our own time frame to explore people, situations and issues which are important to us here and now. Many of our dramas will use the present to look at friendships, families, personal experiences and local events. However, we can also combine the present time frame with a different place or location to explore interesting and dramatic situations from the Olympic Games to terrorism, from being a refugee to being an astronaut.

It is by using the present time frame that we explore the world we live in now and come to understand it better.

**Time future**

This can mean going to thousands or millions years into the future to explore some of the possibilities for the world. It also offers a frame for us to create fantastic and surreal dramas, which can be amazingly dream-like or futuristic. Films like *The Time Machine* and series like *Stargate* and *Star Trek* use future time frames to create fascinating dramatic situations and characters.
Time future—*Galaxy Quest* with Tim Allen, 1999

We can also choose a time frame that is only years, months, or days later than the present. This allows us to foresee the future consequences of present actions and behaviour. We can also move between future, present and past time frames to enhance our dramas.

**Time Frame Exercises**

1. Working in pairs, begin improvising a scene set in the present. Take it in turns for one of you to time jump after about twenty seconds of improvisation—to the future, back to the present or into the past. Each jump must continue the improvisation, but change the action according to the time frame. For instance, star troopers fighting an alien in the future would become knights in armour in the past, while someone working a computer in the present would mime writing with a quill on parchment in the past.

2. Again in pairs, improvise a situation involving friends in the present. It could be going to movies together, playing a sport or working together. Now choose a past time frame and improvise what two friends would do in that time. Finally, do the same for a future time frame, imagining what the friends would be doing.

**Using time in different ways**

Within each time frame we can also use time in different ways. Real Time is when our dramas take the actual time of the action. A five-minute improvisation would last five minutes, just as it does in real life.
Selective Time is the most common form of dramatic time. Here we choose to focus only on the most dramatic moments. When we use selective time we can begin a drama and then skip large blocks of time, concentrating on just the interesting moments in our story. In fact, we can use selective time to cover the highpoints of an experience, or a person’s whole life, in just a few dramatic moments.

Flexible Time can use time frames flexibly, moving back and forth in history. We can also use the actual passing of time flexibly, slowing it down in slow motion action or speeding it up so events happen very quickly.

**Flexible Time Exercises**

1. In pairs, improvise a situation, such as putting up a tent, where everything goes wrong. Create the whole situation and each of the accidents in real time.

2. In groups, improvise a series of news photographs of an incident. Create each of the photographs in freeze-frames so that we see selective pictures of the incident.

3. Create a drama about a game of tennis or cricket or netball. Speed up and slow down the time at key moments to emphasise the action.

**Place**

As an element, place is vital because it locates our dramas, and we need to be aware of finding the most effective place frames for all our work. Even in spontaneous improvisation, where we form the drama as we go along, we need to have a very clear place frame in our minds to provide the right context.

Just as there are three key time frames, there are also three key place frames we can use.

**Specific place frames**

Specific place frames locate our drama in an actual place, such as a room, a schoolyard or a shop. This is important when we are working realistically and want to give a strong texture to our drama.

We can also choose a particular location everyone knows, such as Uluru, for an improvisation about being tourists in the outback, or the Eiffel Tower if our drama involves experiences overseas. Locating our drama in specific places such as these provides us with an immediate and clear context.

**General location frames**

We use general location frames when we are interested in exploring experiences that happen in certain kinds of environments—at the
beach, in the snow, or in space, for example. In these cases the actual location does not matter, but the type of environment does. A drama about the drought could be set in a dry riverbed, and could be anywhere in Australia.

![Drought-affected country](image)

**Mood location frames**

Sometimes our dramas require a particular mood or feeling rather than a place, and here we can use stagecraft techniques to create environments that have a particular atmosphere.

A nightmare might be located in a dark, eerie environment full of shadows and strange sounds; and locating a drama in space or underground would use similar lighting and staging techniques. We could suggest a beautiful, peaceful place, such as underwater with blue lights and cloths and soft music. What matters is the feel rather than the appearance of the location.

**Key Term**

Music is perhaps the best way of all to create a mood, because we respond emotionally to music with the right side of the brain.

**Place Frame Exercises**

1. As a whole class, create an improvisation based in a classroom. Use your classroom as the location.

2. In groups, improvise a drama about visiting the beach. Mime some of the activities that would take place, clearly establishing the characteristics of the place.

3. In pairs, improvise exploring a haunted house at night as a dare. Create the atmosphere of the place as strongly as you can.
Warming up

Time and place jump: Working in groups, have one person begin an improvisation by doing a simple action and talking. When the teacher calls time, and names a past or future jump, the next member of the group enters and joins the improvisation, changing the time frame. The teacher can also call place and name a location and the next member of the group enters and changes the place frame to the one named.

Forming

The class divides in half. One half creates an event from Australia's past—the First Fleet, the Eureka Stockade or Gallipoli, for example. Try to make the drama set in this time and place frame as real as possible.

The other half of the class creates its drama as a contemporary film company making a film about this historical event.

Performing

The two groups perform for each other. As much as possible, the audience should be included in the action. So, in the past time and place frame, the film crew group can become convicts or miners or soldiers. In the modern time and place location the audience can be included as extras in the film, being the characters they portrayed in their own improvisation.

Reflecting

Write an analysis of the other group's performance. How effectively and believably did they create their time and place frame? How well did they use characterisation and focus and tension in their drama?
Although Jerzy Grotowski died in 1999, he actually stopped directing plays in 1976, and spent the rest of his life working in private with small groups of people using drama techniques to help them improve their lives. However, his use of transformation has influenced most modern theatre.

Grotowski called his form of theatre 'Poor Theatre' because he refused to use expensive technical or staging resources in his work. He believed that it was up to the actor to create whole worlds and different characters through the power of imagination and the use of expressive skills. His methods of doing this are extremely valuable in the drama classroom.

Trevor Nunn was a young theatre director working with the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960s when Grotowski brought his theatre to England. Nunn’s work was powerfully influenced by Grotowski’s techniques. But Nunn has gone on to develop other ways of using transformation as well. In the past fifteen years he has helped to create and direct some of the most interesting and successful theatre the world has seen, including Nicholas Nickleby, Cats, Starlight Express and Les Misérables. These musicals directed by Nunn make extensive use of transformation to achieve their magical and dramatic effects.

As soon as you try to provide a realistic setting for a drama—one that looks real—your space becomes cluttered with objects. If you are exploring family relationships and one of your scenes involves a family breakfast, do you really need to turn the drama space into a recognisable kitchen with a sink, stove, cupboards, table and chairs, plates, cutlery, glasses and so on? Even if you had the room for and access to all these objects, using them all would slow down the action of the drama and distract your focus from the meaning of the scene, which concerns the relationships in a family.

**Transforming Objects**

There may be times when your drama demands a completely realistic setting, but this will be very rare, and only necessary when the nature and meaning of the drama is enhanced by real objects, costumes and props.
For most of your work you will be able to use your imagination to transform simple objects already available in the classroom to represent the particular location or setting that you need. For the family kitchen, your classroom chairs can serve as the kitchen chairs, a desk or a table with cloth on it is the kitchen table, and you simply mime the use of all the other objects in the scene, imagining them and pretending they are there. If your focus on the drama is strong enough, this will be all you require to create the kitchen for yourselves and for any audience that is watching.

Furthermore, you can go on transforming simple objects and empty spaces as many times as you like. The classroom chairs can be used as kitchen chairs, and can then become the seats in a car, a park bench and even a fence. The desk can be transformed from the kitchen table to a bed in the next scene, then the counter in a shop, and can be turned upside down to represent anything from an elevator to a sailing boat.

We use simple transformations like this in the classroom all the time. Modern theatre uses transformation in exactly the same way to create exciting and powerful plays.

In Grotowski’s production of the play Akropolis, the play began with a pile of old metal pipes on stage. The play was set in a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War.

As the play progressed, the characters used the pipes to create the settings for different scenes, and at the end joined them together to make the gas ovens that were used to exterminate the Jews.

The costumes for this production were made out of old flour sacks with big holes in them, and the insides were lined with red
material, so every time the characters moved, it looked as though they had been slashed with knives or bayonets and we could see their bleeding bodies.

The use of objects in this way not only makes it possible to stage any scene you want with a minimum of resources, but it also actually challenges your imagination, so that you become really involved in the drama as a performer or audience.

**Journal Writing**

Describe how you could use a simple household object and transform it to create the staging of a play set in four different locations, inside and outside.

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1. As a whole class, form a circle. Begin with one student taking a piece of paper and transforming it imaginatively into something else. Fold it, use it, wear it or place it in some way to clearly demonstrate what it has become. See if others can identify the newly transformed object. The paper is passed to the next student who transforms it into something else in a similar way. The piece of paper is passed around the circle until every student has had the opportunity to transform it.

2. Working individually with a chair, imagine that your chair is another kind of seat somewhere else. Sit in the chair in a way that demonstrates what kind of chair it has become and where it is.

3. Now take the chair and transform it into a completely different object and move it or use it in a way that makes it absolutely clear what it has become. Be as imaginative as possible in your use of transformation.

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**Transforming Light and Sound**

In a similar way to transforming objects, you can use simple lighting, sound effects and music to create powerful and atmospheric settings and situations. You do not need elaborate stage lighting or sound equipment to do this. A tape recorder, a few coloured lights, or even just plain white light and darkness can create whole worlds for your dramas.

One of the most powerful pieces of modern musical theatre, *Les Misérables*, directed by Trevor Nunn, used just a bright white light shining through gaps and the sound of dripping water to create the sewers of Paris. In the same musical one of the most stunning theatrical effects ever created was done through transformation.
This was the suicide of the policeman, Javert. It was achieved by the actor jumping off a narrow bridge, which was then flown up out of sight. A pattern of light like water flowing was projected onto the floor and the actor rolled slowly through it as though being washed away by the river.

![Image](Transforming the stage with light—the sewers of Paris from *Les Misérables*).

It is the skilled, imaginative use of transformations like this that can make your work really powerful and creative—combinations of light and dark, and sound and music, are among the most effective resources you have for making dramatic meaning.

**Transforming Light and Sound Exercises**

1. Set up one or more separate spotlights in the room, preferably using different colours. Working in pairs or small groups, improvise a situation that uses the coloured spotlights as the environment for your drama. Use your imagination to transform the shafts of coloured light into as many different kinds of environment as possible.

2. Working in small groups, listen to a piece of music or sound effect. Discuss what kind of environment the music or sound suggested. Then structure an improvised sequence to fit the transformed environment.
Transforming Materials

Although costumes can be important in establishing the time and place of a drama, you do not need to dress up in all the clothes a character would normally wear. A single item, such as a coat or skirt, or even just a hat or a tie, is often all you need in the way of costume. Using single pieces of costume to represent a whole outfit encourages your imagination to fill in the details and visualise the complete costume and, in doing this, you become more actively involved in the world of the drama.

Another valuable form of transformation involves the use of pieces of material. A few lengths of coloured cloth are enough to create not only costumes but settings and locations. If you want to create a river on stage all you need is a length of blue cloth, which can be gently waved as though it is water flowing. If you want to show people crossing the river as it gets deeper and deeper, the cloth can be lifted higher as you mime wading through it until it is up to your necks or even over your heads. If your focus is strong enough and the use of movement is really skilled, then your drama space will be transformed into the river and the story of the people crossing that river will come to life.

Journal Writing

How could you use coloured cloths to create environments such as rainforests, the Great Barrier Reef, a snow slope or the surface of the moon? Draw a series of labelled sketches to demonstrate the use of transformation or materials to create these environments.

Pieces of cloth can be used to represent other experiences as well. A piece of red cloth can become blood flowing from a wound, as Grotowski showed, but it can also be used a hangman’s noose, a whip, part of a uniform, a sail, or anything else.

It would be possible—and powerful—to create a whole drama about convicts on the First Fleet using nothing but coloured cloth to represent all the costumes and the settings—and even to show the action through the use of cloth.

Two of the most stunning puppetry companies in the world use cloth in this way. The Phillippe Genty company from France combines puppets, actors and the use of cloths to create magical worlds. Australia’s Handspan Theatre Company in Melbourne has created miraculous theatre, which has made it world famous, through the use of transformation of materials.


**Workshop 1: Transforming Materials**

**Warming up**

Working in pairs, use a length of cloth and transform it a number of times to create a series of freeze frames with titles such as The Rescue, Trapped, The Slave, The Savage Creature and The Execution.

**Forming**

Using lengths of coloured cloth, transform the drama space into a number of different dramatic environments such as the goldfields of the 1850s, the Great Barrier Reef, or a fantasy world. For each of these environments, improvise in character, responding to the imaginary environments that you have created.

**Performing**

Choose one of the dramatic environments you created with coloured cloth. Refine your work and perform it to another group.

**Reflecting**

Work in small groups and act as costume designers for another group using cloth to represent elements of costume to depict the different levels of power and wealth of a futuristic society.

Place the actors portraying the characters in this futuristic society in freeze-frames, and then sculpt them to show what their personalities are and what relationships exist between them. (Another group should act as designers for your group.) The actors then take over the drama by selecting a caption, title or line of dialogue for each character. Finally, the scene is brought to life through improvisation.
Note

The play *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* by Peter Shaffer uses this type of transformation. It tells the story of the conquest of Peru by the Spaniards.

The actors portraying the Incas turned their backs to the audience and spread their cloaks, lifting their hands above their heads. This created the effect of a series of mountain peaks, and the actors portraying the Spaniards mimed climbing between these mountain peaks. The effect was particularly memorable and dramatic.

Transforming Ourselves

As you saw in Chapter 2 on characterisation, when you take on a role in drama you transform yourself into someone else. However, you can also transform yourselves physically and vocally not just into other people, but also into anything at all. Your bodies can be frozen into any shape you choose, from rocks to trees to doors to nightmare creatures from the imagination. When you do this you become sculptural objects in the drama space, providing a setting that is much more interesting and dramatic than real objects.

Using your bodies as staging in this way also allows you to transform yourselves as often as you like, so that you could create a play where an expedition of explorers crossed deserts, climbed mountains and struggled through jungles. Some of your group could portray the explorers while the rest of the group transform themselves to become the different environments one after another.

Nicholas Nickleby

By far the most successful and sustained use of physical transformation by actors in modern theatre occurs in Trevor Nunn’s production of *Nicholas Nickleby*, the theatrical adaptation of Charles Dickens’s novel.

The whole work runs for more than eight hours. In its performances throughout the world the play was performed in four parts over four nights, and then, on the Saturday, the whole four parts were performed, beginning at 10 a.m. and finishing
close to midnight! The work tells the story of Nicholas Nickleby, a young man in nineteenth century England whose adventures take him from London to a teaching position in a school in the north, then to travelling with an acting company, and finally returning to London.

The most surprising and creative element of Nicholas Nickleby was the way that the actors created all the scenes using their bodies and movement to represent hundreds of different places and events on stage over the eight hours.

As well as portraying all the characters in the story, the actors became the walls, doors and windows of houses, the graves in a cemetery, a dark mist swirling across the ground, and a coach travelling across the stage.

By transforming themselves and a few simple objects, props and materials, the actors were able to perform the whole story of Nicholas Nickleby over eight hours without elaborate staging or settings. In fact, the constant use of transformation made the work much more exciting and imaginative than a complete, realistic portrayal would have been.

Grotowski used similar forms of self-transformation to explore a range of human experiences, even asking his actors to transform themselves into animals, birds, and dream and nightmare creations to represent the whole range of human experience and explore it in new ways.
Workshop 2: Transforming Ourselves

Warming up

Working in pairs, create a series of freeze-frames where you combine to transform your bodies to create dramatic images of creatures, objects and places. Bring these images to life and freeze them again.

Forming

1. Working in groups of five or six, create an improvisation entitled ‘A Day At School’. One member of the group acts as him or herself and the rest of the group transform themselves to become everything in the environment of the school: for example the walls of rooms, desks, chairs, whiteboards and television monitors.

2. Prepare a series of role cards or obtain some from your teacher around a theme such as A Voyage of Discovery, An Archaeological Find, A Visitor from Another World. The role cards need to cover a whole range of human and non-human roles which challenge you to be as creative and skilled as possible in your transformations. Make sure you take on a number of different roles.

Transforming the Audience

Finally, when you are performing for an audience, you can transform not just the acting space but the space occupied by the audience as well.

Grotowski pointed out that the theatre gives you something that film and television can never achieve—an encounter between living actors and a live audience. In the end, to create a piece of theatre, all you need is someone acting and someone watching. You can then involve that audience in the drama by placing them in certain positions, or moving them to different places in the acting space so that they feel they are part of the action.

Very often in the classroom, you do not need a separate audience for your dramas at all. You are both the actor and the audience, actively creating a piece of drama and also watching and appreciating it as it develops.

Grotowski did just this in all his productions, getting rid of the standard theatre structure of an auditorium full of seats facing a raised stage. Instead, he chose to work in empty rooms and halls. This allowed him to place the actors and the audience together, sharing the same space.

For Grotowski’s production of Christopher Marlowe’s play Dr Faustus, about a man who sells his soul to the devil, the audience entered a large room which had long tables scattered around with food and drink on them. The audience sat at these tables, and so
did the actors. The play began with the actors simply standing up and starting to act, performing around and even on the tables, right among the audience. For *Kordian*, which is set in an insane asylum, the audience sat on chairs among the beds occupied by the actors portraying the inmates, and some of the audience even sat on the beds themselves, almost as though they were in the play.

You can use the same technique in the drama classroom, so that when you perform a drama for an audience of your classmates, or another class, or for the public, you deliberately organise the relationship between the performers and the audience to make the play really work.

For instance, if you have created a piece of dramatic movement to music to create the environment of the rainforest, you might place your audience inside your improvisation as though they are part of the rainforest.

For a play about people living in a hostel or halfway house and trying to re-build their lives after illness, abuse or imprisonment, you might place the audience in a circle around the performance space, making up the walls of the room, so that they are outside the action but feel very close to it.

As you can see, transforming the audience space can change and intensify the nature of your dramatic work, making the communication of meaning much more direct and effective.

Can you visualise a prison cell? How else could you use audience placing to make a drama more powerful?

*Note*

Grotowski did not try to make the audience take part, but he always tried to place them so that they felt themselves part of the whole experience. In this way the normal theatre space of auditorium and stage was transformed into many different spaces where the relationship between the actors and the audience always suited the play.
Transformation: Working with a Text

Away by Michael Gow

We used two speeches from this superb modern Australian play in our work on voice. Let us look at it in more detail as an example of transformation on stage.

Away is actually set in 1968, when Australia was involved in the Vietnam War and the country was undergoing rapid and wide-ranging social change. It tells the story of three families who go away on holidays at Christmas time, and shows how they come to terms with the changes in their lives.

The play uses a wonderful blend of realism and magical transformation in the characters, the plot and the settings. The play opens with a school production of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. The fairies in this scene magically reappear in a later scene in the play to cause the storm that brings the three families together.

Many productions of Away use the actors playing these spirits to change each scene in the production, transforming the stage with coloured cloths and using music and lighting to create whole environments—the school hall, the houses of the families, a ballroom, a caravan park and the beach.

Away uses transformations like this not just to create whole worlds on stage, but also to celebrate the real and dramatic power we have to transform ourselves as well as our world.

Away, The Playbox Theatre Company production, 1986, with Jillian Murray, Ross Williams and Rosemary Barr
Reflecting

In your journals or workbooks, analyse the following two scenes from Away, and decide what forms of transformation you would use to stage them. Be as imaginative and dramatic in your use of transformations as possible, sketching and describing your ideas.

Away

Act 1 Scene 1
[A school performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream is coming to a close. The Mendelssohn soundtrack blares from a tinny loudspeaker. Kids dressed as FAIRIES scurry about in garish light. The music ends and the FAIRIES strike a tableau. One of them, TOM, steps forward and addresses the audience.]

TOM:  If we shadows have offended
  Think but this, and all is mended,
  That you have but slumbered here
  While these visions did appear.
  And this weak and idle theme,
  No more yielding but a dream,
  Gentles, do not reprehend.
  If you pardon, we will mend.
  And, as I am an honest Puck,
  If we have unearned luck
  Now to scrape the serpent's tongue,
  We will make amends ere long;
  Else the Puck a liar call.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.
[Music again, the FAIRIES scurry about and the curtain closes.]

Forming

There are a number of different ways of interpreting this scene. For this workshop, try to make this closing speech from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream as magical as possible.

Work in groups to transform the stage and the actors using cloths, fragments of costume, objects, lighting and staging. In particular, make the appearance and movement of the fairies as surreal and magical as possible.

Performing

In Act 3 Scene 4, a storm strikes the caravan park where Jim and Gwen and their daughter Meg are staying, destroying their caravan. Magically, the fairies who appeared in the first scene have returned to create the storm. Again, try to make the use of transformation as imaginative and powerful as possible. When you perform the scene for another group or the whole class, make sure you place your audience so that they experience the scene as effectively as possible.

Away

Act 3 Scene 4

Storm Scene

[The FAIRIES return and stage a spectacular storm, emptying the stage to the sound of Mendelssohn's Wedding March.]

JIM: Put the clothes in the car.
GWEN: Take the stove!
JIM: I'm going to try and dig a trench.
GWEN: You'll get struck by lightening.
JIM: Stay in the car.
GWEN: Where's my purse?
JIM: Stay in the open.
GWEN: The boat will be washed away.
JIM: Stay away from the trees.

[JIM, GWEN and MEG are driven out by the FAIRIES, who wreak havoc with noise, light and frenzied activity.]
Reflecting

Write an analysis of one other group's use of transformation in their work on the two scenes. Concentrate on how effectively and imaginatively they used all the different forms of transformation, and explain how these helped to create the scenes.

Extension Task

1. Working in groups or as a whole class, take the theme of a family or group of friends going away together somewhere and having an experience which transforms their lives. Make the experience an extraordinary one and be as imaginative as possible in finding ways to represent it on stage.

2. Once you have planned and improvised the situation, the characters and the experience, concentrate on using transformations of every kind to enact your drama, applying all you have learnt in the chapter to your work.

Performing

Perform your drama for an audience, making sure you also transform their involvement in the play.
Chapter 8
Ritual and Symbol

Introduction

Drama in the classroom and on stage is not just about making a play, but also about making a special kind of meaning.

We use drama to enact stories and characters in ways that highlight the most important actions, and events, and the most significant people in a story. In this way we make sense of the story for ourselves and for an audience. Throughout history, human beings have always used drama in this way to give special meaning to their lives.

So, our use of drama in the classroom to understand the world we live in is a real part of the whole experience of drama and theatre, and we use the same dramatic elements that are valuable in all drama. In this unit we will concentrate on just two ways of making meaning. These are the elements of ritual and symbol, and they are the special elements that have always been used to make sense of human experience by all peoples in all countries.

The New Shakespeare Company use ritual and symbol in
A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1995
Rituals are ceremonies that are used to celebrate or recognise important events. They involve speaking or singing certain words and acting in certain ways, usually repeating special words and actions a number of times. They also involve wearing particular clothes and using certain objects. Many rituals are associated with religion, and all religious services include rituals.

Getting married in a church involves a ritual everyone recognises. The bride enters to music, escorted by her father, the minister or priest reads from the Bible, the guests sing hymns, and the bride and groom exchange wedding rings. Funerals are also rituals, involving a similar use of music and singing, formal speeches, and particular behaviour patterns.

As well as these very serious rituals, special events such as the Olympics, Grand Finals and festivals also involve rituals that are important to the particular event. For the Olympics, the opening ceremony involved the lighting of the flame. The entrance of the athletes has become a major ritual, watched by billions of people around the world.

Finally, all of us have been involved a number of personal and group rituals which are part of our daily lives. Celebrations, such as birthday parties and graduation ceremonies, involve dressing up, doing things together in a group, and speaking and acting in certain ways.

As you can see, rituals work to emphasise and focus on important moments in people's lives in very dramatic ways. Ritual is therefore a valuable element in drama and, if we can use it effectively, it can give deeper and clearer meaning to our dramatic work.
Can you identify any important rituals that have meaning for you in your own life? Make a list and see if you can describe the reason for each particular ritual. For example, did your primary school have a formal graduation ceremony? Are you a member of a church, club or team with its own rituals?

8.2 Symbol

The use of symbols is another major way that we can give meaning to our drama. A symbol can be anything we give special meaning to. We use symbols all the time in our daily lives, particularly in special ceremonies involving rituals. The gold ring used in the wedding ceremony is a symbol of marriage, and it represents what marriage means. Friendship and engagement rings are also symbols of special relationships and we all understand what they mean.

A skull and crossbones was the symbol of a pirate ship, but now it is used as a warning of deadly poison, either chemical or radiation. And a cross has always been the symbol of Christianity.

Symbols do not have to be objects. We often use gestures to symbolise important ideas or meanings. For example, a clenched fist raised in the air can symbolise freedom, while a finger run in a line across the throat usually symbolises the threat of violent death.

The sound of a heartbeat is often used to symbolise life, as is the sound of breathing. On the other hand, heavy, growling breathing can symbolise some kind of danger or threat, as in a nightmare.

Music too can symbolise particular moods or feelings. Very soft, slow, gentle music often means or evokes feelings of peace and tranquillity, or love and romance. Loud, clashing music carries a clear message as well, and can be used to symbolise war and other forms of violence. Again, we often use music to give special meaning to rituals, such as weddings, funerals and celebrations.

8.3 Ritual and Symbol in Drama

Ritual and symbol work very closely together to make meaning of important experiences in our lives. In order to understand how to make them a powerful part of our drama work, we will look at some particularly effective examples of their use in the theatre. In this regard, the work of two important theatre directors—Antonin Artaud and Peter Brook—is particularly valuable for us.
Artaud: The Theatre of Cruelty

Antonin Artaud was a Frenchman who was one of the most talented European poets of the 1920s.

In 1931 he saw a group of dancers from Bali perform in Paris. This experience inspired him to try to create a form of theatre that did not rely on realistic acting, but used ritual and symbol to make special meaning, using movement and dance, music and sound to create plays which totally involved the audience and in fact overwhelmed them.

If you have ever been to a really outstanding rock concert you will know how excited the audience gets—people yell and sing and dance, totally absorbed in the whole experience. Artaud set out to achieve this effect with stage plays, hoping that they would make the audience feel differently about the world they lived in and want to change it. He wanted to do plays about racial discrimination and war against innocent people that were so powerful that audiences would feel that they had to stop these things happening.

Artaud called his idea of theatre the Theatre of Cruelty because he wanted his plays to have a real impact on audiences—not necessarily painful but always powerful.

To achieve this, he suggested that actors should create their own plays and then use ritual and symbol to perform them, combining spectacular movement and violent action with music, chanting, singing and sound to shock and stun the audience. The performances would have the feeling of powerful rituals which would make the audience feel that what they were experiencing was really important.

Instead of realistic staging, Artaud wanted to use single symbols, which would be more effective and mean more to the actors and the audience.

A play about people locked in prison due to their political beliefs would be set on an empty stage with a giant set of metal bars across the back of the stage to create the sense of being locked in a cage, like an animal. The actors might be asked to make sounds like imprisoned animals or birds, and to prowl or flutter about the stage like helpless, trapped creatures, symbolising the inhuman cruelty of governments that lock up innocent people like animals in a zoo.

Unfortunately, Artaud suffered from mental illness, and never had the chance to put his theories into practice. But his ideas about the use of ritual and symbol in the theatre have been very influential ever since, and provide us with a range of valuable techniques for making meaning in our own dramas.

Key Term
What Artaud meant by the Theatre of Cruelty was an experience that stunned, shocked or amazed an audience, and made them think about their own lives. He did not mean theatre that hurt people or attacked the audience!
Symbol Exercises

1. Create a series of freeze-frames that show people suffering in wartime. Make the frozen images as powerful as possible. To increase the impact, use symbols such as a gun to represent violent death.

2. Using only movement and sound, create an improvisation where each actor portrays an animal to symbolise the different personalities of people—a snake could represent a sly, mean person, a lion a powerful, dominant person, and so on. Create a scene in a workplace where the people show these animal characteristics when they work with each other.

Brook: Towards a World Theatre

Peter Brook is an English director who has been strongly influenced by Artaud and also by Grotowski’s work on transformation, which we explored in Chapter 7.

In his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company in England in the 1960s, Brook was always searching for exciting and different ways to stage and perform plays. His direction of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream in 1970 still stands as one of the most stunning and successful productions of Shakespeare ever staged.

The magic of ritual and symbol—A Midsummer Night’s Dream

For the past thirty years Brook has been trying to develop a form of theatre with universal appeal and meaning. To do this he works with actors from all around the world and uses stories and plays from many different countries to develop performances that can be seen and understood anywhere in the world, from an African village to an Indian temple to the biggest theatres in America and Europe.
The Ik was created by Brook's group of actors working with a number of African tribes. The Ik are a tribe in Africa who still live a very traditional lifestyle. The play used African songs, drumming and dancing to create ritual movement and chanting, which had a powerful effect on audiences around the world. Certain symbols were used that were also understood by audiences everywhere. A pair of boots was used to symbolise the main character in the play, who was always on the move. When actors or members of the audience put on the boots, they became the character, acting out the story of his travels and adventures.

Note
It is important to realise that Brook is not trying to create a new style of theatre, but to find the fundamental elements of theatre that everyone understands and responds to, regardless of language or culture.

Journal Writing

What other symbols could we use in a play to represent the story or a character in it? List some you can think of and explain what each would actually symbolise.

In The Conference of the Birds, which Brook helped to create and then directed, birds and animals were used to symbolise different types of human beings. Ritual movement, singing and dancing were used to tell the story in a way that would make sense to audiences anywhere in the world. Like Aristophanes had done in his plays in ancient Greece, Brook used animals and birds to symbolise human beings.

Brook's most ambitious attempt to create a world theatre using ritual and symbol has been the play called The Mahabharata. It is based on a famous myth from India, which tells the story of the beginning of the human race. In this creation story, two groups of brothers who are descended from the gods fight each other for control of the world. In many parts of Asia The Mahabharata is as well known as the Bible in the Western world. The story is performed all the time in Indonesia and Malaysia by the wayang kulit, the shadow puppets that are the main form of theatre in south-east Asia. However, Peter Brook's version is the first time the story has been performed around the world by actors.

Throughout The Mahabharata, Brook uses repeated movement, singing and chanting to create rituals that have a clear meaning for anyone watching. Many of the battles are fought in a very stylised, ritualistic way so that we see and understand not only the reasons for the fighting but also the cruelty and waste of life.

At the same time, a number of powerful symbols provide the staging for the play. A single chariot symbolises war, and a blood-stained sword stands for violent death.

In one of the most powerful scenes in the play, a woman who had been assaulted and humiliated by one of the warriors watches...
him being killed and then washes her hair in his blood. This symbolic action of revenge conveys a very clear and strong message about the horror of war and the destructive nature of revenge.

Peter Brook directing a rehearsal of *The Mahabharata*

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### 8.4 Ritual and Symbol in Classroom Drama

Artaud's search for ways to change the world through the use of ritual and symbol in the theatre, and Brook's attempts to create a worldwide theatre that communicates through ritual and symbol, provide us with valuable and original ways to make special meaning in our dramatic work.

Let us now look at the key elements in their work and apply them to our own dramas.

**Meaning through Movement**

Stylised and repeated movements can very often convey a message far more powerfully and imaginatively than words. Like Artaud, you should look for ways to tell a story and make meaning through actions, rather than always relying on words. As Brook does, you should search for patterns of movement that focus the attention and communicate clearly to everyone.
A piece of stylised movement or a freeze-frame showing a key moment or crucial experience in a character’s life can be far more effective than a long scene with dialogue. If movement is repeated a number of times during the drama and involves the speaking or chanting of key words, it can take on the force of a ritual which makes clear the importance of the experience.

For example, if your drama concerned a young man who had caused the death of a friend through carelessness or stupidity (perhaps through driving while drunk), then the moment of the friend’s death could be repeated throughout the drama as a ritual in slow motion, with stylised movement. The tragedy of the death and its effect on the young man would then become very clear and give the whole drama real force.

Similarly, a court scene which ends with the verdict of guilty could be ritualised so that after the judge announces the verdict each of the witnesses who has given evidence could stand one by one, point to the accused and also say guilty.

A scene depicting bullying in the playground could begin realistically but then transform into a ritual, with each of the bullies becoming a savage animal which attacks the victim in stylised movement so that a repeated rhythm develops.

Can you recall any dramas you have seen where ritual and symbolic movement was used to make the meaning clear? Describe what happened and analyse the impact of the ritual and symbol.

A drama about a girl growing up and achieving maturity could contain a scene where all the important people in her life ritually celebrate this moment. Actors portraying her parents could act out setting her free, like a bird finding its wings, while other adult characters could create a mime of people working together. There could be a space in the mime for the girl to enter.

Another use of ritual could involve the girl and her schoolfriends saying goodbye. This could be enacted so that the group begins with arms and hands linked and then the group slowly draws apart, until only their hands are touching. Then they could separate completely and move away from each other, looking back over their shoulders. Appropriate music would add an effective symbolic element to this scene and help to give a ritualistic rhythm to the movement.

The use of repeated, stylised movement to create a piece of dramatic ritual offers you the opportunity to give more power and more meaning to your dramas, both for yourselves and for an audience. When you add sound effects and music the force of the ritual is enhanced even further.
Students creating a ritual of the parting of friends

Workshop 1: Ritual and Symbolic Movement

Warming up
Create a sequence of stylised movements with repeated patterns performed in a set rhythm around the idea of someone leaving home.

Forming
As a whole class, create and develop a procession to celebrate the arrival of spring, your school's anniversary, the founding of your town or city, or some similar event. Use symbolic objects, costume, and chanting, as well as your specially devised movements to construct a ritualised dramatic piece.

Reflecting
Analyse the meaning your whole class ritual celebration was designed to convey.

Meaning through Gestures and Images
Even simple gestures can have real force in creating meaning. The finger drawn across the throat as a threat of death is recognised in many different countries and carries real menace. When someone makes the gesture of stretching both arms out like a person being crucified, for many people it has all the impact of Jesus being nailed to the cross, with the many powerful messages that go with this gesture.

When you combine special gestures and actions like these to make particular images and pictures, you can create a whole world of ritual and symbolic meaning in your dramas.
Important moments in a person’s life can also be represented quickly and powerfully using these elements.

Birth, or a major change in someone’s life, can be shown by that person crouching or lying down, enclosed completely by the bodies and arms of others in the group. They can then unfold like a flower opening, and the person can rise and stretch up, freezing in a final image.

The ritual use of gestures and the creation of a symbolic image creates meaning in ways that realistic acting and the use of ordinary language can never achieve. It also allows you to represent significant experiences, such as birth and death, that are almost impossible to enact in the classroom.

**Gesture and Image Exercises**

1. Select a series of gestures followed by freeze-frames that could be used by concerned people demonstrating for a cause. Choose two or three really powerful symbolic gestures and end with a freeze.

2. In groups, select a symbolic object, such as a key, letter, diary, ring, or coin, and focus your improvisation around the significance of that object.

**Meaning through Sound**

You have already seen examples of how the use of words and sounds combines with ritual movement to create clear meanings. You can also use sound effects and music to create both rituals and symbols in your dramas. In any drama involving the portrayal of a natural environment, you can use sound and music to help build a picture of that environment, as you did in Chapter 7. However, you can extend this to create special meaning by developing symbols and enacting rituals involving sound.

Imagine you are working together to dramatise a rainforest environment by transforming coloured cloths, music and sound, and your own bodies.

The meaning or purpose of your drama might be to show that a rainforest is a living organism, and that each part works together to function as a whole, just like your bodies do. Once your group has created the shape and sense of the rainforest, you could play the sound of a human heartbeat and all begin to move and breathe together, as though the rainforest were breathing and had a pulse. This would be an effective way of symbolising your understanding of the rainforest as a living organism.
If you were creating a drama about a drought which was affecting the whole country, what sound effects and music would you use to symbolise the drought? List some of these sound effects and music and explain what they symbolise.

Because music has an emotional impact on us, it is a valuable resource in creating meaning. Artaud, in particular, argues that we should use music to make audiences feel strong emotions in the theatre.

When you combine music with ritual movement, you can generate very intense emotional states that can work to convey your meaning. For example, loud and discordant music can be used to symbolise a jangling and stressful city environment. When you move to that music as well, rushing aimlessly around the space to create the sense of a busy city street, the meaning is clear. If the music also builds to a peak, getting louder and faster, and ending in a clashing climax, you can move in response to that change in rhythm to reinforce the message.

Soft, slow, sad music combined with stylised movement can create a very moving ritual of departure or farewell without a word being said. You can symbolise many important experiences in this way, finding music conveying the emotional nature of the experience, and then constructing ritual movement to go with it.

Symbolic Sound Exercises

1. Start with the sound of a clock ticking and create a piece of ritual using movement, gesture and freeze-frames to make meaning of that ticking clock.

2. Select a piece of music and, in groups, devise a ritualised movement sequence to suit the music.

Meaning through Mask

In the same way as the ancient Greeks used masks in their theatre to symbolise certain aspects of human nature, Brook uses masks from many parts of the world to symbolise the nature of particular characters and their culture.

Artaud suggested the use of masks that would have a clear meaning for the audience. You can create and use masks in all these symbolic ways in your dramas to symbolise important aspects of a character or a situation. If you combine the wearing of masks with ritual sound and movement, you can give special and powerful meaning to your work.
If you wanted to emphasise the way a person will behave quite differently in various situations, you could give your character three or four masks. The person could then put on a new mask in each scene and behave in a very different manner.

If your protagonist were a young man, he might wear a mask with half-closed eyes and a droopy mouth for the scene at work, symbolising his boredom and laziness. In this scene he would just laze around and move very slowly, half-asleep. For a disco scene he could wear a colourful, wild-looking mask, and dance and jump around, full of energy. For a scene with his mates, you could satirise the way they all behave the same by giving them all masks of sheep's faces, and they could all speak and act in unison, creating a ritual of conformity.

You can also use blank or neutral masks to give symbolic effect to your work. Masks without any colours or features really de-humanise the person wearing them, and this can be a useful and effective image to create.

In a drama about a homeless girl, you could all wear neutral masks except the student portraying the girl. This would symbolise the way that the police, social workers, teachers and others who deal with the girl all seem faceless and uncaring in her eyes, rather than individuals who each want to help.

In a nightmare improvisation where people from someone's everyday life become threatening strangers, neutral masks again help to create a sense of threat and inhumanity.
When you combine neutral masks with symbolic movement and chanting, the effect is intensified. In the homeless girl drama, each of the professionals could speak to the girl separately at first, but then they could begin speaking together in a jumble of different words or in a rhythmic repeated chant until she is terrified and finally overwhelmed. The same effect could be used in the nightmare improvisation to create the feeling of a bad dream.

Finally, you can use a technique pioneered by Grotowski in his work on transformation. This is the use of a frozen mask, where your face takes on a strong expression—anger, fear, surprise—and then freezes in that expression. This creates the effect of you being trapped in that expression, forced to go on acting like that whether you want to or not.

This is a useful symbolic tool for dramas about power and persecution. A scene about a prison or a refugee camp could show how the inmates are forced to behave in certain ways, and this would be symbolised by the frozen expression on their faces. Combined with ritual movement where the characters all do the same thing at the same time in rhythm, the meaning of power and persecution would emerge very strongly.

On a personal level, you could use the same technique to show someone being forced to conform by their friends, family or employer. If certain characters were ordered to smile and get on with their work, they could freeze a smile on their faces and work in a forced, mechanical way to symbolise and ritualise the way they are being controlled.

**Mask Exercises**

1. Working in small groups, decide on a situation where people ignore and neglect someone who needs their help. Set your faces in frozen masks that show your lack of interest, indifference or even cruelty towards the person in need. Improvise the scene where they ask for your help, keeping your face frozen in that mask.

2. Using neutral masks or masks of your own design, construct a character for yourself. Take turns to sit in the 'hot seat' and answer in role the questions directed to you by the rest of your group or class. Now create a drama using your masks and devised characters where somebody finds themself surrounded by total strangers.
Working in groups or as a whole class, choose a significant event from Australia's past. It could be the landing of the First Fleet, the destruction of the Aboriginal way of life, the Gold Rush, the settlement of the outback, women gaining the vote, the Vietnam War, immigration, and so on. Discuss what special meaning this event has for you. For example, Gallipoli could symbolise heroism and nationhood, but it also involved a terrible waste of young lives. The settlement of the outback could be a celebration of the pioneer women who worked so hard in such difficult physical conditions.

**Forming**

Create a drama about the significant past context you chose, using all the elements of ritual and symbol you can to convey the meaning of the drama.
Performing

Remember when you perform the drama that you are not trying to tell a story or bring the event to life realistically, but rather to represent it in ways that convey the special meaning it has for you to an audience.

Reflecting

1 Act as an audience for another group’s work. After the performance, discuss the work in detail, asking questions and providing feedback.

2 In your workbook or journal, analyse the performance you saw, identifying the uses of ritual and symbol and evaluating how effectively these conveyed the meaning of the drama.

3 Taking the most effective ritual and symbolic elements from all the works you saw, write a scene which would be both powerful and clear in its meaning in performance.

Extension Task

Here is an extract from Peter Brook’s production of The Conference of the Birds. In the play, the birds of the world all go searching for their true king to guide them through their lives, but when they finally find him, he is really themselves. The play ends with the line: ‘The way is open, but there is neither traveller nor guide.’

The whole meaning of the play, and of the scene below, must be created through the ritual movement of the birds, and you need to make visible on stage the many symbols that are found in the dialogue.

Forming

Work on the scene, improvising the use of ritual and symbol to make sense of the scene and give it special meaning.

Performing

Develop your work for performance to another group or the whole class, using light, sound, music and other resources to make the ritual and symbolism more powerful.
The Conference of the Birds

HOOPOE: Button up your beaks. Stop calling yourselves ants and beggars. Swallow your excuses. Love loves difficult things. It sets fire to each harvest. Don’t hesitate, let childhood go. Put your best foot forward and beat your wings. If everyone burns, we’ll burn, too. [The HOOPOE places himself in the lead, saying:]

HOOPOE: Away.
[The BIRDS form up behind him. All together, they take to the air.]

In the desert
[They fly for a while, slowly, in silence. Then the HOOPOE tells us:]

HOOPOE: At first they had to cross an endless desert where the scorching wind never drew breath. Sometimes the earth seemed to groan beneath them, at other times the only sound was silence. [While they fly, the BIRDS put questions:]

HERON: Why is the way so bare?
FIRST EXOTIC BIRD: What will we eat and drink?
SPARROW: I’m hot. My eyes ache.
DOVE: Tell us what to expect tomorrow and the day after.
DOUBLE BIRD: Describe to us life at the Simorgh’s court.
FALCON: How should we behave? Tell us if you know.
FIRST EXOTIC BIRD: The wind’s making me cry. I can’t see past my wings.
[A BIRD lags behind, saying:]

GUILTY BIRD: I give up. I’m ridden with guilt.
[The HOOPOE flies to his rescue.]

HOOPOE: Come, fly, don’t despair.
GUILTY BIRD: My crimes are so heavy they drag me down.
HOOPOE: Forward!
GUILTY BIRD: I can’t. I’m rotten to the core.
[The HOOPOE forces him to fly. At once another BIRD says:]

SPARROW: Me, too. I’m quitting. I feel I’m quitting.
HOOPOE: Why?
SPARROW: Why? You ask me why? Haven’t I told you? I’m effeminate and unreliable. All I ever do is hop from branch to branch. One day I let myself go, the next day I pull myself together. And besides, I’m not sincere.

HOOPOE: Who is? Your heart’s full of rust. Fly and clean it.
SPARROW: Sometimes, I get drunk.
HOOPOE: And so?
SPARROW: At other times, I only drink water. I don’t know why.
HOOPOE: What will you drink in the desert?
[As the BIRD does not answer, the HOOPOE adds:]

HOOPOE: Your blood, perhaps.
[Another BIRD drops to the ground, saying:]

DOUBLE BIRD: I can’t go any farther.
HOOPOE: Why not, bird?
DOUBLE BIRD: Because I'm my own worst enemy. Don't you see? I've a thief inside me. I don't know him but he's there. I can feel him. If I go any farther, he'll attack me and I'll die.

[The DOUBLE BIRD is silent. The HOOPOE tells him:]

HOOPOE: I knew a very old gravedigger and I asked him: 'You've spent all your life digging tombs. What marvels have you seen?' 'I've only seen one marvel,' he answered. 'I've dug tombs for seventy years, but I've never once buried my desires.'

[The DOUBLE BIRD is thoughtful. It grows dark.]

DOVE: It's growing dark.

HOOPOE: Let's stop for the night.

[They land, while night falls. Suddenly, a BAT swoops amongst them, asking:]

BAT: What are you doing there?
DOVE: We're resting.
BAT: Why are you resting? Do I ever rest?
DOVE: We're tired.
BAT: Have you any news of the sun?
HERON: No, not since last night.
BAT: Then get up. Go back! Quick! You're in great danger. Come on! Get up!

[The BIRDS are alarmed.]

Reflecting

Write a comparative analysis of your own and one other group's work, identifying the more effective uses of ritual and symbol to make meaning of the text.
CHAPTER FIVE
The Development of Australian Theatre

THE BEGINNINGS

The first theatrical performance in Australia was given on 4 June 1789, just eighteen months after the First Fleet arrived. It was a production of a comedy which had recently been successful in England, *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar. The performance was acted by convicts in a mud hut with an audience of about sixty people. Admission was paid with whatever the convicts could afford, including wheat, rum, tobacco and fowls. If you are interested in discovering more about this first theatrical performance, read Thomas Keneally's book *The Playmaker*.

There is also an outstanding modern play based on Keneally's book. This play, *Our Country's Good*, was written in England by Timberlake Wertenbaker, and performed in Melbourne in 1989 and subsequently in other states. Ms Wertenbaker's play shows us the convicts rehearsing *The Recruiting Officer*, and explores the way their involvement in theatre changes their lives. See *Our Country's Good* if you get the opportunity; it is a fascinating account of the beginnings of Australia's theatre, and our society, and a profound reflection on the relationship between them.

The first theatre in Australia was opened in 1796 by Robert Sidaway, a convict. The theatre seated 120, and admission was one shilling. It was closed two years later by order of Governor Hunter, probably because of the pickpocketing and burglary associated with it. Sidaway opened another theatre in 1800, but it did not survive.

The first Australian play did not appear until 1829. There were some very early plays about Australia, but these were written in France and

![Image: Robert Menzies, Jo Kennedy, Bob Hormery and Kim Tren thorne (kneeling) in the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of Our Country's Good.](image-url)

England by people who had never been to Australia, and included lions, tigers and hyenas in their portraits of the wildlife. It is interesting to note that there were two separate plays about the same bushranger, the
Tasmanian convict Michael Howe, who was shot in 1818 in Van Dieman's Land. For more than a century, bushrangers were one of the favourite subjects of Australian plays.

The very first Australian play written by an Australian resident was *The Bushrangers* by David Burn. However, it was performed in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1829, and was not published or performed here until 1971.

In the early days of Sydney's development, Aboriginal corroborees were performed regularly, and they became the first form of public entertainment in Perth after it was founded in 1829. This ancient form of dance drama was therefore part of the birth of theatre in Australia.

In 1833, the first permanent theatre was built in Sydney by Bernard Levey. It seated one thousand people, and Levey presented nearly 400 shows during the theatre's lifetime, mainly melodramas and farces, with occasional operas and Shakespearian plays. As many as five different plays were performed each week. However, the only Australian play was a short piece staged in 1835.

Meanwhile, overseas plays were staged in Hobart from 1833 onwards, there were amateur theatricals in Perth during the 1830s, the first play to be staged in Adelaide opened in 1838, and Melbourne saw its first plays in 1842.

**Melodrama**

Like the rest of the world, Australian theatre was dominated by melodrama throughout the nineteenth century. These plays were written very quickly to a formula (just like TV soaps today) and included sensational happenings, stereotyped heroes and villains and tragic events resolved by happy endings. Most of the plays presented in Australia between 1840 and 1870 were imported melodramas that had been successful overseas.

There were some strong Australian melodramas and comedies written in this period, particularly by convicts. Edward Geoghegan in Sydney wrote *The Hibernian Father* and an operetta, *The Currency Lass*, whilst James Tucker, convict and drunkard, created the comedy *Jenny Green in Australia*, about an innocent London lass who suffers terrible misfortunes in Australia. There was even an early attempt at tragedy: Charles Harper's *The Bushrangers* (1853), the first Australian play published in book form in Australia. The play portrayed the notorious bushranger Jack Donohue as a tragic figure, and was written in blank verse in imitation of Shakespeare.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Australian plays became increasingly popular, but theatre managers in this country were unwilling to stage them unless they were successful in London first. Nevertheless, Walter Cooper's *Colonial Experience* (1866), Arch Murray's *Forged* (1873) and Francis R.C. Hopkins *All For Gold* (1877) were all popular. *All For Gold* toured Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada, and was the first play of Australian origin to be licensed by the Lord Chamberlain in England.

Hopkins went on to write a number of successful plays, as did George Darrell, whose play *The Sunny South* was immensely popular in Australia and England. Alfred Dampier, who produced and starred in Hopkins plays, was one of the few managers to consistently stage Australian plays in the 1880s and 1890s, in particular the stage adaptations of the novels *For the Term of His Natural Life* and *Robbery Under Arms*.

The largest producer of plays in Australia at this time was J.C. Williamson, who had moved to Australia from America in 1874. His company staged plays throughout Australia and New Zealand, and by 1906 employed 650 people, including 187 actors. However, almost all the plays staged by J.C. Williamson's came from overseas, and had been successful, especially in London.

As the twentieth century began, theatre was alive and well in Australia. There were five theatres in Sydney, five in Melbourne, three in Brisbane, two in Adelaide and two in Tasmania. The Theatrical Holiday Book for 1885 listed 62 playwrights in Australia, each averaging two or three plays to their credit, and a number of Australian plays had been successful overseas. The main problem was to get theatre managers in Australia to stage Australian plays.

**EARLY THIS CENTURY**

With Federation in 1901 there were increasing demands for a national Australian theatre which really reflected Australian life. *The Bulletin* had been running a campaign for years, and the emergence of a school of Australian painters, the development of a political consciousness through the trade union movement and the establishment of the ALP all encouraged the supporters of Australian theatre.

A number of Australian writers were inspired by the growth of a national theatre in Ireland and the emergence of a new realism in the theatre through the plays of Ibsen, Chekhov and Shaw, and the work of Stanislavski. A group of these writers, including Louis Esson, attempted to create a distinctive style of Australian drama—without
success. The most popular plays early this century were light comedies, such as *On Our Selection* by Steele Rudd and *The Sentimental Bloke* by C.J. Dennis. Whilst these plays provided amusing, popular entertainment, they relied on caricature and exaggerations of Australian speech to generate laughter.

However, an increasing number of amateur theatre groups around the country were attempting to stage serious and experimental Australian plays, including the Adelaide Repertory Theatre, the Pioneer Players in Melbourne, and in 1930, the Community Playhouse in Sydney. The 1920s and 1930s also saw the emergence of the socialist New Theatres in various states.

Another interesting development in this period was the appearance of playwrights in different parts of the country who wrote specifically about their own local events and concerns. Alexander Turner in Western Australia created definite characters in a particular environment, whilst George Lander Dunn in Queensland wrote about the problems confronting Aborigines in his state. *Fountains Beyond* was the first Australian play to have an Aborigine as its hero, and to deal with the situation of Aborigines as fringe dwellers in a serious drama.

The popularity of radio in the 1930s also led to a number of Australian dramas being broadcast, and the ABC encouraged new playwrights to submit radio plays. There were a number of Eureka plays at this time—both on radio and on the stage—just as there had been bushranger and Ned Kelly plays fifty years earlier.

**WOMEN WRITERS**

In the first half of the twentieth century, women writers in Australia had a much greater influence on the development of their nation's theatre than did their sisters in England or America. As a group, Australia's female playwrights contributed a number of significant plays to our theatre. As individuals, they provided a range of fresh insights and varied perspectives on our drama and our culture.

Betty Roland's play *A Touch of Silk*, first performed in 1928, tells the story of Jeanne, a French girl who meets an Australian soldier in France during the First World War, and comes to live with him on a farm in Australia after the war, in the middle of a drought. She buys some silk underwear from a travelling salesman named Osborne. Her husband makes her life intolerable because of this 'waste' of money, and she goes off to a dance with Osborne. Her husband follows and kills him. To save her husband, Jeanne publicly confesses to adultery with Osborne, which is not true.

Jeanne is an interesting, believable, complex character, and her dilemma in the play tells us a great deal about Australian attitudes to women in the 1920s. Betty Roland wrote a number of other plays, including *Are You Ready Comrade*, a powerful piece of political theatre, and *Granite Peak*, a play set in central Australia.

Catherine Shepherd, another significant writer, lived and worked in Hobart. All her writing deals in some way with the need for self-realisation. *Daybreak* is set in Hobart in convict times and explores an attempt to rebel against the establishment of the day. *Jane My Love* is another historical play set in Tasmania with Lieutenant-Governor Franklin and his wife as central characters.

A third playwright, Dymphna Cusack, went to Sydney University before becoming a teacher. Her plays are sharp social commentaries which support the underdog, and therefore have a very Australian flavour. *Morning Sacrifice* is set in a girls' high school, with an all female cast: the staff of the school. The school is revealed as elite, snobbish and hypocritical. This play was successfully revived by the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1991.
Cusack's plays *Shoulder the Sky* and *Eternal Now* both deal with experiences during the Second World War; not the experiences of the soldiers, but those at home who had to cope with the traumas and dislocations caused by war.

Two important women writers associated with the left-wing New Theatres were Oriel Gray and Mona Brand. Gray's play *Had We But World Enough* deals powerfully with racial discrimination in a small town when a school teacher casts an Aboriginal girl in the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in a Easter play.

Brand won international success with her play *Here Under Heaven* in 1948, which also deals with racism, this time on a sheep station in Queensland during the Second World War.

**THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION**

**Rusty Bugles**

This play by Sumner Locke-Elliott was first performed on 21 October 1948, and marked the beginning of a revolution in Australian theatre. It is set in an army camp in the Northern Territory in 1944, and shows a group of soldiers waiting for the war to end, bored, frustrated and stressed. The play is very strong on character and the conflicts between characters, and the dialogue is free-flowing, authentic Australian speech, superbly structured. The play was immensely popular and influential, and was also prosecuted by the police for the use of obscene language.

As a result of the increasing interest in Australian theatre generated by plays such as *Rusty Bugles*, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was set up in 1954. The Trust raised £90,000 from donations, and received a grant of £30,000 from the Commonwealth Government. The aim of the Trust was to establish a distinctively Australian artistic scene in drama, opera and ballet. In its first year of operation, the Trust achieved an overwhelming success with its presentation of the play *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.

**AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMES OF AGE**

**'The Doll'**

On 11 January 1955, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust presented its first Australian production, Ray Lawler's play *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. The play had shared first prize in The Playwrights' Advisory Board 1954 competition with a play by Oriel Gray called *The Tempests*. 'The Doll' went on to become the most celebrated and influential of all Australian plays. *The Tempests* disappeared into obscurity.

*The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* still stands today as one of the most important plays of the twentieth century. It explores one of the major concerns of modern, realistic theatre: the need of people to have dreams to sustain them, and the way these dreams can also destroy. Roo and Barney, the two cane cutters who come to Melbourne every year during the luff off season in Queensland, are genuinely original creations, as is Olive, the woman who waits for Roo. The end of Olive's dream, when Roo wants to settle down to work in a factory, is treated with compassion. It also marks the end of the Australian myth of the powerful, independent, outback Australian male. The play has universal meaning as well as a distinctively Australian significance, and yet the characters, the situation and the events of the play are completely believable and fascinating. The language is colourful and amazingly effective, yet entirely appropriate to the characters.

*The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was a world-wide success, and awakened an interest in Australian drama not only in this country, but universally. It was followed by another extremely successful play, Richard Beynon's *The Shifting Heart*, which seemed to confirm that Australian drama had come of age.

Like 'The Doll', *The Shifting Heart* is set in a Melbourne suburb—this time Collingwood instead of Carlton—and deals with an Italian immigrant family. On Christmas Eve the son, Gino, goes to a dance and gets into a fight. He comes home, but goes back again, this time carrying a knife. He is badly injured and rushed to hospital, but dies. Maria, his sister, blames all Australians—including her husband Clarrie—for Gino's death, because of their prejudice against Italians. However, the play ends with Maria and Clarrie being reconciled and naming their new son Gino.

*The Shifting Heart* is a devastating attack on Australian racism and attitudes to migrants, but it is also full of warmth and humour. The characterisation is excellent, and even the most stereotyped Italian characters seem interesting in an Australian setting.

A number of interesting plays followed, including the musical, *Lola Montez*, and *The Slaughter of St. Teresa's Day* by Peter Kenn, Plays dealing with Aborigines also emerged at the end of the 1950s, including Oriel Gray's *Burst of Summer*, which was first staged at the Little Theatre (now St. Mark's). The central character is Peggy, an Aboriginal girl who returns to her small country town after starring in a film. The play deals powerfully with racism and its effect on the victims. Other plays to confront the issue of the treatment of Aboriginals at this time were Barbara Stelmach's *Dark Herbies*, set in Queensland, and David Ireland's *Image In The Clay*.
The Nineteen-Sixties

In 1960, the Adelaide Festival of the Arts was staged for the first time. It has gone on to become a major festival, held every two years. Most Australian cities now run regular arts festivals, such as Melbourne’s International Festival, formerly called Spoleto.

Television began in Australia in 1955, and by 1960 was firmly established. From the very beginning, the ABC regularly broadcast TV drama plays, whilst ABC radio continued to support the writing of new drama.

A play rejected by the Board of Governors of the Adelaide Festival in 1960 became the first major play of the 1960s to achieve international acclaim. The One Day Of The Year, written by Alan Seymour, opened at the Palace Theatre in Sydney on 26 April 1961. Set in the Cook household before, during and after Anzac Day, the play is a powerful study of attitudes to Anzac Day, to war itself, and to the whole myth of the ‘bronzed Anzac’. It is also an exploration of family relationships, which gives it a universal appeal.

The 1960s saw the appearance of a number of significant Australian writers.

Patrick White was renowned as a novelist before he turned to writing plays, producing four plays in the early 1960s. Ham Funeral, his most effective work, is an interesting piece of anti-naturalism with effective and often stunning use of language. All his plays achieve moments of striking, non-realistic drama, challenging our attitudes to sexuality and life, but are often sketchy and undeveloped as drama.

In 1968 Thomas Keneally, another renowned novelist, wrote Childersas, a symbolic play dealing with the plight of children in Vietnam. This was one of the first plays to confront the topic of Vietnam.

Born in Perth in 1923, Dorothy Hewett attended university in Western Australia, and was a member of the Communist Party until 1968. Her first play, This Old Man Comes Rolling Home, is a drama of family life, containing a moving, affectionate portrait of the alcoholic Laurie, wife and mother. In 1969, Hewett’s play The Chapel Perilous caused a furore in Perth with its rebellious, sexually-liberated central character, Sally.

A Melbourne doctor, Jack Hibberd’s first play was White With Wire Wheels, a savage comedy about four young Australian males and their sexist, materialist attitudes. Hibberd’s wedding comedy Dimboola, where the members of the audience become the wedding guests, has been enormously successful.

Born in Sydney in 1944, Alex Buzo wrote his first play in 1967. In 1968 Norm and Ahmed was staged at the Old Tote Theatre in Sydney.
This one-act play shows two men meeting on a street at midnight. Norm, a middle-aged Australian, and Ahmed, a Pakistani student. The play ends with Norm attacking and bashing Ahmed, a violent reaction to Ahmed’s foreign reserve and alien attitudes.

Alongside the appearance of new playwrights came a rapid growth in theatre activity. By 1965, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was sharing out more than $2 million amongst the arts in Australia, although only $374,000 went to the theatre. At the same time, the Australian Council For The Arts was established by the Federal Government to distribute money to the arts. A number of new theatre companies were formed, including the Australian Performing Group, based at the Pram Factory in Melbourne, and the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation, which was established in 1969 to encourage cultural traditions and arts amongst Aborigines. The Canberra Repertory Society staged a number of new plays, including Ric Throssell’s For Valour, a tragic portrait of a forgotten hero of the First World War.

In 1966 over a dozen new Australian plays were given professional productions, the most in any year this century. One was Alan Hopgood’s Private Yuk Objects, a comedy about the prospect of going to fight in Vietnam. Hopgood had previously written a very popular comedy about Australian Rules football, And The Big Men Fly.

THE NINETEEN-SEVENTIES

The year 1970 saw the appearance of the first play by Australia’s most successful playwright, David Williamson. Born in Melbourne in 1942, Williamson lectured in engineering at Swinburne College of Technology. The Coming of Stork depicts four young people sharing a flat, and was first performed in 1970 at La Mama Cafe, where many new Australian plays were first seen.

In 1971, two of Williamson’s major works appeared. The Removalists concerns an inexperienced, cynical, police sergeant, Simmonds, and his new young constable, Ross. They agree to help Fiona separate from her drunken husband, Kenny. However, Kenny is attacked by Ross and so badly beaten that he dies. The play ends with the two policemen bashing each other so that they can claim that they were injured by Kenny and killed him in self-defence. This play is Williamson’s most serious piece of social reflection, a powerful indictment of violence and misused authority.

Don’t Party, on the other hand, is a cynical, black comedy about the failure of dreams and the breakdown of the institution of marriage. It depicts a group of people at a party on the eve of the 1969 Federal Election. Both plot and characterisation are sketchy, but the language is flexible, hilarious and revealing. Juggler’s Three, staged by the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1972, deals with a returned Vietnam veteran. Violence and the disintegration of marriage are again Williamson’s concerns.

Williamson wrote prolifically during the 1970s, producing more plays about family relationships, such as What If You Died Tomorrow? and handful of Friends. There were also some biting comedies on the way different kinds of administration work. The Department satirises the workings of a college department, whilst The Club is an hilarious, cutting comedy about an Australian Rules football club. All Williamson’s plays were popular successes, and a number have been performed overseas.

Meanwhile, a number of playwrights who had emerged in the 1960s went on to become major writers. Alex Buzo produced a number of plays which dealt with the dominance of brute force and materialism in Australian society. In Rooted, the rich, virile Simmo never appears on stage, yet he dominates the play. In The Front Room Boys, the bosses control the lives of the office workers in the twelve scenes, one for each month of the year, while in Tom the real villain is big business. Buzo also wrote Corall Lansdowne Says No, a much more individual psychological study, while Martello Towers and Markus Reef both deal with groups of Australians on holiday.

Jack Hibberd’s play A Stretch of the Imagination was a daring piece of theatre, with just one character on stage, the eighty-year-old Monk O’Neill, reminiscing about his life. First performed in 1972, this play is often revived, creating an effective portrait of the end of an Australian myth. The year 1972 also saw Hibberd’s play Captain Midnight VC, about a part-Aboriginal army officer. A Toast to Melba, premiered in 1976, was an episodic biography of Nellie Melba, the famous opera singer.

New playwrights also emerged in the 1970s. John Romeril, who became writer-in-residence at the Pram Factory, wrote a number of plays, most significantly The Floating World in 1974. Set on a cruise ship traveling to Japan, the play evokes the horrors of the Second World War through the memories of its central character, Les Harding. Romeril also created some satirical work, much of it improvised, for the Australian Performing Group.

Born in New Zealand, Alma de Groen lived and wrote in Australia from 1973 onwards. Her play Chidle, premiered in 1976, was based on
the life of William Chidley, an eccentric reformer, and is an adventurous, amusing piece of theatre. On the other hand, Going Home examines the failure of a group of Australians living abroad to find success or happiness.

Jim McNeil wrote a number of plays about life in prison—from prison. Sentenced to seventeen years jail for armed robbery and wounding a policeman, his plays about jail included The Last Cuppa, The Chocolate Frog, and The Old Familiar Juice, all one-acters, and the full-length plays How Does Your Garden Grow, and Jack. All his plays deal with believable, interesting characters, and show prison as a reflection of society itself. Sadly, McNeil died soon after his release from jail.

Other playwrights of the 1970s include Barry Oakley, whose work was performed at the Pram Factory, most notably The Bedfellows, a 1975 domestic comedy about marriage. Ron Blair’s monologue play The Christian Brothers is a marvellous portrait of a Catholic teaching brother, whilst Peter Kenna returned to Australia from England to create another Catholic play, A Hard God. This work examines not only the gulf between man and God, but between the different generations in a family.

The 1970s saw a tremendous growth in drama in Australia both in the size of established theatres, and in the appearance of new ones.

It was the decade of major expansion in the building of new theatres in Australia. The Adelaide Festival Theatre had been the first state arts centre to open, and during the 1970s the Sydney Opera House was completed and arts centres opened or buildings were begun in every state and territory. These new ‘palaces of culture’ were occupied by heavily subsidised State Theatre, Ballet and Opera companies, receiving funding from the Arts Council and from state governments, with sums of close to $1 million to the largest companies by the end of the decade.

At the other end of the scale, small theatre companies blossomed and began performing in a range of buildings which were converted into theatres, including churches, halls, schools, and cafes. In Ipswich, Queensland, an incinerator designed by Walter Burley Griffin became a lovely, intimate little theatre seating about 80 people, opening in 1969 and still in operation.

Children’s Theatre and Theatre-In-Education (TIE) also became an important part of the theatre scene, with individuals such as mime artists and small companies of actor-teachers visiting primary and secondary schools.

In Sydney, The Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre staged a number of Aboriginal plays, including The Cakeman by Robert J. Merritt in 1975, about life on an Aboriginal mission, and Here Comes the Nigger by Gerald Bostock in 1976, about a blind Aboriginal poet in love with his white teacher.

Playwrights were encouraged by the development of the Australian National Playwright’s Conference, which began in 1973, and took place each year in Canberra, giving rehearsed readings of a number of previously unperformed plays.

There were some theatrical casualties during the 1970s as well. The Old Tote Theatre Company, the largest in Sydney, went into decline, and was finally replaced by the Sydney Theatre Company. The Australian Performing Group at the Pram Factory, the actor’s co-operative responsible for staging so many new plays during the 1970s, was a spent force by the end of the decade. However, Anthill, the Australian Nouveau Theatre under the direction of Jean Pierre Mignon, had already emerged to balance this loss. All-in-all, the 1970s was the most vibrant decade in the whole development of Australian drama.

THE NINETEEN-EIGHTIES

The decade of the 1980s saw two major developments in Australian drama. The established theatres and the well-known playwrights continued to flourish. At the same time, a whole range of new theatres emerged, and there was an upsurge in new writing for the stage.

The large, subsidised theatre companies in each state and territory continued to expand and increase the number of plays presented and the size of their audiences. As well as presenting ‘classic’ plays such as a yearly Shakespeare and a regular diet of successful, contemporary, overseas plays, the state theatre companies also showed an increased interest in staging new Australian plays, and in re-discovering plays from earlier decades. The Melbourne Theatre Company for example, successfully revived Betty Roland’s play A Touch of Silk.

The standard of acting, direction and design also improved dramatically in the established theatres as new directors, many with overseas experience, were appointed, and visiting overseas companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company challenged levels of local performance. The vitality of the smaller theatres in each state also had a revitalising effect on the larger companies.

As the established theatres continued to prosper in the 1980s, so did the well-known playwrights. David Williamson continued to be Australia’s most successful playwright, with The Perfectionist (1982) being performed throughout the country. This was another of Williamson’s
savage comedies about marriage, but with a refreshingly feminist viewpoint. *Sons Of Cain* in 1985 focused on newspaper journalists, with the menace of drugs—such as heroin—to Australian society as the central concern of the play.

Alex Buzo continued to write, with *Big River* in 1980, an historical play set at the beginning of the century, and *The Marginal Farm* in 1984, set in Fiji and dealing with Australian colonialism there and also, more universally, with growing up.

Ron Blair wrote *Marx*, a dramatic biography of Karl Marx, as well as a number of other plays, while Patrick White, who had contributed *Big Toys* in the 1970s, wrote *Signal Driver* for the 1982 Adelaide Festival, and followed it with *Netherwood* in 1983. Thomas Keneally continued his concern with the plight of Aborigines in Australia, and in *Billie’s House* examines the huge gulf between white society and Aboriginal life and traditions.

Two other established playwrights completed plays which linked in with earlier successes to create dramatic trilogies. Ray Lawler’s *Other Times* follows on from *Kid Stakes*, written in the 1970s, telling the story of Ran, Barney, Olive and Nancy up to the beginning of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. However, these later plays are slightly pieces of work in comparison with *The Doll*, written more than twenty years previously.

Peter Kenna, whose play *A Hard God* had been so successful in the 1970s, produced two more plays about its central character Joe Cassidy. *Furtive Love* and *An Eager Hope* are both bitter plays about human isolation and the nature of sexuality, and in particular, Joe’s homosexuality.

The 1980s also saw a growth in new theatres, new companies and writers, characterised by a real variety and diversity. A large number of experimental, TIE and alternative theatre companies came, and often disappeared, during the decade, all across Australia. One of the most interesting is Handspan in Melbourne, a company which utilises puppetry, black theatre, music, acting and multi-media. Their production of *Four Little Girls*, a Picasso play directed by Arietta Taylor, was one of the highlights of Australian drama in the 1980s, and of world-class significance.

Of equal interest and importance has been the emergence of new playwrights. Ron Elisha, born in Israel in 1951, came to Australia as a tiny boy and became a doctor. His plays deal with the Jewish experience of suffering, persecution and the search for identity. His most powerful play so far, *Einstein*, depicts the life of the famous scientist through a
INTO THE NINETEEN-NINETIES

As has happened so often in the past, a worsening economic situation has seriously affected the theatre. The Nimrod in Sydney and The Church Theatre in Melbourne have been major casualties, and many small companies have disappeared or are struggling for survival.

On a happier note, the Playbox Theatre finally moved into its new home at the Malthouse in South Melbourne in 1990, after years without a theatre. Playbox continues the policy of all-Australian seasons of plays which has made it a vital force for so long. New plays by established writers continue to emerge, including the latest David Williamson play and Louis Nowra’s Capricornia, adapted from the epic Xavier Herbert novel.

Talented new writers have appeared. Michael Gow, whose plays

![Image: Bradley Bynar and Lydia Miller in the Melbourne Theatre Company’s 1990 production of Capricornia, a play written by Louis Nowra and adapted from Xavier Herbert’s epic novel.]

Europe and Away established him as an interesting new talent. Darryl Emmerson, the creator of The Pathfinder, an exquisite musical biography of John Shaw Nielson, continues to produce original, appealing work.

There is a continuity in Australian drama as well. The New Theatres continue to present radical and left-wing drama as they have done for more than half a century. A number of Australia’s oldest theatres have been restored or are undergoing restoration. A number of the plays which formed part of the development of Australian drama since the 1950s, are now regarded as modern classics and are studied in schools and universities, not only in Australia, but in many parts of the world.

Australian drama has come a long way since that day in 1789 when a group of convicts stepped onto a makeshift stage in a mud hut. Its present vitality and diversity are a promise for the next two hundred years.

Workshop

To develop an appreciation of a range of Australian plays, and the ability to express this appreciation in performance, an effective approach is to work in pairs or small groups and choose a scene each from three or four different plays which have something in common—either the characters are similar, the settings are the same, or the themes or concerns of the plays have elements in common. Work on the chosen scenes, applying the appropriate dramatic styles and theatrical techniques, and present them as a unified performance.

Chapter 15, Reflections, gives a detailed example of this approach.

Research

Explore one element of Australian drama—a play, a playwright, a period or a style.

- Collect appropriate research material.
- Interpret the material.
- Attend theatre performance relevant to the research.
- Submit a research report of approximately 1000 words with accompanying resource materials.
In 1901.

1. What was being demanded by Australians during the year of Federation?

2. Describe the first theatrical performance in Australia.

3. When was the first theatre opened in Australia? By whom? Why was it closed?

4. What was the first play appeared in 1829. What was the problem with the earlier plays about Australia?

5. What size of plays dominated the Australian stage in these early days?
THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION

What influence did women writers have on Australian theatre?

WOMEN WRITERS

What were the three other notable developments in Australian theatre of this time?

2. The early Australian playwrights were inspired by the realist plays like those of Ibsen, Chekhov and Stanislavski. However, Australian audiences were

3. The nineteenth doll was the first production. What was so successful about the success of Rusty Buggles by Summer洛克e-Eliff in 1948. The summer of 1948 established and support a distinctly Australian artistic scene in response to

1. The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was established in 1954 to help
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Play Name, Year of Publication</th>
<th>Themes Explored</th>
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<tr>
<td>1969 Jack Hibberd Dimbola White With Wire Wheels</td>
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<td>1968 Dorothy Hewett The Chapel Penitents This Old Man Comes Rolling Home</td>
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<td>1968 Thomas Kennedy Childermas</td>
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<td>1948 Patrick White The Ham Funeral</td>
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2. Fill in the table below:

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1. What were the two significant events that occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s that influenced the theater?
2. Where were theatres popping up in Australia? Who were the casualties?

1. What is his most well-known work and what is it about?

David Williamson is the most prolific Australian playwright whose work was produced at a rapid pace. Australian drama, new theatre companies and new works were being produced during this period.

The 1970s was the most vibrant decade in the whole development of theatre companies. Several theatre companies were formed during this period. List them:

1968

Alex Buzo

Norm and Ahmed
1. What affected the closure of the theatres in the early 1990s?

2. What types of works do they continue to produce?

---

INTO THE 1990S

---

Theatre companies continued to flourish. What kinds of works were the companies producing each season?

---

Themes that they explored in their plays:

- Their names were Jack Davis and Louis Nowra. What were some of the plays?
- Ray Lawler continued to write. Two new playwrights came onto the scene.
- Australian playwrights like David Williamson, Alex Buzo, Peter Kenna and

2. Australia...
1. Answer the questions in a sentence or two.

2. Elaborate on that answer by explaining it.

3. Use a workshop example in a quick recount.

4. What insight does that example provide?
Practitioner Profile

Sophie Clausen
Freelance Production Coordinator and Stage Manager

Sophie is a graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) Production Course. She has worked as a stage manager and production coordinator both in Australia and the United Kingdom. She has worked with the Adelaide Festival, Skylark Theatre, and most recently the Melbourne Theatre Company.

I began working in theatre on a voluntary basis through school and with a theatre company. I studied the production course at NIDA, which gave me a broad and extensive understanding of theatre and technical production, with substantial hands-on experience. A stage manager needs strong organisational, time management and people skills. Although stage managers give a special focus to the technical aspects of a production, they need to understand all the elements of a production. They need to keep their cool under pressure, and be practical, communicative and appreciative. A stage manager needs to appreciate the importance of maintaining a safe and supportive environment to enable the director and performers to discover and create.

4.3 Script Detective Work and Stanislavski’s System

Read Looking for Clues

In this unit you will undertake exercises that are the first steps in preparing a script for rehearsal and performance. You will:

- read and rehearse a script
- prepare a prompt copy
- develop your understanding of character, incorporating aspects of Stanislavski’s System for actors
- work as both director and performer.
The Birth of Realism

A number of developments at the end of the nineteenth century encouraged a change in the way people thought about theatre and acting. One important influence that encouraged change was the development of psychology as a field of study. This branch of science aimed to create a better understanding of the human mind and of personality. This greater understanding influenced the way characters were written about and performed.

Konstantin Stanislavski was a Russian performer-director who worked with the Moscow Art Theatre in the early 1900s. He reacted against the 'artificial' acting of the nineteenth century (see the coverage of melodrama in Chapter 6, pages 114–128). Stanislavski believed that actors should achieve psychological truth in their performances. He devised a series of techniques to help performers create believable characters. These techniques are known as 'the System'. Stanislavski is also known as the founder of the dramatic form termed 'Realism'. Realism attempts to re-create life on stage using realistic settings, lighting, sounds and characters. The theatre term 'the fourth wall' comes from the style of Realism and refers to a proscenium arch stage and the 'invisible' fourth wall the audience looks through to observe the lives of the characters on stage.

To study the whole System in depth would take a very long time. We will only look at some important aspects of the System as part of your script detective work. You will be able to develop your understanding in later years of study.

Exercise Script Detective

The four exercises below take you through the initial exploration and analysis of a script. They incorporate the following aspects of Stanislavski’s System: given circumstances, character objectives and building character. The script that has been selected is realistic in style. In your script detective work you will look for clues to help you understand the characters and the scene. Clues can be found in the stage directions and the dialogue.

- The stage directions. These are the written instructions to the actor and director. They usually appear in italics.
- Dialogue. The main source of information is the dialogue. It will help provide information about the story of the play, and the characters, setting, themes and issues. To complete the script detective work successfully you must carry out all the exercises and complete them in the sequence presented. To complete all these exercises will take more than one session.
Creating a Prompt Copy

To prepare for these exercises, photocopy the script provided and paste it into your logbook (see the example on page 73). Paste the page of script on the left-hand side of an open double page. Divide the right-hand page into three columns: one for sound cues; one for light cues; and one for action and staging. Leave a few blank pages before or after your script to write your responses to the questions in the Step 1 and Step 3 exercises.

Step 1 Finding the Given Circumstances

Divide into pairs and read through the Dana and Lee script below. Alternatively, you could have two volunteers read the parts to the class. Use this first reading to gain an overview of the characters and the situation. As well as playing one particular part, for the purposes of this exercise you also need to think as the director of the script, so you need to use your imagination to try to picture what this script may look like in performance.

Exercise The Given Circumstances

After you have read the Dana and Lee script, use the following questions to help determine the given circumstances associated with the character you are playing: 'Where am I?', 'What time of day is it?', 'What is the season?', 'Who is here with me?', and, 'Why am I here?' Write your responses in your prompt copy.

Dana and Lee

(Lee sits down and opens his backpack. He pulls out a book and begins to flick through the pages. Dana approaches from behind. She is eating and quickly finishes the last mouthful. She wipes any stray crumbs from her lips and then wipes her hand on her pants. She hesitates for a moment. She approaches Lee and sits at the far end of the bench. Lee is aware of Dana's presence but does not look up from his book.)

**Dana** Studying?

**Lee** What?

**Dana** Studying? I wouldn't do that in public.

**Lee** I'm not studying. (Pause) I'm sort of busy. Do you mind?

**Dana** Sorry!

---

Unit 2
Title: The Second Attempt
Sub-objectives:
Lee: To be left alone.
Dana: To get Lee to talk to her.

**Dana** (Silence. She moves closer to Lee and pulls out a stick of gum from her pocket. She offers a piece to Lee.) Gum? (He shakes his head. Dana moves closer again.) Are you going to Vic's on Saturday?

**Lee** No. (He turns away from her. Dana moves away momentarily. Silence.)
Dana (She moves closer to him and looks over his shoulder at the book.) Planning to make a movie?
Lee Can't you take a hint? Listen! Stop hassling me.
Dana What?
Lee You've been hanging around like a bad smell for days. Everywhere I go, you're there. It's giving me the creeps.
Dana I haven't been following you, if that's what you're implying. It's just coincidence. It's not as though this place is big enough to get lost in. What's your problem anyway. You're acting a bit paranoid. (She moves away from him.) I only wanted to talk.
Lee Yeah, right! (He packs the book into his backpack and goes to leave.)
Dana Where are you going?
Lee Anywhere you're not.
Dana Lee ...
Lee Look, I don't want you to come near me, look at me or speak to me. Get it?
Dana Listen, drop kick. You're not that special. Do you think I'd purposely waste my time trying to get a bit of attention from Mr Freeze? You're so arrogant. Typical boy's reaction. Maybe I'm trying to do you a favour. It's not as though you couldn't do with a few friends at the moment. (There is a long, uncomfortable silence. Dana tries a different approach.)
How long do you think you can keep avoiding me?
Lee What?
Dana I know all about it. It's not such a big deal.
Lee What are you talking about?
Dana I spoke to your mum.
Lee Mum?
Dana Yeah, she rang me. I know what happened at your old school. Said she was worried about you. She said not to mention it, but I reckon the sooner you realise people care about you and are worried about you the better. She thought I could help. We were good friends once, remember?
Lee I wish she'd mind her own business.
Dana She only means well.
Lee I know, but she doesn't understand that it just makes things worse. I can deal with it on my own.
Dana I don't think you can. (Pause.) What's the big deal. No-one knows what really happened anyway. People love a bit of scandal and gossip. If they don't know the truth, they make it up. They'll forget about it sooner or later.
Lee  You don’t get it, do you? They won’t! There’ll always be questions and those stupid whispers. People look at me like I’m a freak. Sometimes I wish I could get as far away from here as possible.

Dana  And what use would that be? (Pause.) You already give out the ‘back off’ messages, the way you keep hanging out on your own and dwelling on it. You need to get out more. Losing it all the time doesn’t help either. It lets people see how touchy you are. If you keep fighting back you give them ammunition. I know what it’s like. (Pause.) Everyone makes mistakes. (Pause.) I’ve watched you clinging to that ‘mood’ all term like you want it to be part of you, and I know you’re not like that. (A long pause. Silence.) Okay, I’ll go. I’m obviously annoying you. (Dana goes to leave.)

Lee  What happened, I can deal with. Wrong place, wrong time I guess. All I wanted was a clean start. But I think my reputation got here a long time before I did. (Pause.) Life sucks.

Dana  (Pause.) Maybe. (Dana waits and then goes to leave.)

Lee  (Pause.) Maybe what?

Dana  Nothing.

Lee  Great advice. (Pause.) Sorry.

Dana  You’re pushing it, Lee.

Lee  I said sorry! (A long pause.)

Dana  Have you got any plans for Friday? (Pause) Yes or no?

Lee  (Pause.) Friday?

Dana  Do you want to see Time on Friday? I hear it’s pretty wild. (Pause.) At least in a film I won’t be able to talk to you.

Lee  What makes me think that’s almost impossible? Sorry. Again.

Dana  Bell’s gone. I’ve got double dance now and I’m not going to wait around for your answer.

Lee  (Pause.) Look, I just think I need...

Dana  I reckon you think too much. It’s not such a hard decision. Yes or no?

Lee  Friday? I want to see that. (A long pause.) Can I let you know?

Dana  (She starts to exit.) Look, let’s just say seven o’clock out the front. If you’re there you’re there, if you’re not you’re not.

Lee  Okay, sure.

Dana  I’ve really got to go. See you.

(Dana exits and Lee sits down. He thinks for a moment. And then, remembering the time, grabs his backpack and hurries offstage.)

Interpreting Drama
Read

Step 2  Unit Breakdown: Finding Character Objectives

The ‘objective’ is what the character wants to achieve. Sometimes the character can have more than one objective, and sometimes the character does not achieve their objectives. Objectives can be explicit or hidden. A character’s objective is what motivates them to behave the way they do. Examples of objectives are to win the game, to marry, to keep things the way they have always been, to get the job, to persuade and to deceive.

Stanislavski believed that each character in a play aims to achieve their ‘super objective’. To achieve their super objective, the character needs to achieve sub-objectives in each scene of the play. The steps a character takes to achieve sub-objectives can be found in script units.

Exercise Finding Units and Sub-Objectives

A unit breakdown shows the building blocks of a script. The building blocks give an overview of the way tension is used in the script and can also be used to help identify character objectives. Each unit contains a distinct moment of action, an idea, point or issue being discussed.

Follow the steps below to complete a unit breakdown of the Dana and Lee script. The first two units have been done for you.

- Using a pencil, draw a line after the line of dialogue or stage direction that you feel ends a unit.
- Label the unit with a title that you feel sums up what the unit is about, for example ‘You Don’t Love Me’, ‘The Plan’ or ‘Mum’s Worries’.
- Identify your character’s objective in each unit (the sub-objective) and identify the character’s overall objective in the scene.
- Identify one unit in the script that you feel contains the climactic moment. Pick the precise moment or ‘beat’ in the rhythm that you feel is the climactic moment. Justify your choice.

Read

Step 3  Second Reading: Building Your Character

Read the Dana and Lee script a second time, and then begin to perform as the characters in the situation. This requires the partial adoption of the characters by considering the use of body language and voice, delivery of lines and staging. In this second reading, also consider how the progression of units helps to build tension and leads to the climactic moment.
Write and Discuss

Once you have finished a performed reading, complete the following questions and tasks to help develop your understanding of your character. Record your responses in your prompt copy.

1. What sort of language does your character use? For example, does the character use formal or informal language?

2. What does the rhythm of the character's speech tell you about the energy of the character? Can you find examples from the script?

3. Subtext is the meaning behind a line. Sometimes the meaning is obvious; at other times it is more subtle. In performance, our selective use of body language and timing helps to make the subtext more apparent to the audience. What thoughts lie behind your character's lines? What body language, gestures, pose and mannerisms, for example, will you use to communicate the character's subtext?

4. Are there any pauses in the character's dialogue? If so, what thoughts lie behind the pauses? How long should the pause(s) be held? Why? What impact do the pauses have on the mood and atmosphere of the script?

5. What do other characters say about each other? What does this information tell you about the characters?

6. What is the character's status in relation to the other characters? What evidence from the script can you find to support your opinion?

7. Complete a detailed character biography (see Unit 3.5, pages 56–8). Begin the biography by using the information about your character that is contained in the script. Then add information of your own.
fabrics in France, and sets and props in Venice. This sort of research was unheard of at this time. Stanislavski was not happy with his role in the play, but it was very well received and praised for its psychological realism.

In 1897 Stanislavski met the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. In 1898 Stanislavski formed the Moscow Art Theatre and became its principal director. Stanislavski was then able to develop the disciplined working practices which he had longed to see in the theatre. He produced Chekhov's play The Seagull, which had been unsuccessfully produced once before. Stanislavski gave the play the realistic production that it required. He rejected the melodramatic and romantic style of acting which was common throughout the world at the time. His production was a resounding triumph and was the start of the revolution of realism in the theatre. Stanislavski's accomplishment and fortunate collaboration with Chekhov continued, and in 1899 he directed and acted in the successful premiere of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya. In 1901 Stanislavski directed and acted in the premiere of Chekhov's The Three Sisters. His performance as Vershinin was regarded as one of his greatest.

In 1906 Stanislavski began to look back on his life and work. As a result he started to work out his System, which was founded on his belief in the need for extensive preparation of the psychological motivations of a character. While he continued to direct, Stanislavski worked on the development of his System. In 1912 he established a Studio attached to the Moscow Art Theatre. The aim of the Studio was to further study the System. Stanislavski had successes and failures with the System, but he continued to teach and experiment for the rest of his life. Because of the Russian Revolution in 1917 his work was not made known to the rest of the world for some time.

In 1922–23 Stanislavski went on tour with the Moscow Art Theatre throughout Europe and on to the United States of America. The company was received with critical acclaim and soon after Stanislavski agreed to write his autobiography, which was published as My Life in Art in 1924. In 1928 Stanislavski gave up acting; however, he continued to direct and to write about his work.

When Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre toured, two of the company's actors stayed in the United States of America and started the American Laboratory Theatre, where they taught what they knew of the Stanislavski System. Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg were founder members of the Laboratory Theatre and went on, in their own right, to become exponents of what became known as 'The Method'.

In 1936 Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares was published. It laid down the principles of the System, concentrating on the inner imaginative process. Stanislavski died in 1938. Building a Character, which deals with the body, voice and other means of expression and Creating a Role, the third part of the trilogy, which is useful for its perspective on Stanislavski's later theory are books that were both published from notes after Stanislavski's death.

Using the System

Stanislavski's System is based on the belief that one can learn to act. As an actor you start with yourself and the script, and follow the process summarised below.

Analysing the script

Dividing the text into units and beats
A play is divided into acts and scenes, but these can be further divided into units of action. Each unit of action is defined and controlled by one drive, or objective, within it. One of the most important aspects of an objective is that it is active, pushing the story onwards. The unit ends when the objective ends. A new unit therefore indicates a change of objective; it is sometimes marked by exits and entrances of characters. As an actor you must trace how and exactly when the objective changes. Changes in the objective act as signposts on the journey through the actions of the character. They help create the through-line for the character.
The actor's first task when faced with a script is to divide the script into units and name the objective, or drive, of each unit. This breaks the play into manageable pieces, and also helps you to understand the logical development of the play, as the drive in one unit leads to the drive in the next.

Once the units have been pinpointed they can be broken down further into even shorter sections known as beats. Beats are the individual thoughts or moments that create the rhythmic changes in the unit. Each actor needs to keep the rhythm of the character's actions distinct from the rhythm of other characters on stage. This helps to create dramatic tension.

Here is an example from Katherine Thomson's Diving for Pearls. The double slashes (//) indicate the beats. The units are given by naming the objective from Barbara's viewpoint and are shown in italic print. Of course, it is up to the actor to interpret a text and there is more than one way of segmenting this example into units and beats.

Unit 1: 'I want to make you see that the hotel will be beautiful and successful.'

   Barbara // They're changing the name of the beach, to fit the hotel. Why not, they've got the money. Why shouldn't they? 'City Beach'.
   City Beach. It doesn't make sense anyway. // Listen to this, see all those windows, not one single one of those windows has any kind of view of the steelworks. Or the State Engineering Works. Or anything revolting. // Design. // 'What industry?'
   you'd say up there. 'I can't see anything. Whack some more champagne in the orange juice.' // All the beach and up the back of the escarpment. // I mean that's more or less rainforest that escarpment. Rainforest! Rainforest's fashionable, always going on about it. It's a goldmine and why not? Why shouldn't we have a goldmine here? // Japs see all that sand, they won't be able to stop themselves. Yanks'll be flying here direct.
   Den // I don't know that people'd come down here for a holiday.
   Barbara // We think we don't deserve this, that's the problem. The entire city's got an inferiority complex. // You know what international means? They know how to make a go of it and they know what the f*** they're doing. // A lovely pink palace.
   Den // Bit of work for tradesmen on it . . .

Unit 2: 'I'm going to get a job that will make me beautiful and successful.'

   Barbara // And think how many people they're gonna need to run it. They'll have to take some locals, Den. The Labour Council'll make them take some locals. // But what calibre of person are they going to get?

Asking the 'Fundamental Questions'
The next task in the actor's analysis of the script is to answer the following 'Fundamental Questions' about the character and the play. The answers are to be found in the text of the play, but once you have found all the relevant information there, supplement it using your imagination.

Who am I? Think about what your character is like in terms of personality, appearance, age, family background, beliefs, prejudices, interests and so on.

What time is it? Consider the century, the year, the season, the day of the week, the month, the date and the time in which the action of the play takes place.

Where am I? Consider the setting of the play. Does it take place in the country or the city? Does it take place in a district like the one you live in? What kind of house do the characters live in? What kind of neighbourhood? What are the rooms like that the characters inhabit? In what part of the room does the action occur?
What surrounds me? Consider your environment. Are there people around you? If so, are there many of them or few? What are they like? Know what furniture, colours, smells, textures and sounds are around you.

What are the given circumstances? Your given circumstances include the details of your recent past (what happened to you yesterday, today and five minutes ago), how you are feeling now, what is about to happen to you and any other relevant details of your present situation. A character's given circumstances change from moment to moment; they are not constant.

What are my relationships? Consider your relationships to other characters, to events and to the things that surround you.

What is my objective? Know what you want in each scene, what your motivation, or reason for action, is. The objective should be described as a verb, not a noun. You will be better able to show your objective if you think in active terms and say to yourself 'I want to . . . ' or 'I must . . . ' For example, your objective might be 'I want to convince you,' 'I will insult you' or 'I must defend myself'.

What is the obstacle? Know what problems you are encountering and what problems you must attempt to overcome in order to achieve your objective. The obstacles that stand in the way of the character reaching an objective give rise to the conflict in the play.

What is the action? The action is what you are doing to get what you want. You need to know what physical and verbal action you are playing to reach your objective. All action is the result of the objective; you play an action because you want to achieve your objective. When you are on stage you should only move when there is a purposeful, meaningful reason for your character to move. Every physical action should have an inner justification, or objective, and say something about the character's emotions and thoughts.

What is my super-objective? Your super-objective is your main goal in the whole play. In other words, your super-objective is the overriding action of the play. There will be small actions in each scene, but for the whole play there is an overriding action. In 'Little Red Riding Hood' the wolf's objective in the first scene may be to find out from Red Riding Hood where her grandmother lives, but his super-objective is to eat Grandma and Red Riding Hood. He always has that in the back of his mind and it inspires all his other actions.

What is my through-line of action? The through-line is the current connecting all the character's objectives and directing them towards the super-objectives. In other words, the through-line is what makes the character tick, or what leads the character to form super-objectives. The through-line links all the units in the play. As you perform you need to be constantly aware of your through-line. You must follow the journey of your character from moment to moment, moving forward in the play. You must discover what it is that drives your character and what is behind your character's super-objective. Using 'Little Red Riding Hood' as an example again, the wolf's first objective on meeting the little girl is to find out what she is doing. When that objective is achieved, his new objective might be to find out Grandma's address. Then his next objective might be to get to Grandma's first, and then to get Grandma to let him in, and so on. The wolf's through-line is what connects all these actions. His through-line is to get a good meal.

Applying the actor's skills
Your starting point as an actor is yourself. Your memory, your voice, your body and its movements are your tools. Stanislavski proposed that it was possible to learn to act, and set about finding a way to train actors. He borrowed from other disciplines, so to develop the actor's voice he used singing exercises and concentrated on projection and articulation. He knew actors needed both grace and strength in their movement, but most of all he wanted actors to be able to control their movements and to be aware of their bodies. To achieve this, he drew on the principles of mime and dance. Partly as a result of
Stanislavski’s great influence in the field of actor training, we now take it for granted that actors must work on their voices and bodies throughout their careers.

To help actors come to a deeper understanding of their characters’ psyches, Stanislavski drew upon the study of psychology, but he believed the most important thing was for actors to become observers of human behaviour and to learn to understand themselves and their own actions.

**Drawing on life experience**

**Muscular memory** If you are expected to act as though you are cold, you need to remember how it felt to be cold. You need to recall such sensations as how your muscles were tensed, or how your arms were held in close to your body. Generally this is easier if you focus on one part of your body, say your hands or the back of your neck. You re-create the physical sense associated with cold through your muscular memory. Your muscular memory will help your body to show emotions and sensations, for example nervousness, lethargy or excitement. Your muscular memory, plus observation of others, helps you re-create emotions and sensations on stage.

**Emotional memory** Your emotional memory can be drawn upon to bring back feelings you have experienced in the past. If you are required to play a character who is struck by grief at having lost a member of the family you must draw upon your emotional memory. You may not have lost any close family members yourself but perhaps you have lost a dog or a cat that you loved. Remember how that felt. If you are required to play a character in a terrifying situation, remember a frightening situation you have been in yourself, or one that you have observed and related to closely. Use your memories of emotions to re-create your character’s feelings on stage.

**Using the creative imagination**

Using the creative imagination involves asking the question ‘What if?’ This aspect of Stanislavski’s System requires you to use your imagination to put yourself into your character’s situation. What would happen if this set were a real place? What if that character opposite really was my sister, my friend, my enemy? What if the given circumstances really did exist? As an actor you need to sincerely believe in the possibility of what is happening on stage. This is the skill that makes your actions on stage real for the audience. Sometimes actors are asked to explore imagined situations which are not in the text, to help them deepen their understanding and feeling for a role.

In Stanislavski’s System the actor uses personal life experiences, drawing on muscular and emotional memory, to find a personal truth in the situation on stage. The actor builds from personal life experiences, always using the creative imagination to find the truth for the character. Consider this example. As a character in a play, you are asked to commit a murder in a rage. You begin by using your emotional memory to remember a situation in which you had feelings of uncontrollable anger and where you felt a great sense of injustice. Then you use your muscular memory to let that feeling affect your body. Finally you need to place your feeling in the context of the script by using your creative imagination and posing ‘what if’ questions. Of course, the actor is always in control, even in a scene of uncontrollable rage. The actor must be conscious of every move on stage. The character is doing about ninety per cent of the work, while the actor is controlling the character and doing the remaining ten per cent.

**Applying performance skills**

**Developing circles of attention**

To achieve the appearance of being natural when playing a character, you need to relax on stage; however, it is a paradox that acting also requires great concentration and energy. Another paradox is that actors must focus on what is happening on stage, and yet always be aware of the audience. Actors must be sure that actions are communicated to the audience and that the voice can be heard at the back of the theatre.
The dilemma of being real and truthful as the character while being conscious that you are performing as an actor is overcome by applying Stanislavski’s concept of the circles of attention. The smallest circle is you, in character, focused on yourself and your thoughts. The actor learns to create a sense of being alone in public. Stanislavski called this public solitude. As your focus widens so does your circle of attention, so that a bigger circle will include maybe a person next to you and finally the biggest circle includes the whole stage. In Stanislavski’s realist style of theatre the actor’s focus must always be on stage and not directed to the audience. The aim is to create the sense that what is happening on stage is real. Although an actor is aware of the audience, the characters are not aware of the audience. The audience watches the action through a so-called fourth wall.

**Acting as a member of an ensemble**

One of the most famous quotes that is attributed to Stanislavski is ‘There are no small parts, only small actors’. Stanislavski did away with the ‘star’ system, and actors in his company would have lead roles in one production and bit parts in the next. Stanislavski believed that actors must forget their personal ambitions and cooperate to create a vital piece of theatre. Everyone must serve the play. On stage Stanislavski’s actors spoke to one another, maintained eye contact and played off one another. This was a great contrast to the popular style of acting at the time, which involved actors directing their performances out front to the audience.

It is now accepted that if you want a character to be real and believable, you must believe in, and interact with, the other characters on stage. Your character is usually defined by the relationships to other characters in the play. One actor offers ideas, emotions and actions for other actors to receive and respond to with their own offerings. All cast members are part of the work being performed; everyone is seen and considered together. The basis of all acting is giving and receiving. If every performer in a cast acts well, giving the focus to others and taking it when it is offered, the whole cast will look good and the play will be better served. Acting with and through others is called ensemble acting.

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**Questions**

1. What is the importance of Stanislavski’s System?
2. What is the idea at the heart of Stanislavski’s System?
3. Why did Stanislavski develop his System? (Your answer should include some details about common theatrical practice before Stanislavski.)
4. Explain the difference between units of action and beats.
5. Explain the connection between units of action and the through-line.
6. Summarise the purpose of the Fundamental Questions.
7. Where should an actor look for answers to the Fundamental Questions?
8. Why is the actor’s life experience and creative imagination important?
9. An actor needs to be relaxed on stage and yet also needs to be alert. What does the actor need to concentrate on and be aware of on stage?
10. Why is it so important for an actor to be aware of the other actors on stage and to interact with them?
Speaking with Phillip Rouse, Director of ‘A Property of the Clan’

A production that holds contemporary relevance in a society where a culture of violence against women still persists.

By Amanda Huynh – 24.09.2015

Don’t Look Away Theatre and Blancmange Productions will present the production, A Property of the Clan, from 29 September to 17 October 2015. The production will be the first in the newly created Kings Cross theatre space, Blood Moon Theatre located within The World Bar.

A key piece of writing for Australian youth in the 90s, A Property of the Clan is a powerful and emotionally candid examination into peer pressure by one of Australia’s pre-eminent playwrights, Nick Enright. In 1997, the play was adapted into the Australian drama thriller film, Blackrock.

A disturbing tale inspired by real events, A Property of the Clan tells the story of the sexual assault and murder of a 14-year-old girl at a party. It examines a culture of boys and girls lost in the misrepresentation of one another, the ugliness of victim blaming and the emotional and social effects the unexpected death of a peer has on young people.

The story follows a small group of teens including Jared who witnessed the crime, his girlfriend Rachel and best friend Ricko, and the victim’s best friend Jade. Torn apart by the tragic event, the group delves into why it happened, who is responsible and if justice will be served.

In a bold staging concept, A Property of the Clan will see the performers both create and destroy the set during the show. On a Perspex backdrop, the performers will paint their childhood memories before tearing it down at the end, symbolising the loss of innocence experienced from the terrible crime.

The production holds contemporary relevance, particularly with increasing exposure on the issue of violence against women in the community today. A Property of the Clan examines the psychology of victim blaming. LOTL spoke to director Phillip Rouse to discuss the play and its exploration of social issues:

What drew you to the story of ‘A Property of the Clan’?

It feels much bigger than an earnest Australian Drama. It works like a myth. Ricko, our God of Masculinity, comes to town and causes havoc, which the human beings left behind have to grapple with. In metaphoric terms, after the death of Tracy, the rest of the play is spent in awe of the God’s Masculinity and Grief. We see teenagers and adults alike constantly butting against their inability to emotionally cope with what has happened. The other thing that drew me to the story is that while the criminals are brought to justice, the world doesn’t change. That even an event that is as horrific as the rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl cannot create any real shift in their society. That was a very important truth that drew me to the show.

What are the most difficult things to consider in regard to the direction of a play, and how is this influenced by what you want the audience to take away from the production?
Avoiding cliché is probably the trickiest thing about this production. Because basically every character is implicated in the terrible crime either through direct action or a lack of direct action, no one in this play is wholly good. But as a director I want my audience to empathise with their struggles without going easy on them. I want the audience to honestly identify in themselves when they haven’t spoken out, or weren’t brave enough, or were and the great things that happened when they did. That requires a lot of honesty on my part as a director and confronting my own flaws around this issue. It’s a delicate balancing act.

In your opinion, why is ‘victim blaming’ so common?

That is an enormous question. For me, the base pathology of it is if men haven’t done anything wrong (or their crime is the lesser crime) then nothing needs to change about society. We have built a critical framework where men become the hapless victims of the woman’s indiscretions, her failure to fit into a conservative blueprint of what it means to be female, and thus he wouldn’t have acted how he acted if she didn’t act how she acted. We put yet another horrible act away in a box and the machine keeps ticking over. It’s a culturally institutionalised bullying. And it is fucked beyond belief.

Have any of your personal beliefs been unexpectedly challenged in the process?

When looking at this material as a straight white male, and especially while reflecting upon your teenage years, realising how much you were in the thrall of this conservative blueprint can really take you by surprise. You want to believe you are a good person, but maybe that wasn’t always the case. The process of shedding damaging notions of masculinity (particularly attitude towards women) is a long one and one not every male goes through it. And in working on this play, if forces you to engage with attitudes you have shed and admit you understand them from the inside. That is what I mean by being honest as a director.
# A Property of the Clan

Make notes as you read the play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Dramatic Techniques, Quotes, Props, Notes, Etc.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Year 11 Classroom</td>
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<td>2. Middle of the schoolyard</td>
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<td>3. Ferry wharf, city side</td>
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<td>4. Classroom.</td>
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<td>5. Jared’s house.</td>
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<td>6. No formal setting; loud music is heard, suggestive of a party.</td>
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<td>7. Jared’s house.</td>
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<td>8. Voices (darkened stage?)</td>
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<td>9. A headstone in the cemetery</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Classroom.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Schoolyard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>City skate park; Jared is standing near a skateboard ramp, he stares out at the water, p.31.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Schoolyard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Rachel’s house on the hill.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>The beach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Rachel’s house on the hill.</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Surf Club at Blackrock Beach.</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Soliloquy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Schoolyard.</td>
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The Directorial Concept

A directorial concept is how the director envisions the play. It is a written expression of how the director will approach the play and what s(he) wants the audience to take away from the show. The concept defines the central themes, ideas, mood, tone, and visual appeal of the play. The DC is the unifying idea that the production team will try to create—it is the specific point of view the play will be approached from. Basically, it is your analysis of the play (use the answers from the guiding questions for this) and your general ideas about what you would want to do as a director to make sure that the audience understood what you wanted them to feel, think, or know about the show. Complete this concept about the short play “Trifles.”

Examples:

*King Lear* is a reminder of how quickly a country can be destroyed from within by political back-biting, greed and complacency. Lear takes for granted both his responsibility as king and his land’s stability, assuming he can leave the daily running of the country to others while he retires to “the good life”. Because Shakespeare’s message is appropriate for any point in history, we have chosen to set this production without specific period or culture. We also wanted to create a raw, elemental world where violence becomes commonplace. Fire, wind and water are placed within a steel structure set upon the earth, giving the set a non-realistic, presentational feel, where one does not expect each location to be fully realized visually. This helps to accommodate Shakespeare’s quick and constant scene changes. In the background you can see a vague image of the empire that everyone is trying to capture. It is polluted and corrupt, not beautiful. On this land, no one is immune from the desire for power. In our "King Lear” there are no heroes and there is ultimately no innocence; everyone gets their hands dirty. As the battles both political and personal ensue, the story reveals itself to be actually a quest for love and understanding, and what is truly important in life.”—Karen TenEyk, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park.

On the surface, *I Am the Walrus* is a play about the misadventures of a walrus named Timmy. When one delves deeper, however, one will discover a play about acceptance and love. Timmy, like most every other teenager, wants to fit in with those around him. This poses a problem for Timmy, as Timmy is the only walrus in a city of humans. Boys shun him; girls spurn his overtures of affection. Timmy feels isolated and alone. Socially awkward, Timmy constantly gets himself in situations that cause amusement for others and disappointment for himself. To represent Timmy’s internal strife, the play will employ harsh lighting and dark tones. However, splotches of color will appear throughout, representative of the innate hopefulness of our protagonist. The costumes and lighting will become increasingly bright and rich as our Timmy transforms from dope to hero.

Loss. Disappointment. Unrealized expectations. These are the themes at the heart of *Death of an Interior Decorator*, and these are the ideas we wish to leave the audience with. Our protagonist is a woman in a monotonous, boring marriage with three grown children who have sapped her of her energy. She has found the promise of domestic life to be nothing of the fantasy she imagined. She is a sympathetic character, and we wish to treat her as such. She serves to question the institutions our society holds so dear. We will expose this world as a fantasy land by using a unit set on a thrust stage. The set will be bright and joyous, standing in stark contrast to the themes of the play. This will highlight the disparity between our character’s expectations and her reality. We will use traditional symbols of marriage throughout the design, and at the center will be an immaculate, perfectly designed interior—her greatest achievement, which is all a lie. Touches of blue will appear throughout the set, linking everything together and foreshadowing our protagonist’s eventual watery suicide.
WRITING A DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT

1. Evoke a Moment from the Piece to Create a Sense of Atmosphere

This is written in a similar fashion to the opening of a theatre review or a descriptive paragraph in a narrative. It visually communicates a moment from the piece. I got my student’s to focus on the opening of their DADA Performances.

2. Form an opinion about the intention of theatre as influenced by your particular theatrical style. Write a statement expressing that.

I asked my student’s: What is it about DADA that has influenced theatre? Why is theatre the way it is because of DADA?

3. Summarise the theatrical style that you have been influenced by. What are the key aspects of that style that you have focused on in your piece?

This could be pulled from a worksheet or textbook you have given your students on the topic you have been studying. In my case I gave them notes about what DADA is, what Theatre of the Absurd is all about (think existentialism) and, for some of them, had them regurgitate exactly what was written in the notes. The stronger student’s will be able to identify which aspect of that philosophy they are wanting to focus on. Maybe even why as well.

4. Discuss how the style influenced your concept.

I encouraged the use of “I” and “we” here. This is where the students start to think about their own thinking process. They are making connections between what they know about the style and they are starting to apply it to their own performance piece. What initial discussions and ideas were had by the students? Why is this of interest to them?

5. Outline the structure of your piece. What happens? What is the key theme, dramatic question that you wish to explore? Why is this piece relevant to your audience now? What do you want your audience to think, feel, do?

These are such key questions when devising any sort of drama. Stronger students should be able to clearly articulate their dramatic question in no more than one or two sentences. A good way to see if this has been achieved is to see if an audience member can articulate another groups concept in their own words. If they too can do it in no more than one or two sentences, the performance has clearly communicated to its audience.

6. How have you attempted to use the elements to convey your message?

Here there should be specific reference made to the elements of drama and why they have been used. I don’t think it is necessary to discuss all of them (because they should all be there) but I do think students should be able to address three to four clearly. If they can’t, they haven’t given their concept enough thought.

The stronger students will write too much and the weaker students will struggle to write much at all, particularly when explaining the use of elements and even even when discussing the intenion of theatre, style and influence on concept. In a follow up lesson, it would be good to look at editing the piece down to fit the intended 300 words.
### TEEEL

**Writing in Drama**

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<td><strong>TOPIC</strong> or <strong>TECHNIQUE</strong></td>
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<td>Your first sentence should introduce the topic of the paragraph. You might be talking about a particular theme, issue or perspective. You might also be introducing a technique used in the play.</td>
<td>You should then write a sentence or two that provides an example of this technique or whatever it is that you are writing about. This could be a quote or idea from a play or a general example of a topic.</td>
<td>You must then go on to write a few sentences about the significance of what you’re writing about. You could talk about the effect the technique has on the audience and how it helps communicate the desired theme/message. You should also refer to perspectives in this section.</td>
<td>You MUST provide relevant examples from your own practical experience and how it has helped you gain a better understanding of the technique/concept/theme/topic that you’re discussing. This needs to be extended to a full explanation of how you used techniques to develop a better understanding.</td>
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<td>Here you must conclude with a sentence that wraps up the main point of your paragraph, directly answers the question, perhaps provides a link to your next paragraph, where applicable, and also provides a link to what the play is suggesting about society or how society and context influenced the creation of the play or a specific production.</td>
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