

Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

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A level

A level – Edexcel Section C, Component 3

Introduction

Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe is one of the nine set texts for the new Pearson A level specification. These set texts form the basis of Section C of Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice. Section C: Interpreting a Performance Text requires students to write about a set text in relation to a practitioner and the play's original performance conditions. The most effective way for students to understand how they would approach their chosen set text is to have practically explored the text in depth.

This scheme of work offers a range of ideas for closely exploring the text in relation to different practitioners to enable students to write in the specific, drama-focussed way that is required in the exam.

The Component 3 exam: Theatre Makers in Practice

The written examination is 2 hours and 30 minutes and is out of 80 marks.

The exam is divided into three sections:

- ▶ **Section A:** Live theatre evaluation. Students must answer one extended response question on the performance they have seen.
- ▶ **Section B:** Page to stage. Realisation of a complete performance text. Students must answer two questions related to an unseen extract from the performance text they have studied.
- ▶ **Section C:** Interpreting one complete performance text, in light of one practitioner for a contemporary audience. Students answer one question (from a choice of two) based on an unseen named section (normally between 90 and 110 lines long). Students must take clean copies of texts into the exam.

Doctor Faustus is a set text for Section C. In this section of the exam students are required to:

- ▶ Practically explore a complete performance text in the light of a chosen practitioner in order to outline and justify their ideas for a production concept. They will need to develop an integral understanding of the text as a whole in order to interpret it for a contemporary audience.
- ▶ Students will assume the role of a director and will need to outline and justify how different theatre makers and theatrical elements work alongside the methodologies of a recognised theatre practitioner. The practitioner chosen for this component must be different from the one studied in Component 1.
- ▶ Students must also research the original performance conditions and gain knowledge and understanding of the social, historical and cultural factors that are central to the context of the original text.
- ▶ Students must have an appreciation of the original aims and intentions of the playwright.

When considering how their chosen performance text might be interpreted and staged in the light of a practitioner students should consider:

- ▶ Their intended audience and an appropriate theatrical venue/space, staging and visual impact
- ▶ How the use of design elements such as set, lighting, sound, costume, multimedia, masks, props and puppets might help to communicate ideas to an audience
- ▶ The acting style of key roles including the use of characterisation, vocal expression and movement
- ▶ The original performance conditions and the historical, social and cultural context of the text.

(Taken from the Pearson specification.)

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Text used: *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, published by Norton and Company, ISBN: 978-0-393-97754-7.

Practitioners

The practitioner chosen from the list below should be different to the one studied in Component 1.

- ▶ Antonin Artaud
- ▶ Kneehigh
- ▶ Brecht
- ▶ Joan Littlewood
- ▶ Steven Berkoff
- ▶ Punchdrunk
- ▶ Complicite
- ▶ Stanislavski.

Section 1: Research questions**Learning objectives**

- ▶ To research Christopher Marlowe and discover some historical facts about the playwright, the text and the original performance conditions
- ▶ To present these findings.

In pairs, ask students to research the following questions, adding as much information as they can to the answers. Ask each pair to present their answer to each question and allow everyone to add to their own answers if necessary.

Where was Christopher Marlowe born?
 Where did he study?
 What did he intend to do with his life?
 What job did he do?
 What is the full title of *Doctor Faustus*?
 When was *Doctor Faustus* first performed?
 Where did the idea for *Doctor Faustus* come from?
 What is the difference between text A and text B?
 Is *Doctor Faustus* a medieval or Elizabethan text?
 What is a morality play and how does *Doctor Faustus* fulfil the conventions of a morality play?
 How does it differ from a traditional morality play?
 What were the main conventions of Elizabethan theatre?
 What sort of staging would Marlowe have used?
 How does *Doctor Faustus* use elements of other theatre styles, e.g. Greek?
 What questions did *Doctor Faustus* raise for an Elizabethan audience? How are these questions relevant for a twenty-first-century audience?

Section 2: Brecht**Learning objectives**

- ▶ To use on and off text work to explore gestus, split roles, narration and direct address.

Text: Act 1, scene 3 – summary of the whole scene

After being instructed in the previous scene by his friends Cornelius and Valdes, Faustus conjures Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles appears, and Faustus demands that he returns as a Franciscan friar. Mephistopheles does so and asks Faustus what he wants. Faustus tells him that he wants Mephistopheles to serve him. Mephistopheles says that he only serves Lucifer and that he appeared when Faustus conjured him in the hope of gaining his soul not because Faustus had commanded it. Faustus tells Mephistopheles that he will offer his soul to Lucifer if he can command Mephistopheles. He sends Mephistopheles away to put his offer to Lucifer.

Practical activities

1. Gestus: This Brechtian device is a gesture or movement performed by an actor to show the essence of a character.

Ask students to think about three gestures or movements that represent Faustus and a further three to represent Mephistopheles. They should label them Faustus 1, 2 and 3 and Mephistopheles 1, 2 and 3. Ask students to walk briskly in neutral around the performance space. On your call of 'Faustus'

or 'Mephistopheles' '1', '2' or '3', they stop and should perform their chosen movement or gesture before returning to neutral and continuing to walk around the space. Repeat.

Discussion: Ask students to discuss their choices and justifications.

2. Split roles: Brecht used this concept to show the different facets of characters, allowing the audience to understand the character in more depth. This technique highlights the Brechtian idea of ensuring that the audience are always aware that they are watching a performance and stops them from becoming emotionally attached to a character.

Discussion: In this scene, what are the different sides to Faustus and Mephistopheles that you want to show? Why would these elements be important for the audience?

In groups of three, ask students to rehearse Faustus' lines from the opening of the scene up to p. 15, '*Quin redis, Mephistopheles, fratris imagine?*', with each student in the group exploring a different side to Faustus. E.g.:

- ▶ The intelligent scholar; perhaps this persona only speaks the Latin phrases
- ▶ The scholar who is excited by his conjuring
- ▶ The determined and fastidious nature of his conjuring
- ▶ The arrogant man who is enjoying demanding that Mephistopheles returns as a friar
- ▶ The man who shows some humility and doubt about his actions.

Rehearse and perform

Repeat the same activity with three students taking on the role of Mephistopheles. For this activity students should focus on the following sections of text:

- ▶ p. 16, '*That was the cause*' to '*And pray devoutly to the prince of hell*'.
- ▶ p. 17, '*Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it*' to '*Which strike a terror to my fainting soul!*'

They may also refer to other lines in the text.

Again, ask students to consider the different sides to Mephistopheles. E.g.:

- ▶ The devil who is a servant of the prince of hell
- ▶ The fallen angel who suffers the absence of God
- ▶ The entity who wants Faustus to be as damned as he is
- ▶ The entity who sympathises with Faustus for what he is about to get himself into.

Think about how you will use vocal and physical skills to show the different elements of Faustus.

- ▶ **Physical:** Movement, gesture, posture, gait, energy, facial expressions, interaction.
- ▶ **Vocal:** Pitch, pace, pause, tone of voice, volume, emphasis, accent, use of choral voice.

3. Narration and direct address: These techniques were used by Brecht to further emphasise to an audience that they were not watching real life unfold, but a performance.

In pairs, ask students to rehearse a section from p. 15, '*Now Faustus, what wouldst thou have me do?*' to p. 16, '*And are forever damned with Lucifer*'. Ask students to use the text to add elements of direct address and narration to the exchange.

E.g.:

Mephistopheles: Now Faustus, what wouldst thou have me do?

(*Pointing to audience member.*) What wouldst thou have me do? (*Addressing someone else.*) What wouldst thou have me do?

Mephistopheles: (*To audience with disdain.*) I am a servant to great Lucifer and may not follow thee without his leave. (*To Faustus with conviction.*) I am a servant to great Lucifer and may not follow thee without his leave.

Rehearse, perform and discuss students' choices.

Elizabethan audiences were used to actors performing asides and soliloquies. How do these conventions link to direct address and breaking the fourth wall?

Section 3: Artaud

Learning objectives

- ▶ To explore Artaud's ideas of language and ritual to create a physical and non-verbal performance
- ▶ To explore Artaud's theatre of cruelty and devise a performance of the seven deadly sins based on these concepts.

Text: Act 2, scene 3 – summary

Faustus has signed away his soul and Mephistopheles begins to answer some of his questions, telling Faustus about hell. However, when Faustus asks who created the world, Mephistopheles refuses to tell him. The good and evil angels appear and discuss repentance. Mephistopheles returns with Lucifer and Beelzebub; Lucifer offers to entertain Faustus with the seven deadly sins. Each sin arrives in turn before Faustus bids them away to hell, having much enjoyed the spectacle.

Practical activities

1. Language and ritual

Artaud felt that there was too much speech in theatre and he wanted it to develop with a new physical language that integrated gestures, signs, cries, postures, all of which were primitive and ritualistic. Artaud wanted the performance space to move away from the traditional auditorium into larger, empty spaces where actors would perform in the round as well as above and through the audience so that they were totally immersed. Artaud sought for audiences to feel confined and helpless.

Discussion: What words would you use to describe the three devils?

Write a comprehensive list of students' ideas. As a group, discuss what gestures, movements and sounds might accompany each word.

In groups of three, as Mephistopheles, Lucifer and Beelzebub, ask students to choose five words from the list for each devil and create a repeated physical sequence using the physical gestures discussed. Of course, these gestures might evolve, or students might decide to change them.

Next, ask students to add a non-verbal sound to their sequence, e.g. heavy breathing, hissing, sighing, grunting, clicks, etc. This might be a different sound for each movement or the same repeated sound throughout the sequence.

Ask students to rehearse their sequences making sure that the transition between each gesture is smooth.

Ask students to decide on how they will stage their performance to immerse the audience.

Finally, ask them to consider how they will add lighting to their performances, e.g. strobes to disorientate the audience.

Perform and discuss the choices that students made, the effect on the audience and how they might develop these choices further.

2: Theatre of cruelty

Discussion: Define each of the seven deadly sins. How would you use physical skills to portray a character representing each of the sins? How would you use vocal skills? What does cruelty mean when referring to Artaudian theatre? How can you link this to your previous performance using non-verbal language and ritual?

Party quirks

One person is the host of a party, seven others are guests at the party. As each guest arrives, the host needs to identify which of the seven deadly sins is being represented. The guests must stay in character at all times and should aim not to be too obvious as part of the fun is watching the character develop. Once a guest has been guessed, they leave the party and the game continues until all sins have been correctly identified.

You can repeat this several times and discuss students' different vocal and physical interpretations of the sins.

Artaud wanted to immerse audiences and make them feel uncomfortable in order to raise questions and illicit change. Consider Artaud's concept of grotesque.

Parade of sins

In groups of seven, using the text from pp. 31 to 33 create the parade of the seven deadly sins in a way that would demonstrate Artaud's idea of cruelty.

Things to consider:

- ▶ Vocal skills – how might you use your voice to make the audience feel uncomfortable?

- ▶ Physical skills – how will you physically represent your sin? How will you move, if at all?
- ▶ Proxemics – Your proximity to the audience can have a huge effect. Think about how it might feel if the sin of lechery is in extremely close physical proximity to the audience with strong eye contact and lascivious facial expressions.

They might use the text as it is written but can choose to edit or repeat it, perhaps using choral voice. Rehearse and perform.

Discussion: As an audience member, how did the performances make you feel? Did performers show cruelty? How? What changes could be made? How would an Elizabethan audience have felt about the ideas explored in this scene? How might they have reacted and how can you link this to Artaud's work?

Section 4: Kneehigh

Learning objectives

- ▶ To create a puppet of invisible Faustus and explore how puppetry can be used
- ▶ To create appropriate characters to represent the friars
- ▶ To create an ensemble performance of the friars' dirge using music/song.

Text: Act 3, scene 1 – summary

Faustus talks with Mephistopheles of all the places he has travelled to and asks if, as instructed, Mephistopheles has brought him to Rome. Mephistopheles makes Faustus invisible as the Pope, Cardinal and friars enter. Faustus uses his invisibility to lark around snatching cups and dishes from the Pope and boxing his ears, very much enjoying himself as the Pope becomes distressed at what is happening.

Practical activities

1. Puppets

Discussion: Puppets are often an integral part of Kneehigh's performances; how might you use puppetry in this scene? Ideas might include creating Faustus' puppet as he is made invisible and using the puppet to play the tricks on the Pope, or using puppets to represent the friars.

In groups of four, rehearse from line 60 to line 80 using a puppet to play the invisible Faustus. The puppet need not be complex; a toy, doll, wooden spoon puppet will suffice at this stage.

Things to consider:

- ▶ Puppet handlers are important in Kneehigh's work; they do not try to hide or blend in and are often not representing the same character as the puppet but are characters in their own right. How will the person controlling the puppet create a character?
- ▶ Will the vocal skills used for the puppet be different to those used for Faustus? Why/why not?

Perform and discuss students' choices.

2. Characters, chorus and ensemble

Ensemble work is the essence of Kneehigh and their work is created as a collaborative process from start to finish. Kneehigh characters are often bold and quirky, but also allow us to see something of ourselves within them.

In groups of seven, ask students to consider what type of characters the seven friars might have. In contrast to the seven deadly sins, students could consider basing their characters on the seven virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice.

After some time to discuss their characters, ask students to find a space and stand as their character would stand. Guide them from head to toe to consider each part of their body and how their character would hold themselves. Ask students to consider how their character will move around the space as well as to decide on how they will use their vocal skills to create their character.

Then, ask students to freeze in character. When you say 'Go' they should move around the space as their character. When they pass someone they should stop and greet them using the vocal skills appropriate to their character.

Music and dance are important features of Kneehigh and the dirge in this scene lends itself to being performed as an ensemble piece with the friars forming a chorus.

Discussion: How could music and/or choral voice be used to perform the friars' dirge? Consider the traditional music of the Church as well as how you might use

Extension

Using the ideas of cruelty, non-verbal language and ritual, ask students to explore p. 22 where Faustus cuts his arm to write in his own blood. They should condense the action to what they feel is the essence of the scene, carefully considering how to create an Artaudian performance. An added element might be to explore the split role idea and have several people playing Faustus as an ensemble.

Further research

Punchdrunk's 2006/7 production of *Faust* and Grotowski's 1963/4 production of *Doctor Faustus*.

Consider the use of puppets and marionettes in Elizabethan theatre.

modern music, e.g. rap or grime. Consider the use of live music in Elizabethan theatre.

Ask students to return to their groups of seven and read and rehearse the friars' dirge on p. 36 using music/song to create a Kneehigh-inspired performance.

Perform and discuss students' choices.

Section 5: Linking practical work to exam questions

Learning objectives

- ▶ To link practical activities to exam style questions.

Below are two examples of the type of question students will be asked in the exam.

Section C: Interpreting a performance text sample questions

Answer ONE of the questions in this section with reference to the performance text you have studied.

You are the director of a new production concept of the performance text you have studied.

EITHER

As a director, discuss how you would apply the methodologies of your chosen theatre practitioner to create mood and atmosphere in your production concept.

Your answer must make reference to:

- ▶ The overall aims of your production concept in response to the play as a whole
- ▶ How your practical ideas will work in performance
- ▶ The original performance conditions of your chosen performance text.

OR

As a director, discuss how you would apply the methodologies of your chosen theatre practitioner to the interpretation of one key role in your production concept.

Your answer must make reference to:

- ▶ The overall aims of your production concept in response to the play as a whole
- ▶ How your practical ideas will work in performance
- ▶ The original performance conditions of your chosen performance text.

After each practical activity, ask students to refer to these questions and make notes on how the ideas they have explored might help them answer the questions. It is important to remind them that their production concept is not limited in the same ways that they might be in the classroom. For example, students have rehearsed work with a small handmade puppet, but the puppets they would use in their own production concept could be much more elaborate. They must also always be mindful of the original performance conditions of the text and how this has influenced their ideas. Students will be asked to write about a short extract in Section 3 of the exam, but they must show that they know the whole play, so referencing how their work links to other areas of the text after each practical activity would be useful.