



Drama

AS & A Level | Edexcel | 8DR0 / 9DR0



Joan Littlewood

A Complete Guide for AS and
A Level Edexcel

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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 unwavering 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 Edexcel specifications.

In the **AS** Edexcel specification, Joan Littlewood's work as a theatre practitioner can be used for Component 1: Exploration and Performance. In the **A Level** Edexcel specification, it can be used for Component 1: Devising, as well as Section C of Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice.

This resource could also be adapted to a range of BTEC L3 Performing Arts (2016) units including Unit 2: Developing Skills and Techniques for Live Performance; Unit 4: Performing Arts in the Community; Unit 15: Theatre Directing; and Unit 21: Improvisation.


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 Edexcel 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.

 For all web links, go to zzed.uk/7724

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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 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 theatre, and 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 1: Exploration and Performance	This unit is internally assessed.	For Section A of Component 1 you must explore, interpret and perform one key extract from a performance text using the methods of your chosen practitioner.
		Your performance will be assessed by your teacher. Your assessment will be based on your understanding of the text and your ability to perform it.

A Level		
Unit title	Description	
Component 1: Devising	This unit is internally assessed.	AO1, AO2
	Using an extract from a play text and a practitioner as your stimulus, you must devise an original piece for performance, or provide a design.	The performance will be assessed by your teacher. Your assessment will be based on your understanding of the text and your ability to perform it.
Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice	This is the final written exam and synthesises everything you have explored throughout the course. Your understanding of a practitioner is relevant for Section C: Interpreting a Performance Text, where you show how your ideas have been influenced by the theatre practitioner you have studied.	AO3 is assessed in your written exam.

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Chapter 1: Joan Littlewood's Life and the Social, Cultural Context she Worked In

'Theatre should be grand, vulgar, simple, practical, genteel, not poetical.'¹

It's almost impossible to separate Joan Littlewood's work with the social and cultural context in which it was produced. These were extraordinarily complex times. The 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 a period of 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 theatres were 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 movements like Expressionism, ensemble working, Brecht and agit prop, theatre was still largely made up of 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 performances, and crystal-clear received pronunciation.

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



Assessment Top Tip

Edexcel

In your portfolio, you should demonstrate how your research has been in the context of the social and cultural context your practitioner lived and worked in (AO1 – create and develop ideas). Make notes on the context in which Joan Littlewood worked and keep your notes for your portfolio.

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¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/24/arts/joan-littlewood-british-theater-pioneer-of-oh-w>

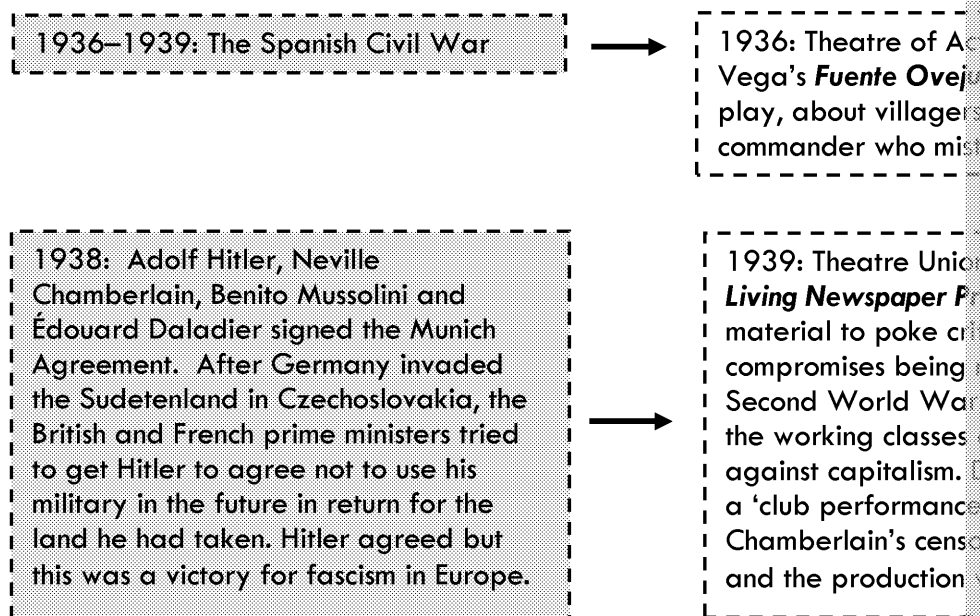
Timeline Activity

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

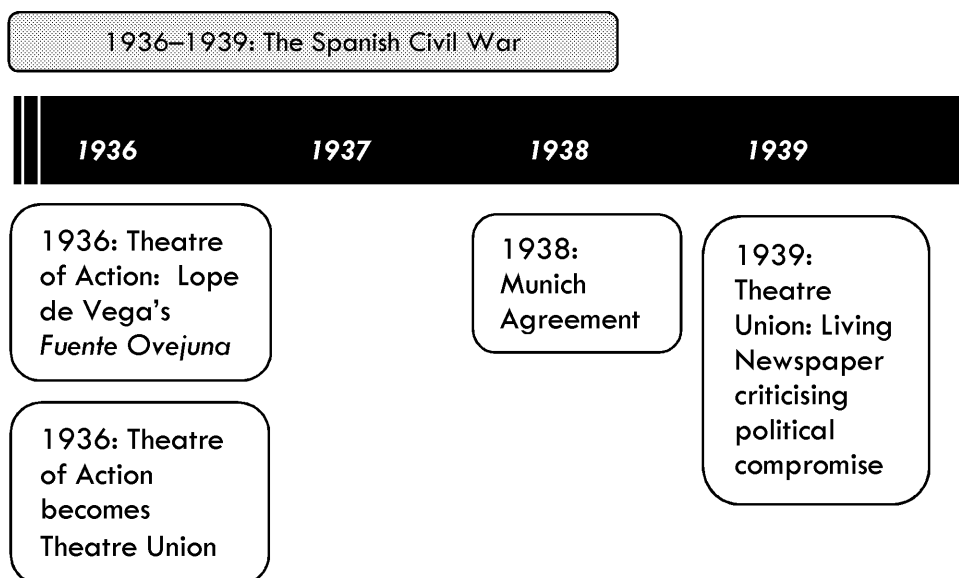
- a) a major historical/political event; or
- b) an event in Joan Littlewood's life and career.

Task 1

Cut out the squares and lay them out in a way that shows the links 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: **Mother Courage** with Joan 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 to the area of London to an area named after 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 Have a Father** by Henry Chapman – set in the 1930s.

1934: After **John Bullion**, Littlewood and MacColl were expelled from the Communist Party, accused of putting their art before politics.

1932: Joan Littlewood won a scholarship to RADA.

1956: Suez Crisis

1929: The Wall Street Crash.

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

1939: Outbreak of World War II

1952: **The Travellers**, written by MacColl.

1958: **The Hostess**

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

1949–52: 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, Lope de Vega's **Fuente Ovejuna**, a seventeenth-century play about villagers who collectively murder the commander who mistreats them.

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: **Johnny Noble** and an adaptation of Moliere's **The Flying Doctor**.

1934: Theatre of Action production, **John Bullion**. The play itself was about the 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 'club 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 **Lysistrata** which tells the story of a group of women who withhold 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.

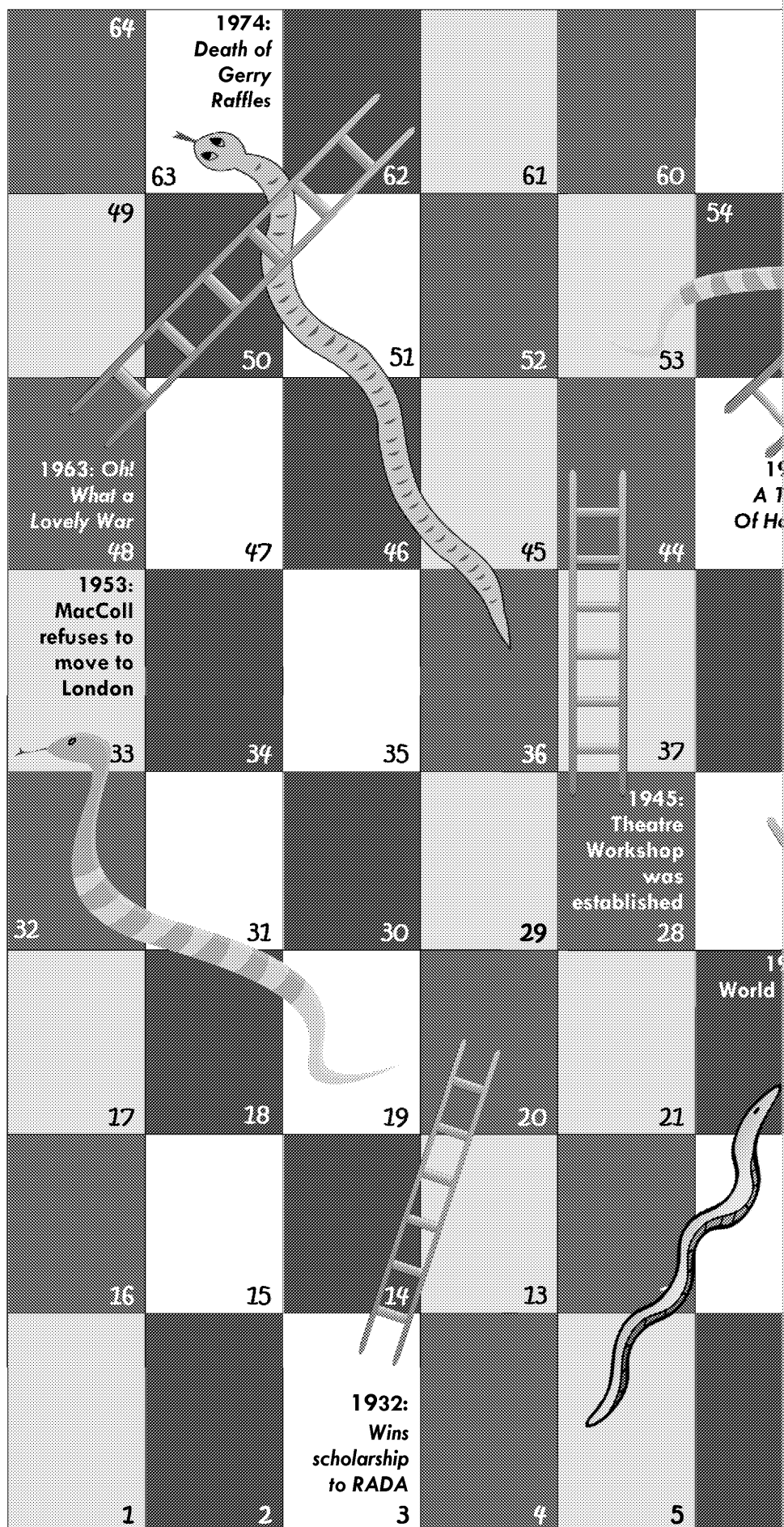
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Snakes & Ladders

Dice and counters not provided!



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Snakes & Ladders – Blank Board

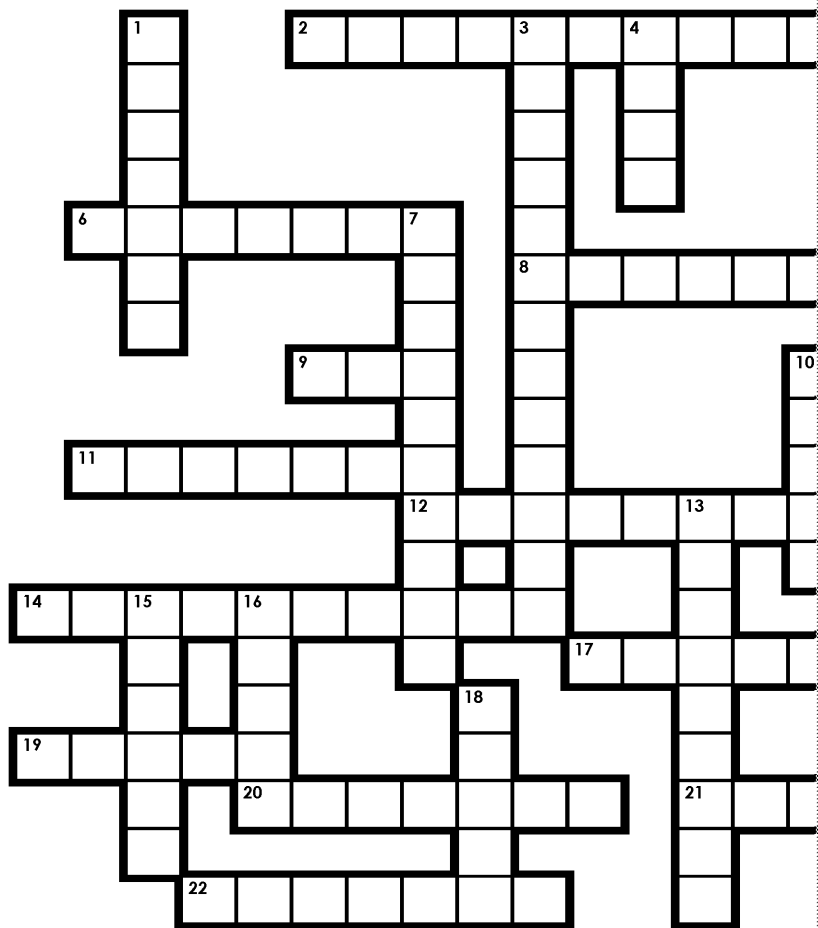
64	63	62	61	60	
49	50	51	52	53	
48	47	46	45	44	
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32	31	30	29	28	
17	18	19	20	21	
16	15	14	13	12	
1	2	3	4	5	

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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 was a long... (5)
- 20** 1958 play, '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 Anger? (7)
- 3** The location of the restored by Theatre Workshop (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 news (4)
- 16** This report about the school was released in 1945 (8)
- 18** Which country did she visit in 1936 and 1939 (5)

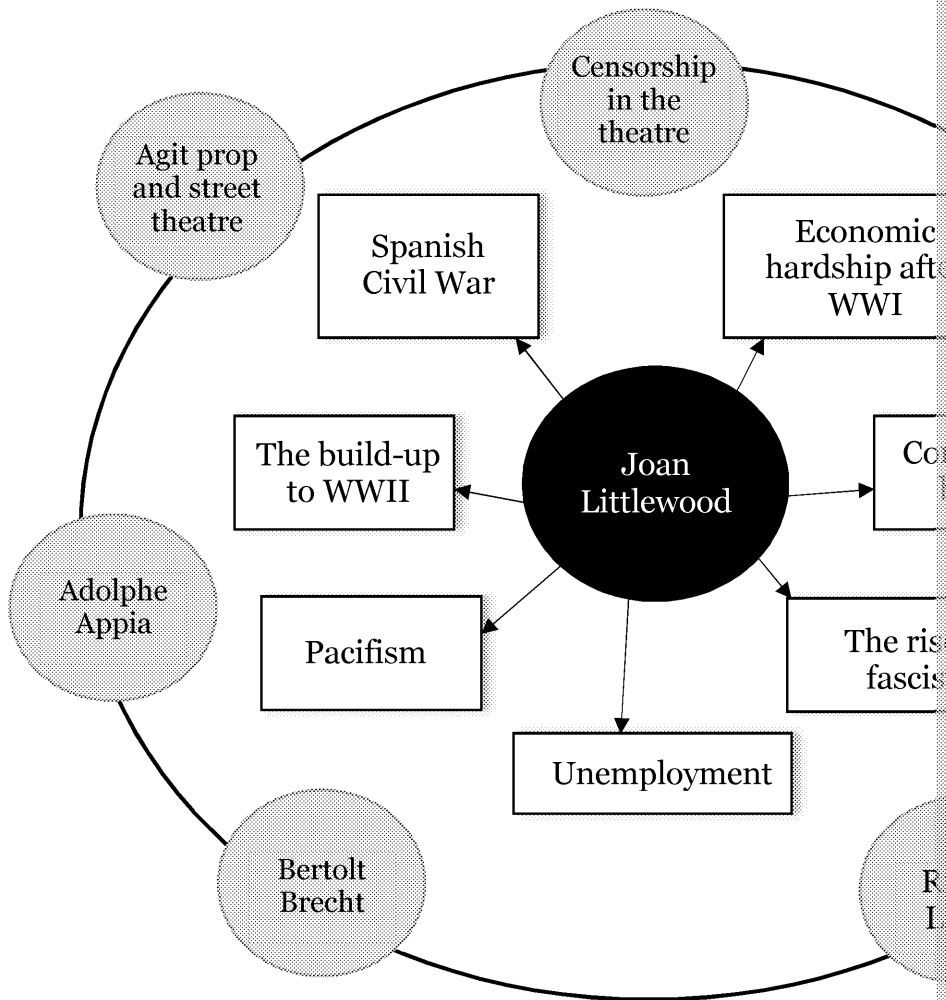
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Research

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



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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 be able to give a 5-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



Assessment Top Tip

Edexcel

In your exam you will need to outline how the work of your chosen theatre company is developed and performed (AO3 – demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how your chosen theatre is developed and performed). An understanding of the influences on Littlewood will help you to justify your application of her methodology. Make sure you take notes on other people's presentations, not just your own!

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Chapter 2: Her work – an Overview of Joan Littlewood with a Closer Focus on Key Moments

Jo: I hope to be dead and buried by the time I
Just think you've been living for forty
Helen: I know, I must be a biological phe
Jo: You don't look forty. You look a sort of w
sixty.²

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 she discovered, and discovering exciting new playwrights, such as Irish dramatist Brian Friel's *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's *A Taste of Honey*, a play about a northern white girl who falls pregnant after

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: the late 1930s / early 1940s; the mid 1940s; the mid 1950s; the late 1950s; and the 1960s, examining a production in each period.

1: *Last Edition*

The material for Theatre Union's 1940 production of ***Last Edition*** was inspired by 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 going to war in Europe.

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

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

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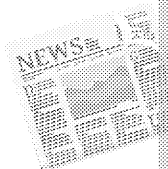
Task

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 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 like a newspaper headline, perhaps with a loudspeaker or a big sign.
- End with a call to action!

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



Living newspaper
say on the
Russia and
agitprop
toured
current
villagers
America
produce
Project

They call
naturalis
technique
fast-mo
format
events
race, ho

Living newspaper
with left
theatre
Federal
were pr
served



Assessment Top Tip

E

This task is particularly helpful for your devising component, where you can use real material and develop ideas for a specific audience (AO1 – Create and perform) and keep your audience in mind for this exercise. Your research, your aims and objectives will influence your performance.

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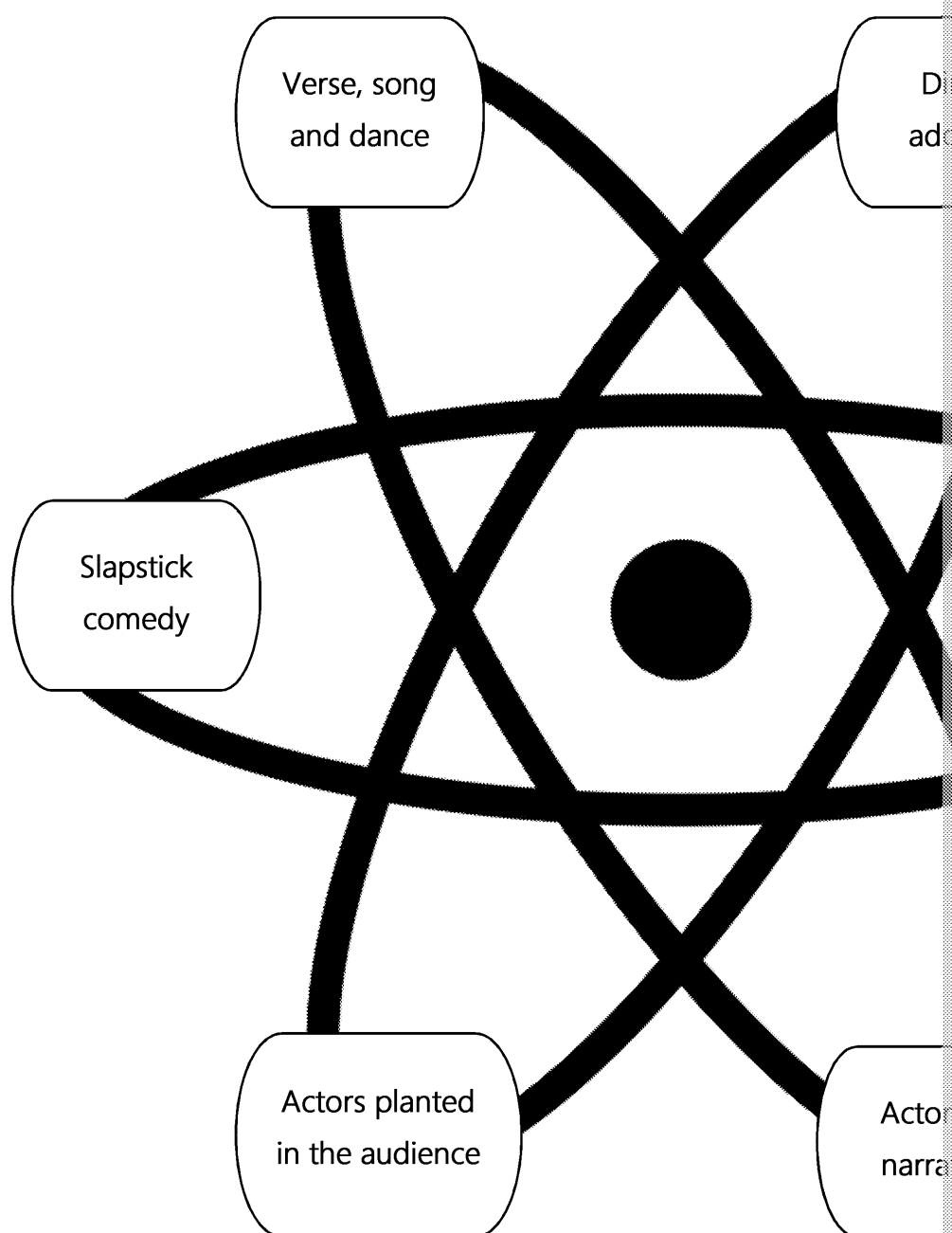


2: Uranium 235

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 just after the States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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

They first had to learn everything they could about atomic energy – a complex set of topics! Nevertheless, 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 thirties, but we had also returned into its rich deposits of theatrical ideas. We had, so to speak, struck gold – sufficient raw material to fashion the kind of play needed to deal with the new science of the atom and atomic physics.

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

How does one describe such a piece? An episodic play? A documentary play? A twentieth-century morality play? almost any of these descriptions would be completely so. 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. There were scenes of rapidly changing scenes in which they were called upon to dance, sing and to parody themselves doing all these things.³

As a whole group, 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:

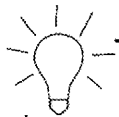
- Agit prop presentation style with slogans and songs, as in the Living Theatre
- Direct address to the audience
- Slam poetry
- Choral speaking
- A TV game show
- Serious, naturalistic drama
- News broadcast (radio or TV style)
- A documentary-style presentation

You can, of course, use some of the methods used in *Uranium 235*, such as dance/movement or planting actors in the audience. Show your work 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 news in a way that is both informative and entertaining.

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

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Assessment Top Tip

Ed

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

3: Richard II

The 1955 production coincided with the Old Vic production directed deliberately so, because Littlewood wanted to showcase her alternative classical drama. With a cast of 14 compared to the Old Vic's 45 and 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 the Old Vic's *'traditionally elegant, poetic version'*.⁴

The play divided critics and audiences. Kenneth Tynan, a respected 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 life was to become Steptoe in that very famous series. Richard II was being presented at the Old Vic with John Neville playing Richard III. 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 on the edge of the breath. I considered that to be the first time I had seen 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 seen something 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 with a map of England painted on it, so when Edward was centre stage he was at the centre of his England. Oh, it was wonderful! Now, I am going back to see it and I've yet to see a classical production that comes up to either of

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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 note that stated: 'I am sending this play to you for your opinion. Would you like me, as whatever sort of theatrical atrocity it is to you it means something, to adapt the story from a novel she was writing, two weeks after seeing Rattigan's *Variation on a Theme*. Delaney had been unimpressed with Rattigan had portrayed the homosexual characters in *Variation*, thin and better. The play's central character, Jo, is a 17-year-old working-class neglectful 'semi-whore' mother in a grim Salford bedsit. Jo gets pregnant with a black sailor. When he abandons her, she is taken care of by her mother.

Two weeks later, Littlewood started rehearsing the play, although none of the script 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 wash-house 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 starkness 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 some pictures and objects. What colours and textures predominate? (This task helps you to understand the style of a text, useful for Component 1)

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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 global force with Peter Hall's production of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*, and the production of *The Roses*. But over at the other Stratford, in the east end of London, an equally devastating impact. It was *Oh What a Lovely War* and it was that it viewed the first world war from the perspective of the common soldier. It 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, including '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 Top Tip

Edexcel

If you are using Joan Littlewood as your chosen practitioner for your development, *Oh! What a Lovely War* is essential! It contains loads of Littlewood's theatrical techniques that you can emulate in your performance and document in your portfolio, satisfying the criteria (to realise artistic intentions in live performance) in the process!

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⁵ Michael Billington, *The Guardian* newspaper theatre critic, writing about the 2014 Theatre Royal production.

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 commedia dell'arte roots.
- Perhaps it was because this was the first time the war had ever 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 recruitment, boost morale in soldiers' minds off their cold and hunger.
- Perhaps it was that the show incorporated the very latest in tech posters and images, sound effects, a range of lighting and news- at the back of the stage behind the actors, presenting sobering st war: deaths tolls, battles fought, or the average life expectancy of audience members commented on '*... the fact, never so clearly s had died in unimaginable squalor for Kitchener's pointing finger worthless mud, for patriotic lies, for the vanity of bad command*
- Perhaps it was that every theatrical technique which Littlewood 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 exp juxtaposition of scenes – which included knockabout comedy to trenches – generated rapid, dramatic shifts in tone and mood: a '**collision montage**'.
- Perhaps it was because *Oh! What a Lovely War* was a genuinely co effort – true ensemble theatre. Inspired by a radio documentary on the first draft script was rejected as 'rubbish' by Littlewood. However the project, she sent the cast away to research the documentary evi and poetry of the time. Such was the importance of improvisation 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 sung 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 Lo

Up to your waist in w
Up to your eyes in sl
Using the kind of lan
That makes the serge
Who wouldn't join the
That's what we all en
Don't we pity the po
Sitting beside the fi

Chorus:

Oh! Oh! Oh! It's a lo
Who wouldn't be c
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 this knockabout art of theatre survives and

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 upper classes. For Littlewood, theatre belonged to *everybody*, not just the upper classes. It was a theatre 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 the upper class audiences.

Post-war British theatre was culturally conservative, with its hierarchy of undemanding drawing-room comedies, and performances of Shakespearean plays used 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 all pretensions to 'luvvie-ness'. Known as the director who hated acting, she was often rude about some of the most famous actors of the day. She thought that if someone was 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 text. 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. Her collaborative approach even encompassed living arrangements. Earnings were shared and she 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. Her awe of Shakespeare – or any writer of text. Words on a page were a fluid entity, not a fixed entity.

Popular theatre – a definition

Many theatre directors and practitioners have found their inspiration in the concept of Popular theatre originates from the French, 'theatre populaire', and is defined as 'theatre for social change'. The 'popular' part of it means people – or the common people – 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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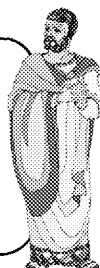
**Commedia
dell'Arte**

**Shakespeare's
plays at the
Globe**



Cabaret

**Ancient Greek
theatre**



**Punch and
Judy**



Circus



Assessment Top Tip

Edexcel

This exercise will help you to understand the influences on Littlewood's theatre and to demonstrate how she adapted these for her audiences. Bear this in mind when writing your performance text! If you do, you'll hit AO2 (apply theatrical skills to real life) - not only a good thing!

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Chapter 4: Her Theatrical Purpose and Practice

'Art is not a mirror with 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 a voice 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, the country 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 motivated Littlewood in her political fight for a more equal society.

London commercial theatre could not serve Littlewood's purpose, so her work in the early days had to be taken out on the road (although she was based in London after the purchase of Theatre Royal Stratford East). She had plenty of time to experiment; she spent 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 sketch to be performed at lunch time at the factory gates. With no time to create fully fleshed-out characters, the performances were short, direct and uncomplicated, with basic props and costumes – a bit like a sketch show!



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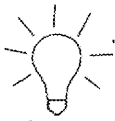
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⁸ Believed to be Brecht, although the origin of this quote is disputed:
<http://www.philipchircop.com/post/8473310418/art-is-not-a-mirror-held-up-to-reality-but->

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 speeches. You can also use quotes from one of the texts you are studying for other areas of the course.



Assessment Top Tip

This would be a great opportunity to start deconstructing your key texts (to create and develop ideas)

- 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 to let the choosing be for you!). Everyone else in the class should make up a scene.
- 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 about.
- 5) The first actor begins the 'play' by picking up any card. S/he then reads the line of dialogue, with the appropriate emotion and pitch.
- 6) The second actor picks up a card and responds with whatever is on it. This is the second line of dialogue – building the scene and creating a relationship. And so on.
- 7) Once all 10 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 seemed 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 allow you to suspend your collective disbelief, or settle comfortably into their sea of experience wash over them. Political theatre is the dramatic equivalent of a political rally. Its purpose, like Littlewood's, was to encourage people to participate, to feel empowered to effect change and to participate in political action against the dominant bourgeois forces. Political theatre speaks to its audience –

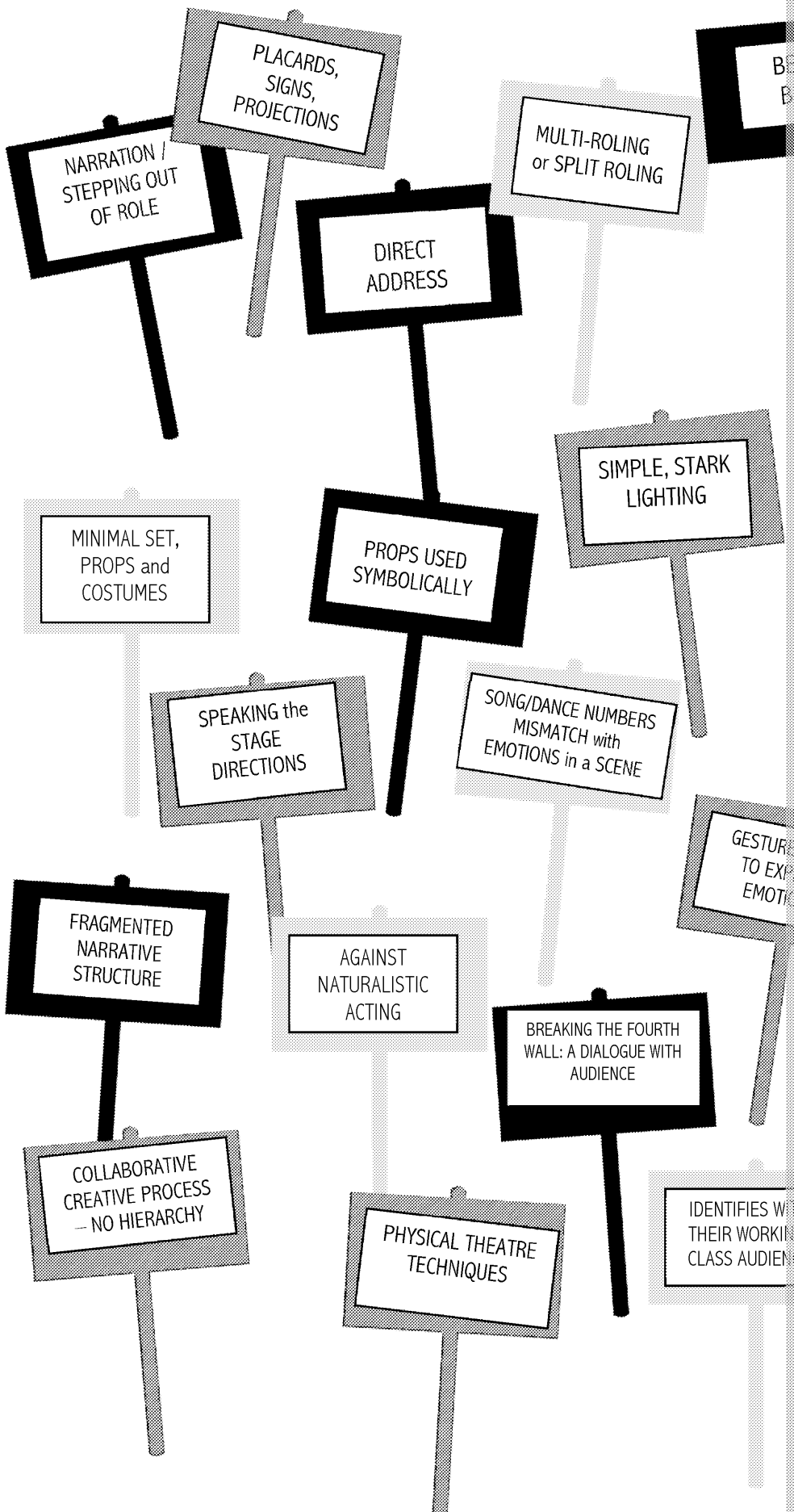
Learning about political theatre would require a resource bigger than this page.

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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', discuss 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 to get into their statue pose is out, and the game continues until everyone is out. When the exercise has been completed, discuss how far your statue pose was from the text. The same exercise can be done with themes from your text.



Assessment Top Tip

Ed

This activity is a great way to start practically analysing themes from your text. Take notes of what you find for your portfolio! (AO1: Create and develop)

- 3) **MUSICAL MUDDLE.** Get into two groups. Group 1 makes a list of well-known songs. These could be anything, e.g. nursery rhymes, music from a current chart topper. There should be a range of styles. Group 2 makes a list of four or five emotional speeches or short scenes – perhaps from your text. Swap lists. Group 1 now starts to act out one of the speeches/scenes. When they reach an emotional climax, Group 2 should shout out one of the songs from their list. The actor or actors should immediately break into the song, returning to complete their speech when finished.

When the exercise has been completed, discuss the effect of the juxtaposition of music and text.

- 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 a convincing performance.

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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, a nose of an imaginative people, a long well-shaped nose with wide nostrils, a short lipped mouth, and handsome fighting chin. She comes eagerly to the door, and penetrated to Baudricourt's presence at last, and full of hope as to the check or frighten her in the least. Her voice is normally a hearty coaxing, very appealing, very hard to resist.

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

ROBERT *[outraged]* Orders from your lord! And who the devil may you think you are to give 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 she was mad?

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, and then 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 will, squire; but you will find it all coming quite different when you do not see me; but here I am.

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 goodness.

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 to a new role, the 'Stage Direction Actor'. Read the lines as you would normally (however, actors must also read out the stage direction applicable to the 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 bright, as often do in very imaginative people, a long well-shaped nose with wide nostrils, but full-lipped mouth, and handsome fighting chin. She came eagerly to the door, penetrated to Baudricourt's presence at last, and full of hope as to the result, which did not frighten her in the least. Her voice was normally a hearty coaxing voice, very persuasive, and hard to resist.*

JOAN *bobbed a curtsey.* Good morning, captain squire. Captain: you are to go and get 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 you are to go. Go back to him, and tell him that I am neither duke nor peer at his orders: I 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 did you let her in?

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

JOAN *was impatient, but friendly:* They all say I am mad until I talk to them. It is the will of God that you are to 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 castle with 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.

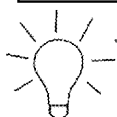
THE STEWARD *appealed:* Yes, sir. You see, sir.

ROBERT *snapped:* Hold your tongue, you.

THE STEWARD *was abject:* Yes, sir.

Then ROBERT said to Joan, with a sour loss of confidence: So you are mad, are you?

JOAN *replied sweetly:* Yes, squire.



Assessment Top Tip

Adapting stage directions in this way is a great way to deconstruct 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 a saboteur.'

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 in 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 members to share their savings and resources, and any box office earnings were shared equally among all the members.

The most vital element of Littlewood's ensemble ideal was the collaborative approach, 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 instinctively and genuinely. The qualities of ensemble living feed 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 pioneered by practitioners such as Joan Littlewood, Harley Granville Barker 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 hailed as the 'culmination of the company's work'.

DEVISING is when a theatre piece is created *without* existing text. Text may be used in a dramatic way, as a stimulus, but the production as a whole is not pre-written nor is there a playwright present in the devising space.

Everyone is part of the process and this could involve looking 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 material to work with, it also authenticates your work.

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

Blank Slate

Create a piece of theatre from the actors you have chosen – even your teacher is allowed to hand you a stimulus!

- Where 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 working with professional companies! It's great preparation for A Level Component 2 to work collaboratively and show that you have the skills to work effectively. You can record in your portfolio (ticking off AO4 in the process!).

The importance of ensemble-building should never be underestimated. Under the pressure to skip 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
skills

discover new
skills and
talents

experiment,
even if you fail

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Here are some great ensemble-building exercises to

Perfect Circle

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 next time you were before, so it's a good idea to check where your feet are before you move again, but without talking!

Fairy Tale Minute

In groups, create a freeze-frame of a scene from a well-known fairy tale. Everyone should be able to guess the title of the fairy tale just by looking at it. Examples include Snow White and Gretel, Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, or The Princess and the Pea. This can be done with scenes from Shakespeare's plays, films, historical moments, or current events.

Slow Motion

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 chosen place in slow motion. The trick is to make movements as precise as possible and everyone moving at the same pace. You can do this in silence, or add some sound effects, producing slowed-down vocal effects!

Voices Together

Singing rounds is an enjoyable way to work together. Try 'Three Blind Mice', 'London Bridge', 'Burning', or 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat'.

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Chapter 6: Littlewood's Working Methods

"I don't see myself as a theatre director. To give me a pain – the directors who say "move", do groupings 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 a critic of the methods of top drama schools such as RADA, whose cerebral approach produced extremely articulate verse-speakers, but paid no attention to the internal voice. She called this 'talking-head acting'.

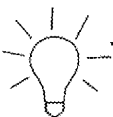
The methods used by Littlewood were eclectic and varied, but laid the foundation for the working methods of future generations of ensemble theatre companies. The Littlewood School (University of Essex) evolved from Littlewood's teaching methods.



Assessment Top Tip

Edexcel

Make sure you make notes on the practical exercises below and add them to your portfolio. Put Littlewood's rehearsal methodologies into practice, something to do when preparing your performance. This will satisfy both AO1 (*Make connections between theory and practice*) and AO2 (*Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions*). Note



Assessment Top Tip

Edexcel

Understanding Littlewood's rehearsal techniques will help you justify your methodology to a production concept. This will ensure you hit AO3 (*Demonstrate understanding of how drama and theatre is developed*).

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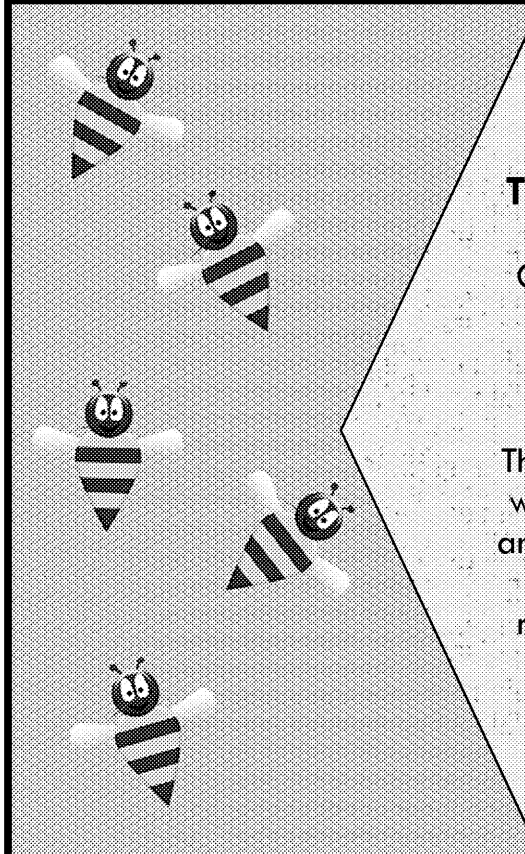
¹⁰ *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* – by Elizabeth Schafer, p. 16

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 a class – childhood games such as Musical Chairs, Stick in the Mud or Musical Bells are firm favourites.

This game, based on a similar one invented by Joan Littlewood, is great for breaking inhibitions:



THE HONEYCOMB GAME

One person stands out while everyone else in the group interlinks arms to create a honeycomb rock shape.

Then the person who has been waiting works their way out and through the gaps to get to the other side, touching as many people as possible on the route.

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 of the 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', Joan Littlewood to build her ensemble of actors.
- 2) To develop a script. This method was used in adapting *A Taste of Honey* by improvising around Delaney's dialogue.
- 3) Improvisation was also used as a way of creating a rough outline before adding the detail.

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 walk and any gestures they make.

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

Improvising the Broad Brushstrokes

Any script will do for this exercise, but a good way to get the gist of this or any other known films and tell the story of the film in increasingly shorter and shorter segments – ten minutes, then five minutes, then two minutes, then one, then 30 seconds.

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

Improvising around a Script

Taking any script as your starting point, find a few pieces of dialogue – 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 quickly find that your dialogue focuses on the emotional arc of the scene. 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 in 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 an 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 persuade her husband to kill the king, she uses a variety of tactics to is given an **action verb**.

Lady Macbeth

Was the hope drunk
 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,
 Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
 Like the poor cat i' the adage?

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

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 (using 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 walk as slow as you possibly can, as if you have all the time in the world to get there.

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

SPACE (focus): move across the space in a very direct way, with laser focus, as if you’re on a really significant mission or on your way to a very important meeting; alternate this with a very indirect walk, meandering across the space, as if you keep stopping to pick 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, like a child; opposite, moving in a very bound-up way, as if you are anxious not to be seen; if someone greets you, you might manage a curt nod.

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

Classifying movement in this way can help you to create a character:

Effort	Time	Weight	Space
Punch	Quick	Heavy	Direct
Dab	Quick	Light	Direct
Press	Sustained	Heavy	Direct
Glide	Sustained	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 up first – feel the thrust of your fist as it moves through the body as you practise your jabs. Then walk to the ring and whole body.
Dab	
Press	
Glide	
Slash	
Flick	
Wring	
Float	

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

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

From the devised *Uranium 235*, with its characters such as the Puppets, 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 production which formed the basis of the set for Marlowe's *Edward II*, to the production of *Oh! What a Lovely War*... nothing about Littlewood's performance is a 'convention'!

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

Discuss

'There's so much shit on Will; we've got to scrub it off.'

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 reflect 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 afraid of its own voice and which will comment as fearlessly on society as did Aristophanes.'

Years of experimental theatre-making culminated in Theatre Workshop's 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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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 moments 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 bunkers (or perhaps this one of the Christmas Day truce, which features in the show).
- Ticker tape: paper strips containing some of the most sobering statistics of the war, or make a news billboard displaying relevant headlines.
- 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 songs for you, a few battles and some jokes.'*¹⁴

Discuss

What is the effect of juxtaposing cheerful posters and songs with the horrors 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, such as 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 related to the issue – you could announce these news items, write them on banners/signs, or create your own version of ticker tape.



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

Design

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

She found a kindred spirit in John Bury. With no training, and a complete lack of formal education, Bury was given the job of driving the Theatre Workshop company van, painting scenery, hanging lamps and building bits of set. From this, he progressed to being one of the most influential theatre designers of the twentieth century, eventually leaving Theatre Workshop to join Sir Peter Hall at the RSC. As his 2000 obituary stated, *'he ploughed a new path for English theatrical taste and received opinion about how sets should be made, and he brought it certainly to Joan Littlewood's taste!*

Like Littlewood, Bury rejected fussy, over-produced stage sets and traditional design practices. His work – with Littlewood – was stark to the point of being almost abstract, using shades to highlight architectural shapes and structures such as ramps and stairs. The set for *Richard II* was a map of England as big as the stage. Light was used in a way that had never been used before – using pinpoint and side-lighting – not just for illumination, but good but to create tension and mood. Some Theatre Workshop productions used lighting to conceal the backstage area, so the bare brickwork and radiator pipes were visible. 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 'scenery book' 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 Top Tip

Ed

An understanding of Littlewood's stage design is essential, as the visual design is central to her intentions to her audience every bit as much as all the other elements. Make sure you understand the design decisions for your production concept (and score you a load of A's).

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

Chapter 8: Her Collaboration with other Practitioners

'I did an awful lot to improve their work. I have
known how theatre works.'¹⁶

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

Her 'workshop' approach was uncommon at the time, although 'workshop' was a common 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 previous chapter – it may not always be the most efficient way of working, particularly when creating a new play. However, what developed, by the time *A Taste of Honey* was being produced, was a participatory style where Littlewood took on a directorial role. Material produced and improvised by the members of Theatre Workshop was structured and directed by Littlewood and she shaped the emerging dialogue. She guided the source material by providing reading material about World War II and encouraged 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 today's newspaper.



Task 1

- ✓ Choose five interesting images of people. You may be drawn to their 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 this time you need to find five fragments of text which capture your attention – this could be the subject matter, the words, clever alliterative techniques, the rhythm of the words or particular vocabulary.
- ✓ Place the segments in an order which could suggest a story.
- ✓ Find unusual ways to present the segments – play around with the order, choral speaking, repetition, echoing, singing them... and any other techniques 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 work continues to influence theatre practitioners today who have embraced and adapted her devising methods, her approach to developing material, and her willingness to use a range of performers. 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 was true of post-war British theatre, in particular the techniques used by almost every theatre company. Her influence on theatre, and on British culture, should not be underestimated.

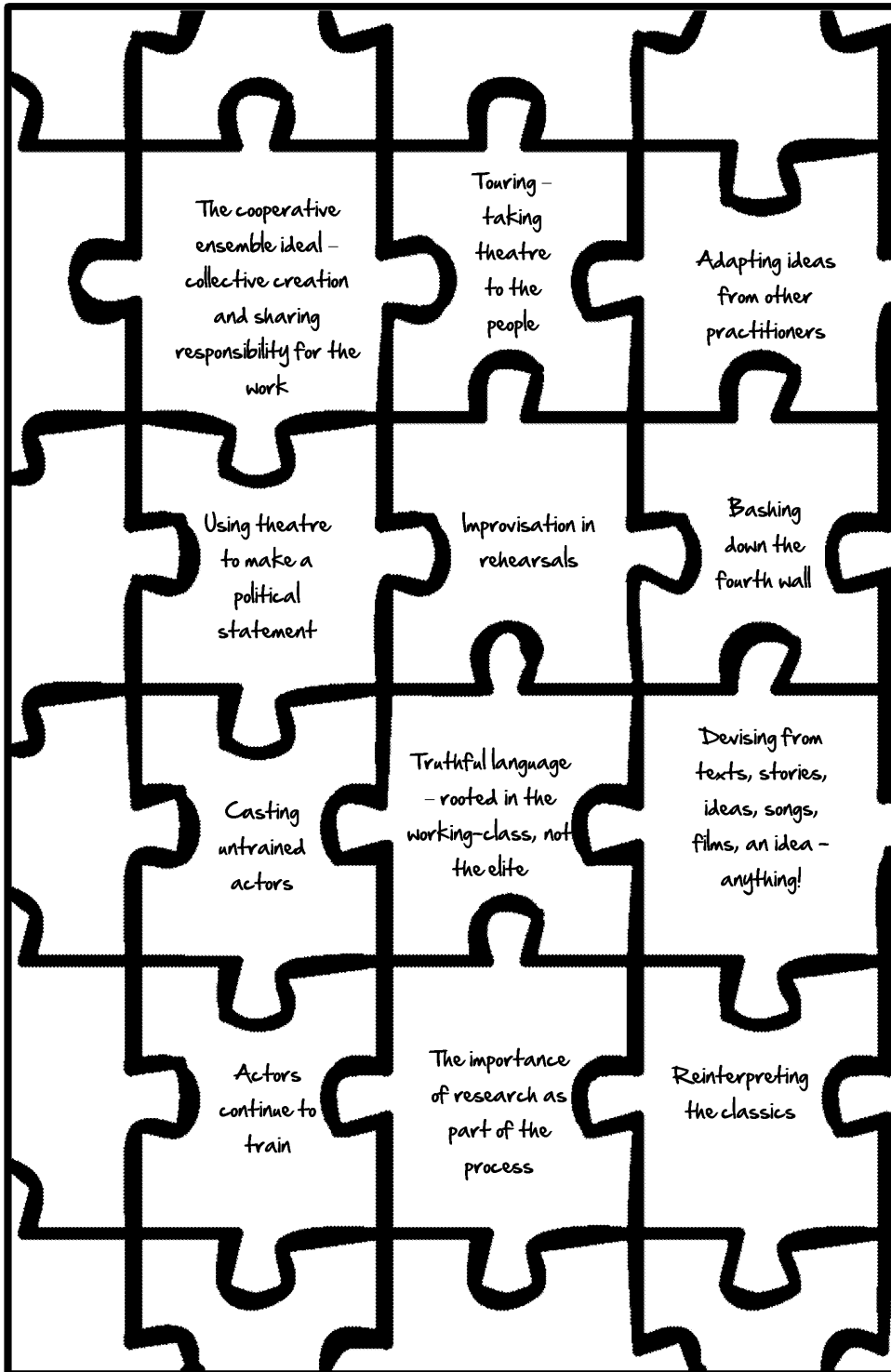
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¹⁷ Michael Billington writing for *The Guardian*, on the day Joan Littlewood would have turned 100.

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 identifies parallels between its work and the work of Joan Littlewood and Theatre Vagabond.

You will need to include:

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



Assessment Top Tip

E

Seeing how another theatre company has applied Littlewood's theories in practice (and offer some great content for your portfolio!) (AO1: Create)

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Chapter 10: Exam Section

AS Level Component 1: Exploration and Performance

For this component, you are required to study and practically explore a text. You will then prepare a group performance of an extract of that text, in which you will use the methodology of your chosen practitioner. The component will be assessed through a performance and a portfolio which documents and analyses your work.

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

- 1) **Be clear on the purpose of your performance.** Who is the audience? What message are you trying to convey? Remember that Littlewood was a socialist and made work for the working classes.
- 2) **Be collaborative in rehearsals.** Littlewood did not believe in a single important person in the theatre, not even the director or writer. She should emphasise the collaborative nature of your rehearsals, e.g. all suggestions were discussed and explored, and how everyone had a role to play.
- 3) **Use improvisation to develop your performances** and explore the text. Littlewood was a pioneer of this innovative approach to rehearsal.
- 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. (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 understanding of the text, and discuss the ways in which Joan Littlewood influenced the process. Analyse and evaluate your own work.

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A Level Component 1: Devising

For this component, you are required to develop an original performance extract using the ideas and work of a theatre practitioner as your point of reference. The fact that Littlewood and Theatre Workshop incorporated such a range of techniques gives you a *huge* range of choice!

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

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

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



You could link 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 issues) where all the 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.

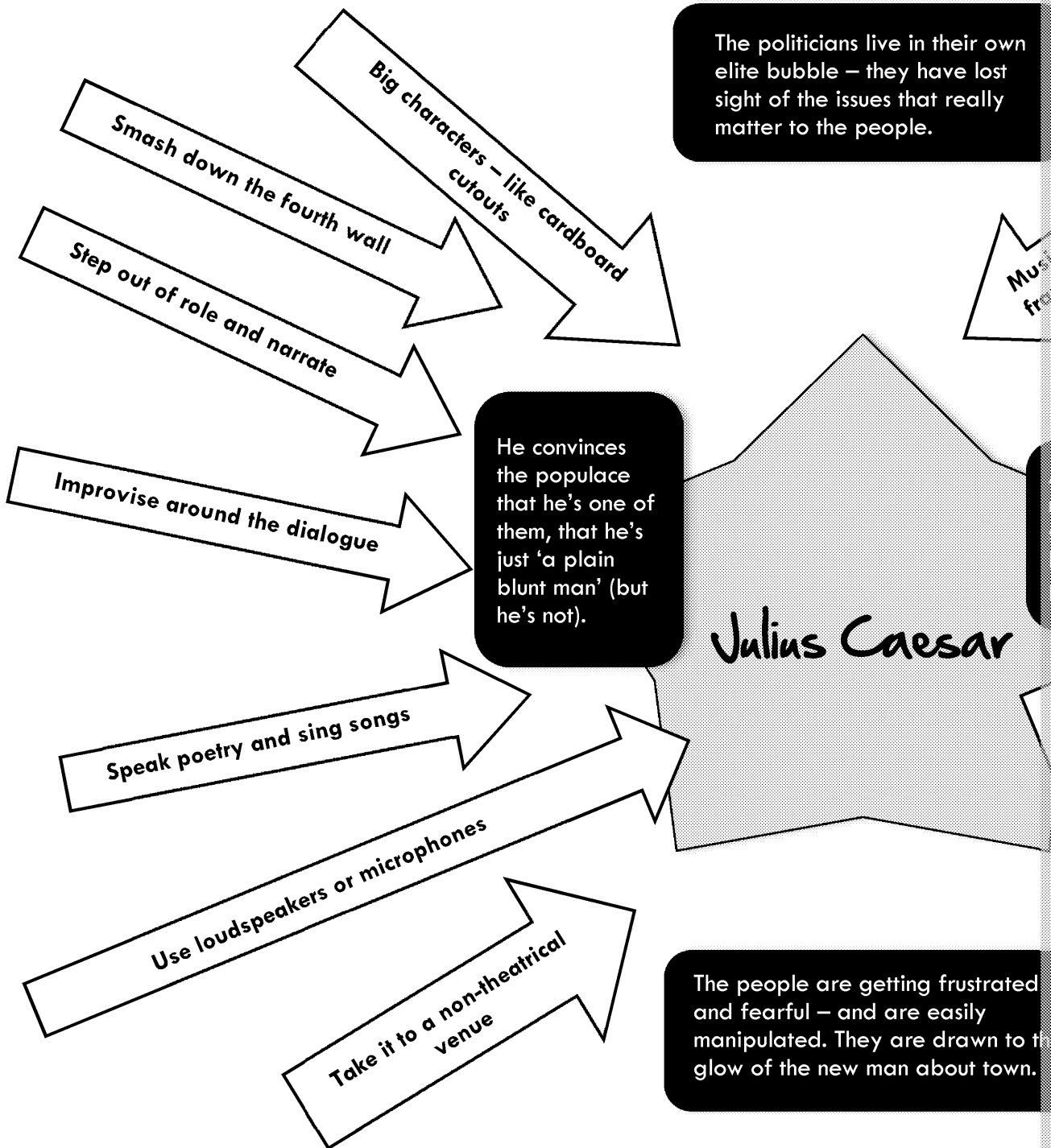


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A Level Component 3: Theatre Makers in 1

In Section C of the Component 3 exam, you will be required to discuss and imagine a complete performance text for a contemporary audience in the practitioner's methodology and practice.

You will be given the choice of two questions which ask how you would apply methodology to aspects of either **performance** or **production design** of a chosen text. You should also refer to the original performance conditions in your answer, and show how your decisions fit into your overall production.

- 1) If your question asks you about aspects of **Performance**, you might apply Joan Littlewood's methodology in the following ways:
 - a) **The rehearsal process** – the first thing you should point out in the text in the style of Littlewood, the term 'director' is defunct. It is a cooperative ensemble process driving your approach.
 - b) **The audience** – Littlewood's audience was the working class. She *justified* her approach to productions. The same applies to your audience is, it should not be made up of 'the elite', but people from diverse communities who share the same values, or face the same issues. The text should be to reflect and respond to their concerns. This could be a social issue; concerns about the use of a heritage site; women's issues. They are telling *their* story, not yours. The most convincing answer is one where the intended impact on the audience will be realised.
 - c) **The text** – Littlewood refused to treat the text as a sacred object. It was yours. As a director you must show how you have enhanced the text (e.g. Shakespeare!), using exercises such as improvising around a key scene, the narrative arc of the play and keep up the pace!
 - e) **The blend** – Littlewood may have used seemingly incompatible styles but what she did best was the way she blended them together. 'Montage'? It is useful, as indicated in the *Julius Caesar* exam question, in the same way that Littlewood used Music Hall as a frame for her work, then weave in your techniques of song, dance, clowns, puppetry.
- 2) If your question asks you about aspects of **production design** (set, costume, lighting, design), you might apply Joan Littlewood's methodology in the following ways:
 - a) Employ the use of a **framing device**, such as the colours, textures, the music hall or end-of-pier show. In this case, the **eclectic style** of her productions, with its blend of styles and genres, should dominate.
 - b) Use a bold, stark, atmospheric, **expressionist design** which is visually striking and sound, perhaps with a significant central image. In this case, the text is the main stimulus for your design ideas. There may be an overall theme or a repetition of particular words or images which provide your inspiration.

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You should also consider the European design influences on Littlewood and approach the following points from a design perspective:

- 1) **The rehearsal process** – your design should be part of a collaborative process
- 2) **The audience** – you are designing for popular, not highbrow theatre
- 3) **The text** – if a text is broken up into an episodic structure, your design can be realised on stage; for example, the use of levels, ramps and platforms
- 4) **The blend** – your design must have the flexibility to incorporate Littlewood-style production; for example, song and dance, projection, puppetry, loudspeakers and placards

Example Exam Questions

- 1) As a director, how would you apply the methodology of your chosen text to the costume design in *[a 100-line extract from your chosen text]*? In your answer, refer to your overall production concept and the original performance context.
- 2) As a director, how would you apply the methodology of your chosen text to the performances of your actors in *[a 100-line extract from your chosen text]*? In your answer, refer to your overall production concept and the original performance context of the text.

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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
	1936 Theatre of Action became Theatre
The Spanish Civil War. 1936 – 1939	1936 Fuente Ovejuna.
Munich Agreement. 1938	1937 Lysistrata.
	1939 Living Newspaper Project.
World War II. 1939 – 1945	1939 MacColl and Littlewood blacklisted
	1942 Theatre Union disbanded but agreed
The Smyth Report. 1945	1945 The company reformed as Theatre Moliere's The Flying Doctor.
	1945-53 Touring all over the UK and abroad
	1946 Anti-bomb play: Uranium 345.
	1949-52 Littlewood toured Shakespeare across Manchester and Glasgow.
	1951 The Long Shift – play about trapped
	1952 The Travellers.
	1953 Company moved to a permanent theatre while they restored it.
	1955 Richard II at the same time as the C
	1955 Mother Courage with Joan Littlewood the title role.
	1956 The Quare Fellow.
Suez Crisis. 1956	1956 John Osborne's <i>Look Back in Anger</i> produced
	1957 You Won't Always be on Top – set in
	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	1959 Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be.
	1961 East 15 drama school was established
	1961 They Might Be Giants.
The Profumo Affair. 1963	1963 Oh! What a Lovely War.
	1967 The Marie Lloyd Story.
	1972 The Theatre Royal Stratford East was
	1975 Gerry Raffles died – Joan Littlewood

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Glossary

Agit prop – agitational and propaganda, a style popular with revolutionary theatre companies, particularly the international Workers' Theatre Movement as a weapon in the class struggle.

BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

Brecht – Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956) was a German political playwright. He initially studied medicine but eventually directed his energies towards drama. Expressionism were early influences. A Marxist, he despised theatrical realism, strongly that audiences should not be encouraged to empathise or identify with characters on the stage but rather view the events presented before them with detachment. His narrative and non-dramatic style of theatre is known as 'epic theatre' 'incorporating devices that promoted the alienation effect – or *verfremdungseffekt*'. After moving to Berlin in the 1920s, he collaborated with Kurt Weill to produce a musical adaptation of *The Beggar's Opera*. In 1933, as the Nazis rose to power, he went into exile with his family. He settled in Prague and wrote some of his most famous works including *Mother Courage and her Children* and *The Good Person of Szechwan*.

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

Carnival – carnivals are annual festivals which involve the whole community (and tourists) in a celebration of music, dance, costumed parades, masquerades, etc. Most people have heard of the big ones, such as Rio de Janeiro, or Venice. There are many smaller carnivals which include some unusual events, such as the 'Burning of the Witches' where people throw rotten fruit at each other in the Italian town of Ivrea. Carnival time is associated with transgression – a time when you can misbehave and get frowned upon... or pretend to be someone you're not (hence the masquerade).

Censorship – censorship on the British stage lasted for 231 years, from 1739 to 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 First World War, anything which might damage the war effort was most certainly censored. In the 1950s, anything seen to contain inappropriate themes or references to sex and sexual behaviour, racial unrest, the Crown and politics. Playwrights who suffered censorship included C. P. Snow, Shaw and Ibsen.

Choral Speaking – speaking a text (such as a poem) as a group. It can involve parts of the text being spoken by a solo or small group, creating dramatic 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 stupidity and japes, although they often have far more intelligence and insight than they appear). They are often subversive characters who get away with outrageous behaviour and comments. Two traditional types of clown are the White Clown, whose Pierrot is derived, and the Auguste clown, who, with his colourful clowning, 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 of comedy 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. The common plot followed the journey of two young people in love despite opposition and involved trickery, mistaken identities, love rivals and plenty of k

Collision Montage – see **Montage**

Direct Address – when an actor speaks directly to the audience, without coming out of character and certainly breaks through the fourth wall to acknowledge that they are watching a play.

E15 – East 15 is an acting school, established in 1961, and now part of the University of East London. 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. No one is the 'star' of the show. The ideal of ensemble theatre is when a group of performers work together over a period of time to create a distinctive body of work.

Episodic Structure – when a play consists of several short scenes, which are 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. Episodic structure includes the ability to span different locations and periods of time, and to focus on 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 distorted structure. Expressionist techniques were surreal and dreamlike; staging was based on distorted, angular shapes, starkly illuminated to draw attention to light and shadow. The palette was often garish and clashing, masks and puppets often featured, and grotesque caricatures rather than recognisable characters.

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

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

Heightened Speech – Brecht identified three levels of speech: first, naturalistic, then singing, then heightened. Heightened speech involves a declamatory, rhythmic delivery (see Slam Poetry) and is often used in storytelling. Certainly, it is not 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 – often contrasting – scenes, images or characters are placed side by side, forcing the audience to make a comparison. So, an image of a thorn will deliver a different message from an image of a rose, and an image of thorns will deliver a different message from an image of a heart. See **Montage**.

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Kitchen Sink Drama – a genre that developed in the late 1950s across 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 and became interested in the way we move through space. He founded the Laban Dance Centre in Manchester – now the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London – which offers a range of contemporary dance training.

LGBT – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered.

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 and included learning ballet, circus movement and gymnastics. He was also interested in industrial design, which embraced an industrial aesthetic: ramps, treadmills, rollers, wheels and even trapezes.

Montage – this is a term associated with film editing. When two scenes 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 and short. 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 requires actors to master the art of quick changes in between (or during) scenes as they move from one role to the next.

Music Hall – a popular form of entertainment between the 1860s and 1930s. People 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 buttons.

Pinpoint Lighting – a bit like a spotlight, pinpoint lights direct attention to 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, which were hugely influential on theatre practice, included projections of scenery, newsreel, scaffolding and revolving stages, flashing lights (the equivalent of modern lighting), sirens and loudspeakers.

Placards – a placard is a public notice. People who take part in protests often carry placards and try to make them as visible as possible, with pithy messages in big, bold writing.

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Popular Theatre – from the French, ‘theatre populaire’, this is the aims to be accessible to all. Popular theatre includes Greek drama, of Shakespeare and, of course, the plays of Joan Littlewood and Theatre theatre’s audiences are drawn from all sectors of society and in part they are encouraged to be participative rather than passive.

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 to be associated with wealthier, more-educated people who live in London the UK. Heightened RP is an exaggerated form. Some members of the heightened RP speakers.

Revue – a satirical sketch show containing comedy, dance and music written with new lyrics. The golden age of the revue was between WW1 and 1930s, but they are still popular with university students – including

Satire – usually a comic device, satire can also deliver quite serious of ridicule, or send-up. A person, their beliefs, policies, ideas or even government can be satirised. Political cartoons in newspapers are a 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 of spoken word, often appearing in competitions or events, where the emotional and very personal story. Two wonderful examples are Dan and Katie Makkie’s ‘Pretty’.

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

Stanislavski – Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) was a Russian who developed a system of actor training that is used extensively in the world today. The core of his system was that actors should be able to Many people believe, erroneously, that this is the same as the American Acting. It is not. American acting teachers such as Lee Strasberg based on what they had learnt from Stanislavski, mostly using a form of Emotion technique of calling up previously experienced emotions when creating which Stanislavski later abandoned.

Stylised – in theatre, this is a non-naturalistic technique to create a representational rather than ‘real’. Stage musicals are often very stylised exaggerated, e.g. costume, movement, and vocal delivery. In a stylised movement and characterisation can appear artificial and cartoon-like

Symbolism – this is when something is imbued with an abstract meaning its original meaning. For example, in *Death of a Salesman*, the sound symbolises – or represents – particular memories for the play’s protagonist throne or crown symbolises power; colours can symbolise emotions or example, but the colour symbolism in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is fascinating character’s name, Blanche, means white, and she is presented at the start

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(pure) in character, even wearing white clothes; the men in the play do symbolise their masculine vitality; and a 'blue' piano is heard playing o

Ticker Tape – like the horizontal stripe (called news ticker) of 'Bre across the bottom of the screen during television news broadcasts, tic transmitting statistics and facts. It was originally a method of trans telegraph lines and got its name from the sound the machine made as narrow strips of paper.

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Teacher Notes

Chapter 1

Timeline Activity

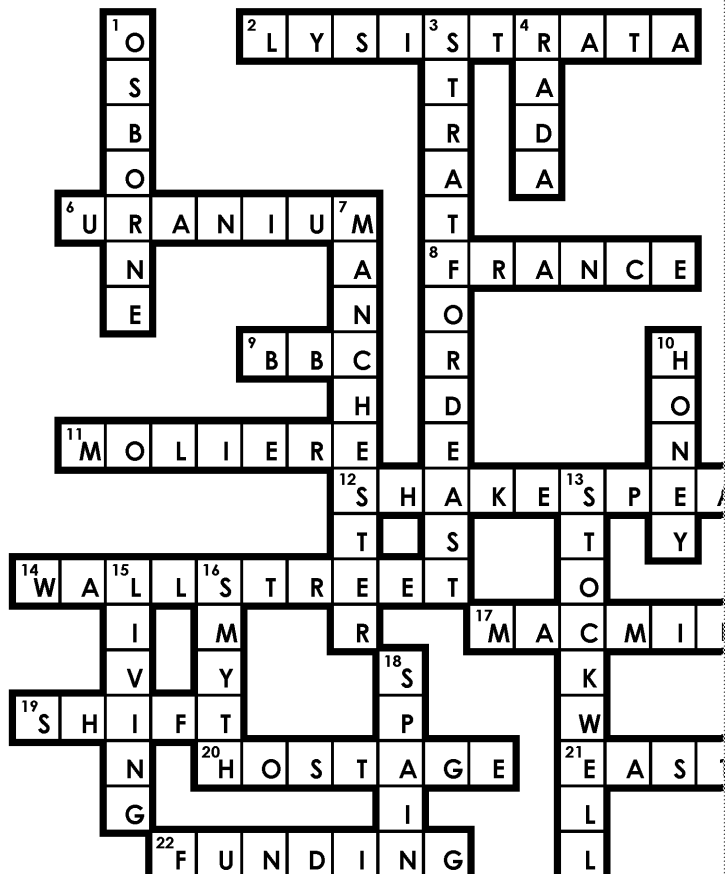
There will be a number of historical events (the Suez Crisis, the Profumo affair) with which students can provide the basis for a research task – or they can explore these in the context of the plays which appear in Chapter 2.

The timeline activity can also be done by copying out the material by hand. I suggest drawing attention to the parallels between political events and productions. A timeline of the 1950s is in the Appendix. Students should look out for links between events and the performances of these events, 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 what they have been trying to make.

Crossword Solutions



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Research Task

1. Theatre censorship

The Lord Chamberlain is an office of the Royal Household. Under the Licensing Act 1737, the Lord Chamberlain 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 1892, the Lord Chamberlain had powers; now, the Lord Chamberlain had to justify his decision, based on whether it was 'contrary to the interests 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'. Themes such as homosexuality and bad language were banned. Plays such as Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* and Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire* were just two of the plays which came under the axe. The Theatre Censorship and the very next day, the full-frontal hippie rock-musical *Hair* opened.

2. Agitprop, Brecht and the Workers' Theatre Movement

The term agitprop, short for 'Agitational Propaganda', originated in communist literature and art containing an explicitly political message, including stage plays, films and posters. It spread 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, and the WTM 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.org.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:

- i. Expressionist theatre in Germany, which started in the early part of the twentieth century, was part of the Expressionist movement in literature and art (e.g. Edvard Munch's *The Scream*).
- ii. Expressionism opposed realism and naturalism in the theatre, contesting the objective truth of a character's inner mental state.
- iii. A Marxist, Brecht, sought to make theatre that instructed *and* entertained. The German dramatist Erwin Piscator, who used projected newsreel film, loudspeakers and lighting effects, is another key figure: <https://vimeo.com/19550097>
- iv. Brecht went on to create his own form of theatre, and is probably most famous for his 'alienation' (alienation) technique: he wanted audiences to watch theatre with detachment and critical distance.
- v. Techniques included heightened/stylised movement; episodic structure; short speeches; bare staging; stark lighting which created shadows; distorted, angular sets.
- vi. The experimental director Vsevolod Meyerhold was one of the founding members of the Russian Revolution. A highly innovative theatre maker, he was influenced by commedia dell'arte and 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 now known today as Laban Movement Analysis. Laban's father was a high-ranking military officer, and he followed the army as a career path and studied architecture in Paris. Here he became interested in how people move 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: Weight (heavy or light); Speed (quick or sustained); Flow (bound or free); and Direction. These categories to help create character; for example, a very uptight character might move in a bound flow (up) and move quickly and indirectly, to avoid conflict. Laban then created 'Laban's 12 basic movements' (flick; dab; glide; float; punch; slash) which are used with the four movement categories. For example, a character twists (wrings) their hands in despair, the movement is: Indirect, heavy, quick, bound. This can also apply to vocal qualities, where some characters might 'dab' their words (like monosyllabic characters) or have a very floaty delivery.
- In Theatre Workshop, Joan Littlewood drew on the work of Laban, adopting his ideas for characterisation.

5. Adolphe Appia

- Adolphe Appia was a Swiss architect and stage designer, whose ideas on stage design had a major influence on theatrical design practice. Born in 1862 (his father was the composer), he rejected the fashion for pictorial two-dimensional sets which were merely decorative. His three-dimensional creations allowed him to integrate movement with light and shadow. He designed 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: architectural 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 is orchestrated.
- Joan Littlewood researched Appia's work and incorporated the four elements into her productions, particularly the use of 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=811111111111>. 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 a living newspaper. Short individual parts starting with rule 1 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=811111111111>
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 exploits different musical styles and instruments into the spotlight, each exploring and interpreting the central musical theme. They should then link this to the stylistic features of *Uranium 235*. This 'Limbo Jazz' YouTube video is a good illustration of two jazz ensembles from contrasting cultural heritages playing together. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e85w08rsCoQ>

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

Practical Task

Students should be encouraged to discuss the relative success of different presentations. They should 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 – theatres rather than expecting their audience to come to them! Red Ladder Theatre Company performed under a bus. If this is not possible, can they rearrange their performance space?

A final 'test' of the success of an agitprop production is to focus on what it would look like. Ask students to state the message of their theatre production in a poster, sign or banner. If they come down to a simple, visual message, 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 the National Theatre and Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre. Educational resources containing lesson plans, worksheets and activities are available from their websites:

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

The 1961 film of *A Taste of Honey*, and Ken Russell's film *Shelagh Delaney's Salford* are available on YouTube.

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

Shoobox Task

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

5. *Oh! What A Lovely War*

Pierrot: A stock character of mime, the sad clown, who embodies naïveté and is seen in 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 format.

Songs: These were real songs from WW1

Film: Although the film is generally regarded as inferior to the original stage show, it is a good example of the format. The entire film is accessible on YouTube.

The archived BBC iWonder website contains comprehensive information about the radio show '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. A huge hillside structure called a theatron (seeing place), which could hold up to 20,000 people, was used for dramatic competition with other plays and loud audience participation was encouraged! Tragedy was the most popular and included processions, ceremonies and sacrifices of goats in honour of the gods.

Commedia Dell'arte: Like its televisual counterpart, the sitcom, commedia dell'arte used 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. The main character was a 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 used physical comedy (highly physical comic gags) throughout the show.

Carnival: A carnival is a festival, often held annually and lasting from several days to several weeks. It is a communal performance, where boundaries between audiences and performers are relaxed. Carnival art forms, from dance, music and drama to puppetry and parades, as well as a lot of other activities, include London's Notting Hill Carnival, the Venice Carnival, Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Carnival in Brazil. Carnivals are periods when the normal rules and norms of society are relaxed and anything is 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, a modern circus world, 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, such as magical and comedy acts, many of which, such as burlesque and drag shows, are delightfully risqué. Themes are often satirical. Many people have seen the 1972 film *Cabaret* starring Liza Minnelli.

Clowning: Not everyone feels at ease around clowns, but that is rather their point. In ancient times, the court jester, the function of their irreverent and playful behaviour is to highlight some of the darker aspects about ourselves or the society we live in. Clowns come in many guises, not just the traditional clown 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 *Modern Times*. 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, the music hall 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 circus acts, including performing animals. Famous London music halls were the Alhambra, the Empire and the Gaiety. The music hall reached a peak of popularity during World War I, with audiences encouraged to sing songs – the very same songs used in *Oh! What a Lovely War* – including the 1917 comedy *Oh! What a Lovely War*. This not only kept people's spirits up but rallied support for the war effort as well as provided a distraction from the war, other forms of entertainment contributed to the decline of music hall; for example, the rise of radio, television, and film.

Shakespeare's plays at the Globe: Everyone went to the Globe – from the very poor to the very rich. The poor stood close to the stage as a groundling, to the very rich buying the more expensive cushioned seats. The poor in polite silence while the play was performed. Audiences were a noisy bunch, clapping, shouting, or even fighting among themselves. There was a high turnover of plays, which were popular for lots of music, lots of laughs and no shortage of violence. Joan Littlewood was a great admirer of direct Shakespeare's plays. She had little interest in the prevailing bourgeois approach to Shakespeare. She might any other text she adapted for the stage. In an interview on the Essential Shakespeare series, Nadine Holdsworth says: 'Littlewood was a great lover of theatre in all its guises, particularly the popular 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 times 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 and his 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. Nineteenth-century shows were performed by one puppeteer from within a mobile puppet theatre, with an audience from adult to children.

Chapter 4

Political Theatre Exercises

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

1. **CAN YOU HEAR ME?** Most students, frustrated with their attempts to communicate, will use hand gestures, or 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 balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* (II.ii); Lady Macbeth's monologue 'The raven is hoarse...' from *Macbeth* (III.iv); the speech in *Antony and Cleopatra* (IV.xii); 'Once more unto the breach...' from *Henry V* (III.ii). You could also mine American writers such as Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams for emotional scenes. Scandinavian writers like 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'. To make this exercise further by asking students to write the smaller stage directions on placards or signs, and to read and speak them out loud.

Chapter 5



For

Blank Slate

The end product is nowhere near as important as the process! Indeed, you may wish to show the process 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 discuss ideas. If they gain nothing else from this exercise, they should learn 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 this matter? Did the group work well to their strengths? Were all ideas considered?
- ✓ **Management:** how did the group manage themselves, resolve disagreements and keep the process on track?

There is a helpful article here in online magazine *Aesthetica* about how Forced Entry works: <http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/experimental-theatre-provoking-ideas>

Ensemble-building Exercises

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

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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 Holdsworth's excellent book on Joan Littlewood) is It will also encourage students to be observant, a key element of Littlewood's working

Once the group has entered the room and got themselves ready to work, ask them to be exactly as they had done 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 <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 instructor. She has authored two books about Laban, 'Laban for Actors and Dancers' She eventually married Ewan MacColl and had a daughter: the late singer-songwriter information about her at <http://www.jeannewlove.com/index.php>

Laban Exercise 1

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

Laban Exercise 2

Some ideas for the efforts could include:

- **Punch:** Plumping 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 lipstick. 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 the room. A match striking a light. The flick of long hair over the shoulders. The flick of a cigarette.
- **Wring:** Wringing a wet cloth. Becoming the cloth being wrung out. Tying or untying 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. In groups of four and ask each of them to create a character in their head which is based on one of the efforts. Give them too long to think about this – maybe 30 seconds – otherwise they might overthink it (if you have trouble, you might want to spend some time before the exercise 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 at the same time. For example: a bus, a lift, a waiting room, a party.

Within this setting they must create an improvised scene which includes some kind of conflict. The conflict 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 is using.

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

Chapter 7

Discuss

Ideally, students will appreciate that what Joan Littlewood wanted to 'scrape off' was the elitism of Shakespeare's plays in mainstream theatre. Her alternative vision was unsentimental, and focused on the human condition.

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

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 scope for discussion about the use of knockabout comedy with the chilling statistics of the wholesale slaughter which took place in the Holocaust.

Students should consider TONE. Humour can be all sorts of things, from gentle poking to satire. They should understand how effective juxtaposition can be and are able to embed this technique into their own performance work. (A01 – Research 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



For a

Kneehigh

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

Background:

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

Venues:

Another similarity with Theatre Workshop is the early touring venues. Kneehigh toured 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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Key Shows:

1946: *The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips* – co-adapted with the book's original author, the story of the American servicemen who were killed during Operation Tiger, which covered the landings in 1944 – a wartime secret. It has been compared in style to *Oh! What A Lovely War*. The show features dance routines, the combination of comedy and tragedy, and the creative use of staging. Emma Rice talks about how she led on the structure of the show here:

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

Their 2014 Asylum season was dedicated to Joan Littlewood and her concept of Fun Palaces. <http://funpalaces.co.uk> illustrates how Fun Palaces continue to evolve.

Working Methods:

This ISTA document contains very useful material about Kneehigh's work:

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

There is a Theatre-Workshop-style collective, ensemble spirit to rehearsals with Kneehigh. They use barns which the company rents from the National Trust, everyone eats together in the barns and has the responsibility for clearing up after meals. Daily games and exercises unite the company members. Rehearsals are described in four stages. Everyone in the company is encouraged to contribute to the process. Emma Rice's process is described in four stages:

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 key moments for their character. 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 focuses on building scenes – creating a storyboard and putting the scenes together.

Source material is vast and ranges from films to fairy tales – the common denominator is that they are not afraid to rewrite and shares Littlewood's frequent irreverence towards the original. What she did to Littlewood – is what works theatrically.

Chapter 10



For

Exam Section

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>

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