

DIGITAL THEATRE+

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Drama Universal Questions



Below is a list of questions and tasks to guide your study of any play, they're intentionally non-specific so that they can be used with a wide variety of plays.

You may need to tailor these to the specific play you are studying, as well as the context of your students.



- 1) Create a **prompt book** to organise **dramaturgy**, **blocking**, and **play analysis** (see our [Director's Notebooks](#) for examples).
- 2) Choose a **career** in the theatre to **investigate**:
 - Using a variety of resources from Digital Theatre+ (e.g. interviews, documentaries and guides), investigate your chosen career, including the **training** and **experience** required to **build a career** in that field.
 - In your final product, share **specific experiences** from at least **two working practitioners**, and chart their career progression into that field.
 - Digital Theatre+ has a variety of interviews and documentaries on various theatre careers which you can reference in your research. Use our search bar to look for the specific career you would like to investigate. You can also search through our [My West End](#) series or search a generic term such as [Design](#) to get a variety of results.
- 3) Based on **clues** found within the **text**, make a **rough sketch** of the **physical environment** of your chosen scene from the text. Denote the type of stage (e.g. proscenium, thrust, theatre-in-the-round/arena, black box), where the **audience would sit**, and the **main entrances** and **exits** for the characters*
- 4) Choose and watch a production from Digital Theatre+.
 - After viewing, evaluate the resources used to mount that specific production, the **production's faithfulness** to the **playwright's intent**, and to the **time period** and **culture**.
- 5) Choose and watch a production from Digital Theatre+.
 - Focus on **two particular characters** or actors for detailed study (e.g. gesture, walk, stance, body language, facial expression or voice tones).
 - Jot down enough detail to be able to enlarge on two or three particularly **striking moments** with as much visual back-up as possible*
 - You could also use and associated interviews to gain more **insight** into the **choices** the actors and/or director made for the production.





- 6) Choose any production, play text, or graphic novel on Digital Theatre+.
 - After reading/watching, **identify the main conflict** in the text/production.
 - Then, write about any **contemporary situation(s)** that have the **same conflict** explaining how they **mirror** the conflict within the text/production.

- 7) History has a way of repeating itself. Write about this with reference to the text.
 - Then, think of other plays, books, or films with **historical settings**.
 - What is the **impact** on **modern audiences/readers** of setting a **work of art** in the **past**?

- 8) **Create a full list of characters** in the text/production and then – either gradually, as you work your way through, or in one go, after your first full reading/viewing – **annotate** it with **thumbnail descriptions** (no more than 20 words per person), taking into account what each character says and does, and what others say about them.
 - Then, looking at your thumbnail descriptions, **identify an actor** who has **played a comparable character** in any other play, film, or tv show you're familiar with and cast them in the role. You will need to **justify your choices**, which could include the actor's age, build, looks, voice and perhaps performance style. What makes you think they are a good fit for this role?
 - Once you have compiled your cast, you could **find and print online head and shoulders photographs** of the performers to create a cast **photo gallery**.*

- 9) Determine **one or more themes** or central ideas of a text.
 - Analyse in detail its **development** over the course of the text, including how it **emerges** and is **shaped** and **refined** by specific details, such as **setting, characterisation** and **plot**.

- 10) **Compare** similar **themes** in a variety of **literary** or **dramatic texts** representing different cultures.





- 11) Analyse **multiple interpretations** of a story or drama, **evaluating** how each **version interprets** the source text. (Digital Theatre+ has multiple versions of several key titles including *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*).
- 12) **Research** the time **period** and **historical context** of the play/novel.
- Create a **timeline** or presentation of the **major events** that occurred (refer to the *Nibroc Trilogy Study Guides* or *Director's Notebooks* on Digital Theatre+ as examples).
- 13) Charles Darwin's observations of behaviour in nature suggested that organisms adapt to their environment. **Environment** therefore has a determining **role** in **shaping behaviour**. Thinking about your own life answer the following:
- Do you agree or disagree that we **behave differently** in response to different environments and factors, such as whether we are inside or outside, what time of the day it is, whether we are in a classroom or in our living room, etc.?
 - Is behaviour **entirely determined** by environment, and hereditary?
 - Is there any room for **individual agency** or responsibility?
 - What about the circumstances in the **text** – do the **characters behave differently** in response to **different environments**? Support your opinion with specific examples.
- 14) Citing evidence from a specific production found on Digital Theatre+, support an **interpretation** of the **artistic choices**, and defend the use of a specific **style, form** or **period** to express an intended **message**.

*Adapted from *How to Read, Watch and Write about Plays: The Tempest*





EXTRACT FROM JENI WHITTAKER'S THE BASICS:

REVIEW WRITING:

What to look for when preparing to write a review of a play/production

AREAS TO LOOK FOR IN A PLAY:

- Name of play
- Playwright
- Name of company
- Where seen
- When seen
- Type of theatre/stage (e.g. theatre-in-round, proscenium arch, etc. include size of theatre/auditorium, e.g. small, intimate etc.)
- Set (include a rough sketch)

WHOLE TEAM EFFORT:

- Focus on two particular actors for detailed study (as practised in class - gesture, walk, stance, body language, facial expression, voice tones.) Jot down enough detail to be able to enlarge on two or three particularly striking moments with as much visual back-up as possible.
- **Lighting:**
 - Appropriate? Too dark? Imaginative?
 - How and at what points of the play?
 - Did it help with the atmosphere/themes of the play?
- **Sound:**
 - Appropriate? Late? Imaginative?
 - How and at what points of the play?
 - Did it help with the atmosphere/themes of the play?
- **Costumes & make-up** (include sketches):
 - Was there anything special about them?
 - How was colour used?
 - Were certain characters linked by colour?
 - Was a character picked out by a contrasting colour?
 - General effect?
- Any unusual features for special mention?
- **Audience response?** Were they noisy, quiet, laughed appropriately/inappropriately, restless, clearly totally absorbed?





- Your feelings about what the director and company were trying to achieve?

Some additional questions you could ask yourself to help you write up your evaluation **as soon as possible after the event:**

- What was the work about? Was there a message or a theme you could recognise?
- Was the work a recognisable genre - comedy, farce, melodrama, tragedy? Or was it a mixture of things?
- How did it make you respond at particular moments? Were you moved at any time? Did it surprise you, or shock you at any time? Did it make you laugh? For each of these try to latch onto a specific moment and write it up in as much visual detail as you can.
- Where and when was it set?
- How interested were you and how did it make you feel at the end?

On a practical level:

- Were the actors showing awareness of an audience or pretending they weren't there?
 - How well were their characters maintained?
 - How well was the story put over?
 - Was it clear?
 - Was the pace good?
 - Did it vary appropriately?
 - Did you believe in the characters? If not, was this deliberate? Did you feel sympathy for them? If not, why not?
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