

Topic Exploration Pack

Edward Gordon Craig

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Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions cover the student activity section which can be found on [page 7](#). This Topic Exploration Pack supports OCR AS and A Level Drama and Theatre.

When distributing the activity section to the students either as a printed copy or as a Word file you will need to remove the teacher instructions section.

ABC – This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.

DRAMA AND THEATRE

Teacher Instructions

Introduction to Craig

Edward Gordon Craig lived from 1872 to 1966. He was born in Stevenage, Hertfordshire. He and was an actor, theatre director-designer, producer, and theorist who influenced the development of the theatre in the 20th century.

During his early years Craig worked as an actor before exploring design within theatre developing ideas on how the set, costumes, lighting, sound and movement of the actors would all share the same concept.

Craig wrote 'On the Art of the Theatre' in 1911 which was his greatest written work, and laid out an idealistic vision for how theatre should be. Craig was famously asked by Konstantin Stanislavski to direct a production of Hamlet at The Moscow Art Theatre where he developed the use of portable folding hinged screens within the production.

Craig was fascinated in how using form, lighting, colour and the movement of actors could break away from the traditional theatrical production. Craig envisaged a theatre where the set would be all moving, with the shape and texture changing throughout the production. Craig as a designer created numerous visions for the staging of his productions many highly ambitious and technologically advanced for the time in which he was writing. Craig's legacy is the vision he had for theatre and the experimental approach he took to creating beautiful drama.

This exploration pack will explore the visionary Craig that wanted to create an ideal theatre, with the exercises towards the end of this resource students will be exploring how they can use Craig's ideas to design and create theatre.

Key facts about Craig

Craig's purpose and practice

Craig had a vision, a dream of a kind of theatre where movement and the form that theatre took would create an emotional reaction with the audience. His ideal theatre would be one that wasn't constrained by characters within a narrative journey but one that is a combination of movement, sound and lights all working together in harmony. For Craig movement would provoke a reaction within the audience as they soak up the energy being created on stage.

Craig believed every play had its own décor, its own colour that would guide the designer and director on realising their vision. This helped all elements of the theatrical experience to be linked by this colour, or design, to create the world of the play. The writer may have set the play in a living room but he may stage it in a space filled with colour and shadow, light bouncing off the walls. This was how a new theatre would be born and the ways of the old theatre reformed. For Craig theatre was a process of discovery and experimentation.

Artistic intentions

For Craig the role of the actor was one of deep concern; he wanted a truly emotional performance to come from the actor and the acting he saw during his lifetime didn't satisfy him. It was this quest for a new way of acting that attracted the attention of Stanislavski and led to Craig being asked to work at The Moscow Art Theatre. He believed that if acting was superficial, then the actors should be silenced, relying on movement and action rather than speech to communicate with the audience.

Craig explored the idea of using puppets or 'uber marionettes' to replace actors in the quest of creating a new theatre, while at the same time exploring how creating 'uber actors' or 'super actors' was needed for the theatre. It was this focus on changing the traditional 'stock character' acting that resonated so strongly with Stanislavski.

Innovative nature of Craig's work

Craig as a designer and director was ahead of his time; he had a vision for a new theatre that was never to be realised in his life time. He would look at a play that was to be staged and create a design for the play that would combine all the different elements of the theatrical experience. He envisaged the stage being a huge mechanical being with cubes, screens and lights moving in all directions across the stage area. It is only today, with the technical advancements in theatre that ideas that Craig had can be effectively put into practice. While at The Moscow Art Theatre Craig, experimented with revolutionary ideas for staging Hamlet. He used a series of hinged and moveable screens which so wonderfully created the towers, corridors and passages of Elsinore to great effect. The ghost would appear and disappear aided by the use of the screens with the contrast between light and shadow creating the grey world of the Danish court.

Working methods and theatrical style

Craig argued that theatre had become obsessed with the spoken word and that by removing speech theatre would reconnect with its traditional form based in mime, movement and dance. Craig at heart was an experimental practitioner whose working methods would start on the numerous pages of his design note books in the form of sketches and annotated diagrams. He was bold and challenged how theatre was created striving to develop a new theatre that reconnected with the very origins of theatre itself. Craig was not bound by what could be staged effectively and within budget instead he would create designs that would be technically challenging. Craig most applauded design was the idea of having all scenery made of screens with two way hinges that are 'flown' around the set during a production. His screens were used at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin by W.B. Yeats.

Craig's influence

A generation of designers that have followed Craig are testament to his legacy. It is almost a 'given' today that there should be a correlation between all the different areas of a production between design, direction, staging, acting, lighting and sound. Craig was one of the first designers to move away from the footlights and use lighting from above and from the sides of the stage.

DRAMA AND THEATRE

Teacher Instructions

Craig's influence can be seen in the work of other practitioners such as Lecoq, Brook, Grotowski and Meyerhold. His vision for a movement based ensemble theatre has had a huge influence on modern devised theatre and the work of companies such as Complicite and DV8.

Preparing to teach

The key resource to use when exploring Craig as a practitioner would be the text *On the Art of Theatre*:

Craig, E.G. (2009). *On the Art of Theatre*, Charleston: Bibliolife. ISBN 978-1115985963

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Art-Theatre-Edward-Gordon-Craig/dp/1115985965>

This outlines Craig's vision for theatre and gives a wonderful insight into his key ideas and practices.

Suitable texts

As Craig had ideas beyond his time in how a play should be approached, directed and designed many contemporary plays would be perfect for the Craig treatment. Similarly devised work would benefit greatly from having Craig's ideas on staging and design explored throughout the devising process. If you look at devising work that have evolved over the last twenty years much of the ideas on staging and use of movement are directly compatible with Craig's vision of theatre.

Design tools

Creating stage screens or flats can be done fairly easily, all you need is wood cut to order as a frame and stage flat material that can be pulled tightly over the frame and nailed down to create your screens. These screens can be used again and again and can easily be moved around the stage. Below is a link to follow when building flats to use as screens. The advantage of material is that your designer can create effects using the stage lighting through the canvas to create a world of light and shadow.

[How to build a theatre flat](#)

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Student Activity

Suggested activities

In this section are three examples of exercises to use with your students when using Craig's ideas working with actors and in design. There is a design homework for you to set your design students to create their own vision of the play or devised piece you are exploring with your students. Many of Craig's designs and ideas would be beyond the budget of the professional theatre so these exercises have been designed with the school and college studio in mind.

1. Actor exercise – The truth of movement

- Take a scene from the play or devised piece that you are working on and run the scene with the dialogue as rehearsed.
- Take the scene and remove all dialogue / speech and use a series of movements to express the truth of your character within the circumstance they are in.
- Run the scene with just movement and have one of the group either the director / designer comment on what they have understood from the scene.
- Think about how movement can create an emotional reaction in the audience.
- Using blocks or simple screens establish an experimental set in which to stage the scene.
- Add lighting to create shadow on stage from which the actors can move freely.
- Run the scene.

Use this exercise to experiment with ways to use movement to help tell the story of the scene and to create a bold vision of the play or the devised piece you are exploring.

Using video

Craig with today's resources would have revelled in using video and film to enhance the theatre experience. Try using filmed sequences combined with colour that reflects the design of the play / devised piece to enhance the truth of movement in the scene.

2. Screen scene

- With the play you are working on or the devised piece decide on the stage space you want to use.
- Using flats as screens positioned horizontally and vertically start to build the set for the first scene. Think about the atmosphere you want to create using the screens.



- With the screens in place rehearse the scene on the set with the screens moving as part of the scene as the actors move.
- Think about how the screens can become part of the scene telling the story and symbolising the message of your piece.
- Use lighting to work in tandem with the movement of the actors and the screens on stage.
- Think about how the story of your piece can be communicated through the movement keeping the screens and the actors moving at the same tempo rhythm to create an emotional reaction in the audience.

3. Exploring the space

- As part of the devising process or with a scene of your play look for another art medium that will help with the staging of your piece.
- Think about paintings that would support the narrative or message of your piece or poetry that would help trigger movements that would create an emotional connection with the audience.
- Choose an art work and create a thirty second movement sequence that reflects that art work.
- As a group think about how you can integrate the movement sequence within your devised or text work allowing the essence of the two pieces of work to exist together.

4. The colour is the thing

- During the devising / working on text process, as a group decide on what colour and shade best fits the play or your devised piece.
- With a sheet of white card and several brushes and a selection of paints explore the different colours until you find one that best fits your work.
- Take several pieces of card painted with the colour chosen and hang them around the studio.
- If you have the equipment project that colour on to screens around the studio.
- Using lighting bounce light off the card and using the screens from the previous exercise explore how you can create shadow around the set.

Homework exercise

The Designer's model

- With the play you are exploring or the devised piece you are working on create a miniature model for the set you would like to create.
- Use a scale that works for your space so that all the objects are in proportions.
- Create a series of screens that can be moved around your set.
- Decide on the colour to create the atmosphere of the set, try different colours for the set before deciding as an ensemble which colour best represents the piece you are working on.
- Use lighting to create light and shadow through the set.
- Now assemble the cast and walk through your play piece showing the scene changes and lighting changes as they occur.
- Allow this process to be two way so the actors and director offer ideas on how the set can combine with the performance and flow a unity can be created between the acting, movement, set, lighting and sound.
- Have your stage model on hand throughout the rehearsal process to use as a guide for staging and prop and scene changes.