WE TEACH DRAMA
TRAIN | LEARN | INSPIRE

Theatre Design Toolkit

10 Practical Approaches for Teaching Theatre Design

Music & Drama Expo 2024

Who we are

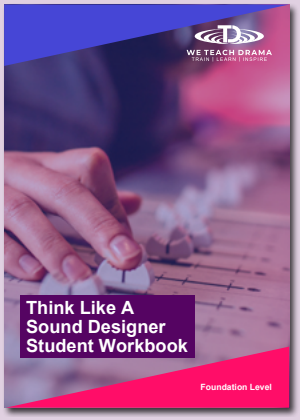
We Teach Drama Ltd are an e-Commerce company who have developed a range of theatre design resources over the last three years and were thrilled to win '**Outstanding Drama Education Resource**' in 2023 at the Music and Drama Education Awards, for our '*Think Like a Lighting Designer*' Student Workbook & videos.

music&drama education awards 2023 WINNER

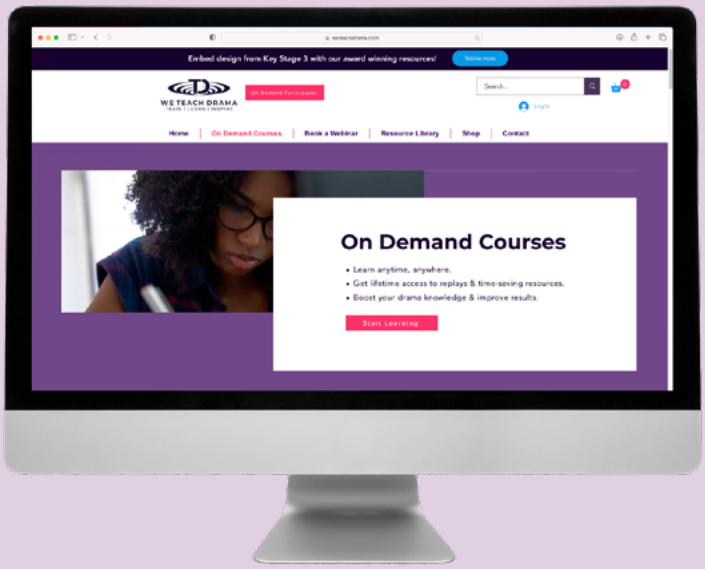
OUTSTANDING DRAMA EDUCATION RESOURCE

Winner: We Teach Drama, for 'Think Like a Lighting Designer'

The judges thought this was a well-produced, solid resource to share with students. They said it supports teachers to teach the fundamentals of the topic using a wide range of resources, adding that it is a responsive piece of work generated as a result of a genuine need.



Read more about our design packs here: www.weteachdrama.com/design-packs



We also have a range of On Demand courses for teaching theatre design: www.weteachdrama.com/on-demand

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Connect

Connect with us on social media and email us. We have a close relationship with our customers & subscribers and always love to hear from you: info@weteachdrama.com

Facebook: /weteachdrama X: /weteachdrama Pinterest: /weteachdrama

Free Resources

There are masses of resources for teaching theatre design in our free-to-access Resource Library, which you can sign up for here: www.weteachdrama.com/get-the-password

Shoebox Theatre Competition

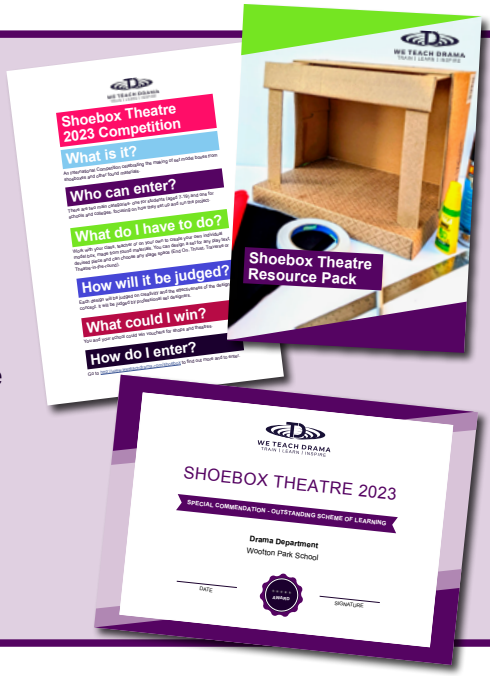
We also have a Shoebox Theatre Competition, which we run every year. There are two main categories for the Competition:

1. **Outstanding Model Box.** Awarded to the student's model box & concept whom the judges feel is the most creative and effective.
2. **Outstanding Scheme of Learning**. Awarded to the school or college which sets up the project and their scheme of learning in the most innovative way.

Prizes awarded for both categories are £100 e-voucher for Hobbycraft.

You can read more about our 2023 competition here:

www.weteachdrama.com/shoebox



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Welcome to the Theatre Design Toolkit!

If you are looking to increase student engagement within your school context or raise the profile of theatre design within your school, look no further. This guide is packed with 10 easy-to-implement practical approaches to developing theatre design within your curriculum.

How to use this Toolkit

Read through the document and select one or two strategies you are going to focus on over the coming year. Small changes which are properly implemented can make a big impact on student engagement and results.

A note for international teachers:

This toolkit references Key Stage 3 and 4 in the UK Curriculum. Key Stage 3 is 11-14 years and Key Stage 4 is GCSE-Level (14-16 years)

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Strategy 1

Teach one scheme per year at Key Stage 3 which has a design focus.

Aim to teach ONE scheme in Years 7, 8 and 9 which have lots of opportunities for teaching design.
For example:

Year 7- Stage Spaces

Students are introduced to the different stage spaces through practical exploration. The scheme culminates in each group performing a short script on a different stage space. In this unit they learn the areas of an End on Stage Space and also the pros and cons of each stage space.

Year 7- Puppetry

At the end of Year 7, students take part in a puppetry unit. All four design elements can be introduced through this unit. For example, they can start to think about fabrics, texture and colour as their design and make their puppet. They can use lamps and torches to light their performance plus think about how to include sound effects and music.

Year 8- Shoebox Theatre

There are lots of ways to set this up and many resources on our website to support with teaching this, including downloadable templates: www.weteachdrama.com/shoebox

There are two Blogs showcasing the very best model boxes from our 2023 competition here: www.weteachdrama.com/blog

Winner.
Outstanding Model Box 2023.
The BFG

Year 9- Stereotypes

This works well as a costume design unit when the students learn how to design and label a costume. They create a character in a particular group or gang and explore the idea of 'stereotypes' (e.g. the geeks, the Instagrammers etc)

Year 9- Ghost Plays

Year 9's love this unit and it's great to introduce sound and costume. If they focus on Woman in Black, they can start to explore how silhouette can be used within costume design (e.g. her Victorian dress & bonnet). They can start to explore sound effects, foley sound and music to build tension & suspense.

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Strategy 2

Develop a whole-school approach.

Think about how you are going to engage the whole school and get them excited about theatre design and technical theatre. An extra-curricular technical theatre club on a lunchtime or after school is a great way of building a backstage team for your next show. You will also find that the older students will teach and support the younger students.

Get inspired by reading our Blog about our *Shoebox Theatre 'Outstanding Scheme of Learning' winner and runner-up*. One teacher launched their Shoebox Theatre Competition for the whole school on World Theatre Day, what a fantastic idea!

www.weteachdrama.com/post/winner-announced-for-outstanding-scheme-of-learning

> *Over the course of the academic year I have held a technical theatre club during a Friday lunchtime.*
> *We have spent a half term focusing on the following: Lighting, Sound, Puppetry, Costume. Then for World Theatre Day I launched the Set in a Box competition with the whole school as well as the Technical Theatre Club. We had 60 set designs entered in total with 2 individual entries and 2 school entries submitted to this competition.*
>
> ***Drama Teacher Julia Blain.***

Winner Announced for Outstanding Scheme of Learning

Winner- The Island Free School

Special Commendation 1- Cramlington Learning Village

Special Commendation 2- Wooton Park School

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Strategy 3

Embed design in EVERY LESSON in a small way.

This sounds like a tall order but in fact, it's about routine and habit. Spend 2-5 mins every lesson on teaching theatre design. This may include:

- Learning one new word/ key vocabulary
- A question
- A sketch
- A mini-design task
- Refer to *Key Elements poster* on your drama display
- Finisher/ exit ticket
- Do now/ starter
- Think/ pair/ share

TIP!
Re-design your lesson plan template to include a space for your theatre design task or question and you won't forget!

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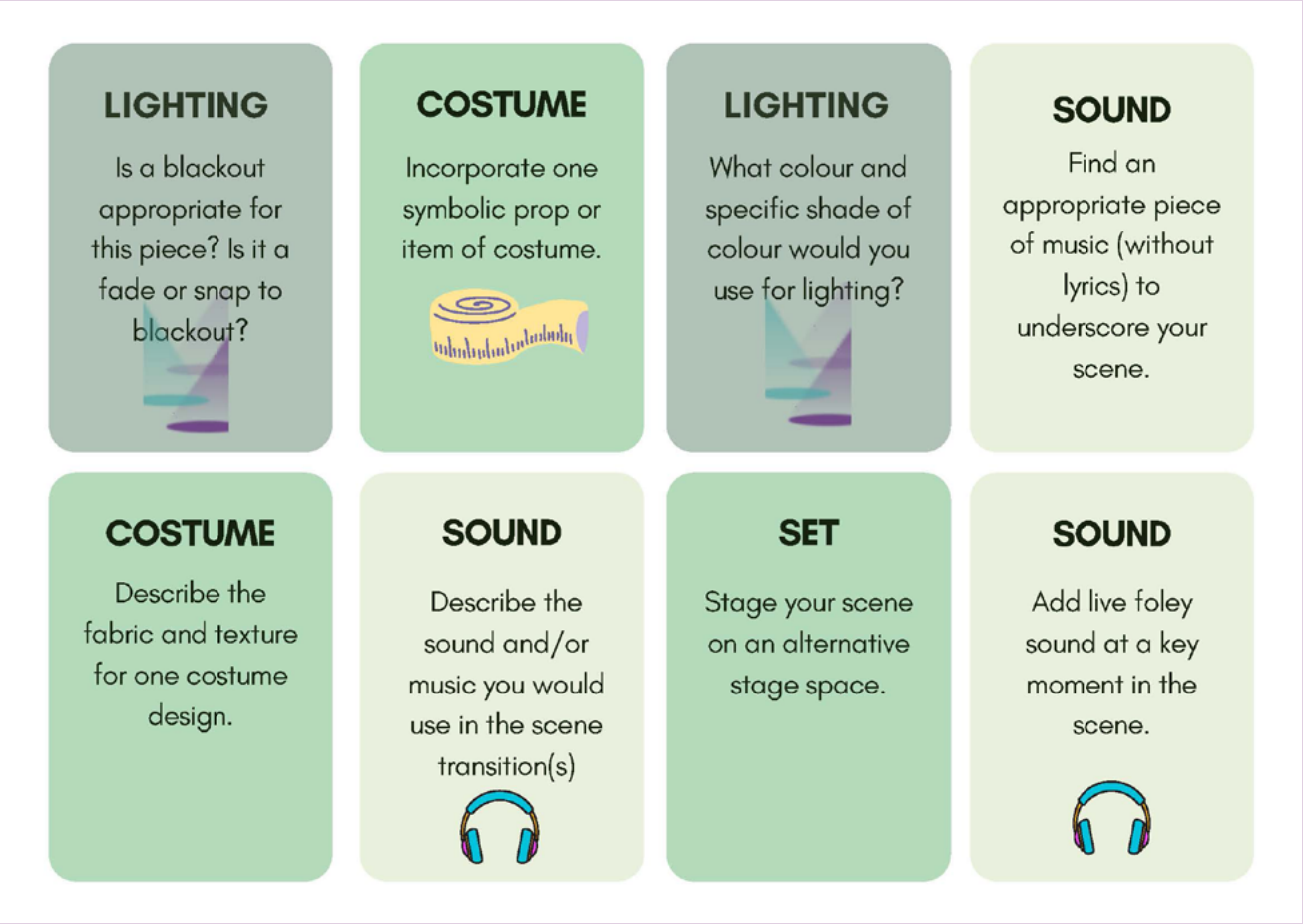
Strategy 4

Incorporate questions about design into each lesson, enabling students to shift the focus to design, such as:

- How could we light this scene?
- Can we perform this on a different stage space?
- What colour palette would this scene have?
- When should we cue sound in this scene?

This could be whole-class, small group or individual questions as groups are working practically. These flashcards are a great resource for this:



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Strategy 5

Allow time for practical exploration.

As we would with acting and directing, it is crucial that students have time to practically explore design. This is totally possible even if you have limited resources. Shoebox Theatre is a great place to start, you could use a mannequins or jelly babies and torches to explore lighting.

- ✓ 1 wooden mannequin
- ✓ A small lamp, torch or use the light on your phone
- ✓ Lighting gels
- ✓ Small pieces of material- a range of fabrics and colours
- ✓ Some plain A4 paper for sketching

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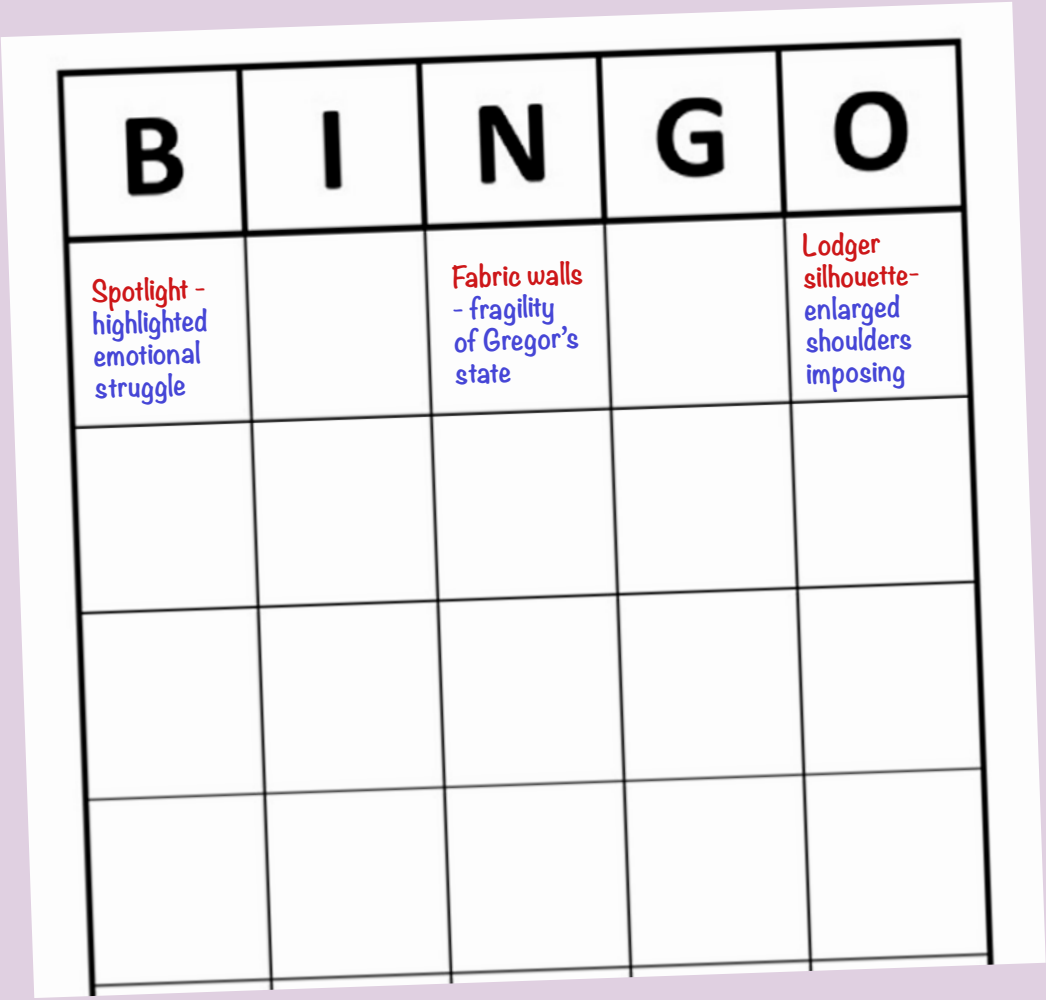
Strategy 6

Use ‘Bingo’ template & colour-coding

Use a Bingo board for analysing and evaluating design elements for live performance review. For example, create a board for ‘lighting’, ‘set’, ‘costume’ & ‘sound’ elements:

1. The students write in BLUE the design element, such as ‘spotlight’ or ‘scene transition’. (Analysis)
2. They must then write a brief note in RED about the impact/ effect this created for them as an audience member. (Evaluation)

Bingo boards can also be used as revision tools and students can then develop a paragraph which is colour-coded **BLUE** (for Analysis) and **RED** (for Evaluation).



B	I	N	G	O
Spotlight - highlighted emotional struggle		Fabric walls - fragility of Gregor’s state		Lodger silhouette- enlarged shoulders imposing

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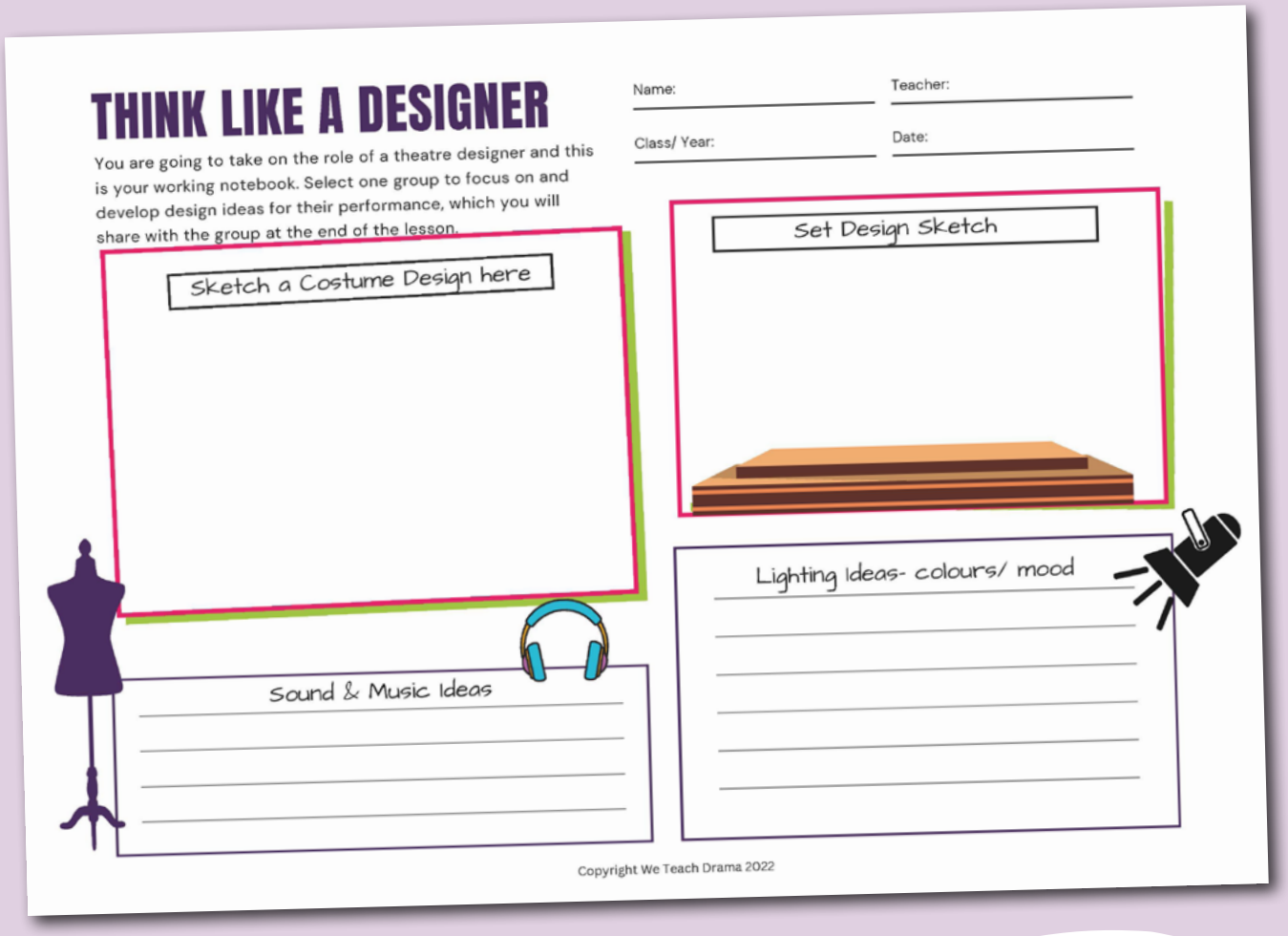
Strategy 7

Assign roles at Key Stage 3

Assign a design role to one student every lesson. They have a clipboard and the following worksheet:



THINK LIKE A DESIGNER

You are going to take on the role of a theatre designer and this is your working notebook. Select one group to focus on and develop design ideas for their performance, which you will share with the group at the end of the lesson.

Name: Teacher:

Class/ Year: Date:

Sketch a Costume Design here

Set Design Sketch

Lighting Ideas- colours/ mood

Sound & Music Ideas

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TIP!

Leave time for them to feedback to you or the class at the end of the lesson.

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Strategy 8

Showcase design visually

Create visual displays which showcase design, which you can refer to every lesson when you teach. Here is an example of a display created with the We Teach Drama Design Posters from our **free** Resource Library:

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Strategy 9

Model, model, model

Just as we model excellent practical work and written work in drama, use as many tools as you can to model outstanding work in theatre design. The online portfolios of professional designers are an excellent place to start. Here are some amazing ones:

BE INSPIRED!

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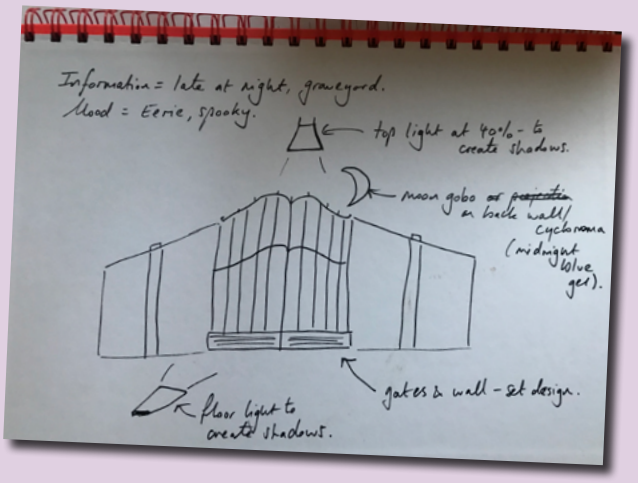
Strategy 10

Invest in sketch books (Key Stages 4 & 5)

This sounds so simple but can have a huge impact on how students engage with theatre design. If you have the budget, purchase an A4 sketch pad for your exam groups. They can then build up sketches and designs for key scenes and set texts. It fosters autonomy and gives the more able students an opportunity to really excel. Show them modelled examples, even from Art students, to show how they should be set up and maintained to a high standard.



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Q. How does theatre design fit into your current curriculum?

Schemes at Key Stage 3 with design opportunities

Resources/ facilities

Extra-curricular

Barriers within your context

Number of students specialising in design

Aims/ intentions

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THINK LIKE A DESIGNER

Name: _____ Teacher: _____

Class/ Year: _____ Date: _____

You are going to take on the role of a theatre designer and this is your working notebook. Select one group to focus on and develop design ideas for their performance, which you will share with the group at the end of the lesson.

Sketch a Costume Design here

Set Design Sketch

Sound & Music Ideas

Lighting Ideas- colours/ mood

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Key Stages 3 & 4 Curriculum Mapper 2022-2023

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	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Yr 7						
Yr 8						
Yr 9						
Yr 10						
Yr 11						

Drama Vocabulary Tracker

Year/ Class:

Scheme:

Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2

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Drama Vocab
BOOKMARK

Scheme:

Drama Vocab
BOOKMARK

Scheme:

Drama Vocab
BOOKMARK

Scheme:

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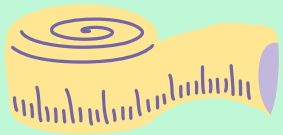
Scheme:

LIGHTING

How could you use a spotlight in this scene?

COSTUME

What is your character's favourite item of clothing?



SET

How could you make your performance more immersive for the audience?

COSTUME

Select an appropriate colour palette and fabrics for your character's costume.

SET

Mark on the floor with tape where the wings are positioned on stage and the centre line.

SOUND

Add a diegetic sound effect to your scene.

LIGHTING

Describe the lighting you would use in the scene transition(s)

SET

Add a different level to your scene using rostra or stage blocks.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

THE STAGE MANAGER

LESSON TOPIC: _____

Prove it!

Use examples and key moments from rehearsal

NOTES

Are your group working well and fulfilling the success criteria?

SUCCESS CRITERIA

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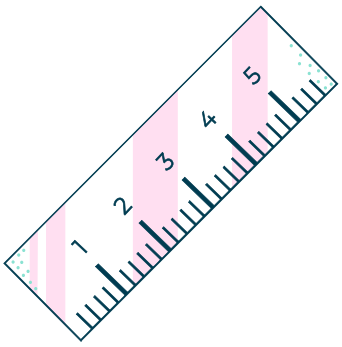
Key Elements of Set Design

Practicality & Shape

The physical features of the set and how the actors use the space to tell the story.



Scale

How set pieces relate to each other, the actors and the audience, in terms of size (usually 1:25).

Colour

How colours within the set evoke certain emotions and associations for the audience.

Masking

Masking hides any distractions which might be in the wings or backstage.

Faux Effects

Using skills in scenic carpentry and painting to create specific effects.

Set Dressing

Consideration of the props and furniture on stage (e.g. chairs, books etc)

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Key Elements of Costume Design

What are the key elements or considerations for a costume designer?

Colour Palette

The colour of a costume can tell you so much about a character. Colour can be used to emotionally manipulate the audience.

Shape & Silhouette

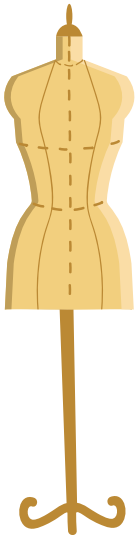
Consideration of the shape of the costume on the performer's body and the silhouette it creates on stage. Silhouettes can indicate specific time periods.

Texture & Fabric

Every fabric has a different texture. This refers to how the fabric feels and moves on the actor. For example, is it rough, smooth or soft?

Character/ Personality/ Style

Just as we have our own personal style, so does every character. What are the details in the costume which communicate their unique personality?



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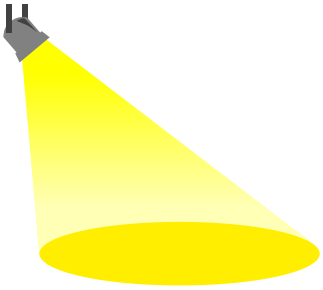
Elements of Lighting Design

Direction

The angle of light as it hits the performer or object.

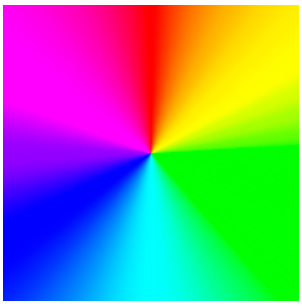


Intensity

How bright or dimly lit the stage is.

Movement

A transition from one lighting state to another.



Colour

The use of colour to convey a particular mood or atmosphere

Quality

Whether the beam of a lantern is hard or soft.

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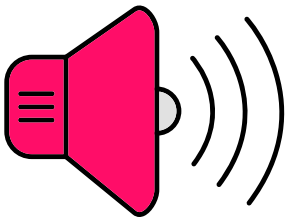
Key Elements of Sound Design

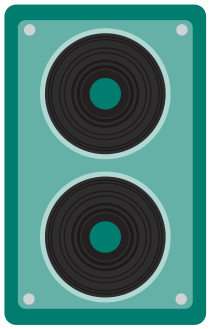
Source & Direction

Where is the sound coming from? If it's coming from a speaker, where is the speaker in the performance space? For example, behind the audience or underneath the stage? Are they wall mounted?



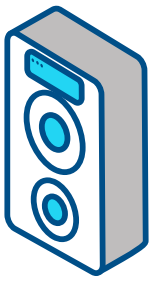
Volume

Is the sound being played at a quiet, medium or loud volume?



Types of sound

Are the sounds recorded or live (Foley)? Diegetic or non-diegetic?

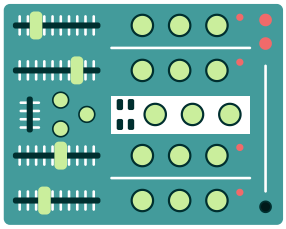


Cues

What is the 'trigger' for the sound to be played or performed (e.g. a line of dialogue or visual 'cue')?

Editing

How has the sound been manipulated or edited? (e.g. echo/ fades/ loops)



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