

Choosing location and time

As theatre evolves, directors are always looking to **reinterpret** plays and put their own creative mark on productions. Different directors might set the same play in different **locations** or **time periods**, making their decision carefully to emphasise a specific message for a target audience.

Location

Playwrights are often very specific about the **location** of the play. This may be particularly relevant for historical dramas, where the plot is based on real events. However, there are many instances where a director will decide to change the location. Whenever directors choose to do this, there must be very clear and **justified reasons** for the decision, so that the central message of the play is not diluted and remains clear.



In a 2004 production of *Macbeth*, theatre company Out of Joint changed the location from Scotland to central Africa in order to highlight the devastating impact civil war was having on the population in that area in the early 21st century.

Time

Directors will also experiment with setting plays in different time periods or even making a play '**timeless**'.



In this 2013 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the modern-day setting takes the central message of division and expands on the reasons behind it.

Why change the location?

There are many reasons why a director may choose to change the location of a play or scene. For example:

- 1 to make the play more **relevant** for a contemporary audience
- 2 to make a **political** or **moral point** about a contemporary issue
- 3 to **reflect** better the original playwright's message, which may no longer be appropriate in the original setting
- 4 to provide a more **local** setting for the audience.

Why change the time?

As with location, the time period in which a story takes place can have a powerful effect on the central message the director wishes to convey. The time might be changed:

- 1 to make a strong **historical** point
- 2 to show how things **might be** in the future if things don't change
- 3 to show that the central message is **timeless**
- 4 to engage a contemporary audience and make the play more **relevant**.

Now try this

As a director, think about your vision for a production of your prescribed text, and the central message you want to convey. How might different locations be appropriate for your prescribed text?

Make sure you can clearly **justify** all the points in your answer.

Materials and practicality

The choice of materials used in costume design can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the end results. More traditional or original materials can now be represented by modern ones, which can help to make costumes far more practical for the performers on stage.

Velvet

- 👍 Gives a very luxurious look for high status characters
- 👎 Can be expensive

Leather

- 👍 Can provide an authentic look for specific eras and genres
- 👎 Can be difficult to alter and gets hot under stage lights

Wool

- 👍 Strong
- 👎 Can be very hot under stage lights
- 👎 Becomes heavy when wet and may be itchy

Cotton

- 👍 Easy to dye or alter
- 👍 Cheap and easy to repair
- 👎 Can rip easily and slow to dry when wet

Metal

- 👍 Can give an authentic look for some costumes
- 👍 Modern metals can be a lot thinner (and lighter) than older varieties
- 👍 Can be used for accessories
- 👎 Polished metal can reflect the lights and dazzle the audience
- 👎 Can be noisy

Plastic / PVC

- 👍 A lightweight alternative to leather or metal when sprayed (for example, for armour)
- 👍 Does not make excessive noise
- 👎 Not breathable so can become sweaty

Lace

- 👍 Excellent for enhancing costumes
- 👎 Is often finely detailed, a feature which cannot be appreciated by audience members at a distance

Materials used in costume design

Practicality

A costume must enable the performer to work effectively, efficiently and comfortably on stage.

The costume:

- 1 must give the performer a clear field of vision so they can see what is on stage
- 2 must allow the performer to move and speak freely, so the audience's experience is not disrupted
- 3 needs to be light enough to allow the performer to move without draining their energy or distracting them
- 4 needs to prevent the performer from becoming excessively hot under strong stage lights
- 5 must not be noisy or in any other way distracting to the audience.

A suit of armour made from leather and sprayed plastic gives a very convincing look in the RSC's 2015 production of *Henry V*. These materials make the costume quiet, light and easy to put on, and do not restrict movement in the way metal would.



Now try this

Take a character in a key scene from your prescribed text. Consider what practical considerations you need to take into account in order to make the performer's costume usable on stage.

Think about how you will make sure the performer is as comfortable as possible while also communicating the scene's message to the audience.

The Crucible – an overview

You need to consider the ways in which performers, directors and designers create impact and meaning for an audience. Understanding the context and subtext of the play will help you make key decisions about the messages you wish to convey. You also need to consider how each character has an impact on the plot.

Only revise this page if you studied *The Crucible* as your prescribed text.

Context

You must make reference to the context in which the text was created and performed.

During the early 1950s, the American people became terrified that Soviet spies were living among them, undermining national security. As a result, Senator Joseph McCarthy led a very public campaign to find communist sympathisers and have them tried in court. Many of the accused were ostracised (excluded from society) and found it difficult to find work. Some people saw this as an opportunity to settle personal disputes and to discredit those they didn't like. Arthur Miller saw parallels with what had happened in Salem in the late 1600s and wrote *The Crucible* as a warning of what might happen.

Key information

Written by: Arthur Miller

First performed: New York, 1953

Set in: Salem, Massachusetts, 1692;
a strict, Puritan society

Structure: four acts

Themes

Guilt – Proctor feels guilty about his affair with Abigail.

Responsibility – Abigail is responsible for pressuring the girls to accuse others.

Revenge – Putnam uses his daughter to accuse his neighbours of witchcraft so that he can buy their land.

Morality – Reverend Hale changes his mind about who is telling the truth.

Gender – The oppression of women in this Puritan society may have led the girls to explode into life through the forbidden excitement of dancing in the woods.

Race – When accused, the girls deflect the blame on to Tituba, the only person of lower social standing in Salem.

Status and power – The judges consider themselves superior to the villagers of Salem.

Individual v. society/the system – Proctor stands up against the rest of society to fight for what he believes in.

Central characters

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| John Proctor | Mid-thirties. Respected landowner. Married to Elizabeth, it is his affair with Abigail which, in part, provides the motivation for the events in Salem. A man of principal and filled with guilt, he is willing to stand up against the Establishment. |
| Elizabeth Proctor | Married to John. Highly respected and deeply religious, she has the highest moral standards. She finds it hard to forgive her husband initially, but softens towards the end. |
| Abigail Williams | Former servant girl to Proctor and influential leader of the girls. Her desire for Proctor fuels her actions, although eventually they run beyond her control. |
| Mary Warren | Proctor's servant girl. Much more timid than the others, she knows the girls are wrong. However, when she tries to stand against them, she capitulates under the intense pressure. |
| Reverend Parris | Minister of Salem. A self-centred character who causes division within the village. |
| Deputy Governor Danforth | A highly experienced judge with enormous power. His religious convictions and unwillingness to compromise prevent the truth from being discovered. |

Now try this

Look at the list of themes above. Go through the text and find examples of each theme. The examples may be individual lines, small sections of text, stage directions or longer sections of the play.

Consider how the production elements of the 1950s would have had an impact on the original production. You will need to make reference to this context in your answer to question (b) (i) in the exam.

Question 9 (a): design

Question 9 (a) will ask you to **analyse** how an element of the **performance or design** was used to engage the audience. Here, the focus is on **design**. See page 104 for a focus on performance.

Answering the question

Question 9 (a) is worth **6 marks**, so you should aim to spend about **8 minutes** on this question. This allows you 12 minutes for your Question 9 (b), which is worth 9 marks. In your answer to this question, you will need to **analyse** an element of design. When you are analysing a performance:

- pick out different elements used by the designer to **engage** the audience
- give **specific examples** of the **effect** these elements have on the audience
- use **appropriate vocabulary and drama terminology**.

Worked example

9 (a) Analyse how lighting was used to engage the audience during a key moment of the performance. (6 marks)

Sample extract

A key moment where lighting was used by Bruno Poet, the lighting designer, was when Victor confronted the Creature. Here, the designer made use of various different lamp types and lighting effects to create atmosphere in the scene and engage the audience in what they were watching. The use of LED strip lighting at this moment blended with the smoke on stage to give a sense of depth to the space, making the space seem larger than it actually was. The use of side lighting, which helped to throw a shadow off both Victor and the Creature, added to the mysterious and dark nature and style of the piece overall, and emphasised this moment where the audience are unsure about what might happen next. The use of stark, white lighting added to the clinical way in which Victor examined the Creature's physicality, adding another level to this particular moment.

Design questions may focus on a number of areas, including set, costume, sound and lighting.

Links See pages 48 to 54 for more about lighting

Links Turn to pages 41 to 66 for a reminder about the different design roles and what they involve.

This question focuses on lighting, so you need to comment on how lighting **effects** (such as colour) or **techniques** were used, and what the **effect** was on the audience.

This question specifies 'a key moment of the performance', so here you need to choose an **appropriate key moment** to focus on in your answer. Notice the word '**engage**' – you need to think about the response of the audience.

This answer is about the National Theatre's 2011 production of *Frankenstein*, in which Benedict Cumberbatch played Frankenstein and Jonny Lee Miller played the Creature.

Make it clear which moment in the play you are analysing and comment on a range of lighting effects and techniques used at that point in the performance.

Keep your analysis focused on the design element specified in the question (for this question it is lighting) and use technical drama vocabulary to demonstrate your knowledge.

Comment on how the design has helped to engage the audience. Here, the student gives details of the atmosphere created by the lighting.

Now try this

Think of a live production you have seen.

Analyse how sound was used to engage the audience during a key moment of the performance. (6 marks)

Remember to use appropriate vocabulary and drama terminology in your answer.

Materials and practicality

Guided

1 Describe **three** practical points a costume designer must consider.

- (a) Ensure the costume is not too hot or heavy for the performer to use.
- (b)
- (c)

As a designer, you should always think about the **practical implications** for a performer, as well as the overall **concept** required by the director.

Guided

2 Read these director's notes about a character in the opening scene of a play.

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name | Joseph Daniels - army messenger | Notes <i>Private Daniels has returned from the battlefield to deliver news to the king that his army has been subjected to a surprise attack. He has ridden a horse through a terrible thunder storm, which is still raging. Additionally, he was caught in the middle of the attack and wounded in his left arm. However, he managed to fight his way clear.</i> |
| Age | 18 | |
| Gender | Male | |
| Era | 16th century | |

As a costume designer, describe which materials you would use to construct a practical costume for this character.

If I were the costume designer for this character, I would dress Daniels in light armour, chainmail and a leather jerkin. This would ensure the audience understands that the character

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Decide what you want the audience to understand about the character and the situation. Then consider if there are alternative materials that will help the performer on stage.

3 The materials below could be used in a modern costume design. Write down one **advantage** and one **disadvantage** of each material.

Remember to consider the visual impact and the practical application of each material.

| Material | Advantage | Disadvantage |
|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| Wood | | |
| Lace | | |
| Metal | | |
| Plastic/PVC | | |
| Cotton | | |
| Leather | | |
| Velvet | | |

The Crucible – an overview

Guided

1 Decide which of these statements about *The Crucible* are true and which are false.

You need to know about the context in which the text was created and performed. For the statements you decide are false, make sure you know the correct answer.

| | Statement | True | False |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| a | <i>The Crucible</i> was written by Arthur Miller. | ✓ | |
| b | It was first performed in 1953. | | |
| c | The first performance took place in New Orleans, USA. | | |
| d | The play is set in 1629. | | |
| e | The story relates to the Salem witch trials. | | |
| f | The play is a political metaphor for the McCarthy trials, which took place in the 1950s. | | |
| g | Everyone who is accused of witchcraft in the play is definitely guilty. | | |
| h | The play is structured into three acts. | | |

2 Towards the end of Act 2, Elizabeth Proctor is arrested and taken away. This action takes place in the Proctor household in front of a large group of people. Imagine you are directing this section. Explain how you would use staging to demonstrate the relationships and tension between the characters.

Staging refers to the deliberate choices you make about where the performers stand and how they move on stage to communicate character relationships and plot to the audience. It is also about how you create interesting stage pictures using the combination of elements such as set, props and lighting.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3 Choose a scene from *The Crucible*. Complete these director's notes about two themes you want to convey to the audience in this scene.

Directors often give titles to scenes even if there are no scene titles in the text. This helps to describe the scenes to performers and to plan rehearsals.

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Play: <i>The Crucible</i> | Theme 1: |
| Page to page | Theme 2: |
| Scene title: | |
| Ideas for establishing Theme 1: | Ideas for establishing Theme 2: |