

Staging: ACTOR/AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

The choice of stage should fit the relationship you want the audience to have with the work; different stages promote opportunities to make the audience intimate/distant with the work:

- **End-on or proscenium arch theatres** create a clear divide between actors and audience.
- **Thrust theatres** partly surround the stage with the audience. Theatres in-the-round audiences entirely surround the stage.
- **Traverse theatres** have two blocks of audience facing each other across the stage space.
- **Promenade theatre** allows the audience to move freely around the performance space, often guided by the actors.
- **Immersive theatre** surrounds the audience with an experience, and they often interact directly with the actors and the space.

Era is the 'when' of the set design: when does the action take place? This might be the era in which the play is set, or another era that the director or designer has chosen for the production (transposition – when the era is altered to develop meaning: Richard III as Nazi/Hitler). Knowing about the era of the play text allows you to make choices in your design that are appropriate for the production. This doesn't always mean sticking rigidly to one era in your design: sometimes it is useful to deliberately mix eras for a specific effect. However, this must be a deliberate and justified choice by the designer and not a mistake that comes from not knowing the context!

Status

The set should help to provide visual clues as to the status of the characters in relation to each other and the space. For example, a head teacher in her office has higher status than when she is alone at night on a dark street. This requires the designer and director to consult carefully about how the visual clues within the design reaffirm the interpretation of the characters by the actors.

Design

The Visual & Technical Life of the Production:
Set, Costume, Props, Light, Sound, Multimedia.

SET

Staging/Era/Status/Atmosphere/Location /Context/Contrast/Detail

Space, Actor/Audience, revolve; fly tower, cyclorama, floor covering, shape, colour, period/era details, texture, thematic details, locations needed.

Location is the 'where' of the set design: what place does the design represent? For a realist set, this might be a certain room, in a certain house, belonging to a certain character. The designer will try to ensure that the audience understand this by placing specific objects and furniture into the space, as well as creating appropriate scenery. For non-realist sets, the location might be more difficult to decide: for example, the designer might create a location that combines a number of different places. Some designers want to make the audience aware that they are in a theatre, as well as understanding that the action takes place in a specific location. Minimalist or symbolist designs do this particularly well.

Context

A play has two contexts:

1. The context in which it was written: the world of the playwright the context in which the writer lived and worked
2. The context in which it is performed: the world of the audience the context in which the play will be received.

The designer must make sure that the play speaks visually to the audience and is of their times; for example, you might design period costumes with a modern twist such as a fluorescent bow ties.

Style: What style is the set?

Set designers can work in a range of styles. It is important to be able to identify the style a set designer is using in order to understand how and why the set works for a specific play or production. Some examples of styles include:

Realism

Realist set designs incorporate elements that are meant to look like real life. Realism can be total or partial. Total realism means a set that looks as close to real life as possible and includes scenery, furniture and props that mimic a real-life setting. The design will reflect the period that the play is set in with historical accuracy. Partial realism incorporates realistic elements into a set that might not be realistic overall, for example using detailed period furniture on a stage constructed of a series of platforms.

Symbolism

Symbolist sets are more interested in communicating an idea to the audience than in representing real life. Symbolism allows the designers to choose an image that they think represents the key themes of the play and to interpret this as a stage set.

Minimalism

Not all set design has to be large-scale. Minimalist sets use pieces of stage furniture or props to indicate a setting or location. For example, a table and two chairs could indicate a kitchen, dining room, or even a café. The specific identity of the space is determined by the way in which the actors behave. This process is called minimal signification. There are many small theatre spaces, for example black box theatres, that are well-suited to minimalism.

Fantasy

Fantasy set designs allow the designer to create a new world for a production. Designers can engage with fantastical locations without the constraints of representing a world that is already known to the audience. However, it is worth remembering that a fantastical design still needs to maintain an internal logic so that the audience can understand and engage with the world of the production.

Stagecraft: A production is deliberate, everything you experience is carefully chosen

Key Vocabulary:

Space: Think practically is there enough space for the actors to create each scene. Where will they enter and exit? How will set changes happen? Is there enough room for them to happen?

Staging: Think about the actor/audience relationship, what does this production need to have impact?

Revolve: Where the stage turns around, usually on a circle area, to reveal further spaces.

Fly tower: Where the set can be flown in and out of, a tower twice as high as the stage directly above

Cyclorama: The back wall of or curtain for the stage.

Floor covering: Sometimes a cloth or painted or turned to mud: this can be significant in minimalist work.

Shape: the shape of the stage floor, the shape of any platforms, levels, or pieces of scenery and the shape of any stage furniture. Different shapes can have a different effect on the audience or create a different atmosphere: lots of smooth curves look and feel very different to lots of jagged, pointed lines.

Scale: the size of individual items on stage and the relationship between different objects of different sizes. An audience can be told that an object is very important by making it slightly bigger and 'out of scale' or a strange atmosphere can be created by varying the scale of different parts of the stage.

Colour: the colours used on the stage floor, pieces of scenery, stage furniture and backdrop. Colours on stage have many functions: they can be used to reflect colours in real life, create an atmosphere or tell an audience about the mood of a place or the personality of a character.

Period/era details: a work set in a past time period. It is an informal crossover term. A period piece may be set in a vague or general era such as the *Middle Ages* or a specific period such as the *Roaring Twenties*. Details would include: furniture, props, doors, flooring, light fittings, ceilings, windows, etc.

Texture: the textures of surfaces on the stage (the floor or the walls), as well as the texture of the stage furniture. Texture either comes from the materials used to create the set (wood, metal, fabric) or it can be created using paint effects (for example a painted woodgrain effect). Different textures can give the audience information about the setting of the play (ie heavy velvet curtains hanging at a window can tell the audience that the character who lives here is very wealthy) or can help create an atmosphere on stage (ie shiny metal surfaces can give a set a cold and clinical feeling).

Locations needed: The design of the production must serve the set. Can you create the visuals and practical space for each location needed?

Video Revision:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL48EDBCB4915D0ACA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYolkxjzbBM&list=PL48EDBCB4915D0ACA&index=8&t=0s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SU8JYKGekXo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DHcON8JKhY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlh-0QWk3kg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NqRHINHJc>

Careers Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imEaWRV3CCM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swPFRG7i3d8>

<https://beta.salford.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/film-tv-and-stage-design>

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/after-gcses/find-career-ideas/explore-jobs/job-profile/set-designer>

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/set-designer>

Terminology to use for CONTEXT - <https://infogram.com/social-cultural-and-historical-context-1gk9vp1z1kz824y>

| Con- | -Text | Context |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| This prefix means "with" or "together" | the surrounding circumstances, ideas and words woven together to form the setting or background for an event, statement, or idea. | the social, historical and cultural circumstances woven together to form the setting or background for a play, which impact on how the play develops |

HISTORICAL: refers to the events that occurred around an individual – usually on a national or international scale. It can also refer to attitudes that surrounding particular events and movements.

SOCIAL: refers to the physical and social setting in which people live or in which something is developed or takes place. It included the culture, education, people and institutions with whom individuals interact.

CULTURAL: cultural context refers to the ideology, traditions and values that surround and shape an individual's beliefs. It includes can affect and individuals behaviour, decision-making and opportunities.

Design Further Reading:

<https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/drama/AQA-7261-SET-D-TG.PDF>

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/theatre-performance>

http://andywalmsley.com/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI2azu_emq5AIVklQYCh2OQAM6EAYASAAEgLLYPD_BwE

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scenic_design

<https://thespaces.com/10-set-designers-you-should-follow-on-instagram/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/gallery/2019/apr/09/british-stage-designs-at-prague-quadrennial-in-pictures>

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/jul/20/artists-artist-theatre-set-designers>