·HOLDING· ACHILLES

By David Morton

EDUCATION NOTES

These activities have been included to be used in your classroom both before and after the show. They are practical and written activities that you can use and adapt for your students. If you have any questions about the notes, please feel free to email Stephanie Tudor : **steff.tudor@gmail.com**

29 August – 10 September 2022
Playhouse, QPAC

Dead Puppet Society

LEGS ON THE WALL

BRISBANE FESTIVAL

Queensland Government

BRISBANE CITY

Brisbane Festival is an initiative of the Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council

QPAC QUEENSLAND PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

About the show

Presented by QPAC and Brisbane Festival
Dead Puppet Society and Legs On The Wall's Holding Achilles by David Morton

HOLDING ACHILLES
The other half of the legend

Set against the epic violence of the Trojan War, *Holding Achilles* by David Morton is a refreshing take on one of the ancient world's best-known heroes, and his relationship with Patroclus, his not so well-known lover. As a young exile taken in by Achilles' father, Patroclus faces hostility from the young hero until they are thrust together to train under the centaur Chiron, and the two form an unlikely friendship. As Achilles doggedly seeks to fulfil his mother's prophecy to become a legend, their relationship becomes something more. But war with Troy is brewing, and the two young men find themselves caught between their hopes for a future together and the brutal realities of the world that faces them.

This breathtaking new production from visual theatre masterminds Dead Puppet Society and physical theatre virtuosos Legs On The Wall reclaims the queer aspects of Homer's *The Iliad*. Set to a haunting new score performed live by Montaigne, composed with Tony Buchen and Chris Bear, this innovative new work blends heightened physicality and visual storytelling with an ensemble cast to weave a legend of mythic proportions. A tale of trials, grief and love - *Holding Achilles* is an epic tale about a fearless bond forged in the toughest of times.

Estimated running time   2 hours and 30 minutes (including 20 minute interval)

Suitability   Grades 9 – 12

Warnings   This play contains mature themes (*multiple references to acts of attempted suicide*), theatrical effects including haze, smoke, blood, loud music and strobe lighting. Moments of dead black out.

Themes

- Power
- Love
- Relationships
- Identity
- Fate
- Responsibility

- Redemption
- Honour
- Pride
- Legacy
- Masculinity
- Secrets

- Loss
- Family
- War
- Worth
- Sacrifice
- Gender

Curriculum Links

Dramatic Form and Style

Contemporary Theatre

Design-led Theatre

Visual Theatre including puppetry

Physical Theatre

Cinematic Theatre

Dramatic Convention

- openness of form
- appropriation
- hybridity
- contemporary music
- acrobatics
- heightened physicality
- physical metaphor
- poetic image

- ensemble movement
- fragmentation
- live music
- symbolic set
- transformation of gender
- motif
- symbolic prop
- minimalistic set

- puppetry
- montage
- mediatised performance
- movement sequence
- stylised movement
- stage combat
- aerial movement
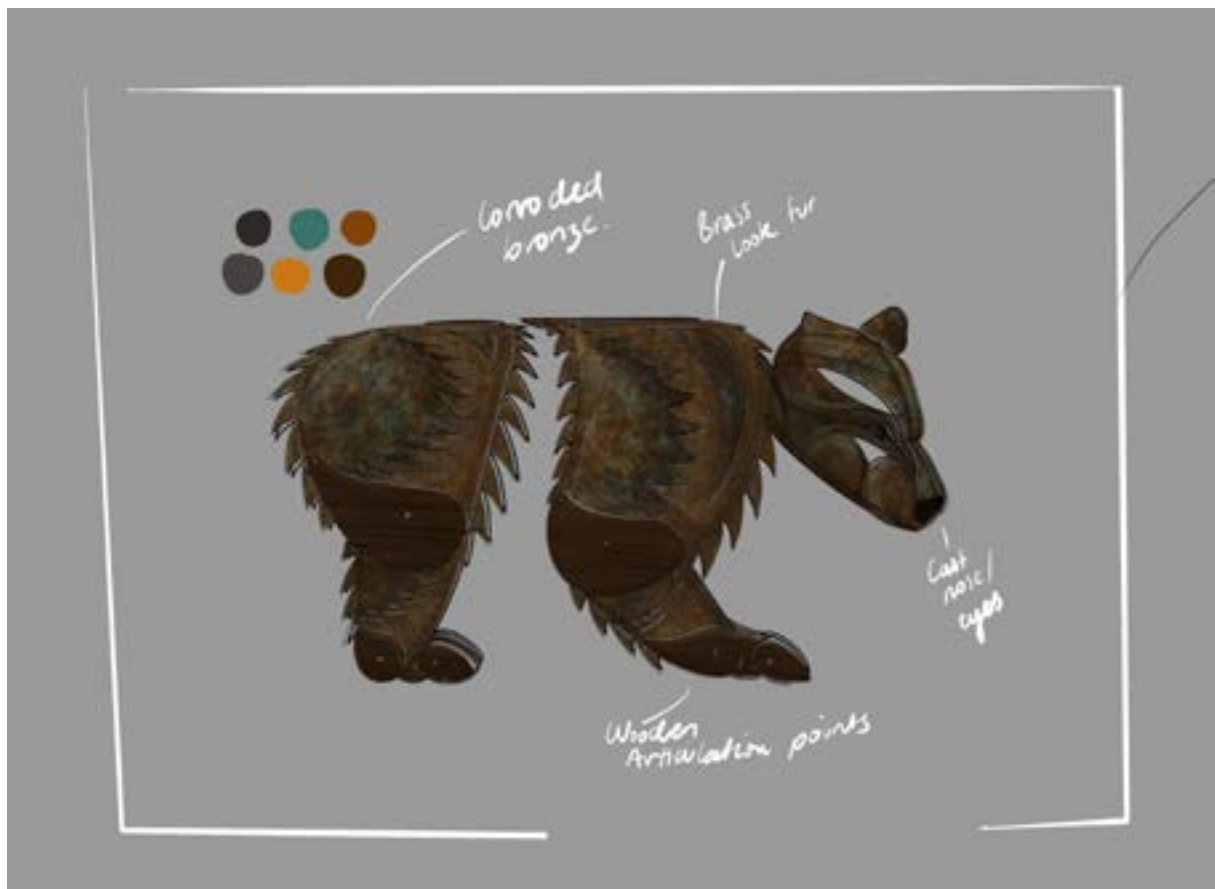
Holding Achilles Draft puppet concept - Savannah Mojidi and David Morton

Cast and Creatives

Creatives

Director and Co-Creator **David Morton**

Movement Director and Co-Creator **Joshua Thomson**

Creative Producer **Nicholas Paine**

Music by **Tony Buchen** and **Chris Bear** with **Montaigne**

Music performed live by **Montaigne**

Co-Designers (set) **Anna Cordingley** and **David Morton**

Designer (costume) **Anna Cordingley**

Lighting Design **Ben Hughes**

Sound Design **Tony Brumpton**

Rigging Design **David Jackson**

Puppet Design **Dead Puppet Society**

Dramaturg **Louise Gough**

Associate Director **Matt Seery**

Associate Producers **James Beach** and **Lauren Eisinger**

Technical Director **Scott Barton**

Head Rigger **Byron Cleasby**

Counterweight **Johnas Liu**

Production Stage Manager **Lindsey Knight**

Deputy Stage Manager **Nicole Neil**

Cast

Leading the cast are **Stephen Madsen** and **Karl Richmond** as lovers Achilles and Patroclus, with **Ellen Bailey, John Batchelor, Lauren Jackson, Thomas Larkin, Nic Prior, Christy Tran** and **Jennifer Vuletic** completing the ensemble.

Visit https://deadpuppetsociety.com.au/holding-achilles to get up to date casting information.

Curriculum Connections

The curriculum connections are provided based on the *Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) General Drama Senior Syllabus Drama (2019 v1.1)*.

General Senior Syllabus

Unit 1: Share and Unit 4: Transform

- How can *Holding Achilles* be used to reframe the story of Achilles to share and examine understandings of love and relationships?
- Using contemporary theatre forms and conventions, how can Dead Puppet Society and Legs On The Wall retell the story of Achilles to entertain and engage a modern audience?

ACARA

Year 9 and 10 Band Descriptors

- **Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles**
  - How does the shaping of *Holding Achilles* reflect global trends and new developments in theatre technology and contemporary performance forms and styles?
  - How does the retelling of the story of Achilles reflect the current social context in which the work was created?

- **Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect**
  - Consider how Dead Puppet Society has integrated multiple forms and styles, as well as their relevant conventions to convey dramatic meaning.
  - How does the production effectively manipulate Visual Theatre conventions to create aesthetic effect?

- **Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making**
  - How can the reframing of *Holding Achilles* be used to explore differing viewpoints about love and war?
  - How can a story from 1200 BC be used to share understandings of the human experience?

Pre-Show Activities

Initial questions

- What do you know about Achilles?
- What do you know about the Greek Gods and Mythology?
- Achilles first appears in Homer's *The Iliad* in 1200 BC. Why do you think this is a story we still are interested in?
- What does Achilles symbolise?
- Dead Puppet Society specialises in design-led theatre, where they use a range of new technologies to enhance the storytelling. Considering the following statement, "this boundary pushing production melds acting and aerial work with puppetry and an original score." What does that statement make you think about?
- Legs On The Wall's vision for their company is "Legs strive to be contemporary cultural influencers and social commentators; contributing to the Nation's narrative through transformative physical theatre." What does this statement make you think about?
- What excites you about seeing this production?

Fate

- What makes you who you are?
- Which is more important, nature or nurture?
- Are we destined to become a particular person based on our situation or environment?
- Are we destined to live a particular life?
- Are you defined by how people perceive you?

See, Think, Wonder

Students are asked to complete a See, Think, Wonder reflecting on two images of Achilles and Patroclus.

https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/5009/achilles-lamenting-death-patroclus

https://www.flickr.com/photos/70289327@N06/6401552557/

Encourage them to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations. They are to complete this as individuals and then in small groups compare and discuss their answers.

- **What do you see?**
- **What do you think about that?**
- **What does it make you wonder?**

Taken from – Visible Thinking by Project Zero. http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/See%20Think%20Wonder_2.pdf

As a class, discuss the ideas that emerged out of the See, Think, Wonder exercise.

Spectrum of difference

Throughout *Holding Achilles* the characters are faced with conflicts and have to decide what is 'right'. Before seeing the production, students have to respond to a range of moral statements. Revisit this activity after you have seen the show. Ask students if they feel differently about any of the questions now and if so why.

Set up an invisible line across the classroom, one end disagree the other end agree. Ask students to stand anywhere across the line, to reflect how they agree or disagree with a statement. Encourage them to not simply stand in the middle. Ask students to justify why they are standing where they are. Students are given the opportunity to move after hearing someone else's justification.

- No one is innocent.
- Love conquers all.
- You should always stick to your word.
- There is glory in war.
- It is better to be remembered as a hero than die unknown.
- Everyone is a product of their upbringing.
- A hero's job is to protect people.
- You are either good or evil.
- If you love someone (family, friend or relationship) you need to approve of everything they do.
- Pride is deadly.
- Loyalty should never waver.
- Love is pure.
- To be a hero you must be a good person.

Revisit this activity after you have seen the play. Ask students to consider

- Have your opinions been changed by the production?
- What do you think now that you didn't think before?
- How did the justification of others impact your thoughts?

Reframing a story

Achilles is often described as the greatest of all Greek warriors and his story has been told for thousands of years. Now Achilles and Patroclus appear in multiple works of art, novels, songs, movies and TV shows. Each version tells a slightly different story or highlights a different aspect of the legend.

Discuss the following questions

- Why are we still drawn to stories that were first told thousands of years ago?
- Why do you think the Greek hero's Hercules, Achilles, Jason etc stories have survived?
- Why do we retell or reframe stories?

Think about what needs to be considered when using a reimagined narrative or using it as inspiration for a new piece. Using the original myth of Achilles explore ways that you can transform the original text to make it relevant for a contemporary audience.

- Create a short scene based on the original story, no longer than two minutes

- Explore ways you can then adapt this by either adapting the characters, the way the narrative is told, the setting or the style and form
  - Tell the story in one minute
  - Remove one of the characters
  - Use a non linear structure by either starting at the end or using flashbacks/ flashforwards
  - Tell the story from another character's point of view
  - Change the time and place
  - Tell the story as a news report / as a soap opera / as a musical
  - Explore using different styles of theatre
- Participate in a discussion about the various conventions and techniques that the students used. How did this change the story for the audience and the actors?

Read and research

If you don't know the story of *The Iliad* or the myth of Achilles, or just need a refresher these websites are a great place to start for a quick overview.

- Classics Summarised: *The Iliad* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faSrRHw6eZ8
- Character Analysis of Achilles in *The Iliad* | Achilles as an Epic Hero https://www.eng-literature.com/2021/06/character-achilles-homers-the-iliad.html
- The Best Couples in History — Valentine's Day Special https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvxC4BeUAVI
- ACHILLES: BRONZE AGE WARRIOR https://www.historynet.com/achilles-bronze-age-warrior/
- *The Iliad* https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/iliad/character/achilles/
- Did Ancient Troy Really Exist - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQbZX9JEQsQ
- Achilles and Patroclus: The erasure of LGBT+ History https://www.academuseducation.co.uk/post/achilles-and-patroclus-the-erasure-of-lgbt-history-by-reyna-jani

Greek Gods and mythology help to understand the background of *Holding Achilles*.

- Greek Gods https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJCm8W5RZes
- Greek Gods Chart - https://www.definitelygreece.com/greek-gods-chart/

Read the following articles to find out some background information on Dead Puppet Society and the type of theatre they create.

- Visual Theatre with Dead Puppet Society https://laboite.com.au/about/latest/visual-theatre-with-DPS
- Dead Puppet Society https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-13/come-inside-the-workshop-of-the-dead-puppets-society/7407284

Read the following articles to find out some background information on Legs On The Wall and the type of theatre they create.

- Legs On The Wall Compilation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZNm8w-rC9U
- Legs On The Wall: History https://www.legsonthewall.com.au/company
- Legs On The Wall's most recent work, inspired by the need for climate action, THAW: thaw.org.au

What makes a hero

Holding Achilles has multiple characters that have been held up as heroes for thousands of years. Discuss with students the idea of heroism and how it has changed over time.

Ask students to respond to the following questions

- Define heroism.
- What characteristics does a hero need?
- Are heroes made or born?
- Brainstorm a list of people that they believe are heroic. They are also asked to identify what qualities in this person they feel they have taken on, or want to take on.
- As a class, discuss the qualities they deemed important.
- Watch 'What Makes a Hero' - Matthew Winkler https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA
- Discuss the similarities or differences to what they believe makes a hero to what is presented in the video.
- Revisit this activity after the production and discuss what characters are considered heroic. Do they disagree or agree with this portrayal? What qualities do these characters have? Which moments are key to these characters being considered a hero?

Directing

Holding Achilles includes a wide range of dramatic conventions, from multiple forms and styles. Encourage students to experiment with these to bring sections of the script to life.

Have them start by brainstorming ways this could be shown onstage. Ensure they unpack what they think the text is about first. Ask them to then brainstorm the conventions that would best work to convey their chosen meaning.

Have students use this to create a directorial vision for *Holding Achilles* using one of the script excerpts. Ask students to include:

- The conventions they would manipulate.
- What message / idea you want to convey to the audience and how you will achieve this.
- Block your scene with other students, however, experiment with objectives, motivations and subtext for the characters. Which one more closely matches your initial vision and interpretation, and why?
- Consider the conventions and styles you would use to convey this piece. What are the differences in having a different actor play each role, rather than switching between them? Experiment with a range of conventions.

Before beginning, read the note on the text from the playwright, David Morton.

> **A NOTE ON THE TEXT**
> *Holding Achilles* was conceptualised to be more than a play - it's a performance event that combines a wide variety of forms, disciplines, and practices. To this end, please use this document as a scaffolding for the wider production and not as a piece of literary theatre. Its text forms the backbone of the narrative but the dialogue carries only a portion of the storytelling weight.
>
> Think of the numbered sequences as the visual-theatre equivalent to the songs of a musical. These sequences push through shifts in the story in a non-literal, often nonverbal, way providing opportunities for spectacle and poetic presentation of the characters and their internal lives.

The descriptions of the action in these sequences (marked in capital letters) are minimal, marking key narrative waypoints, but leaving room for their realisation by the creative team in physical space. Read these sections slowly and allow time to paint a version of these moments in your mind.

Ask students to read the following two extracts and brainstorm how they would realise this onstage. Students are to create a 1-2 minute 'pitch' of their chosen scene

[MUSIC BEGINS]
PATROCLUS STANDS ALONE IN THE DARKNESS.
WORDS APPEAR AROUND HIM.
Let me not die ingloriously and without a
struggle…
…but first let me do some great thing…
…that shall forever be told among men
hereafter.
PATROCLUS, UNARMED, EVADES THE ATTACKS OF A GOLDEN WARRIOR ARMED WITH A SPEAR.
THE WARRIOR OVERWHELMS HIM.
EVENTUALLY, PATROCLUS THROWS HIS WEIGHT AGAINST THE WARRIOR, WHO FALLS AND STRIKES THEIR HEAD ON THE GROUND.
THE WARRIOR LIES STILL.
PATROCLUS TRIES TO REMOVE THE WARRIOR'S HELMET.
HIS HANDS COME AWAY SOAKED IN BLOOD.
THE GOLDEN WARRIOR RISES BEHIND HIM.
THE WARRIOR DRIVES THEIR SPEAR THROUGH PATROCLUS.
MULTIPLE FIGURES EMERGE FROM THE DARKNESS AND FURTHER WOUND PATROCLUS.
THEY WEAVES THE SPEAR AROUND HIM AND THROUGH HIM.
EVENTUALLY, PATROCLUS FALLS.
SEQUENCE ENDS

#2 WELCOME TO PHTHIA
[MUSIC BUILDS]
THE WALLS AND CORRIDORS OF THE PALACE SHIFT AROUND PATROCLUS AND AJAX AS SHE SHOWS HIM AROUND PHTHIA.
THEY WEAVE THROUGH THE PREPARATIONS BEING MADE FOR THE DAY'S FESTIVITIES.
THE MYRMIDONS FALL INTO SYNCHRONISED ACTIONS AROUND THEM.
AJAX AND PATROCLUS PICK UP THEIR PACE. THE PALACE SEEMS ENDLESS.
THE PLACE DRIFTS PAST PATROCLUS IN SLOW MOTION AS HE TRIES TO TAKE IT ALL IN.
THEY STUMBLE INTO THE MIDST OF A GROUP WARMING UP FOR THE GAMES.
ACHILLES STEPS OUT OF THE GROUP AND BLOCKS THEIR PASSAGE.

- Have students pitch their directorial visions to the class.
- Then in groups of 4 or 5 have them realise one of these moments onstage.
- Challenge them to include movement sequences as well as multimedia to convey their intention. There should be a strong sense of time and place created as well as a sense of mood.
- Present these to the class.
  - What similarities or differences did you notice?
  - How did each group create time, place and mood?
  - What conventions did they manipulate to achieve their intended purpose?

- Challenge the students to present the scene
  - Using no dialogue, only soundscape
  - Using a chorus
  - Using puppetry
  - As a realism scene

After each change, discuss the differences. How was the mood shaped? Did the dramatic focus shift? How and why? What differences do we see in the characters?

Holding Achilles featuring Stephen Madsen and Karl Richmond Photo by Joel Devereux

Creating an ensemble

Holding Achilles manipulates movement sequences and ensemble work to create place and time and to move the narrative forward. Use the following exercises with students to develop a greater understanding of their physicality and develop ensemble skills.

Warm ups

- **The Wave.** Working on developing ensemble work and focus, have students stand in one line at one end of the room. Have them pick a fixed point at the other end of the room and as a group they walk towards this point, keeping their line as straight as possible. After they are successful add another element of difficulty. Students are to walk toward the point with any students freezing in position along the way. The line needs to continue without them, and they are to be 'picked up' on the return journey. You can then have students freeze in a specific position or embody a character or animal when they freeze.

- **Laser Beams**. Students are to find a partner and stand facing them, anywhere in the room. Have one student stand out. They can be different heights but must be able to maintain eye contact with each other. In between their eyes they form a 'laser beam'. Place an object in the middle of the room, surrounded by 'laser beams' or create a course that one student has to get through (the student that does not have a partner). If the student crosses the beam, the beam that has been crossed must say 'buzz'. Depending on the difficulty this can either send them back to the start or you can do three strikes and you are out.

Watch the following video from *National Theatre Discover* exploring pace.
Creating Chorus: Pace exercise https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6anj5T_I5k

Have students follow the instructions in the video.

- In a circle have students jog on the spot. Anyone at any time can move and initiate a movement - we should not know who started the movement. This creates the idea that the actor has to be present in the moment and that they must respond to any change in stimuli.
- Then have students walk around the space, using the pace activity.
- At any point someone changes the speed, this can go up or down. Everyone has to be aware of this and immediately react. This exercise starts to get students to work as an ensemble, use their peripheral vision and be present in the moment.
- When students can manage this, adapt this into the 12/6/4 activity. This means that during their walking there needs to be 12 stops, 6 changes in direction and 4 jumps.

After these activities, discuss the idea of whole body listening with the class.

- We need to learn to listen to the whole body. Think back to the 12/6/4 activity, this sensibility of alertness, quickness, availability and openness to one another, and the sense that anything may happen.
- Whole body listening means listening without any idea of the results. When something happens in the room, everybody present can respond instantly, you act upon instinct and intuition.

Use the following videos to develop further ensemble skills and discuss the role of movement in theatre productions.

- Creating Choreography: Building Chorus https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKd9ERhV5SI
- Creating Chorus: Leading Exercise https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0leUlr9H_M
- What is a Movement Director https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY-gWqj-Flk
- History of Movement Direction https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NjU8gttsZo

After watching *Holding Achilles*, reflect on their use of movement.

- How did they use movement to create character and status?
- What ensemble moments wowed you and why?
- How did naturalistic and stylistic movement work together?
- Why is movement so important in the telling of this story?
- How were relationships conveyed through both naturalistic and stylistic movement?

Puppetry

Dead Puppet Society draws on multiple forms and styles to create its unique style of design-led theatre. One of these is Puppetry. Puppetry has been used in theatre since the 5th century BC in Ancient Greece. Puppetry can take many forms, but at its core is the process of animating inanimate performing objects to help tell a story.

To find out more about the history of puppetry head to : **History of Puppetry** https://www.theaterseatstore.com/blog/history-of-puppetry

Dead Puppet Society has created new methods for both creating and animating their puppets to be able to innovatively and creatively tell stories.

Consider the following statement from David Morton, "The use of puppetry expands the possibilities of the types of stories you can tell on stage. Think of it as the theatre's answer to animation."

Using this statement as a starting point, view some of Dead Puppet Society's previous works with puppetry.

> *Storm Boy* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXVPkl97KRs
> Puppet Timelapse, *The Wider Earth* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smaNWSplfzU
> *Ishmael* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqBQVqDcTlk

Engage students in a discussion about David's statement and the videos:

- Connect to what you know or have previously seen with puppetry.
- Challenge your perceptions of what you thought puppetry was.
- What questions or thoughts do you have about puppetry?

Have students watch the following two videos and then read 'An Introduction to Puppetry' to create a puppet. Have students explore how to animate the puppet. Once they have created the puppet, students rehearse how the puppets move. Ensure they focus on working together so the movement of their puppet is unified and seems like one character, rather than a collection of independent parts. Ask them to experiment with movement and sound.

Once they have experimented with this, ask them to work with another puppet to create a short scene. What is the relationship between the two puppets? How do we know this? Ask students to experiment without relying on dialogue.

Discuss

- What did you notice when you watched the puppets interact?
- How did the use of the puppets shift the dramatic focus?
- Without dialogue, what were you using to tell the story? How can this transfer into your own work as actors?
- What was challenging about using puppets?
- What was exciting about using puppets?

If puppetry, "expands the possibilities of the types of stories you can tell on stage," how can you use puppetry to tell the story of Achilles and Troy?

- Brainstorm how you think puppetry may be used in *Holding Achilles*.
- What stories or moments can you tell with puppets that are hard to tell with actors onstage?

Extension: Experiment with the script excerpts using the puppets created by the students. What possibilities does this open up?

- How to Make a Puppet | How You Can Make It | National Theatre
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFEnZfS5IXQ
- Gyre & Gimble Masterclass: Bringing a Puppet to Life - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXT3gPef8zo

For further resources you can engage with Dead Puppet Society's Digital Workshops. These have been designed to provide meaningful arts experiences for students and educators. In this unique program, participants are guided through a series of exercises using common household/classroom materials to gain skills in both design and performance that are fundamental to visual theatre practice. https://deadpuppetsociety.com.au/education

Holding Achilles Draft puppet concept - Savannah Mojidi and David Morton

AN INTRODUCTION TO PUPPETRY: THE ELEMENTS OF MANIPULATION:

There are five key elements that need to be incorporated into the performance of a puppet object to generate the illusion needed for audience investment.

<div align="center">

FOCUS

BREATH

GRAVITY

GESTURE

INTELLIGENCE

</div>

FOCUS

Identifies the physical point on the puppet object that both the operator and the audience understand to contain the primary sensory receptors of the character, particularly pertaining to its eyes or the source of its sight. The focus point must be located on a part of the puppet body that has the ability to move in relation to the rest of the body.

BREATH

Identifies the gentle movement that must always be present in the puppet character to ensure that at no time it becomes a simple inanimate object. This often takes the form of a pattern of breathing. If this approach is taken there are benefits to aligning the breathing of the puppet character with that of the operator/s as it can assist in unifying choices regarding the movement and actions of the puppet.

Holding Achilles Draft puppet concept - Savannah Mojidi and David Morton

GRAVITY

Refers to the way in which the puppet is operated in order to mask the fact that it has an artificial body. It comes into play during moments where the puppet object can achieve tasks with more ease due to the fact that it is literally being carried by its operators and none of its movements are as a result of its own agency, such as the actions of sitting down, climbing stairs, and common movements like walking. It identifies the need to understand and clarify the physical interactions between the puppet and its environment.

GESTURE

As in humans, gesture refers to the culturally loaded shapes and movements made with the body that are an external physicalisation of the internal emotional state of the puppet. The idea of gesture also captures the movements with which a puppet plays out its actions.

INTELLIGENCE

The intelligence (or kinaesthetic intelligence) of the puppet identifies what occurs when all of these elements work together in the creation of a full illusion of life. It doesn't require that all elements be at play in every moment but rather that there is an intelligence behind their orchestration that results in the inanimate body of the puppet embodying the physical characteristics of a living body.

These are pragmatic elements that are present regardless of the thematic content of the scene in which the puppet is performing and serve as useful guidelines in the building and refining of puppet-based scenes.

Gender transformation

Greek stories and myths include strong characters where gender plays a large part in how these characters are interpreted. Consider the female roles in Women of Troy, Antigone, Medea, and Clytemnestra (from *Agamemnon*) or male roles in Hercules, Oedipus, The Odyssey.

- However, what would happen if these roles were swapped so they were male or female?
- How does this change the perception of the scene?
- What effect does this have on the interpretation of the scene?
- Does it challenge traditional gender roles?

Holding Achilles from playwright David Morton transforms warriors Ajax and Hector from men to women. Engage students in a discussion about how this challenges or supports the way women and men are often represented and viewed in society.

Ask students to consider:

- How do you portray these characters without falling into stereotypes?
- Do you think this change will impact the production? Why / why not? Consider positive impacts as well.
- What bearing does gender have on the roles we consider heroes?
- How do you think these characters will show strength and power?

Have students participate in a hot seat activity in the role of Achilles, Ajax and Hector to delve further into the motivations, attitudes, self-awareness and personality of these characters as well as provide insights into their relationships with other characters.
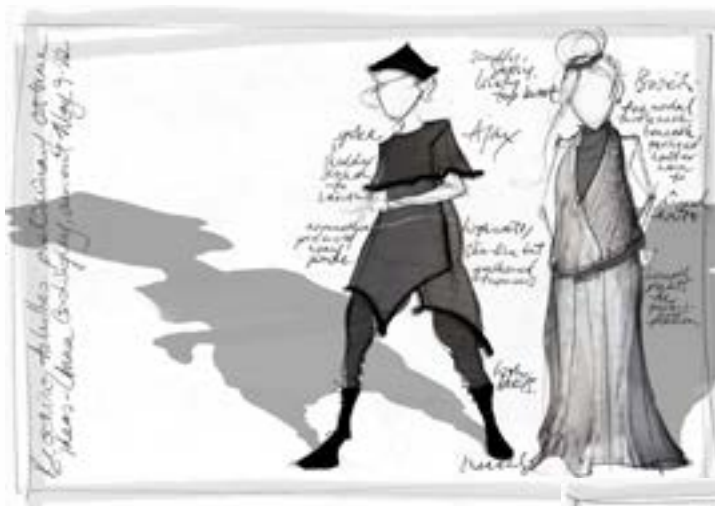
Holding Achilles Costume Design by Anna Cordingley

Holding Achilles Costume Design by Anna Cordingley

Stage design

The production is set in multiple locations including across Greece and TurkeyPhthia, Mount Pelion and Troy. Consider how the stage design will adapt to fit each of these locations.

Task: Have students create a set design for *Holding Achilles*. In their design they need to capture the multiple locations but also consider how they will transition between each.

- Have students research each location. Ensure they are taking the time period into consideration.
- Have students research Ancient Greece including the outfits, the architecture and culture. Make a list of all the locations they can remember.
- Compile a class list of the importance of each location and the mood they want to convey with the set design.
- Consider how they will transform time and place using the set, and add this to the design.
- Make a mood board that captures the design elements. This might include drawings, images from the internet, words and phrases.
- Use these mood boards to come up with a set design for the production.

To help with their design they can visit:

- 3 ways to create a space that moves you, from a Broadway set designer | David Korins: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SU8JYKGekXo
- Behind the Scenes: Set Design Sydney Opera House https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wBNOcCifaE
- Peter Gynt | Designing Theatre https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1eFxlcwRl8

Holding Archilles draft set concept by Anna Cordingley and David Morton

Post-Show Activities

Discussion questions

- What do you believe was the key message of the play?
- How did the actors communicate changes in scene and action?
- Try to recall the plot. What stages led to the eventual climax?
- Recall the moments of strong emotional connection. What led to these moments? Consider acting techniques as well as plot and design elements.
- What do you believe is the best aspect of *Holding Achilles?*
- How does the staging contribute to the production? Discuss the use of props, set, use of symbolic staging, and use of automation.
- Consider the use of automation and how this transforms through the production. How did this impact you as an audience member?
- Why is this an important story to tell?
- *The Iliad* first introduces Achilles by talking about his rage. What is your first impression of Achilles in *Holding Achilles*?
- What is your impression of Achilles in the end?
- What forms or styles really stood out to you? How were these effectively manipulated?
- Ajax's last line is "… After all we've been through, after everything they lost, Troy will become a story about gods and kings." Do you think the story of Troy has been reduced to a story about gods and kings? How does *Holding Achilles* change this idea? How does it reframe the story?
- What impact did changing the gender of multiple characters have on your understanding of the narrative?
- What choices were made to ensure this story continues to remain relevant?
- How did the integration of movement sequences, music and puppetry enhance the telling of this story?
- How did the production create balance between the large epic battles and ensemble moments to the intimate moments between the two central characters?

Key moments

As a class identify 5 key moments from the production. Break students up into smaller groups and assign them each a key moment.

- Have students recreate this moment as a series of freeze frames with no dialogue. The movements should be strong and your emotions evident to effectively convey this to the audience.
- Students are then to add two words per freeze frame. These can be spoken to the other characters or directly addressed to the audience.
- Add additional dialogue so the scene is complete.

OR

- Have students recreate this moment as a series of freeze frames with no dialogue. The movements should be strong and your emotions evident to effectively convey this to the audience.
- Have them consider this a gallery walk through a museum. Have them add a title to each of these freeze frames to direct dramatic focus.

- When presenting these, one actor must step out of the freeze frame and explain the title and the image, as if they were a tour guide explaining a painting.

- Have students extend on this by turning each freeze frame into an abstract representation of that moment, focusing on the mood or character emotions portrayed, rather than the plot. Students can bring these moments to life in a movement sequence.

Creating the setting

Ask students to list the different settings for each scene and describe each one. They can start by referencing the set from the production, but challenge them to go further than this and consider what wasn't shown onstage and what else they imagine would be present.

Have students complete a series of "Postcard" tableaus to create the setting of different scenes.

Discuss what the students have included or what they have left out.

Create a whole class image of the glade, Troy and Phthia. Discuss the locations of significance. What does it represent to the production as a whole and to each character?

Select a character from the production and discuss their relationship to each location. Consider how they feel at the start of the production and then at the end.
Have students sum this up as an action. i.e suffocating, protecting

Ask them to use the space, specifically spatial relationships and movement to metaphorically show this character's relationship to the island. How do you show the island suffocating or protecting? Students can start by creating a freeze frame, then add movement, sound and key words or phrases.

Repeat the same activity for each character.

You can then do this for the characters at the end of the play. Consider extending students by asking them to join the two movement pieces together.

Discuss what this is saying about the character's journey.

Character map

Create a "map" of the main characters. This is useful to do directly after viewing the performance, so students understand the narrative and nature of the work. This can also help later when constructing a response or critique. Consider the experiences within the play that define the characters' journey, the status shifts through the production and how their actions demonstrate their belief systems.

Key themes

Engage students in a discussion about the key themes and concepts explored throughout the production. Ask students which themes were most obvious and what their interpretation of them was. Link this to the manipulation of the dramatic elements and the dramatic meaning.

Extension: Ask students to answer the question "What is at the heart of *Holding Achilles*?". After discussing their responses look at the responses from the three creatives to this same question. Ask students to compare and contrast all of the answers to find the similarities and differences. Link these back to the key themes and ideas.

Timeline

Have students create a timeline of the key events and time periods from the play. Discuss the impact of the play spanning such a long time and traveling to multiple locations. How does this change our understanding of the characters and their journey?

Set design

Task: Reflect on the set design you created before the play. What are the similarities and differences? Annotate the below scenic design (by Anna Cordingley and David Morton) with reference to how it was used in the show.

- How was the essence of theatre captured in the set design?
- Make specific mention of the dramatic elements, performance technologies used and key narrative plot points – eg. What aspects of symbols were found in the set design? How was the set used to enhance the emotions of the characters? How was the automation used to convey time and place?
- How was this set design realised?
- How did the actors interact with the set?
- How did the actors become the set?
- How were the multiple locations captured in the set design?

What aspects of set design stood out to you and why?

Performance

- Revisit the scene excerpts.
- In groups read the scene aloud.
- Try out extreme possibilities as actors might do during rehearsals.
- Go through the scene twice, trying out two contrasting sets of desires/movement/intentions and share their work.
- How do the circumstances and surroundings affect what is being said? Does the audience pick up on different agendas or attitudes when the surroundings change?
- Layer in conventions. How does this change the meaning of the scene?

Reimagine

After viewing *Holding Achilles*, ask students for inspiration from how this production was retold for their own reimagining of a Greek Myth.

Discuss the question: Why do we retell or reimagine classic stories?

Read the interview with David Morton and discuss:

- What was his inspiration for wanting to retell this story?
- How did his process begin?
- What does he see as the difference between the myth of Achilles and *Holding Achilles*?
- What has he made sure he has retained from the original story?

Have students begin the process of reimaging their own work. You could start with the myths of Icarus or Pandora but any Greek myth or class text will work.

- In 3 minutes, brainstorm universal themes and ideas. Think about things that are still struggles or driving forces no matter the generation. After you have a list, go through with a partner and highlight commonalities. Do you see any trends emerging? If not, think about what stands out on the list?
- Identify any ideas from the list that were present in *Holding Achilles*. Consider how these were effectively conveyed to the audience.
- As a pair brainstorm texts that deal with these key ideas or themes.
- Pick one or two and identify the important message or key idea at the centre of the work. Consider how and why these are important messages to highlight to a contemporary audience.
- Make a list of the key characters and relationships.
- Use this information to consider how you could recontextualise the original narrative.
- Consider the statement: "I think there is a reason that the classics are classics, in that there's something about the stories and characters they contain that has managed to resonate so strongly that they have far outlived their contemporary audiences. In breathing new life into these sorts of stories, I feel that there is an onus of responsibility on an artist to unpack the core themes and universal experiences that are evoked in the original text, and put a spin on these that helps them to more strongly connect with today's audiences."
- How is your idea breathing new life into your myth? How are you making it resonate with a contemporary audience? What is your 'spin'?
- Workshop your ideas in the space.
- Layer in design-led theatre conventions. How can you use these to "awaken all of the senses, … and [build] an entire world."

Holding Achilles Costume Design by Anna Cordingley

Elements Of Drama Discussion

ROLE RELATIONSHIP CHARACTER	• Choose a specific moment of dramatic action that exemplifies one of the characters. How? Why? What dramatic meaning did this communicate to the audience? • How would you describe each character? How are their characters portrayed through the voice and movement of the actors? • How would you describe some of the key characters? (Purpose, Attitude and Status) • What key relationships were present? How would you describe them? • How does Achilles and Patroclus' relationship change over the course of the play? • What are Achilles's motivations in wanting to become a warrior? • How do both Achilles and Patroclus' relationships with their fathers define them? • Who has the higher status throughout the production? When does this power balance shift? • Achilles and Patroclus have different belief systems, how is this exemplified through their actions and thoughts? • How is role and relationship conveyed through the movement sequences?
TENSION	• What were some of the key examples of tension during the production? • Choose a specific moment of dramatic action that exemplifies one of the characters. How? Why? What dramatic meaning did this communicate to the audience? • How did the tension engage you? • What were you invested in? • How did the music and use of projections impact the development of tension? • How did the movement sequences develop tension? • Describe how tension was manipulated when time and place was quickly shifted, what impact did this have on the audience? • How does the production develop tension, even when you know how the story ends?
FOCUS	• How did the focus change between moments between the different time periods and locations? What happened onstage to facilitate this change? • How did the lighting, projection and set design create dramatic focus? • How was focus manipulated to convey both big epic moments and intimate moments? • How does the use of puppetry shift dramatic focus? • Think about the moments onstage where dramatic focus shifted. What happened onstage to facilitate this change?

TIME	• When was it written?
	• When is the play set?
	• How would changing the time impact the play's dramatic meaning?
	• The production spans a long time period, how was this conveyed onstage?
	• How is time manipulated throughout the production? Think about a moment where tempo was sped up or slowed down.
	• How was the passing of time shown?
PLACE	• Where did the play take place? How was the space transformed throughout the performance?
	• How are the multiple locations shown on stage?
	• Consider moments when a place was shown literally or symbolically. How did these moments differ? What was the impact on the audience?
	• How was space used to drive narrative and tension?
	• How did the actors work with the automation to shape dramatic action?
	• How were miniatures used to convey place?
	• How was the set and use of automation used to convey place?
MOVEMENT	• Consider how relationships in the play are communicated through body language and movement. Consider how you can show a relationship without "explaining" it.
	• Was the movement symbolic in any way?
	• What movement was repeated in the movement sequences? Why do you think this was the case? What impact did it have on your understanding of the dramatic meaning?
	• How was movement contrasted by stillness? What effect did this have?
	• How was aerial movement used? Why was this so effective in these moments?
LANGUAGE	• How were words used to create power?
	• What was the subtext behind some of the memorable lines?
	• How was language used to shape character? Consider the different ways each character speaks / uses language.
CONTRAST	• Describe two contrasting moments in Holding Achilles. How were these moments created through sound, lighting, voice and movement?
	• Analyse the ways in which contrast is used throughout the play in relation to the range of moods.
	• How was contrast manipulated through the design elements?
	• How was contrast used to switch from humour to more serious moments?
	• What other elements of contrast did you see throughout the production?

MOOD	• Discuss the impact of the sound design and music used to create specific moods. Use specific moments of dramatic action from the show and discuss how they made the audience feel. • Consider how they would've been different if different artistic choices were made, such as alternative lighting or sound. • How would you describe the mood when Achilles and Patroclus first enter the cave? How was this mood created? • Consider the mood at the start of the play. How does this contrast with the end of the play? • How did you feel when Patroclus revealed why he was exiled? What performance techniques and skills of the actors were utilised to make you feel this way? • Consider the inclusion of the epilogue. How would the mood of the play be different if this wasn't included? • How do the movement sequences, combined with music, work together to create mood? • Describe the mood in Act 1. How does this shift in Act 2?
SYMBOL	• Discuss the impact of the symbolic nature of the set. How did this impact your understanding of the production and the narrative? • There are strong symbolic references used throughout the production. What moments stood out to you? How did it impact your understanding of the characters? • How was the automation used to symbolically convey changes in time and place? • How was movement used symbolically? Consider the use of aerial movement as well. • What other elements of symbol were found in the production?

Meet the Writer, Director and Co-Creator David Morton

Achilles is such a well-known Greek figure. How do you go about transforming his story and making him more human?

The process of reimagining Achilles' story started with a deep dive into the huge amount of material about the iconic Greek hero, but the key to unlocking him was an exploration of how the things that happened in his early life could have shaped the person he became. It can be so easy to see figures from history or myth as static, but I find it far more interesting to explore their dynamism. In the myth, the boy that was born to Peleus and Thetis was always going to grow up to be the legendary hero, but the reality of that experience, losing his mother and growing up with overwhelming and confusing pressure, would have been deeply unsettling. In reworking the tale, my job was to put as many obstacles in the way as I could to make Achilles' shift into a hero as difficult as possible. Through seeing a character struggle we empathise and come to see parts of ourselves in their choices and actions. Our Achilles is anything but the golden hero, he's a young man asked to inhabit an impossible position, torn between the machinations of a war that is out of his control, and a yearning need for the life of peace with the one he loves. He does become a hero in the end, but the path he walks to get there is anything but traditional.

Why this story now?

The debate around Achilles' sexuality and the nature of his relationship with Patroclus is a conversation that is quite literally thousands of years old. In the last decade or so there have been numerous adaptations that have explored it but our version is unique in a couple of ways. In *Holding Achilles*, the fact that the heroes of the story are queer is refreshingly beside the point. While there is no doubting the strength of their bond, the story of their love serves as a backdrop for the choices they make when thrust into a broader conflict. There is no room in this play for self-loathing or homophobia, but rather their relationship is normalised, and their struggle not about identity, but how to be a good human. In a similar vein, our version of the story also questions the notion of heroism, and unlike other works that have been derived from the original myth, turns away from the glorification of the conflict and instead focuses on the intense suffering caused by all armed conflicts and the choices of those who lead them. *Holding Achilles* is unique in how it takes the story of the Trojan war hostage and reworks it into a humanist manifesto played out through the bond between two queer heroes.

When you create works you go into a creative development. Can you explain what that is and how it works?

Creative development is an opportunity for the artists working on a production to come together and test ideas. Each development period is usually focussed on a particular area of the production, or a particular creative obstacle that the team are working through. For *Holding Achilles* we've had all sorts of different developments. In the early days of our collaboration with Legs On The Wall, our developments were almost like creative speed dates, trying out ideas for scenes and staging before there was even a script to guide them. Since that time we've had developments with performers sitting around a table to hone the script, numerous periods of intensive design development, and also more than a month of studio time to build the physical sequences so we know what they are before we even hit rehearsals.

How is the process different from 'traditional' theatre?

In 'traditional' theatre, it's pretty normal for the text to have almost godly status, with the other elements of the production existing to serve the dialogue that happens between characters. In all of Dead Puppet Society's work, and especially *Holding Achilles*, our scripts work more like a framework for the performers and creatives to follow as we build the production together. This means that our process is much more open to a diversity of different forms that come together to serve the story outlined in the script in a holistic sense. For this project, the script serves as a document that has informed the development of all of the forms, capturing key images in the staging, narrative cues to be built into the physical sequences, as well as the dialogue to guide the performers in building their characters. When we find something new on the floor, we adjust the document to reflect the discovery, telling the same story, but adjusting the way the forms work together.

What advice would you give to students who are looking to tackle classic texts and transform them?

I think there is a reason that the classics are classics, in that there's something about the stories and characters they contain that has managed to resonate so strongly that they have far outlived their contemporary audiences. In breathing new life into these sorts of stories, I feel that there is an onus of responsibility on an artist to unpack the core themes and universal experiences that are evoked in the original text, and put a spin on these that helps them to more strongly connect with today's audiences. The reality is that so many of these stories have undergone translation after translation, often to speak to the social or political environment of each new version. I like to think that making a new adaptation is just another step in this legacy.

What do you see as the greatest challenge with this production?

The greatest challenge with this production is definitely its scale. There's a level of ambition, both in the physical staging and the size of the story that we're telling, that is equal parts exciting and absolutely terrifying.

Meet the Movement Director and Co-Creator Joshua Thomson

How are Dead Puppet Society and Legs On The Wall collaborating on this project?

When Dead Puppet Society approached us about working together on a new show, well, we thought dreams really do come true. We have been inspired by their work and the infectious energy they cultivate. Even though the two companies have similarities they definitely work in different artistic spaces. We believe this is why this collaboration is so successful, just enough in common but not too much. The starting point was definitely the story, however - being a true collaboration - the story influences the movement and, vice versa, the movement has infiltrated the story.

What can you tell us about the movement language in *Holding Achilles*?

Legs On The Wall has always sat in a hybrid of styles using that freedom to bring any form to bear that would best tell the story. Holding Achilles is no different; we capitalise on our quintessential aerial style while also diving deep into abstract movement both on and off the ground. This fusion catapults the emotional journey into a place beyond words. We have often thought that the aerialist has so many similarities to puppets on a string, getting manipulated by an experienced counterweight on the other side of the line. The genesis of our collaboration with Dead Puppet Society is a symbiotic understanding of the manipulation of objects and what greater object than the body to tell powerful stories.

Holding Achilles Costume Design by Anna Cordingley

Assessment Ideas

Extended response

Task 1

"These sequences push through shifts in the story in a non-literal, often nonverbal, way providing opportunities for spectacle and poetic presentation of the characters and their internal lives." David Morton

After viewing *Holding Achilles*, evaluate the effectiveness of the production by analysing the on-stage dramatic action and how the use of the dramatic languages created dramatic meaning. In your response consider how the play uses Design-led theatre conventions to facilitate the character's journey. Support your statements with perceptive and thorough evaluation and supporting evidence from key moments in the production. Use appropriate drama terminology throughout your essay.

Task 2

"Design-led theatre evokes a different kind of emotional response than realism, or other text-based theatre. It awakens all of the senses, and asks for a different sort of imaginative engagement, because it's not just concerned with characters and a story, but building an entire world." David Morton

In response to the above quote, you are to write an analytical essay evaluating how the production works to evoke an emotional response. You are to evaluate the success of the production to share understandings of the human experience and how it created dramatic meaning through the manipulation of the movement and relationship and one key convention.

Dramatic concept

Task

Working as a theatre-maker you will view *Holding Achilles*. Using this as stimulus, you must identify one key convention used in this production and devise an original dramatic concept that shares an understanding of the human experience.

Your dramatic concept must organise information under the following headings:

Analysis and evaluation (400 words)

- how was the convention manipulated to contribute to the communication of the shared human experience?

My concept (800 words, 10–12 images)

- identify a chosen purpose and context
- make specific reference to the original chosen convention
- argue how the dramatic languages have been used to communicate dramatic action and meaning
- develop a storyboard with explanatory paragraphs and annotations that document your dramatic ideas.

Directorial vision

Task

In this unit, you have been exploring how you can transform dramatic practice. By manipulating and shaping the dramatic languages you can reframe purpose, context and meaning of inherited texts into a contemporary performance.

You have been approached by Dead Puppet Society to pitch an original directorial vision to be considered for their 2023 Season.

You have been asked to choose another Greek myth or legend and reframe or reimagine it to engage a modern audience and reflect contemporary performance trends.

Work in the role as director to present a multimodal pitch, combining spoken word with a digital presentation that includes moving or still images. Your directorial vision will describe how an excerpt of the script is transformed into a contemporary performance. In creating your pitch, you may edit, reframe and resequence the text, but the text cannot be rewritten.

Individually develop a directorial vision to be delivered through a multimodal pitch that:

- applies digital literacy skills by combining spoken word with digital visual presentation to communicate ideas
- demonstrates how the elements of drama and conventions of contemporary performance will be manipulated to transform a selected inherited text
- applies and structures dramatic languages to make clear the relationship between text, purpose, context and dramatic meaning in the vision
- evaluates and justifies the use of the dramatic languages