



## **A Level Drama and Theatre Studies Summer Task 2025**

We are looking forward to seeing you in September and getting to know you all as a group. Over the summer holidays, we would like you to complete a few tasks. This will be excellent preparation for the course but will also give us a strong understanding of your current ability in Drama and Theatre Studies. Remember A level is a big step up from GCSE, so ensure you give yourself plenty of time to complete these tasks to enable you to put in as much effort as possible.

### **TASK 1**

Over the course of Year 12, you will be taking influence from Frantic Assembly's performance style in your own devised piece. It is important that you research this company and make yourself familiar with their work and methodologies.

Over the summer, we would like you to create an information booklet / presentation around Frantic Assembly, which demonstrates your own understanding of who the company are and what they do. You should consider the following points:

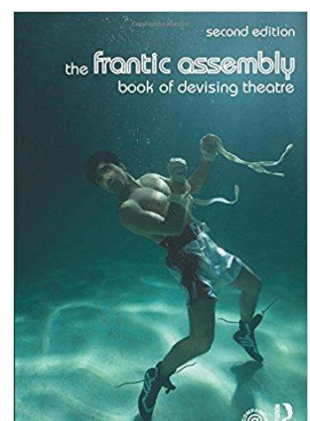
- What is the historical background of Frantic Assembly? (When did they start up? Why?)
- The rehearsal process
- Frantic Assembly performances/plays and their content (find images too)
- How do Frantic Assembly incorporate music into their pieces?
- The movement – consider 'motifs' and 'pedestrian movements'
- Frantic Assembly exercises: Chair duets, Round-By-Through and Picking Oose etc

You should write this in your own words and you can present this how you want. What we want is detail and EFFORT! It is suggested that a page per bullet point would be a good starting point here. You can do this in any format. Suggestions: A booklet (minimum 5 pages), Powerpoint slides (minimum 10 Sildes).

We recommend you purchase this book to read, which will be an extremely beneficial resource to your research, development and understanding throughout the devising unit:

### **The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre**

Paperback – 15 Jul 2014 by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett



[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Frantic-Assembly-Book-Devising-Theatre/dp/1138777013/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1528218194&sr=8-1&keywords=frantic+assembly](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Frantic-Assembly-Book-Devising-Theatre/dp/1138777013/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1528218194&sr=8-1&keywords=frantic+assembly)

You can purchase copy of you wish, but is not essential.

There are also some fantastic video resources on YouTube – just type Frantic Assembly into the search bar – the Masterclass videos are particularly useful!

## TASK 2

During the A Level course, we will be organising a number of trips to the theatre. This will not only be beneficial to the written paper you will sit in Year 13 but will also help to provoke and develop your own ideas for practical performance.

Over the summer, we would like you to go and watch some live theatre. If you cannot get to the theatre then source to online. A LOT of theatre has been made accessible online to view so if you cannot go to a LIVE performance, look into some online alternatives.

**If you decide for online** - CHOOSE something to watch (all the way through!) and be ready to write about it. Please **do NOT** pick something you have already seen. We are looking for you to start looking at a piece of theatre with fresh eyes as an A level student.

We temporarily have received login details for the National Theatre Collections for Davenant students Follow the link below with the login details:

<https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com>

Username: Davenant

Password: M@cbeth1

(Please note: this is just for Davenant Students, please do not share elsewhere)

3 good suggestions you can type straight into the search bar:

-Frankenstein –Benedict Cumberbatch

- Jane Eyre

- Twelfth Night

Make the effort to catch more than one if you can! There is plenty of choices on there (more than listed).

You must watch and take notes on the performance in preparation to complete an essay on the play seen.

**Next task:** Complete the essay question below on ONE performance seen using the Live Theatre booklet (attached) to support you with your response. If you follow this, it will help you to structure the response.

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Analyse and evaluate the live performance you have seen in light of the following statement:

**“Live performance today relies too heavily on complex design to convey meaning.”**

Your answer should:

- include analysis and evaluation of key moments from the performance you have seen and the contribution made by different theatre makers
- offer balanced consideration between your analysis and evaluation of the performance and your response to the statement.

You should aim to have an introductory paragraph, 4 – 5 paragraphs on key moments in the play linking to the statement and a conclusion. Ensure you use the revision guide to support you in writing this

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The essay: You should aim to have an introductory paragraph, 4 – 5 paragraphs on key moments in the play linking to the statement and a conclusion. Ensure you use the revision guide to support you in writing this. Any queries on this, please contact Head of Drama, Mrs Brooks on [sarah.brooks@davenant.org](mailto:sarah.brooks@davenant.org)

**Mrs Brooks and the Drama Department**

## **EDEXCEL Written Paper LIVE THEATRE REVIEW REVISION GUIDE**

Do you know how a theatre production works?

Do you understand the functions of playwright, design team,  
Director and performers?

**You will be assessed on evidence that you have:**

**Working knowledge of production values and can make critical and evaluative judgements**

You must show appreciation of the different elements which  
together create a production

You need to evaluate a range of production elements

Your opinions must be justified and informed

You must show sensitive reactions to the performance on a personal level,  
as an audience member

Your judgements must be balanced and considered, avoiding extremes

You must weigh up the positive and negative aspects of the production

**REMEMBER:** You cannot be in the top band unless **you refer to cast and creatives by NAME**, so include these in your notes.

## Structure

You will be permitted to take in 500 words of TYPED notes to help you in your essay.

You will be given a choice of two questions.

One question will include a statement and ask you to discuss how you agree or disagree with the statement. This is ONLY with regard to the play you have seen – this is NOT about theatre in general, though the statement will be broad.

One question will be more specific and refer to one or more elements of the acting or design.

**REMEMBER:** To gain top band marks, **you MUST use at least three specific moments from the play**. This means that you should refer to these moments in detail – calling them KEY MOMENTS – and evaluating/analysing them clearly.

## What to include

You need to ensure that within your essay you cover **some of (NOT ALL OF)** the following factors:

CONTEXT	How is this play relevant in 2017? How is the play reminiscent of any practitioners you have studied? What style/genre is the play and how does this suit the meaning of it?
SPATIAL ELEMENTS	Acting space – how is it used? How are actors and audience separated? Is the fourth wall broken? Were levels used? Could the space on stage be altered for different scenes?
VISUAL ELEMENTS Set Costume Props/Furniture Lighting Projections and Multi-media	Is it realistic/non-realistic/symbolic/minimalistic? Is it a single set? Are there entrances/exits? Is there a sense of time period? Are there strong colours used? Does the set convey any meaning? Are costumes realistic? Are they signifying a time period? Does costume symbolise meaning? Do props and furniture blend with the set or stand out? Are furniture/props realistic or symbolic? Are the props and furniture responsible for establishing period or location? Is lighting generally bright or dim and what does this convey? How does the lighting vary during the play? Is it realistic lighting? Does lighting establish location? Are there any special lighting/projection effects and what impact does this have? Is colour lighting used?
AURAL ELEMENTS	Is background sound used in the scenes? Is sound live or recorded? How is volume used to convey meaning? How do sounds convey the environment or meaning?

	Is music used? Why and how? Is any live sound created by the actors (singing) – is this effective?
STAGE MANAGEMENT	Are scene changes well-managed? Are scene changes actively contributing to the meaning? Is pace maintained?
ACTING	Is there an overall acting style? Is acting particularly effective at any one moment? Is multi-role used effectively? How much interpretation is the actor using to develop a role away from what is actually written by the playwright? Do voices suit the characters? Are accents used? Is the projection good enough? How do actors establish who they are using movement and space? How are relationships between roles shown?
DIRECTION	Are you aware of pace or rhythm in the performance? Is mood and atmosphere successfully established? What are the key decisions the director has made to establish meaning in the play? How has the Director interpreted the writer's intentions? How does the design support the Director's decisions?
AUDIENCE	What was the audience's reception of the performance? What was the actor/audience relationship? Were we directly addressed? Were we immersed?

**REMEMBER:** To gain top band marks, **you MUST use drama terminology.** Attempt to include at least ten drama terms within each paragraph.

## Drama terminology

VOICE: Pitch, pace, pause, tone, emphasis, diction, pronunciation, clarity

MOVEMENT: Posture, gesture, facial expression, eye contact, gait, stance, energy, tension

DIRECTION: Blocking, proxemics, levels, tension, climax, mood, atmosphere

PLUS DESIGN TERMINOLOGY SPECIFIC TO LIGHTING/SOUND/COSTUME

E.g.:

*One moment which failed to achieve an adequate level of impact on me was the scene between Aseef and Amir, when the two had grown up. The **mise-en-scene** created by designer Barney George became distracting and prevented me from feeling attachment to either character or from building anticipation or excitement as the scene progressed. Aseef's costume, whilst suitable for his role, appeared exaggerated and **representative**. In particular his bright blue sunglasses and fake beard drew a **comical** response and prevented any sense of **naturalism** from being established. The fake blood on his tunic appeared to be crudely painted and lacked believability which meant that I was not fearful when he entered the stage. Although Nicolas Karimi acted the role superbly, using powerfully masochistic **facial expression** and a broad **posture** with wild **gestures** to establish his physical power over Amir, no amount of excellent acting could make-up for the **poor semiotics** of his costuming. In*

addition, the projections, designed by William Simpson, showed bright green floral patterns, which appeared incongruous to the scene and added a warmth which detracted from the tense atmosphere between Aseef and Amir. It was clear that Director Giles Croft intended to create an antagonistic relationship between the two men, built up throughout the trajectory of the play. However, in this scene, it was impossible for tension to build to a climactic point because the physical violence between the pair was woefully lacking in pace, excitement and impact. The choreographed sequences were poorly-timed, almost as if in slow-motion, and they seemed under-rehearsed. With a slicker fight sequence, it may have been possible to overlook the comical visuals of the scene, but when coupled with the poor direction at this moment it can clearly be said that in this key scene, theatre of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century lacked impact and excitement.

## How you are marked:

### To achieve top band marks, your essays must show:

- Arguments that agree, disagree or offer a balanced reaction to the statement
- Analysis and understanding of the role of the director and how various production values have been used to communicate ideas and meaning to an audience
- Analysis and evaluation of how dramatic elements have been used to create theatrical impact such as set, lighting, costume, sound, staging and acting
- The evaluation of key theatre makers, their collaboration and the contribution they have made to specific aspects of the production
- Consideration of performance style, influence and theatrical interpretation
- Analysis of and reference to key moments
- Analysis of audience and audience reaction
- References to other art forms and the role of theatre in society
- Analysis and evaluation of the overall intentions for the production as a whole

**REMEMBER:** To hit the top band, you must show that you understand how theatre is created. No one design element works in isolation. The idea of creating a 'mise-en-scene' is vital in your responses.

### Your basic structure for the essay should be:

**Introduction** and Overview – Very brief details about the production you saw and an initial response to the statement/question – answer the question in the first paragraph and your main impressions of the play (including a comparison with your expectations)

**3 Main Points** – A paragraph for each production element or key moment you wish to evaluate (details, analysis, evaluation). You should have three or four of these.

**Conclusion** – A sentence or two concluding the essay

Within each of your main paragraphs you need to ensure you say:

**HOW:** Identify what was used to convey meaning (production element) and give specific examples

**WHY:** Explain why you think this decision was made

**WHAT:** What effect did this have on you as an audience member?

**EVALUATE:** Offer a justified opinion carefully linked to the question

E.g.

*One moment which was extremely exciting was the scene in which Amir won the Kite-flying competition. In this scene the steady build-up of the aural elements, including loud whirring of whirligigs*

and rhythmical table drumming, produced as live sound by the ensemble, was coupled with the stage positioning to create a clear sense of tension and anticipation. The lighting designer, Charles Balfour had clearly worked alongside Sound Designer Drew Baumol to create a mise-en-scene of excitement and visual interest. Side light was used to highlight Amir's father as he stood on a raised level, watching Amir take part in the competition. His higher level, along with the highlighting of his facial expressions by the focused side-lighting, gave him a clear status as he watched the race, emphasising how important his father's opinion was to Amir. As the race continued, the repetitive movements of the ensemble gathered pace and their eye contact focused clearly onto Amir, guiding the audience to watch as the scene reached its impactful climax, showing the final moments of the race. There was effective direction at this moment by Giles Croft, who had clearly established a brief moment of dramatic pause, heightening the excitement for me, as I was unsure if Amir's final attempt to cut down the other kite had been successful. The juxtaposition of this impactful dramatic pause with the loud cheer from the ensemble and sudden use of an intense warm wash filling the stage, created a superbly effective sense of the importance of the race to the trajectory of the play and filled me with anticipation, excitement and suspense, reflecting that Theatre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where several design elements can fruitfully work together, is full of impact.

**REMEMBER:** Many of the production elements work TOGETHER to convey meaning. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ISOLATE THEM. The exam requires you to consider how theatre makers work together to convey meaning.

You CANNOT cover everything, so choose carefully, but always ensure you have:

- GIVEN A PERSONAL AND JUSTIFIED OPINION AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER
- EXPLAINED SOMETHING ABOUT THE CONTEXT OF THE PLAY IN 2017
- DISCUSSED WHAT YOU FELT THE MEANING OF THE PLAY WAS AND HOW THIS WAS BEST CONVEYED
- ANALYSED KEY MOMENTS AND GIVEN SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
- COVERED AT LEAST ONE ACTING ELEMENT (voice, movement, relationships etc.)
- COVERED AT LEAST ONE DIRECTORIAL DECISION (choreography, proxemics, levels, blocking, timing, pace)
- COVERED AT LEAST TWO VISUAL/AURAL/SPATIAL ELEMENTS
- REFERRED TO KEY ACTORS/CREATIVES BY NAME
- REVIEWED/RATED/EVALUATED THE PLAY – This is your own judgement

**REMEMBER:** To hit the top band you must mix **ANALYSIS** and **EVALUATION**. This means:

**ANALYSIS:** Picking out key concepts or ideas from the production and being able to identify how they were created by theatre makers

**EVALUATION:** Forming a clear judgement about whether a concept or idea has worked successfully to convey meaning, backed up with evidence

## Evaluative/Critical Vocabulary

POSITIVE VOCABULARY	NEGATIVE VOCABULARY
Accomplished	Basic
Enhanced the performance	Inconsistent
Exemplary use of	Variable
Sophisticated	Detracted from
Highly effective	Lacked development
Impressive	Poor



Creative	Cursory
Thought-provoking	Vague
Powerful	Patchy
Inspired	Little evidence of
Innovative	Incongruous with
Well-focused use of	Dull
Strategically applied use of	Lacking creativity
Successfully conveyed	Ineffective in portraying
Aided the impact	Little impact

*Make clear, critical and judgemental statements:*

- The use of lighting at this point lacked imagination and appeared basic...
- The use of floor lighting was effective and aided the creation of impact at a key moment when...
- The costume successfully conveyed the status of the characters...
- The sound effects were strategically applied to portray...

## Wider context/Meaning

In order to achieve top band marks, you must show appreciation of the meaning and social/political context of the play. In particular, how is it relevant to 2017? Include this information in your essays, either in your opening overview or in your conclusion. Alternatively you might 'pepper' this throughout your essay. E.g.:

*The scene may well have lacked impact due to the serious nature of the Taliban's current status in world politics. As an audience member, I am used to seeing actual footage of Taliban leaders on the news, such as graphic images of Taliban beheadings etc. This meant that the comical nature of the scene did not fit with my contemporary perception, thus impacting on my acceptance of the key moment.*

*Although the exact situation which Baba and Amir were in was slightly different, the scene where they were trapped in a small truck, attempting to leave Afghanistan had enormous emotional impact as it resonated with the current news about refugees from the Middle East.*

*With the current travel ban in place in the US, where those from Afghanistan are not permitted to enter the country, the scene where Amir and his father arrived in America held great importance contextually. It showed how they viewed the opportunity to come to America as a chance for freedom from the Taliban's oppression, which was captured perfectly by designer Barney George.*

## Exam Tips/Preparation tasks

- **ALL OPINIONS MUST BE JUSTIFIED – simply describing what you saw 0 marks.**
- **Try to prepare your notes so that you think of at least one key moment where each design element worked well OR worked poorly**
- **Try to prepare your notes to include key moments where the socio-political meaning was clear or where it had relevance in 2017**
- **Try to include in your notes key moments where several different theatre makers worked together to create atmosphere/mood/impact**
- **In your notes, for each key moment, think about a very brief way to describe the plot, as there are no marks for this**



### AFTER READING THE QUESTIONS:

- 1) Underline or highlight the key words within each of the two questions. Take a minute to brainstorm the relevant details of each of the key words (e.g. if the question refers to 'relevance', briefly write down all moments you could refer to that held some relevance for you.) If the question offers a choice (for example; one theatrical element) then you will need to make your selection at this point
- 2) Write a brief essay plan for the three or four key moments you will include – within these, try to allow yourself opportunity to cover a range of production elements and acting skills

### WRITING YOUR RESPONSE:

- 1) IMMEDIATELY RESPOND TO THE QUESTION – in your introduction, offer the answer to the question as soon as you start. E.g.:

Having seen the production of The Kite Runner at the Wyndham's Theatre, I would argue that...

It is clear from the production of The Kite Runner that...

- 2) Always create a sense of personal reflection – use 'I' and 'me' throughout your response
- 3) Back up all opinions with clear examples
- 4) Refer to all theatre makers/actors by their name
- 5) Ensure you include the socio-political relevance of the production at least once in your essay
- 6) Write a balanced response to the statement – either offer 2 positive/2 negative or 3/1 or 2/1
- 7) You must include at least three key moments and refer to them as 'key moments'
- 8) Don't be afraid to be critical – you can make this sound like a newspaper review, as long as you give a clear justification

### Sample Questions:

Analyse and evaluate the live performance you have seen in light of the following statement:

'\*statement\*.'

Your answer should:

- include analysis and evaluation of key moments from the performance you have seen and the contribution made by different theatre makers
- offer balanced consideration between your analysis and evaluation of the performance and your response to the statement.

"Live performance today relies too heavily on complex design to convey meaning."

"Theatre of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century lacks relevance for the youth of today."

"Theatre today focuses on unimportant themes and has no political relevance."

"The theatre of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more concerned with images than words."

"Theatre in 2017 is expensive and lavish and prioritises expense over meaning."

“Theatre of the 21st century should be looking forward, not looking back.”

“Actors take second place to directors in today’s theatre.”

“Young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century struggle to understand the relevance of theatre.”

“In 21st Century theatre, designers are more important than actors.”

“The age of the actor has now gone; we are now in age of stage effects.”

“Theatre of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is more concerned with spectacle than content.”

“Theatre in the 21st Century is full of tricks and gimmicks.”

“Theatre is a product of its time but its themes and issues are timeless.”