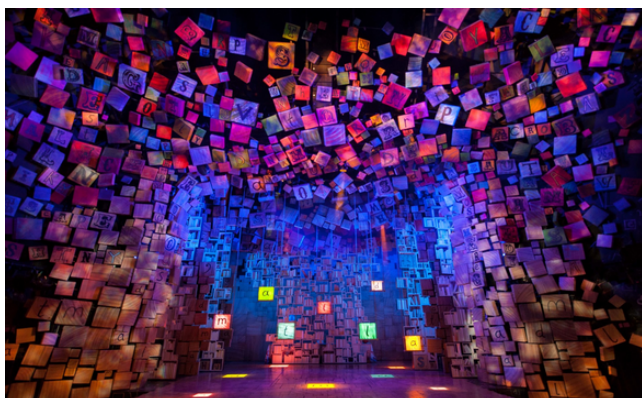## What's a Theatre Designer?

Last week we looked at Playwrights, this week we're going to look at Theatre Designers. Theatre Designers will come up with the idea for a play's set (what's on the stage) and also the actors costume (what they wear). They will create a drawing or model of what these will look like first and show these to rest of the creative team working on a show. Then, someone else will actually make the set or costumes, making sure it is exactly how the designer wants it. A Theatre Designer is responsible for creating the 'world' that you see on stage when you watch a play. Watch the first half of this video to see more about a Theatre Designer's job: https://youtu.be/MeARm369J08

What is a Set?

A 'set' is everything in and around the acting space, such as furniture, raised platforms or playing areas, entrances and exits, and the shape of the space itself. It's important that the choice of set suits the style of play. The set designer must have an excellent knowledge of what happens in the play (the *plot)*. Their work involves creating multiple locations, sightlines for the audience and entrances and exits for the actors as well as dealing with any set changes that are needed.

Here are some pictures of some famous sets. What do you think makes them interesting for an audience?

What's a Costume?

A costume is what the actors wear onstage. A costume is what communicates a character to an audience, a place or the period of history in which the play is set. The designer's choice of costume will vary according to the needs of the play. For example, if the play was set in ancient Rome, the actors might wear Togas and Tunics. Sometimes, an actor might just wear one item of clothing or carry a *prop (*an object like a walking stick or a briefcase) to show that they are a certain character. For example, an actor might put on a yellow helmet if they were a builder.

Have a look at these costumes. What kind of characters do you think they are?

Where do Designers start?

All Theatre Designers will start with an idea. They might talk to the Director and Playwright about the script and go over what the show needs. It's important that a theatre designer isn't only creative, but can also be a good problem solver and can think outside of the box to make sure their ideas will work for the play, the stage it will be on and the number of actors in the cast.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Give these exercises a try to help you think outside of the box and come up with new ideas:

1) Pick a random object in your house. Can you find another use for it? For example, a helmet might become a boat for a teddy bear, or a carrot might become a flute. Show your ideas back to someone by saying, 'This isn't a _____, it's a _____! See how many objects you can make into new things.

2) Take a piece of paper and a pen and draw a random squiggle. Give yourself 2 minutes on a timer and see if you can make your squiggle into a picture!
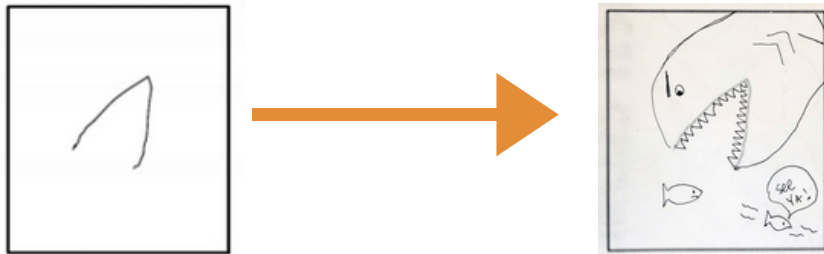
3) On a piece of paper, draw 30 equal sized circles (you can use a bottle lid or similar as a stencil). Give yourself 3 minutes on the timer to draw inside the circles in as many different ways as you can think of, as quickly as you can. You can do this however you want - all your circles might have a theme, like road signs or emojis, or they might all be completely random. Did you manage to fill in all 30 circles in your 3 minutes?

Mood Boards

Once a Designer has an idea, they might start to put them all together in a Mood Board. A Mood Board is a collection of images, fabric samples, colours and words that give a sense of the overall idea. Designers are often inspired by artwork, films or books so it's a chance for them to collate all their inspirations into one place.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Take a story that you know well, like a fairy tale, and create a mood board for it. You can use magazines, newspapers and printed pictures and stick them together on a piece of paper or create one on the computer using images from the internet.

Costume sketches

A Costume designer might begin by making sketches of the costumes so that the Director can see what the actors will look like on stage. There are some important things a Designer should remember when making sketches which are:

- The **style of the Production**. If a director has chosen to make a *naturalistic* performance, then the designer will aim to dress the character in an authentic costume that is as close as possible to what the characters would have actually worn in that setting. For example:

Naturalistic costume

Non -naturalistic costume

- What **time period** the play is set in. If the script is set in 1920, then the costume designer will have to research 1920's clothes to make sure the actors look like they are in the right setting. Sometimes a Director can chose to *modernise* a play, which is where an old play (like a Shakespeare play) is re-imagined in a modern day setting.

1920's costume design sketches

A modern version of Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*

- **What happens in the play**. If a designer knows something happens in the play, this might influence how a costume is designed. For example, if a character flies on stage, the designer will need to add space for a harness in the costume. It could be as simple as knowing the character takes things out of their pockets in the play, so making sure the costume has pockets!
- What kind of **materials** the costume will be made out of. It's important to remember that someone will have to wear this costume on stage! It can get very hot on stage under lots of lights so often, thick materials like fur or wool can be very uncomfortable for an actor. Designers should also have a good knowledge of how different materials move or stretch so that they know which materials will be best to bring their costume design to life.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Take the characters from *Little Red Riding Hood* and create your own Costume sketches for them. You can use the outlines below or draw them from scratch. Try and create a costume for the following characters:
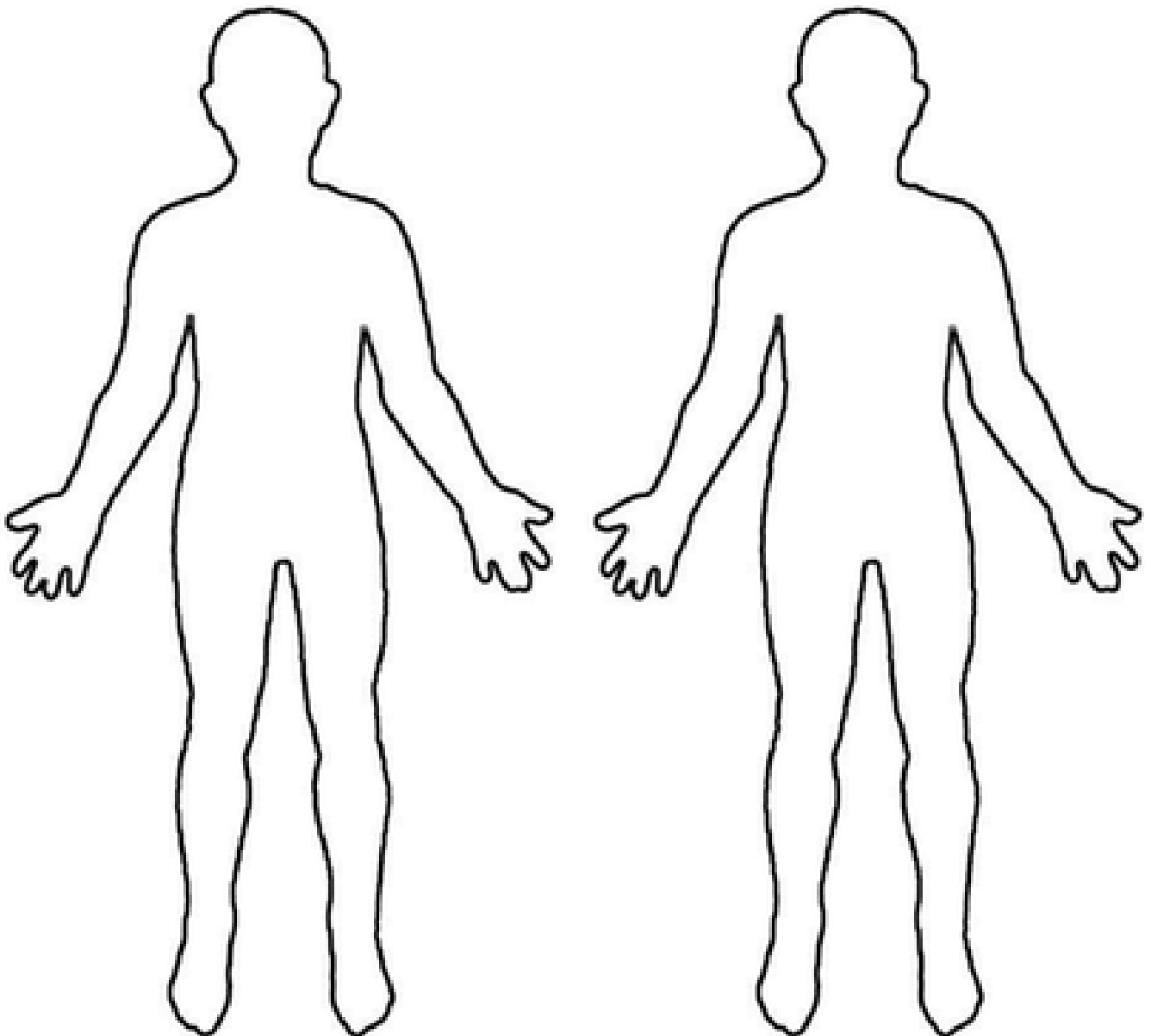**RED RIDING HOOD**
GRANDMA
THE WOLF

Remember to think about the following things before sketching your costume design:
- Where is the play set?
- When is this happening? (Which time period)
- What happens in the story that you should be aware of?
- What materials will the costume be made from?

Model Boxes

Once a Designer has an idea for the Set, they will start to bring this to life using a Model Box. A Model Box is a scale model of the set, which is normally 25 or 50 times smaller than what the real set will be. This gives them an idea of what the real set would look like and lets them make any necessary adjustments.

Watch this video, where Set Designer Wendy Todd talks about using a model box when designing a set for *Emil and the Detectives:* https://youtu.be/HC7IDv5PQeg

The first Model Box a designer makes is called a *White Card Model.*
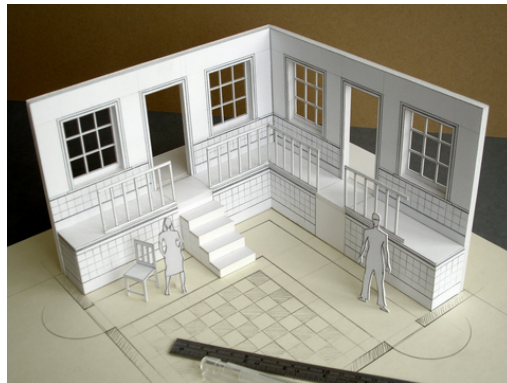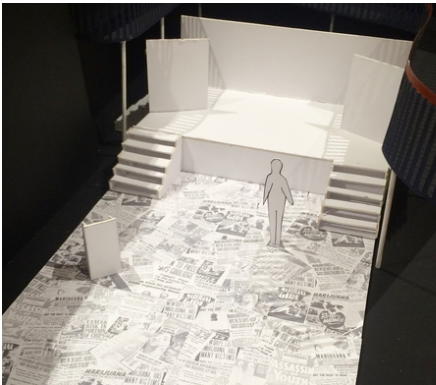
A White Card model's purpose is for the designer to start to see the set in 3D, to make sure all the pieces fit together on stage and to see how the actors might move around it. Normally, there isn't any colour or texture choices yet as the main focus is about the shapes of the objects on the stage.

Once everyone is happy with the White Card Model, the designer will then make a full model box with all the details which looks like this:

TRY IT YOURSELF

Create your own model box by using an old cardboard box, shoe box or even a big Tupperware box! Just tilt your box so that the opening is facing you, and now you have a stage! Next, gather lots of different objects and junk from around your house like bottle tops, newspaper, smaller boxes, Lego or building blocks. Use your objects creatively and put them in your model box to make a set. Try and make lots of different versions of your set using your objects in different ways.

You can also follow this video to make a model box: https://youtu.be/fb1_mJuC2tU

Challenge: Make a set design for *Little Red Riding Hood.*