Staging play texts

IB DP Theatre production-proposal task full package

Staging play texts

- read a play text as a theatre-maker, not as a literature student;
- find a play's given circumstances, **spine**, action units and world;
- turn your reading into one concept that ties every staging choice together;

Staging play texts (2)

- choose a stage configuration that gives the audience a role;
- plan three key moments and write a proposal that justifies every choice.

Reading the play as a theatre-maker

- A literature student reads a play to find what it means.
- A theatre-maker reads it to find what it **demands**: what must be seen and heard, who is on stage, and what changes from moment to moment.
- Think of the text as a **score** for performance, like sheet music: it is only complete when it is played.
- The theatre-maker's read has four layers:

Vision, design and the audience

- **proscenium** : the audience watch through an invisible "fourth wall", like people looking into a room;
- **thrust** : the stage pushes out into the audience on three sides; actors can speak almost to them;
- **traverse** : the audience sit on two sides facing each other; they see the action and each other, like guests at a party;
- **in the round** : the audience surround the stage; nothing can be hidden.

Writing the proposal

- Weak: "The family wear bright clothes because they look good."
- Strong: "The family keep wearing bright Paris fashions while the servants' clothes fade, so the audience sees who pays for the dancing."

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Theatre guide* (first assessment 2024).
- A. Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), and his letters of 1903–1904 on the first production.
- K. Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* (1924), on the Moscow Art Theatre productions of Chekhov.
- P. Brook, *The Shifting Point* (1987), on his 1981 production at the Bouffes du Nord.

Common errors

- Writing a literature essay about themes and symbols instead of saying how the play would be staged.
- Choosing a theme ("loss") instead of a concept that tells designers what to build.
- Staging only one scene, when the task asks for a vision of the **entire** play.

Common errors (2)

- Making design choices that do not connect to the concept.
- Ignoring the audience’s position, or choosing a stage configuration without saying what it means.
- Filling pages with pictures that do not show any decision.
- Going over 4,000 words or 12 pages.

Key terms

- **Production proposal**: a document of at most 12 pages and 4,000 words presenting a vision for staging a whole play.
- **Given circumstances**: the facts a play text fixes, such as time, place, money and relationships.
- **Spine**: the one want that drives a play from beginning to end.

Key terms (2)

- **Action unit**: a section of a scene in which a want meets an obstacle and changes.
- **Concept**: one governing idea that ties every staging choice together.
- **Traverse**: a stage with the audience on two opposite sides.

Check yourself

- 1.
- How many pages and words can the **production proposal** have, and what share of the HL grade is it? 2.
- Name the four layers of the theatre-maker's read. 3.
- Give two given circumstances from *The Cherry Orchard*. 4.