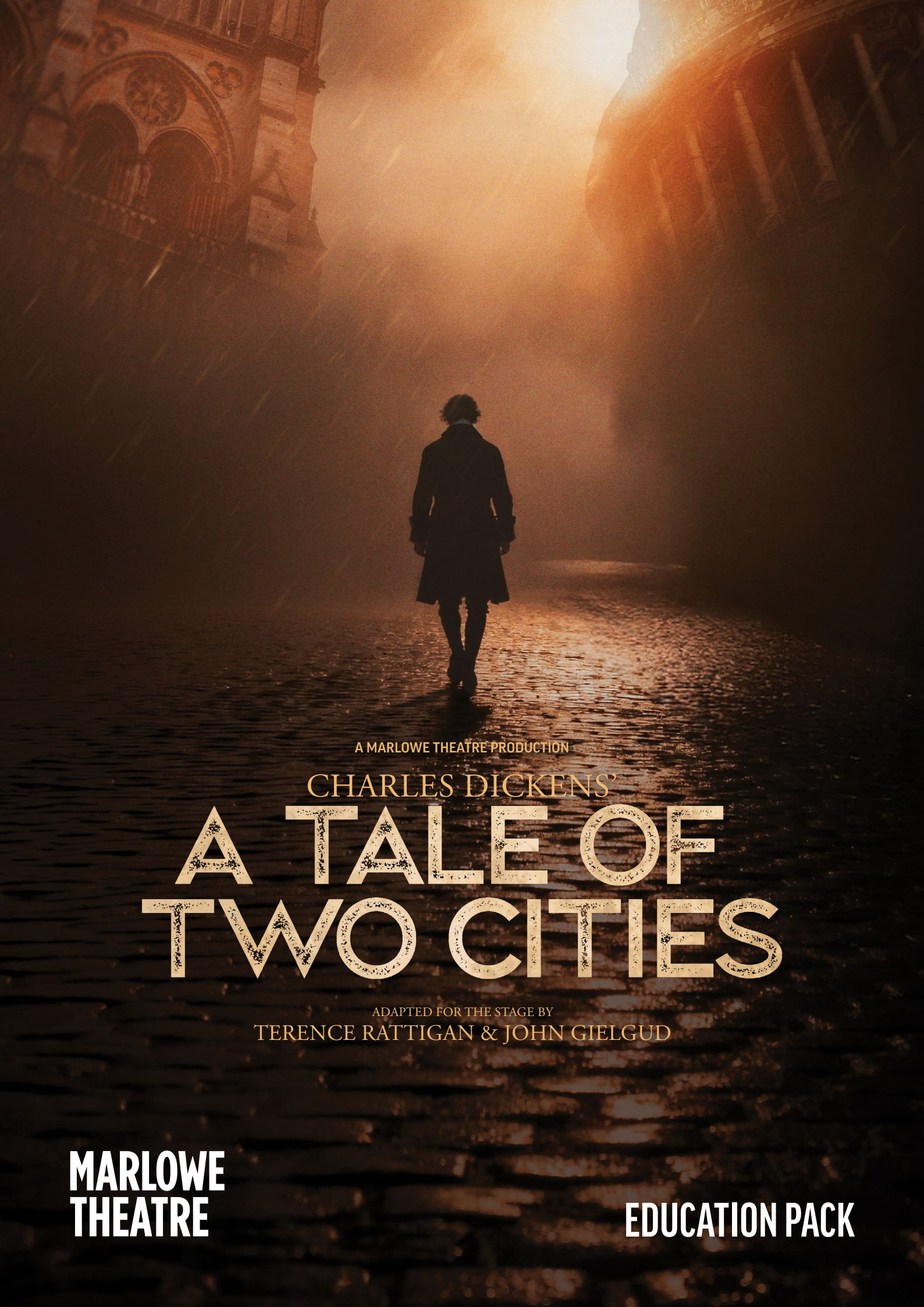

A MARLOWE THEATRE PRODUCTION
CHARLES DICKENS'
A TALE OF TWO CITIES
ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY
TERENCE RATTIGAN & JOHN GIELGUD
MARLOWE THEATRE
EDUCATION PACK

ABOUT THIS PACK

This resource has been designed to support secondary students before, during and after their visit to the Marlowe Theatre's production of *A Tale of Two Cities*. It invites students to explore how Charles Dickens' novel has been reimagined and brought to life on stage.

The activities are suitable for GCSE and A-Level Drama, BTEC Performing Arts and Secondary English, encouraging students to engage with the production both practically and critically. Students can use this resource without any prior knowledge of the novel.

The central enquiry asks students to explore **how theatre-makers can transform an epic novel into a live theatrical experience.**

CONTENTS

2 About this pack
4 Pre-show lesson: Exploring the production
6 Post-show lesson: Responding to the performance
8 Student Handout 1: Your production guide
10 Student Handout 2: Five creative challenges
11 Student Handout 3: Explore the world of Dickens
12 Student Handout 4: Theatre notes
14 Student Handout 5: From novel to stage
15 Student Handout 6: Evaluating the production
16 Appendix: Teaching and learning opportunities

HOW TO USE THIS PACK

BEFORE THE VISIT	DURING OR IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE VISIT	AFTER THE VISIT
Student Handouts 1-3	Student Handout 4	Student Handouts 5-6

SYMBOLS USED THROUGHOUT THE PACK

LESSON PLAN	STUDENT HANDOUT	NOTICE	DEEPEN THE CHALLENGE
			
Teacher guidance, timings and suggested questions.	A page to copy, print or share directly with students.	A prompt for observing and recording live performance.	Ways to extend students' thinking and practical work at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and Key Stage 5 (KS5).

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE PRODUCTION

The production is aiming to meet the basic standard of the Theatre Green Book, with sustainability considered across the set, costume and props. The pack encourages students to notice how environmentally responsible choices can contribute to the production's creative design.

PRE-SHOW LESSON

LESSON 1
EXPLORING THE PRODUCTION

A FLEXIBLE 50-60-MINUTE LESSON FOR DRAMA AND ENGLISH STUDENTS.

BIG QUESTION

How can theatre-makers transform an epic novel into a live theatrical experience?

Students will:

- **Explore** the challenges of adapting an epic novel for the stage.
- **Make** and **justify** creative theatrical choices.
- **Consider** how theatre-makers might respond to these challenges in performance.

RESOURCES

- Print Student Handouts 2 and 3.
- Access to online or teacher-provided research materials.

STARTER (5-10 MINS)

Ask students to name stories they know that have been adapted into different forms – novel, film, play or musical.

Discuss: Why do we keep retelling some stories? What changes when a story moves from page to stage?

Introduce the **big question**: How can theatre-makers transform an epic novel into a live theatrical experience? Explain that students will explore some of the creative decisions involved in bringing *A Tale of Two Cities* to the stage.

MAIN ACTIVITY 1 (20 MINS)

Using Student Handout 2, groups explore the **Five Creative Challenges**. Ask them to choose the challenge they think would be hardest to solve and devise a theatrical solution.

Consider: What does the audience need to see, hear or understand? How might performers, space, sound or design help? Share and compare solutions.

DEEPEN THE CHALLENGE

For **KS4**, encourage students to identify which theatre-makers would contribute to their solution and justify their ideas using appropriate theatrical terminology.

For **KS5**, ask students to develop a clear artistic interpretation and consider how performance and design elements could work together to shape audience response and support an overall concept.

MAIN ACTIVITY 2 (25 MINS)

Using Student Handout 3, groups complete the **Living Museum Challenge**. Ask them to choose one aspect of Dickens' social, cultural or historical context and develop a short interactive exhibit that brings this world to life for the class.

Encourage students to combine researched detail with theatrical choices such as performance, narration, movement, sound, images, space or focus.

Share the work and discuss: What did the audience learn about Dickens' world? Which theatrical choices communicated this most effectively?

POST-SHOW LESSON

LESSON 2
RESPONDING TO THE PERFORMANCE

A FLEXIBLE 50-60-MINUTE LESSON FOR DRAMA AND ENGLISH STUDENTS.

BIG QUESTION

How successfully did the Marlowe Theatre transform an epic novel into live theatre?

Students will:

- **Evaluate** how the company interpreted Dickens' novel.
- **Analyse** creative choices using evidence from the performance.
- **Develop** and **justify** a personal response to the production.

RESOURCES

- Student Handouts 2, 4, 5 and 6.

STARTER (5-10 MINS)

Revisit the **Five Creative Challenges (Student Handout 2)** and students' pre-show predictions. In pairs, identify which challenge the company solved most effectively and how. Share one example, supported by evidence from the performance.

POST-SHOW LESSON

MAIN ACTIVITY 1 (20 MINS)

Using their **Theatre Notes (Student Handout 4)** and **Student Handout 5**, students explore the company's decision to open with the death of Gaspard's child.

Discuss:

- How was the opening staged?
- What did it establish about the world and themes of the play?
- Why might the creative team have chosen to move this incident from later in the novel?

Students support their responses with evidence from acting, staging or design.

MAIN ACTIVITY 2 (20 MINS)

Using **Student Handout 6**, students choose the pathway most relevant to them:

Drama: Evaluate how acting, direction or design communicated meaning in one significant moment.

English: Explain how the production developed or changed your understanding of one of Dickens' themes.

Students create a short written or spoken response, supported by precise evidence from the performance.

DEEPEN THE CHALLENGE

For **KS4**, encourage students to analyse how specific acting, directing or design choices communicated meaning and influenced the audience, using precise performance evidence and appropriate theatrical terminology.

For **KS5**, ask students to evaluate how performance and design choices worked together to realise the company's artistic intentions, and consider how alternative choices might have created a different interpretation or audience response.

FINAL REFLECTION (5 MINS)

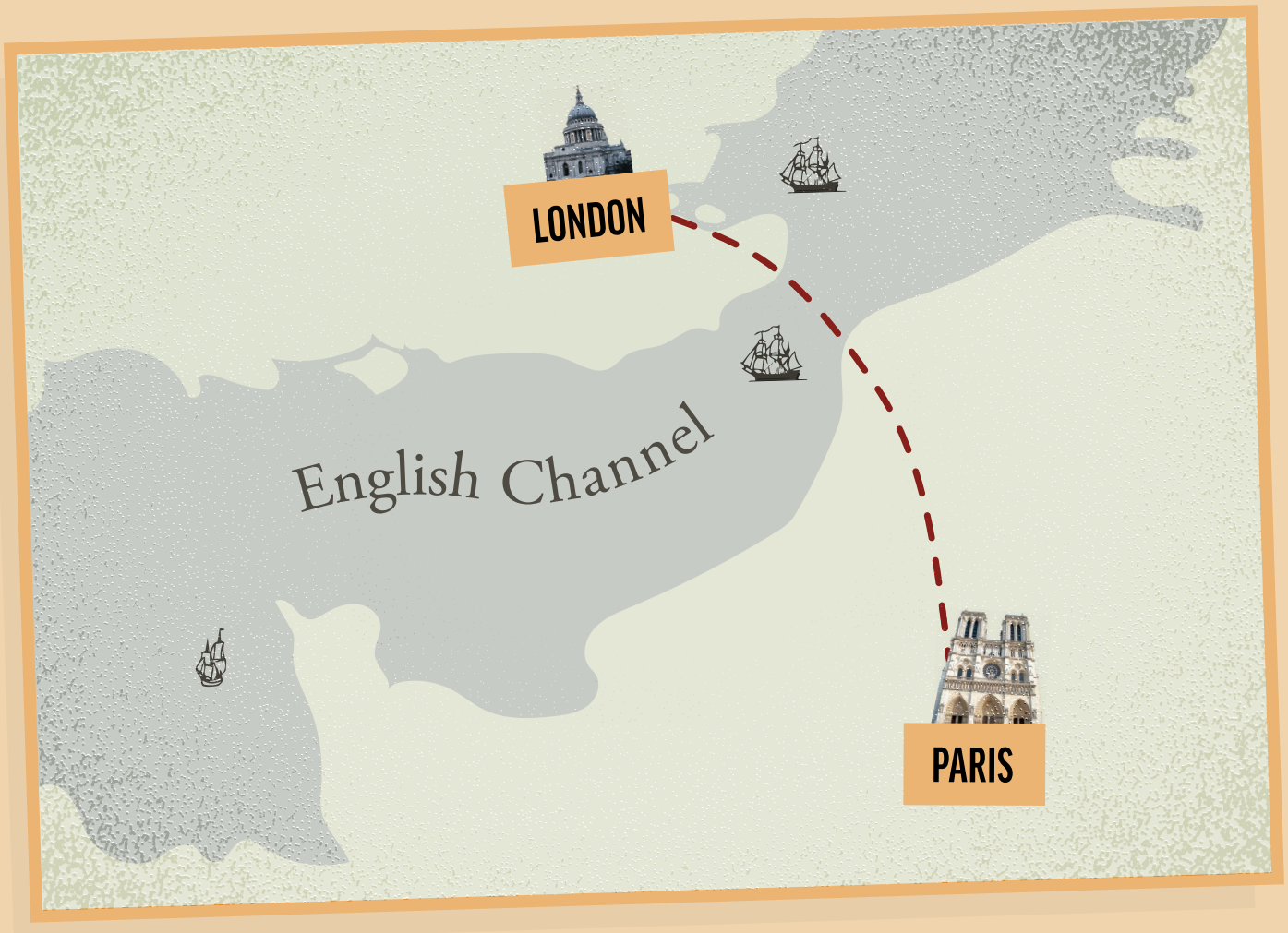
Students respond to the question: Which single creative decision had the greatest impact on your experience of the production, and why?

STUDENT HANDOUT 1

YOUR PRODUCTION GUIDE

ONE STORY. TWO WORLDS.

The story moves between England and France, across thirteen years of change.
How does the production establish each place and time?



ENGLAND – LONDON

- **The Old Bailey:** Darnay stands trial.
- **Soho:** Lucie and Dr Manette build a new life.
- **Tellson's Bank:** News arrives from France.

FRANCE – PARIS AND BEYOND

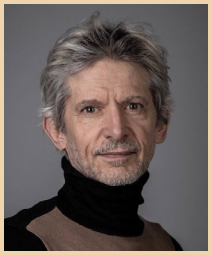
- **Saint Antoine:** Poverty and anger fuel unrest.
- **Château Evrémonde:** Aristocratic cruelty is exposed.
- **Revolutionary Paris:** Justice, revenge and sacrifice collide.

SOME KEY CHARACTERS



LUCIE MANETTE

Dr Manette's daughter, whose compassion and loyalty bring people together.



DR MANETTE

Lucie's father, haunted by his imprisonment in the Bastille.



CHARLES DARNAY

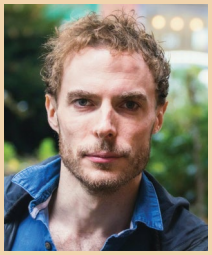
A French aristocrat who rejects his family's privilege.



Character 1

SYDNEY CARTON

A troubled lawyer whose resemblance to Darnay proves important.



Character 2

MARQUIS ST. EVRÉMONDE

Charles Darnay's uncle and a symbol of the aristocracy's cruelty.



MADAME DEFARGE

A revolutionary driven by injustice and revenge.



MONSIEUR DEFARGE

Dr Manette's former servant and arevolutionary leader.



JARVIS LORRY

A trusted friend who connects the two worlds.



GASPARD

The father of the child run over by the Marquis's carriage.

MULTI-ROLE

Every actor plays more than one role, sometimes transforming in full view of the audience.

Notice: how costume, props, voice and movement signal each change of character.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Some scenes are performed in French, with English surtitles projected onto the set. Director Michael Fentiman chose to include dialogue in French, rather than relying entirely on actors imitating French accents. A French-language specialist and a French associate director supported the company's work.

Notice: what else helps you follow the story.

STUDENT HANDOUT 2

FIVE CREATIVE CHALLENGES

First published in 1859, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* remains one of the most celebrated novels in English literature. The Marlowe Theatre's production brings this epic story vividly to life for a contemporary audience. This production is a stage adaptation by Terence Rattigan and John Gielgud. Director Michael Fentiman led the decisions about how the script has been shaped for this production.

Creating this production presents the actors and creative team with five key challenges.

Notice: How the creative team responds to each question.

1) HOW DO YOU TURN AN EPIC NOVEL INTO LIVE THEATRE?

The novel contains many characters, events and ideas. How do theatre-makers decide which moments to include, reshape or bring to the foreground?

2) HOW DO YOU MOVE BETWEEN DIFFERENT PLACES AND TIMES?

The story moves between London and Paris, many different locations and several time periods. How can set, lighting, sound, costume and performance help the audience follow these shifts?

3) HOW DO YOU BRING MANY CHARACTERS TO LIFE WITH A SMALL ENSEMBLE?

Dickens' story contains a large cast of characters. How can a smaller company make each role distinctive and help the audience follow their relationships?

4) HOW DO YOU USE TWO LANGUAGES IN ONE PRODUCTION?

The production uses both English and French. How can performers, surtitles and other theatrical choices help the audience follow the story while allowing both languages to remain part of the theatrical experience?

5) HOW DO YOU BRING A HISTORICAL WORLD TO A CONTEMPORARY STAGE?

How can costume and design evoke the eighteenth century without recreating it exactly? What might make the production feel contemporary?

Notice:

- How set, costume and props may have been reused, repurposed or sourced responsibly.
- Creative solutions that reduce waste without limiting the production's visual impact.
- How sustainable choices contribute to the production's overall design.

EXPLORE THE WORLD OF DICKENS

Published in 1859, Dickens' novel looks back at the French Revolution, exploring deep social inequality and the human consequences of revolutionary violence.

1789
The French Revolution begins
The Bastille becomes a symbol of resistance.

1858
Dickens begins writing
He develops a story about sacrifice and revolution.

1859
The novel is published
A Tale of Two Cities appears in weekly instalments.

Key Quotations

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times…"
Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

"It is extraordinary to me that you these people cannot take more care of yourselves and your children."
The Marquis, stage adaptation

"They said I plotted against the Republic, but I've done nothing wrong."
The Seamstress, stage adaptation

BIG QUESTION

Can injustice and inequality ever justify revolution?

LIVING MUSEUM CHALLENGE

The Marlowe Theatre's creative team have transformed Dickens' world into live theatre. Now it's your turn.

Working in groups, choose one aspect of the novel's social, cultural or historical context and develop it into a short interactive exhibit. Use performance, narration, images and researched detail to bring it to life.

Possible exhibits: poverty and privilege, the Bastille, revolutionary Paris, aristocratic power or everyday life in London and Paris.

DEEPEN THE CHALLENGE

For **KS4:** Integrate accurate contextual details with purposeful theatrical choices. Be prepared to explain how your exhibit helps the audience understand Dickens' world.

For **KS5:** Develop a clear interpretation of the context, exploring contrasting perspectives and making connections to Dickens' presentation of injustice, inequality and revolution.

STUDENT HANDOUT 4

THEATRE NOTES

Use this page during the interval or as soon as possible after the performance, following the theatre's guidance on note-taking.

SENTENCE STEMS

- A memorable choice was...
- The actor/designer created... by...
- The transformation was clear because...
- This was effective because...

KEY WORDS

Voice • movement • facial expression • gesture • pace • focus • interaction • set • costume • lighting • props • transition • music • atmosphere

THE OPENING

Why might the creative team have chosen to begin with this moment?

ACTING

One memorable performance choice.

STUDENT HANDOUT 4

DESIGN
One design choice I'll remember.

MULTI-ROLE
One transformation I noticed.

SOUND
One effective moment.

FROM NOVEL TO STAGE

The Marlowe production begins with the death of Gaspard's child after the Marquis's carriage drives through the crowded streets. In Dickens' novel, this incident does not occur until Book Two, Chapter 7. Director Michael Fentiman chose to move it to the opening of the production.

Notice: Which details from Dickens' original scene have been retained, changed or condensed? What effect does beginning with this incident have on the audience?

EXTRACT 1: MARLOWE THEATRE ADAPTATION - PROLOGUE

GASPARD appears with a dead child in his arms.

Out steps the MARQUIS DE ST. EVREMONDE.

MARQUIS *(looking round, distastefully)*
Que c'est-il passé? *What ever is the matter?*

GABELLE Pardon, Monseigneur... c'est une enfant *Pardon, Monseigneur, it is a child –*

MARQUIS C'est son enfant? *Is it his child?*

GABELLE *nods.*

MARQUIS Hm. Est-elle grièvement blessée? *Hm. Is the child badly hurt?*

GABELLE Je le crains, Monseigneur. *I believe so, Monseigneur.*

Breathing stops

GASPARD Elle est morte... Ma fille est morte! *She's dead. My daughter's dead!*

MARQUIS *(looking round)* Il est tout de même extraordinaire que ces gens sachent si mal veiller sur eux-mêmes... et sur leurs enfants (a pause).
Qui répond de cet endroit? *It is extraordinary to me that these people cannot take more care of themselves and their children. Who is in charge here?*

EXTRACT 2: FROM THE NOVEL

"What has gone wrong?" said Monsieur, calmly looking out.

A tall man [...] had caught up a bundle from among the feet of the horses.

"Pardon, Monsieur the Marquis!" said a ragged and submissive man, "it is a child."

[...]

"It is extraordinary to me," said he, "that you people cannot take care of yourselves and your children."

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)
Book the Second, Chapter VII: "Monseigneur in Town"

DISCUSSION

Think back to the opening and use your **Theatre Notes (Handout 4)** to help you.

- What did the opening communicate about the world of the play, particularly power and injustice?
- How did the acting, staging or design help communicate this?

STUDENT HANDOUT 6

EVALUATING THE PRODUCTION

1. DISCUSS: FIVE CREATIVE CHALLENGES

Choose one of the five challenges from Student Handout 2.

- How did the company respond?
- Which moment showed this most clearly?
- How effective was it?

2. DEVELOP YOUR EVALUATION

Choose one pathway: Drama or English

PATHWAY 1: DRAMA LIVE THEATRE EVALUATION

Choose one memorable moment.

- One effective moment was...
- The company used...
- This created...
- This was effective because...

PATHWAY 2: ENGLISH EXPLORING A KEY THEME

Choose one theme.

- The production deepened my understanding of...
- This was clear when...
- The company presented this through...
- This suggested...

DEEPEN THE CHALLENGE

Drama: Consider how two production elements worked together to shape the audience's response.
English: Compare how the production communicated the theme with Dickens' original text.

3. FINAL REFLECTION

How did the Marlowe production transform Dickens' novel for the stage?

APPENDIX - TEACHING & LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This resource supports teaching and learning across Drama, Performing Arts and English at Key Stage 3, GCSE and post-16 level. It encourages students to experience live theatre as active, critical and reflective audience members.

DRAMA AND PERFORMING ARTS

QUALIFICATION	SPECIFIC CURRICULUM LINKS	RELEVANT PACK SECTIONS
GCSE Drama	• AQA Component 1, Section C: Live theatre production (AO4) • Pearson Edexcel Component 3, Section B: Live Theatre Evaluation (AO4) • Eduqas Component 3, Section B: Live Theatre Review • Analysis and evaluation of acting, directing, design and audience impact	Five Creative Challenges; Theatre Notes; Evaluating the Production – Drama Pathway
A-Level Drama & Theatre	• AQA Component 1, Section C: Live theatre production (AO4) • Pearson Edexcel Component 3, Section A: Live Theatre Evaluation (AO4) • Eduqas Component 3, particularly Section B: using analysis and evaluation of live theatre to inform interpretation	Five Creative Challenges; From Novel to Stage; Theatre Notes; Evaluating the Production
BTEC Performing Arts	• Pearson Level 1/Level 2 Tech Award, Component 1: Exploring the Performing Arts • Investigation of professional performance and production work • Exploration of creative purpose, influences and intended audience • Using professional practice to inform students' own ideas and practical work	Five Creative Challenges; From Novel to Stage; Living Museum Challenge; post-show activities

ENGLISH AND ORACY

CURRICULUM AREA	TEACHING AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	RELEVANT PACK SECTIONS
Secondary English: Key Stage 3 & GCSE	• Exploring a significant nineteenth-century narrative, its contexts and central themes • Examining how narrative, character, time and place are reshaped for the stage • Developing evidence-based responses through discussion and analytical writing	From Novel to Stage; Explore the World of Dickens; Living Museum Challenge; Evaluating the Production
A-Level English Literature	• Considering theatrical adaptation as an interpretation of a literary text • Analysing structural choices and shifts in perspective, time and place • Connecting narrative, character and theme with social and historical contexts	Five Creative Challenges; From Novel to Stage; Living Museum Challenge; post-show analysis
Teaching through Oracy	• Articulating and justifying interpretations • Listening, responding and building on or challenging ideas • Using subject vocabulary and performance evidence to communicate clearly	Discussion, practical exploration and reflection activities throughout

Qualification references identify relevant skills and components. *A Tale of Two Cities* is not presented as a prescribed examination text. Teachers should consult the current specification and assessment requirements for their course.