



# Performance Studies

**A LEVEL**

## **Performance Studies: Anthol Fugard**

Topic Exploration Pack

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*This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.*



## Teacher Guide

Athol Fugard is one of the practitioners in the Performance Studies AS unit G402, Performance Contexts 1.

This is a 2-hour written paper with questions on two different practitioners. One hour, therefore, is the optimum time for candidates to tackle Fugard through the study of his works.

The specification says that candidates must study one work, the choice being left to the centre's discretion but it must 'demonstrate broad trends in the output of that practitioner' and 'comment generally on the relationship between the work studied and the practitioner's output as a whole.'

Questions test knowledge and understanding in one or more of the following:

- structure and form – how Fugard organises materials within his work and the effects this organisation produces
- elements of the performing arts – how he exploits dialogue, characterisation, physicality, proxemics, tension and other dramatic elements and the links across the art forms
- performance techniques – what approaches and specific skills performers of his works adopt in performing his plays
- stylistic influences – how is he influenced by and his work informed by the styles of other practitioners, genres and cultures
- contexts - how he explores, reflects and is influenced by social, historical and cultural contexts.

This pack is designed to introduce teachers and students to Athol Fugard for preparation for G402 or any other exam, stand-alone study or as part of wider drama and theatre studies.

## Biography

Students often think that a practitioner's life story will tell them all they need to know. Certainly it's helpful to understand that he, a white South African, was born in 1932 and is best known for his political plays opposing South Africa's system of racial apartheid.

Influenced by Brecht's gestic acting when he ran the Circle Players and the Serpent Players in the early 1960s he explored disillusion and social critique with satiric comic routines of urban African vaudeville to champion political causes.

Therefore an overview of his life and his catalogues of works is a good starting point. After all, artists are products of their times and are influenced by a wide range of events, people and circumstances in a lifetime.

## Prior Knowledge

The assumption is that students will have a working knowledge of the elements, vocabulary and practice of drama, of improvisation and of studying scripts with a view to taking them from page to stage.

Some understanding of the theories of Brecht is essential. Some knowledge of apartheid with its white supremacy, racial segregation and censorship (1948 – 1991) would be useful.

Teachers will find it helpful to select either complete texts or a range of extracts in advance of doing practical work. It is also recommended that practical experimenting comes early in the study, even before any scripts are read.

For preparation of the written aspect, previous questions and mark schemes provide a solid training base applicable to exam or analysis of plays.

Fugard was sometimes criticised early on for a willingness to sacrifice character to symbolism, yet his characters are remarkably detailed and full of human life. His later work was more imagist, not using any prior script but giving actors “a mandate” to work around “a cluster of images.”

These perceptions need to be considered by the teacher before being presented to students.

## Sources of Information

The most comprehensive book on Performance Contexts 1 is *Performance Studies for A Level* by John Pymm, Gail Deal and Mark Lewinski, Hodder Education (2008) ISBN: 978 0340 967 539. Published in association with OCR this book demonstrates how to teach the other units of Performance Studies A-Level, too.

Encyclopedia Britannica has a succinct summary of Fugard’s life and work which is a good introduction and basis for further research. <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Athol-Fugard>

Teachers will find a useful way of evaluating performance is through reviews of his plays. The New York Times has a good commentary and article archive.

[http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/f/athol\\_fugard/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/f/athol_fugard/index.html)

Article written by Fugard in The Guardian in 2010 about his alcoholism and life and work.

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/oct/31/once-upon-a-life-athol-fugard>

Playwright Athol Fugard: a man of obstinacy and courage, a Michael Billington analysis of a 2012 documentary about him. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jun/03/athol-fugard-playwright-apartheid-documentary>

Athol Fugard in a lecture/discussion about his work on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zlv4n7maQcl> is interesting.

Short extract from 'The Island' on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcYOBQonABU>

'Sizwe Bansi Is Dead' on YouTube

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoTJUKt\\_HzU&list=PLEu4C3GxQXEfr\\_Hw7mPvNooaJOjzEg5gQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoTJUKt_HzU&list=PLEu4C3GxQXEfr_Hw7mPvNooaJOjzEg5gQ)

'Boesman and Lena' (2001) DVD, the full play.

'Master Harold ... and the Boys' (2011) DVD, the full play.

Devising Theatre resources from the TES, aimed at GCSE level, but useful ideas for all teachers and students when exploring issue-based drama through improvisation

<https://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/devising-theatre-6315265>

## The Texts

Fugard's plays are often grouped chronologically or by themes. This is a selection from one by Iain Fisher <http://www.iainfisher.com/fugard/athol-fugard-play.html>

### Port Elizabeth Plays:

'The Blood Knot' (1961)/'Blood Knot' (1987), about a fishing knot, a common bond.

'Hello and Goodbye' (1965), about a brother and sister with no love to share, a life unfulfilled.

'The Last Bus' (1969) and 'Friday's Bread on Monday' (1970), workshop pieces about deprivation and attitudes.

'Boesman and Lena' (1969), about a derelict, homeless husband and wife walking with all their possessions.

'Master Harold ... and the Boys' (1982), about apartheid's power to corrupt.

### **Township Plays:**

'Klaas and the Devil' (1956) and 'The Cell' (1957), early works.

'No-Good Friday' (1958), inspired by an empty pocket.

'Nongogo' (1959), nongogo is slang for a cheap prostitute.

'The Coat' (1966), about a man jailed for political crimes who has only his coat to send to his wife.

'People Are Living There' (1968), psychological study of frustration and loneliness.

### **Exile and Other Worlds:**

'The Road to Mecca' (1984), about an eccentric 'outsider' sculptress and restless creativity.

'A Place With the Pigs' a personal parable set outside South Africa.

### **Statement Plays:**

'Sizwe Bansi Is Dead' (1972), a man takes on a dead man's identity to get work.

'The Island' (1973), about hope and despair with two prisoners rehearsing 'Antigone'.

'Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act' (1972), about a white and a coloured lover being arrested.

### **My Africa:**

'Playland' (1993), Fugard's first play after apartheid ended.

'Valley Song' (1996), about old Africa and the new Africa.

### **Sorrow and Rejoicing:**

'Sorrows and Rejoicings' (2001), about the apartheid legacy on two women, one black and one white.

'Victory' (2006), about a girl born on the day Nelson Mandela was released from house arrest.

## **Approaches**

For exploring Athol Fugard it's recommended that teachers select their preferred playscript(s) to study.

In this order the easiest way to approach the teaching is:

- Background including biography
- Stylistic influences
- Cultural, social and historical contexts of the play
- The plot in summary
- Key themes
- Performance style(s).

As well as a study of theory and factual information, practical work is particularly important. Students should be asked to devise a drama piece around the themes and/or characters.

Because Fugard's plays are rarely performed compared with other 20<sup>th</sup> Century playwrights, students often treat his plays as works of literature rather than as frameworks for creating live performance to an audience.

A class read-through after improvisation is a good introduction to the text itself, with the teacher reading stage directions and interjecting comments which direct thinking and encourage questions students may have.

Small groups trying one scene or section, all working on the same extract is best, followed by sharing and peer assessment. This should be followed by more focused performance skills with students taking it in turns to direct each other.



Extracts should be polished, as this helps passages to be learned by heart and meaning to be explored and conveyed better.

It is useful to teacher and peer assess the group polished performances, perhaps using the G404 repertoire mark scheme from 2011 onwards. [www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/download-past-papers/](http://www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/download-past-papers/)

Research could begin the process, but many teachers will find that if interest is already awakened in a particular theme, issue or idea through improvisation and reading some text, then research will be more valuable. The internet is full of helpful sites.

Reviews of productions of his plays are always informative, even those that are quite old. However, Variety has one of his 2015 play, 'The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek' which offers insight on his recent political legacy writing and 'outsider artist' work.

Teachers will take every opportunity to see any live Fugard being done locally. Occasionally the arts programmes on TV feature might some aspect of his work

## Lesson Activity 1

### Warm up:

The teacher asks students in small groups to create a scene in which all are pitching a tent happily and collaboratively. Invite each group to share their scene in turn.

The same groups are asked to repeat the scene but with one as an unwelcomed outsider they have to put up with. What makes this person different (age, race, religion, disability)? Again, they are asked to share.

Same groups are asked to repeat it with the outsider and one of the in-crowd making a commentary from the side directly addressed to the audience of all that is unfolding which may be funny and/or unkind for benefit of the audience.

The teacher again asks them to repeat it, but adding in a) a bystander making comments and b) the outsider addressing audience directly to say how he/she feels.

## Discussion:

Explain that they have just experimented with dispassionate commentary of the obvious with a viewpoint (comic, serious, hurtful) and direct address to the audience. Both are Brechtian techniques.

Teacher gives summary of his techniques and how they appear in drama:

- Epic theatre, theatricalism (the audience are aware they are in a theatre) and alienation or maintaining an emotional distance between actors and characters
- Verfremdungseffekt or v-effekt or 'making strange', distancing
- Episodic or montage, where scenes may be played in any order and maintain integrity of structure
- Actors do not act, but demonstrate a part
- Their gestures plus their attitudes are 'gestus', inviting audience to realise that what they say is more important than immersing in a character, scenery/set, lighting or the illusions of theatrics
- Incongruity provokes thought. For example something out of keeping on stage makes audience question
- Changing roles during a piece is used to break emotional links between characters and actors. This became multi-roling, used frequently by Caryl Churchill and John Godber, for example
- There is frequently a strong political message for the audience.

However, Brecht was an early influence on Fugard and while traces remained, he was not a major stylistic influence. Politics was and is the driving force in Fugard's work.

## Improvise round a theme:

Groups are asked to devise a scene where a group of 'outsiders' in society possess strengths and weaknesses, but are unable to fit into what society requires. Each one has different characteristics, yet they have been branded 'outsiders' by an authoritarian society in which they happen to live.

They are also isolated people who have been marginalised, yet they have a distant hope of something better coming. They may even have a dark sense of humour in the face of their misery.

From Brechtian techniques students should take such as they find useful to push the characters forward or to make a statement/message. They could play it naturalistically instead. If one character is to be dominant, it should be a female one, if possible.

After devising a scene, each group is asked to share it to peers so that the issue of the outsider and why can then be discussed. The authority must be absent, yet its power must be felt.

The groups are asked to explore further in dramatic terms how to develop the scene – with authority figure(s), with something happening to them, with one managing to leave? They should try to build in a sense of passive despairing acceptance of the situation, but one which could be ignited into the flame of independence.

### **Plenary:**

The introductory Fugard lesson has been about applying some Brechtian techniques to a piece of improvisation as and if appropriate to a situation with one or more outsiders who have human strengths and weaknesses yet are caught up in a system that is beyond their power to influence or change.

## **Lesson Activity 2**

### **Warm up:**

The teacher shows a YouTube clip of one short section from a Fugard play.

The class reads the extract as text and discusses how it was made into performance, page to stage, bringing the words alive.

### **Discussion:**

Teacher lead discussion – How do people see different perspectives from what is apparently the same event? How can somebody watching a play interpret it very far from what Fugard may have intended?

### **Politics:**

Teachers should explain the gist of the South African apartheid regime and compare it with racial segregation in the USA, for instance. The Nazi holocaust and later Balkan and Rwandan 'ethnic cleansing' and racial hatred generally may also be relevant.

Students should be made aware that a man like Fugard who was not black was very brave to work with and perform alongside black people and to write plays on the issues and in the way he did.

## Research:

Students are asked to find out as far as possible what Fugard has said about a particular play or theme. There are news items of his appearances; there are written quotations he has given on particular issues.

## Deconstruction:

The teacher explains that taking a play apart to consider its meaning is called deconstruction. Students should be able to analyse how stage directions, lighting, costume, settings, transitions between scenes, multi-rolling and heavy political messages impact on what the audience sees and remembers.

## Presentation:

In small groups students are asked to prepare a short group presentation on what are the meanings of and behind a scene from a particular play chosen by the teacher. Students should use scripts to illustrate and support their arguments.

## Lesson Activity 3

From the OCR archive of previous questions and mark schemes. [www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/download-past-papers/](http://www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/download-past-papers/) teachers prepare sets of questions to use in lessons over a period of time after devising around themes/issues and after practical exploration of text(s) has given students familiarity with the work.

## First step:

Take two questions from the archive and teachers talk them through. Are they focused primarily on contexts, stylistic influences, performance techniques or elements of the performing arts? Ask students to work through and make planning notes in pairs.

It's essential that students appreciate while every question has a focus, it cannot be answered well without including something from the other main focus points. For example, it's hard to talk about a Fugard play without using drama elements, knowing what influenced him and the social, political, historical and cultural contexts in which he wrote.

### **Second step:**

Take another pair of previous questions, repeat the approach. Teachers then ask students to draft out a response to one question.

### **Third step:**

Mark the responses and ask students to mark each other's simultaneously by reference to the Mark Scheme.

### **Fourth step:**

Repeat with a different set of archive questions, never giving more than two question choices at a time.

### **Fifth step:**

Students are asked to sit in exam conditions and answer one question from the archive they have not yet seen and in an hour only.

These should then be teacher and peer marked against the relevant Mark Scheme.

# Student Sheets

## Student Sheet 1

### Adapted from the Performance Studies Mark Schemes:

Fugard's fingerprints.

- Fugard uses real events often to tell a story; debate and argument are used to communicate political viewpoints
- uses physical intensity to create theatrical and dramatic power of actions, including moments of sudden and unexpected brutality
- uses few characters and settings, preferring one location with no scene changes and minimal props (ref: Brecht)
- uses personal struggles and asserting self-identity and self-worth to develop characters
- uses guilt and conscience as frequent elements in characters' make up
- uses relentless movement towards tragedy but often with humour and comic action in the face of adversity which heightens the sense of isolation
- uses the necessity of considered choice and working towards a better future despite everything apparently against it
- uses specific actors for particular parts, including himself, having acted in almost every play he wrote
- uses a radical mix of characters in most plays which is significant for the action and some white roles are 'unseen'
- uses an atheistic stance but includes religion as supportive of political struggle
- uses religious imagery and symbolic allusion to classical theatre, especially Greek, to explore universal themes through local action
- uses collaborative approaches to writing up till 'The Island'; more introspective, reflective and conventional playwriting after it
- uses a specific audience for each performance where he has a choice to convey the particular message. South African audiences interact with and debate stage action in a way that European and American audiences do not.

**QUESTION:** Are there any trademark fingerprints you have identified in a Fugard play you have studied that are not included above?



## Student Sheet 2

### Quality of Written Communication (QWC)

If Fugard is being studied for a written assessment, the quality of the written English will play an important part. In Performance Contexts 1, for example, Knowledge and Understanding is worth up to 24 marks, while QWC could gain 6 marks per question. That 20% of the mark could make a difference of a grade in the exam.

#### Do's

Do spell his name correctly, Athol Fugard.

Do give his play titles initial capital letters. The Island, Sizwe Bansi Is Dead.

Do give the names of characters initial capital letters too.

Do make any direct quotation from a play or other source clear with the speech marks.

Do make sure you have read and understood the question. It will never ask you to write all you know about Athol Fugard.

Do use performance specific words correctly.

Do use quotes from the play(s) to support what you are saying, but make them relevant and not just something you have memorised to suit any occasion.

Do use references from other practitioners, commentators, songs, films that are relevant to support your response to the question.

Do you have a sense of Fugard's repertoire, even though you may have only closely studied one play?

Do remember you are writing about a performance to an audience, not a work of literature.

FINALLY, do plan your time carefully. If you have an hour, jot down a plan. Opening should be relevant and get into the question. Conclusion should be a short, sharp wrap-up.

#### Don'ts

Don't call him Athol. In an essay he is Fugard.

Don't spell incorrectly any words given in the question.

Don't use etc, it is meaningless.

Don't use textspeak or unnecessary abbreviations such as &.

Don't open an essay with a long-winded biography unless it's helpful in answering the actual question.

Don't write a conclusion which merely repeats what you have already said.

Don't write extensive rambling sentences and/or paragraphs.

Don't make sweeping statements and generalisations that are not backed up.

FINALLY, don't use a formulaic response in which you end every paragraph with repeating the question and think you have answered it.



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