

# That Face by Polly Stenham

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AS/A level

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## Introduction

*That Face* by Polly Stenham is one of the six set texts for the latest Pearson/Edexcel AS and A level syllabus; the set texts form the basis of the 'Page to Stage' element of the exam, which requires students to explore how they would realise key extracts from the play. The best way for students to understand how they would play the characters in their chosen set text is to have explored them practically in depth. This scheme of work offers a range of different ideas for closely exploring the text to enable students to write in the specific, drama-focussed way that is required.

### Structure

This scheme of work looks closely at different extracts from the text and how students can explore the play through character work, improvisation, devising or practitioner work. This allows students to examine a range of scenes from a practical perspective, which will be invaluable for exam writing. This scheme is written with the assumption that students have read the text and undertaken some research into its social, historical and political context. All of the activities can be adapted for use with any scene from the play that you would like to explore in preparation for the exam.

It would be prudent for students to keep a log of their practical explorations to inform their exam preparation.

### The AS and A level exams

#### AS level

The AS exam is divided into two components.

- ▶ Component 1: Exploration and Performance is worth 60 per cent.
- ▶ Component 2: Theatre Makers in Practice is worth 40 per cent and is in the form of a one-and-a-half-hour written exam.

The exam is in two parts:

- ▶ Section A – Live Theatre Evaluation worth 16 marks
- ▶ Section B – Page to Stage. Two essay questions based on a set text examining how you would realise an extract from the text in performance. One question is based on performance and one is based on design skills. These questions are worth 16 marks each.

#### A level

The A level exam is divided into three components:

- ▶ Component 1: Devising is worth 40 per cent.
- ▶ Component 2: Text in Performance is worth 20 per cent.
- ▶ Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice is worth 40 per cent and is in the form of a two-and-a-half-hour written exam.

The exam is in three parts:

- ▶ Section A – Live Theatre Evaluation worth 20 marks
- ▶ Section B – Page to Stage. Two essay questions based on a set text examining how you would realise an extract from the text in performance. One question is based on performance and one is based on design skills. These questions are worth 16 marks each.
- ▶ Section C – Interpreting a performance text. One question (from a choice of two) worth 24 marks, based on a second set text. This question focuses on your chosen practitioner.

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Text used: *That Face* by Polly Stenham published by Faber & Faber, ISBN: 9780571244218.



## Performance – Scene 1

### The question might be similar to this:

As a performer, discuss how you might interpret and portray one of the key roles in the extract. You should use examples from the extract to support your ideas and your answer should make reference to the performance text as a whole.

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To explore the opening of the play from a performance perspective
- ▶ To devise work exploring the characters' internal monologue that closely explores performance choices.

### Warm-up: Alien Translator

Explain to the group that half of the people in the room are actually aliens. Fortunately, the other half are alien translators and can understand everything the others say.

Ask students for ideas for an activity that needs explaining, e.g. building an Ikea bunkbed; baking a cake; putting up a tent; etc. Choose someone to begin. S/he must talk nonsense and perform an action that may give the rest of the group an idea of what they are referring to, e.g.: 'Slub cam skolla bob tralska' (mime breaking eggs into a bowl and mixing). Once they have done this, the person to their left should copy the action and give a translation of what the alien has said e.g. 'Break two large eggs into a bowl'.

Students can be quite free in their translations but whatever they say must somehow relate to the activity they are meant to be describing. If a long alien explanation is given, the translator may simply respond by saying 'bake for one hour' or 'hammer in the pegs'. Similarly, a very obvious mime, like throwing a ball, may be given a surreal and lengthy description.

The person to the translator's left speaks another phrase of alien language and performs another mime and the next person translates and so on around the circle. When you have been around once ask the aliens and translators to swap roles and go round again.

### The extract

**Scene 1:** From p. 9 – '*Mia: Can she breathe?*' to p. 13 '*Izzy: What's wrong with her? She's out cold.*'

In the opening of the play Mia and Izzy have tied Alice to a chair. It is a boarding school initiation and we learn that under normal circumstances, very much the done thing. Alice is responsive to Izzy and Mia to begin with but loses consciousness as the scene progresses.

### Main activity

**Rehearse:** After reading the whole extract, ask students to rehearse a short section of the scene in groups of three. Ensure that the whole scene is covered by different groups.

Ask students to stage this opening scene with careful consideration given to what they want the audience to know about these girls, their status and their relationship by their use of movement, facial expression, vocal skills and proxemics.

**Perform:** Ask each group to perform their pieces in the correct order.

**Discuss:** Ask each group to justify their choices for their performance. Which work did students find most effective and why? What techniques and ideas were commonly used? Did any groups interpret the characters very differently from what they expected? How? Why? Was it effective? Why/why not?

**Devise:** Ask groups of three to join up to make groups of six. Ask three students to create an image that sums up the opening scene, e.g. Alice on a chair, Izzy and Mia on either side of her. Ask the other three to stand behind one of the characters as an alter-ego. Each of the alter-egos should step out of the image and introduce themselves, what is happening in the scene and how they feel about their part in the initiation to the audience. The introductions should pay careful attention to movement, facial expressions, posture, gesture, vocal skills and proxemics. When one group of three has competed this, ask students to swap over so that everyone in the group has had a chance to interpret a character.

**Perform:** Ask groups to perform their work.

**Discuss:** Discuss students' interpretation of the characters and their inner monologue as well as how students believe their character feels about what is happening in the scene. Ask students to relate their ideas to the feelings that Mia and Izzy show when they visit Alice in hospital.

**Consolidation:** As a class look at each section of the extract and with reference to the performance work discuss each character and list all of the ideas for performance. It is important to remember that students must be able to make reference to the whole text, not just the extract.

## Performance – Scene 6

### The question might be similar to this:

As a performer, discuss how you might interpret and portray one of the key roles in the extract. You should use examples from the extract to support your ideas and your answer should make reference to the performance text as a whole.

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To use monologue to explore the character of Martha looking closely at movement, facial expressions and vocal skills
- ▶ To adapt Martha's monologue into an ensemble performance exploring the different sides of her personality
- ▶ To improvise a scene from Henry's point of view, showing his fears about Martha's behaviour.

### Warm-up: Clap Trap

Ask students to sit in a circle and number them. Teach them the following rhythm: hit your thighs with both hands at the same time, clap your hands together, click your fingers on your left hand, click your fingers on your right hand. Everyone performs the rhythm quite slowly to start; then number one begins by saying her/his own number on the first click of fingers and someone else's on the second click. This person then says their own number on the next click followed by someone else's: e.g. 1 to 7, 7 to 13, 13 to 6, etc. If someone makes a mistake either by not saying a number on the rhythm or by saying an incorrect number they are out and players are renumbered. The last two players left win the game.

### The extract

**Scene 6:** From the start of the scene up to p. 64 'Henry: This is cat food. She mock miaows.'

At the start of this extract Martha is alone; in Martha's previous scene she has shredded Henry's clothes and given him a love bite near to where he had one from Izzy. Here Martha is talking to herself and becomes agitated when she thinks the cleaner is ringing the doorbell. Henry enters and begins to try and tidy the mess while Martha remains frosty with him and talks about her son dying. Henry realises that he can only communicate with Martha if he plays along with her. They talk about Martha getting a job and she reminisces about fruit picking in her younger days. The end of the extract is when Henry returns from the kitchen upset, worried that Martha has eaten the cat food.

### Main activity

**Rehearse:** After reading the whole extract, ask students to rehearse individually Martha's monologue on pp. 58 and 59.

Ask students to move into groups of three and share their rehearsed monologues, focussing on their use of movement, facial expression and vocal skills.

Ask each person in each group to rehearse the monologue alone focussing only on movement, facial expression or vocal skills.

After some rehearsal time bring the threes back together and ask students to share their ideas, and, based on this, to rehearse Martha's monologue again.

**Perform:** Ask some students to perform and feedback on their use of the specific skills they were focussing on.

**Discuss:** What are the different sides to Martha's personality as displayed throughout the play? Ideas might include that she is controlling, aggressive, emotional, manipulative, unwell, scared, as well as being content at times. Consider these ideas and how they link to her role as Henry and Mia's mother.

**Practitioner idea:** This work would be an ideal opportunity to explore Brecht's idea of *gestus*, extending the concept from movement only to facial *gestus* and vocal *gestus*.

**Devise:** In the same groups of three ask students to devise an ensemble performance of Martha's monologue with each person using the ideas discussed to show a different facet of Martha's personality.

**Perform:** Ask groups to perform their work.

**Improvisation:** In pairs, ask students to improvise the scene that Henry fearfully imagines on p. 64, where he believes that Martha has eaten the cat food. Students should improvise a short scene where Henry walks in on Martha eating the cat food and confronts her. They should consider how she might react. Will she find it funny? Will she be angry if he tries to stop her? Will she come to her senses and be horrified by what she has done?

**Perform:** Ask groups to perform their work.

**Extension:** You could allow students more time to rehearse and refine this work for another performance. A deeper exploration of students' work here will allow them to focus on performance skills in more detail.

## Performance – Scene 7

### The question might be similar to this:

As a performer, discuss how you might interpret and portray one of the key roles in the extract. You should use examples from the extract to support your ideas and your answer should make reference to the performance text as a whole.

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To use internal monologue and doppelgangers to explore the subtext of the scene
- ▶ To use improvisation to explore characters' feelings towards each other.

### Warm-up: Tongue twisters and vocal work

Display the following tongue twister and give students some time to learn it.

'She stood upon the balustraded balcony. Inexplicably mimicking his hiccupping. Whilst amicably welcoming him in.'

Ask students to walk with purpose around the space whilst repeating the words in their own time. They should vary the pitch, pace, tone, volume and use of emphasis. Repeat this activity with students' own ideas for tongue twisters.

Ask students to choose their favourite tongue twister and experiment with delivering the lines using a range of emotions, e.g. angry, surprised, happy, anxious, begging for forgiveness, etc.

### The extract

**Scene 7:** From pp. 67 to 70, '*Mia: You're sweating. Brought the sweaty weather with you?*'.

In this extract Mia and Hugh are in a restaurant. The conversation in this part of the scene is awkward and superficial with neither Hugh nor Mia wanting to discuss what they really need to talk about.

### Main activity

Introduce students to the idea of a doppelganger being a double; sometimes an evil twin. It is a good way to explore internal monologue and subtext and can be used to great effect.

Ask students to work in pairs to rehearse either pp. 67 and 68 or pp. 69 and 70. Ask two pairs who have been rehearsing different pages to join up. Starting with the pair who have been rehearsing pp. 67 and 68, students should set up stage space and have the person who is playing Mia from the other pair to mirror the Mia from the first pair and the same for Hugh. As pair 1 run their scene, they should be conscious of their movements and facial expression so that pair 2 can copy them. After some rehearsal to work with the movement, pair 2 should add their characters' internal monologue in between the spoken text, e.g.:

**Hugh 1:** Yes. Nice place. Good steak. Can't get a good steak in Hong Kong.

**Hugh 2:** I would give anything to be back in Hong Kong now. I do not need this stress.

**Mia 1:** Terrible.

**Mia 2:** Like you care even the tiniest bit what the food at my school is like. As long as I'm out of your way, you couldn't give a damn.

It's important when rehearsing this type of scene that the doppelgangers are given enough time to speak in between the scripted lines. Students also need to give some thought to what they are doing when the doppelganger is speaking,

This could be an ideal opportunity to explore Artaud's ideas of the double.

e.g. how are they moving, using facial expressions, giving eye contact and so on. Although it works well for the doppelgangers to mirror the real character it also is effective if they have the freedom of movement around the stage space when they are speaking.

When pair 1 have rehearsed their scene with pair 2 playing the doubles, then the pairs should swap over and rehearse the second scene.

**Perform:** Ask groups to perform their work with the audience using the following as a focus for feedback:

**Discuss:** What were the major themes that came up as part of Mia and Hugh's monologue? What themes did all groups cover? Were there any more unusual ideas that were explored? What did groups' portrayal of Mia and Hugh's internal thoughts tell us about their characters? How did students' internal and external Hugh and Mia differ? Be precise about the use of specific skills.

**Improvisation:** Ask students to stand in a circle with one person in the middle who decides on which character from the text they would like to play. Another student takes on a different role and enters the space telling the character something that they have got on their mind. Both students should respond in character to the other until you stop the action. One character leaves and another enters taking on a different role and so on. The action might run as follows:

Student 1 playing Mia – Student 2 enters playing Martha, Mia and Martha interact. Action freezes. Student 1 leaves. Student 3 enters playing Henry, Henry and Martha interact. Action freezes. Student 2 leaves. Student 4 enters playing Hugh, Hugh and Henry interact and so on. It could add an interesting element to the activity if there are two people playing the same character.

Although improvisation can be speedy work, students should still aim to keep the creation of character at the forefront of their performance.

## Design

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To explore extracts from a design perspective.

#### The question:

*As a designer, outline how you would use theatrical elements to create mood and atmosphere in the extract.*

*You should use examples from the extract to support your ideas and your answer should make reference to the performance text as a whole.*

*That Face* takes place in the following locations:

- ▶ A boarding school dorm
- ▶ Martha's flat in London. Henry's bedroom. Neat, tidy, boyish. All of the scenes in Martha's flat are set in Henry's bedroom
- ▶ A private hospital room
- ▶ Hugh's flat in Canary Wharf. Minimalist and impersonal; a businessman's bachelor flat
- ▶ A restaurant.

Below are some ideas to guide students through an exploration of any of the sets used in the play.

#### Things to consider:

##### Set

The play takes place in a number of locations all of which offer lots of opportunity for you to interpret the play in many ways. Will the set change or will each area of the stage represent a different location?

**Dorm:** How would you create the dorm at Mia's boarding school? Is Alice tied to the chair in a room that Mia and Izzy share? How would you decorate the walls? What personal things will the girls have? What will their bed covers be like? What will these things tell the audience? Consider the contrast between the girls having teddies on their beds and what they are doing to Alice.

**Henry's bedroom:** Henry's room is described as neat and boyish. How would you interpret this? How might you reflect Henry's love of art? Consider how Henry's room changes throughout the play; it almost reflects Martha's decline as she destroys his things.

**Costume**

The play was first presented in 2007 so the costumes would reflect modern fashion trends.

- ▶ **Martha:** Martha is often not dressed; how might you use nightwear to reflect Martha? Is she wearing a silky nightdress or an oversized, faded t-shirt? Why? In scene 8 Martha is dressed in an evening gown. What type of dress is it? Expensive? Designer? How might you use this type of dress to tell the audience about Martha? How might Martha's hair and use of make up further reflect what is happening?
- ▶ **Mia:** When Mia arrives at the flat she might be wearing her school uniform. How might you use this to tell the audience about Mia's school life? How might you contrast Mia's school uniform and her own clothes? Consider her choice of hair and use of make up here too.
- ▶ **Hugh:** How will you use costume to reflect a middle-aged, wealthy man? Is he wearing a suit and tie or expensive, designer casual clothes? Is he fashionably dressed or will you use costume to show that Hugh is struggling himself?

**Sound**

The majority of the play is set in London. Will you use any sound to suggest a busy part of London? In the restaurant or in Hugh's flat how might you use music to create mood and atmosphere?

**Lighting**

The play moves between day and night. How and where will you use lighting to create these changes?

**Use of space including staging, levels, entrances, exits and proxemics**

What type of staging would you use and why? Can the play work in the round? What would the advantages of this be? Would a thrust stage allow the audience to engage closely with the performance and remove the 'fourth wall' element of a proscenium arch?

**Actor/audience relationship**

How do you want the audience to engage with your interpretation? Do you want to present real life in a naturalistic, Stanislavskian interpretation, or will you break the fourth wall in a more Brechtian approach? Do you want the audience to learn something? What message do you want them to leave with?