



**WE TEACH DRAMA**  
TRAIN | LEARN | INSPIRE



# Theatre Design Toolkit

## 10 Practical Approaches for Teaching Theatre Design

Creative Conference 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.



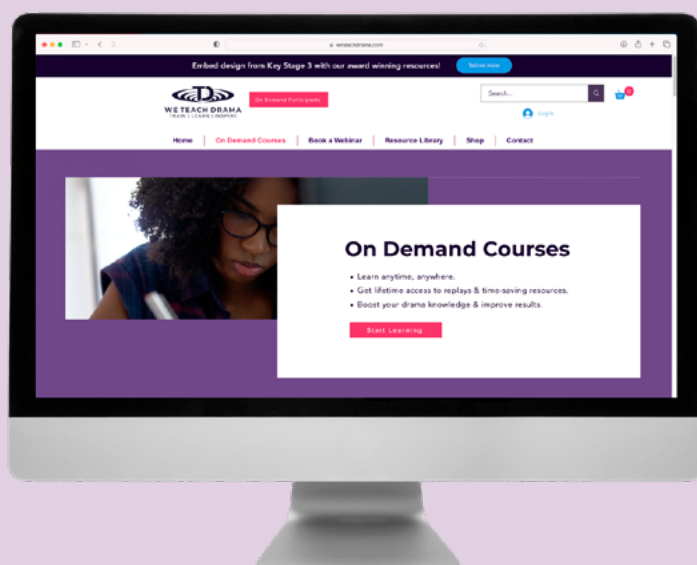
## OUTSTANDING DRAMA EDUCATION RESOURCE

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](http://www.weteachdrama.com/design-packs)



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

# 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](mailto: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](http://www.weteachdrama.com/get-the-password)



# Shoebox Theatre Competition

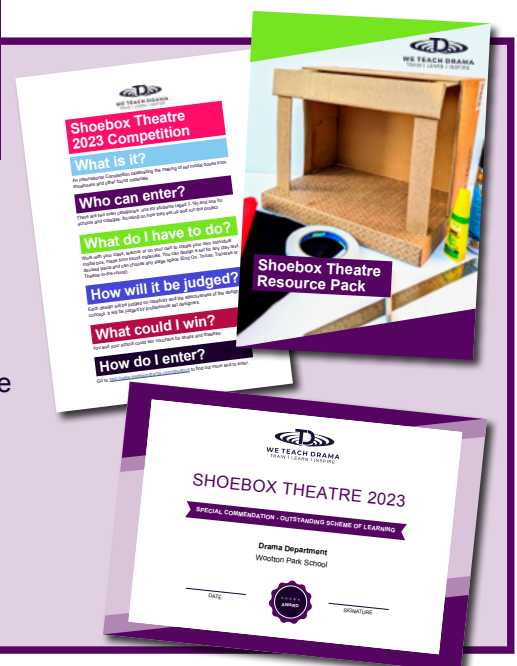
We also have a Shoebox Theatre Competition, which we run every year. There are two main categories for the Competition:

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](http://www.weteachdrama.com/shoebox)





# 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)*





# 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](http://www.weteachdrama.com/shoebox)

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

### 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.



Winner.  
Outstanding Model Box 2023.  
The BFG

# 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 *Shoobox Theatre 'Outstanding Scheme of Learning' winner and runner-up*. One teacher launched their Shoobox 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](http://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.**

The screenshot shows a blog post from 'We Teach Drama' dated September 30, 2023. The title is 'Winner Announced for Outstanding Scheme of Learning'. The post is by Lucy Bellingham. It features a grid of images showing various stage set designs. The text describes a competition for 'Shoobox Theatre' where students submitted set designs. The winner is 'The Island Free School' with a scheme of learning by Harry Potter. The post also mentions a 'Special Commendation 1- Cramlington Learning Village' and a 'Special Commendation 2- Wooton Park School'. The bottom of the screenshot shows a social media sharing bar and a list of recent posts.



# 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!



# 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:

## LIGHTING

Is a blackout appropriate for this piece? Is it a fade or snap to blackout?



## COSTUME

Incorporate one symbolic prop or item of costume.



## LIGHTING

What colour and specific shade of colour would you use for lighting?



## SOUND

Find an appropriate piece of music (without lyrics) to underscore your scene.

## COSTUME

Describe the fabric and texture for one costume design.



## SOUND

Describe the sound and/or music you would use in the scene transition(s)



## SET

Stage your scene on an alternative stage space.

## SOUND

Add live foley sound at a key moment in the scene.





# 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



# 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



# 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



Sound & Music Ideas



Lighting Ideas- colours/ mood



Copyright We Teach Drama 2022

### TIP!

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

## 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:





# 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:



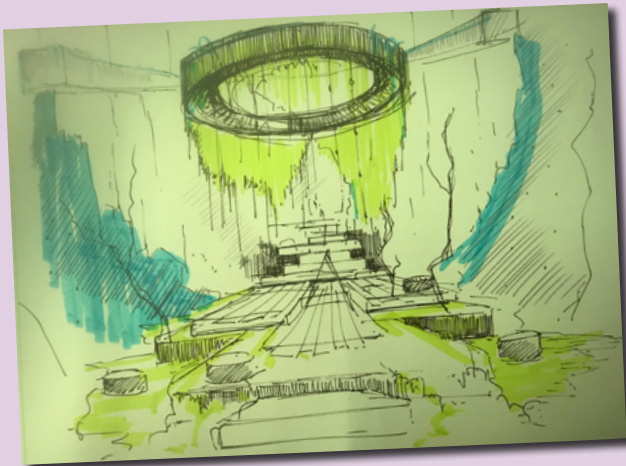
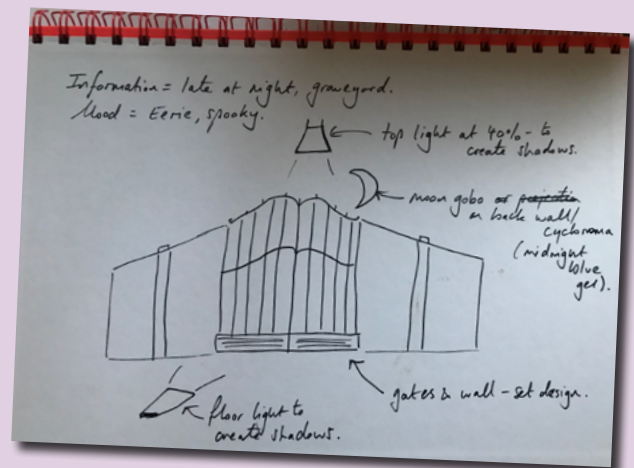
**BE INSPIRED!**



# 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.



# 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

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# 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.

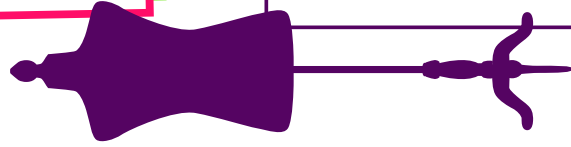
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Class/ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sketch a Costume Design here



Sound & Music Ideas

---

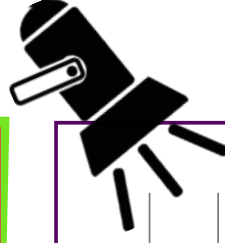
---

---

---

---

Set Design Sketch



Lighting Ideas- colours/ mood

---

---

---

---

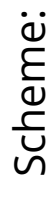
---

# Key Stages 3 & 4 Curriculum Mapper 2022-2023

© We Teach Drama 2024



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



## Summer 2

[illegible]

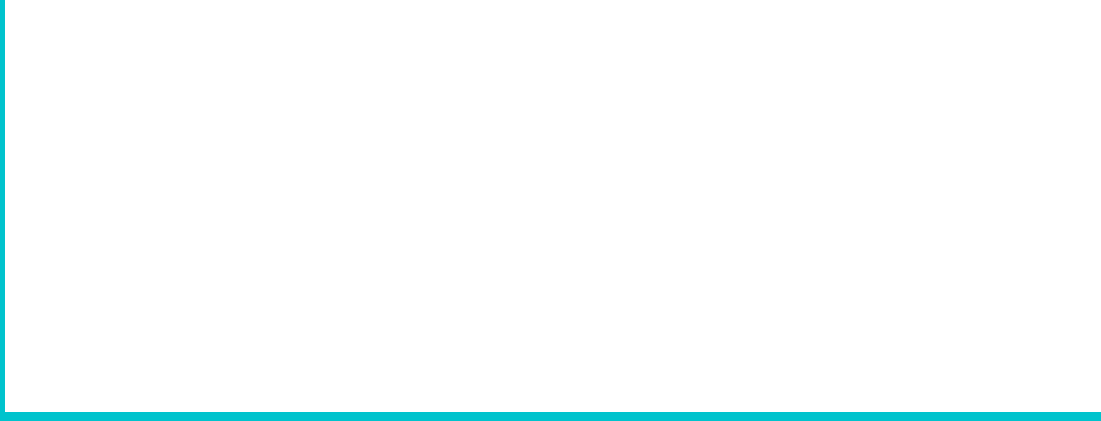


*Drama Vocab*  
**BOOKMARK**



**Scheme:**

*Drama Vocab*  
**BOOKMARK**



**Scheme:**

*Drama Vocab*  
**BOOKMARK**



**Scheme:**

*Drama Vocab*  
**BOOKMARK**



**Scheme:**

## LIGHTING

How could you use a spotlight in this scene?



## COSTUME

What is your character's favourite item of clothing?



## SET

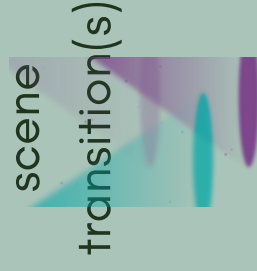
How could you make your performance more immersive for the audience?

## SET

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

## LIGHTING

Describe the lighting you would use in the



## COSTUME

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

## SET

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

## SOUND

Add a diegetic sound effect to your scene.



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# THE STAGE MANAGER

LESSON TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

## NOTES

Prove it!

Use  
examples  
and key  
moments  
from  
rehearsal

## SUCCESS CRITERIA

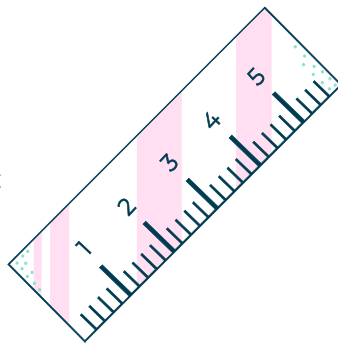
Are your group  
working well  
and fulfilling  
the success  
criteria?



# 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.



## Faux Effects

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



## Masking

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

## Set Dressing

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




[www.weteachdrama.com](http://www.weteachdrama.com)

[info@weteachdrama.com](mailto:info@weteachdrama.com)

© We Teach Drama Ltd





# 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.

## 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?



## 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?



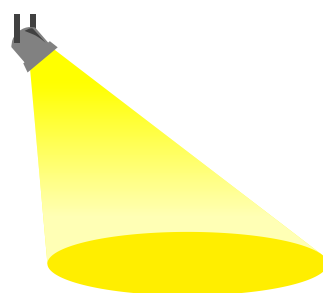


# Elements of Lighting Design



## Direction

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



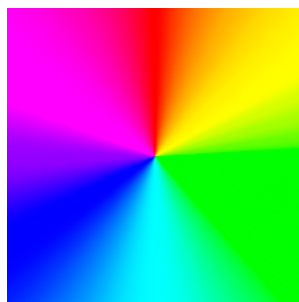
## Intensity

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.



[www.weteachdrama.com](http://www.weteachdrama.com)  
[info@weteachdrama.com](mailto:info@weteachdrama.com)  
© We Teach Drama Ltd

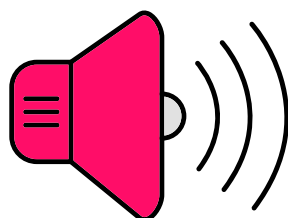
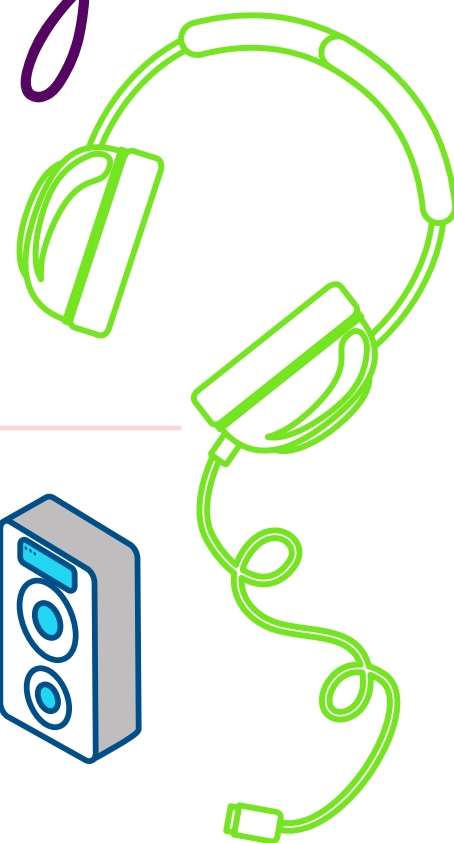




# Key Elements of Sound Design

## 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?



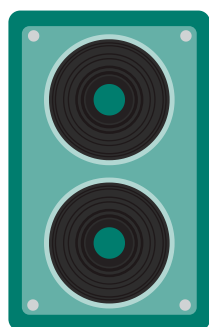
## Volume

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



## Cues

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

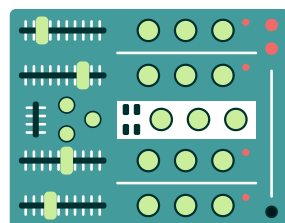


## Types of sound

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

## Editing

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



[www.weteachdrama.com](http://www.weteachdrama.com)

[info@weteachdrama.com](mailto:info@weteachdrama.com)

© We Teach Drama Ltd 2022

