



Joan Littlewood

A Complete Guide for AS and A Level OCR

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Contents

Thank You for Choosing ZigZag Education.....	ii
Teacher Feedback Opportunity.....	iii
Terms and Conditions of Use	iv
Teacher's Introduction.....	1
Student Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Joan Littlewood's Life and the Social, Historical and Cultural Context She Worked In.....	3
Timeline Activity.....	4
Snakes & Ladders	7
Crossword	10
Research.....	11
Chapter 2: Her work – an Overview of Joan Littlewood's Work with a Closer Focus on Key Moments.....	12
1: <i>Last Edition</i>	12
2: <i>Uranium 235</i>	14
3: <i>Richard II</i>	16
4: <i>A Taste Of Honey</i>	17
5: <i>Oh! What A Lovely War</i>	18
Chapter 3: Her Artistic Intentions	21
Chapter 4: Her Theatrical Purpose and Practice.....	23
Instant Theatre Fun!.....	24
A Crash Course In Political Theatre.....	25
Chapter 5: The Innovative Nature of her Approach	29
Chapter 6: Littlewood's Working Methods	32
Chapter 7: The Performance Style / Theatrical Conventions she Used and the Philosophy of These.....	38
Design	40
Chapter 8: Her Collaboration with other Practitioners	41
Chapter 9: Influence on Other Practitioners	42
Littlewood's Legacy	43
Chapter 10: Exam Section	45
AS Level Component 01/02 and 03/04: Process to Performance.....	45
Top Tips for Process to Performance!	46
A Level Component 11/12 and 13/14: Practitioners in Practice	47
Top Tips for Practitioners in Practice!.....	48
Timeline.....	50
Glossary	51
Teacher Notes.....	55
Chapter 1	55
Chapter 2	57
Chapter 3	59
Chapter 4	60
Chapter 5	60
Chapter 6	61
Chapter 7	62
Chapter 8	62
Chapter 9	62
Chapter 10	63

Teacher's Introduction

Joan Littlewood changed the face of theatre in the mid twentieth century, yet has received surprisingly little attention. She was a revolutionary, a woman theatrical director (rare in those days), and – it is not an exaggeration to say – a genius, whose unswerving commitment to her politics and her working-class audience spearheaded the biggest shake-up British theatre had encountered for generations. She has been called the Mother of Modern Theatre – an accolade which is richly deserved. Her impact on twentieth and twenty-first-century theatre practice is simply monumental. Countless theatre makers of today, including the students accessing this guide, are embedding elements of her practice into their daily work... yet without realising it! Her inclusion in the new A Level Drama and Theatre specifications highlights just how far her influence extends.

This guide is written primarily to support the 2016 AS and A Level OCR specifications.

In the **AS** OCR specification, Joan Littlewood's work as a theatre practitioner can be used for the Process to Performance component (01/02 and 03/04). In the **A Level** OCR specification, it can be used for the Practitioners in Practice component (11/12 and 13/14).

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

This guide is intended to introduce students to the conventions of Joan Littlewood's practice, and particularly her work with Theatre Workshop. To support students' understanding and practical application of the methodology she used, they are provided with a range of activities, both written and practical. Littlewood's productions were visually ground breaking, so this guide is as useful for design candidates as it is for directing questions.

How to use this resource

This resource has been matched to the requirements of the 2016 OCR AS and A Level in Drama and Theatre specification. Relevant AOs and exam tips are provided throughout, which will demonstrate to students how to apply the ideas from the resource to the relevant parts of the course.

Divided into 10 sections, the resource includes the context in which Joan Littlewood lived and worked, the innovative nature of her approach, details of her working methods, and more.

The final section shows how to apply theory to practice, both for practical examination purposes and written exam responses. Following this, there is a section at the end containing answers, indicative content to assist with activities, and further helpful information.



A web page containing all the links listed in this resource is conveniently provided on ZigZag Education's website at zzed.uk/9152

You may find this helpful for accessing the websites rather than typing in each URL.

November 2018

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* resulting from minor specification changes, suggestions from teachers and peer reviews, or occasional errors reported by customers

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Student Introduction

The table below illustrates which components of your course require skills of practitioners, and which AOs are assessed for each component. As a resource, the AO references will help you to see how tasks can contribute to the assessment objectives.

The assessment objectives for both AS and A Level Drama courses are:

AO1

Create and develop ideas to communicate meaning as part of the theatrical process, making connections between dramatic theory and practice

AO2

Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions in live performance

AO3

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how drama and theatre are performed

AO4

Analyse and evaluate their own work and the work of others

AS		
Unit title	Description	
Component 01/02 and 03/04: Practitioners in Performance	This unit is internally assessed. For this component you must explore a performance text and practitioner, perform or design one key extract and compile a research report and portfolio.	For this component, AO1 and AO2 are assessed. Your portfolio will be assessed. Your research report will be assessed.
A Level		
Unit title	Description	
Component 11/12 and 13/14: Practitioners in Practice	This unit is internally assessed. You must study an extract from a play text and two practitioners and prepare a research report about them. You must then use these as stimuli, devise an original piece for performance, or provide a design and compile a portfolio about your work.	AO1, AO2 and AO3 are assessed. The portfolio will be assessed. Your research report will be assessed.

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Chapter 1:

Joan Littlewood's Life and the Social, Political and Cultural Context She Worked In

'Theatre should be direct, vulgar, simple, popular, genteel, not poetical.'¹



It's almost impossible to separate Joan Littlewood's work with Theatre from the context in which it was produced. These were extraordinarily complex decades of the twentieth century saw two world wars and a spate of political events at home and abroad, which were to shape events in a way that no one could have predicted. Hardship and deprivation was a way of life for many, who endured unemployment, hunger and the ever-present threat of yet more military conflict. It was a struggle for the average working-class family to live decently.

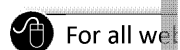
Theatres were run like businesses, with hierarchical structures. All political expression was subject to censorship, which kept anything considered offensive or provocative off the stage. Theatres got round this by performing as private members' clubs, but they still faced police raids and prosecution. Despite the influence of European art and drama, British Theatre was a mix of Expressionism, ensemble working, Brecht and agit-prop, theatre was not always pleasant yet unadventurous drawing room comedies and staid Shakespearean plays tucked neatly behind the proscenium arch. The star actors of the time were known for their elegant performance and crystal-clear received pronunciation.

The first few links in this resource are designed to give you an overview of the context in which Joan Littlewood worked. They will help your knowledge and understanding of the cultural and political context behind Littlewood's work.



Assessment Top Tip AS Process to Performance and A Level

In your research report, you should demonstrate your understanding of the context in which the practitioner lived and worked, and how it influenced their work (AO1 – ensure you fully understand the context in which Joan Littlewood worked, and how it influenced her work in your research report!)



¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/24/arts/joan-littlewood-british-theater-pioneer-of-oh-why-not.html>

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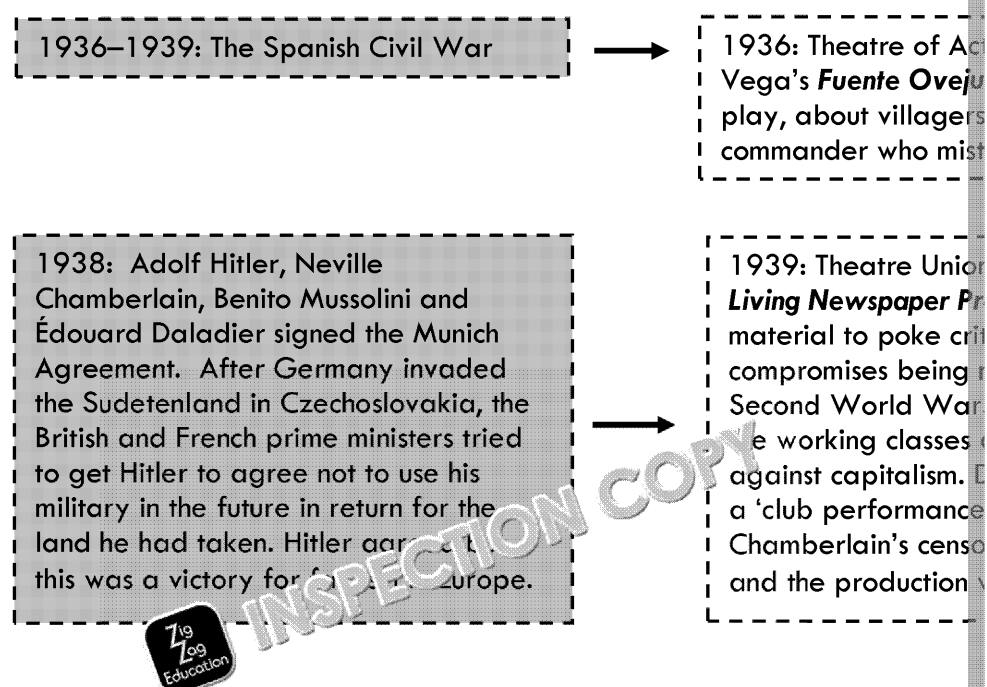
Timeline Activity

On the next pages you will see a number of informative boxes, each containing details of either:

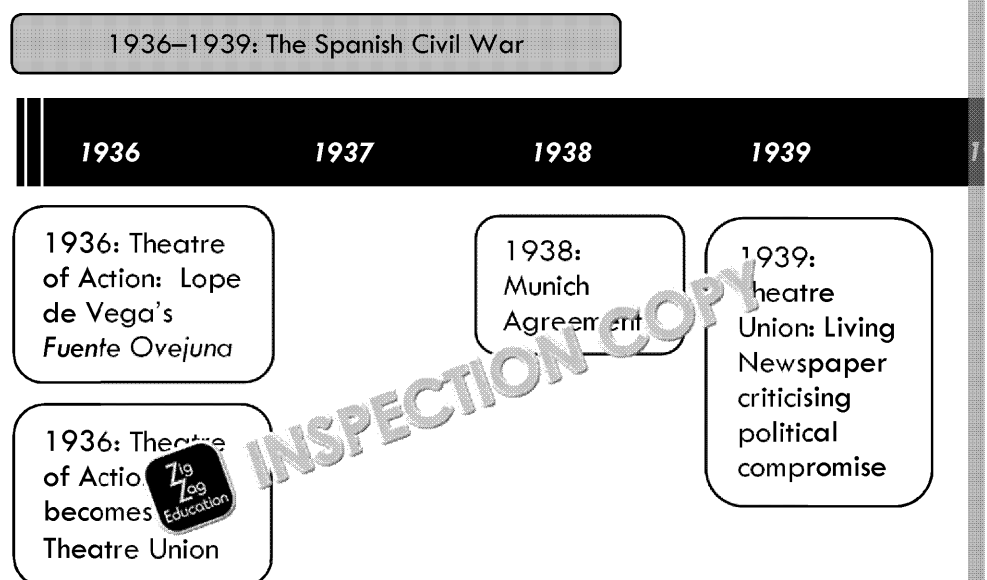
- a) a major historical/political event; or
- b) an event in Joan Littlewood's life and career.

Task 1

Cut out the boxes and lay them out in a way that shows the links and influences between political events and theatre. Here is an example to start you off:



Alternatively, you could link events and productions in this format:



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Timeline Activity

1959: Conservatives in power for the third time in a row. The PM, Harold Macmillan, declared 'you've never had it so good'.

1955: *My Darling Clementine* with John Littlewood directing and appearing in the title role.

1956: John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* premiered at The Royal Court Theatre – the era of the Angry Young Men had begun.

1967: **The Marie Lloyd Story**

1972: The Theatre Royal Stratford East was designated a listed building.

1914: Joan Littlewood moved from the area of London to an area in the north by her maternal grandfather. Books left behind by the family.

1955: landmark production: *Richard II* at the same time as the Old Vic production.

1958: *A Taste of Honey*

1957: *You Won't Always Be a Winner* by Henry Chapman – set in the 1930s.

1934: After *John Bullion*, Littlewood and her company were expelled from the Communist Party, accused of 'betraying their art before politics'.

1952: Joan Littlewood won a scholarship to RADA.

1956: Suez Crisis

1951: *The Long Shift* – play about trapped miners.

1929: The Wall Street Crash.

1939: Outbreak of World War II

1952: *The Travellers*, written by MacColl.

1958: *The Hostage*

1936: Theatre of Action became **Theatre Union**, a collaborative of actors, stage technicians, writers and artists.

1952: Littlewood toured adaptations of *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Henry IV* as well as surreal versions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* to schools in Manchester and Glasgow.

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1936: Theatre of Action production, London. **Fuente Ovejuna**, a seventeenth-century play about villagers who collectively murder the commander who mistreats the



1953: Company voted to move to a permanent base at Theatre Royal Stratford East, a disused Victorian theatre in the East End of London. MacColl refused to move so left the company. Littlewood fell in with recent Manchester graduate, Gerry Raffles.

1945: The company launched with a double bill as **Theatre Workshop** but the next few years were a physical and financial struggle – no permanent base, short-term accommodation on tour. Launched the company with a double bill: a ballad opera penned by MacColl and **Noble** and an adaptation of Moliere's **The Miser**.

1934: Theatre of Action production, **John Bullion**. The play itself was about capitalist pursuit of war for material gain at a time when the peace movement was at its height with overwhelming support for the League of Nations.

1939: Theatre Union produced **Last Edition**, a large-scale **Living Newspaper Project** using documentary material to poke criticism at political compromises being made in the approach to the Second World War. The project sought to unite the working classes across Europe in a fight against capitalism. Despite running the show as a 'documentary performance' to avoid the Lord Chamberlain's censorship, they were arrested and the production was stopped.



1938: Adolf Hitler, Neville Chamberlain, Benito Mussolini and Édouard Daladier signed the Munich Agreement. After Germany invaded the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, the British and French prime ministers tried to get Hitler to agree not to use his military in the future in return for the land he had taken. Hitler agreed but this was a victory for Fascism in Europe.

1937: Theatre of Action production, the **Life of a Woman** which tells the story of a group of women who hold sex to stop their men going to war.

1939: MacColl and Littlewood are blacklisted from BBC because of their communist beliefs.

1945: End of war. The Labour party seize power. Introduction of the Welfare State, but also rationing, a devalued pound, and the emerging Cold War.

1961: East 15, a drama school dedicated to the methods of Joan Littlewood, was established.

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Snakes & Ladders

To help you better remember and understand the events of Littlewood's life and the context in which she lived, play the board game, which contains some of the key events of the time.

Once you have had a go, why not create your own board game using events from the timeline? A blank board is printed for you to use on the next page.



HINT: draw ladders for the high points of Joan Littlewood's life and low points.



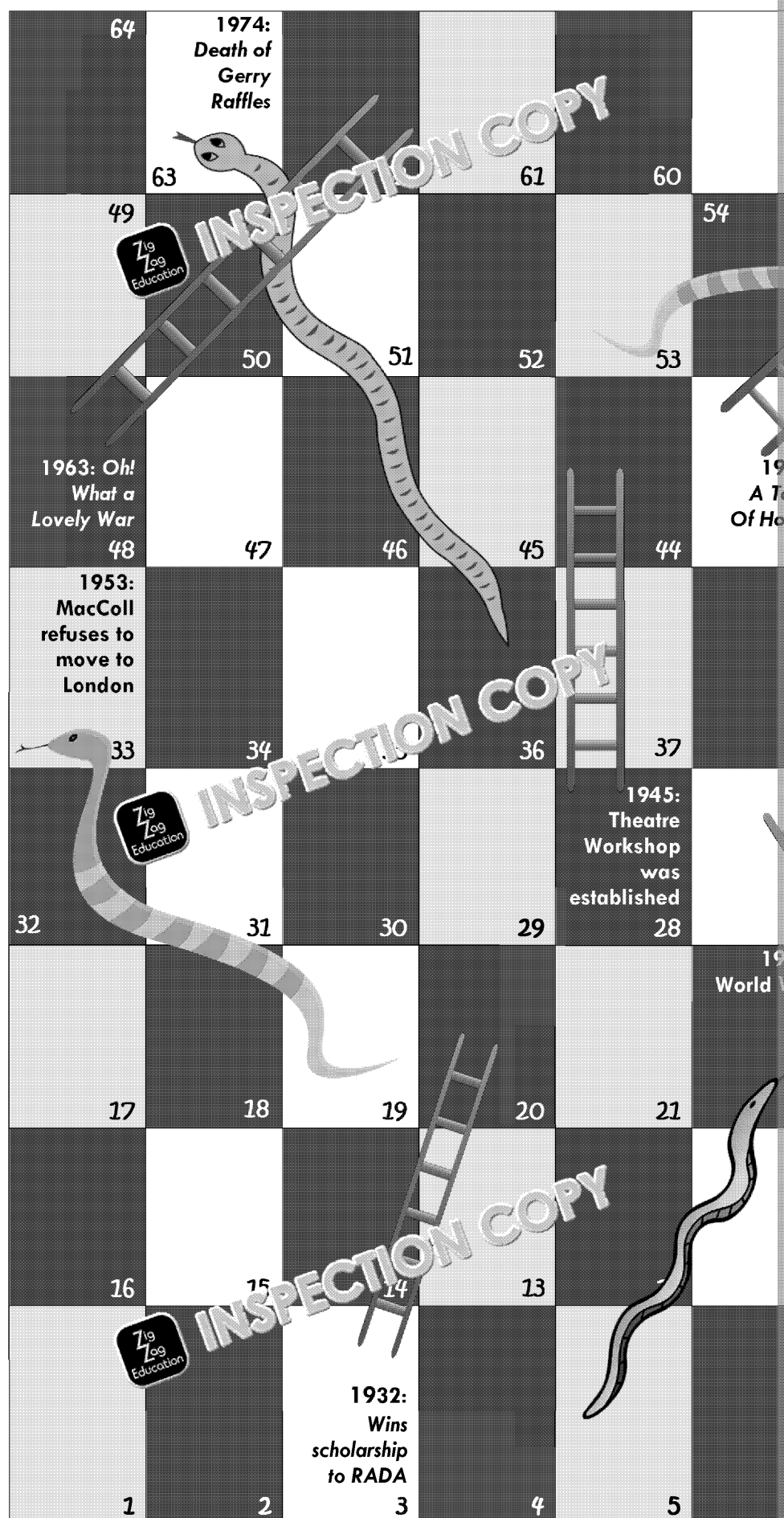
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Snakes & Ladders

Dice and counters not provided!



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Snakes & Ladders – Blank Board

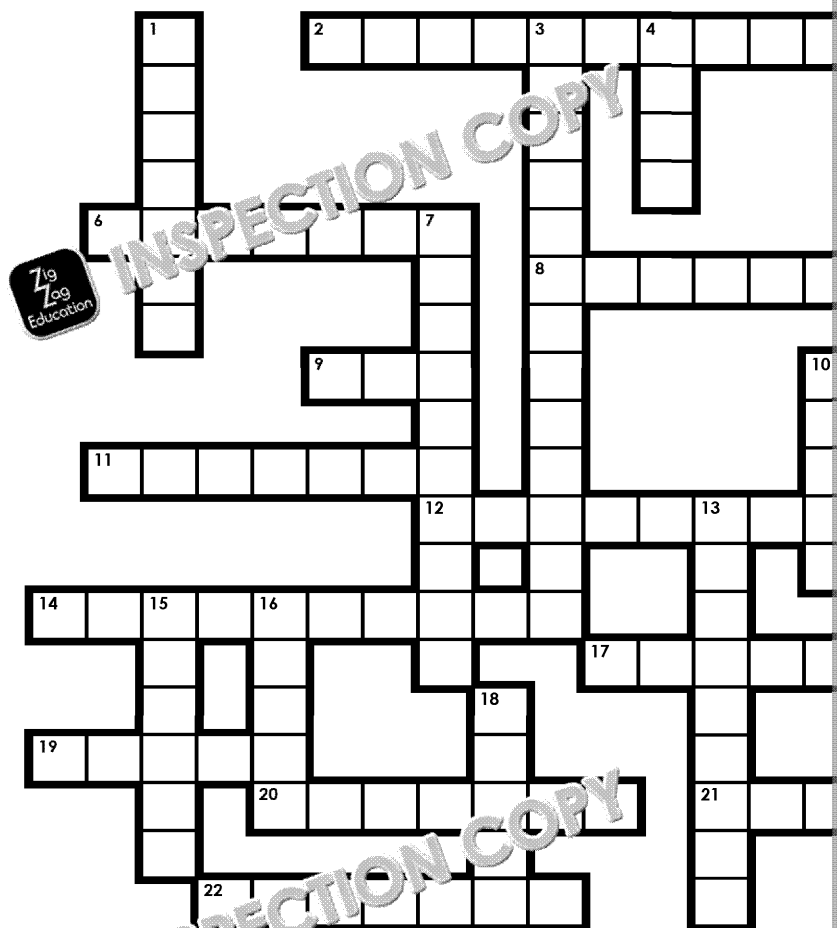
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1	2	3	4	5	

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Crossword



Across

- 2 Greek comedy (10)
- 6 Chemical element which formed part of Theatre Workshop's anti-bomb play (7)
- 8 Joan Littlewood went to live here after the death of Gerry Raffles (6)
- 9 MacColl and Littlewood were banned from here for their communist beliefs (3)
- 11 Who wrote The Flying Doctor? (7)
- 12 Whose plays did Joan Littlewood tour around schools? (11)
- 14 It crashed in 1929 (4,6)
- 17 The Prime Minister in 1959 (9)
- 19 A play about trapped miners in a long mine (5)
- 20 1958 'The _____' transferred to the West End? (7)
- 21 Drama school established in 1961 (4-2)
- 22 What did Theatre Workshop receive from the Arts Council in 1956? (7)

Down

- 1 Which John wrote Angry (7)
- 3 The location of the restored by Theatre (10)
- 4 Joan Littlewood (4)
- 5 Ewan MacColl's (4)
- 7 Gerry Raffles graduated from university (10)
- 10 Theatre audience in 1958 (5)
- 13 Joan Littlewood (4)
- 15 Not a dead newspaper (7)
- 16 This report about the 1945 (7)
- 18 Which country for 1936 and 1939 (5)

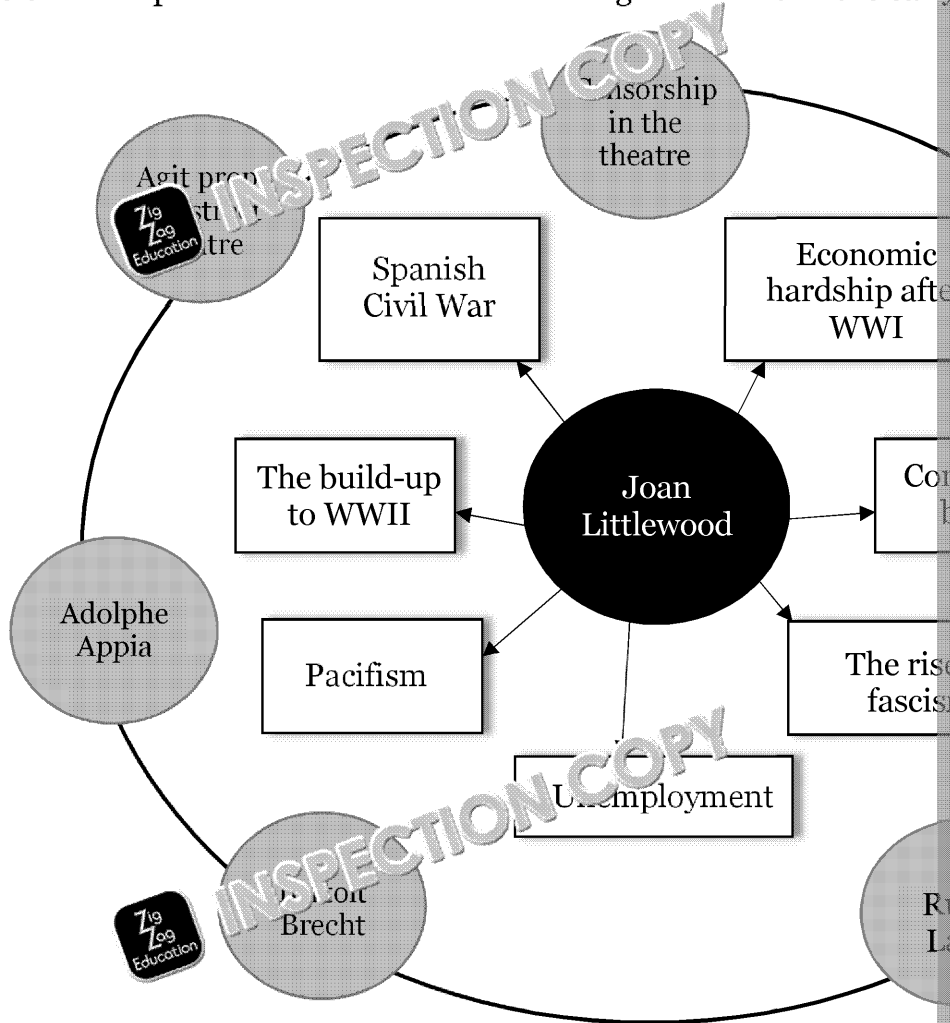
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Research

In the introduction, I suggested that it was impossible to separate Joan Littlewood from the social, historical and cultural context of the time. The below attempts to show the influences circling Littlewood in the early 1930s.



Research Task:

To consolidate your knowledge and understanding, the early influences on Littlewood deserve a closer look. In groups, research the following areas. You should choose one area that they might have influenced Joan Littlewood. Report your findings back to the class in a minute oral presentation (this can be done using Powerpoint or Prezi if you wish).

- 1) Theatre censorship
- 2) Agit prop and the Workers' Theatre Movement
- 3) European Expressionism including Brecht and Meyerhold
- 4) Rudolf Laban
- 5) Adolphe Appia



Top Tip

In your portfolio you will need to outline the connection between Littlewood's influences and your performance. An understanding of the influences on Joan Littlewood will help you in the application of her methodology. Make sure you take notes on other groups' influences.

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Chapter 2:

Her work – an Overview of Joan Littlewood with a Closer Focus on Key Moments

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Jo: I hope to be dead & buried by the time I reach 40.

Helen: You've been living for forty years.

Helen: I know, I must be a biological phenomenon.

Jo: You don't look forty. You look a sort of well-preserved.

Joan Littlewood's work was a constant experiment with different styles. She wasn't afraid to borrow, invent or adapt theatre forms in her never-ending quest to break down the barriers we erect between "popular" and "art" theatre'.²

She was a talent spotter too, nurturing young actors, many of whom went on to become major stars, and discovering exciting new playwrights, such as the Irish dramatist Brecht. She produced *The Quare Fellow*, a play which attacked capital punishment and was performed the night before a hanging. She also discovered the 18-year old Shelagh Delaney, who wrote *A Taste of Honey*, a play about a young white girl who falls pregnant after a relationship with a black man.

She is probably best known for her production of *Oh! What a Lovely War*.

In this section, we are going to take a closer look at five defining periods in her work: the late 1930s / early 1940s; the mid 1940s; the mid 1950s; the late 1950s; and the 1960s. We will be examining a production in each period.

1: *Last Edition*

The material for Theatre Union's 1940 production of ***Last Edition*** was inspired by the national and international political events. These events included the rise of Hitler, the build up to the Second World War, with an uncompromising warning to the audience about the dangers of being exploited in peacetime by a capitalist system, and the going to war in Europe.

Produced in the form of a **Living Newspaper**, it combined many of the techniques that the company had used up to the point in their street theatre productions. It used satire as well as music, dance, and traditional folk song. It also used a mock-up of a telephone exchange dialing board to create a cacophony of overlapping voices reporting the breaking news.

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² Act 1, Scene 2, *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney

Task

Get into groups of three or four. First, watch the examples of living newspapers that your teacher is about to show you. Then, in your groups, choose a current issue *or* select one of the historical events in the timeline activity, e.g. the Profumo affair, and use this material to create your own living newspaper.

Instructions:

- Content/material should be lifted directly from news, newspapers / the media / current affairs.
- You should all aim to play different characters in the story – multi-role if there are more characters than there are people in your group. Don't worry about building rounded characters – they should be cartoon-like, cardboard cut-out characters (not *actual* cardboard, although there is no reason why you couldn't do this, given the time!).
- You should limit yourself to a five-minute show consisting of between four and six scenes.
- Dialogue should be snappy and direct. This is no place for long dramatic monologues. Think of it as a fast-paced variety show.
- Keep staging bare – with a minimum of scenery and props.
- Announce each scene with a newspaper headline, perhaps with the speaker or a big sign.
- End with a call to action!

This is not a subtle theatre form, so don't overcomplicate things. You need a dramatic backdrop to a contemporary problem.



Assessment Top Tip

This task is particularly helpful for your devising component, where you are developing others' work and develop ideas for a performance (AO1 – Create and develop ideas). Your aims and your intentions should all influence your performance.

A Level



Living newspaper
say on the
Russia de
agitprop
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villagers
America
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Project i

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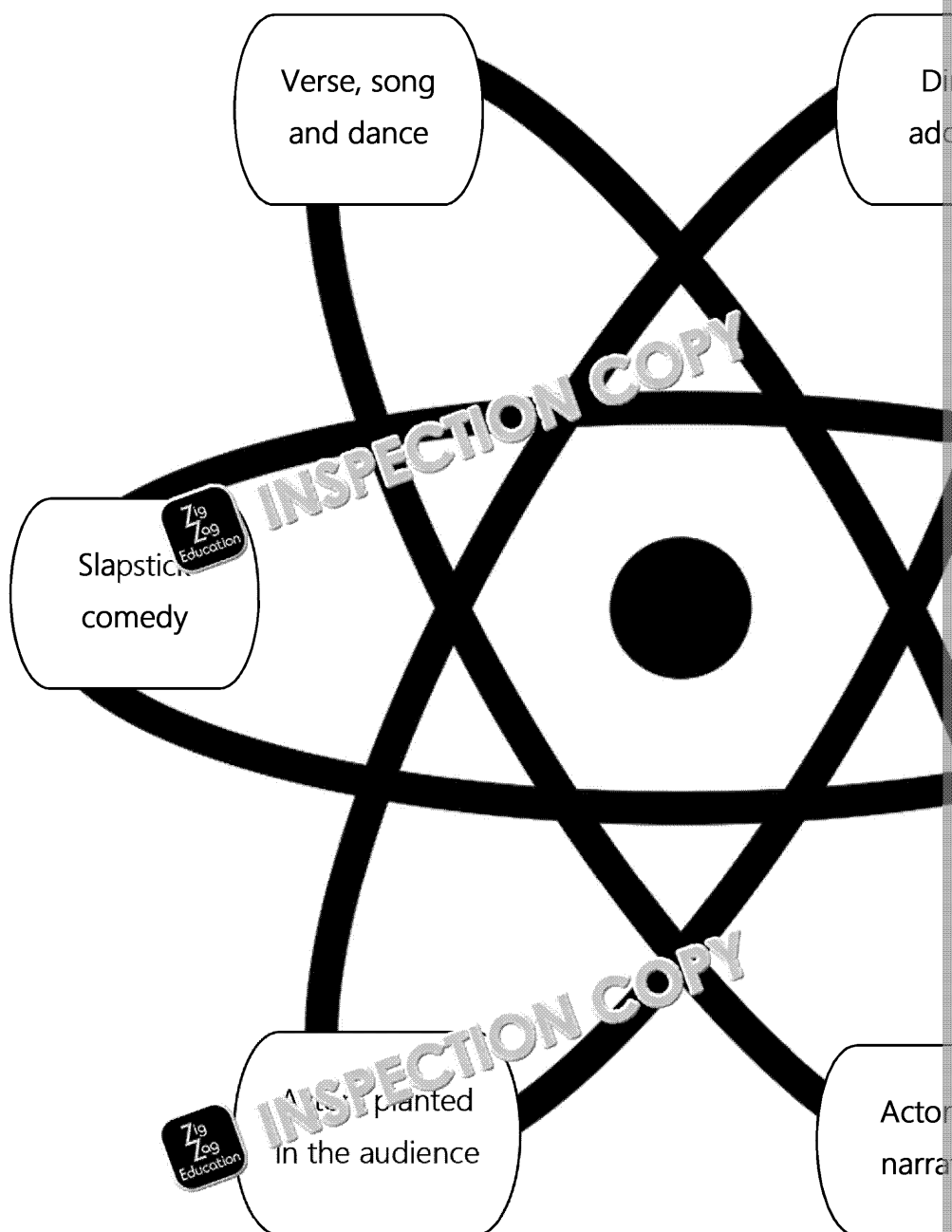


2: Uranium 235

Uranium 235 had its first showing in 1946. It was written in response to the official account of the development of nuclear weapons. It was released after the States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Two of the actors with Theatre Workshop had scientific backgrounds. C. MacColl and Joan Littlewood developed a production designed to tap into the national anxiety around the discovery of atomic energy.

They first tried to put everything they could about atomic energy – not just the science topics! Nonetheless, the fast-paced, episodic production, a montage of theatrical techniques, many of which had their roots in the company's earlier work, was a success. The image below (can you tell it's an atom?!) illustrates the show:



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Discuss

Read what Ewan McColl wrote about the play below:

“

In *Uranium 235* we had again returned to the agit-prop style of the 1930s, but this time we had moved into its rich deposits of theatrical ideas. We had, so to speak, struck gold. There was sufficient raw material to fashion a kind of play needed to deal with the complexities of modern life and atomic physics.

... a whole variety of styles were used; indeed the clash of different idioms was a distinctive feature of the over-all style.

How does one describe such a piece? An episodic play? A documentary? A twentieth-century morality play? Almost any of these descriptions would be incomplete. In some ways it resembled the playing of a good jazz ensemble. As has often been stated, solo instruments take turns in exploring the theme, each one restating the theme in a different way.

In *Uranium 235*, however, an actor was expected to be a trombone at one moment, next and then to be a trumpet and a piano playing counter-melodics. The rapidity of rapidly changing scenes in which they were called upon to dance, sing, and to parody themselves doing all sorts of things.³

As a whole class, discuss what you think he meant by comparing the styles in *Uranium 235* to a jazz ensemble. Ensure you understand some of the musical terms used, e.g. episodic/morality play; chordal structure; counter-melodics.

Task

As a class, choose a recent news story or current affairs topic. Then, create two or three ways to present the same information, such as:

- Agit prop presentation style with slogans and songs, as in the Living Theatre's *Uranium 235*
- Direct address to the audience
- Slam poetry
- Choral speaking
- A TV game show
- Serious, naturalistic drama
- News broadcast (radio or TV)
- A documentary-style presentation

You can, if you wish, use some of the methods used in *Uranium 235*, such as dance/movement or planting actors in the audience. Show your content to the class and discuss ways in which you could combine everyone's ideas into a dramatic presentation. You should aim to focus on presenting the message in a way that is both clear and powerful.

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³ <http://www.wcml.org.uk/maccoll/maccoll/theatre/theatre-workshop/>



Assessment Top Tip

In this exercise, you will have applied Joan Littlewood's techniques to you do the same when interpreting your chosen performance text, as this skills to realise artistic intentions in performance).

3: Richard II

The 1955 production coincided with the Old Vic production directed by Joan Littlewood because Littlewood wanted to showcase her alternative classical drama. With a cast of 14 compared to the Old Vic's 45 and a certainly got the attention she craved. Eschewing the usual pomp and classical theatre, Littlewood's approach to casting, text and staging was King Richard was portrayed as an overtly effeminate man who selfish position, and she cast a female actor in the role of Prince Edward. Littlewood's *aesthetic and political approach*, in which the actors playing Mowbray actually spat at each other in the opening scene, couldn't have been in the Old Vic's 'traditionally elegant, poetic version'.⁴

The play divided critics and audiences. Kenneth Tynan, a respected theatre critic, reported that the actor Harry Corbett's king was 'a flutter of puff past'. Melvin, who later became an actor and played Geoffrey in the film version, describes seeing it, and, the following year, Littlewood's *Edward II*:

“

The play we saw was Richard II, and Richard was played by Harry Corbett. Much later in his life he was to become Steptoe in that very famous series. Richard II was being presented at the Old Vic with John Neville playing Bolingbroke. Stratford was run on a shoestring, so there were no long golden cloaks, no great long processions coming on stage – just raw Elizabethan theatre. We were on the edge of the seat the whole evening. Elizabethan language was a moment, rather than on the breath. I considered that to be the first moment of modern theatre. It was gobsmacking. Now, we were taken back the next year when *Edward II* was done on a sloping ramp, the width of the stage. Oh, now, I had a different experience and neither had many other people. Designed – as was Richard – by the resident designer John Bury, who went on to work at the National Theatre. He had a map of England painted on the floor, so when Edward was centre stage, he was in the centre of his England. On, it was wonderful! Now, I am going back to the Old Vic and I've seen a classical production that comes up to either of the

⁴ Joan Littlewood's *Theatre* – by Nadine Holdsworth, p. 93

4. A Taste Of Honey

In 1958, 19-year-old Shelagh Delaney sent Littlewood her first play, *A Taste of Honey*, with a note that stated: 'I am sending this play to you for your opinion. Would you, as whatever sort of theatrical atrocity it is to you it means something to me, adapted the story from a novel she was writing ten weeks after seeing Rattigan's *Variation on a Theme*. Delaney had been unimpressed with what Rattigan had portrayed the homosexual characters in *Variation*, thinking it better. The play's central character, Jo, is a 17-year-old working-class, neglectful 'semi-whore' who lives in a grim Salford bedsit. Jo gets pregnant and stands with her father. When he abandons her, she is taken care of by her mother.

Two weeks later, Littlewood started rehearsing the play, although not all of what Delaney had written. Dispensing with the fourth wall, Littlewood added her own: a music hall style of direct address to the audience, and entrance provided by a live jazz trio. *A Taste of Honey* is now regarded as a masterpiece.

The world of the play is important. *A Taste of Honey* is set in the run-down north. Stage directions and quotations at the beginning of Act 1 give the surroundings:

- 'A colourless flat in Manchester'
- 'a lovely view of the gasworks'
- 'It's freezing!'
- 'an unshaded electric light bulb'
- 'the roof's leaking'
- 'You'll find the communal latrine and washhouse at the end of the road'

Task

Not all of Littlewood's plays were colourful 'pageants' like *Uranian*. She could do social realism just as effectively. *A Taste of Honey*'s stage is as gritty and as authentic as its Salford setting. Decorate a shoe box which encapsulates the dingy and uninviting atmosphere of the flat and its surroundings. You could find some fabric to line the box with and add pictures and objects. What colours and textures predominate?

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5. Oh! What A Lovely War

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“

It was a momentous year. In 1963, we had the Profumo scandal, the National Theatre company was created under Laurence Olivier, the Shakespeare Company became a major force with Peter Hall's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. But over and over again, in the east end of London, an equally devastating impact. It was *Oh What a Lovely War* and its impact that it viewed the first world war from the perspective of the common soldier, counterpointed songs from the period with grim battle statistics that were shown on a newsreel tape above the stage.⁵

Even if you have never heard of Theatre Workshop, it is likely you have seen a successful production, *Oh! What a Lovely War*. This 1963 satire of World War I, in the style of a seaside revue, told through the speeches and songs of the war, 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' and 'Pack up your Troubles'. Littlewood's *absurdity, the vulgarity of war*. It later transferred to Broadway and was made into a film, directed by Richard Attenborough.



Assessment Tip

If you are using Joan Littlewood as your chosen practitioner for your device, *Oh! What a Lovely War* is essential! It contains loads of Littlewood's theatrical ideas that you can explore practically to document in your research report, and shows her use of performance from inspiration (in this case songs and statistics). This helps to demonstrate *skills to realise artistic intentions in live performance* in the process!

A Level

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⁵ Michael Billington, *The Guardian* newspaper theatre critic, writing about the 2014 Theatre Royal production of *Oh! What a Lovely War*.

What made this the landmark production of Littlewood's career?

- Perhaps it was the unique way she blended the aestheticism of European theatre practice with the earthiness of traditional English music hall, complete with the soldiers costumed in end-of-the-pier show Pierrot costumes which hinted at their commedell'arte roots.
- Perhaps it was because this was the first time the war had been depicted on stage from the ordinary soldier's point of view, much to the annoyance of the military top brass. In our information age, it can be difficult to appreciate how little people knew of the squalor of trench life; *Oh! What a Lovely War* dared to articulate the view that the Great War had been anything but. Rather, it had been a senseless tragedy of epic proportions. As Littlewood told her actors: *'Stop falling in love with it; it's not a sentimental subject. And don't ever mention a poppy in a corner field, where there's likely to be some poor bugger screaming to*
- Perhaps it was the incorporation of so many well-known songs of songs which were used to encourage recreation, boost morale in soldiers' minds off their cold and hunger.
- Perhaps it was that it incorporated the very latest in technology: posters and images, sound effects, a range of lighting and news-stills at the top of the stage behind the actors, presenting sobering statistics: deaths tolls, battles fought, or the average life expectancy of audience members commented on *'... the fact, never so clearly stated, that he had died in unimaginable squalor for Kitchener's pointing finger, for worthless mud, for patriotic lies, for the vanity of bad command*
- Perhaps it was that every theatrical technique which Littlewood had used with since her early days of political street theatre, right through *Taste of Honey*, was brought to glorious fruition in a flamboyant, show. Its blend of genres and acting styles, from agit prop to experimental juxtaposition of scenes – which included knockabout comedy to the trenches – generated rapid, dramatic shifts in tone and mood: at the **'collision montage'**.
- Perhaps it was because *Oh! What a Lovely War* was a genuinely collective effort – true ensemble theatre. Inspired by a radio documentary on the first draft script was rejected as 'rubbish' by Littlewood. However, the producers sent the cast away to research the documentary evidence and put it into the time. Such was the importance of improvisation in rehearsal period, that the show itself continued to change even after



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⁶ H Neill, 'When Did You Last See Your Father Cry?' *Times*, 18 March 1998, 41

Task

The title *Oh! What A Lovely War* came from a 1920s music hall song 'Oh! It's a Lovely War', which is one of the main songs in the production. Listen to the song, which your teacher will play you, then look up the lyrics for the whole song.

This, and other songs, were written by British soldiers during World War I. At first glance, the self-mocking lyrics espouse everything that is best about wry British humour: determination to keep up the morale, and soldiers who appear to have cheerfully resigned themselves to their fate.

But look a little closer... Can you spot the ironic, disillusioned undertones? How would a song like this suit the satirical presentation of war in Theatre Workshop's production of *Oh! What a Lovely War*?

How might songs like this assist Littlewood in presenting war from the point of view of the ordinary soldier, rather than the ruling elite?

Oh! It's a Lovely War

Up to your waist in water
Up to your eyes in slush
Using the kind of language
That makes the sergeant
Who wouldn't join the army
That's what we all end
Don't we pity the poor
Sitting beside the first

Chorus:

Oh! Oh! Oh! It's a lovely war
Who wouldn't be a soldier
Oh, it's a shame to

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Chapter 3: Her Artistic Intentions

"I do not believe in the supremacy of the director or even the writer. It is through collaboration that the art of theatre survives and thrives."



If there was one thing Joan Littlewood hated, it was the snobbery of the establishment. Fiercely anti-establishment in her political as well as in her artistic life, she rejected the highbrow conventions of theatre which was run by – and for – the conservative elite. For Littlewood, theatre belonged to *everybody*, not just the upper classes. It was a place which boosted the well-being of the lower classes, especially if it focused on issues which concerned them, and did not just reflect the conservative tastes of middle-class audiences.

Post-war British theatre was culturally conservative, with its hierarchy of undemanding drawing-room comedies, and performances of Shakespeare seen merely as star vehicles for leading actors of the day.

There were to be no stars in Joan's theatre. She wanted actors to be free of any pretensions to 'luvvie-ness'. Known as the director who hated acting, she was rude about some of the most famous actors of the day. She thought that if someone was not acting, then this was bad acting. She employed untrained actors who shared her approach and commitment: to create an ensemble, a group of people who would work together as a group and create a shared approach to the work. Everyone was equal, whether writers, directors, technicians, designers or actors. There was no hierarchy. Everyone was part of the decision-making process. Egos were forbidden!

Even as artistic director, Littlewood saw her role more as a facilitator than a director. Her approach even encompassed living arrangements. Earnings were shared and everyone was expected to commit to the collective and its aims.

Her refusal to play by the rules extended to her approach to the classical canon. She was aware of Shakespeare – or any writer of text. Words on a page were a starting point, not a fixed entity.

Popular theatre – a definition

Many theatre directors and practitioners have found their inspiration in the concept of Popular theatre, which originates from the French, 'theatre populaire', and is a form of theatre for social change. The 'popular' part of it means people – or the common people. It is often aimed at people who don't go to the theatre either through lack of interest, lack of education, lack of affordability, or all three, which is why popular theatre is performed in different communities rather than expecting their audience to come to the theatre.

⁷ Hodge, A (Ed), 1999, *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge), pp. 14–15

Task

Which of the forms below would you put into the category of popular

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**Commedia
dell'Arte**

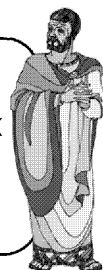


**Shakespeare's
plays at the
Globe**



Cabaret

**Ancient Greek
theatre**



**Punch and
Judy**



Circus



Assessment Top Tip

This exercise will help you to understand the influences on Littlewood's theatre and how she adapted these for her audiences. Bear this in mind when rehearsing your text! If you do, you'll hit AO2 (Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intent) - a good thing!

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Chapter 4: Her Theatrical Purpose and Practice

'Art is not a mirror which to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.'



Littlewood dreamed of a British theatrical revolution, not only in terms of *what* she created with her company, but also *who* she created it for. She wanted to provide theatre for the working class; she had no interest in pandering to middle-class tastes. Her working-class audience and fiercely left-wing politics shaped Littlewood's vision and practice.

The working class had, like Littlewood, experienced plenty of war and hardship, but there was still reason for optimism. Despite the upheavals of the First and Second World Wars, Britain seemed as divided as ever; rationing meant that daily life was tough, and the threat of atomic war lurked in the background. These were the conditions that shaped Littlewood in her political fight for a more equal society.

London commercial theatre could not serve Littlewood's purpose, which is why in the early days had to be taken out on the road (although she was later based in Manchester after the purchase of Theatre Royal, Manchester). She had plenty of time to spend the early days of her career perfecting the methods of Instant Theatre.



Instant Theatre

Instant Theatre was an early form used by The Red Megaphones, a theatre group formed by Ewan McColl in his pre-Littlewood days.

Instant theatre involved travelling from place to place; for example, the cotton mills in Lancashire, where workers were striking in protest at the introduction of new looms.

Their method was efficient: they would arrive at a mill, collect facts from the workers during the morning break, then write and rehearse a play to be performed at lunch time in the factory gates. With no time for elaborate sets or fancy costumes, the performances were short, direct and uncomplicated, with basic props and costumes – a bit like a sketch show!



For all web links, go to zzed.uk/9152

⁸ Believed to be Brecht, although the origin of this quote is disputed:
<http://www.philipchircop.com/post/8473310418/art-is-not-a-mirror-held-up-to-reality-but-a>

Instant Theatre Fun!

- 1) Form teams of two (three in a group works just as well).
- 2) In your pair, make 10 card strips containing lines of arbitrary quotes from plays, films, TV programmes, novels, songs, adverts and speech quotes from one of the texts you are studying for other areas of the



Assessment Tip

A Level

would be a great opportunity to start deconstructing your extracts and be used as inspiration for a devised piece! (AO1 – create and develop a text) keep a record of how the exercise went, and how it developed your understanding and/or Littlewood's techniques, as you have to show how you explore research report.

- 3) One pair starts the game by distributing their cards face down around the space. They then choose another pair to play the game (you may choose the choosing for you!). Everyone else in the class should make up the space.
- 4) The game begins when the selected pair enters the space. They will have no idea what characters they are playing, or what the scene is.
- 5) The first actor begins the 'play' by picking up any card. S/he then delivers an opening line of dialogue, with the appropriate emotion and physicality.
- 6) The second actor picks up a card and responds with whatever is written on the second line of dialogue, building the scene and creating a relationship. And so on.
- 7) Once all cards have been used, the performing pair distribute the cards around the space and choose another pair to be the actors.
- 8) The exercise continues until everyone has had a go at being actors. The winners are the pair who create the most believable and entertaining scene.

Instant theatre is a very small sub-species of political theatre. Joan Littlewood's philosophy and principles of political theatre in a much wider way. She was interested in the political theatre developments in Europe at the time, but they bizarrely – did not seem to travel well over the water to British soil.

The main point here about political theatre – and, by default, Joan Littlewood's – is that it is the total opposite of a 'pleasant evening out'. Political theatre does not suspend their collective disbelief, or settle comfortably into their seat and let the experience wash over them. Political theatre is the dramatic equivalent of a purpose, like Littlewood's, was to encourage people to participate, to feel empowered to change and to participate in political activity. Political theatre is dominant in the forces. Political theatre speaks to its audience –

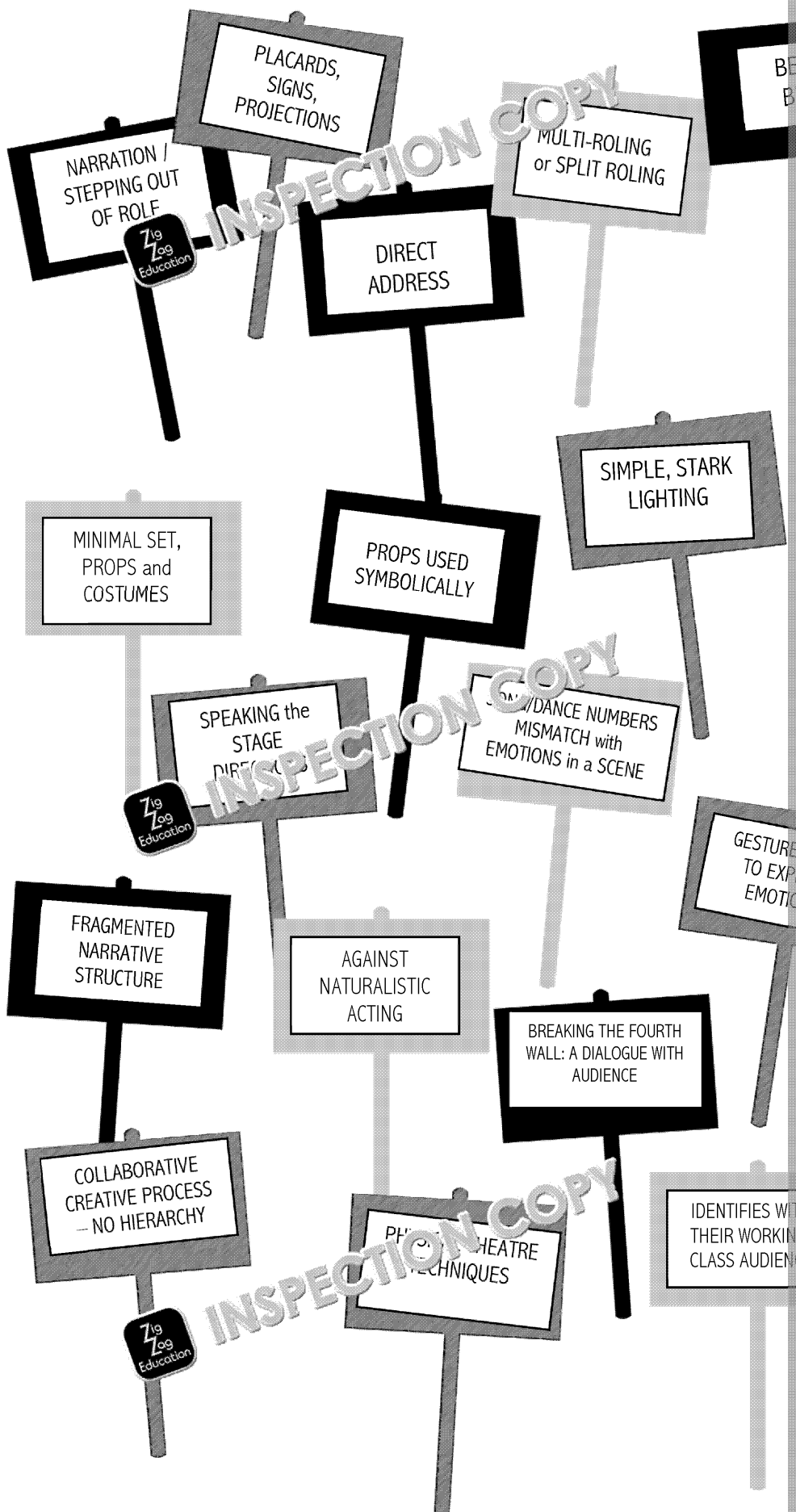
Learning about political theatre would require a resource bigger than

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A Crash Course In Political Theatre



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Here are a few political theatre exercises for you to

- 1) **CAN YOU HEAR ME?** In pairs, stand opposite your partner or partner. Pick a quote or couple of lines from a play (perhaps your text for the year) or song. On your teacher's signal, everyone must try to communicate this message to your partner. When your teacher says 'stop', what happened.
- 2) **MUSICAL PAIRS.** Your teacher will instruct you to walk around the room to music. When the music stops, you need to get into pairs as quickly as you can. Each pair must create a statue which demonstrates an opposite, such as summer and winter. When the music starts again, the pair that was in a statue pose is out, and the game continues until only one pair remains. When the exercise has been completed, discuss how far your statue represented the opposite. The same exercise can be done with themes from your text.



Assessment Top Tip

This activity is a great way to start practically analysing themes from your text. Take notes of what you find so that you can report on and analyse this practical in your research report! (AO1 – Create and develop ideas)

- 3) **MUSICAL MUDDLE.** Get into two groups. Group 1 makes a list of five well-known songs. These could be anything, e.g. nursery rhymes, music from a current chart topper. There should be a range of styles. Pressure everyone is familiar with the tune and the words. Group 2 is given together four or five emotive speeches or short scenes – perhaps from a play. Swap lists. Group 1 starts to act out one of the speeches/scenes. Group 2 should shout out one of the songs from the list when an emotional climax is reached. The actor or actors should immediately break into the song, returning to complete their speech when the song is finished.

When the exercise has been completed, discuss the effect of the juxtaposition of the song and the scene.

- 4) **STAGING THE STAGE DIRECTIONS.** On the next page is a list of stage directions from Bernard Shaw's *St Joan*. As a class, allocate parts and discuss how you could assist the actors playing Joan, Robert and the Steward to create the atmosphere of the scene.

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Joan appears in the turret doorway. She is an able-bodied country girl dressed in red, with an uncommon face; eyes very wide apart and bulging, an imaginative people, a long well-shaped nose with wide nostrils, a short upturned mouth, and handsome fighting chin. She comes eagerly to the turret, having penetrated to Baudricourt's presence at last, and full of hope as to the result. She does not check or frighten her in the least. Her voice is not only a hearty coaxing but is very appealing, very hard to resist.

JOAN [bobbing a curtsey] Good morning, captain squire. Captain: you have my armour and some of my things, and send me to the Dauphin. Those are your orders.

ROBERT [straggled] Orders from your lord! And who the devil may you be? and tell him that I am neither duke nor peer at his orders: I am squire of the king's orders except from the king.

JOAN [reassuringly] Yes, squire: that is all right. My Lord is the King of France.

ROBERT Why, the girl's mad. [To the steward] Why didn't you tell me so?

STEWARD Sir: do not anger her: give her what she wants.

JOAN [impatient, but friendly] They all say I am mad until I talk to them. But it is the will of God that you are to do what He has put into my mind.

ROBERT It is the will of God that I shall send you back to your father with lock and key and thrash the madness out of you. What have you to say to that?

JOAN You think you are a squire; but you will find it all coming quite different when you see me. I am not a squire.

STEWARD [appealing] Yes, sir. You see, sir.

ROBERT Hold your tongue, you.

STEWARD [abjectly] Yes, sir.

ROBERT [to Joan, with a sour loss of confidence] So you are presuming on my name?

JOAN [sweetly] Yes, squire.

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Here is the same extract, but this time it has been adapted so that the stage directions have been switched in to the past tense. Allocate parts as indicated, including the new role, the 'Stage Direction Actor'. Read the lines as you would in a play, but however, actors must also read out the stage direction applicable to their part (and emotion). When the exercise has been completed, discuss how the

STAGE DIRECTION ACTOR *Joan appeared in the turret doorway. She was of 17 or 18, respectably dressed in red, with an uncommon face; eyes very blue, often do in very imaginative people. A long well-shaped nose with wide nostrils, but full-lipped mouth. A handsome fighting chin. She came eagerly to the courtyard to the court's presence at last, and full of hope as to the result of her fight, in the least. Her voice was normally a hearty coaxing voice, very hard to resist.*

JOAN *bobbed a curtsy.* Good morning, captain squire. Captain: you are to go and see some soldiers, and send me to the Dauphin. Those are your orders from my lord.

ROBERT *spoke in an outraged tone of voice:* Orders from your lord! And from me! Go back to him, and tell him that I am neither duke nor peer at his orders: I will take no orders except from the king.

JOAN *said, reassuringly:* Yes, squire: that is all right. My Lord is the King's squire.

ROBERT *said:* Why, the girl's mad. *He then said to the steward:* Why didn't you tell me she was mad?

The STEWARD *replied:* Sir: do not argue. I will give her what she wants.

JOAN *was impatient:* They all say I am mad until I talk to them. I know the will of God. I will do what He has put into my mind.

ROBERT *said:* It is the will of God that I shall send you back to your father's lock and key and thrash the madness out of you. What have you to say to that?

JOAN *responded:* You think you will, squire; but you will find it all come to nothing. I would not see me; but here I am.

THE STEWARD *appealed:* Yes, sir. You see, sir.

ROBERT *snapped:* Hold your tongue, you.

THE STEWARD *was abject:* Yes, sir.

Then ROBERT said to Joan, with a look of confidence: So you are a squire, are you?

JOAN *replied:* Yes, squire.



Assessment Top Tip

Adapting stage directions in this way is a great way of deconstructing and developing your ideas for a devised piece. (AO1 – Create and develop ideas)

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Chapter 5: The Innovative Nature of her

I'm a saboteur or something or other, but not

Joan Littlewood confounded the post-war theatre scene with her innovative approach. She upset about that. Her heart and soul belonged to her work. For much of the time, she followed her instinct for experimentation, freshness and a spirit of invention.

Ensemble

Littlewood is credited for developing ensemble theatre in England. True ensemble theatre is more than actors working together, collaboratively, on one project. True ensemble is a group of people who share the same values, who live together in a community, creating theatre within a theatre 'home'.

To live and work as a cooperative required all the members to share their savings and resources. Every body's office earnings were shared equally amongst the members.

The most vital element of the ensemble ideal was the collaborative approach to a democratic way of working which avoided the supremacy of the director or fawning over 'star' actors.

In a cooperative, everyone had a role to play and there was no hierarchy, whether you were in charge of rigging or had the most lines in the play. Everyone had equal rights, too, to making policies and decisions about the ensemble, as well as artistic suggestions.

Ensemble working means that everyone can bring their ideas and skills into the mix and is possibly one reason why Littlewood's output was so eclectic.

Ensemble actors also develop a huge amount of trust in each other. Working and living as a community means working through the daily niggles and fall outs and learning how to respond to others in a supportive and genuinely. The qualities of ensemble are fed into the quality of their work.

Research

Devising is part of most Drama and Theatre syllabi but it's a relatively new way to create theatre, and was pioneered by practitioners such as Joan Littlewood, Caryl Churchill and Peter Hall.

Littlewood would start the devising process by sending Theatre Workshop members out to get as much information as they could on the relevant topics.

Oh! What a Lovely War was devised by all the members of the company; Littlewood did not even want to put her name on the programme.

Everyone contributed to the research, discussions, ideas and improvisations, which resulted in a production that was the 'culmination of the company's work'.

DEVISING is when a theatre piece is created without an existing text. Text may be used in a dramatic way, as a stimulus, but the production as a whole is not pre-written. No playwright present in the devising space.

Research is part of the process and this could involve research into historical facts; the meanings behind a poem; a social issue; a news story; a piece of music; a question; a story you've heard; even a comment someone made. Research is a key part of the creative process. As well as providing the material to work with, it also authenticates your work.

⁹ Peter Rankin. Peter Rankin interview. 29 November 2007.
<https://research.gold.ac.uk/12256/1/Burt%20PhD%20Thesis%202015.pdf>

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Blank Slate

Create a piece of theatre from the actors you have in your class. Even your teacher is allowed to hand you a stimulus!

- What do you start?
- What do you need to get?
- What is the process?
- What are the problems?

Set yourself a time limit – say, one week of lessons – presenting your work.



Assessment Top Tip

If you found the above exercise terrifying, that's because the process of devising is a key skill for professional companies! It's great preparation for your devising, as it encourages you to work collaboratively and show that you have the skills to work effectively with others (this is a key skill in AO4 in the process!).

A Level

The importance of ensemble-building should never be underestimated. Games and exercises, especially if you feel you haven't got a script, but they are a valuable element of the process, to:

build trust and
feel safe

learn to engage
with others, to
give and take

promote
listening and
concentration



discover new
skills and
talents

experiment,
even if you fail

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Everyone stands in a perfect circle, facing into the centre. This works very closely together. On your teacher's command, break away from the circle to touch the wall, then run back to form the perfect circle again. The same as you were before, so it's a good idea to check where your feet are before you start again, but without talking!

In groups of 3-4, take a freeze-frame of a scene from a well-known fairy tale. The goal is to guess the title of the fairy tale just by looking at it. Ideas include Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, or The Princess and the Pea. You can also be done with scenes from Shakespeare's plays, films, historical moments, or current events.

In groups, choose a place associated with a lot of activity, such as a restaurant, a tennis match or a theme park. Perform a scene from your play in slow motion. The trick is to make movements as precise as possible and all moving at the same pace. You can do this in silence, or add some sound effects, producing slowed-down vocal effects!

Singing rounds is an enjoyable way to work together. Try 'Three Blind Mice', 'The Farmer in the Dell', 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat', or 'Burnin' Round the Tree'.

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Chapter 6: Littlewood's Working Methods

"I don't see myself as a theatre director. The give me a pain – like directors who say "move", down my legs and use stylised bloody costumes grown with the role or the actor. No I can't stop never could."¹⁰

Joan Littlewood's working methods were unlike anything else experienced in theatres. The core of her method was her belief that training did not just because an actor had left drama school and started work. She was aware of the methods of top drama schools such as RADA, whose cerebral approach produced extremely articulate verse-speakers, but paid no attention to the integrity of the voice. She called this 'talking-head acting'.

The methods used by Littlewood were eclectic and varied, but laid the foundation for the working methods of future generations of theatre companies. The Littlewood School (University of Essex) evolved from Littlewood's teaching methods.



Assessment Top Tip

Make sure you make notes on the practical exercises below and add them to your portfolio. These exercises put Littlewood's rehearsal methodologies into practice, so you can be preparing your performance. This will satisfy both AO1 (*Make connections between texts and practice*) and AO2 (*Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions*). Note that



Assessment Top Tip

Understanding Littlewood's rehearsal techniques will help you take influence over your own performance. This will ensure you hit AO2 (*Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions*).



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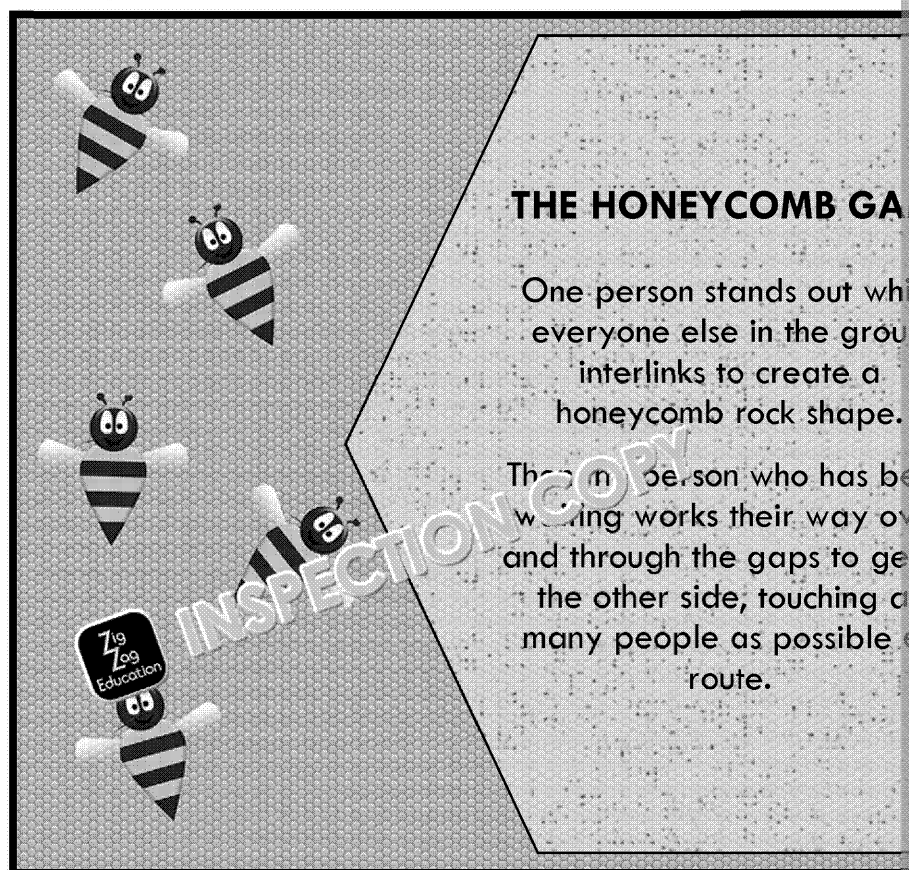
¹⁰ *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* – by Elizabeth Schafer, p. 16

Games and Physical Exercises

Games and physical exercises are a great way to warm up the body, get group dynamics and encouraging actors to make the mental switch from everyday routine) into the world of the drama studio.

All drama teachers have plenty of games up their sleeves, but in the studio students should be able to research and introduce their own games as part of class – childhood games such as Musical Chairs, Stick in the Mud or Clapping Games are firm favourites.

This game, based on a similar one invented by Joan Littlewood, is great for breaking down inhibition.



Having played this, discuss why you think Joan Littlewood would choose this particular:

- 1) How does it fit into her ideas for ensemble working?
- 2) How does this game fit in to what you have learnt so far about her?



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Improvisation

Improvisation follows on naturally from games. It was the starting point for many productions and served a number of functions:

- 1) In what has been described as Theatre Workshop's 'house style of physical contact (and) challenging and confronting improvisation', Littlewood to build her ensemble of actors.
- 2) To develop a script. This method was used in adapting *A Taste of Honey* around Delaney's dialogue.
- 3) Improvisation was also used as a way of creating a rough outline before adding the final text.

Here are three different ways to improvise, Littlewood-style:

Improvisation for Observation

One person enters the space and creates the atmosphere of a space or situation: a waiting room, a funeral, a museum, a cinema queue – just by the way they move, at which they walk and any gestures they make.

Slowly and silently, the other students join the lone student, using the same technique, interacting with others silently. They may not necessarily have guessed what is going on, but nevertheless, something will come out of it.

Improvisation with Sound and Brushstrokes

Any script will do for this exercise, but a good way to get the gist of this one is to take a known film and tell the story of the film in increasingly shorter and shorter time periods: five minutes, then two minutes, then one, then 30 seconds.

It is astonishing how quickly you find this concentrates your mind on the essence of the story.

Improvising around a Script

Taking any script as your starting point, find a few pieces of dialogue – or a scene such as an argument is usually a good choice – and then play the scene without the script, and without worrying about any of the lines being right or wrong.

You will find that your dialogue focuses on the emotional arc of the scene, and offer some different ways of playing it.

PS: This is a great way to access Shakespeare's plays!

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¹¹ *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* – by Elizabeth Schafer, pp. 14–15

Units and Objectives

Magpie that she was, Littlewood also applied some of the elements of her work.

Units and Objectives are a way of chunking up acts and scenes into action, to make them more manageable. Every time there is a shift in a change in focus, or the entrance or exit of a character, that is a new

Within each unit there should be 1 objective, i.e. what your character scene and, therefore, the reason for our actions. If my objective is to action might be to play very loud music late at night. If my objective

Here is an example from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In this scene, Lady husband after he tells her he doesn't want to go through with the murder she wants to be queen (it's her **super-objective**; the one thing she wants and what drives her throughout the play)!

The monologue has been divided into units – which are a little arbitrary every actor/director may have their own ideas about some of the sub

Since Lady Macbeth's **objective** (what she wants from Macbeth) in this scene is to persuade her husband to kill the king, she uses a variety of tactics to achieve this. Each unit is given an **action verb**.

Lady Macbeth

Unit 1: You mean you've turned into a coward overnight

Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Lest 'twere my fault to starve? I dare not wait upon 'I would,'
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

Unit 2: That means you don't love me any more!

Unit 3: Are you really so scared of going after what you want so badly?

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You can, of course, do this exercise with any piece of text. Many directors sometimes for days, if not weeks – before even the first rehearsal, so it can be a time-consuming exercise!

Laban-based Movement and Voice Work

Laban's work was developed from his background as a dancer and choreographer.

Laban broke down the *way* we move into four different areas:



TIME – WEIGHT – SPACE – FLOW

Laban Exercise 1:

Start walking around the space. Vary your walk in the following ways (use the prompts):

TIME (speed/tempo): as fast as you can (without breaking into a run or bumping into anyone!). Imagine you are late for an important appointment, so you walk as fast as you can. Then, as slow as you possibly can, as if you have all the time in the world to get to your destination.

WEIGHT (force): walk in a heavy way, as if gravity is pulling you down. Imagine you are wading through thick honey; then as light as you can, as if the crown of your head is touching the sky, as buoyant and as effortless as possible.

SPACE (focus): move across the space in a very direct way, with laser focus. Imagine you're on a really significant mission or on your way to a very important meeting. Then, alternate this with a very indirect walk, meandering across the space. Imagine you are keep stopping to look at imaginary flowers, or engage people in conversation.

FLOW: Move around the space in a joyful, open-hearted way. Be as if you are being carried around by water. Greet everyone enthusiastically, with a big smile. Then, opposite, moving in a very bound-up way, as if you are anxious not to be noticed. If someone greets you, you might manage a curt nod.

When all the different styles of movement are put together, it creates a unique quality which Laban termed the **Eight Efforts**: Punch, Slash, Dab, Flick, Press, Glide, Wring, and Float.

Classifying movement in this way can help you to create a character's physicality.

Effort	Time	Weight	Space
Punch	Quick	Heavy	Direct
Dab	Quick	Light	Direct
Press	Sustained	Heavy	Direct
Glide	Controlled	Light	Direct
Slash	Quick	Heavy	Indirect
Flick	Quick	Light	Indirect
Wring	Sustained	Heavy	Indirect
Float	Sustained	Light	Indirect

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Laban Exercise 2:

What styles of movement utilise the eight efforts? Complete the chart start with the small, individual movement, then feel it connect to you has been done for you:

Punch	Imagine you're a boxing champion getting ready to defend. Stand up first – feel the thrust of your fist as it moves through the body as you prepare your jabs. Then walk to the ring and throw a whole body punch.
Dab	
Press	
Glide	
Slash	
Flick	
Wring	
Float	

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Chapter 7: The Performance Style / Theatrical Convention and the Philosophy of Theatre

'... she changed the face of British Theatre'

From the *Uranium 235*, with its characters such as the Puppet Death, dancers waltzing in between knockabout comic routines and atomic fusion... to Lorca's *Blood Wedding* which incorporated heightened expressionistic dream sequences and stylised lighting design... to the which formed the basis of the set for Marlowe's *Edward II*, to the Pie of *Oh! What a Lovely War*... nothing about Littlewood's performance a 'convention'!

The philosophy behind Littlewood's experimental techniques was her with fresh eyes, including – especially – the classics. She wasn't interested in pieces; she aimed to highlight the contemporary relevance of everything.

Discuss

'There's so much in the Will; we've got to see it'

What do you think of this (colourful!) statement by Joan Littlewood? Consider it alongside a section from Theatre Workshop's manifesto.

'The great theatres of all times have been popular theatres which reflected the struggles of the people. The theatre of Aeschylus and Sophocles, of Jonson, of Commedia dell'Arte and Moliere derived their inspiration from the art from the people.'

We want a theatre with a living language, a theatre which is not of its own voice and which will comment as fearlessly on society as did Beckett and Aristophanes.'

Years of experimental theatre-making culminated in Theatre Workshop production: *Oh! What a Lovely War*. The following tasks will help you explore the performance style which Littlewood is remembered for.

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For all web links, go to zzed.uk/

¹² Linda Regan, *Rogues & Vagabonds* 23.9.02

¹³ www.michaelarditti.com/non-fiction/joan-littlewood-making-a-scene – written for the *Independent*

Task

Create a 'museum corner', displaying an exploration of some of the key issues employed in *Oh! What a Lovely War*. This could include:

- Posters for traditional seaside end-of-pier Pierrot shows.
- A mock-up programme for a Music Hall show.
- Pictures of WWI soldiers in the bunker (or perhaps this one of the Christmas Day truce, which featured in the show).
- Ticker tape: paper strings containing some of the most sobering statistics of the war to make a news billboard displaying relevant facts.
- Pictures and information about some of the key figures of the time e.g. the Prime Minister David Lloyd-George; Field Marshall Douglas Haig.
- Lyrics, sheet music (and, if possible, recordings) of WWI songs.
- Military insignia and medals – your school may have some useful props, or you could make some.
- Quotes from the script, such as the MC's line: *'We've got some sorrow for you, a few battles and some jokes.'*¹⁴

Discuss

What is the effect of juxtaposing cheerful posters and songs with the horrific reality of war?

To explore the effect of this juxtaposition further, head on to the next section.



CLOWNING AROUND

This is a Theatre Workshop rehearsal exercise. It will help you to understand the silliness of the Pierrot characters to comment on a serious issue.

Create a scene based on a topic which wouldn't normally raise any laughs – a health issue such as poverty, violent crime or eating disorders; or a recent situation conflict.

Make sure your scene contains:

- Clowns – with plenty of silliness and joking around.
- Songs – the heartier the better.
- Slow motion at one key moment.
- Sobering statistics about the issue – you could announce these new facts with the clowns, or write them on the posters, signs, or create your own version of ticker tape.



For all web links, go to zzed.uk/9152

¹⁴ <http://springboardarts.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/joan-littlewoods-theatre-workshop.html>

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Design

In Chapter 1 you will have read Littlewood's interest in the striking designs of Josef Albers and Adolphe Appia.

She found a kindred spirit in John Bury. With no training, and a complete lack of experience, Bury was given the job of driving the Theatre Workshop company van, painting props, making lamps and building bits of set. From 1935, he progressed to being one of the leading theatre designers of the twentieth century, eventually leaving Theatre Workshop to join Sir Peter Hall at the Royal Shakespeare Company. As his 2000 obituary stated, 'he ploughed the furrow in English theatre design and received opinion about how sets should be made'. It is certainly true that Littlewood's taste!

Like Littlewood, Bury rejected fussy, over-produced stage sets and wasteful design practices. His work – with Littlewood – was stark to the point of being almost abstract, using light to highlight architectural shapes and structures such as ramps, stairs and doors. The set for *Richard II* was a map of England as big as the stage. Light had never been used before – using pinpoint and side-lighting – not to illuminate the stage, but to create tension and mood. Some Theatre Workshop productions used light to conceal the backstage area, so the bare brickwork and radiator pipes were in contrast, the sets for productions such as *A Taste of Honey* were realistic.

John Bury was also influenced by European theatre practices, such as the use of a fixed approach to theatre design, the use of newsreel (influenced by Piscator) and the use of pinpointing lighting techniques pioneered by the French Theatre National.



Assessment Objective 1: The Process to Performance and A Level

A good understanding of Littlewood's stage design is essential, as the visual impact of her designs to her audience every bit as much as all the other elements. The designs she used can help you justify decisions (even if you are performing). As a designer it is absolutely key for AO2 (Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions).

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For all web links, go to [zzed.uk/9152](https://www.zzed.uk/9152)

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/nov/15/guardianobituaries>

Chapter 8: Her Collaboration with other Practitioners

'I did an awful lot to improve i'bin work. I have
learned how theatre works.'¹⁶

Everything produced by Joan Littlewood bore the stamp of collaboration. Works such as Brendan Behan and Shelagh Delaney, theatre makers such as Ewan Parker within Theatre Workshop, where all the actors collaborated to find and explore, develop scripts and experiment with staging ideas.

Her 'workshop' approach was uncommon at the time, although 'workshopping' is now a part of theatre making, whether at A Level or in the world of professional theatre.

Littlewood believed in collaboration, but – as you may have discovered in the past – it may not always be the most efficient way of working, particularly when creating a play devised. Well, Littlewood discovered this too. What developed, by the time *The Cenci* was being produced, was a participatory style where Littlewood took on a directorial role by material produced and improvised by the members of Theatre Workshop. The play was structured and directed by Littlewood and she shaped the emerging dialogue. She guided the source material by providing reading material about World War I and the theatre to talk about their experiences and even bringing in an army drill sergeant to show how to do military marching!

Workshopping Text

Find a copy of *The Oldie* newspaper.



Task 1

- ✓ Choose five interesting images of people. You may be drawn to their facial expressions or postures.
- ✓ In groups, recreate the images as accurately as you can, in any order, capturing the emotions and the expressions you see in the pictures.
- ✓ Then, place the five images in a sequence which suggests a story.
- ✓ Try placing the images in a different order – does this suggest a new story?
- ✓ Next, present your sequence to music and find ways to move between the images.

Task 2

- ✓ This is very similar to Task 1, but instead of images you need to find five fragments of text which capture your attention. This could be the subject matter, the way the text is written, clever alliteration, metaphors, the rhythm of the words or particular vocabulary.
- ✓ Place the fragments in an order which could suggest a story.
- ✓ Find unusual ways to present the segments – play around with the order, use props, choral speaking, repetition, echoing, singing them... and any other technique you can think of.

¹⁶ Improving the work of Brendan Behan and Shelagh Delaney. The Oldie 2002.

Chapter 9: Influence on Other Practitioners

'Oh What a Legacy.'¹⁷

Joan Littlewood's influence continues to influence theatre practitioners. Today when we embrace and adapted her devising methods, her approach to developing material, and her willingness to use a range of performance spaces, the 15 Theatre School, established in 1961, still uses her training methods.

Today, Littlewood's influence is so pervasive it is easy to forget what a revolution she brought to post-war British theatre, in particular the techniques used by almost every company. Her influence on theatre, and on British culture, should not be underestimated.

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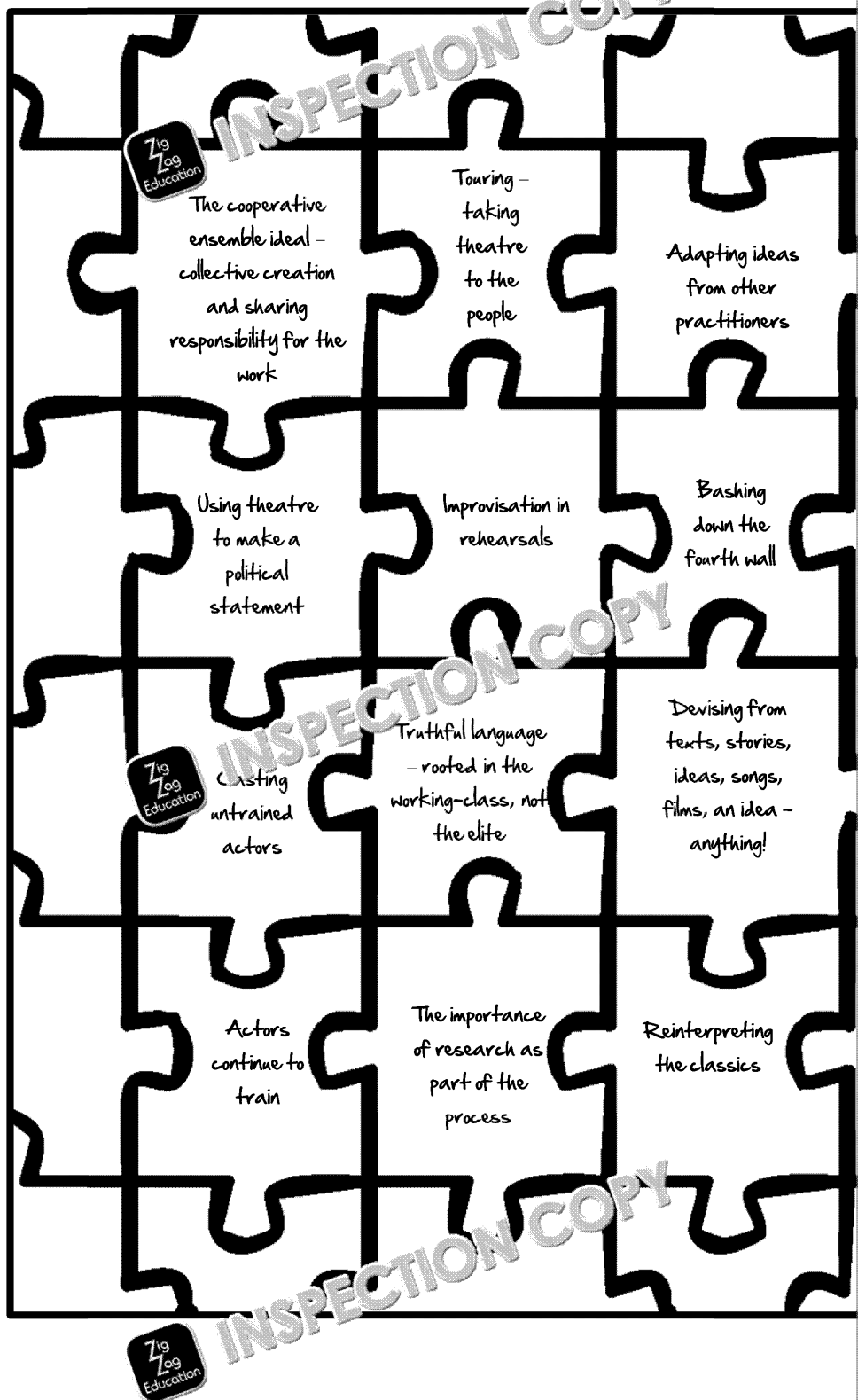
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¹⁷ Michael Billington writing for *The Guardian*, on the day Joan Littlewood would have turned 100.

Littlewood's Legacy

Ensemble Theatre Techniques



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Research Task

Kneehigh is a theatre company whose work has been particularly influential.

In pairs, produce and present a poster which summarises the work of Kneehigh and draws parallels between its work and the work of Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop.

You will need to include:

- ✓ Their background/history
- ✓ Venues where they perform and their target audiences
- ✓ Their working methods
- ✓ Key shows



Assessment Top Tip

A Level

Seeing how another theatre company has applied Littlewood's theories in process, and offer some great content for your portfolio! (AO1 – Create the differences and similarities between different practitioners and compare when writing your research report on your two practitioners. (AO4 – Analyse and the work of others)



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Chapter 10: Exam Section

AS Level Component 01/02 and 03/04: Process to Performance

For this component, you are required to study and practically explore a practitioner. You must first create a research report on the text and then prepare a group performance or a design realisation of an extract you will apply the methodology of your chosen practitioner. You will be evaluating your process for your performance or design.

This component is worth 120 marks and accounts for 60% of your total portfolio and research report are each marked out of 20 marks, with 10 awarded for the AO4 content in both (analysing and evaluating your own and others). The performance or design realisation is worth 60 marks.

Research Report

The report must contain research into the performance text and practice. It must also contain description and reflection on the practical exploration of the practitioner. It is recommended to be a maximum of 2,000 words.

Devised Performance / Design Realisation

The performance length should vary depending on how many students are in the group (2–3 minutes), two to three students (4–6 minutes), three to five students (6–8 minutes), six to eight students (8–10 minutes). As well as performers, students can take the roles of:

- Set designer (including props and multimedia staging)
- Costume designer (including make-up, hair and/or masks)
- Sound designer
- Lighting designer
- Combined sound and lighting designer

There can be a maximum of one designer per role per group, and eight students must provide cue sheets and design sketches alongside the performance or design realisation.

Portfolio

The portfolio is recommended to be a maximum of 2,400 words if written, or a combination of notes, photographs, annotated images and other media if recorded. You can also use a combination of forms in proportion. If your portfolio was exactly half recorded media and half written, you would need 12 A4 pages and 1,200 words. In the portfolio you should explore your understanding of your chosen practitioner and the development of the performance or design. You should also analyse and evaluate your decisions, the use of the practitioner and the design.

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Top Tips for Process to Performance!

You can apply the methodology of Joan Littlewood to your rehearsal in the following ways:

- 1) **Be clear on the purpose of your performance.** Who is the message are you trying to convey? Remember that Littlewood was made work for the working class.
- 2) **Be collaborative in rehearsals.** Littlewood did not believe an important part of the theatre, not even the director or writer. You should emphasise the collaborative nature of your rehearsals, e.g. suggestions were discussed and explored, and how everyone had a role to play.
- 3) **Use improvisation to develop your performances** and experience. Littlewood was a pioneer of this innovative approach to making a piece.
- 4) **Break down the script into Stanislavski's units and objectives.** Littlewood was afraid of using the methodology of other practitioners in her work.
- 5) **Focus on movement.** Littlewood was heavily influenced by Laban's movement into the Eight Efforts. Think about *how* and *why* you move.
- 6) **Don't be afraid of trying new things.** Littlewood was well known for her experimentation. Even if an idea doesn't work – at least you tried! Document your process in your portfolio and analyse why certain things worked and why not. (This'll give you some serious AO4 points!)

Remember to not only apply these points to your practical work, but also to your portfolio. You must document your contextual research and your analysis of the text in your research report, and in your portfolio you should discuss how Littlewood influenced the process and how you developed your work. Finally, evaluate and evaluate your own work.

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A Level Component 11/12 and 13/14.

Practitioners in Practice

For this component, you are required to study and practically explore performance text and two practitioners. You will first create a research report on the practitioners. You will then devise a group performance or create a design by the extract and practitioners. You will then create a portfolio documenting your process for your performance or design.

This component is worth 120 marks and accounts for 40% of your total report is marked out of 30 marks, and your portfolio out of 20 marks, with 10 marks awarded for the AO4 content in both (analysing and evaluating your own and others). The performance or design realisation is worth 40 marks.

Research Report

The report must contain research into the extract and two practitioners. It must also contain description and reflection on the practical exploration of the practitioners. It is recommended to be a maximum of 2,000 words.

Devised Performance / Design Realisation

The performance length is recommended to be between 15 and 30 minutes. The group must perform for at least six minutes. As well as performers, students must include:

- Set designer (including props and multimedia (staging))
- Costume designer (including research, hair and/or masks)
- Sound designer
- Lighting designer
- Composer and lighting designer

Groups should have between three and eight performers and a maximum of 10 roles. Design students must provide cue sheets and design sketches along with their work.

Portfolio

The portfolio is recommended to be a maximum of 3,000 words if written, or a combination of notes, photographs, annotated images and other media if recorded. You can also use a combination of forms in proportion. If your portfolio was exactly half collage of media and half written, you would need 15 A4 pages and 1,500 words. In the portfolio you should explore your understanding of the extract and practitioners and the development of the performance. You should also analyse and justify your decisions, influences and the final performance.

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Top Tips for Practitioners in Practice!

The fact that Littlewood and Theatre Workshop incorporated such a range of techniques gives you a *huge* range of choice in how to incorporate them into your own work.

The issue you will face is in *making* those choices. You cannot – and should not – do everything. That would be like trying to make a soup and throwing everything in the cupboard into the pot. It'll be a mess. Littlewood's work was a *deliberate* blend of techniques which:

- ✓ focused on the social, cultural, historical and political aspects of the texts and how they might be interpreted and communicate meaning for their audience
- ✓ used a range of dramatic elements which included movement, voice, lighting, sound effects, music and dance, costume and use of props, shaping the work to reflect what was current in society in her day

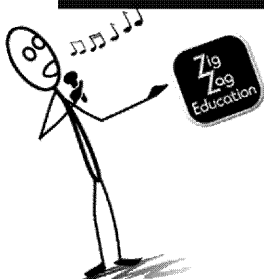
On the following page is an example of how you might apply Littlewood's approach to the play, *Julius Caesar*. Do not be afraid to deconstruct and then reconstruct the play in your own way.



You could explore the theme of power in *Julius Caesar* to the election of President Trump.

You could perform your play in the school canteen (health and safety considerations) where students gather and discuss the issues that are important to them. And keep the staging simple, too!

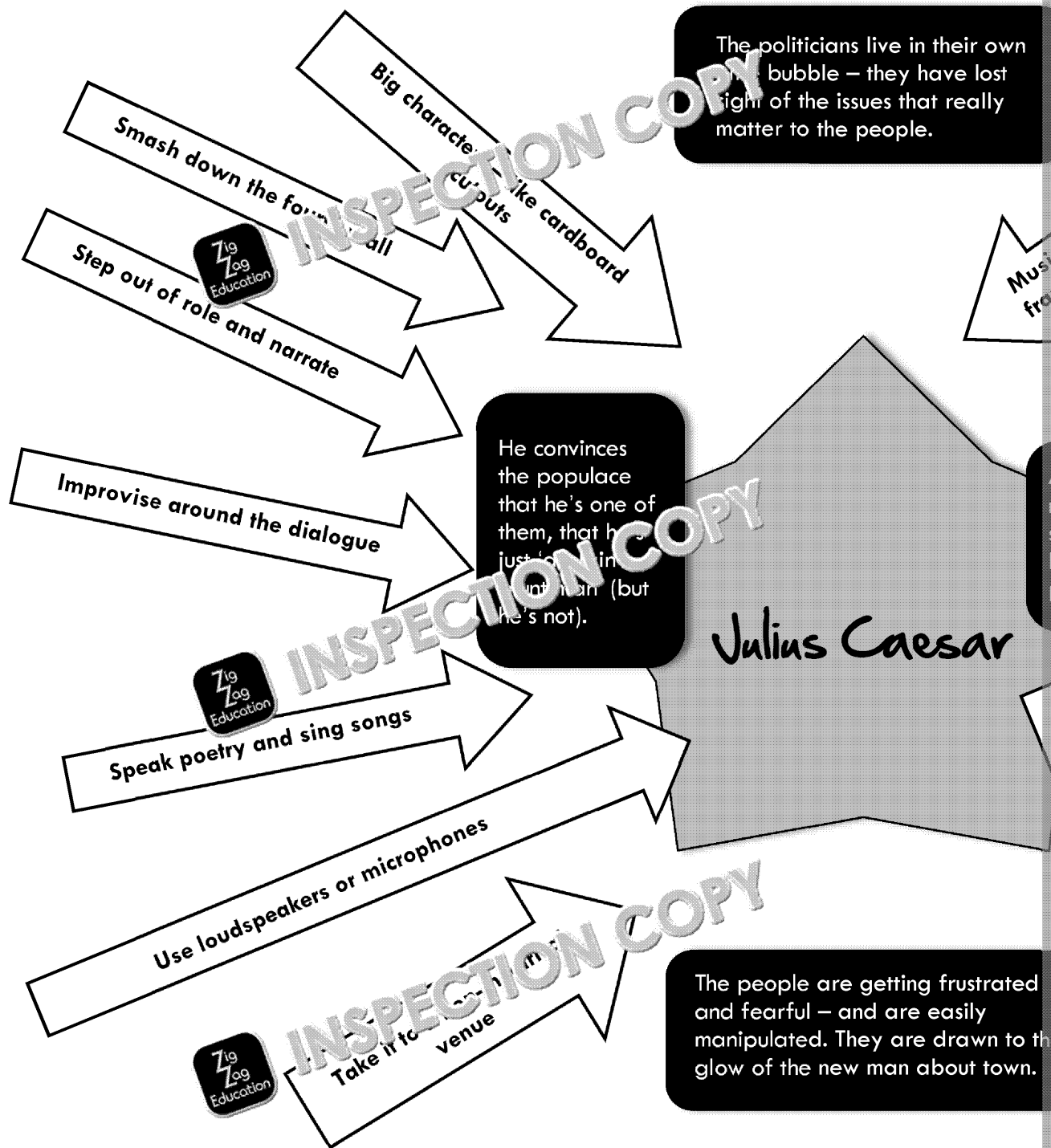
Song choice could incorporate something that everyone is singing at the moment and relevant. Or you can change the words to a well-known tune.



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Timeline

Historical Events	Biographical Events
	1914 Joan Littlewood born.
The General Strike. Hunger Marches. High unemployment.	1926
The Wall Street Crash.	1929
	1932 Joan Littlewood won a scholarship.
	1933 Left RADA – went to Manchester.
	1934 Met Jimmy Miller (Ewan MacColl).
	1934 John Bullion.
	1934 Littlewood and MacColl expelled from RADA.
The Spanish Civil War.	1936 Theatre of Action became Theatre of Action.
Munich Agreement.	1936 Fuente Ovejuna.
	1937 Lysistrata.
	1939 Living Newspaper Project.
World War II.	1939 MacColl and Littlewood blacklisted.
	1942 Theatre Union disbanded but a new company formed.
The Smyth Report.	1945 The company reformed as Theatre of Action and Moliere's The Flying Doctor.
	1945-53 Touring all over the UK and abroad.
	1946 First full-length play: Uranium 345.
	1946 Littlewood toured Shakespeare in the North to Manchester and Glasgow.
	1951 The Long Shift – play about transport.
	1952 The Travellers.
	1953 Company moved to a permanent theatre while they restored it.
	1955 Richard II at the same time as the first production of Mother Courage with Joan Littlewood in the title role.
	1956 The Quare Fellow.
Suez Crisis.	1956 John Osborne's Look Back in Anger at Theatre.
	1957 You Won't Always be on Top – sketch.
	1958 A Taste of Honey.
	1958 The Hostage.
Conservatives in power for the third time in a row. The PM, Harold Macmillan, declared: 'you've never had it so good'.	1959 Things Ain't What They Used T'Be.
	1961 East 15 drama school was established.
	1961 They Might Be Giants.
The Profumo Affair.	1963 Oh! What a Lovely War.
	1967 The Marie Lloyd Story.
	1972 The Theatre Royal Stratford East building.
	1975 Gerry Raffles died – Joan Littlewood was 61.

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BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

Cabaret – an entertainment show which takes place in a restaurant, includes many of the same types of act as a variety show, e.g. singing, they tend to be much more subversive and adult in content.

Carnival – carnivals are annual festivals which involve the whole community (and lots of tourists) in a celebration of music, dance, costumed parades, masquerades. Most people have heard of the big ones, such as Rio de Janeiro, or Venice, but there are many smaller carnivals which include some unusual events: in Brazil, where people throw rotten fruit at each other; in the Italian town of Ivrea, where a carnival held in Elzac, Germany, where 2,000 jesters parade through the streets. Carnival time is associated with a 'letting off steam' – a time when you can misbehave without being frowned upon. It's a time to pretend to be someone you're not (hence the masks).

Censorship – censorship on the British stage lasted for 231 years, a 1968. Prior to this, all new plays had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for his power to decide whether a play was ‘suitable’ for public performance. During the Second World War, anything which might damage the war effort was most certainly seen to contain inappropriate themes or references to sex and sexual relations, civil unrest, the Crown and politics. Playwrights who suffered censorship included Shaw and Ibsen.

Choral Speaking – speaking a text (such as a poem) as a group for speaking can involve parts of the text being spoken by a solo or small effects and variations in tone, pitch, volume and pace.

Clown – theatre has always included its fair share of clowns (often the buffoon of the show who lightens the mood with his or her perceived japes, although they often have far more intelligence and insight than characters in a play). They are often subversive characters who get away with behaviour and comments that would be unacceptable in a more serious play. Two traditional types of clown are the White Pierrot, associated with the Auguste clown, who, with his colourful clothing, is associated with circuses and horror films!

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Commedia Dell'arte – masked comedy originating in Italy, and popular in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Commedia is an improvised form with no standard plotline and featuring stock characters such as the foolish old man, the servant, the gullible shopkeeper, the arrogant doctor and the adventurous young man. A common plot followed the journey of two young people in love despite opposition and involved trickery, mistaken identities, love rivals and plenty of kissing.

Collision Montage – see **Montage**

Direct Address – when an actor speaks directly to the audience, whether coming out of character and certainly breaking through the fourth wall to acknowledge that they are watching a play.

E15 – East Angles, an acting school, established in 1961, and now part of the University of East Angles. Its teaching was based on the theatre practice of Joan Littlewood and the school continues to honour her methodology.

Ensemble Theatre – cast and crew work together to create a performance, rather than the 'star' of the show. The ideal of ensemble theatre is when a group of performers work over a period of time to create a distinctive body of work.

Episodic Structure – when a play consists of several short scenes, linked together in some way; for example, a character or a theme. Shakespeare used episodic dramatic structure in their plays, and it is also used for TV sitcoms. This structure includes the ability to span different locations and periods of time, and to involve many characters.

Expressionism – a reaction against realism and naturalism, expressionism foregrounded the emotional, subconscious undercurrents of a play and frequently featured taboo subjects placed within an episodic and disjointed narrative. Expressionist techniques were surreal and dreamlike; staging was barbaric, distorted, angular shapes, starkly lit to draw attention to light and shadow. The palette was often garish and clashing, masks and puppets often featured, and the characters were grotesque caricatures rather than recognisable characters.

Fourth Wall – the invisible barrier which separates the audience from the action. Breaking the fourth wall is when performers deliberately address or interact with the audience – it is a common convention in pantomime ('he's behind you').

Gestus – a Brechtian technique, gestus is a form of gesture, which signifies an emotion. For example, a person gobbling food is not simply gorging, but represents the greed of the capitalist system, or be representative of capitalist work ethic.

Heightened Speech – Brecht identified three levels of speech: first naturalistic, then singing, then heightened. Heightened speech involves a declamatory delivery (see Slam Poetry) and is often used in storytelling. Certainly not naturalistic or naturalistic.

Instant Theatre – this is theatre which pretty much does what it says on the tin. It is theatre created in a very short space of time. The form is explored in the book 'Instant Theatre'.

Juxtaposition – when two contrasting scenes, images or characters are placed side by side, forcing the audience to make a comparison. So, an image of a person in a suit next to an image of a person in a uniform, or an image of a person in a suit next to an image of a person in a uniform, or an image of a person in a suit next to an image of a person in a uniform.

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Kitchen Sink Drama – a genre that developed in the late 1950s in many areas of British culture, including plays, art and film. John Osborne is generally thought to be the first play in this genre. Protagonists were working class; poor, frequently unemployed and completely disillusioned. In the domestic settings of kitchen sink drama, the drudgery of life is defined by sexuality, homelessness, class and race.

Laban – Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958) was a Hungarian dancer, choreographer and movement theorist who formulated a dance notation technique now known as Labanotation. He originally studied as an architect but became interested in the way we move through space. He founded the Laban Dance Centre in Manchester – now the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama in London – which offers a range of contemporary dance training.

LGBT – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

Meyerhold – Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) was a Russian actor and theatre innovator. He experimented with different theatre styles in his plays, including symbolist approaches, mask theatre and commedia dell'arte. He later developed actor training called Biomechanics which was based on the idea that the human body is a machine and so all movement should be efficient. Training was physical, involving learning ballet, circus movement and gymnastics. He was also interested in industrial design, which embraced an industrial aesthetic: ramps, treadmills, moving walkways, wheels and even trapezes.

Montage – this is a term associated with film editing. When two images or sequences are placed side by side and they 'collide', this creates a new meaning; for example, two different sequences. In theatre, montage can create dramatic effect, particularly in short plays. It is a method commonly used in non-naturalistic, non-realistic plays, particularly in the plays of Brecht.

Multi-roling – sometimes called split-roling, this is when actors play multiple roles in a play. Multi-roling is associated with ensemble theatre practice and is often used by master thespians. The actor's role changes in between (or during) scenes as they move from one character to the next.

Music Hall – a popular form of entertainment between the 1860s and 1930s. Music hall shows enjoy a range of acts from singing and dancing to comedy and magic.

Pierrot – descended from commedia dell'arte, the Pierrot is a wistful character, often depicted by the white powdered face and loose tunic-style costume with big butterfly wings.

Pinpoint Lighting – a bit like a spotlight, pinpoint lights direct a very specific light onto the subject – for example, an actor's head.

Piscator – Erwin Piscator (1893–1966) was a German theatre director and producer. He strived towards 'Total Theatre' and his innovations were hugely influential on theatre practice, including projections of street scenes, newsreel, scaffolding and revolving stages, flashing lights (the equivalent of modern lighting), sirens and loudspeakers.

Placards – a placard is a sign or notice. People who take part in protest often carry placards and try to make them as visible as possible, with pithy, short, big, bold wording.

Popular Theatre – from the French, 'theatre populaire', this is theatre that aims to be accessible to all. Popular theatre includes Greek drama, commedia dell'arte, Shakespeare and, of course, the plays of Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop. In popular theatre's audiences are drawn from all sectors of society and in particular, they are encouraged to be participative rather than passive.

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Punch and Judy – rarely seen these days, unsurprisingly due to the Punch and Judy shows promote domestic violence, these are seaside characters, however, originated in Europe as string puppets.

RP – Received Pronunciation is a way of speaking without an obvious accent to be associated with wealthier, more-educated people who live in London and the south of the UK. Heightened RP is an exaggerated form. Some members of the heightened RP speakers.

Revue – a satirical sketch show combining comedy, dance and music, often written with new lyrics. The golden age of the revue was between World War I and the 1930s, but they are still popular with university students – including at the University of York.

Satire – by a comic device, satire can also deliver quite serious messages of ridicule, irony and send-up. A person, their beliefs, policies, ideas or even a government can be satirised. Political cartoons in newspapers are a familiar example, comedians who do impressions, or satirical TV shows such as *I Got News for You*.

Slam Poetry – the best (and only!) way to understand slam poetry is to watch it. It is a form of spoken word, often appearing in competitions or events, where the poet tells an emotional and very personal story. Two wonderful examples are Dan Snierson and Katie Makkie's 'Pretty'.

Slapstick – very physical, over-exaggerated comedy, often involving pratfalls, often violent falls, trips and chases. See: Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton (more recently) Rowan Atkinson and Lee Evans.

Stanislavski – Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1928) was a Russian actor and director who developed a system of actor training that is used extensively in the theatre world today. The core of his system was that actors should be able to create a character from within. Many people believe, erroneously, that this is the same as the American Method Acting. It is not. American acting teachers such as Lee Strasberg based their technique on what they had learned from Stanislavski, mostly using a form of Emotional Memory, which Stanislavski later abandoned.

Stylised – in theatre, this is a non-naturalistic technique to create an impression of reality rather than 'real'. Stage musicals are often very stylised, e.g. costume, movement, and vocal delivery. In a stylised production, movement and characterisation can appear artificial and cartoon-like.

Symbolism – this is when something is imbued with an abstract meaning beyond its original meaning. For example, in *Death of a Salesman*, the sound of a train symbolises – or represents – particular memories for the play's protagonist. A throne or crown symbolises power; colours can symbolise emotions or ideas. For example, but the colour symbolism in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is fascinating. The character's name, Blanche, means white, and she is presented at the start of the play as a 'pure' in character, even wearing white clothes. The men in the play do not symbolise their masculine vitality: and a piano is heard playing on the street.

Ticker Tape – like the horizontal stripe (called news ticker) of 'Breaking News' across the bottom of the screen during television news broadcasts, ticker tape transmits statistics and facts. It was originally a method of transmitting information by telegraph. It got its name from the sound the machine made as it printed out narrow strips of paper.

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Teacher Notes

Chapter 1

Timeline Activity

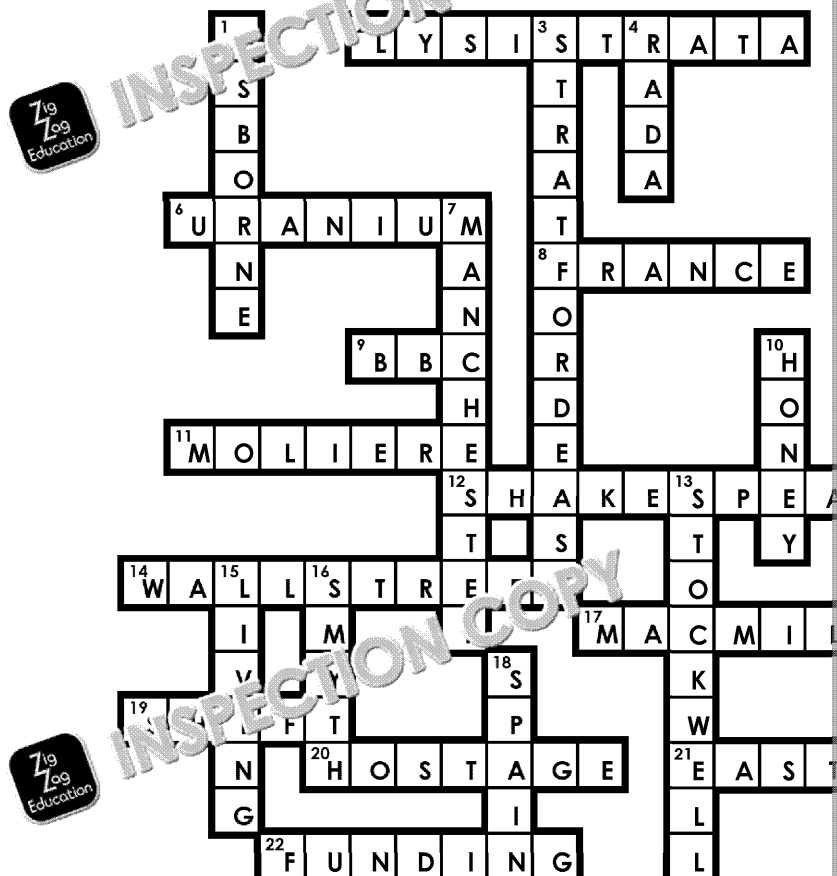
There will be a number of historical events (the Suez Crisis, the Profumo affair) with which students should be familiar and which can provide the basis for a research task – or they can explore these in the context of the plays which appear in Chapter 2.

The timeline activity can be done by copying out the material by hand. I suggest drawing attention to the links between political events and productions. A timeline of the 1930s to 1960s is in Appendix. Students should look out for links between events and the performances with which they are associated, particularly in the early, overtly political years of Theatre Action, Theatre Workshop and Cottesloe. They may need to quickly look up what some plays are about. For example:

- *John Bullion*, an anti-capitalist play, appeared five years after the Wall Street Crash
- Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna*, a play about a village uprising in defiance of a ruler, was going on in Spain at the time
- *Lysistrata*, which was performed by Theatre Union two years before the outbreak of the Second World War, in which a group of women go on a sex strike as part of a plan to stop their men going to war
- The 1939 *Living Newspaper* project followed the perceived political compromise of the 1930s
- *Uranium 235* was produced only two years after the Smyth Report on nuclear weapons
- *The Quare Fellow* appeared when capital punishment was still being used in the UK

They should be able to identify why Theatre Workshop seized on these events to draw attention to the social issues that have been trying to make.

Crossword Solutions



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Research Task



For a

1. Theatre censorship

The Lord Chamberlain is an office of the Royal Household. Under the Licensing Act 1737, he had the statutory authority to veto (or edit) the staging of any new play, or a modification of an existing play. If a theatre owner did so without permission, they could face prosecution. In 1844, the Lord Chamberlain's powers were extended; now, the Lord Chamberlain had to justify his decision, based on whether the play was 'of good manners, decorum or of the public peace so to do'. Theatres got round this by staging controversial plays in members-only 'Club Theatres'. Plays such as homosexual themes and bad language were banned. Plays such as Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* and Caryl Phillips's *Warren's Profession* were just two of the plays which came under the axe. The Theatre Censorship and the very new play, the full-frontal hippie rock-musical *Hair* opened in 1971.

2. Agitprop, Brecht and the Workers' Theatre Movement

The term agitprop, short for 'Agitational Propaganda', originated in communist Russia. It was an explicitly political message, including stage plays, films and pamphlets. It was sent to Europe and America, with left-wing touring companies performing plays in order to influence – if not alter – people's political beliefs using very direct techniques. The Workers' Theatre Movement, set up in 1926, was a national network. Ewan MacColl's troupe, The People's Theatre Movement (PTM) sketches. The work of Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop was hugely influential. Red Ladder is a contemporary theatre company with strong agitprop roots: www.redladder.co.uk

3. European Symbolism and Expressionism – Meyerhold and Brecht

Students should not be expected to cover much more than the main points here. The content to be:

- Expressionist theatre in Germany, which started in the early part of the twentieth century. The Expressionist movement in literature and art (e.g. Edvard Munch's *The Scream*).
- Expressionism opposed realism and naturalism in the theatre, contesting the truth of a character's inner mental state.
- A Marxist, Brecht, sought to make theatre that instructed and entertained. He was influenced by the German dramatist Erwin Piscator, who used projected newsreel film, loudspeakers and other techniques. <https://vimeo.com/19550097>
- Brecht went on to create his own form of theatre, and is probably most famous for his 'alienation' technique. He wanted audiences to watch theatre dispassionately and with detachment.
- Theatrical techniques included heightened/stylised movement; episodic structure; short scenes; sparse staging; stark lighting which created shadows; distorted, angular sets.
- The experimental director Vsevolod Meyerhold was one of the founding members of the Workers' Theatre Movement. A highly innovative theatre maker, he was influenced by commedia dell'arte. He used ramps, levels, platforms and mobile staging in his very non-realistic set designs. He also used the episodic structure of his productions.

4. Rudolf Laban

- Born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Rudolf Laban is famous for inventing what is today as Laban Movement Analysis. Laban's father was a high-ranking military officer. He joined the army as a career path and studied architecture in Paris. Here he became interested in the way moves through space. He opened dance centres in Germany before moving to England.
- His work has had a lasting influence not just for dancers, but also for actors, choreographers and health professionals. Laban classed human movement into four parts: Direction (up, down, left, right); Weight (heavy or light); Speed (quick or sustained); Flow (bound or free). He used these categories to help create character; for example, a very uptight character might move quickly and indirectly, while a relaxed character might move slowly and directly. Laban then created the 'Laban Movement Vocabulary' which are used with the four movement categories. For example, if a character twists their hands in despair, the movement is: Indirect, Heavy, Quick, Bound. This can be applied to vocal qualities, where some characters might 'dab' the words (light, direct, quick, bound) or have a very floaty delivery.
- In Theatre Workshop, Joan Littlewood drew on the work of Laban, adopting his ideas for characterisation.

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5. Adolphe Appia

- Adolphe Appia was a Swiss architect and stage designer, whose ideas on stage design influenced theatrical design practice. Born in 1862 (his father was the composer), he rejected the fashion for pictorial two-dimensional sets which were merely illustrations. His three-dimensional creations allowed him to integrate movement with light and shadow. He worked on operas of Richard Wagner and worked on many of Wagner's productions, focusing on the movement and music. To Appia, scenic design consisted of four elements: architecture, light, vertical scenery, actors, and light – the most important, unifying all the elements.
- Appia developed systems which allowed him to manipulate light in the same way as an orchestra.
- Joan Littlewood was inspired by Appia's work and incorporated the four elements into her productions. She particularly focused on light and shade, intensity and colour.
- Students researching Appia would be advised to produce a PowerPoint or similar presentation.

Chapter 2



1. Last Edition Task

1. An example of a living newspaper performance is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...> It illustrates the pace and episodic structure of a living newspaper show.
2. There is also a series on YouTube which gives an effective overview of the 'rules' of the living newspaper. Short individual parts starting with rule 1 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>
3. Some productions of *Oh! What a Lovely War* (including the film) use life-sized puppets. See <https://www.jessicaknight.co.uk/projects>

2. Uranium 235 Discussion Task

Students should be able to identify how a jazz ensemble uses its different musical styles and instruments into the spotlight, each exploring and interpreting the central musical theme. They should then link this to the stylistic elements of *Uranium 235*. This 'Limbo Jazz' YouTube video is an illustration of two jazz ensembles from contrasting cultural heritages playing together. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e85wO8rsCoQ>

Ewan MacColl suggested that the actors had a tougher job than jazz musicians, as they had to switch from one to another at speed (episodic), as well as bring different styles and components into a form that was entertaining to watch (pageant), had an important message (documentary).

Practical Task

Students should be encouraged to discuss the relative success of different presentation styles and include:

1. What difference would it make if you changed the order of the sketches?
2. What effect does pace have on the overall production?
3. What is the effect of keeping the final production short?

Students must also be encouraged to consider unconventional performance spaces – taking the performance to the audience rather than expecting their audience to come to them! Brecht's Theatre Company performed under a bus. If this is not possible, can they re-configure their performance space?

A final 'test' of the success of an agit-prop production is to focus on what it would look like if the students were to state the message of the theatre production in a poster, sign or banner. If they can't do this, they have not achieved success.

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4. *A Taste of Honey*



For all

Following Delaney's death in 2011, there have been several revivals of *A Taste of Honey* at Theatre and Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre. Educational resources containing ideas and activities are available from their websites:

1. http://d1wf8hd6ovssje.cloudfront.net/documents/TasteofHoney_Background.pdf
2. <https://www.royalexchange.co.uk/65-a-taste-of-honey-resource-extra/file>

The 1961 film of *A Taste of Honey*, and Ken Russell's *Shameless* about Delaney's Salford are

A two-minute animated plot summary can be found on the BBC Bitesize website:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/primary/zg7kqty/video>

Shoebox set



Ideas could include stone chippings to suggest the colour of the brickwork or a fireplace, a washing line; bits of paper scattered to denote untidiness; staining the 'walls' of the box with peeling wallpaper; a window cut out of one side with scrappy curtain material hanging

5. *Oh! What A Lovely War*

Pierrot: A stock character of mime, the sad clown, who embodies naïveté and is seen through for Littlewood's theme – oblivious to reality.

Music Hall: The BBC series *Good Old Days* ran from 1953–1983, and in it well-known comedians Morecambe and Wise, Danny La Rue and Les Dawson, performed music-hall favourites. iPlayer: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06rhv2r> and is a good example of the

Songs: These were real songs from WW1

Film: Although the film is generally regarded as inferior to the original stage show, it is the entire film is accessible on YouTube.

The archived BBC iWonder website contains comprehensive information about the musical 'Pack up your Troubles': <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3ypr82>

The same website contains information about the show itself with a short video sequence *Did Oh What A Lovely War shape our view of WW1?* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3ypr82>

More excellent material and images from the BBC Radio 3 website here:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01jv2wf/p01jskh1>

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Chapter 3

Popular Theatre Task

The answer is – *all* of them! And here's why:

Ancient Greek Theatre: going to 'the theatre' was a big social event for the ancient Greeks. They performed in a huge hillside structure called a theatron (seeing plays in this could hold up to 20,000 people). Competition with other plays and loud audience participation was encouraged! Tragedy was the most popular and appeal and included processions, costumes and sacrifices of goats in honour of the gods.

Commedia Dell'arte: Like the visual counterpart, the sitcom, commedia dell'arte had stock characters. Originating in fifteenth century Italy, commedia was performed by a troupe of actors. They improvised dialogue around familiar storylines, often tailored to a particular audience. A typical pair of young lovers, the innamorati, whose union was being thwarted by one or more antagonists, the innamorati were helped towards their happy ending by various servants, zanni, who provided (highly physical comic gags) throughout the show.

Carnival: A carnival is a festival, often held annually and lasting from several days to a week. It is a communal performance, where boundaries between audiences and performers are relaxed. It includes art forms, from dance, music and drama to puppetry and parades, as well as a lot of decoration. Examples include London's Notting Hill Carnival, the Venice Carnival, Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Carnivals are periods when the normal rules and norms of society are relaxed and are often permitted. Participants enjoy dressing up in masks and colourful costumes.

Circus: Circus has its roots in the gladiatorial contests of ancient Rome, providing entertainment in amphitheatres. Still highly physical in nature, many people will have either visited a circus or seen one up in their local area. The focus is on large-scale spectacle. Traditional circus skills include acrobatics, clowning, tricks involving animals and music within a big top. Cirque du Soleil is perhaps the most well-known contemporary circus troupe.

Cabaret: Cabaret has enjoyed quite a renaissance in recent years. It began in France in the 19th century and evolved into a popular form of entertainment across Europe and the USA. It usually takes place in venues such as clubs, pubs and small restaurants. Over the course of an evening, performers perform a variety of acts, including magical and comedy acts, musicals, and burlesque and drag shows, are deliberate themes. Many people have seen the 1972 film *Cabaret* starring Liza Minnelli.

Clowning: Everyone feels at ease around clowns, but that is rather their point. Like a court jester, the function of their irreverent and playful behaviour is to highlight some aspects about ourselves or the society we live in. Clowns come in many guises, not just those associated with circus performances. Ancient Greek theatre had rustic fools; commedia dell'arte plays included fools; Charlie Chaplin clowning around in classic films such as *The Kid*; and Joan Littlewood appeared in Theatre Workshop's *Oh! What a Lovely War*. Clowning involves a great deal of physical comedy and humour.

Music Hall: Popular from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, it is probably best described as a variety show – good, clean, affordable family entertainment. It included acts such as character singers, contortionists, ventriloquists, impersonators, comedy music, and performing animals. Famous London music halls were the Alhambra, the Empire and the Gaiety. Music hall reached a peak of popularity during World War I, with audiences encouraged to sing along to songs – the very same songs used in *Oh! What a Lovely War* – including the 1917 song 'We'll Sing in the Night'. This not only kept people's spirits up but rallied support for the war effort as well as entertainment. During the war, other forms of entertainment contributed to the morale of music hall; for example, the BBC, as well as radio, television, and film.

Shakespeare's plays at the Globe: For many centuries, the Globe – from the very poor to the very rich buying the more expensive cushioned seats – was a place of polite silence while the plays were performed. Audiences were a noisy bunch, clapping, cheering, or even booing during themselves. There was a high turnover of plays, which were tailored to the tastes for love, music, lots of laughs and no shortage of violence. Joan Littlewood was a direct Shakespeare's plays. She had little interest in the prevailing bourgeois approach to Shakespeare. She might say any other text she adapted for the stage. In an interview on the Essential Drama series, Nadine Holdsworth says: 'Littlewood was a great lover of theatre in all its guises, particularly the traditions. She saw the renaissance period, Shakespeare and his contemporaries as part of a tradition which was about getting the groundlings in as well as the aristocracies.' She was attracted to the characters of classic plays as well as parallels between the politics of Shakespeare's time and the politics of the 1960s.

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Punch and Judy: Punch and Judy shows are traditional seaside puppet shows, performed at such as festivals, fairs and children's parties. The entire show involves the anarchic Mr Punch characters, including his wife Judy, and often violently beating them into submission. Originating from Italy in the seventeenth century, Punch is a descendent of Pulcinello, a commedia dell'arte character. In nineteenth-century shows were performed by one puppeteer from within a mobile puppet house, with the audience from adult to children.

Chapter 4

Political Theatre Exercises

Exercises 1 and 2 are designed to help students understand gesture:

1. **CAN YOU TALK TO ME?** Most students, frustrated with their attempts to communicate, will use top, pantomimic gestures into their attempts to be understood!
2. **MUSICAL PAIRS.** Opposites can include: rich/poor; hero/coward; comedy/tragedy; high/low; love/hate; happy/sad; angel/devil; attack/defend; disease/health; past/present; innocent/guilty; first/last; parent/child; hot/cold.
3. **MUSICAL MUDDLE.** Shakespeare is laden with suitable scenes for this exercise. Examples include: 'The raven is hoarse...' from *Romeo and Juliet* (II.ii); Lady Macbeth's monologue 'The raven is hoarse...' (III.ii); 'Once more unto the breach...' from *Henry V* (IV.1); 'I have a dream' from *Antony and Cleopatra* (IV.xii); 'Once more unto the breach...' from *Henry V* (IV.1). Mine American writers such as Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams for emotional intensity. Strindberg and Ibsen will provide plenty of ideas. It would also be possible to use modern texts, for example, Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream'; the radio address by King George VI in 1940 'We shall fight on the beaches'; Emily Pankhurst's 'Freedom or Death' speech.
4. **STAGING THE STAGE DIRECTIONS.** Performing the adapted text will no doubt demonstrate the technique of (as Brecht said) 'acting in quotation'. Further by asking students to write the smaller stage directions on placards or signs and to speak them out loud.

Chapter 5

Blank Space

The end product is nowhere near as important as the process! Indeed, you may wish to show itself is performed. The point of this exercise is to illustrate just how challenging it can be. Students should be encouraged to reflect on the exercise afterwards. A discussion could be held about:

What methods worked – and which didn't? For example:

- ✓ **Choosing an idea:** if students spend half the week choosing an idea, they're doing it wrong! The biggest stumbling block to getting a devised performance on its feet as students go through the process of discussing ideas. If they gain nothing else from this exercise, they should learn to choose an idea that anything can be a stimulus – a snatch of song, an object, a comment, a gesture.
- ✓ **Research and development:** how did groups select and explore their chosen stimulus? Did they use brainstorming techniques, or decided to improvise around the stimulus. Did they use any other techniques?
- ✓ **Group dynamics:** did anyone emerge as a leader? Does it matter? Did the group work well together? Were all ideas considered?
- ✓ **Management:** how did the group manage to agree on themselves, resolve disagreements and manage the process?

There is a helpful article by David Laing in the magazine *Aesthetica* about how Forced Entertainment work: <http://www.aesthetica.com/experimental-theatre-provoking-ideas>

Ensemble Building Exercises

In the spirit of ensemble, students should be encouraged to research and lead games and activities are not solely teacher-led. A great resource is: <http://improvencyclopedia.com>



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Chapter 6



Games and Physical Exercises

There is no shortage of warm-up games and ice-breakers available in drama books and students to bring their own games into the classroom.

Improvisation

The exercise below (from Nadine Holdstock's excellent book on Joan Littlewood) is designed to encourage students to think about, and to perform, a key element of Littlewood's working method.

Once the groups have entered the room and got themselves ready to work, ask them to leave the room and do the first time. They should pay attention to the mood, atmosphere, as well as physical accuracy, such as who was standing next to whom and for how long, exactly what people said, how and to whom.

Units and Objectives

You can read more about how director Max Stafford-Clark uses actioning in this Out of Joint article: <http://www.outofjoint.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Max-Stafford-Clark>

Laban-based Movement and Voice Work

Rudolf Laban's assistant, Jean Newlove, was invited to work with Theatre Workshop as an instructor. She has authored two books about Laban, 'Laban for Actors and Dancers' (1978) and 'Laban for Teachers' (1980). She eventually married Ewan MacColl and had a daughter: the late singer-songwriter, Ewan MacColl. For more information about her at <http://www.jeannewlove.com/index.php>

Laban Exercise 1

You may find this exercise also works well with a variety of choices of music to move to.

Laban Exercise 2

Some ideas for exercises could include:

- **Punch:** Punching up a pillow. Breaking a window to get a dog out of a hot car.
- **Dab:** Painting a windowsill with a tiny imagined brush, putting on make-up or hair. Dabbing a bleeding wound. Tapping on a window.
- **Press:** A weight trainer, a bully being as dominant as possible, a marching army. Pressing a brick into wet cement. Giving someone CPR.
- **Glide:** Skating, skiing. A ballroom dancer. Swiping open an iPhone.
- **Slash:** Trying to get to the other side of a crowded train platform, or slashing your way through a swashbuckling pirate. Someone who is drunk trying to punch a rival but missing.
- **Flick:** Flicking a fly off your arm, using very precise hand and wrist movements. Flicking a match. The flick of long hair over the shoulders. The flick of a switch.
- **Wring:** Wringing a wet cloth. Becoming the cloth being wrung out. Tying or untangling a rope. Tying a bottle cap.
- **Float:** Move like a butterfly.

Taking It Further

Once students have grasped the eight efforts, you could build them into an improvisation exercise. Divide the class into groups of four. Ask each of them to create a character in their head which is based on one of the eight efforts. Give them too long to think about this – maybe 30 seconds – otherwise they might overthink it (if you have time for a bit of brainstorming). For example, they might play a breezy, vague person who has lost their bus ticket.

Then, they have exactly 60 seconds to create a scene where they have all found themselves in the same time. For example: a bus, a lift, a waiting room, a party.

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Within this setting they must create an improvised scene which includes some kind of on the bus is hogging the seats and won't let a pregnant woman sit down.

Watch each improvisation and the other groups must guess which Effort each student

Discuss this afterwards. How successful were the 'Effort' characters being presented? Laban method to develop characters in the future?

Chapter 7

Discuss

Ideally, students will be able to state that what Joan Littlewood wanted to 'scrape off' was the Shakespearean influence in mainstream theatre. Her alternative vision was unsentimental, and

To Littlewood, Shakespeare's plays were simply part of the popular theatre tradition. Shakespeare's plays' themes could connect with a contemporary working-class audience; for example

The Shakespeare plays she directed were:

- *Henry IV part 1*
- *Macbeth*
- *Richard II*

Shakespeare adaptations she directed for schools were:

- *As You Like It*
- *Twelfth Night*
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Clowning Around

After this task has been completed, there should be plenty of time for discussion about clowning and knockabout comedy with the chilling statistics of the 1970s slaughter which took

Students should consider TONE. Humour can be used for all sorts of things, from gentle poking to satire. They should understand how effective just posture can be and are able to embed this technique into their performance work. (AO1, AO2, AO3, and exploration)

Chapter 8

Workshopping Text

Brian Eno's music, e.g. *Music for Film* and *Music for Airports*, is perfect for this task.

Chapter 9



Kneehigh

Kneehigh acknowledge the huge influence of Joan Littlewood on their work. The Kneehigh website has information about how Kneehigh make their shows: <https://kneehighcookbook.co.uk> (you have to

Background:

Kneehigh emerged in 1980 from theatre workshops set up by a local school teacher. The original group of people who became involved were not professionally trained actors. They included students, a social worker, a farmer and an electrician.

Venues:

Another significant aspect of Kneehigh's Theatre Workshop is the early touring venues. Kneehigh took their shows to not just village halls but also outside, by the sea, in quarries and in woodland spaces. Despite their international touring commitments, they remain committed to their community in Cornwall.

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<https://kneehighcookbook.co.uk/adaptation/>

Working Methods:

<http://www.ist.co.uk/downloads/Kneehigh.pdf>

1. Warming up, which includes jogging in the woods and fields, playing games such as tag, and singing together.
2. Everyone's first responses to the story. This can include brainstorming questions, writing down the themes, saying what they do and don't like about it, the key moments, and what people think the story is!
3. Character work. Brainstorming continues and actors are encouraged to think of their characters. Then there is improvisation work focusing on key moments from the story.
4. Building scenes. After a couple of weeks, when some of the music is learnt, Rice starts building scenes – creating a storyboard and putting the scenes together.

Source material is vast and ranges from films to fairytale. The common denominator is that Littlewood is not afraid to rewrite and shares Littlewood's reverence towards the original. The reason why it did to Littlewood – is what works for the story.

Julius Caesar

A rather cheeky example of the way a song can be adapted for topical purposes is here <http://www.broadway.com/buzz/187985/watch-ben-platt-james-corden-more-naughty-donald-trump-matilda-medley>