

YEAR 9 + 10 SUMMER 1

DEVISING-COMPONENT 2

NAME: _____

PARENT EMAIL: _____

TEACHER NAME: _____



BERTOLT BRECHT AND EPIC THEATRE

How his style of theatre links to John Godber's 'Teechers.'

Everything included in this booklet is to get you thinking about the devising process. The information will help you gain a better understanding of non-naturalistic drama or Epic Theatre.

Some of the tasks are more complex than others.

Only do what you feel you can- there is no pressure.

Attempt the tasks with 100% effort and talk to your friends about it. Drama is a very hard subject to consider on your own.

Introduction: Bertolt Brecht - Drama Practitioner

The aim of this work is to start thinking about devising performances (Component 2), with the use of practitioner Bertolt Brecht and his influence on the world of theatre and performance.

The elements of Component 2 you must use to complete the following tasks are as follows:

Students must learn how to create and develop ideas to communicate meaning in a devised theatrical performance.

- carry out research
- develop their own ideas

Week 1: Watch the video and read the following - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7fqMPDcKXM>

Bertolt Brecht was born in Germany in 1898 and died aged 58 in 1956. He was a poet, playwright and theatre director. Brecht's ground-breaking directing style has been hugely influential to many directors and designers over the decades. Playwright David Edgar once said 'Brecht is part of the air we breathe.'

Brecht's work was very popular in the 50s, 60s and 70s, but he is slightly less fashionable today. However, his influence is still present in much of theatre and many would argue that Brecht changed the face of modern theatre.

Brecht was a Marxist. Marxism is a social, political, and economic philosophy named after Karl Marx, which examines the effect of capitalism on labour, productivity, and economic development and argues for a worker revolution to overturn capitalism in favour of communism. This influenced a lot of his work and how he viewed theatre and its role in society. Brecht's theatre was very political and sparked an interest in his audiences' views of their world as well as how others may be living.

His theatre had little to do with entertaining and more a way of getting a message across through performance and get his audience thinking and questioning life. His work was often deemed mischievous, thought provoking and ironic.

Brecht wanted his audiences to remain objective (not influenced by personal feeling) and unemotional during his plays so that they could make rational judgments about the political aspects of his work. To do this he invented a range of theatrical devices known as Epic Theatre.

Epic Theatre is a type of political theatre that addresses contemporary (modern) issues, although later in Brecht's life he preferred to call it dialectal theatre. Brecht believed classical approaches to theatre were escapist, and he was more interested in facts and reality rather than escapism. Epic

theatre doesn't attempt to lay down a tidy plot and story, but leaves issues unresolved, confronting the audience with sometimes uncomfortable questions.

Verfremdungseffekt, (V Effect) or the 'estrangement effect,' was used to distance the audience from the play and is sometimes called the alienation effect. Brecht did not want the audience to have any emotional attachment to his characters, so he did various things to break it.

TASK: Highlight the keywords and phrases in the above text.

Use a dictionary or search engine to find the definitions of the following words:

Capitalism

Communism

Socialism

Irony

Dialectal theatre

Escapism

Contemporary

In your own words, write a paragraph to help you understand what Brecht wanted his audience to think and feel about his theatre.

Techniques Brecht used:

Breaking the fourth wall - This is where the wall between the audience and actors on stage is broken. Rather than allowing the audience to sit passively and get lost in the show, the actors will sometimes directly address the audience with a speech, comment or a question - breaking the fourth wall.

Montage - Short movie clips are put together, often to show factual events. Sometimes clips are edited to juxtapose each other, and/or sometimes the montages are used to highlight the issues Brecht is trying to communicate.

Use of song, music and dance - Some of Brecht's work includes songs, music and dance. This helps to remind the audience that they are not watching real life. Sometimes the songs are juxtaposed ironically, with cheery upbeat music but with dark lyrics. One of the most famous song lyrics comes from Brecht's 'The Threepenny Opera': 'Who is the bigger criminal: he who robs a bank or he who funds one?'

Narration - Narration is used to remind the audience that they are watching a story. Sometimes the narrator will tell the audience what is about to happen in the story, before it happens, because if the audience knows the outcome then they may not get as emotionally involved.

Minimal set, costumes, props and lighting - Brecht believes the stage should be brightly lit at all times. That sets should not be realistic, just suggestive. And that actors should use minimal props, often only one per character. Also, props can be used in several different ways, for example a suitcase may become a desk

Coming Out of Character - Actors will sometimes come out character, often at heightened moments of drama, to remind the audience that it is a piece of fiction that they are watching.

Using Placards - A placard, or projection screen can be used to give the audience some extra factual information, for example it might say how many people have died in a particular war. Placards can also be used to introduce characters in generic ways, e.g. 'mum,' or 'dad.' Placards are also used to introduce a new scene, or to tell the audience when one has finished.

Freeze Frames/ Tableaux - The actors may go into a freeze frame, so as to break the action. Sometimes it's done so that the audience can stop and think critically for moment. And sometimes it's done so that the narrator can speak, or so that an actor can come out of character and perhaps break the fourth wall.

With the information above, **in your own words**, answer the following questions (in your books/type or on paper):

1. *Who was Bertolt Brecht?*
2. *What kind of theatre did Brecht create?*
3. *What was the purpose of his choice of theatre?*
4. *'Brecht is part of the air we breathe', why do you think David Edgar said this about Brecht?*
5. *What was the V effect and what did it set out to achieve?*

'Teechers' by John Godber

'Teechers is a play within a play. Three year 11 students put on a performance for their teachers. School leavers, Salty, Hobby and Gail Saunders perform an account of their time in High School (given the name 'Whitewall' for their performance). They were particularly inspired by their time with Mr. Jeff Nixon, the new drama teacher who ignited their passion for the stage with his idealism and belief that all children should be treated equally.

At the end of the play 'Mr Nixon' leaves Whitewall High School to teach at St George's, another school with a much better reputation.'

- *Which techniques of Bertolt Brecht does John Godber use in the play 'Teechers'? How are they used successfully?*

Activity:

- *Make a list of 4 memorable events that have happened within your school over the last year. Give each event a **short title**, and make a list of which **people** were involved, and **where** each event took place.*
- *Pick one of these events that you think you could develop into a script in the style of Epic Theatre. How would you structure the opening scene? Consider the use of direct address and comedy. You will begin to write this script in week 2 so don't forget it!!*

Week 2 + 3

John Godber enjoys playing with theatrical convention, in his introduction to John Godber Plays: 1 (Methuen, 2001, UK), he says:

“I had become increasingly bored by the conventions of modern drama. Most of the plays I had read were set in realistic locations, and therefore fairly limiting in terms of how they could represent themselves to an audience. In some respects these plays amounted to nothing more than ‘big telly’ – true they had good stories and incisive characterisation, but in terms of their theatrical scope, the four walls of the box set seemed to limit their vision. Of course, I was not the first to recognise this: Berkoff, Edward Gordon Craig, Brecht, Artaud and sundry others had all identified this limitation, and had done work to counter the spread of this particular theatrical virus.”

In the previous quote John Godber talks about the limitations of the theatrical form Naturalism. He explains that the ‘Fourth Wall’ creates a barrier between the audience and the performers, which can stifle the theatrical scope of the production. Godber’s way of thinking is more in line with Bertold Brecht, who developed Epic Theatre. Both practitioners are interested in a political theatre, a theatre which speaks ‘for the people’ and ‘about the people’. Many of Godber’s devices have their roots in Epic Theatre, and particularly the methodology surrounding the V-effect or Verfrumsdung effect. The V-effect was developed by Brecht as a way of distancing the audience from the action on stage. Brecht wanted the audience to remember at all times that they were watching a play, and that the characters were actors performing. He wanted his political messages and social statements to provoke the audience, to make them think and question, and he used a number of techniques to try to create the best possible circumstances for this to happen.

Task: Read the text above and highlight keywords and phrases that link to Epic Theatre.

Write your definitions of the following words:

Naturalism

Methodology

Verfrumsdung effect

In your own words, write a paragraph describing what the Verfrumsdung effect is and why it is important in Epic Theatre.

Task:

- ***What do you think Brecht and Godber are trying to achieve by using the V-effect?***
- ***Brecht was creating theatre between the 1920's and the 1950's, how does one theatre practitioner influence the work of another?***
- ***How important is it that socialism is explored through art?***

The use of language in 'Teechers'.

John Godber's use of language in Teechers is carefully chosen to create honest portrayals of recognisable characters. They are stereotypically working class characters (mostly from the north of England) who are easy to recognise and relate to. Godber uses these stereotypes to draw out humour from his characters, exaggerating language and personality to create funny dialogue and situations.

Here is an extract from the beginning of Act 1, where the audience are introduced to the 3 main characters Salty, Gail and Hobby.

Salty: No more school for us so you can knackers!

Gail: Salty, you nutter?

Salty: What?

Gail: Swearing.

Hobby: Shurrup.

Salty: So what?

Hobby: You daft gett.

Salty: It's true.

Gail: Just get on with it.

Salty: Nobody can do us.

Hobby: We've not left yet.

Salty: Knackers.

Gail: Oh God he's cracked.

Hobby: Shurrup.

Salty: I've always wanted to be on this stage. I've always wanted to come up here and say 'knackers'. I bet you all have...

Task: Colloquial language: Identify any **slang**, **colloquial language** or **swearing**. Why have these characters used these words? What does this language tell us about these characters? What impact does it have on the action within the scene?

Appropriate language: Create a list of words that you use with your friends but wouldn't use at school. Why are these words appropriate in some situations and not others?

Activity: *Using your chosen memorable event from week 1, start to write the opening scene considering the use of language. Consider this quote when including those comical moments and any direct address to the audience.*

“I think a joke only works if it's painfully true. If you didn't laugh you'd cry”

John Godber

Extension

- Think about how language is formed when we are small children, and can you think of any non-verbal forms of language?
- Do you think that a director of a play should adapt the language to fit in with regional dialect?
- Examine different dialects and their colloquial terms, are there any similarities?
- Explore Shakespearean insults and consider how language has changed since the 16th Century.

WEEK 4

Practical exercises to do on your own or when Face-timing a friend.

Heartbeats

Standing on your own tap out the rhythm of a different heartbeat in response to these emotional states:

- relaxed
- anxious
- tired
- curious
- desperate

Gestures 1-10

Perform the question “would you like a cup of tea?” without any words and without using your mouth.

- Perform this gesture as tiny as you can
- Perform this gesture as big as you can
- Perform the gesture in a range of scales from 1(tiny) to 10 (largest)

Explore other gestures.

Although *Teechers* was written in the 1980s it retains its political and social relevance. Many of the issues raised within the play are still current in contemporary schooling.

Context

During the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, the UK education system underwent a great deal of change. When Thatcher took leadership in 1979, schools were predominantly governed by local authorities who drew up catchment areas and distributed funds to the schools. Schools exam results were not published in the public domain, and there was no nationalised curriculum. During her leadership the powers for local authorities to make decisions about their local secondary schools was reduced, and direct control was assumed by Whitehall and central government (notice the name of the school in *Teechers*!). The National Curriculum was introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as a nationwide curriculum for primary and secondary state schools following the Education Reform Act 1988. At the time Thatcher was keen to limit the scope of the National Curriculum to English, Maths and Science, but over time it evolved into what we have now. New schools called City Technology Colleges (CTCs) were established with aid from private sponsorship, and parents were given more choice about which school they sent their children to. This coupled with the publication of league tables and the fact that funding was linked to student intake, meant that management structures within schools increasingly became more market driven. Thatcher would also have liked to have seen more schools charging for their courses, and becoming private schools. Many teachers opposed the changes, and campaigned against the low pay, working conditions, and lack of morale within the industry. Over the past few years there have also been a significant number of changes to the education system resulting in similar problems. In *Teechers* Mr Nixon argues with Mr Badford (The Deputy Head) about the fairness of private education. Mr Nixon believes that all children should have access to the best possible education, and that this should not be reserved for those who can afford it.

Task: *How does this make you feel as a young person in education? Do you feel you have everything you need at Stewards Academy?*

Quote:

Education secretary Nicky Morgan: 'Arts subjects limit career choices'

The Stage 11.11.14

What is your reaction to the above quote? What would you say to Nicky Morgan if you could speak to her face to face?

Activity: *2014 saw the removal of drama from the primary National Curriculum.*

Mind map the implications that this might have on:

- *Primary students*
- *Secondary school drama departments*
- *The performing arts industry*

Using this evidence as stimuli, how would you start to develop a piece of epic Theatre about education? This could link back to the memorable event you wrote about in weeks 1-3.

Write a plan about what you are passionate about and what the articles made you feel. Decide which Brechtian techniques you will use to educate your audience rather than involve them emotionally.

Weeks 5 + 6



Look at the picture above.

- What do you think the image is about?
- How could you use this as a stimulus to create a performance?

If you were to write a piece of Epic Theatre, what would be your **contemporary** theme?

Thinking about all the techniques used in Epic Theatre, how would you apply **at least 4** of them to your piece of theatre?

What would you write on a placard that was to be seen by your audience? What message would you want it to give?

What message would you like your audience to understand from your play about society and their role in creating change?

Try and write a short performance based on your theme. Think about:

- what your message is,
- what you want your audience to gain from the performance, and
- the Brechtian techniques you can use.

Extension:

- Research acting techniques associated with Expressionism.
- Read/recall Jacques Lecoq's 'States of Tension.' Why is this important?

- *What do you think Godber means by 'theatrical magic?'*
- *Research and discuss the concept of 'Semiology' and the readership of signs in theatre.*