

# Drama

**GCSE**

**Drama**

Topic Exploration Pack

Set and Prop Design

November 2015

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Page 13-14: Extract for Wardrobe from Nick Hern Books

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# Introduction

Drama in the Making is about the potential of the ideas presented and not creating a polished final product. When students are completing their designs it is important that they remember that they are not restricted by budget and the space is entirely their choice.

Set and prop design will be completed as either Item 2 or Item 3 for the Drama in Making unit and should link to the given stimulus directly or to another item. For example, if your stimulus for Item 1 is a painting and a group chooses to create an improvisation for this based on the theme of the painting e.g. poverty then, for Item 2 the students might perform a duologue based on two of the characters from the improvisation. For Item 3, they would not be able to perform so the design (or director/ deviser) element could be used and they could base this on the original idea for Item 1 or even Item 2. As long as the students can relate their designs back to original stimulus and can identify the potential for the design elements of the scene they can choose either.

Collectively Items 2 and 3 are worth 20 marks of the whole unit. Some students thrive on this element as this is something that they may already do in their practice and don't always get to put it down on paper or even acknowledge it. A successful design has detail and students often question whether they should refer to their choice of materials or even where entrances and exits lead to. The more detail, the better. The does

not mean, however, that this all has to be written detail. All designs can be presented, so a drawn/ illustrated design of the set and props and a video recording of the student presenting their work should allow for the intentions of the students' design to come across.

For all design elements: set, lighting, costume, props, sound, marketing etc. the key to success in design is context. Once this is firmly established all other ideas generated should fall in to place; considerations for style, semiotics and practicalities.

Students often ask if they should design set and props. It is essential that they only focus on one element as the depth for each design needs to be detailed and justified, therefore time would inhibit the students if more than one design is commissioned.

When presenting their work, the students must use the relevant terminology to show their understanding of their design and considerations. The work should illustrate ideas for potential development and will be between two and four sides of A4 or a two minute presentation or a mixture of the both.

For a set design, an audience-view design is required and a ground plan. For a prop design, details about the materials, and the potential for using a variety of materials and choices would be beneficial along with references to character and practical use. Size and or scale is also advised to show that this has been considered.



# Teacher preparations

Be sure to know the difference between props and set. If you have a stack of boxes that are there for dressing, then these are set. If one is picked up and used; it is a prop. Students often can't identify the difference between set-dressing and props.

This also applies to the difference between a costume accessory and a personal prop; a hat can be both costume and prop – depending on its use; if used to show era/ character then this is costume, if used by the actor to hold up, point, hide things, for example, then it would be a prop. Sometimes these are not clearly defined, often overlapping for both functions.

What evidence would look like for submission for assessment?

The Marking criteria look for students to:

- Match choice of content and intent with perception (AO1).
- Explain how the design would support the drama and any social, cultural and political connections. (AO1).
- Use and understand the social, historical or cultural elements of the drama's context - that can create an idea for a design that will resonate strongly with the overall intention of the drama (AO1).

- Use and select relevant stage space and use of entrances and exits (AO1 and AO2).
- Produce designs in a style relevant to the genre and performance style that resonates strongly with the themes of the stimulus/ other items (Ao1 and Ao2).
- Have accurate and appropriate use of terminology (AO1 and AO2).
- Demonstrate a strong understanding of semiotics and how symbols add meaning and support intent (AO2).

For set design, you would expect to see a detailed – preferably with swatches of colour or fabric – design both in audience perspective and ground plan. Both designs should have detailed annotations on that meet the criteria listed in the specification covering the six areas of study. The designs could be presented to video camera in detail. Remember to keep the candidate in shot as much as possible. Remember that the student needs to be identifiable throughout with the candidate number clearly given at the start.

Similarly for prop design, as above with detail and presentation though sketches from different perspectives desirably to show deeper understanding and complexes of the prop. Safety elements need to be considered along with the practicality of the item in the performance space.



# Activity 1

## Learning objectives:

Recognise advantages and disadvantages of performance spaces.

Identify characteristics of language and the writers'/ devisers' choices that influence design elements.

## Task one:

Ask students to work through Worksheet 1 'What's the space?'

Using 'What's the space?' research or discuss performance spaces.

## Task two:

Work through Worksheet 2 about Props.

What's the overall design of the drama/ style and who is using the prop?

## Task Three:

Worksheet 3 gives a short extract from scene 9 of *The Wardrobe*. A whole task would be to access the play (e version or hard copy) and read a whole scene from the play.

## Task Four:

Worksheet 4 and discuss as a class the advantages and disadvantages of this design for this scene.

In pairs, student need to choose a space and style of performance first, then create/ design a prop for one of the characters in the scene and design a set that would work effectively. They need to base their responses on the writer's choice of language and content and be able to identify in the text where the influence is for their decisions on their designs.

Throughout the process the students need to write down the reasons why they made those choices, making a mini working record.

## Task Five:

Students present their designs to class.

Class then ask presenters questions about their design. This should highlight aspects that have worked well or ideas that they have missed.



## Activity 2

### Learning Objectives:

Recognise the necessary design elements of set and props.

### Task One:

Students need to create a list of criteria that needs to be covered for a successful set design.

Discuss in class.

### Task Two:

Give students Worksheet 5 and ask them to analyse the two set designs. Who lives in these spaces and why – justify.

The two designs are for Fagin's den and Mr Brown's house in the musical Oliver.

### Task Three:

Complete the Five W's Worksheet 6.

### Task Four:

Using Worksheet 7 and the template given, students are to design a set for the Market place in Oliver with considerations for the list the student have previously created.

### Task Five:

Students are to feedback their designs and findings, altering lists if necessary.



## Activity 3

### Learning Objectives:

To recognise the impact of the prop by the target audience and performance space.

Use semiotics to enhance prop understanding/ design.

### Task One:

Briefcase – who's carrying which one? Using Worksheet 8, describe the character – describe the scene. This is good for working backwards rather than feeding from what is given in the text/ drama – the students are asked to look at the prop and assume who they would match it to with their prior knowledge – question does the target audience affect the assumption?

### Task Two:

Small Semiotics exercise on colour/ size/ shape/ material – why does the performance space affect the choices? (Worksheet 9)

Answer: If you chose to make a prop for a performance in the round, it is likely to be needed to be no more than life-size. However, if the performance is end-on / proscenium then it is possible that the prop needs to be bigger to compensate for the distance between the audience and the item. Also, if you were looking at creating a prop for a pantomime, it is likely that it will need to be over-exaggerated – like the style of performance, whereas it was a naturalistic play, the size would be just that. It is sometimes a balance between distance and style – and of course what the director wants!

### Task Three:

Using Worksheet 10, ask students to design a prop for these three characters: Fagin (Oliver), Mikey (from BB) and Leah from DNA – Pictures on a worksheet after choosing a performance space to work in and a style. This could be done practically using resources from the props cupboard.

### Task Four

Write a list of safety implications that you might have when designing props that could impact a performance.

### Task Five:

Peer assess designs against marking criteria and bring good practise to the class' attention.



# WORKSHEET 1: What's the space?



**A**



**B**



**C**

# WORKSHEET 1: What's the Space?



**D**



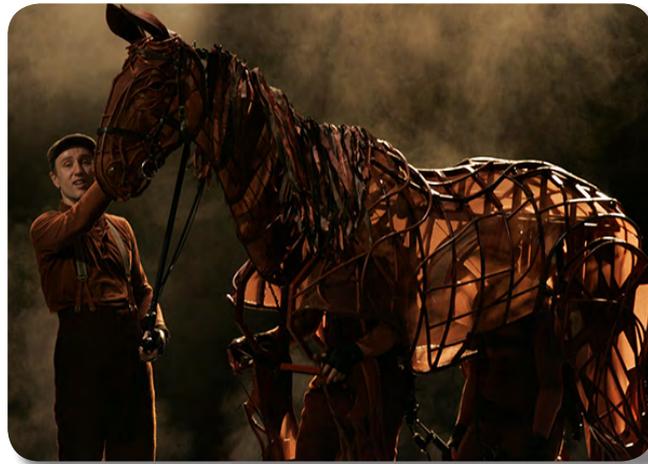
**E**



**F**



## WORKSHEET 2: Prop styles



**War Horse at the Sydney Lyric Theatre**



**Aladdin's lamp for a Pantomime**

Click here to see an example of and read about the making of the Seagull prop itself by The Guildhall School of Music & Drama:  
<https://propmakingdotcom.wordpress.com/2014/03/20/the-seagull/>

**A prop for The Seagull by Chekov - Naturalism**



## WORKSHEET 2: Prop styles

### Props or set?



This is classed as a prop as it's being lifted and used by an actor.



This is classed as set because it is static.  
Could also be classed as set dressing.



## WORKSHEET 2: Prop styles

### Props or costume?



Because the hat is being used for the act it is classed as a prop.



The cast wear their hats and don't use them to enhance the drama.



# WORKSHEET 3: Extract from the Wardrobe by Sam Holcroft

## Synopsis

Across five centuries of British history, small groups of children seek sanctuary in the same solid, old wardrobe. It's the safest place they know – but is it safe enough?

### SCENE NINE

A boys' Catholic boarding school attached to an abbey and run by Benedictine monks, England, 11th November 1888. We hear singing choristers or similar sounds of the time and place.

The papers are awash with stories of a series of gruesome murders that have terrorized Whitechapel in London since the summer. TOM, fifteen-years-old, ARCHIE, sixteen-years-old, HUGO, fifteen-years-old, and JAMES, sixteen-years-old, are students of the school. They huddle together in the wardrobe. TOM reads from a copy of The London Times dated 10th November 1888; he reads with flourish. He reads by the light of a church candle or candle-lamp. HUGO scratches his initials into the wall with a knife.

**TOM.** (Reading) "During the early hours of yesterday morning another murder of a most revolting and fiendish character took place in Spitalfields. This is the seventh which has occurred in this immediate neighbourhood, and the character of the mutilations leaves very little doubt that the murderer in this instance is the same person who has committed the previous ones."

**HUGO.** I thought there were only four.

**JAMES.** Shhh!

**TOM.** "The scene of this last crime is at Number 26 Dorset Street, which is about 200 yards distant from 35 Hanbury Street, where the unfortunate woman, Mary Ann Nicholls, was so foully murdered.

**ARCHIE.** Hugo, what are you doing?

**HUGO.** Writing my initials. Next to these ones. A. R. Who do we know with the initials A.R.?

**JAMES.** (To TOM) Get on with it, Tom.

**TOM.** (Reading) About one o'clock yesterday morning a person living in the court opposite to the room occupied by the woman heard her singing the song "Sweet Violets."

**ARCHIE** sings the song "Sweet Violets," chorus by Joseph Emmet taken from his 1882 play "Fritz Among the Gypsies."

**ARCHIE.** (Singing the song) Sweet Violets, sweeter than all the roses...



**JAMES.** (Speaking over ARCHIE'S singing) Shhh! Tom, finish reading it.

**ARCHIE.** (Continuing) Covered all over from head to toe.

**JAMES.** Tom?

**TOM** and **ARCHIE.** Covered all over with sweet violets.

**ARCHIE.** (Singing) There once was a farmer who took a young miss  
In the back of the barn where he gave her a...

**TOM.** Lecture on horses and chickens and eggs  
And told her that she had such beautiful...

**HUGO.** Manners that suited a girl of her charms  
A girl that he wanted to take in his...

**TOM.** Washing and ironing and then if she did  
They would get married and raise lots of...

**ARCHIE/TOM/HUGO:** (Deliberately taunting JAMES) Sweet Violets, sweeter than all the roses,  
Covered all over from head to toe,  
Covered all over with sweet violets...!

**Source:**

Extract produced with the kind permission of Nick Hern Books.

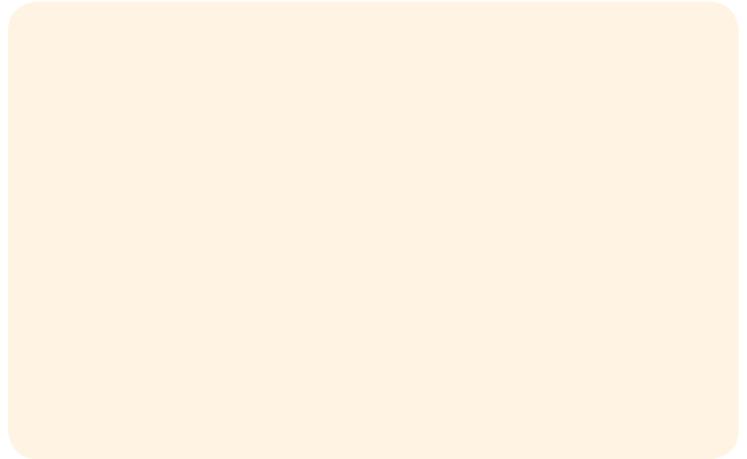
Holcroft, S. (2014) *The Wardrobe*, London: Nick Hern Books



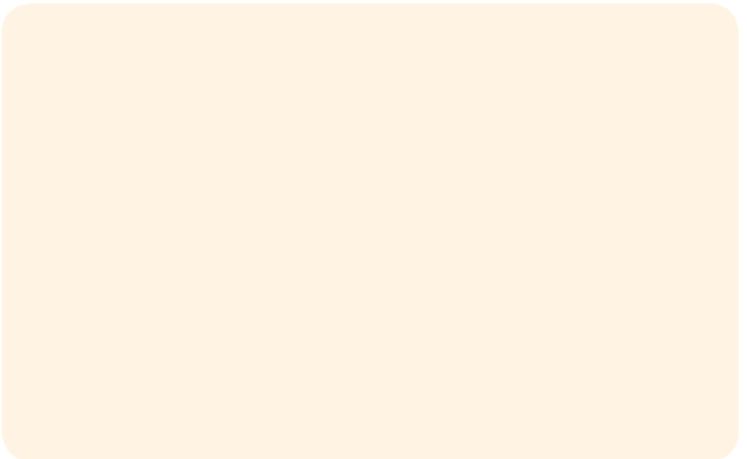
## WORKSHEET 4: Advantages and disadvantages of the wardrobe set design

The two images below are a basic design for *The Wardrobe* by Sam Holcroft where thirteen short scenes are performed in a traditional Tudor wardrobe and move through the eras from 1644 – present day.

If the wooden blocks reflect the wardrobe as a solid entity, what are the practical difficulties for this design?



What could you change to make this wardrobe more effective?



# WORKSHEET 5: Two set designs

## Set design 1



# WORKSHEET 5: Two set designs

## Set design 2



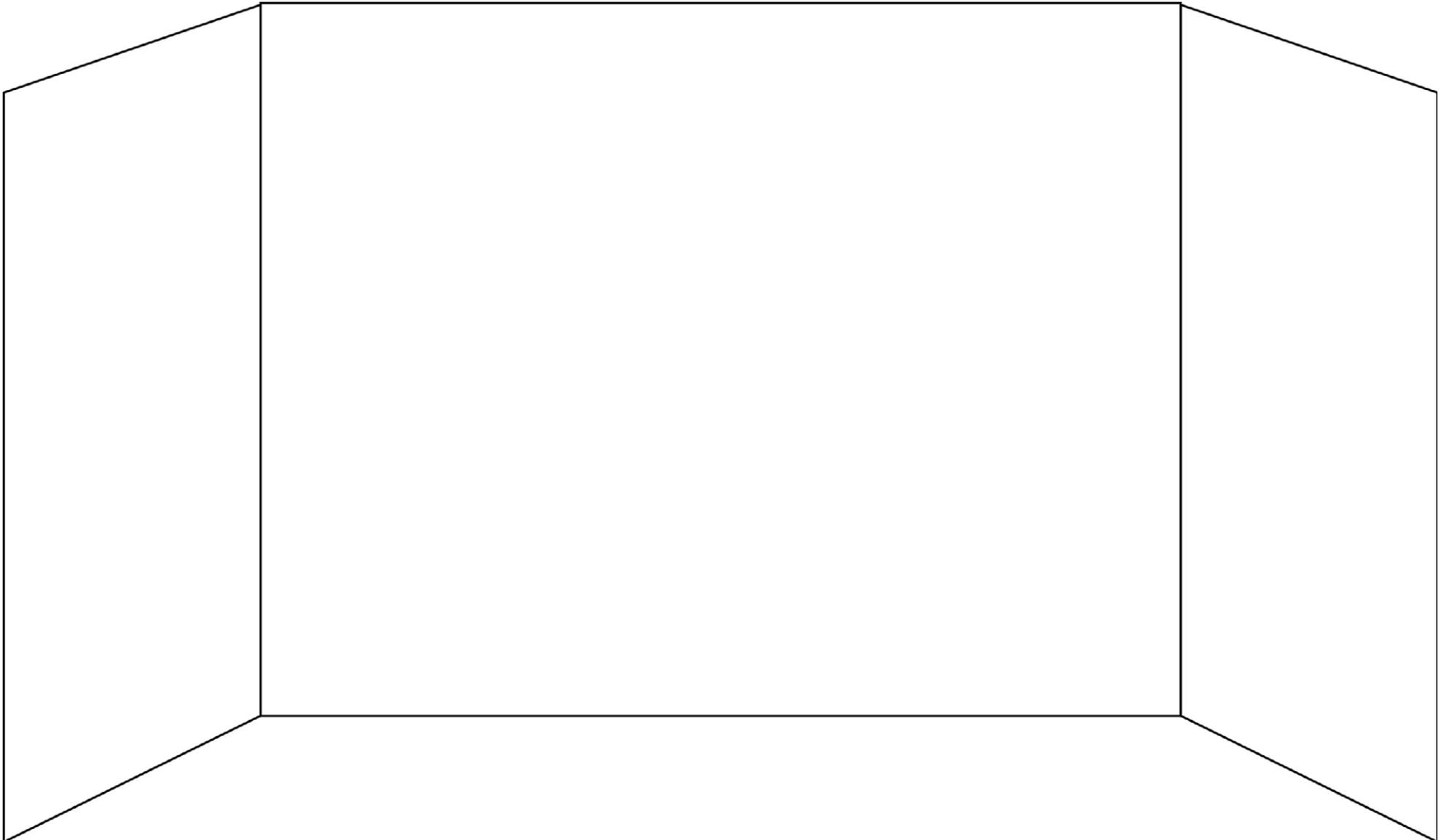
# WORKSHEET 6: Five W's for design

Answer these questions in full to gain a greater understanding of the drama that you are designing for.

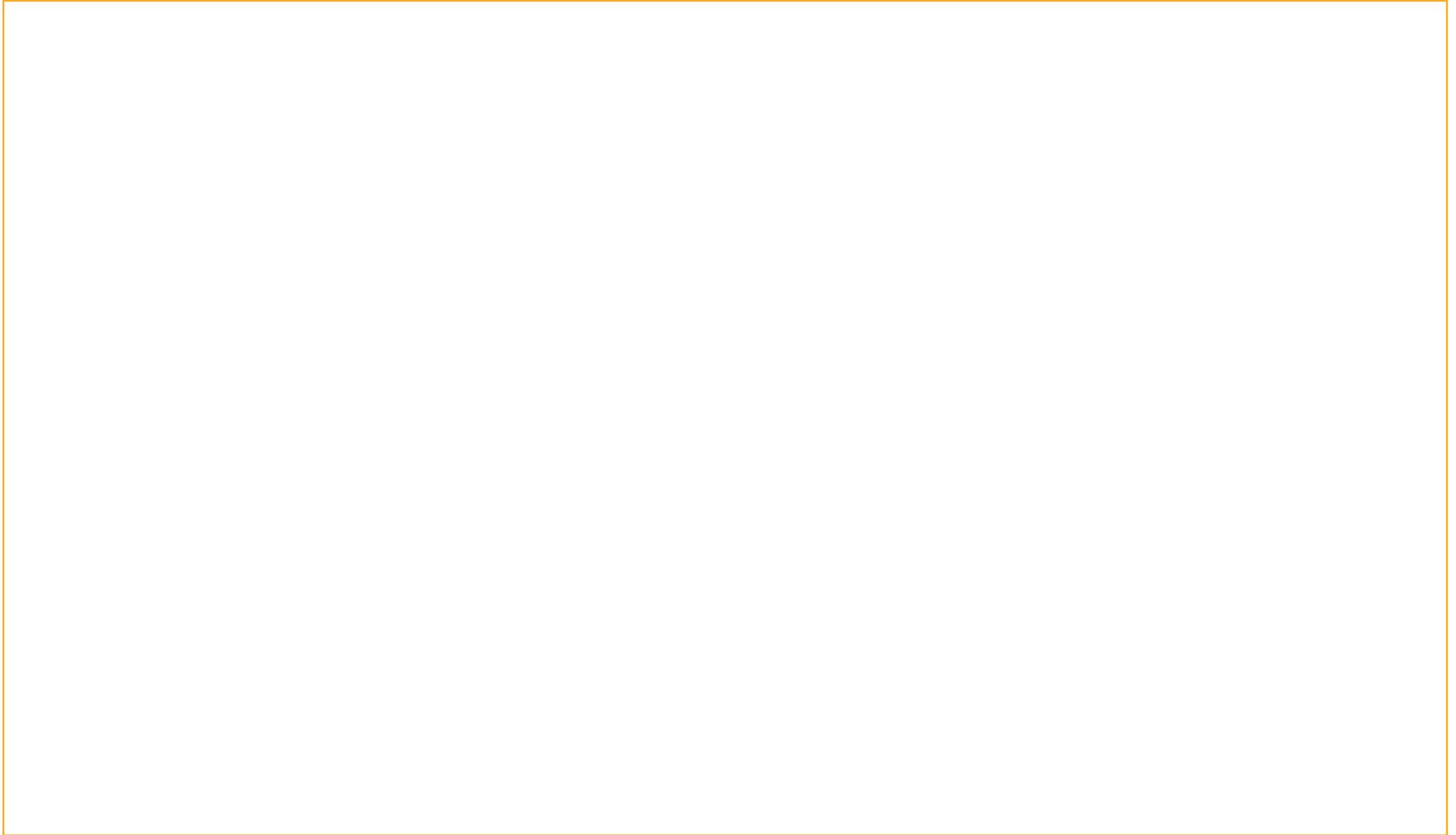
<b>WHO</b>	Who is your target audience?	
<b>What</b>	What are the intentions of the play? What performance space is most suitable for this play? What restrictions does it have? What health and safety elements do you need to consider for this play? What materials are you going to use? What colour scheme are you going to use? What is life like at the time of the play/ scene?	
<b>Why</b>	Ask the question why to all the 'What' questions.	
<b>Where</b>	Location – where is the scene set?	
<b>When</b>	When is the play set? Time / era/ context/ season/ day.	
<b>How</b>	How are you going to put all the answers to these questions in to your design?	



# WORKSHEET 7: Proscenium Arch design



# WORKSHEET 7: Ground plan of design



# WORKSHEET 7: Advantages and disadvantages of performance space

Answer these questions in full to gain a greater understanding of the drama that you are designing for.

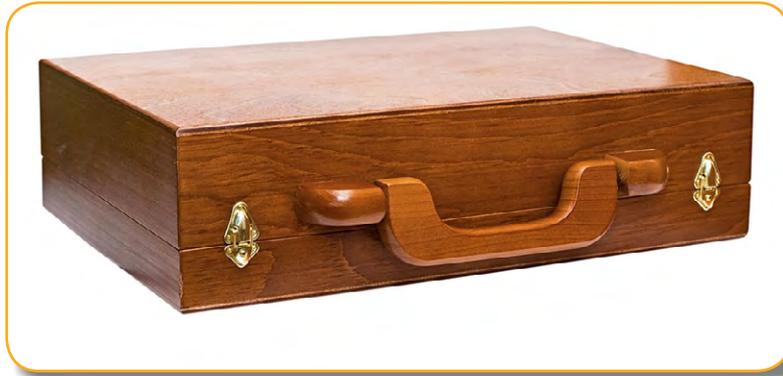
	Stage space one:	Stage space two:
What are the pro's and con's of this staging type?		
What problems may be encountered?		
What kinds of performances would work well on this stage?		
What effect might this stage have on the audience?		



# WORKSHEET 8: The briefcase

What type of character would suit these briefcases?

What type of play would you expect to see these in?



# WORKSHEET 9: Semiotic exercise

**End-on**

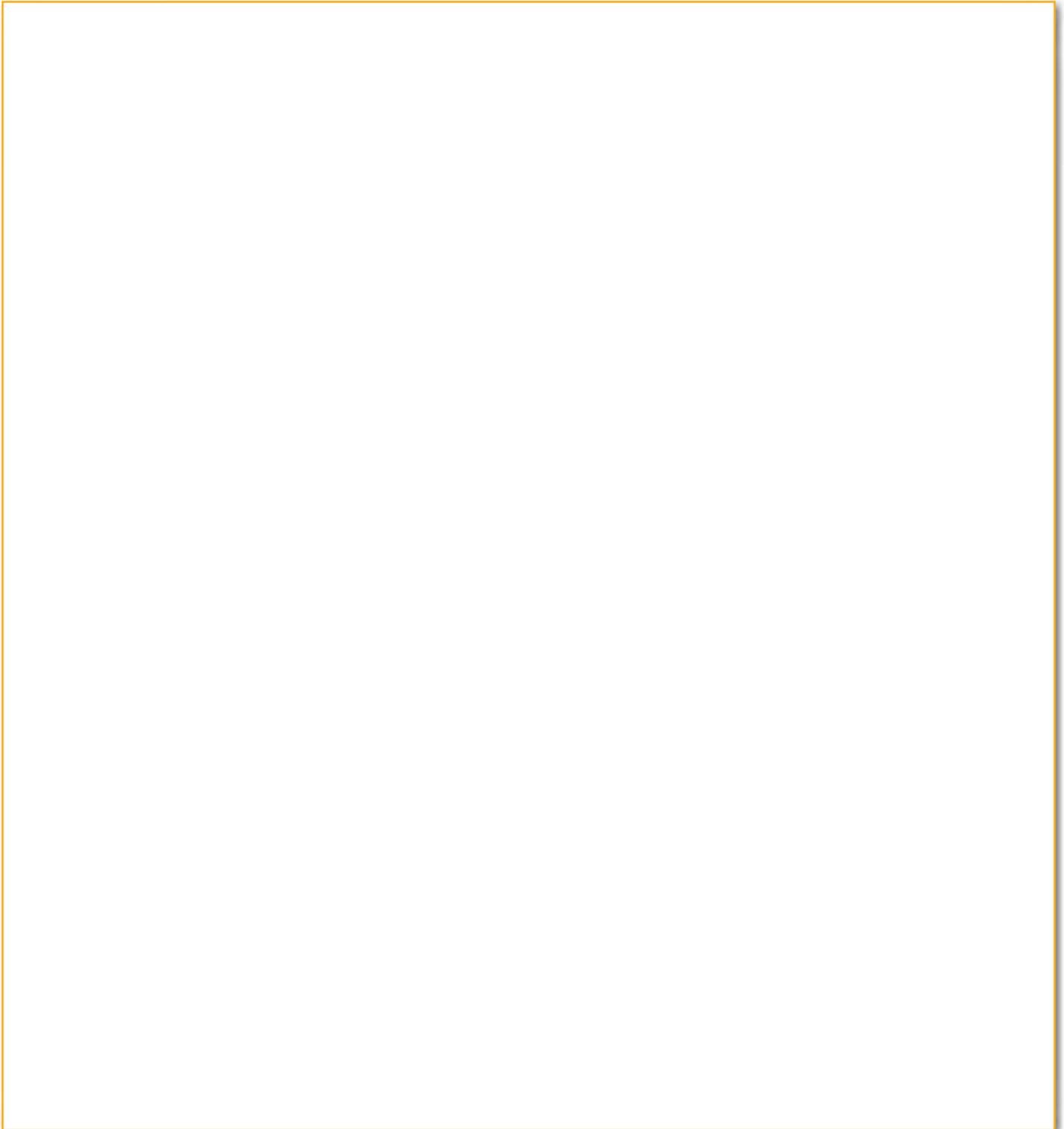
**In-the-Round**

**Thrust**

**Promenade**

**Traverse**

**Proscenium Arch**



# WORKSHEET 10: Designing a prop for characters



Fagin



Mikey



Leah

## Helpful links and resources

There are many websites that are very useful both for teachers and students alike that give examples of designs of props and set for shows that are currently running. Many productions now have resource packs that often have a design element to them and images of the set design, with props, that would provide examples to refer to when discussing the topics.

<http://www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/participation/teachers-packs/> The Macbeth pack contains information on set

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ptop/plain/A1097255>

<http://www.dramainfoweb.co.uk/>

<http://www.theatredesign.org.uk/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/drama/performing/supportrev6.shtml>

[http://www.thewomaninblack.com/connectwp/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/11/wib\\_pack.pdf](http://www.thewomaninblack.com/connectwp/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/11/wib_pack.pdf)

The Wardrobe by Sam Holcroft was commissioned for the National Theatre Connections project 2014.

<http://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/Book/1642/The-Wardrobe.html>



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