ACTING SKILLS

Improving your acting skills can help in any situation where there is an audience. Think about **what** you are trying to show and **how** you are trying to show it.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Show the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the characters you are portraying. Make them larger than life so the audience can see what you are doing, especially if they are a long way back.

VOICE

Hold an audience's attention by making yourself interesting to listen to. Speak slower and louder than normal using pauses, emphasis and variety in tone, pitch, rhythm, and volume. You need a **Stage Voice** which is clear for the audience.

GESTURE

Make your performance visually interesting. The types of gestures you use; aggressive, authoritative, nervous or exaggerated will send messages to the audience about your character's personality, mood and situation.

STANCE

The way you hold your posture on stage will portray your character's age, personality and mood. Your character's stance may change according to what situations they are in.

REACTING

The audience is always looking at you, even when you're not speaking. You are not on the radio, so show how your character is reacting to what others are saying and doing through use of body language and facial expression.

MOVEMENT

The audience will get a sense of your relationship with other characters by how close you are standing to them and the direction you are facing. In your scene decide who should be dominating the space. Hovering by the door for example, may show that you can't wait to leave!

LEVELS

Use levels to help indicate status. One character may be on a higher piece of staging or platform, or it may simply be that one character is standing and another is sitting. It is usually easier to play the dominant, more powerful character if they are on a higher level.

MOTIVATION

Research the text to identify your character's thoughts, feelings and emotions. Understanding your character's motivation will help you give a believable and realistic performance.

visit **www.daydreameducation.co.uk** for more information

ACTING TERMS

Words to help you explain, analyse and evaluate your acting skills.

The first stage of being able to talk or write about an acting performance is to discuss how you show your character's thoughts, feelings and relationships.

VOICE · **THE** · **GESTURE**

MOVEMENT · **BASICS** · **FACIAL EXPRESSION**
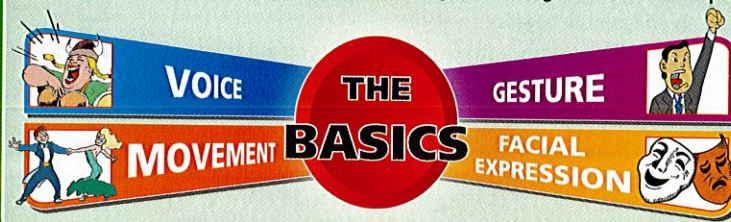
USING MORE ADVANCED TERMS

When you are comfortable discussing and writing about the basics, try using the following acting terms:

PROTAGONIST
The central character.

ANTAGONIST
A character who acts in opposition to the Protagonist.

DENOUEMENT
The end of the play when all loose ends are neatly tied.

DRAMATIC IRONY
When the audience knows something a character on stage does not.

DUOLOGUE
A scene between two characters.

BLOCKING
The precise movement and positioning of actors on stage.

MONOLOGUE
A long speech to an audience or another character onstage.

MASKING
Standing in front of other actors obscuring them from the audience.

PROXEMICS
The use of closeness or distance between characters to make a point.

SOLILOQUY
A monologue where characters share their thoughts with the audience.

STATUS
Power, authority or importance.

UPSTAGING
Diverting the audience's attention away from the main performer.

REMEMBER

When talking or writing about your acting performance, remember to include:
- What you did.
- Why you did it.
- Were your objectives achieved?

ACTING ACTIVITIES

REDUCED PERFORMANCE

Like 'The Reduced Shakespeare Company', act your play in one minute or less!

This helps you concentrate on the story you are trying to perform.

CAPTURING THE ESSENCE

Pick the ten most important lines in the play and turn them into your own 10-line play. This can be done in or out of sequence. This helps you work out what the play is really about.

ROLE PLAY

In character, improvise a 'missing scene' which is not in your play. This deepens your understanding of character and relationships.

HOT - SEATING

In rôle, answer questions about your character.

This helps you flesh out the character and think about character and relationships.

LIVING PORTRAITS

Make five 'frozen image' portraits that tell the story of the scene or play. Variations on this can be used to show the changes in a relationship, or a character's feelings. This helps you portray character and relationships visually.

THOUGHT - TRACKING

Whilst rehearsing or performing, freeze the scene. Every actor (in-rôle) has to say what their character is thinking or feeling that moment. This deepens the actor's understanding of their character's thoughts & feelings.

ACTING ACTIVITIES

MIME

Mime the play or scene in one minute. Try miming dialogue with a movement, gesture or facial expression for every line. This helps you concentrate on the visual aspects of your performance.

GENRE - SPLICING

Perform a scene the way it wasn't intended - try it out as a love story, a horror story, thriller, murder mystery, etc. This helps you discover a subtext you did not know was there, as well as bringing fun back into the rehearsal.

CAPTION MAKING

Write captions for the scene as if it were a comic strip. Perform the scene with someone narrating the captions.

This helps focus on the message you wish to convey.

ROLE ON THE WALL

Draw an outline of your character and put it on the wall. During rehearsals add pictures, statements, thoughts and ideas. This helps you build a deeper understanding of a character.

THESE ACTIVITIES CAN HELP

- Bring things to life physically on stage
- Deepen understanding of character, plot and relationships
- Inspire creative ideas

PERFORMING A CHARACTER

Most characters represent real people with believable personalities. Use the following ideas to help you portray characters onstage.

THE GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES

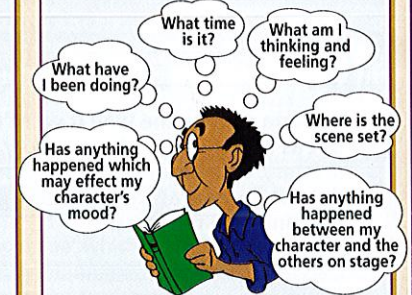These are clues about a character's personality and behaviour.

You can find the given circumstances from:

- What your character says or does.
- What other characters say.
- How other characters react.
- Stage directions.
- Character notes the playwright has provided.

THE CONTEXT OF THE SCENE

This helps build up a picture of how a character should be behaving on stage. Ask yourself:

- What time is it?
- What am I thinking and feeling?
- What have I been doing?
- Where is the scene set?
- Has anything happened which may effect my character's mood?
- Has anything happened between my character and the others on stage?

ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS

Work out what you want to show the audience about your character's relationship with the others on stage.

- Are they close or distant?
- Are they happy with each other?
- What are they thinking and feeling?
- Do they know each other?
- Are there underlying tensions?
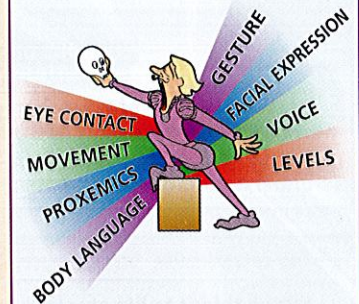- Which character has more authority, status and power?
- What are they talking about or doing and why?

USING YOUR ACTING SKILLS

Use acting skills to portray the character's feelings, motivation and relationships.

GESTURE
FACIAL EXPRESSION
VOICE
LEVELS
EYE CONTACT
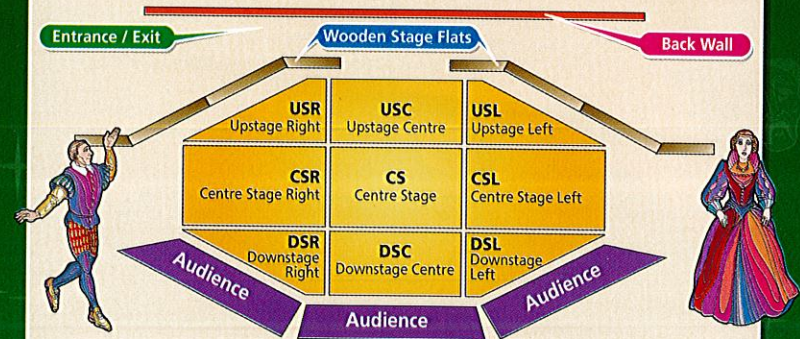MOVEMENT
PROXEMICS
BODY LANGUAGE

REMEMBER

You are portraying a specific character, don't just be yourself on stage.

STAGE POSITIONING

'Proscenium Arch' and 'Thrust' both use the following labelling system.

The Stage is labelled according to the actor's left and right: downstage is closest to the audience, upstage is furthest from the audience.

Entrance / Exit	Wooden Stage Flats	Back Wall

USR Upstage Right	USC Upstage Centre	USL Upstage Left
CSR Centre Stage Right	CS Centre Stage	CSL Centre Stage Left
DSR Downstage Right	DSC Downstage Centre	DSL Downstage Left

Audience

Audience

Audience

The words 'upstage' and 'downstage' are used because traditionally stages slope downwards from the back towards the front. This is known as a 'rake' and is used so the audience have a better view of the actors at the rear of the stage.

Upstage right

Upstage left

Stage right

Stage left

Downstage right

Downstage left
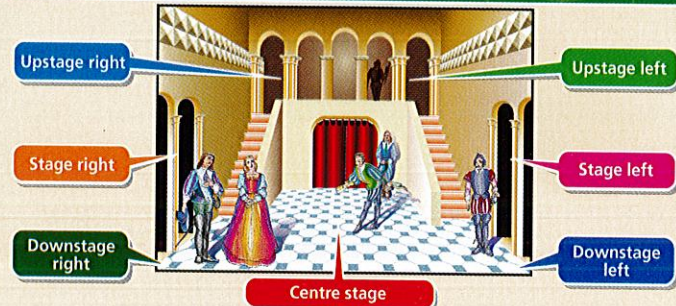
Centre stage

- Centre Stage is usually the most important position as it is the area of central focus.
- Downstage is closest to the audience making intimacy easier.
- Upstage is a position that allows actors to do things which characters in front of them cannot see.

'Traverse Theatre' and 'Theatre in the Round' do not have any specific way of being labelled, but if you are drawing a ground plan of a set-design it is best to split it into areas A,B,C,D etc, in order to be clear about what should happen where.

STUDYING DRAMA AS LITERATURE

Read the play from beginning to end.
Go back, skim read, but re-read key scenes or acts in detail.
Always try to see a performance or a film version.

The main features of DRAMA SCRIPT

SETTING
In drama scripts, the period in which the play is set and the circumstances in which the drama is played out are highly significant. Settings also influence the staging, costumes and props used.

PLOT
The sequence of events, otherwise called 'The Story' or 'The Storyline'. This is the easiest and most familiar aspect of a play to understand, even in complex dramas.

STYLE
The language and imagery used to develop characterization and support the plot. Imagery can play a vital part in forming the audience's attitude to characters and events. Shakespeare relied upon it.

CHARACTERIZATION
The people who feature in the story. There is usually a central character, several main characters and a series of minor characters. Characterization is developed through the words and actions of the characters themselves.

THEMES
The underlying ideas: those common but essential features of life all human beings share and recognise: love, marriage, power, death, war, freedom etc. These help tie the scenes and acts together as much as the events do.

STRUCTURE
The way the play is organised into scenes and acts. Good drama relies on conflict which should consist of an incident to spark the conflict, a development of that incident - the fallout that ensues - and a resolution - an explosion of action leading to happiness or disaster.

REMEMBER:
Playscripts are designed to be seen in performance even if you are studying them on the printed page.

DEVISING TECHNIQUES

Starting to create your own piece of theatre.

BRAINSTORM

As a group, discuss the themes that you want to explore in the play. Brainstorm stories that involve the characters experiencing each theme.

CHARACTERS

Start by creating the characters. Too many devised pieces fail because the characters have not been carefully thought out. Name each character and talk about their personality and relationships.

FREEZE FRAMES

Create freeze frames that depict crucial moments in the character's life. These can then be incorporated into your play later on.

MUSIC

Find a piece of music that represents your theme, either lyrically or through the dynamics or texture. Use the music to create a movement sequence that shows the mood of a character.

STRUCTURE

Create a flow chart of the story and highlight the key scenes. Experimenting with the structure may help you create a more imaginative and original play.

IMPROVISE

Improvise a scene in every rehearsal. Don't just talk things through. Try to improvise a scene using different styles. A scene may work better as a comedy even though it was originally a drama.

MONOLOGUE

In a group, think of one word each that describes your character. Then on your own, use the list of words (in the order they were said) to write a monologue for your character.

REFLECT

At the end of a rehearsal, reflect on what you have achieved and what needs to be done next. Set aims and assign jobs for the next session. Create a rehearsal schedule and stick to it.

WRITING A PLAYSCRIPT

Playscripts can either be original pieces of work or pieces of 'extension writing' involving characters from published plays.

TITLE, CAST AND LAYOUT

TITLE

The title of the play should capture the attention of the audience. A good title will provoke interest before the performance.

The Tempest
Hamlet

CAST LIST

The cast-list should detail all the characters in the play. Write a description of each character's age, personality and relationships with others.

The Tempest
Prospero - The play's protagonist, and father of Miranda. Prospero is a powerful man that controls the island.
Caliban - Son of Sycorax, Caliban is a savage and deformed slave.

LAYOUT

The layout should identify the character speaking. Their name should be in bold and placed in the margin. Anything that is not spoken should be in italics.

Tom - *(whispering)* Do you think he saw us?
Alice - *(sits up straight)* It doesn't matter anyway!
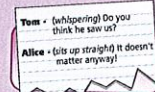
TECHNICAL AND DESIGN FEATURES

LIGHTING AND SOUND

The lighting and sound effects will help create mood and atmosphere. The special effects required should be written into the stage directions.

SET

The set is usually described at the beginning of the script. It should include the type of staging: what is on stage and where and the general atmosphere.

COSTUME

A description of what each character is wearing can help indicate personality, period and situation.

DIALOGUE

ACTION

Scripts are written for visual performances: include action, movement and 'stage business'. If nothing is happening on stage you might as well just play a recording of your script.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Stage directions (in italics) indicate what is happening, where, when and how. They describe what a character is doing physically, vocally and emotionally and indicate pauses.

CHARACTERIZATION

Each character must have a specific personality that is consistent from scene to scene. Although changing situations require different moods and behaviours.
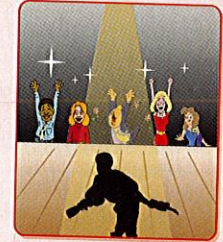
IMPROVING YOUR DIRECTING SKILLS

USING THE SPACE

- Use the three dimensions of the stage - width, depth and height.
- Decide on audience positioning.
- Keep the central acting area free for the actors.
- Do not obstruct the audience's sightlines with scenery or set.
- Use levels to create visual interest and status.
- Position entrances and exits carefully.

BLOCKING

- Organise the movement and positioning of the actors on stage.
- Ensure actors do not stay in the same position for too long.
- When performing, the actors should face the audience.
- Use proxemics (distances) to demonstrate relationships.
- Create things for the actors to do - stage business.
- Where possible, place the actors in a triangle formation to utilise depth and width.

DESIGN DECISIONS

Technical and design elements establish a sense of time and place, create atmosphere and highlight themes.

LIGHTING

Use colour, shadow and highlighted areas of the set to improve the look of the production.

SOUND

Music and sound effects help create atmosphere and mood.

COSTUME

Decide on items of clothing: period, condition and quality. Costumes should be linked to character and era.

CREATING A THEATRE SET

Set designs have many functions, some of the most important are:
- Creating a sense of place [Location] and time [Period].
- Highlighting important dramatic themes or issues.
- Creating an imaginative and interesting acting space.

AUDIENCE POSITIONING

Decide which audience positioning is most appropriate for the scene or play: Theatre in the Round, Traverse, Thrust or Proscenium Arch. Try to think of some reasons why.

STAGE REQUIREMENTS

Look at the 'functional demands of the action'. What does the scene require in terms of set and props? Make a list of what you need and how you can get it.

POSITIONING OF PROPS

Position scenery, furniture and props so entrances and exits are not blocked and the acting space is clearly defined. The centre stage area is usually left free for the actors to use.

AUDIENCE SIGHTLINES

Can the audience see all the characters on stage? Positioning should allow the audience to see the actor's face. The audience should not be able to see off stage. Use levels if possible.

IS THE SET ACTOR FRIENDLY?

Does the set allow the actors to move around freely? Can they sit and stand without being cramped and confined? Do they face the audience?

STYLE AND ATMOSPHERE
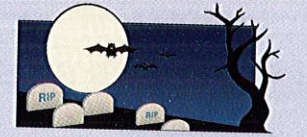
Is the play dark and serious, or light and happy? What period is it set in? The style and atmosphere created through the set will help establish the mood.

REMEMBER

Try sitting in the audience to make sure everything is working.

THEATRICAL TERMS

As in all subjects, Drama has its own specialist terms, words and phrases. Using the correct terms speeds up explanation, clarifies meaning and enables you to be much more specific.

Term	Definition
Aside	A speech delivered to the audience, supposedly not heard by the characters on stage.
Backdrop	Scenery hung at the back of the stage.
Cue	A signal prompting an event in a performance, e.g. an actor's entrance or a sound effect.
Flats	Flat pieces of scenery which can be painted to give the appearance of buildings or setting.
Flies	The space above the stage, where scenery can be hung or stored when not in use.
Gauze	A material which can be see-through when lit from behind, or appear solid when lit from the front.
Iron	A safety curtain separating the stage from the audience in Proscenium Arch theatres.
LX & SFX	**LX** - Lighting effects. **SFX** - Sound effects.
Prompt	A person (off stage) who prompts an actor if they forget their lines.
Props (properties)	Items used by an actor during a performance, e.g. cups, books, weapons etc.
Rostra	Wooden stage blocks or small platforms.
Stage Manager	Person in charge of running the show from the wings.
Truck	A platform or rostrum on wheels used to move furniture, set or scenery on or off the stage.
Wings	The unseen area on either side of the stage hidden from the audience's view.

WRITING A THEATRE REVIEW

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Make brief notes on the context of the play:

- What is the name of the play?
- Who wrote and directed the play?
- Who are the main actors?
- What genre is it?
- Which company is performing and where is it being performed?
- What type of audience will be watching?
- Research previous productions.

DURING THE PERFORMANCE

It is best not to write notes during the performance as you may miss important parts and spoil the performance for other audience members.

- Look at the set and make mental notes of the style and type of staging.
- As well as watching the play, observe the audience's reaction.
- Think about your personal praise and criticisms of the performance.
- Write notes in the interval if you are worried you may forget things.

WRITING A THEATRE REVIEW

STRUCTURING THE REVIEW

1. Start with an introduction that includes the context of the production.

2. Write a short account of the plot, including important facts about how the play was first staged.

3. Give examples of the performances and your opinion on the acting.

4. Describe the set, lighting and sound, giving examples of the best effects and possible improvements.

5. Describe the costumes and make-up and how they suited the characters.

6. Talk about the direction and the themes present throughout the production.

7. Throughout the review, compare the production to previous productions.

8. Finish with a conclusion that sums up what you have gained most from seeing the production.

9. Include pictures and diagrams of the set and costumes to support your opinions.

DRAMA PRACTITIONERS

## OF THE EARLY 20th CENTURY

KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI (1863 - 1938)
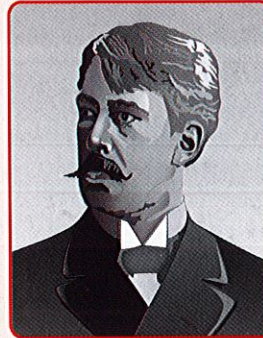
- Stanislavski was a pioneering actor and director who brought 'Naturalism' to the stage.

- He believed actors should research scripts and relate to their character's motivations by delving into their own emotions.

- Co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavski created the first acting training programme called 'The System'.

- As naturalistic acting grew in popularity 'The System' was adapted in the U.S. into 'The Method'.

EDWARD GORDON CRAIG (1872 - 1966)
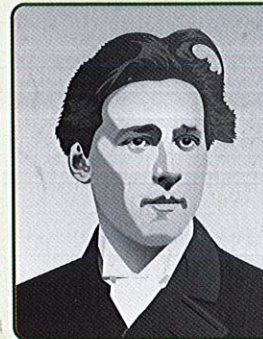
- Craig was a visionary set designer who developed the idea of using steps to create levels on stage.

- He abandoned 'Naturalism' believing in abstract sets that were symbolic of the play as a whole.

- Craig used new technology to create atmospheric effects through areas of light, shadow and colour.

- His most radical concept was to use neutral moveable screens instead of realistic scenery.

DRAMA PRACTITIONERS

OF THE EARLY 20th CENTURY

ANTONIN ARTAUD (1895 - 1948)

- Artaud is regarded as the inspiration behind 'Experimental Theatre' and 'Performance Art'.

- He rejected realistic dialogue and believable psychological character, in favour of 'Total Theatre' using light, movement and sound.

- He created the 'Theatre of Cruelty': a concept that pushed the audience's feelings to such an extreme it was almost painful.

- Artaud imagined the audience imprisoned by the action and experimented with audience positioning.

BERTOLT BRECHT (1898 - 1956)

- Brecht was a pioneer of political theatre and believed drama should educate.

- He founded the 'Berliner Ensemble' and created the 'Verfremdungseffekt' (alienation technique).

- Brecht broke down the illusion of the 'Fourth Wall' by distancing audiences from the action thus preventing their emotional involvement with the characters.

- He created 'Epic Theatre' with songs, explanatory placards, unnatural lighting, projection screens, spoken stage directions and the actors directly addressing the audience.

DRAMA PRACTITIONERS 2

VSEVOLOD MEYERHOLD (1874 - 1940)

- Meyerhold was a theatrical innovator who developed a symbolist style of theatrical representation, breaking away from realism.

- He believed movement, gesture, space, rhythm and music were the key theatrical components.

- Meyerhold set up theatre studios to train and prepare actors for his physically demanding productions.

- He founded his own 'Biomechanics' company that combined acting and physical training to 'teach the body to think'.

JERZY GROTOWSKI (1933 - 1999)
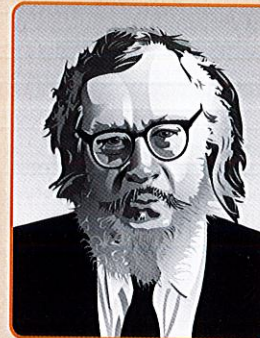
- Grotowski was a leading figure in avant-garde theatre.

- He saw his work with actors as a 'scientific study' and 'spiritual conquest'.

- Grotowski believed the audience should feel part of the performance, often building scenery around them.

- He is best known for his work on 'Poor Theatre' that removed all non-essentials, for example, sets, costumes and lighting, in an effort to intensify the relationship between the actors and the audience.

DRAMA PRACTITIONERS 2

PETER BROOK (born 1925)
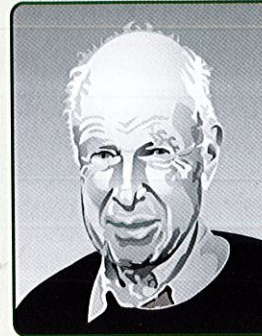
- Brook is a prolific theatre and film director who founded the 'International Centre of Theatre Research'.

- Influenced greatly by Antonin Artaud, Brook rejects the need for traditional performance spaces, stripping theatre down to its basics.

'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all I need for an act of theatre to be engaged.'

Peter Brook - The Empty Space (1968).

AUGUSTO BOAL (1931 - 2009)
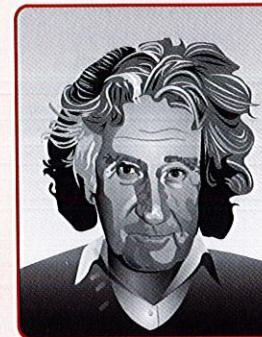
- Boal was a pioneering theatrical director, writer and politician who founded the 'Theatre of the Oppressed'.

- He created various games and warm-up exercises for actors which have influenced the development of 'Community Theatre' and 'Theatre in Education' (T.I.E.).

- Boal created 'Forum Theatre' in which members of the audience were allowed to stop the performance and suggest alternative actions.

- He developed 'Invisible Theatre' that took place outside the theatre. Actors would perform in public places such as shopping centres without the knowledge of the audience.

TYPES OF STAGING

Different types of staging and audience positioning have a large impact upon the atmosphere, the set and the way the actors perform.

PROSCENIUM ARCH / END ON

'Proscenium Arch' is the most common type of staging in Britain. Large offstage areas allow this type of theatre to have complex sets, large casts and numerous scene changes. The audience sits on one side of the stage as if looking through a window.
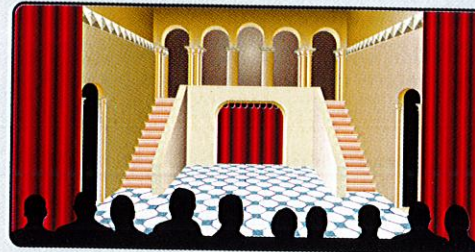
KEY POINTS

- In larger theatres, the audience can feel separated from the action.
- Scenery can sometimes be difficult to organise.
- It is easier for an actor to 'block out' the audience and perform naturalistically.

TRAVERSE

'Traverse' is the most unusual type of staging. Various scenes can be set up simultaneously to allow movement instantly from one scene to another. The audience can see each other's reactions as they are sat on opposite sides of the stage.
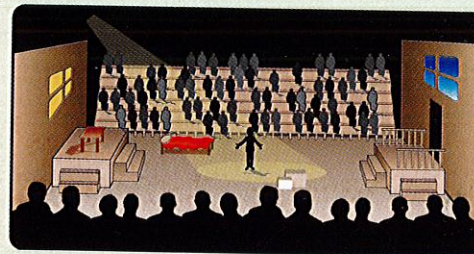
KEY POINTS

- Actors should not keep their back to the same section of the audience for too long.
- Items of set in the central area need to be low level to avoid obstructing sightlines.
- The two ends of the stage are commanding positions where the actors can face the whole audience.

TYPES OF STAGING

Different types of staging and audience positioning have a large impact upon the atmosphere, the set and the way the actors perform.

THEATRE IN THE ROUND

'Theatre in the Round' is commonly used in the circus and smaller venues. Although it is called 'in the round', it is ofte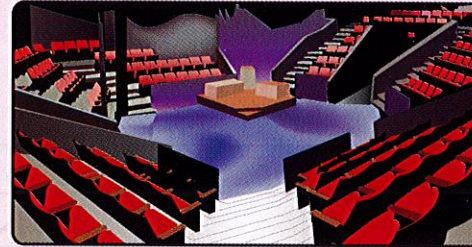n square shaped. The audience surrounds the stage which is an excellent way to create an intimate atmosphere and to allow interaction.

KEY POINTS

- Staging/furniture must be low level and must not obscure the audience's vision.
- Careful attention to movement is required as the actors will always have their back to one part of the audience.
- 'Theatre in the Round' can successfully create an atmosphere of intimacy or entrapment.

THRUST / ARENA

'Thrust' staging is very popular in modern theatres. Complex scenery and ambitious set designs can be created using levels, backcloths or painted flats. The audience is close to the stage sitting on three sides, thus creating an intimate atmosphere.

KEY POINTS

- No curtains separate the audience from the stage.
- It is difficult to change sets during a performance due to the lack of wing space.
- Large sets can be created using stage flats with working windows or doors.
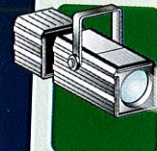
STAGE LIGHTING

FLOODLIGHT

A 'Floodlight' is one of the simplest lanterns. It does not have a lens and cannot be focused. As a result, it provides a general wash of colour and is normally used for lighting flat scenery.

SYMBOL FOR LIGHTING PLAN

PROFILE SPOT

A 'Profile Spot' provides a strong beam of light that can be focused on a specific area of the stage. The defined beams are perfect for long throws and can be used to cut shapes on stage and project gobos.

SYMBOL FOR LIGHTING PLAN

FOLLOW SPOT
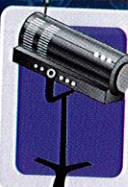
A 'Follow Spot' sits on a stand and is designed to follow performers around the stage. It is a more powerful variation of a profile spot with additional features such as colour magazines and an iris.

SYMBOL FOR LIGHTING PLAN

FRESNEL SPOT

A 'Fresnel Spot' is used to create a general wash of light across the stage. The Fresnel has a stepped lens that causes light to scatter, producing a softer edge. 'Barn doors' on all four sides of the lantern can be opened and closed to determine the spill of light.

SYMBOL FOR LIGHTING PLAN

PAR CAN

A 'Par Can' cannot be focused and is one of the cheaper types of lantern. Often used in rock concerts, Par Can lanterns throw a very harsh, strong beam of light, creating a dramatic effect.

SYMBOL FOR LIGHTING PLAN

WARNING

Lamps and lanterns can get very hot.
Always wear protective gloves when working with stage lights.

THE GLOBE THEATRE

The first true theatre 'The Theatre' was built by James Burbage in Shoreditch, London, in 1576 and rebuilt in Southwark, on the south side of the Thames, when it was renamed, 'The Globe'.

THE OPENING OF THE GLOBE (1599)

The lease ran out at The Theatre so the Burbage brothers invited 5 major partners, including Shakespeare, to be shareholders in the building of The Globe. When Queen Elizabeth died, the new king, James I, took over the company who became The King's Men. Over a 10-year period, Shakespeare produced his seven great tragedies, from Julius Caesar to Coriolanus.

- Wardrobe and storage
- Gallery
- Upper stage
- Hut
- Gallery
- Tiring rooms
- Gallery
- Trap door
- Pit
- Main Stage
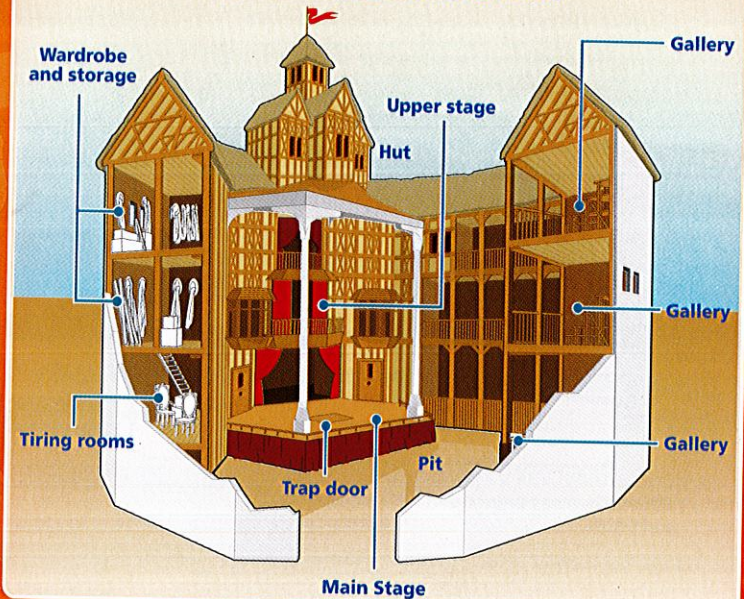
THE BURNING OF THE GLOBE (1613)

On 29th June, 1613 the theatre burned to the ground when a cannon shot during a performance of 'Henry VIII' ignited the thatched roof of the gallery.

Rebuilding The Globe (1614)

The company completed the New Globe (referred to as Globe 2) on the foundation of its predecessor. It continued to operate until 1642 when the Puritans closed it down along with all the other theatres and places where people may be entertained.

GREEK THEATRE

Theatre as we know it today is believed to have begun in Greece in the 6th Century BC.

THEATRES AND ACTORS

Early Greek theatre consisted mainly of choral chanting.

In the 6th Century BC, at the festival of Dionysus, the ancient Greek poet Thespis is credited with introducing prologue and speech into theatre, making him the first 'actor'.

The term 'thespian', meaning actor, is derived from his name.

Orchestra · Parodos · Ramp · Parodos · Proskenion · Skene
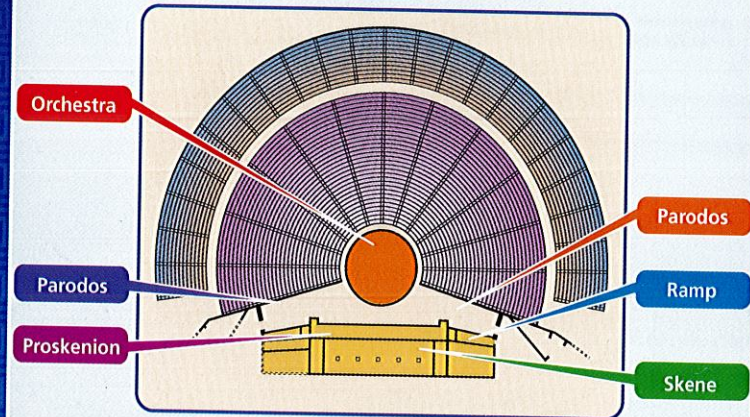
- Greek Theatres were open air and capable of holding large audiences.
- Greek tragedies involved up to three actors and a chorus, all of whom wore masks.
- The actors performed on the 'Proskenion'.
- Sophocles introduced the idea of painted 'Skene' (scenery) during the 5th Century BC.
- 'Deux ex Machina' was the name given to a contraption used for lowering actors portraying gods onto the stage.
- Many theatres are still designed using the basic ideas created by the ancient Greeks.

GREEK THEATRE

Theatre as we know it today is believed to have begun in Greece in the 6th Century BC.

THE PLAYS

The ancient Greeks created three types of play:

COMEDIES **TRAGEDIES** **SATYRS**

The most important of these were tragedies that were based on myth and history. The plays were performed annually in honour of the God of Fertility, Dionysus.

Greek tragedies followed a simple structure: the tragic hero goes through three phases -

HUBRIS
(over confidence)

NEMESIS
(retribution)

CATHARSIS
(purification)

THE CHORUS

- The Chorus was a key feature of Greek theatre, bridging the actors and the audience.
- The Chorus performed in the 'Orchestra': singing, dancing, chanting and playing music between scenes.
- It was made up of 12-15 men representing 'the voice of the people'.
- As well as setting the scene, the Chorus commented on the action helping the audience to think about the relevant issues.

daydream

HISTORY OF THEATRE 1

The exact origins of theatre are uncertain. However, cave paintings of ritual performances suggest theatre dates back as far as the Stone Age.

GREEK THEATRE

1200BC - 500AD

- The word drama comes from the Ancient Greek word 'dran' meaning 'to do'.

- The Greeks created three types of plays: **Comedies**, **Tragedies** and **Satyrs**. Performances were held in open-air amphitheatres that were capable of holding large audiences.

- Greek plays involved three actors and a chorus. The chorus commented on the story, sang, danced and wore masks to help portray their character.

- Greek plays were later adapted and translated to suit the Romans.

Playwrights include: Sophocles (Oedipus Rex) and Aristophanes (Lysistrata).

MEDIEVAL THEATRE

500 - 1500

- After the fall of the Roman Empire, Europe fell into the 'Dark Ages'.

- The Christian Church was powerful and disapproved of the theatre.

- In the twelfth century, people began re-enacting bible stories. 'Mystery Plays' developed that were performed on travelling Pageant wagons.

- Later, 'Morality Plays' appeared that warned people of the terrible things that would happen if they did not live good Christian lives!

Plays include: 'The Second Shepherd's Play' and 'Everyman'.

HISTORY OF THEATRE 1

The exact origins of theatre are uncertain. However, cave paintings of ritual performances suggest theatre dates back as far as the Stone Age.

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

1500 - 1700

- Commedia dell'Arte began in Italy.

- Skilled comic performers improvised stories that mocked human failings.

- The characters were always the same and included: Pantalone - a money grabbing old man, Il Dottore a 'know it all' doctor and Arlecchino (Harlequin) a devious servant.

- Commedia troupes did not use scripts. They improvised scenes and built in comic devices and practical jokes.

Playwrights include: Carlo Goldoni (The Servant of Two Masters).

Elizabethan & Jacobean

1550 - 1650

- In 1576, James Burbage - a carpenter and actor, built 'The Theatre'. By 1600 there were at least 4 other theatres in London, including 'The Globe'.

- William Shakespeare lived and wrote during this period. His plays were popular with all classes, from 'groundlings' (the poor) to Queen Elizabeth I.

- When Elizabeth I died in 1603, James I became king and people were anxious and afraid. Plays became darker and increasingly violent.

- In 1642, the Puritans came to power and closed theatres to stop the plague spreading.
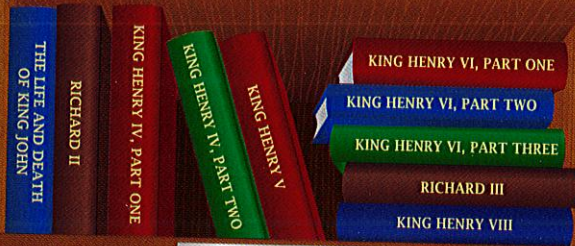
Playwrights include: John Webster (The Duchess of Malfi).

THE PLAYS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE HISTORIES

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING JOHN

RICHARD II

KING HENRY IV, PART ONE

KING HENRY IV, PART TWO

KING HENRY V

KING HENRY VI, PART ONE

KING HENRY VI, PART TWO

KING HENRY VI, PART THREE

RICHARD III

KING HENRY VIII

THE TRAGEDIES

TIMON OF ATHENS

TITUS ANDRONICUS

MACBETH

OTHELLO

HAMLET

KING LEAR

ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA

ROMEO AND JULIET

JULIUS CAESAR

CORIOLANUS

THE COMEDIES

TROLUS AND CRESSIDA

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

AS YOU LIKE IT

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

TWELFTH NIGHT

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

PERICLES

THE WINTER'S TALE

THE TEMPEST

HISTORY OF THEATRE 2

1650 - 1700   THE RESTORATION

- Theatres reopened when Charles II was restored to the English throne.
- The 'Theatre Royal' in Drury Lane was built with a Proscenium Arch stage which allowed actors to approach the audience. This proved a revolution in staging.
- Restoration comedies that poked fun at the rich and their way of life were the most popular form of theatre.
- For the first time women appeared on stage. Eleanor Gwyn, the mistress of Charles II, was the most prominent restoration actress.

Playwrights include: William Wycherley (The Country Wife) and Aphra Behn; Britain's first famous female playwright.

1700 - 1800   18th CENTURY THEATRE

- Theatre became extremely popular, particularly among the upper classes.
- Elaborate scenery was introduced and theatres became larger. Actors had to shout and use huge gestures to hold the audience's attention. Acting became stylised and artificial.
- Comedies that made fun of society, manners and etiquette were the dominant form of theatre: 'Comedy of Manners'.
- For the first time actors became 'celebrities'. Famous actors included David Garrick, John Kemble and Sarah Siddons.

Playwrights include: Richard Sheridan (The Rivals) and Oliver Goldsmith (She Stoops to Conquer).

1800 - 1900   VICTORIAN MELODRAMA

- Early melodramas thrilled audiences with lurid tales of ruined abbeys, dark dungeons and mysterious temples.
- Melodrama used stock characters; wicked villains, high-minded heroes and pure-hearted heroines. Stage effects were inventive and extravagant.
- People used the theatre to escape the monotony of their working lives during the industrial revolution.
- As the century developed, plays dealt with themes that touched ordinary people. It was 'popular' theatre guaranteed to make the audience gasp and weep.

Plays include: 'The Murder in the Red Barn' the true story of William Corder who murdered his mistress.

20th CENTURY THEATRE

During the 20th century there was a huge revolution in theatre. Below is an overview of some of the key developments.

NATURALISM

1860 - Present

- 'Naturalism' refers to dramas that attempt to recreate 'real life'.

- English playwright, Tom Robertson experimented with Naturalism in the 1860's. His plays were labelled 'Cup and Saucer Dramas' as he used real food and drink on stage.

- Konstanin Stanislavski developed 'The System': a system that helped actors relate to their characters' emotions.

- Naturalism is now an accepted form in theatre, film and television. Eastenders and Coronation Street are both naturalistic dramas.

Playwrights include: Henrik Ibsen (A Doll's House) and August Strindberg (Miss Julie).
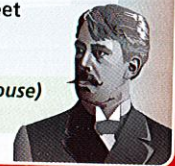
POLITICAL THEATRE

1920 - Present

- The horrors of World War I had a huge impact on people across the world.

- German director Erwin Piscator believed theatre could be used to make people think about political issues.

- Bertolt Brecht wanted audiences to be challenged and think about injustice. He became one of the most influential playwrights and theorists of the twentieth century.

- British playwrights such as Joan Littlewood and Tony Marchant have continued to use theatre as a forum to make audiences think about political issues.

Playwrights include: Bertolt Brecht (The Caucasian Chalk Circle) and Joan Littlewood (Oh! What a Lovely War).

20th CENTURY THEATRE

During the 20th century there was a huge revolution in theatre. Below is an overview of some of the key developments.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

1945 - 1960

- World War II made people further question the meaning of life. Playwrights once again used theatre to make people question the point of their existence.

- One of the most famous plays from this period is 'Waiting for Godot' by Samuel Beckett. Although the play is comic, it also makes many serious points about the futility of life.

- The influential British playwright Harold Pinter was influenced by 'Theatre of the Absurd', particularly in his early works such as 'The Birthday Party'.

Playwrights include: Eugéne Ionesco (The Chairs) and N.F. Simpson (One Way Pendulum).

KITCHEN SINK DRAMA
1956 - 1970

- In 1956, director George Devine commissioned a number of playwrights to write plays for the Royal Court Theatre.

- One play; 'Look Back in Anger' by John Osborne featured a young male character who criticised middle class values. This type of character was labelled an 'Angry Young Man' and refers to anyone who challenged the establishment.

- When censorship was abolished, playwrights were given complete freedom to use theatre to challenge ideas and beliefs.

- This 'revolution in theatre' also had a massive impact on television and film.

Playwrights include: Shelagh Delaney (A Taste of Honey) and Arnold Wesker (Chips with Everything).