Introduction

This scheme explores, from a practical perspective, the play-text *Metamorphosis* by Steven Berkoff. It is designed to develop students’ performance skills and deepen their understanding of the play. The exercises in this scheme follow the work of a variety of practitioners, such as Steven Berkoff and Antonin Artaud. The lessons have been specifically tailored to ‘Component 1: Devising’ within the Edexcel A level Drama and Theatre specification (2016) and focuses on developing the students’ creative and exploratory skills in preparation for creating an original performance.

Learning objectives

By the end of the scheme of work, students will have explored a range of practitioner styles and techniques that challenge them both physically, in terms of performance techniques, and mentally, in terms of their understanding of genre from the viewpoint of both actor and audience. The scheme is structured into five hour-long workshops that range from off-text research exercises to practical group work. The scheme can be adapted according to the teacher’s needs. The workshops and support material are intended to support the students’ exploration of the form and structure of the play, as well as the social, historical and cultural contexts of the time.

Lesson 1: Monologues – An introduction

Before starting the workshop the students will need to have read the play *Metamorphosis* by Steven Berkoff and kept a record of the key plot-points using Resource Sheet 1. At the end of each lesson, the students will create four freeze pictures of the key moments of the text. These will then be photographed and accompanied with a short commentary, produced by the group, and will become part of a visual learning display. Having read the play and completed the exploratory workshops, this visual journey will play an integral part in the devising process and help significantly when deciding which key moments to include in the group’s final piece.

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:

- To analyse and understand how a monologue is used as a theatrical convention
- To understand how genre directly affects the interpretation of the monologue
- To be aware of the physicality and delivery of language.

Warm-up

The aim of this warm-up game is to introduce the key characteristics of expressionism. To start, the students walk randomly around the space, aiming to constantly fill any empty floor space that appears. This gets the blood flowing and helps raise awareness of their surroundings. Explain that when you shout out a number and a title they must get into a group and create a freeze picture of the title. First, shout out ‘Groups of four; nightmare’. Allow only a few seconds (enough to create a tableau) before shouting ‘Six; dreamlike’, then ‘Three; industrial’, and finally ‘Two; struggle for life’. When the final freeze is completed, ask the pairs to sit down and face their partner. Explain that these freeze pictures are in fact some of the key themes and issues within the play.

What is a monologue?

To begin, give each pair a piece of paper and a pen. Each student should spend one minute writing or drawing in silence what a monologue is. Moving on, ask them to turn over their sheet and write on the other side their answer to the question: ‘What is the purpose of a monologue?’
The students now need to share their ideas with their partner. Ask the group to stand up and each interact with at least four different people, sharing their baseline assessment. Finally they return to their partner and reflect on the feedback and what they’ve found out from other students. Ask the whole group for their views on the theatrical purpose of a monologue.

**Exploring two contrasting monologues**

Next, explain to the group that they will be working with two contrasting monologues: starting with Gregor Samsa’s final speech from Steven Berkoff’s play *Metamorphosis* (which is an expressionistic/abstract play) and comparing it to Miss Julie's final monologue from the play *Miss Julie* by August Strindberg (which is a naturalistic play).

In the next exercise give Julie’s monologue to ‘Student A’ and Gregor Samsa’s monologue to ‘Student B’. Allow the pairs time to prepare for performance; the focus is on voice, movement and interpretation. Explain that Student A will perform first and Student B will observe, and should look for three contrasting features of their partner’s monologue. The exercise will then be repeated and Student B will perform. Finally, the pairs come together and reflect on their partner’s performance, paying particular attention to the contrasting styles of delivery.

**Resource Sheet 2: Voice, Movement and Interpretation**

Give out Resource Sheet 2 and ask the pairs to read it together. Explain that you now want them to reflect and, using the ideas from the sheet, make amendments to their monologues, focusing on improving the quality of their work. Also introduce the Level Descriptor from the Theatre Studies Specification, paying particular attention to the top band below:

‘Group performance - vocal and physical skills (performers) and the importance of sophisticated, technical control in the use of physical techniques and proxemics (gesture, stillness, stance, contact, use of space and spatial awareness). The importance of technical control in the use of vocal techniques (clarity, pace, inflection, pitch, projection).’ (Edexcel Draft Specification 2015)

The task is then reworked, but this time the students will perform to a different partner. Explain that the observer needs to focus specifically on their partner’s ‘vocal delivery and the use of space, paying particular attention to: technical control, proxemics, vocal techniques (clarity, pace, inflection, pitch and projection)’. This exercise can be repeated a number of times as a way of fully developing the students’ understanding of voice, movement and character and enforcing the importance of practice and collective responsibility.
Lesson 2: How to write a monologue

Learning objectives
By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:
- How to write a monologue
- To practically explore the use of creative writing
- To be able to identify appropriate genre to enable students to physicalise a piece of text.

How to write a monologue
Ask the students: If you were given the task of writing a monologue, where would you start? How would you structure it? What would be your intention? For example:
- To educate?
- To entertain?
- To inform?
- To shock?

Working with a partner, they must now write a monologue on one side of A4. It must start with the sentence, ‘I awoke one morning and found myself transformed into a gigantic insect’. When the monologue is completed, one of the students takes on the role of director and the other becomes the actor.

Lesson 3: Expressionistic characteristics

Learning objectives
By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:
- To understand the characteristics of expressionism within the play Metamorphosis
- To make connections with the characteristics and apply them to their own practice
- To have a sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the work and methodologies of the chosen practitioner.

Key philosophical questions
- Can we ever justify taking somebody else’s freedom?
- Should we ever try to control others, even if we perceive it to be to their advantage?
- What are the criteria for an ‘equal’ relationship?

Warm-up
In pairs, create three freeze pictures relating to three of the five listed themes and issues within the play Metamorphosis. The themes are: Fear, Discrimination, Disability, Greed and Power.

Next, these characteristics need to be embedded, specifically within the transitions between the tableaux. Remind the group that the pictures do not need to be a literal interpretation and that they can be abstract in their form. Explain that the piece must last exactly two minutes and it’s up to the group to decide which piece of music will accompany the performance.

The final structure should be:
- Beginning
- Freeze picture
- Transition
- Freeze picture
- Transition
- Freeze picture
- Transition
- Ending.

What makes a strong beginning?
Before starting the work, ask the groups to discuss how their performance will begin:
- Will they be on stage as the lights come up or do they enter the space as a whole group or one at a time?
- How will the lighting and sound enhance and heighten the key characteristics of expressionism?
What makes a strong ending?
Discuss the importance of a ‘strong ending’ and refer to films, books or plays the students have witnessed.
▶ Will the piece end in a climax or an anti-climax?
▶ How will the lighting and sound support their ideas?
▶ How will the audience know the performance is finished?

Allow the group time to prepare and reiterate the importance of a strong beginning and a strong ending. Next, the sequences are performed all together and the groups are given a short amount of time to make any final amendments. Finally, the sequences are performed in front of the whole group and evaluated.

The students should have a clear understanding of the key characteristics of Expressionism. Ask them to find a space on their own and hand out paper and pens and Resource Sheet 4, ‘It’s Just a Dung Beetle’. Explain that, individually, they will draw their own expressionistic interpretation of the dung beetle, but they are only allowed to draw their ‘dung beetle’ using straight lines.

Creating the physical beetle
The group should read Resource Sheet 5; the importance of character and how Berkoff uses character as a way of exploring, and drawing out, a number of social and political issues, such as equality and discrimination.

Ask the pairs to decide who will direct and who will act. The directors will mould their partner into the shape of the dung beetle design, making sure expressionistic characteristics are clear and that the pair have a real understanding of the character. Reiterate the importance of the actors staying on their feet and focusing specifically on shape and facial expressions.

Emphasise the importance of working on the detail of the image, trying to get the tableaux as close to the original drawing as possible. Ask the directors to join the teacher in the centre of the space. The lights are then switched off and the teacher uses a torch to explore each beetle in turn, creating ‘stark’ and ‘disjointed’ shapes and reiterating the importance of strong facial expressions. Having studied all of the beetles, ask the directors to go and stand next to the image that, in their opinion, best represents expressionism. They are not allowed to choose their own. In the event of a draw, the teacher has the final vote. Next, repeat the exercise and allow the other director to mould the actor into the image. However, this time the director is not allowed to speak and can only use mime to put across their ideas to their partner.

Exploring the physical characteristics of character
Both pairs have now created the main protagonist. They should now bring the frozen image to life and create a 30-second animated sequence. Explain that the director has an imaginary remote control and can use the settings to move the character in a number of ways: slow-motion; animated tableaux (small number of frames in a loop); normal speed; rewind; and fast-forward. Next, allow the directors the opportunity to explore and move their character around the space. Reinforce the importance of expressionism and being able to control and sustain the heightened movement of the character. The director must guide the character and demonstrate exactly what is required. Switch and allow the other actor to take on the role of director.

Performance and evaluation
The pairs now put together a two-minute piece using their drawings as a starting point for performance. The task is to create a sequence using physical theatre and key aspects of expressionism in which they will draw out the key themes within the play. Allow the students time to prepare and explain that they will perform ‘end-on’.

Finally, each pair is given a torch and instructed that they need to work out how the torches will be used in order to create dreamlike and stark visual pictures. As the group works on their presentations go around and ask each pair to justify their decisions and, in particular, the purpose of their performance. Finally, the pieces are performed and evaluated, and again, the specific focus is on expressionism so refer back to the three key philosophical questions:
▶ Can we ever justify taking someone else’s freedom?
▶ Should we ever try to control others? What if we perceive it to be to their advantage?
▶ What are the criteria for an ‘equal’ relationship?

For homework, ask the students to complete the Artaud worksheet (Resource Sheet 6: Berkoff and Antonin Artaud) for the next lesson.
Lesson 4: Text into performance

Learning objectives
By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:

- To be able to create a short piece of performance using a section of text from the play *Metamorphosis*
- To be able to physicalise the text using voice and movement
- To begin to formalise a piece of ‘Total Theatre’ using visual, aural and spatial elements.

Warm-up: Musical Statues
Start with a quick warm-up activity. Play music and when the music stops, students must freeze. Develop the game into Gruesome Musical Statues by instructing students to create horrible shapes or characters when they freeze. Suggest gargoyles, zombies and monsters.

The Impossible Machine
Ask the students to get into groups of between 4 and 6. Ask them to create an ‘Impossible Machine’ of the play *Metamorphosis*. The group must incorporate ‘machine-like’ movements and rhapsodic phrases to montage the entire play into a one-minute performance.

Explain how Berkoff makes great use of visual and spatial awareness in order to convey the key themes within the play. Hand out Berkoff’s initial stage setting and ask the students to pull out key words, phrases and ideas. Reinforce the importance of scaffolding, abstract sculpture and minimalist movement and the use of different spatial areas. State the importance of form and structure and how the students need to be incorporating these elements in their final performance.

Next, create a cyclorama using a few white sheets sewn together and taped onto the back wall. Ask for a volunteer to stand in front of the OHP projector and then physically to create the insect state. Instantly, the group will start to visualise the heightened geometric shapes projected and the opportunity for creative exploration. Refer to the Artaud homework contextualisation sheet and discuss the importance of Ritual and the Theatre of the Senses.

Allow the group time to prepare their Impossible Machine sequence and then perform their pieces in front of the OHP. Explain to the group that they are now starting to construct a piece of Total Theatre using contextualisation, visual-aural, spatial elements and expressionistic characteristics. Explain to students that the next task allows them to take ownership of their work and to test their ideas prior to the final examination.

Performance task: Rehearsal
Working in groups of between 4 and 5, each group is given a key section of the text. Explain that they must now draw on their practical experiences so far and, to inform and shape their work, they can use as much or as little of the language as they like, but they must use *some*. The performance should be imaginative and demonstrate clear characterisation, and be no longer than 5 minutes. Write on the board three outcomes that you want to see in their performance:

- Abstract and physical theatre
- Strong vocalisation
- Communication of meaning.

Performance
Each group performs their piece and the evaluation is focused on analysing not only the performance, but the contextualisation and construction of the piece.

Key questions
- What was your starting point?
- How did you construct your piece and what was the rationale behind your work?
- As an individual, what skills did you bring to the group?
- What genre did you explore?
- How did you construct the form and structure of the performance?
- What was your final intention?
- How did you want your audience to feel?
- What expressionistic elements did you use in your work?
- What would you do differently next time?

Resources required for this lesson:
- Introduction of Steven Berkoff’s *Metamorphosis*
- OHP projector
- Music: ‘Definition’ from *The Essential Philip Glass*
- White screen.

At this point, introduce the OHP and the cyclorama. An OHP can be purchased online, but make sure it is P.A.T tested.
**Lesson 5: Contextualisation and final performance**

**Learning objectives**
By the end of the lesson students will have:
- Learnt the importance of contextualising the play *Metamorphosis*
- Developed an understanding of the theories behind the piece and how specific actor training influenced Berkoff’s work
- Created a final piece of performance.

**Warm-up**
Ask the students to work in pairs and read Resource Sheet 7. Then ask the pairs to go through the exercises on their own, and share their mimed performances with their partner.

Ask the pairs to discuss the following key questions and then feedback to the whole group:
- How did it feel to act these out?
- How is mask work used in *Metamorphosis*?
- Give two examples of when mime is used in the play?
- What is mime?

Explain that the next phase is for the students to use their exploratory skills to devise an original performance. The starting point will be the play text *Metamorphosis* and the students are to:
- Create and develop a devised piece of performance from one key extract from the play and apply the methods of the practitioner Steven Berkoff
- Analyse and evaluate the creative process and devised performance.

**Practical examination piece**
The group will be marked according to their practical exploration and development of a piece of text from the play *Metamorphosis* and as a group they must decide how they are going to treat the subject matter. The group can interpret the scene in whatever way they like, but they have to justify their interpretation throughout the development stage.

Explain that each group must focus on developing character and that they should have a clear idea of how each character will be portrayed. Emphasise the importance of expressionism and how the group must incorporate these key characteristics into their final piece. The overall objective is to create a piece of Total Theatre.

Finally, the group needs to reflect on the previous workshops and the range of skills they have developed, incorporating the following points into the discussion:
- Plot and subplot
- Language
- Form and structure
- Visual, aural and spatial elements
- Contextualisation
- Subject matter
- Vocalising the text

Explain that the text is a starting point and that the group needs to use this as a pretext for creating their own original piece of work. The group now needs to spend eight hours preparing their piece ready for the examination.

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**Resources required for this lesson:**
- Resource Sheet 7: Berkoff and Theatrical Training in the 1960s
- Resource Sheet 8: Lesson Evaluation Sheet
- Key extracts from the play *Metamorphosis*.

**Hand out Resource Sheet 8: Lesson Evaluation. Read through with students, making sure they understand the importance of reflecting on their work. The students should have kept a written/visual diary of the workshop process and the reflection sheet is an ideal way of achieving this.**

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RESOURCES

Resource Sheet 1: Plot Structure/Review (this should be supported by the plot structure overview below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page reference: breaking point in the text</th>
<th>Plot so far; important incidents; important characters</th>
<th>Key image</th>
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Plot Structure

1. **Exposition**: Where we are introduced to the characters and the situation in which they find themselves (this often makes reference to what has taken place beforehand)
2. **Conflict**: Where the central problem is introduced with which the protagonist must deal
3. **Complication**: Where the difficulties become much more complex
4. **Climax**: Where the tension builds towards a crisis that must be dealt with
5. **Denouement**: Where the complications in the plot are finally resolved
### Vocalisation and meaning of the text

This means:

The Vocalisation of the text refers to the sounds on stage that are created through the performer and can be pre-recorded.

It is the use of voice.

Vocalisation is realised through:
- Spoken dialogue/Pre-recorded speech
- Song
- Spoken sfx
- Released sounds through the performer

The **Dynamics** of vocalisation and expressed through:
- Intonation
- Volume
- Tempo
- Rhythm
- Clarity

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### Meaning:

**This means:**

The meaning of the play is the underlying message of the work. This relates to the themes and issues of the piece. The meaning is anything that is communicated to an audience, which could be non-verbal, sub-conscious or even unintentional.

You cannot identify the meaning of the play without looking at the methods used to convey that meaning. The human tendency is to ask *what is it about?* We concern ourselves with finding meaning.

The themes and issues are often introduced in a foreword to the play and express the playwright’s intentions in creating the work. To identify the themes and issues it is important to analyse the text. The characters, setting, structure and language are all indicators of the **meaning of the play**. **When interpreting the play certain themes and issues can be highlighted according to what meaning you are trying to create.**
Resource Sheet 3: Berkoff and Expressionism

This movement heavily influenced Berkoff. You can tell this just by looking at the images presented in his production of *Metamorphosis*.

**Expressionism** was a movement born from Germany from 1905-1925. Unlike Surrealism, they need not produce a manifesto. They were linked by their themes and ideas. They expressed a distorted and tortured view of the world with angular and thrusting shapes that threaten to overpower the individual.

They rejected naturalism/realism as obvious imitation. The German Theatre of Expressionism was reacting against the pre-war authority of the family and community, the rigid lines of social order and the industrialisation and mechanism of life. Freud and his interpretation of dreams that was also being published also contributed to the references to self-expressionism and the exploration of the self.

Then the impact of the First World War and its mass slaughter of men in the trenches began experimenting with man and society.

**Characteristics of Expressionist plays:**

1. **Atmosphere** - often dreamlike and nightmarish. Unrealistic lighting and visual distortions in the set.
2. **Settings** - avoided reproducing the detail of naturalistic drama, and created starkly, simplified images the theme of the play called for. Often bizarre shapes and sensational colours.
3. **Plot and structure** - tended to be disjointed and broken into episodes, incidents and tableaux, each making a point of its own. The emphasis was on a sequence of dramatic events.
4. **Characters** - lacked their individuality, nameless, e.g. ‘the man’. Such characters were stereotypes and caricatures rather than individual personalities, representing social groups rather than particular people. They would appear grotesque and unreal, and the mask was re-introduced.
5. **Dialogue** - unlike conversation was poetic, rhapsodic. One time it might be long, lyrical monologues, and at another staccato phrases.
6. **The style of acting** - a deliberate departure from realism. A player might appear to be overacting, adopting the mechanical movements of a puppet.

(The above has been summarised from Styan, *Expressionism and Epic Theatre*)
Resource Sheet 4: “It’s Just a Dung Beetle.”
Resource Sheet 5: Characterisation

This means:

**Characterisation** does not stand in isolation of the text. The characters and their message/theme are interwoven. They speak the language of the text.

**Characterisation** has a history associated both with styles of theatre and of actor training. Much of the twentieth-century theatre has complex characters that resemble multi-faceted human beings. This has mainly happened since the development of Naturalism in the early twentieth century. Characters can play representatives of life as well as addressing the bizarre and irrational aspect of human existence.

The writer/dramaturg will give clear indications of character on which you can build:

1. The character’s own words
2. the character’s own actions
3. other characters’ words/actions
4. stage directions
5. the subtext behind the character’s words
6. characters’ relationships

As performance takes characters from the page the second stage in characterisation is in presenting the character. This will usually come in the form of a genre/practitioner technique in rehearsal and performance.

1. Action
2. Body movement
3. Gesture
4. Facial expression
5. Tone/type of voice
6. Pace of speech
7. Volume
8. Additional detail; e.g. make-up, costume, props, etc.

The Character also has a significant role to play in the conveying of the plot:

- **Antagonist:** A character who acts in opposition to the protagonist; an adversary to the main character
- **Anti-Hero:** a protagonist, but one who displays the less pleasant characteristics of human beings
- **Chorus/Narrator:** Commenters on the action
- **Protagonist:** The principal character who initiates the action directly/indirectly.
Resource Sheet 6: Berkoff and Antonin Artaud

BERKOFF AND ANTONIN ARTAUD

BERKOFF was influenced by the practitioner ANTONIN ARTAUD (1896-1948). He followed Artaud’s beliefs of the physicality of the actor being of great significance to interpretation.

- Artaudian actors: The actor’s body should be highly trained.
- Breathing and the voice would be important.
- The actor would work with masks and puppets

Artaud drew upon the darker side of human nature. He hoped to show the world through a distorted mirror as irrational and passionate.

Artaud loved the anarchic physical liberation of the Marx Brothers (it is worth getting to watch some of their films).

Ritual and Theatre of the senses: these are two important factors of Artaud’s Theatre. Find a definition of each:

Ritual

Theatre of the Senses
Resource Sheet 7: Berkoff and Theatrical Training in the 1960s

Berkoff trained as a mime artist at the ECOLE JACQUES LECOQ in Paris.

Jacques Copeau and his idea of mime, neutrality and mask work influenced Lecoq.

Lecoq is especially interested in the pre-state of the actor. He specialises with the initial phase that precedes speech and character. The work is based around becoming aware of yourself both physically and mentally. You become aware of your habits of walking, etc. and study these until you can make the movement as neutral as possible.

For example: ‘Walking using only the necessary movements of walking with only using the energy, rhythm, space and time that the action requires’ (Rolfe, 1972): *Acting Reconsidered*.

Mask Work is of great importance in Lecoq’s training and the actor has to train for a whole year before they are allowed to use the mask in their own work. During this time they train through acrobatics and conditioning of using the body in the surrounding space. Actors study the mask for eight days before they are allowed to wear it. They are to use the mask (which displays no personality, emotion, or character, it is a blank canvas) to perform the life of the mask.

This is a style of exploring character.

Task: try these exercises with partners.

- Do not create false style, overacting, etc. There is no need for narrative.
- Only use the actions necessary
- Be clear and simple with the imagery; do not try and create emotion, etc.

1. Wake and stand in fog; explore the fog; find yourself at the end of the sea, as the fog clears; throw a stone out to sea.

2. Walk to the end of a pier and pull in a sailboat; punt the boat away from the shore; raise the sail; lower the sail; throw out the anchor; cast a net and pull it in full of fish, lift the anchor and raise the sail.

- How did it feel to act these out?
- How is mask work used in *Metamorphosis*? (Look at the stage directions and use of mask; give 2 specific examples)
- What is mime?
Resource Sheet 8: Lesson Evaluation

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Name of production: ___________________________ Session number: ___________________________

What was the purpose of the session?

What did you do?

What did you find out? Say something about any issues or solutions that occurred to you in rehearsal.

How is the piece developing? How are you using research? How is your character developing?

What do you need to do next and specifically what do you need to improve on?