

**THEATRE ROYAL STRATFORD EAST**

# OFF STAGE

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Designing  
Monologues

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

These exercises will help students to explore the early stages of the design process. Exercises will challenge their creativity and stimulate their imagination. They will help students to work out what kind of design their monologue inspires and the different ways in which you can explore potential creative options as a launchpad for set design.

1

DESIGN  
PROCESS

2

DEVELOPING  
YOUR CONCEPT

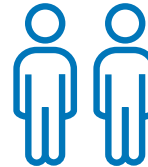
We have created a key that will help you to dip in and out of this resource quickly



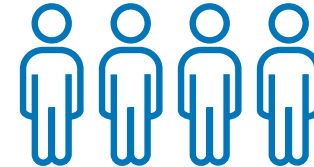
A suggestion for how long this exercise might take. If there are two times, this means that there is an optional extension, reflection or homework task.



Solo exercises



Partner exercises



Group or whole class exercises



Questions to encourage reflective practice that can be logged in students' journals.



A helpful tip for the students



Please begin by ***watching this interview with designer Peter McKintosh*** who shares his top tips and practical ideas for designing a monologue. This short film can be shared with students.

You will see quotes with tips and advice from Peter's interview throughout this pack

1

# DESIGN PROCESS

*A designer has to go through a number of stages before creating the set and costume designs you see when you watch a show. On the following pages is an outline of those steps.*

# 1. RESEARCH AND INSPIRATION

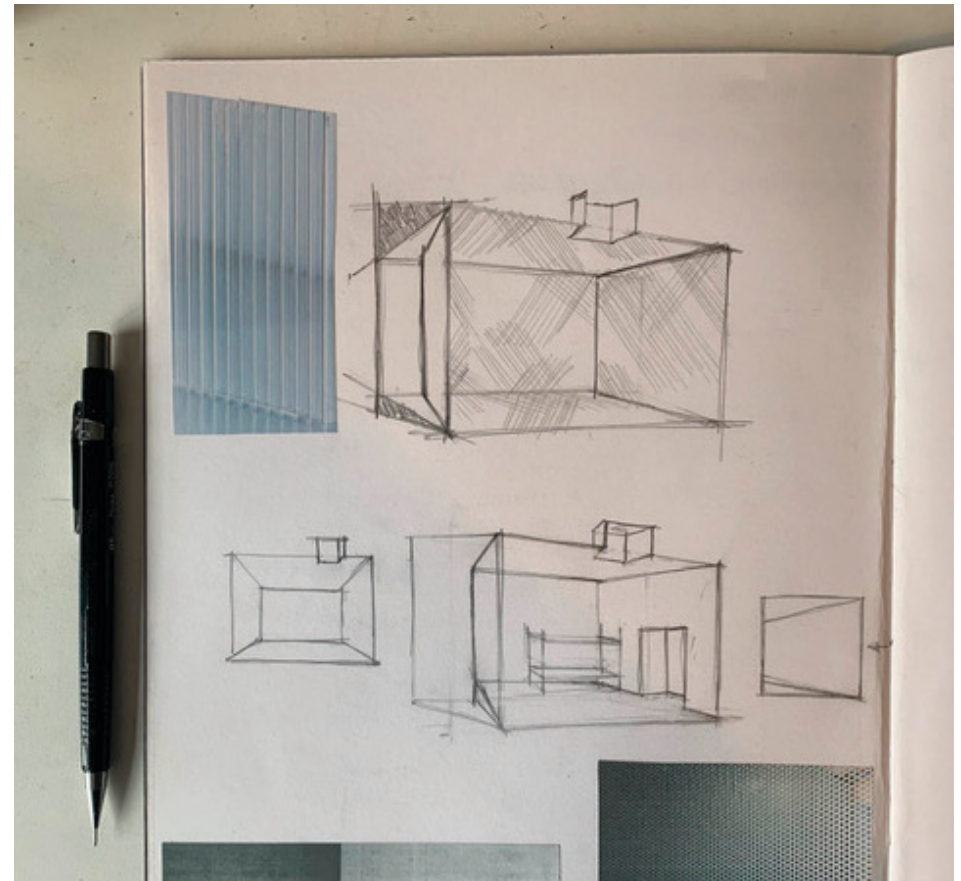
The preparation stage for a designer is key. The designer will read the play numerous times. They will highlight clues in the script about sets, costumes, lights, sounds, props, colours and imagery. You will find a set of exercises below that will help you to think about your initial reactions and responses to the play and how that might shape your design ideas.



*Peter McKintosh research images for King Hedley II*

# 2. CONCEPT IDEAS

A concept is a plan and/or idea of how the designer will respond to the play that is often shared in the form of annotated sketches and mood boards. The designer might have a couple of concept ideas that they will create to share with the director.



*Peter McKintosh concept sketches for TRSE Recovery Season*

### 3. COLLABORATE WITH DIRECTOR

The designer and director need to work together to create a shared vision for the play. There may be specific requirements made by the director or restrictions of the playing space that will impact on the design.

### 4. WHITE CARD

The designer will next create a model in white card of their set design. This is a detailed 3D model of the set to scale. This is then shared with the whole creative and production team and is where things like budget are discussed. The focus is on dimensions and measurements and how it technically works in the space, rather than colour, texture or materials. It is a chance for all the team to come together to know exactly how the set will work and agree any final changes that need to be made to the overall concept and design.



*Peter McKintosh white card model for King Hedley II*



## 5. MODEL BOX

The final step is to create the model box. This is similar to the white card, but will show colour, texture and materials.

Directors use the model box to explore what set up or stage configurations they can have in different scenes, how the actors interact with the set, and what blocking might be possible. The model box is often used as a reference during rehearsals when the actors don't have the full set to rehearse on.

The model box, along with detailed technical drawings will be shared with the teams that build the set.



*Peter McKintosh model box for King Hedley II*

## 6. REHEARSALS

The designer will be on hand in rehearsals for any changes and adaptations that need to be made to the set now that the actors and the director are working together.

## 7. TECHNICAL REHEARSALS AND PREVIEWS

The designer will oversee the build of the set and be on hand to work with the other technical teams to ensure that the set is fitted and lit and that it works in the space. Any final changes can be made over the preview period which are the first few shows in which an audience are present before the show officially opens.

## 8. OPENING NIGHT

The show officially opens and press are invited to review it. The designer's job is now done and any maintenance on the set will now be looked after by the Stage Management team.

## 2

# DEVELOPING YOUR CONCEPT

*These exercises will help students to develop a design concept for their monologue. They will encourage students to think about how the themes and emotions evoked by a script can inform a set design. The exercises will ask them to consider both literal and metaphorical design choices and give useful ways in to coming up with ideas and concepts.*

# READING AND REREADING



*This exercise will help students find clues in the text to help begin to imagine the world of the monologue and the play which it comes from. This will inform what set design they might like to think about.*

- Read the full play that your monologue appears in.
- Think about the following questions whilst you are reading. These are prompts to help you begin to articulate and document your response to the play.

***What is happening and where? (What are the key events and the locations they take place in?)***

***How does the play make you feel?***

***What are you reminded of when you read the play? (This might include people, places, songs, movies, colours, smells, tastes...anything that comes into your head as you are reading)***

***What does it look like? (What can you see in your head when you are reading?)***

***What excites you?***

***What do you not understand?***

***What questions does it make you ask?***

***What practically does the play need, For example, a door or a staircase etc.?***

The process starts with reading the script. More than once, because when I as a designer read the script for the first time my head is spinning with what you could do. What you are trying to do is separate those thoughts out and just read the play and not think what it should look like. Just have a gut response to the play.

Peter McKintosh - Designer



# SENSORY MAP



*This exercise will help students think about using all their senses to create a vision for the world of the play.*

- To help build a vision for the show it can be useful to think about the senses.
- On a piece of paper, draw your character in the middle of the space. It doesn't have to be a detailed drawing, just something that represents them.
- Fill the rest of the paper with images or words to create a sensory map of the world that character is in. You could choose to write words, draw, or create a collage from images from newspapers or the internet.
- Think about what your character can see, hear, taste, smell and touch.
- Where are those things in relation to the character, are they close, at a distance, or far away, beyond what can be seen onstage? How can you represent this on the page?



*The following questions are good prompts to get the students thinking about how they could use this map to represent the sensory world onstage. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals.*

***What colours could you use in the materials of your design to represent elements of your sensory map?***

***What textures could you use in the materials of your design to represent elements of your sensory map?***

***Are there sound or lighting effects you could add to your design that will enhance the sensory experience for an audience?***

***What other ways can you bring the space to life through smells or tastes?***

# WHAT DOES THE PLAY FEEL LIKE?



*This exercise will help students think about how they want the set to feel like for the audience.*

- During your research and imagining stage it is important to ask yourself a lot of questions to explore all the possibilities of the set you are designing.
- Read your monologue and ask yourself what does it feel like?
- Set yourself a timer for 10 minutes and allow yourself time to really consider this question.
- You can use the following prompts to help you. You could capture your thoughts in writing, drawings, voice notes- whatever works best for you.
  - Texture (does it feel rough or smooth, calm or chaotic etc.?)
  - Size (does it feel claustrophobic, or colossal etc.?)
  - Period (does it feel modern, timeless, or period specific?)
  - Weight (is it weightless or dense, or expanding etc.?)
  - Emotion (does it make you feel happy, oppressed, nervous etc.?)
  - Space (Is it very specific space or a metaphorical space? What does the quality of the space remind you of?)

Tell me what the play feels like to you. Is it a metal play, a wooden play, a water play? Is it architectural? Is it abstract? Is it a big or a small space? Does it need furniture, Ask yourself lots of questions about the play. This can focus your thoughts into a mood.

Peter McKintosh - Designer



*King Hedley II designed by Peter Mckintosh*

*Photo credit: The Other Richard*

- Now you have captured your response, think about how you could translate all these ideas into a design by filling in the table below.
- Don't worry at this stage about thinking about practical or realistic ideas, just explore what the responses would be visually.

<b>QUALITY (TEXTURE, SIZE, PERIOD, WEIGHT, EMOTION, SPACE)</b>	<b>DESIGN IDEA - (LIGHTING, SET, PROPS OR COSTUME)</b>	<b>HOW THIS MAKES THE AUDIENCE FEEL</b>
<i>Emotion- Feels oppressive</i>	<i>Lighting- Low strip lighting</i>	<i>It feels like a prison cell, everything brightly lit, nowhere to hide, being interrogated.</i>

# REIMAGINE



*This exercise will help students explore the potential for their design ideas.*

If your play is multilocal, how can you find one set that is not just suggestive of all of those locations, but suggestive of the mood and the poetry of the piece.

Peter McKintosh - Designer

- Before you make a decision on the design of your monologue it can be useful to explore loads of ideas. Often this is more about working out what the design definitely isn't than what it is.
- Start by asking yourself that question. 'What is it definitely not?' for example, "this is not a realistic play" or "this play is not light and fluffy". You might want to set a timer for 5 minutes and keep writing different answers until the timer goes off. No answer is wrong here.

- Next you are going to reimagine the design responding to at least two of the following prompts.
- Set a timer to think about each prompt for 3-5 minutes. You can choose to sketch the design, or write a description. It's not about creating the perfect design, but getting some ideas on the paper. Don't over think it at this stage.
  - A realistic set design
  - A poetic or symbolic set design
  - A design that reflects your emotional response to the monologue
  - The most obvious set design
  - The least obvious set design
  - The set design if it was a Hollywood blockbuster
  - A set design using only one material or object







The following questions are good prompts to allow the students to reflect on their ideas. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals?

**What did your designs have in common?**

**Were there any ideas that surprised you?**

**What would definitely not work?**

**Which ideas fit your monologue the best?**



*King Hedley II* designed by Peter Mckintosh  
Photo credit: The Other Richard

**What stage configuration are you using? (Proscenium Arch, In-the Round, Thrust, Traverse etc.) If you changed this how would this change the design?**

**Does your monologue need a set that focuses on the architecture of the scene (does it need to be a clear location with the functionality of that place, e.g. a laundrette with a washing machine and baskets of washing etc.) or could it be a set that focuses more on the mood of the monologue work (you could have your actor buried in a pile of grey/brown/beige clothes to reflect how they are overworked by the mundanity of their job)?**

If someone says they are somewhere, unless there is actual business needed, we don't need to see the space. If the play says somebody opens a door, you have to ask yourself if that is important, can you do without it?

Peter McKintosh - Designer





# GET IN TOUCH

*We hope that these exercises have been useful  
to help your students generate exciting new design ideas.  
We would love to see the work they have created.  
You can share with us via the follow platforms.*

**Learning & Participation Instagram: @trse\_getinvolved**

**Stratford East Instagram: @stratford\_east**

**Stratford East Twitter: @stratfordeast**

**Facebook: Theatre Royal Stratford East**

**Website: [stratfordeast.com](http://stratfordeast.com)**

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*If you have any questions, get in touch with Learning & Participation at  
Theatre Royal Stratford East on [getinvolved@stratfordeast.com](mailto:getinvolved@stratfordeast.com)*