

# PART TWO



## DIRECTING, DESIGNING, PLAYWRITING AND REVIEWING THEATRE



- Chapter 5** Directing and designing: staging and performing play scripts
- Chapter 6** Playwriting: creating and writing play scripts
- Chapter 7** Theatre criticism: analysing and evaluating performances





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# 5

## DIRECTING AND DESIGNING: STAGING AND PERFORMING PLAY SCRIPTS

### WHY STUDY DIRECTING AND DESIGNING?

Two of the key practices in theatre are the roles of the director and designer. In previous chapters you have focused on the roles of the actor and the playwright in your work on playbuilding. This chapter looks at working with pre-written scripts as a collaborative process of discovery. A polished performance of a script is the end product of analysis and rehearsals involving directors, designers, production crew and performers. The process of creating a directorial concept and communicating this to everyone involved helps the director, the performers and the production team develop an understanding of the script and explore creative opportunities for its presentation. Studying the methods of script interpretation and presentation will develop our ability to read, interpret and perform scripts.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 5.1 The director
- 5.2 The designers
- 5.3 The stage manager
- 5.4 Directorial concept and the elements of production
- 5.5 Script detective work and Stanislavski's System
- 5.6 Rehearsing and performing scripts
- 5.7 Performance task: interpreting a play script

### OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- explore and consider the collaborative roles of the director, the designers, the production team and the actors in the interpretation and performance of scripts
- create a prompt copy for use in rehearsals and performance
- explore and apply a method of analysing a script for meaning, character development and effective presentation
- explore and apply a method for creating a directorial concept with design elements
- apply an understanding of the elements of drama to interpret and present a scripted performance.







Sydney Theatre Company/Brett Boardman

*Macbeth* as performed  
by the Sydney Theatre  
Company, directed by  
Kip Williams

## 5.1 The director

*Actors are in the habit of putting their attention only on the roles assigned to them ... This is a mistake ... It is very important that the performer senses the production as a whole, its entire intent ... Then, by itself, the part given to you will become clear.*

Constantin Stanislavski – Russian performer and director

### PRACTITIONER PROFILE

#### KIP WILLIAMS

##### Director, Sydney Theatre Company

Kip Williams is one of Australia's most exciting young directors of theatre, opera and film, and is currently Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company.

While at STC Kip directed Caryl Churchill's new play *Love and Information*, in a co-production with Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre. Kip's previous productions for STC include *The Golden Age*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Macbeth*, *Children of the Sun*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Under Milk Wood* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, as Associate Director with Andrew Upton.

In addition to directing numerous drama productions, Kip has also directed several productions for Sydney Chamber Opera. These include *I Have Had Enough* (double bill of *Ich Habe Genug* and *Nunc Dimittis*), the song cycle *Through the Gates* (also for the 18th Biennale of Sydney), and the acclaimed production of *The Lighthouse*. Kip also directed a radical staging of Romitelli's *An Index Of Metals*.

Kip has worked on a number of screen projects, including the short films *B, Bee & Mee* and *Walk*; and music videos *Little Fingers* and *Botanist* for the band Guineafowl, the latter of which was listed in ABC's *rage* top 50 music videos for 2009.



Getty Images/Brendon Thorne

Kip Williams



#### HINT

A good director leads, directs and instructs the performers, but also allows the performers to make their own discoveries.

#### THE DIRECTOR'S ROLE

The role of the director is a relatively 'new' occupation. Prior to the end of the 19th century, the director in theatre was virtually non-existent. The term 'actor-manager' or 'stage manager' was given to the person or actor who was responsible for organising the performance.

Today, some of the director's tasks and responsibilities are as follows:

- Negotiate with producers and theatre companies about the choice of production, the possible casting and the selection of the production team.
- Interpret the script and develop a directorial concept, which is recorded in the director's production brief. The concept explains the director's overall vision of the play and will include consideration of themes, issues, characters, lighting, costume, sound, set and style of performance. It will also contain a copy of the script with explanatory notes, sketches and ideas.
- Complete a detailed unit breakdown and analysis of script, including careful consideration of the elements of drama.
- Lead a group of actors and the production team through a process to performance.
- Block the action of the play.

## COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Individually, write down what you know about directing and what questions you have. Share these with the class.
- 2 What kind of leader do you think a director should be? To answer this question, use your recollections of previous performances where you have been directed.
- 3 Communication is an essential aspect of the director's role. What are four key ways a director might communicate effectively with actors and the production team?
- 4 Research directing by interviewing a theatre director. He or she may be the director of a school production, amateur theatre production or a professional production. Ask questions that will help you understand the role and responsibilities of the director. Also ask questions about the director's approach to working with actors, and the process they apply to create their directorial concept.

## 5.2 The designers

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Although each area contributes its own creative ideas, all areas are united by the directorial concept. This collaboration between the director and the designers helps to ensure the final production has a sense of unity and cohesion. The main responsibilities of each role are listed under each production area.

### SET DESIGNER

The set designer must consider the following:

- the appearance and style of the set, taking into account the requirements of the directorial concept
- the use of colour, texture and shape, and how they will work with the designs for costume and lighting
- practical issues, such as the venue, the size of the performing area, the entrances and exits of actors and the ease of scene changes.

It is also the set designer's job to provide 1:25 scale drawings and a three-dimensional model of the set.



### HINT

Staging is the 'putting on stage' of all the aspects of the performance including the movement of actors, props, set pieces, lighting and sound. Blocking involves making decisions about how each scene appears on stage, and directing actors to assist them with their positions, entrances, exits and moves.



The Guardian – *Want to be a Theatre Director?* (Article)



### HINT

Professional directors rarely make decisions about set, costume, lighting and sound in isolation. Often the development of the directorial concept is a collaborative effort, involving all the designers.



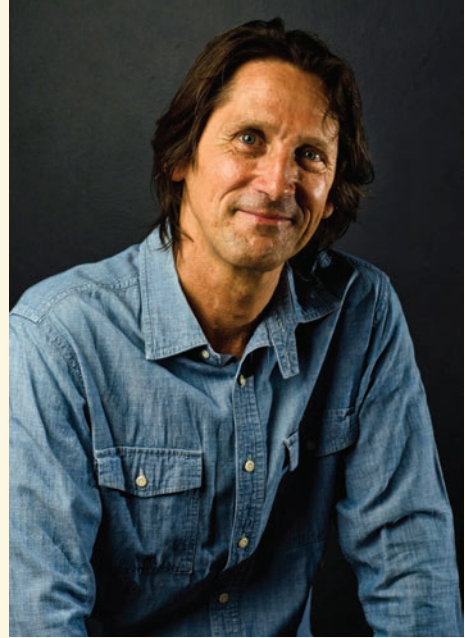
## PRACTITIONER PROFILE

### STEPHEN CURTIS

#### Designer

Over a career of more than 30 years Stephen Curtis has worked extensively as both a production designer for film and costume and set designer for drama, opera and dance. His book *Staging Ideas: set and costume design for theatre* is widely used as an inspirational guide to the design process.

Stephen writes, 'How will this production feel? How will it work? What will it mean? As designer, I set out together with my director to find answers to these questions. This is often the very first step in getting the production off the page and giving it a tangible, real shape. Through discussion, research and experimentation, the design becomes a brilliant tool for actually seeing what kind of production it is going to be, and communicating this to everyone else involved in bringing the production to life: the performers, the set and costume-makers ... and ultimately the audience.'



Courtesy of Stephen Curtis

Stephen Curtis

## LIGHTING AND SOUND DESIGNER

A lighting and sound designer must design both lighting and sound to suit the requirements of the directorial concept. To do this they must consider the following:

- practical lighting issues, such as whether the actors can be seen and whether special effects are achievable
- practical sound issues, such as the coordination of technical equipment and the use of microphones.

It is also the set designer's job to:

- find and record all the necessary music, sounds and sound effects using digital software to assemble and edit what is required
- select lanterns and colours of gels, and consider how they contribute to mood and atmosphere
- assess the effect of lighting on set and costume designs
- assist the director to make artistic decisions about lighting states and lighting changes
- use lighting software to program and operate lighting.

Similar to the set designer's drawings, the lighting designer must prepare a 1:25 scale drawing of all lamps and their positions, as well as providing a running cue sheet of all lighting cues.



#### HINT

A lighting state contains particular lamps that are set at certain levels. There can be several lighting states within one scene.

## COSTUME DESIGNER

The costume designer's role is to design the costumes to suit the requirements of the directorial concept, such as the period and the style of performance. To do this, the costume designer needs to:

- consider practical issues, such as fitting of costumes, costume changes and whether the actors can move freely in the costumes
- make artistic decisions in consultation with the director, such as choice of fabric, fabric colours and style of costumes
- prepares and present renderings of all costumes for all characters
- construct costumes that need to be specially made.

## 5.3 The stage manager

### MANAGING A PERFORMANCE

The stage manager plays a central role in the presentation of performance work. They oversee and coordinate all the various elements of a production. Some of the stage manager's duties are to:

- attend all rehearsals and assemble the prompt copy
- include in the prompt copy a full copy of the script, including detailed notes on actors' movements, scene changes, and sound and lighting cues
- record details of blocking, set changes, lighting and sound cues in columns on the opposite page of the script
- use a code to ensure the efficient recording of sound and lighting cues, movements of actors and the positions of set items
- use the prompt copy during the performances to call cues and to ensure all the elements of the production run smoothly.

The prompt copy example on page 110 shows how the cues are written to correspond with the dialogue and stage directions in the script. The use of aerial diagrams in the action column shows the movements of actors in the scene.

The following information will be found on pages in the front or back of the prompt copy:

- **costume breakdown** – a list of all the actors/characters and the costumes they wear
- **props list** – a list of all the props used in the performance, where they are to be placed, who uses them, and in which act and scene they are used
- **pre-show setting list** – outlines what needs to be checked and in place before the show can start
- **scene chart** – charts which actors are in which scenes
- **contact list** – a list of the names and addresses of all people involved in the performance.



American Theatre Wing  
– Working in the Theatre:  
Scenic Design



#### HINT

A costume 'rendering' is an illustration of a costume design. The rendering can be presented as a sketch, collage, watercolour or computer-aided design. The rendering will include annotations on how the costume is constructed, and may be accompanied with samples of fabrics and colours.



#### HINT

During rehearsals, notes on blocking are made in the action column of the prompt copy. Lighting, sound and technical cues are added during the final weeks of rehearsal when the theatre is available and the set and equipment have been installed.



#### HINT

Letters and arrows can be used to indicate set items as well as actors' positions and moves.



| PROPS  | SOUND = SFX   | LIGHT = LFX   | ACTION   |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>CISSY: BOUQUET DSR<br/>MARGARET: CAMERA USL<br/>LISA, HELENA: CONFETTI</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standby SFX cue 17 (<i>Wedding March and cheering</i>)</li> <li>SFX 17 cue GO</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standby, followspot CS</li> <li>Standby LFX cue 24 (full light)</li> <li>Followspot GO: follow Cissy to DSC</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actors in position at doors to stairs USR and USL</li> <li>Cissy Onstage DSR</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Scene 13</b><br/><i>Sound of The Wedding March and cheering. A spotlight comes up CS. Cissy dives into the spotlight and catches bouquet. As she clutches it to her chest, full lights come up to reveal Margaret, Jeanette, Lisa, Helena and Kat waving and yelling to the departing couple.</i></p> <p><b>Margaret</b> (<i>Taking photos</i>) Oh Jeanette! Look at Cissy, she's so excited.<br/><i>Need to remember that Margaret seems excited but her subtext is disappointment as it is not her daughter getting married.</i></p> <p><b>Jeanette</b> Yes, always a bridesmaid though.<br/><i>(Jeanette and Margaret exit. Kat goes to Cissy.)</i></p> <p><b>Kat</b> Good catch, Ciss. <i>Need to work out how to block this action.</i></p> <p><b>Cissy</b> Sarah said she'd aim for me.<br/><i>(Felix enters.)</i></p> <p><b>Felix</b> Hi. <i>He is nervous, need to show this more effectively.</i></p> <p><b>Kat</b> Hi.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SFX cue 17 FADE OUT</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LFX cue 24 GO X-fade (full light up, followspot down)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jean and Marg. exit USL; Kat to CS</li> <li>Felix enters USR</li> </ul>   |
|  |   |   | <p>A diagram of a stage layout. At the top, two 'Stairs' are indicated with arrows pointing down to the stage. The stage is a rectangle with 'Audience' written below it. Inside the stage rectangle, 'L+H' and 'J+M' are positioned near the top. 'Kat' is in the center, with an arrow pointing down to 'Cissy' at the bottom. A large oval is on the right side of the stage.</p> |

## 5.4 Directorial concept and the elements of production

### DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT

The 'directorial concept' is the director's vision for the play. The concept will include consideration of:

- characters, setting and era of the play
- message, themes and issues of the play
- performance space
- target audience
- elements of production.

The designers of costume, set, lighting and sound work closely with the director to realise the directorial concept in the staging of a production. The designers use the directorial concept as the basis for their designs.

## THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

The ‘elements of production’ in a performance are lighting, sound, set and costume.

These serve an important function in the performance of a play. Through the power of symbol, they help to convey information about atmosphere, themes and character.

The designers of set and costume will consider the following basic design elements and principles when formulating their ideas:

- **design elements** – line and its direction, shape, texture, proportion, colour, tone and size
- **design principles** – dominance, balance, harmony, contrast, variety, radiation, gradation, repetition, symmetry and asymmetry.

Each designer will consider their own particular requirements in their initial planning. The factors to be considered as part of each design discipline are as follows:

- **costume design** – costumes required, types of garments, colours, textures, accessories, patterns on fabric, comfort and practicality for the performers
- **set design** – the stage space, use of vertical and horizontal lines, use of angles, use of shapes (circles, squares, and so on), colour, texture, levels, furniture, entrances and exits, locations of the action and symbolic images
- **lighting design** – use of light and shadow, sense of warmth or coolness, colour, pattern, highlight, silhouette, spotlighting and washes
- **sound design** – use of recorded music, sound effects, soundscapes, voice-overs, live music and percussion.

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### COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Visit some theatre design websites and select one costume or set design that is illustrated. Copy the image and evaluate your chosen design. Although you may not know the play for which the design is intended, comment on the designer’s use of the design elements and principles. Explain how the design may help establish atmosphere, communicate character or work symbolically.



TEDx Talks – What is Theatre Capable of?

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### THE DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT: *SUMMER OF THE ALIENS* BY LOUIS NOWRA

The following example provides a description of a production and demonstrates how the elements of production evolve from the directorial concept.

#### Synopsis of *Summer of the Aliens*

The play is mostly a heart-warming comedy, but also has many serious issues that give the play its drama. The play will open with the older Lewis as the narrator. He takes us back into his memories as a boy growing up in Broadmeadows, Victoria. The young Lewis has an active imagination and indulges his obsession with flying saucers to escape from the harsher realities of his world. He befriends a young Indigenous girl, Dulcie, who, like Lewis, escapes from the troubles in her life through ideas about angels.



#### HINT

Broadmeadows is a northern suburb of Melbourne. In the 1960s it was largely made up of paddocks with a few housing estates.

## Social, historical and political context

The play is set in Australia in the early 1960s. This was a frightening time for the world as the United States of America, believing in the threat of Communism, was on the verge of bombing Cuba during what was known as the Cuban missile crisis. Australia was also dealing with the impact of the many new immigrants who were arriving from Europe during this period to begin a new life. Despite its dark background and some disturbing moments, the play will be funny, provocative and moving; it will appeal to a broad audience.

## Intention and performance style

The play is about a rite of passage from youth to adulthood. The use of a realistic acting style will encourage the audience to consider the issues of racism, sexuality, and abuse, as believable characters will encourage empathy. At points in the action, the older Lewis will speak to his younger self. This dramatic technique will help the audience identify with the changes Lewis goes through.

Although the play will be realistic in acting style, the set will be symbolic to show that what we see on stage are the memories of the older Lewis. The performances of some of the other characters will be exaggerated slightly, and stylised to create comedy and to help convey to the audience young Lewis's perspective.



Shutterstock.com/Jack Q.



## Performance space

The play will be performed in a 250-seat auditorium with a thrust stage.

## Set design

The set is intended to look artificial. The stage floor is raked and will be covered in dry grass to represent the paddocks of Broadmeadows. A large cyclorama will be lit in certain colours to show times of day. At its base will be three miniature houses to suggest the rest of the housing estate. The housing estate where the young Lewis lives must seem vast, empty, dull and monotonous. The people who live there seem out of place. Three clouds will be painted on the cyclorama and are intended to look artificial. It is summer, so everything must look hot and dry. Lewis's house is represented by only one room: the kitchen. It will be decorated in the style of the 1960s. The colours of lemon yellow and pastel pink will give it a homely feel.

## Costume design

The period is important. The costumes will be researched and designed to be as suggestive of the early 1960s as possible. Hairstyles should also be typical of the period. Performers will have their hair styled or wear wigs as appropriate. Research will be conducted to see how make-up was applied during this period. Each character will be distinguished by the colour and tone of their costume. The costumes will have a hint of roughness about them to indicate the characters' economic situations. The angel costumes will look impressive but homemade. They will look more powerful under certain lighting.

## Lighting design

The general lighting will be composed of strong washes in straw colour and in blue. Lewis's house will be lit by profile spots to isolate scenes in that location. Other areas will also be isolated for certain scenes. There will be two shades of blue gels used for the floods on the cyclorama to indicate day and night. The fading of lights on the cyclorama will be very important for establishing mood. Special lighting effects include the flying saucer effect, fibre optic lights for the miniature houses, and a fire effect for the final scene of the play.

## Sound design

The play includes a few radio announcements from the period; these will have to be researched. Sound effects include budgie noises, wind, rain, thunder, crickets and cicadas. Music from the era is required in some scenes. Some atmospheric sounds and music will be specially composed by the designer for certain scenes. The atmosphere at certain moments should be gripping.



### HINT

A cyclorama is sometimes used at the rear of a stage to create a large, neutral surface for lighting and projections. It can be used to suggest exteriors and to create the illusion of distance, but can also be used to create interiors. Traditionally, the cyclorama is made of fabric and is hung near the upstage wall from a bar above the stage. It can also be stretched between bars located in the wings of the stage to create a smooth surface that is slightly curved.

## EXERCISE

### THEATRE DESIGN PROJECT

Create a set and/or costume design. Choose a play to design for. If designing a set, focus on two particular scenes in the play. If designing a costume, focus on two characters. If you do not have time to read a full-length play, choose a one-act play or a play you have studied in another subject.

Before you choose particular scenes or characters to design for, create a directorial concept for your play. Use the following questions to help you.

- **Performance style** – What style will the play be performed in? Why?
- **Themes and issues** – What are the themes and messages of the play?
- **Target audience** – Who is the target audience? Why is this play appropriate for them?
- **Performance space** – Where will the play be performed? Why is this an appropriate space for your performance?
- **Set design** – Which scenes will you design a set for? What are the locations of the scenes? What is the predominant mood or atmosphere of the play? How can colour, shape, scale of set pieces, etc. help establish symbol and atmosphere?
- **Costume design** – Which characters will you design costumes for? What are the features of each character's personality? How will colour, garment and texture portray personality? What are the dramatic needs of the characters in each scene and how will the costume design support these? How will you convey time period, season or occupation?

### COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Visit the website of a theatre company of your choosing. View images or video clips of the performances and read the descriptions of the productions. Identify some of the features of set, costume and multimedia used in a performance. Who is the target audience for this company?

## 5.5 Script detective work and Stanislavski's System

### 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 19th 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.

Constantin 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 19th century. 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.

## SCRIPT DETECTIVE

The exercises that follow will 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:

- **stage directions** – the written instructions to the actor and director; usually appear in italics
- **dialogue** – the main source of information that helps provide information about the story of the play, 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. Completing all these exercises will take more than one session.



### HINT

The proscenium arch is the ‘picture frame’ around the proscenium arch stage. The arch and wings hide the backstage area and heighten the illusion of real life on stage.

Getty Images/Hill Street Studios



Working with scripts requires you to think critically about the many ways in which dialogue and stage directions can be interpreted.





## HINT

Although a script is provided, you can use the following exercises to work with any script.

## Creating a prompt copy

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

## DANA AND LEE

*(LEE drops his backpack, sits down and checks his phone for messages. 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 phone.)*

### Unit 1

*Title: The First Try*

#### Sub-objectives:

*Lee: To be left alone.*

*Dana: To get Lee's attention.*

**DANA** Did you get my message?  
**LEE** What?  
**DANA** I sent it during English. Almost got caught.  
**LEE** I didn't get it. *(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.)*  
 Do you want some?  
*(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 phone screen.)*  
 Who are you talking to?  
**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'm not stalking 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 puts his phone in his pocket, picks up 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** What did you just say? Listen Lee, 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** Everyone knows about it. It went viral didn't it?

**DANA** But I spoke to your mum.

**LEE** Mum?

**DANA** Yeah, she rang me. I know what really happened. 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 ... people make stuff up all the time. The world is full of fakers and haters, and once it gets out there, well, you know ... who doesn't love a bit of scandal and gossip? They'll forget about it sooner or later.

**LEE** You don't get it, do you? They won't! There'll always be questions, annoying posts 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** Some of us are going to see your favourite band. They're only here this weekend. *(Pause.)* At least the music will be so loud I won't be able to talk to you.

**LEE** What makes me think that's almost impossible? Sorry. Again.

**DANA** Bell's gone 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 ... uhm ... *(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.)*

Actors interpret a script and find subtext to know who characters are, what they think and how they feel.



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## Step 1 – Finding the given circumstances

### EXERCISE

#### THE FIRST READING

Divide into pairs and read through the *Dana and Lee* script. 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.

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.

## FINDING UNITS OF ACTION, SUBTEXT AND SUB-OBJECTIVES

A unit breakdown shows the building blocks of a script. Each unit contains a distinct moment of action, an idea, a point or an issue being discussed. The building blocks give an overview of the way tension is developed in the script and can also be used to help identify character objectives. By looking closely at small sections of the script, the director and actor are able to 'read between the lines' to determine the underlying motivations and intentions of the character/s.

## 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.



### HINT

The beginning and end of a unit is indicated by entrances and exits of characters, by changes in conversation, or by changes in action, mood or tension.

### EXERCISE

#### ANALYSING THE UNITS

Follow the steps below to complete a unit breakdown of the *Dana and Lee* script. The first two units have been done in the script margin 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 the precise moment or 'beat' of the rhythm in one unit in the script that you feel contains the climactic moment; justify your choice.

## BUILDING CHARACTERS

### Step 3 – Second reading: building your character



#### HINT

The sort of language the character uses can provide you with information about the character's personality, situation and background.

#### EXERCISE

#### ACTING AND READING

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.

#### COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

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? Are there any particular lines that you feel say something about who your character is and what they want?
- 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, and 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 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 pauses 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 your 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. Begin the biography by using the information about your character that is contained in the script, and then add information of your own.

## 5.6 Rehearsing and performing scripts

### PRACTITIONER PROFILE

#### ANNE-LOUISE SARKS

##### Theatre maker

Anne-Louise Sarks is an award-winning theatre maker whose work has been performed around the world. Anne-Louise is one of Australia's most exciting theatre makers, and her style is best characterised by her intelligent and deeply playful refocusing of classic works into the present day. She has created a series of remarkable productions that combine the full force of ancient myth with the confronting familiarity of modern life.



Fairfax Syndication/Jamie Barrett

Anne-Louise Sarks

Anne-Louise writes, 'When I am beginning to develop a new theatrical project, I start by asking myself a few important questions. Firstly, why does this story need to be told? Secondly, how does it speak to the present moment in time? And finally, what form would best support the telling of this story? These questions ensure that I'm clear about what the story means to me and how and why I'm creating it. As you get further into your process of making theatre, these initial answers can also be useful to refocus and clarify the direction of the story. There are many personal and political motivations that drive me to tell stories, and to reimagine myths in new ways. What drives you to tell a story?'



AustralianPlays.org

### REHEARSING AND PERFORMING

So far we have looked at the three steps you need to complete before you rehearse and perform scripts. To refresh your memory, they are:

**Step 1** – Finding the given circumstances

**Step 2** – Unit breakdown: finding character objectives

**Step 3** – Second reading: building your character.

The remaining steps are:

**Step 4** – Rehearsals: exploring the elements of drama and testing ideas

**Step 5** – Performance: being the character

**Step 6** – Evaluation: looking for improvement.

You can see some similarities in this process with the stages of the creative process and the process of playbuilding. In steps 4 to 6 you will explore the following aspects of Stanislavski's System: relaxation, emotion memory, 'the magic if' and concentration.





## HINT

It is important to develop the habit of writing notes during rehearsals. These notes can be used to reflect on your character work and the general interpretation of the script. Often asking questions about character choices or acting decisions can contribute to the creative process stage 3: gathering a broad range of potentially related information, and stages 5 and 6: generating ideas and combining ideas. You should use a pencil for notations on your script so that corrections and alterations can be made easily.



## HINT

It is best to leave the memorising of lines until last because the way you deliver a line depends on your interaction with other actors. It also depends on consideration of important factors. If you learn your lines too soon, it is difficult to change the way a line is said later.



## HINT

Repetition is the best way to memorise lines. You should only memorise small chunks of script at a time. It is also helpful to imagine the situation the character is in as you memorise the line.

## Step 4 – Rehearsals: exploring the elements of drama and testing ideas

The rehearsal process involves the following stages:

- Continue to read and rehearse the script referring to the elements of drama. Record all blocking in the action column of your prompt copy. Include decisions for hand props, movements, positions of actors, delivery of dialogue, character objectives, the building of tension to the climactic moment, and so on.
- Explore how the use of space and levels can add meaning to your performance. For example, how can the status of the characters be emphasised by using levels and/or distances from other characters?
- Improvise situations that show the characters ‘outside’ the time and place indicated in the script.
- Continue to develop your character by adding to the character biography. You can also incorporate the following techniques from Stanislavski’s System: emotion memory, ‘the magic if’ and relaxation (see below).
- Memorise lines once all decisions have been made.
- Make final refinements to blocking, lighting, sound and performance work.
- Complete a technical rehearsal. This is where the focus is placed on the movement of scene changes, and the light and sound cues. Finalise cues in the prompt copy.
- Complete a dress rehearsal. This is where you perform with all the required elements and without interruption, as though it is the actual performance.

## EXERCISE

### EXERCISES FROM STANISLAVSKI’S SYSTEM

#### Emotion memory

Emotion memory requires you to recall memories of the emotions you felt when you were in a situation that is similar to the situation the character is in. For example, you may be playing the role of a character who is lost in a strange city. In this instance you should recall a time when you were lost to help evoke the feelings associated with the experience of being lost.

#### ‘The magic if’

You may have to play a character in a situation that is outside your own life experience. The question ‘What if ...?’ helps you to play your character truthfully by utilising the power of the imagination to vividly create experiences and feelings. By asking this question, you are putting yourself in an imaginary situation and determining how you would react. For example, you may never have been first in a race. Asking yourself ‘What if I won a race?’ leads you to ask questions such as ‘How would I feel?’ or ‘What would I do at the moment I crossed the finish line?’

#### Relaxation

Relaxation is an ideal technique to use in conjunction with ‘The magic if’ and ‘Emotion memory’ exercises to develop character. When we are relaxed, our imagination is heightened, helping us recall and create feelings and sensations.

Lie on the floor and progressively tense and release different body parts. Breathe in as you tense the muscles, and exhale as you relax them. When you are completely relaxed, imagine you are the character in various situations. Use your imagination to explore the character’s feelings and thoughts.

## Step 5 – Performance: being the character

In the script work in this chapter, you have looked at the style of realism. This style attempts to re-create life on stage. The performers in a realistic play need to use their skills of concentration and focus to become absorbed in the character and reduce their awareness of the audience. Use of imagination is an essential aspect of being focused and concentrating when rehearsing and performing. Through your imagination, you ‘see’ the world of the play and experience the thoughts and feelings of the characters and roles that you play. Stanislavski believed that, in realistic acting, the performer is 90 per cent being the character and 10 per cent aware as the performer. Stanislavski believed that, to achieve this, the performer needed to concentrate and focus their attention to help them become more deeply involved in their character.

### EXERCISE

#### CONCENTRATION

Concentration is the ability of the performer to maintain their involvement in their character and the performance by ignoring external and internal distractions. An external distraction may be a distant noise outside the performing area or an unexpected event that happens on stage. An internal distraction is where the mind wanders from pretending to be the character in the situation and instead thinks about other things. If the performer is totally engaged in the performance and the character, and resists being distracted, the audience will be more convinced that the performance is truthful.

Stanislavski used an exercise called ‘Circles of attention’ to explain how concentration is maintained in performance.

#### Circles of attention

Work with a partner. Create two characters and set them in an improvised situation within a room of your choosing. At the beginning of the improvisation, their circle of attention should encompass the whole of the performance area. The performers utilise the skill of concentration to limit their awareness of the audience and to maintain focus. On a given signal from the group leader, the circle of attention becomes smaller until it is only a small area around the two actors.

Example: The circle of attention encompasses the whole performance space. Two people are inside an art gallery. The circle of attention reduces. The two visitors examine a large glass cabinet of pottery work. The circle of attention reduces even further. The two visitors examine a program of art works, looking for the name of an artist.

## Step 6 – Evaluation: looking for improvement

After you have performed, it is important to evaluate the performance. In theatre jargon, this is sometimes known as the ‘post mortem’. Evaluation is an opportunity for the director, the performers and the production team to consider the strengths of the performance and the areas for improvement. Often the evaluation helps to build a deeper understanding of the play and its message.



### HINT

Methods of relaxation have been used for centuries to help people not only relieve tension but achieve in particular areas. Today many professional sporting clubs employ sports psychologists who use relaxation and visualisation techniques to help players perform well. Relaxation has the same benefits for performers who would like to improve their performance work.



### CHALLENGE

During the ‘Circles of attention’ exercise, audience members can occasionally cough, stand or move to a different seat. The performers are to ignore these distractions and maintain their concentration by focusing on the situation.



## HINT

Memorise all your lines. This will make your performance of the script more enjoyable to watch. Reading a script limits the performer's ability to use body language and be absorbed in the character.



*WICKED* The Musical – Costumes: Design/Build  
National Theatre – Medea's Dress: Making Blood and Mud  
Royal Opera House – Design Challenge: Designing and Making a Set  
National Theatre – Designing *Emil and the Detectives*  
Practical Technical Theatre – Demo: Lighting Design  
The Guardian – Russia's Stage Revolution: When Theatre was a Hotbed for Impossibly Space-Age Design (Article)

## EXERCISE

### MINI TASK: PERFORMING *DANA AND LEE*

Continue developing the *Dana and Lee* script (pp. 116–118) to performance by completing the requirements for steps 4 to 6. You will need to:

- rehearse the script with your partner; based on the information you have discovered, incorporate decisions about character, setting and how the scene is played
- include the use of sound and lighting, if you have access to equipment
- write all your cues in your prompt copy so that the lighting and sound operators are able to follow your instructions
- present your interpretation to the class.

## COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Use the following tasks to evaluate your work and the work of others.

- 1 Briefly describe the process you went through to gain an understanding of the *Dana and Lee* script.
- 2 Outline any discoveries you made about the characters or the situation.
- 3 Compare your interpretation of the script with one other interpretation. What were the similarities and differences? Can you offer an explanation for the differences in interpretation?
- 4 Compare your character interpretation with a class member who played the same character as you. What were the similarities and differences? Can you offer an explanation for the differences in interpretation?
- 5 Describe how one interpretation of *Dana and Lee* best demonstrated an understanding of the building of tension to the climactic moment. How was this achieved? In your discussion, refer to the use of rhythm, pace, timing and energy.



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Effective collaboration when working with scripts requires everyone to remain focused on the aims of the rehearsal.



# PERFORMANCE TASK



## 5.7 Performance task: interpreting a play script

### The task

In pairs or small groups, you are to prepare a script and perform it for an audience. You are to find your own script or use one of the scripts provided. Performing arts bookshops and script websites are good sources for finding scripts. Try to avoid using film scripts as these often need to be adapted substantially to make them appropriate for live performance. For successful completion of this performance task you are required to:

- choose a script
- prepare a prompt copy
- include, in the front of the prompt copy, written answers to script detective work (see pp. 114–120)
- clearly describe your directorial concept; this will include a discussion of how the elements of production—set, lighting, costume and sound—will be unified
- use sketches and include samples (such as colours and fabrics) to help illustrate your ideas
- follow the steps in rehearsing and performing a scene (see pp. 121–124)
- record all your responses in your prompt copy
- give a short, verbal presentation to the class that summarises your directorial concept for the script and how you would perform it if you had access to a full production team.

### Rehearsing and performing scripts

Follow the steps below to prepare for the performance task.

- 1 Choose a script and cast the roles.
- 2 Paste a copy of the script into your logbook and create a prompt copy. Even if you do not have access to sound and lighting equipment, you can record your creative ideas for sound effects and lighting cues. Remember to leave pages for the written responses.
- 3 Follow the script detective steps (pp. 114–120).
- 4 Follow the rehearsing and performing scripts steps (pp. 121–124).
- 5 Write a character biography for your character.
- 6 Write a point-form directorial concept for the extract you choose to perform. Your concept will identify themes and issues, as well as the predominant atmosphere. Your concept will also explain how costume, set, lighting and sound will help to communicate themes and issues.



#### HINT

You may like to think of how your set or costume designs could be used in a symbolic way to help establish mood and atmosphere, and to convey some of the broader issues of the script.



#### HINT

When rehearsing, it is important to remain focused as the character. Consciously engage yourself as the character in the scene and with the other character. This will encourage more truthful interaction between you and the other performer.

The prompt copy will be assessed in terms of:

- presentation and layout
- inclusion of required elements
- degree of sophistication in interpretation of the script.

## Evaluate using a performance checklist

You and your teacher will evaluate your work individually using a list of criteria. These criteria relate to your achievements in this task. Some criteria will relate to the achievement of the group. The criteria are listed on the evaluation sheet at the end of this chapter and will be used to evaluate your ability to:

- sustain and develop character in performance
- select and incorporate voice that is suitable for character
- select and incorporate effective body language and movement
- effectively use the performance space
- develop a script into a coherent performance
- make suitable choices for lighting, sound and costume.

## Sample scripts

### *THE LONG WAY HOME (EXTRACT)*

Characters: 1 man, 1 woman

Created from first-hand accounts, *The Long Way Home* captures the experiences of members of the Defence Force who have served in combat zones internationally. While the script is based on actual interviews and testimonies, the playwright, Daniel Keene, did not want to create a piece of 'verbatim theatre' but to craft the interviews into scenes that capture the often traumatic and damaging experience of serving in a conflict zone. In the following scene, Anna and Nick are trying to find normality in their lives after his return from Afghanistan. Nick is severely traumatised and possibly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.



*The Long Way Home* by Sydney Theatre Company

Fairfax Syndication/Elesa Kurtz

## THE LONG WAY HOME

### 5. TWO LIVES

*NICK approaches the front of the stage.*

**NICK** When you first get back, the smell of shampoo or the scent of perfume on a woman's skin ... just floors you. You stand on the street and breathe it in.

*Pause.*

Out on patrol you might not wash for a couple of weeks. You're sweating like a pig all day. You don't change your clothes.

*Pause.*

One day and the next just blur into one another. There's a lot of time, but there aren't any days. Every step you take could be your last. You push the fear down, way down. You learn how to live with it. But here ...

*He turns from the audience.*

*Lights rise on the living room of a suburban house.*

*Night.*

**NICK** *sits at one end of the sofa, staring at a blank TV screen.*

*His wife, ANNA, comes into the doorway and stands watching him; NICK is unaware of her.*

*After a pause:*

**ANNA** Where are you?

**NICK** *(Startled, spins around to face her)* What?

**ANNA** You were ... off somewhere.

**NICK** Was I?

**ANNA** Where were you?

**NICK** Nowhere in particular.

*Pause.*

**ANNA** Some days you're not really here at all.

**NICK** Then where am I?

**ANNA** I don't know.

*Pause.*

**NICK** I don't know either.

*Pause.*

**ANNA** *approaches and sits at the other end of the sofa.*

**ANNA** We need to talk.

**NICK** We talk all the time.

**ANNA** But we don't talk about anything.



**NICK** We must talk about something.  
**ANNA** Maybe you don't need to talk, but I need to.  
**NICK** I'm not stopping you, am I?  
*Pause.*  
**ANNA** I want you back.  
*Pause.*  
**NICK** I don't know what you mean.  
**ANNA** You do know.  
**NICK** No. I don't.  
**ANNA** You don't want to know.  
*Pause.*  
I don't think that you want to be here.  
**NICK** *stands up and moves across the room.*  
**NICK** I can't do this.  
**ANNA** What?  
**NICK** I can't have this conversation.  
**ANNA** You're going to have to.  
**NICK** No. I don't have to.  
*Pause.*  
**ANNA** I love you.  
*Pause.*  
**NICK** Don't say that.  
**ANNA** You used to like me saying it.  
**NICK** Just don't say it.  
**ANNA** I love you.  
*Pause.*  
Nick?  
**NICK** What?  
**ANNA** Do you know that?  
**NICK** Yes.  
*She stands and approaches him; he moves away.*  
**ANNA** Nothing's changed. I haven't changed.  
**NICK** I have.  
*Pause.*  
When I look in the mirror, do you know what I see?  
Nothing. Because that's all I'm good for now. Nothing at all.  
*Pause.*  
My war's over. I know that. I'm not goin' back to Afghan.  
**ANNA** Is that what you want to do?  
*Pause.*

**NICK** I can fight. I'm good at it. Is anyone going to pay me to fight? That's what I can do. I'm good for nothing else. I'm useless. I'm a blank space.

**ANNA** Nick ...

**NICK** I can't be what I used to be. I am my job. Now there's no job.

**ANNA** But there's here ... there's home. You're home now.  
*Pause.*

**NICK** Every time I was in Afghan I had to forget about you and about coming home. I might not come home. I had to forget about it. So I did.  
*Pause.*

**ANNA** I never stopped thinking about you.

**NICK** Maybe you should have.

**ANNA** Some women do.  
*Pause.*

**NICK** Did you?

**ANNA** You just said I should have.

**NICK** Did you?  
*Pause.*

**ANNA** After you left I didn't touch anything. I left your shirt on the end of the bed, I left your towel in the bathroom. I left the cup you'd drunk out of on the table. I didn't touch anything, not for a week. It took me that long to admit that you were gone. I expected you to walk in the door any time. I think that I was waiting for you to walk in the door, as if nothing was any different, for you to be home again as if you'd never been away. Then I began to expect it a little less each day. Then finally I put away your things and I knew that you were gone.  
*Pause.*

I think that part of me is still expecting you to come home any day.  
*Pause.*

But there you are.  
*Pause.*

I think that now I'm just waiting for you to be gone for good. And I expect that a little more each day.  
*Pause.*

**NICK** When my last tour was almost up, I kept imagining all the things that would happen when I got home. I'd kept you out of my mind, but then I let you back in. I kept trying to imagine what it would be like the first time I touched you again.

*Pause.*

Then I touched you ... and I just felt numb.

*She turns away from him.*

When I walk down the street I look the same as everybody else. I don't have any injuries that you can see. I look like everybody else. But I'm not there. I'm a ghost.

*Pause.*

I'm a soldier. That's how I think of myself. There isn't anything else.

*Pause.*

I can't be a soldier anymore. That part of my life is over.

*Pause.*

But there isn't any other part. I can't be who I think I am.

*Pause.*

I don't know who I am.

*Pause.*

**ANNA** *leaves the room.*

## HOME (EXTRACT)

Characters: 1 female, 2 male

The play *Home* was commissioned by Shopfront Youth Theatre for Young People; it was written by P. P. Cranney. The play explores the concept of 'home' through two story-lines: that of a girl who runs away from her home and that of two refugees to Australia.

Merinda and Ali are brother and sister; they have escaped their war-torn country without their parents and family. They are staying with their uncle in Australia. Ali is having difficulty adjusting to his new home and is still affected by memories of war. His sister Merinda has adapted more quickly and wants to belong to her new country. In this scene, Ali and Merinda come into conflict over Sammy, a boy Merinda has met.

## HOME

### SCENE 13 – HOMELANDS #5: UNCLE'S PLACE

*(In a bedroom in their uncle's flat, ALI and MERINDA are sleeping in separate single beds. We can hear traffic noise—one particularly loud backfire causes ALI to start thrashing about in his bed as if in a nightmare. MERINDA gets up, crosses to his bedside and tries to soothe him.)*

**MERINDA** It's all right, Ali, it's all right! It's only the traffic. Sleep, my brother, sleep. Everything's all right.

*(ALI drifts back to a more peaceful sleep.)*

*(To audience)* Our mother writes to us—finally! The situation has not improved back home. Stay in Australia

as long as you can, she says. She gives us an address of an uncle who we have never met. He lets us move into his tiny flat in a block of redbrick units near a busy road. I'd become used to the silence of the bush that surrounded the barracks, and here the noise of the traffic, night and day, makes it difficult for me to sleep. At least I don't suffer the nightmares that torture Ali more and more.

*(She leaves her sleeping brother, and begins to quietly get ready for the day. It is now morning: as **MERINDA** energetically prepares for school and work, **ALI** rises sluggishly, without enthusiasm for the new day. He turns on the TV and slumps down in front of it.)*

**MERINDA** What will you do today, Ali?

**ALI** The same as I did yesterday and the day before that: I'll wait.

**MERINDA** But we have no idea when the war might end. *(No response)* Mum wouldn't say that it is too dangerous to come home if it wasn't true.

**ALI** She says that to protect us—we should be there to protect her.

**MERINDA** There's nothing we can do. If you would accept that, if you would try to learn English, or get a job, instead of just sitting all day watching *(TV)*.

**ALI** Watching our homeland being destroyed—bombed and burnt to the ground. Our people being killed.

**MERINDA** We can do nothing.

**ALI** Then that's all I'm doing. Leave me alone.

**MERINDA** But it's not good for you to just sit and—

**ALI** I'm sick of your nagging and whining.

**MERINDA** Ali, please ...

**ALI** Shut up!

*(Maybe he kicks or throws something. **MERINDA** is silenced by the depth of his anger. She continues to prepare to go out.)*

**MERINDA** I'll be going straight from school to work tonight. I'm on the late shift, you and uncle will have to feed yourselves.

*(**ALI** doesn't reply.)*

There is plenty in the fridge ... *(Still no reply)* See you later.

*(**MERINDA** leaves. **ALI** flicks the remote control at the TV.)*

**NEWS REPORT** NATO continued its air strikes against the besieged city overnight despite growing concerns about mounting civilian casualties ...

A passenger train carrying up to three hundred civilian commuters, including children ...

Outside the capital, Government forces clashed with Liberation Army rebels in a bloody confrontation ...



*[The news fades out [or under] the sounds of the battle we have heard before in the earlier 'War Zone' scene. The room becomes a battlefield; we are in the War Zone again. Perhaps among the other images there is the image of ALI and MERINDA's MOTHER being pushed around and assaulted by soldiers. The War Zone sound effects crescendo, ALI hurls the remote control at the TV, goes into his bedroom and throws himself on his bed. The War Zone effects fade out.]*

*[Later that night, MERINDA enters the flat with a boy, SAMMY.]*

*SAMMY waits by the entrance. MERINDA enters the bedroom. ALI stirs in his bed.]*

**ALI** Merinda?

**MERINDA** Sorry to wake you. Have you eaten yet?

**ALI** I'm not hungry.

**MERINDA** Uncle?

**ALI** Probably at the club. Poker machines! ... What are you doing? It's late. Who's that out there with you?

**MERINDA** I have no class in the morning. I'm going to the movies with a friend.

**ALI** You brought someone here?

**MERINDA** Yes, I've brought a friend home. We're going to see a film.

**ALI** You think so, eh? If it's one of those Australian girls, I don't think you'll be going anywhere.

*[ALI sees SAMMY waiting. MERINDA follows him out.]*

**MERINDA** Ali, Sammy's not a girl ...

**SAMMY** Not the last time I looked anyway.

**MERINDA** Ali, this is Sammy.

**SAMMY** Hello, Ali, nice to meet you.

*[SAMMY puts out his hand, but ALI does not take it. ALI directs most of the following to MERINDA.]*

**ALI** He speaks—

**MERINDA** Our language, yes. And his English is good too.

**SAMMY** 'How are you going, mate.'

*[SAMMY and MERINDA laugh.]*

**MERINDA** Sammy works with me at McDonald's.

**SAMMY** Yeah, take my word for it: don't eat there unless it's an emergency—and even then think twice!

**ALI** Why have you brought him here—into our home?

**MERINDA** So this is your home now—good, you must be feeling better.

**ALI** I'm not joking. Why have you brought him here?

**MERINDA** He's taking me to the movies. *[To SAMMY]* I'm ready, let's go.

**SAMMY** Listen, Ali, it's really ... *[all right]*

**ALI** That's not our language he speaks.

**MERINDA** Yes, it is—it's the same as ours.

**ALI** Where are you from?

**MERINDA** Ali, he's been in Australia five years ...

**ALI** I asked where is he from? That accent—from the North.

**SAMMY** Originally, my people—*(came from)*

**ALI** Your people are slaughtering our people.

**MERINDA** Ali, don't say such stupid things.

**ALI** We are exiled in this stupid country because your people are killing our people—my father, my family.

**MERINDA** No, Ali, please, don't talk like this.

**SAMMY** Our family came to Australia, too, because we were driven out by war.

**ALI** A war that your people started.

**MERINDA** Sammy didn't start the war. People like us don't make wars. Governments make the wars.

**ALI** How could you bring this person to this house. If you don't care about my feelings—

**MERINDA** I do care about—

**ALI** *(Over her)* If you don't care about my feelings, think of your uncle—you know he lost his family, his homeland, because of these people ...

**SAMMY** Merinda, I'd better go—

**MERINDA** Wait, we're going together, to the movies.  
*(ALI pulls his sister back.)*

**ALI** You're not going anywhere with scum like this.

**MERINDA** Ali!

**SAMMY** Ali, you better take it easy.

**ALI** Get out of here—get out of here now!  
*(ALI pushes SAMMY back toward the door. SAMMY would like to retaliate, but doesn't for MERINDA's sake.)*

**SAMMY** I'll go now, Merinda. This was a mistake.

**MERINDA** No, please, wait—

**SAMMY** I'll see you at work tomorrow.

**ALI** Merinda will not be returning to work.  
*(SAMMY goes. MERINDA pulls away from ALI.)*

**MERINDA** Ali, how could you? You are not my father! You can't do this to me!

**ALI** I'm glad your father is not here to be shamed by you like this.

**MERINDA** My father shamed?

**ALI** Yes, to see you become friends—become lovers maybe—with people who want to kill us, drive us from our own land.

**MERINDA** Sammy and his family came here before this war. They were driven out of their homeland by another war. Sammy has nothing to do with what is happening to us.

**ALI** His people—his people right now are waging war on us.

**MERINDA** Sammy is not waging war on us. We are in Australia now. We are not at war in Australia.

**ALI** I am telling you—you will not have anything to do with his kind—is that clear?

**MERINDA** And you say I shame our father? My father's soul was never as bitter and poisoned as yours. You're the one who shames our father's memory.

*(ALI hits her across the face, shocking himself as he does so. MERINDA does not retaliate—she picks up her things and leaves the flat, perhaps chasing after SAMMY. ALI does not attempt to stop her or follow her.)*

*(ALI stands alone. The sound effects of the War Zone fade up and out.)*

## **THE LIGHT BURNS BLUE (EXTRACT)**

Characters: 2 women

Set in London, England during the First World War, this play by Silva Semerciyan dramatises fictional events around the publication of photos of fairies, known as the Cottingley Fairies, taken by a young girl. These photos caused a sensation at the time because they seemed to capture fairies in a garden on film. The playwright has suggested that the devastating impacts of the war and the loss of lives created the conditions for people of the time to want to believe in something that gave them hope. In this scene, two friends confront each other. Elsie is the girl who took the photos, and her friend Winifred is an ambitious journalist who seeks to expose Elsie as a fraud.

### **THE LIGHT BURNS BLUE**

#### **3. THE NEGATIVE**

*Optional slide: August 1917*

*Saturday, 25 August 1917, 7.50 p.m. At a hotel **ELSIE** is standing on a raised platform. **WINIFRED** stands below her, dressed in the professional skirt and blouse of a journalist. **WINIFRED** withdraws a camera from her satchel and points it at **ELSIE**.*

**WINIFRED** Smile, Elsie.  
*She takes the photograph.*

**ELSIE** It's you.  
**ELSIE** *stares at WINIFRED in disbelief.*  
I can't believe it. What are you doing here? And why are you dressed like that?

**WINIFRED** I'm here in my official capacity.

**ELSIE** Your official capacity? What does that mean?

**WINIFRED** I mean my own particular—

**ELSIE** I know what official means. Why did you leave like that? So suddenly? We looked everywhere for you. We even asked Constable Warren to help us. He said, 'What's one missing girl when there are millions of missing men?' And now, here you are.

**WINIFRED** I know how you did it, Elsie.

**ELSIE** Did what?

**WINIFRED** The photographs.  
*A pause*

**ELSIE** Winifred? Is that even your name?

**WINIFRED** Yes.

**ELSIE** I thought you were my friend.

**WINIFRED** Another person would have done this long ago.

**ELSIE** Done what? What are you going to do?  
*A pause*

**WINIFRED** I'm a journalist for the newspaper called *The Dispatch*.

**ELSIE** A journalist?

**WINIFRED** My editor has instructed me to denounce you as a hoax and report back on the reaction of the other guests.

**ELSIE** *(Taken aback)* You wouldn't do that, would you? All the girls are here— Vivie, Flossie, Mags— even Viv's mum. It's our first ever trip to London. Please don't spoil it for them. My mother has never been so happy.

**WINIFRED** You're not. Happy. Are you?

**ELSIE** You don't speak for me. You don't know me. You were in Cottingley for two days and then disappeared without a trace.

**WINIFRED** You'll tell everyone the truth because you *want* to tell them. You are going to stop this before it goes any further.

**ELSIE** You lied to me. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to the lobby to wait for the others.

**ELSIE** *begins to go out.* **WINIFRED** *moves towards her and speaks with urgency.*

**WINIFRED** Elsie, in less than an hour, reporters from all the major London newspapers are going to descend on this hotel. They will have one purpose—to learn the truth of the Cottingley Fairies. My editor wanted a major press event to launch the story. Of course, we'll be first to go to print—most of the story is finished. It only remains for me to describe the outcome of our discussion tonight.

**ELSIE** What discussion? There is not going to be any discussion. You've obviously made up your mind. There's nothing more to say.

**ELSIE** *begins to go off again.*



**WINIFRED** Wait. Elsie, wait. My editor wants a story. She's sure you're a fraud, but she's never met you. I have. And it's not as easy for me ... because I saw something last month that made me think there was more to this than I first believed.

**ELSIE** What? What is there?

**WINIFRED** You told me yourself it's your dream to go to art school. The truth about fairies will be revealed tonight. But if you convince me that you are an artist and not a fraud I will defend you—against the world if necessary. If you don't, I will be the first to tear you down.

## COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Discuss how successful you felt you were in using the six steps in rehearsing and performing scripts. In which steps did you feel you made the most progress? Why?
- 2 Identify the strengths of your prompt copy. In which areas could you improve?
- 3 Evaluate your performance, considering the performance criteria listed on the evaluation sheet on p. 137.
- 4 Describe one performance you enjoyed. Select key moments that you remember and explain why you felt those moments were successful. Consider the performers' use of voice, body language, focus, timing and character portrayal.
- 5 If you have seen several different pairs performing the same script extract, compare one strong performance with another. Discuss the similarities and differences between the performances, and the effectiveness of the choices made.
- 6 Describe how the exercises from Stanislavski's System assisted you in preparing your script. In your discussion, explain the value and purpose of Stanislavski's System both for the performer and the audience.
- 7 Imagine you are a director. Choose a play, novel or film you will stage. Explain in point form your directorial concept including ideas for costume, lighting, set and sound. Include concept board images, sketches and diagrams where possible.



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## Performance task: interpreting a play script

Student ..... Teacher .....

Group names .....

By completing this task you should be able to:

- create a prompt copy for use in rehearsals and performance
- articulate a directorial concept for your script performance
- explore a method of analysing a script for meaning, character development and effective presentation
- apply an understanding of the elements of drama to interpret and present a scripted performance
- explore the use of the elements of production in the interpretation of a script.

| Key learning areas   | Level of achievement |               |           |           |
|--|----------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|
|  | Beginning            | Consolidating | Mastering | Excelling |
| <p><b>Collaborating, creating and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes:</b></p> <p><b>Have you prepared for your performance by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• completing a legible prompt copy that is annotated and divided into units, and shows blocking, lighting and sound cues?</li> <li>• recording all research and rehearsal notes?</li> <li>• completing a character biography?</li> </ul> <p><b>Have you selected and incorporated the skills of voice, movement and character work by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sustaining and developing character in performance?</li> <li>• using vocal dynamics that are suitable for the character?</li> <li>• using body language and movement in a way that helps to communicate the character?</li> </ul> <p><b>Have you planned, selected and modified your presentation by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making effective decisions regarding the design of set, costume, lighting and sound?</li> <li>• making effective decisions regarding stage action and the use of space?</li> <li>• presenting a performance that is coherent and well-rehearsed?</li> <li>• presenting an original and insightful directorial concept that includes consideration of all the elements of production?</li> </ul> |                      |               |           |           |
| <p><b>Responding:</b></p> <p><b>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide a deep understanding of the aspects of directing script and working with the elements of drama through reflections and explanations of your own work and the work of others?</li> <li>• establish links in your explanations and ideas between your own ideas about directing, designing and working with script and your knowledge of directors, directing, theatre design and dramatic forms and styles like realism?</li> </ul>  |                      |               |           |           |

Comments

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