

# Being the Director

David Porter

KS4/KS5

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## Introduction

This scheme aims to explore a range of directing techniques through practical drama sessions linked to text. Exam bodies now ask for directorial approaches at GCSE and A/AS level in both practical and written work. The five 2-hour sessions provide a range of experiments for students to learn what a director does and how he/she actually does it and how meaning is conveyed to an audience.

The scheme suggests approaches from a range of drama/theatre techniques employed by directors in rehearsal and performance. Directors also work with designers and technical staff to create an overall performance that realises the vision and gets the message across.

Maximum group sizes are determined by the exam boards, as are some selected and specified plays. In devising there is more freedom, but group sizes should always be appropriate to the abilities of the students and give each a full chance to perform and to direct.

Teachers should select (and where appropriate edit) monologues and duologues as well as group pieces because the opportunity to perform in pairs or solo is available in the exams. Being a director applies to monologues and duologues as well as larger groups. While it is possible to self-direct, learners should be encouraged to accept that outside direction will help them in character realisation.

### Learning objectives

By the end of this scheme students will have:

- ▶ Explored a number of different directorial techniques and some practitioners who use them to develop an individual stylistic approach to directing
- ▶ Self- and peer-assessed and evaluated directed work in performance
- ▶ Collaborated with others to make drama and convey meaning to an audience.

### The sessions

#### Session 1: The directorial approach

What does a director do? How does a piece of performance move from page to stage with a director's viewpoint?

#### Session 2: Staging is king

The shape and style of the stage area and how the audience can access what's on it is fundamental to the vision and work of the director.

#### Session 3: Stage directions

Sometimes the playwright's stage directions are not enough for a director, and he/she may experiment with the performers to convey the message better.

#### Session 4: Subtext, context and contradiction

People frequently are contradictory and don't say what they mean. Subtext is vital and contexts are essential to understand characters' motives, actions and responses.

#### Session 5: Open rehearsal

Bringing together the learning of the scheme, this is a sharing of work in progress on an extract and inviting review by others in order to further development.

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Photo by permission of Thehero

Participants in the Theatre of the Oppressed workshop presented by Brazilian theatre director and writer Augusto Boal at Riverside Church in New York City

### Exams

Resource 1 is a list of the exam boards and their components where practical directorial skills, knowledge and understanding are either required or very useful for learners' drama work. Sometimes this is applicable to written work, too.

### Other roles

Exams offer design/technical roles as well as performing perspectives, but the directorial approach is an essential part of student learning and exam preparation.

### Gender

While encouraging experimentation with playing different roles, teachers will be aware of sensitivities surrounding how some students may choose to identify themselves in gender terms.

### Stretching and challenging

While not noted at every point, the teacher will be aware of moments in a session for asking the most able to work with the least able: to multi-role; to lead on peer assessment; to be far-reaching on self-evaluation and direct, act and design the same piece.

## Session 1: The directorial approach

### Learning objectives

By the end of the session students will have:

- ▶ Explored aspects of similarity and contrast between the Brechtian and Stanislavskian directorial approaches
- ▶ Self- and peer-assessed a piece of directed text
- ▶ Collaborated with others to make performance from script and convey meaning.

### Warm-up (5 mins)

In groups of two or three with one as the director, create a short scene involving an accident with a scythe, done in the following styles:

- a) Naturalistically and,
- b) An uninvolved, dispassionate presentation by actors. The director must explain what he/she is trying to achieve.

### Discussion, new learning (20 mins)

Teacher leads discussion on the role of a director, starting with films students have seen, then leading on to theatre.

What would the end product be without a director? Is directorial intention clear?

What techniques may be deployed to realise the intention(s)?

How might a director work differently during rehearsals as they progress?

Ask learners if everyone takes well to direction, advice and co-operation.

Ask them what might happen in an artistic dispute between a director and an actor.

This leads on to a discussion of the work of Stanislavski and Brecht. It may be that at this stage of drama, students have some knowledge and understanding of their theories and methods and a useful primer/reviser is the BBC Bitesize site: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/topics/zm72pv4>

Teachers accept that it's too simplistic to say that Stanislavski's methods are in contrast to Brecht's distancing effect, but a comparison is useful in order to get learners started on the directorial approach.

It may be helpful to summarise the difference as:

- ▶ The Stanislavski actor says, 'Now I am *being* Person A'.
- ▶ The Brechtian actor says, 'Now I am *demonstrating* Person A'.

### The text (20 mins)

Read the text *Virtual Reality* in Additional Material 3 at the end of this scheme.

In small groups (a maximum of 5), discuss possible directorial visions and artistic intention for it. One member of the group must be the director of the others.

Start blocking one section.

Start rehearsing that section.

Each group then chooses up to 3 directorial devices from Additional Material 2.

- ▶ **First sharing (20 mins):** Invite selected groups to present work in progress.
- ▶ **First assessment (10 mins):** Peer assessment with the director asked to justify decisions
- ▶ **Making changes (10 mins):** Each group adjusts their scene in the light of the peer review.
- ▶ **Second sharing (15 mins):** Selected groups share the revamped scene.
- ▶ **Second assessment (10 mins):** Peer assessment with director again justifying decisions.

### Plenary and reflection (10 mins)

A round-up of learning this session, particularly on how directorial style/intention always/usually influences the performance.

### Forward planning

For next session, research the work and ideas of an established and innovative director, living or dead. Be prepared to justify why that director appeals.

### Vocabulary

Some of the following drama terms will be useful throughout for directing a piece: proxemics, semiotics, blocking, stage directions, sightlines, technical effects, costumes, props, stage furniture, backdrop, scenery, projections, levels, subtext, context, wings, on/off and upstaging.

### Resources

- ▶ How to direct a play, a simple but useful 2 minute intro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiblvjqGJc>
- ▶ *How to Direct a Play: A Masterclass in Comedy, Tragedy, Farce, Shakespeare, New Plays, Opera and Musicals* (2012) by Braham Murray (Oberon, ISBN 978-1-849-43041-8)
- ▶ The *Guardian*, Top ten survival tips for a director: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/mar/23/theatre-director-10-top-tips>

### Films

- ▶ *Lincoln* (2012), Spielberg movie in which Daniel Day-Lewis becomes totally immersed in the title part: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0276919/>
- ▶ *Dogville*, (2003), less on the acting but the direction is done in the style of Brecht: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0276919/>

## Session 2: Staging is king

### Learning objectives

By the end of the session students will have:

- ▶ Explored different staging and other directorial techniques
- ▶ Self-and peer-assessed and evaluated directed work in performance
- ▶ Collaborated with others to make drama and convey meaning to an audience.

### Warm-up (5 mins)

In groups of 2 or 3, devise a quick scene in which one is a thief, the other(s) is/are victims, so there is an altercation. The teacher periodically calls out different staging styles: proscenium, thrust, round, traverse, among-the-audience and theatre in a cupboard.

### Discussion, new learning (20 mins)

How a text is staged is vitally important. In a performance venue with a fixed stage, there may not be much choice. But in a more flexible area, the director must decide (perhaps after experimenting with actors) on the most suitable staging shape for the text, the artistic intention and the audience.

Discuss staging styles students have seen in action already.

Discuss the impact on audiences of being close to/distant from the actors (proxemics), different sightlines depending on where someone is sitting (unlike in a film where all the audience get the same viewpoint) and how the transmission of the message is served by the space.

Discuss proscenium arch, thrust, in-the-round, traverse, black box theatre, theatre in a cupboard, promenade and within-the-audience. A helpful summary can be found at BBC Bitesize: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/drama/performing/stagerev1.shtml>

### The text (20 mins)

Return to the text *Virtual Reality* in Additional Material 3.

In groups (either the same as before or different ones; a maximum of 5 per group), discuss possible directorial visions and artistic intention. One of the group must be the director of the others.

Discuss the overall directorial vision and agree on what might be the artistic intention. How is it best served by a particular staging type?

Ask groups to do the following:

- ▶ Choose up to three techniques from the list in Additional Material 2;
- ▶ Deliberately use at least one aspect of a studied director/practitioner to influence the work; and
- ▶ Consider the practical demands of the text, the most suitable performance space, spatial stage relationships, actor/audience proxemics, character motivation, interactions, pace/pitch, voice and gesture, movement and physicality, subtext, plot direction, credibility of each actor, stage directions, genre of text, design (lights, sound, effects, costumes, furniture/props, sets) and social, historical, cultural contexts.

Start blocking the extract.

Start rehearsing the extract.

- ▶ **First sharing (20 mins):** Invite selected groups to present work in progress.
- ▶ **First assessment (10 mins):** Group assessment with the director asked to justify decisions.
- ▶ **Making changes (10 mins):** Each group adjusts their scene in the light of the peer review.
- ▶ **Second sharing (15 mins):** Selected groups share the revamped scene.
- ▶ **Second assessment (10 mins):** Group assessment with director again justifying decisions.

### Plenary and reflection (10 mins)

Consider the relative effectiveness of different staging/spaces on conveying meaning to an audience, relevant to this particular text.

### Forward planning

Research the recent work and evolution of ideas of an established and innovative living director. Be prepared to justify your choice.

### Resources

- ▶ There are very many influential directors and practitioners. The AQA site has a list of some suitable directors and their styles (while other boards specify different ones):
- ▶ <http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/drama/a-level/drama-and-theatre-7261>
- ▶ *The Director's Craft, A Handbook for the Theatre* (2009) by Katie Mitchell, (Routledge, 978-0-415-40439-6).

### Review

The *Guardian's* December 2016 review of Katie Mitchell's *The Maids* carries useful insights into her directorial work: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/dec/20/the-maids-review-katie-mitchell-jean-genet-stadsschouwburg-amsterdam>

## Session 3: Stage directions

### Learning objectives

By the end of the session students will have:

- ▶ Explored stage directions and further directorial techniques
- ▶ Self- and peer-assessed and evaluated directed work in performance
- ▶ Collaborated with others to make drama and convey meaning to an audience.

### Warm-up (5 mins)

Prepare a sheet with the following instructions written on it and sealed in an envelope. One student volunteers to open it and perform instructions.

Look as if you are interested as you read this.  
 Smile, then laugh out loud.  
 Get up and pace about, pleased.  
 Stop.  
 Not so pleased.  
 Stop reading, look away, controlling anger.  
 Carry on reading.  
 Say, 'No, no.'  
 Crumple the paper.  
 Leave.

Teachers can devise infinite variations of these stage directions to try.

### Discussion, new learning (20 mins)

Stage directions are frequently written into performance texts by authors as part of their visualizing the scene on stage and to allow their characters to move, react and develop.

Directors obviously pay attention to them. But they sometimes add new directions, trim or alter others – it's an essential part of the directorial work.

What do learners think would be the effect of actors speaking stage directions aloud? Almost invariably, it would be comedy or surrealism.

Give some background history on stage directions – the influence of raked stages, hence downstage and upstage terms.

### The text (20 mins)

In groups with one as director, take an extract from a play the centre is already studying or has already decided on from the exam board list.

Discuss the overall directorial vision and agree what might be the artistic intention?

Ask groups to do the following:

- ▶ Choose up to three techniques from the list in Additional Material 2;
- ▶ Deliberately use at least one aspect of a studied director/practitioner to influence the work; and
- ▶ Consider the practical demands of the text, the most suitable performance space, spatial stage relationships, actor/audience proxemics, character motivation, interactions, pace/pitch, voice and gesture, movement and physicality, subtext, plot direction, credibility of each actor, stage directions, genre of text, design (lights, sound, effects, costumes, furniture/props, sets) and social, historical, cultural contexts.

Start blocking.

Start rehearsing.

- ▶ **First sharing (20 mins):** Invite selected groups to present work in progress.
- ▶ **First assessment (10 mins):** Teacher assessment with the director asked to justify decisions
- ▶ **Making changes (10 mins):** Each group adjusts the scene in the light of the peer review.
- ▶ **Second sharing (15 mins):** Selected groups share the revamped scene.
- ▶ **Second assessment (10 mins):** Teacher assessment with director again justifying decisions.

### Plenary and reflection (10 mins)

Consider the relative effectiveness of the given stage directions in realising artistic intention, conveying meaning and helping actors.

### Resources

- ▶ *The Basics of Stage Directions for Actors* - elementary but useful learner reminder: <https://www.thoughtco.com/stage-directions-upstage-and-downstage-2713083>
- ▶ Stage directions for *The Tempest* - sample sheet for teaching the purpose of stage directions: <https://www.teachit.co.uk/resources/ks3/the-tempest/plays/stage-directions/7138>

### Reviews

- ▶ The *Guardian* review of Knee High Theatre's *The Tin Drum*: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/oct/06/the-tin-drum-review-kneehigh-everyman-liverpool-gunter-grass>
- ▶ The *Telegraph*'s review of Knee High Theatre's *Rebecca*: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11583659/Rebecca-Malvern-Theatres-review.html>

**Forward planning**

Research the recent work and evolution of ideas of an established and innovative living director in any part of the world – except the UK. Be prepared to justify what attracts you to that work.

**Session 4: Subtext, context and contradiction****Learning objectives**

By the end of the session students will have:

- ▶ Explored subtext, context and more directorial techniques
- ▶ Self- and peer-assessed and evaluated directed work in performance
- ▶ Collaborated with others to make drama and convey meaning to an audience.

**Warm-up (5 mins)**

In groups of 2 or 3, devise an interview in which one character does not say what he/she means to the increasing frustration of the other(s).

**Discussion, new learning (15 mins)**

People often don't say what they mean. Discuss with learners whether this is their own experience. We may do it deliberately in order to manipulate, control or escape something. We may do it unintentionally.

People are also full of contradictions. Ask learners for their experiences of this.

A further directorial point is that people may say something they think is very clear, but listeners misunderstand or mishear it.

*Subtext* is a term from psychology which searches for deeper meaning in what is said. If you say for example, 'This is a wonderful place and I am with some amazing people', that may mean what it says quite literally or it may be sarcastic and the place and people are dreadful.

Subtext enriches the characters in a text. It's also part of the inherent *contradictions* we may evidence in our human lives. For example, a man may be fiercely protective of his own children's well-being but seek to exploit or harm the children of others.

*Context* is the consideration of the time, place, values, laws, experiences and expectations relevant to the characters. Social, historical and cultural contexts are most usually considered, but there are gender, economic, political, legal and behavioural contexts that may also be relevant. In days gone by certain racial and gender attitudes people expressed were 'the norm', whereas these attitudes are not acceptable to express today.

**The text (50 mins)**

In groups, possibly different and certainly with a different learner directing, return to the extracts already determined for the exams. Read and discuss; what is the directorial vision? Is the artistic intention clear in this extract?

Read the extract (which may or may not be familiar by now) and agree collaboratively which character has what 'objective' or goal in the play in general and in the extract in particular. Try to capture it in a very short sentence, such as 'She longs to be cared for' or 'He yearns to be free of his routines'.

These objectives are a form of subtext; they drive the character. There may be more than one per character in each section of the play.

What are the relevant contexts, such as different time, country, values, perceptions, laws and expectations of gender that affect the characters?

Are there any contradictions of character evident in the extract?

The director decides through discussion with the actors how the subtexts, contexts and contradictions will affect the way lines are spoken, the moves that are made and the best staging to convey meaning to the audience.

Each group blocks and rehearses the extract in the light of the discussions.

**Sharing work in progress (20 mins)**

Each group presents a piece of their extract to the class and the director explains as needed the intentions, focusing on subplot and contexts and contradictions. Polished performance is not required.

**Assessment (20 mins)**

A random selection of self-, peer- and teacher-assessment is used to determine the success of the discussions, direction and staging of the extract so far.

**Resources**

- ▶ *Where's the Drama, Subtext and Context?*; aimed at teachers, mainly about film, but gives a useful overview: <http://www.wheresthedrama.com/textcontextsubtext2.htm>
- ▶ *BBC Bitesize* on subtext linked to improvisation but relevant to scripts: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/zts9xnb/revision/4>

**Review**

*Washington Times* review of *An Inspector Calls* with strong reference to subtexts: <http://www.brucekluger.com/WASHTIMES/WashTimes-Inspector-9-4-94.html>

**Plenary and reflection (10 mins)**

What has been learned about subtext, contradictions and contexts? What difference has this made to the progress of the piece and the characters within it? Is one learner becoming an effective, natural director? Why and how?

**Forward planning**

Research how two or three distinct practical ideas from any director/practitioner could improve the interpretation of your own extract(s). Do not feel you have to slavishly follow others' ideas, but often one thing done by somebody can spark off your own original creativity.

**Session 5: Open rehearsal****Learning objectives**

By the end of the session students will have:

- ▶ Explored directorial techniques and put them into practice
- ▶ Brought to rehearsed performance level a directed extract
- ▶ Self- and peer-assessed and evaluated directed work in performance
- ▶ Collaborated with others to make drama and convey meaning to an audience.

**Warm-up (5 mins)**

Physical and vocal warm up, as required and to the taste of the chosen director in each group.

**Reminder (10 mins)**

Begin by summarizing their learning on the directorial approach so far and set out the outline of this session: to present at least three minutes from the chosen extract with one director in each group leading, taking responsibility for decisions and answering questions from the audience afterwards.

The piece must show evidence of:

- ▶ At least three directorial techniques being used in rehearsal
- ▶ An attempt to realise the artistic intentions of the extract
- ▶ Awareness of subtexts, contexts and character contradictions
- ▶ Consideration of the most effective staging
- ▶ Spatial stage relationships, proxemics
- ▶ Appropriate pace/pitch, voice/gesture, movement/physicality
- ▶ The influence of a practitioner/director (optional?)
- ▶ Potential opportunities for design to support the performance.

**Preparing and sharing (65 mins)**

Allow a short time to prepare and do not encourage over-polishing. It is work in progress. Maximum time will be needed to permit each group to share something.

**Assessment (20 mins)**

Teacher leads a discussion of how effective each group was in achieving the requirements in the piece, or if they had potential with further work and how successful the direction was.

It should be a mix of self-, peer- and teacher-assessment and be based on the applicable exam board criteria.

**Plenary and reflection (20 mins)**

Teacher leads discussion on directorial techniques, performance outcomes and how they can be evaluated.

**Resources**

- ▶ Talawa Theatre Company with a specific direction and mission for black performers: <http://www.talawa.com/about/talawas-mission/>
- ▶ Tamasha performance with particularly diverse cultural focus: <http://www.tamasha.org.uk/about/>

**Reviews**

- ▶ Nicholas Hytner and some of his work reviewed: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/29/balancing-acts-nicholas-hytner-review>
- ▶ Reviews of several Graeae Theatre shows: <http://www.thereviewshub.com/tag/graeae-theatre/>

# RESOURCES

## Additional material 1

Exams either requiring elements of the directorial approach, along with design, acting and presentational skills, in drama and theatre, or where they will be of use to all students:

*Pearson Edexcel A level Drama and Theatre*

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/drama-and-theatre-2016.html>

Component 1, Devising

Component 2, Text in Performance

Component 3, Theatre Makers in Practice

*Pearson Edexcel AS Drama and Theatre*

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/drama-and-theatre-2016.html#tab-1>

Component 1, Exploration and Performance

Component 2, Theatre Makers in Practice

*Pearson Edexcel GCSE Drama*

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/drama-2016.html>

Component 1, Devising

Component 2, Performance from Text

Component 3, Theatre Makers in Practice

*OCR A level Drama and Theatre*

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/>

Components 11/12, Practitioners in Practice

Component 21, Exploring and Performing Texts

Component 31, Analysing Performance

Components 41–48, Deconstructing Texts for Performance

*OCR AS Drama and Theatre*

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/>

Components 01/02, Process to Performance

Component 05, Exploring Performance

*OCR GCSE Drama*

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse-drama-j316-from-2016/>

Component 01/02, Devising Drama

Component 03, Presenting and Performing Texts

Component 04, Performance and Response

*AQA A level Drama and Theatre*

<http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/drama/a-level/drama-and-theatre-7262>

Component 1, Drama and Theatre

Component 2, Creating Original Drama

Component 3, Making Theatre

*AQA AS Drama and Theatre*

<http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/drama/a-level/drama-and-theatre-7261>

Component 1, Interpreting Drama

Component 2, Process and Performance

*AQA GCSE Drama*

<http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/drama/gcse/drama-8261>

Component 1, Understanding Drama

Component 2, Devising Drama

Component 3, Texts in Practice

*Eduqas A level Drama and Theatre*

<http://www.eduqas.co.uk/qualifications/drama-and-theatre/as-a-level/>

Component 1, Theatre Workshop

Component 2, Text in Action

Component 3, Text in Performance

*Eduqas AS Drama and Theatre*

<http://www.eduqas.co.uk/qualifications/drama-and-theatre/as-a-level/>

Component 1, Performance Workshop

Component 2, Text in Context

*Eduqas GCSE Drama*

<http://www.eduqas.co.uk/qualifications/drama-and-theatre/gcse/>

Component 1, Devising Theatre

Component 2, Performing from a Text

Component 3, Interpreting Theatre

*CIE IGCSE Drama*

<http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-igcse-drama-0411/>

Component 1, Written Examination

Component 2, Coursework (practical)

## Additional material 2

A few of the techniques and devices directors may use during rehearsals and in shaping performances:

Hot seating	Ask a character to answer questions from group to help shape his/her background, views, hopes, situation and motivations.
Mantle of the expert	A student becomes an expert in a given field to help a character develop motivation and justification for behaviours.
Subtext	The hidden meaning/suggestion/direction in a speech or action that the audience must read.
Thoughts from the head	Character's private thoughts spoken aloud to audience to develop character.
Slow motion	Applying slo-mo to a series of actions and blocking that will serve as light relief/comedy and will help actor focus on movement detail.
Change the style	Swap the genre and the period of the text to apply different values in order to strengthen the characters and their places within the original texts.
Change the motives/agendas	Swap black-hat villainy with white-hat goodness of spirit to explore characters and motivations more deeply.
Mime	Cut all words in a given passage and convey meaning purely through mime.
Mime with music	As above, but with added movement. Not meant to become a dance.
Semiotics	Exploring and adding meaning to signs and symbols on stage and in props and costumes to assist an audience to understand better the messages.
Proxemics	Explore changing distances between actors (both closer and more distant) and between actors and audience.
Metaphors	Figures of speech which may be exaggerated or simplified to help characters develop.
Emotion memory	Stanislavski technique to use memories of emotional experiences to develop and buttress a character.
Body language and gesture	The way things are said or not said and the gestures we make reinforce the aspects of the character the director/actor wants people to see.
Controlling emotions	Comic or seriously pent-up emotion adds depth to a character and conveys meaning to the audience.
Direct address/stepping out of character	Brechtian technique of sharing information with the audience not known by other characters. Try it even in a play that has none written in.
Third person narration	Actors describe their roles in the third person which adds some distance and helps understand what an audience actually sees.
Pinteresque pauses	The quite lengthy pause used to dramatic effect, to let the audience think. Can also be comic.
Distancing/demonstrating a role	Brechtian technique of showing that an actor is putting on a role like an overcoat to demonstrate the character, rather than becoming personally committed to the person.

Singing and dancing a part	As rehearsals come to the end, turn the text into a musical, slow, fast or normal speed which is fun and adds late insight into the way characters interact and what the audience sees.
Puppets	Present a scene as puppets, or make/use actual puppets to help actors discover whether their characters are three dimensional or not.
Masks	Use fixed expression or blank masks to take away facial expression, so actors must focus on body language and text.
Contradictory movement/words	Use actions and moves that are in opposition to the spoken words, which forces actors to rethink the gestures they use in role.
Audience truth/credibility tests	In late rehearsals ask trusted people to report back on the credibility of characters, the veracity of their roles.
Swapping roles	To prevent any one actor becoming too attached to a particular role, swap round periodically. It is often used in professional musical theatre where certain performers are 'swing' roles, covering others on given days.
Given circumstances	Characters' choices given to the actor to possibly incorporate into the evolving role.
The Magic 'What If ...'	Creating different situations and circumstances from the text in order to stretch the imagination and strengthen the credibility of the character in a given place and time.
Speeded up	Good near the end of rehearsals, run a piece at double, triple, impossible speed, as the Reduced Shakespeare Company do with their <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .

## Additional Material 3

### Virtual Reality

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A play, with parts playable as male or female throughout.

#### **Characters:**

The Presenter

Basket

Eddy

Nolan

Smithy

Electrician

Voices

#### **Scene 1, a broadcasting studio**

*A dark area. The Presenter is in spotlight.*

**PRESENTER:** Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, and all others, folks, friends, welcome to our timeless but slightly retro entertainment. Glad you could join us, indeed you arrive at a truly fascinating moment.

All our research and algorithms suggest that this show is not only top of the faves but is what people of almost all age groups, socio-economic backgrounds actually want to see.

*Eddy, Nolan, Smithy wander across area, somewhat the worse for wear and start prodding the Presenter, who objects. There is a scuffle and the three end up tasered.*

**PRESENTER:** As I was saying, we are ready for our experiment. This is therapy for one lucky person in our random audience. A chance for that person to have some help with the past and the present and therefore the future.

Anybody? Oh come on, we haven't got all night....

The thought police are taking notes... only joking.

There might be ready money in it.

You? What about you? You with the nervous eyes and the bad smell? Ah yes.

Basket! It's you.

*Basket is dragged onto set by the three drunks, now recovered.*

**BASKET:** How do you know my name?

**PRESENTER:** It's all in the database, Basket. Silly question, really.

**BASKET:** I thought I was coming here to watch some reality TV, some gripping entertainment.

**PRESENTER:** And so you shall, Basket, that's exactly what you will see.

#### **Scene 2, a pub**

*There is noise and atmosphere, music in background. This can be played as an account of a women's soccer game.*

**EDDY:** He got offside!!

*All fall about laughing, except Basket who doesn't get it.*

**Scene 3, the studio**

*Presenter takes Basket by the shoulder and circles the area.*

**PRESENTER:** What we have in mind now, is a scream.

**BASKET:** A scream?

**PRESENTER:** A scream of pure terror, preferably. Of course if you want to do a series of little screams, building up, they will have to do.

**BASKET:** Not sure, I can do that. I haven't screamed since I was a child and my brother hid in the cupboard, opened the door when I wasn't expecting it.

**PRESENTER:** Basket, I'd save the retrospective psychological damage crap till we need it.

**BASKET:** I just said, I don't think I can scream on demand, that's all.

**PRESENTER:** Oh anybody can scream, in the right circumstances.

**BASKET:** Well I'm not anybody, I am Basket and you ...

**PRESENTER:** Don't get clever with me, Basket.

**BASKET:** I'm not; I just think you should get somebody else...

**PRESENTER:** Ladies and gentlemen, Basket, what a case, hey!

*Canned laughter and applause. The Voices enter like smiling hosts, circle round Basket and proceed to slap him around a bit. Then Presenter takes a pair of cutters from pocket, Basket is held and a portion of his little finger is cut off. Basket howls and screams. More applause.*

**BASKET:** My bloody finger!

**PRESENTER:** The blood will stop, get over it.

**BASKET:** You can't just do this, I'll sue you ...

**PRESENTER:** That's reality entertainment for you.

**BASKET:** I'm leaving, I'm going home now.

**PRESENTER:** Dream on, Basket, dream on.

**Scene 4, a bare room**

*One chair. Voices enter and throw Basket into centre as if into a cell. Basket crawls up on the chair.*

*Periodically they throw Basket off it. Mimed plate of bread and a cup of water are given. There is really sad music.*

**VOICES:** Why is Basket here, nothing wrong is there? Well, Basket has failed the tests. We all fail the tests. Depends on the tests. Basket is supposed to be sad. Who ordered that? Have you asked Basket? Any point in asking Basket? I think anything like Basket is sad. Lonely. Whatever that means. In the end as we go down into our graves we are all alone, each of us. Wouldn't you agree? Why should I agree? Does Basket agree? Does it matter? Does Basket matter? No, not in the end, but somebody gets some brief fleeting joy from Basket's misery. Is that the key to life? The enjoyment of the misery of others? And the relief and gratitude when we are not the ones suffering? That's very philosophical. Is it? Basket thinks so, Does that matter? No, not in the end. When is the end? Does that matter?

**Scene 5, the studio**

*The Presenter pushes Basket around the area.*

**PRESENTER:** Going well, so far, isn't it ladies and gentlemen? (*Applause*) Oh don't you think so, Basket?

**BASKET:** I have lost part of my finger, been humiliated and been laughed at and mocked by an audience of strangers. How is that going well?

**PRESENTER:** My point exactly.

**BASKET:** I have no dignity and respect here.

**PRESENTER:** You have never had it.

**BASKET:** In my own mind, I have.

**PRESENTER:** Fantasy and illusion. Now think, Basket, people use words, single words to describe their lives from childhood to present day. Can you identify with carefree, happy, safe, comfortable, wanted or valued?

**BASKET:** Well, in a way when I was young I ...

**PRESENTER:** No, not for you. What about troubled, uncomfortable, poor, opportunity-lite, unwanted, undervalued, misunderstood?

**BASKET:** Well, life is full of contradictions and inconsistencies...

**PRESENTER:** The one word for you, Basket, is REJECTION.

**BASKET:** Well, that's a bit...

**PRESENTER:** Rejection! Rejected! Reject!

*Voices enter and swirl around Basket while Presenter enjoys a meal to the side.*

**VOICES:** I'm Basket's mother and even I asked if I could swap him five minutes after his birth! Basket has always been a bit odd, wouldn't you say? His teachers thought so. His social workers thought so. His father thought so as he buggered off pretty sharpish. He didn't relate to people properly. On the spectrum, would you say? There was no spectrum in those days, he was just weird. Different. Separate. Not of this earth. An outsider. Nothing wrong with that, it's good to be different, an individual. Not as different as Basket. Certainly not nowadays.

*Voices break away leaving Basket uncomfortable.*

**VOICES:** Happy birthday, Basket. Not too many more happy returns.

**PRESENTER:** A few tears for our files, if you would, Basket. People like a few real tears.

**BASKET:** I can't cry to order!

**PRESENTER:** Oh but you can. Everybody can. Nobody has ever loved you.

**BASKET:** There was one! Yes, one human being truly loved me!

**PRESENTER:** Well, it wasn't your mother, was it, we just heard her?

**BASKET:** There was one, years back. There was Lee. How we loved each other. It was only the world conspiring against us that took Lee away from me.

**VOICES:** He paid me to love him and I managed it a couple of times. But then I just threw up every time I smelled him or thought of him. No amount of money was enough to make believe to be Basket's lover. There is something sad, an aura of imbecility about Basket that makes Basket totally and unremittingly unlovable.

**BASKET:** I very nearly didn't come tonight, but Eddy said they were all going and would I come as well as they needed someone to laugh at if the show wasn't funny. I have got used to that banter. I mean, Eddy – he's the leader – and Smithy and Nolan are my only friends, though they don't seem to do anything I want to do or go places I like. I haven't made any other friends, but friends are not the be all and end all, are they? Oh no. Truth is, I don't really know what a friend is supposed to look like. I have no other family. Some people have grandparents and cousins and things. I

seem to have avoided picking any of those up. And I work in the apartment block where I have the cheapest space, I clean up after people. Well, someone has to do it. And I don't make a fuss when some people throw rubbish about when I have just cleaned. Or block the toilets with dead rats as happened last week. Or put vomit on the steps. Or have a party in my space when I'm trying to sleep. There were some having sex last time and they just laughed at me when I objected, but what can I do? I have to live somewhere. I thought I was lucky to get the place, but everybody else seems to think it a terrible hole to live in. And I am a terrible person for living in it. But hey, I refuse to be downhearted. Well, not too much. I mean some people are born lucky; some born poor. Some have loving families, some don't. Some are cared for and encouraged, others are discouraged and treated like shit. As I say, what can I do? I seem to be just unpopular. I could believe that my father left and my mother didn't want me after I was born. I can understand, I suppose. But Lee, no. I told Lee everything, all my inner thoughts and secrets. Lee would not reject me or say I paid for affection. That was just to help Lee out of some financial difficulties, because I cared. And I loved Lee. Truly, loved.

*A single tear rolls down Basket's cheek, which a Voice collects in a tube and they all laugh and clap in delight.*

### Scene 6, a playground

*Basket is among the Voices and Smithy, Nolan and Eddy as kids.*

**PRESENTER:** *(Blowing a whistle)* Stand still, all of you. It's time to come in to your lessons, playtime is over. So nobody and I am looking at you, Basket, nobody starts off on any clowning, mock hatred or anger, unfunny sarcasm or comic dancing.

**BASKET:** I never did that and I never would. I really have had enough of all this.

**PRESENTER:** Well, not yet, Basket, we need a bit more. We need some laughter for our files.

**BASKET:** I told you I can't do things to order – laugh or cry.

**PRESENTER:** You'll do what you're told. Now all your friends in the playground can help you - clowning, mock hatred or anger, unfunny sarcasm or comic dancing. Or all at once.

**BASKET:** No, stop this nonsense. I did not consent. I will not be an object of ridicule and amusement to others.

**VOICES:** Too late Basket, far too late.

*Voices, Eddy, Nolan, Smithy and Presenter circle Basket, prodding and goading, clowning, making faces, farting, pushing, shoving, tickling, pulling at clothes, slapping, laughs in Basket's face.*

*It builds to a climax and Basket loses his temper and lashes out, frothing at the mouth, shrieking hysterically. He attacks Eddy, Nolan and Smithy, he flails at the Voices but saves his biggest violence for the Presenter who fits and falls. All rush off leaving Basket staring at Presenter.*

### Scene 7, studio

*Electrician rushes on and kneels at the Presenter's side.*

**ELECTRICIAN:** What the hell have you done, Basket? You're crazy!

**BASKET:** No, I didn't mean anything, it was just...

**ELECTRICIAN:** Stop snivelling, Basket. That's not going to bring the Presenter back.

**BASKET:** I don't want the Presenter back. I have been treated appallingly ever since I got here and I don't care...

**ELECTRICIAN:** Stop being aggressive, Basket. That's not going to bring the Presenter back.

**BASKET:** It was an accident, I was being provoked, it's not my fault, you just can't treat people like this.

**ELECTRICIAN:** You're not people, Basket; you're Basket, the lowest of the low.

**BASKET:** What is this device round the Presenter's neck?

**ELECTRICIAN:** It's just a monitor.

**BASKET:** No, it's more than that, look, it's part of a network, oh no... the Presenter is a robot! It's not real, it's not human. Help me, somebody ... please! They're all robots.

**ELECTRICIAN:** Just because it's a network device doesn't mean it isn't human or real, you should know that, Basket. It's virtual, it all is, but that's reality for you.

**BASKET:** No, no, no, how much of this is real?

**ELECTRICIAN:** You don't know much at all, do you, Basket? What do you want now? To open a debate about meaning, about reality and about life and death?

**BASKET:** I've had more than enough of this. You are using me to make a fool of and I still, just, have enough self respect to ...

**ELECTRICIAN:** Don't make me laugh, Basket. Or make me sick.

**BASKET:** This is all wrong. Something has gone wrong. I'm pressing escape, quit and exit. I'm leaving this insanity. My world may be sordid, sad, comical or pathetic to you people but to me it's reality.

*Voices and Eddy, Smithy and Nolan re-enter, move around like robots.*

**VOICES:** There is no escape, quit or exit for you, Basket. There is no reality, no virtual reality. You have damaged equipment, you have failed to co-operate on the show that you signed up for. You have been assigned Punishment B.

**BASKET:** What?

**VOICES:** Punishment B. Punishment B. Punishment B. Punishment B. Punishment B.  
Punishment B. Punishment B.

**BASKET:** What is Punishment B?

*They all close the circle on Basket. Punishment B begins.*