ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD AT THE OLD VIC

TEACHING RESOURCES

FEB 2017–APR 2017
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All information is correct at the time of going to press, but may be subject to change

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Design Alexander Parsonage & Matt Lane-Dixon  
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Old Vic New Voices  
Hannah Fosker  
Education & Community Manager  
Liz Bate  
Education Manager  
Richard Knowles  
Stage Business Co-ordinator  
Poppy Walker  
Old Vic New Voices Intern

Further details of this production oldvictheatre.com
HERMEILIO MIGUEL AQUINO

Courtier, u/s Polonius/Claudius
Theatre: Well (West End); One Night in Miami (Donmar); Early Doors (Lowry/UK tour); A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Hive Theatre, Off Broadway); The Tempest (First Folio Shakespeare Theatre Festival Chicago); Snow Angels (Lincoln Center/Here Theatre). Short film: Four Nine. TV: Doctor Who, Blue Bloods, Boardwalk Empire.

LOUISA BEADEL

Player, u/s Player swing
Theatre: Future Conditional (The Old Vic); Dick Whittington (Key Theatre); The Wind in the Willows (Mercury Theatre); La Lune (LAS Theatre/Wild Rumpus); Three Sisters (Etc Theatre); Robin Hood & the Babes in the Wood, Dick Whittington (City Varieties Music Hall); The Sunset Five (Pleasance London); Wolf’s Child (Felbrigg Hall Norfolk); The Blonde Bombshells of 1943 (Upstairs at the Gatehouse); Tony Boyz, Prince of Denmark, Romeo and Juliet (National Youth Theatre Rep at the Ambassadors); Contractions (Bikeshed Theatre); Othello (Edinburgh Fringe).

WILLIAM CHUBB

Polonius
Theatre: King Lear (The Old Vic); Waste, Great Britain, Othello, Scenes From an Execution, The History Boys (National Theatre); The Sea, Whose Life Is It Anyway?, You Never Can Tell (West End); In the Depths of Dead Love (Print Room); Lawrence After Arabia (Hampstead); Richard II (Shakespeare’s Globe); Yes, Prime Minister (Chichester/West End). TV: Close to the Enemy, Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell, Silk. Film: 6 Days, Adrift in Soho, Veer, Milk.

JOSIE DUNN

Player, u/s The Player/Gertrude
Theatre: Backbeat (West End/Toronto/Los Angeles); Desert Rats (West End); Snow White and other Tales from the Brothers Grimm, Summer of Shakespeare (Creation Theatre); After Orlando (Theatre Royal Stratford East/The Vaults); Here Be Monsters (UK tour); Alice in Wonderland (Watermill Newbury); Dark Tourism (Park Theatre); James and the Giant Peach (Colchester Mercury); The Story Giant (Shandy Theatre Company); Occupied (Theatre 503); Faust (Greenwich). TV: Doctors, Playhouse Presents: Hey Diddly Dee.

MATTHEW DURKAN

Alfred, u/s Rosencrantz
Theatre: Neil Gwynn (West End); The History Boys (UK tour); The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Sherman Theatre). Short film: Dog. TV: #HoodDocumentary.

TIM VAN EYKEN

Player, u/s Guildenstern
Theatre: Shakespeare in Love (West End); The Little Match Girl (Sadler’s Wells); Easter Rising, Thereafter (Jermy Street); Birdsong (UK tour); War Horse (National Theatre/West End); NT: 50 Years on Stage (National Theatre); The Ballad of Little Musgrave (Aldbourne Music); Ballroom of Joys and Sorrows (Watford Palace); Good (Royal Exchange Manchester); The Long Goodbye (Hampstead). Film: The Imitation Game. TV: Foyle’s War. Radio: From Dots to Download, Vital Mental Medicine, The Loving Ballad of Captain Bateman, The Night Visiting. Awards include BBC Folk Award 2007 for Best Traditional Track and BBC Audio Drama Award 2014 for Best Radio Drama Script by a new writer.

DAVID HAIG

The Player
Theatre: Blue/orange (Young Vic); Guys and Dolls (West End); Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me, Pressure (Chichester); The Madness of George III, Yes Prime Minister, Mary Poppins, Journey’s End, Donkey’s Years, Hitchcock Blonde (all West End); Our Country’s Good - Olivier Award, Best Actor (Royal Court); Art (West End and Broadway). TV: Witness for the Prosecution, Penny Dreadful, The Thick of It, Mo, My Boy Jack, Talking Heads, The Thin Blue Line. Film: Florence Foster Jenkins, Four Weddings and a Funeral. Writing: My Boy Jack, The Good Samaritan, (Hampstead Theatre); Pressure (Chichester and Edinburgh); My Boy Jack - FIPA Award, Best Screenplay (ITV / Ecosse Films).

WIL JOHNSON

Claudius
Theatre: Fuente Ovejuna (National Theatre); Redundant (Royal Court); A Mad World My Masters (Shakespeare’s Globe); A Wolf in Snakeskin Shoes (Tricycle); Torn (Arcola); King Lear (Royal Exchange Manchester); Serious Money (Birmingham Rep); Pow! (Paines Plough); The Queen and I (Out of Joint); The Swallowing Dark (Liverpool Playhouse). Film: Macbeth, Adulthood, Dead End, In a Better World, Babymother, Anuvahood, Pimp. TV: Outlander, The Five, Lewis, Hollyoaks, Hetty Feather, Moving On, Emmerdale, Waking the Dead, Clocking Off, Babyfather, Cracker, Holly City, Waterloo Road, Buried Treasure, A Midsummer Night’s Dream.
JOSHUA McGUIRE

Guildenstern
Theatre: Future Conditional (The Old Vic); The Ruling Class (West End); Posh (Royal Court/West End); Amadeus (Chichester); Privacy (Donmar); The Magistrate (National Theatre); Hamlet (Globe/international tour); Hay Fever (Rose Kingston). Film: The Happy Prince, Mine, Old Boys, Get Santa, Cinderella, Mr Turner, About Time. TV: Lovesick: Series 1 & 2, Love Nina, Siblings: Series 1 & 2, You, Me & Them: Series 1 & 2, A Young Doctor’s Notebook: Series 1, The Hour: Series 1 & 2, Mr Stu.

LUKE MULLINS

Hamlet
Theatre: Waiting for Godot (Sydney Theatre Company/ Barbican); The Glass Menagerie (Belvoir St/Malthouse Theatres Sydney); Angels in America, Small and Tired, Death of a Salesman (Belvoir St Theatre); Night on Bald Mountain (Malthouse Theatre); Endgame, The History Boys, Cloud 9 (Melbourne Theatre Company); Little Mercy, Long Days Journey into Night, Citizens, Gallipoli, Soldiers, The Season at Sarsaparilla (Sydney Theatre Company); The War of the Roses (Sydney Festival/Perth International Arts Festival); The Eisteddfod (New York Fringe Festival). Film: Holding the Man, The Wilding, Neon Skins. TV: New Blood, Reef Doctors, Satisfaction, Blue Heelers, Medical Defence Australia.

THEO OGUNDIPE

Horatio/Soldier
Theatre: Julius Caesar (RSC/West End/Broadway); Cymbeline, King Lear, Hamlet, Marat/Sade, A Midsummer Night’s Dream (RSC); Brave New World (Royal & Derngate); The Tempest (Singapore Repertory Theatre); Ragnarok (Eastern Angles); Drive, Ride, Walk (Filament Theatre); Snow Queen (Stephen Joseph Theatre Scarborough); Labour Exchange (South Street Theatre); Twelfth Night, Henry V (Orange Tree Richmond). Film: Julius Caesar, Stud Life. TV: Doctors, Eastenders.

MARIANNE OLDHAM

Gertrude
Theatre: The Argument (Hampstead); The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Chichester/UK tour); Sons Without Fathers/Platonov, Uncle Vanya (Arcola); The Girl in the Yellow Dress (Market Theatre Johannesburg/international tour); An Inspector Calls (West End); Troilus and Cressida (Cheek by Jowl); You Can Still Make a Killing (Southwark Playhouse); The Real Thing, The Changeling (ETT); Persuasion, Design for Living (Salisbury Playhouse); The Years Between (Royal & Derngate); Mad Forest, JMK (BAC); Present Laughter (Theatre Royal Bath/tour). TV: The Living and the Dead, Life in Squares, The Musketeers: Series 2, The Crimson Field, WPC 56, Foyle’s War. Film: Finding Your Feet, Absolutely Anything.

EVLYNE OYEDOKUN

Player, u/s Ophelia
Theatre: Sapriya, E15 (Lung Theatre); Mya, Bricks and Pieces (Latitude Festival); Ash (Park Theatre). Evlyne graduated from RADA in 2016.

DANIEL RADCLIFFE

Rosencrantz
Theatre: Privacy (Broadway); The Cripple of Inishmaan, Equus (West End/Broadway); How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (Broadway). Film: Now You See Me 2, Swiss Army Man, Imperium, Horns, What If, Kill Your Darlings, The Woman in Black and the eight Harry Potter films. TV: The Gamechangers, A Young Doctor’s Notebook: Series 1 & 2, Extras and voice work in The Simpsons, Robot Chicken and BoJack Horseman.

ALEX SAWYER

Player, u/s Hamlet/Horatio/Alfred

HELENA WILSON

Ophelia
Helena graduated from Oxford University in 2016. This is her professional theatre debut. Theatre while at Oxford: The Alchemist (Arcola/Edinburgh Fringe); West Side Story (Oxford Playhouse); Romeo and Juliet (Southwark Playhouse/Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre).
CREATIVE TEAM

TOM STOPPARD
Writer
Plays: The Hard Problem, The Real Inspector Hound, After Magritte, Jumpers, Travesties, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour (with André Previn), Dirty Linen, New-Found-Land Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth, Night and Day, The Real Thing, Happgood, Arcadia, Indian Ink, The Invention of Love, The Coast of Utopia, Rock ‘n’ Roll. Adaptations: On the Razzle (Nestroy), Rough Crossing (Molnar). Tom’s most recent work for TV was Parades End; for radio Darkside (with Pink Floyd); and for film Anna Karenina. His film Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead won the Venice Film Festival Prix d’Or, and Shakespeare in Love won an Academy Award.

DAVID LEVEAUX
Director
Theatre: Plenty (Public Theater, New York); Closer (Donmar); The Real Thing*, Nine*, Electra (Donmar/Broadway); Arcadia (West End/Broadway); Jumpers (National Theatre/Broadway); No Man’s Land, Moonlight, The Distance From Here (Almeida); Betrayal (Almeida/Broadway); Romeo and Juliet, Cyrano de Bergerac, Fiddler on the Roof, The Glass Menagerie, Anna Christie* (Broadway); Romeo and Juliet, ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore (RSC); A Moon for the Misbegotten (Riverside/ West End/Broadway); Sinatra Live at the London Palladium; The Three Sisters (Abbey, Dublin). Opera: The Turn of the Screw (Scottish Opera); The Marriage of Figaro, Salome (ENO). Film: The Exception. *Tony Award for Best Revival.

ANNA FLEISCHLE
Set & Co-Costume Designer
Theatre: Don Juan in Soho, The End of Longing (West End); Hangmen (Royal Court/West End); The Exorcist (Birmingham Rep); Henry V (Regent’s Park); Beware of Pity (Schaubühne Berlin/Complicite); RENT The Musical (West End/UK tour); Two Noble Kinsmen, Cymbeline (RSC); Liberian Girl (Royal Court); Before I Leave (National Theatre Wales), Before the Party (Almeida); Blindsided, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Royal Exchange Manchester); Love the Sinner (National Theatre). Opera: Don Giovanni (English Touring Opera); Candide (Opera National de Lorraine); King Priam (English Touring Opera/Royal Opera House/UK tour). Anna has won Olivier, Critics’ Circle and Evening Standard awards for set design.

HOWARD HARRISON
Lighting Designer
Theatre: The Playboy of the Western World, Inherit the Wind, Complicite (The Old Vic); The Truth, Neville’s Island, The Pajama Game, Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, Guys and Dolls (West End); Saint Joan, Anna Christie, City of Angels — Olivier Award, Privates on Parade, Tales from Hollywood (Donmar); Mamma Mia!, Macbeth — Olivier Award (West End/Broadway); Mary Poppins, Rock’n’Roll, Putting it Together, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Opera/dance: Hamlet (Shanghai Ballet); Nabucco (Metropolitan Opera); Nutcracker!, Edward Scissorhands (Matthew Bourne).

FERGUS O’HARE
Sound Designer
Theatre: The Winslow Boy (The Old Vic/Broadway); Noises Off, Hamlet, The Tempest, The Entertainer, Inherit the Wind, Richard II, Aladdin, The Philadelphia Story, Cloaca (The Old Vic); Noises Off (West End/Broadway); This Is Our Youth, Passion Play, Birdsong, On an Average Day, Lobby Hero, Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me, Up for Grabs, Twelfth Night, My One and Only, Death and the Maiden, A Chorus of Disapproval, The Dance of Death, See How They Run (West End); Macbeth, A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, King Lear (West End/Broadway); The Shape of Things, Electra, The Seagull (Broadway).

LOREN ELSTEIN
Co-Costume & Associate Set Designer
Theatre: The End of Longing (West End); Rent (UK tour); Priemetime (Royal Court); Pia de Tolomei (English Touring Opera); Stoneface (Finborough); Wanderer Strange (RSC); A Room of Her Own with Mimbret Acrobats (Southbank Centre); The Water Palace (Tète à Tête Festival); Polymer (Udderbelly Festival); Loot – Australian Production Design Guild Award for Best Design (Sydney); A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Theater Trier, Germany); The Ugly One (Park Theatre); Hidden (Oxford Playhouse). Video Art Direction: Magic FM, The Fatboy Slim Collection, McBusted’s Most Excellent Adventure tour. TV: The Man Who Almost Killed Himself.

CORIN BUCKERIDGE
Composer
Theatre, as Composer: Closer (West End); Arcadia (West End/Broadway); The Late Middle Classes (Donmar); Jumpers, Our Lady of Sligo (National Theatre/ Broadway); The Alchemist, King John, ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore, The Merchant of Venice, Richard III, 

The Old Vic Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead teaching resources
A Warwickshire Testimony (RSC); King John, A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, The Conquest of the South Pole, Hay Fever (Rose Kingston); Antony and Cleopatra (Liverpool Playhouse); A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, Design for Living (ETT). As Music Director: Chicago, Hairspray (West End). Opera: On the Road with Ron and Ros (ETT). Film: Purcell Room/UK tour; Angela (Rosemary Branch). Film: Connected, Fraternity.

JESSICA RONANE CDG
Casting Director
Theatre: King Lear, The Caretaker, The Master Builder, Dr. Seuss's The Lorax, The Hairy Ape, Future Conditional (The Old Vic); Running Wild (Regent's Park); Angus Thongs and Even More Snogging (West Yorkshire Playhouse). Theatre (children casting): To Kill a Mockingbird, The Sound of Music (Regent's Park); School of Rock, The Audience, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Made in Dagenham, I Can't Sing, Singin’ in the Rain, Billy Elliot the Musical (West End); Matilda the Musical (RSC/West End); Bugsy Malone (Lyric Hammersmith); Caroline or Change, Baby Girl, Mrs Affleck (National Theatre); A Member of the Wedding (Young Vic).

LIZZI GEE
Movement Director
Theatre: The Girls, Love Story, Onassis, Daddy Cool, Around the World in 80 Days, The Miser (West End); Million Dollar Quartet (West End/UK tour); Goodnight Mr Tom (West End/Chichester); National Theatre 2017 Gala, A Pacifist’s Guide to the War on Cancer, Rocket to the Moon (National Theatre); The Winter’s Tale (RSC); Vernon God Little (Young Vic); The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, Running Wild (Chichester); But First This (Watermill Newbury); Sunshine on Leith (Dundee Rep); Annie Get Your Gun (UK tour). Film: Pride.
TV: The Fit Farm, The Big Performance, Diddy Movies, The Legend of Dick and Dom.

BARBARA HOUSEMAN
Voice Coach
Theatre: Sweet Bird of Youth, The Duchess of Malfi, Playboy of the Western World, Design for Living (The Old Vic); The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Kenneth Branagh Season, Dr Faustus, Richard III, Macbeth (West End); St Joan, Shakespeare Trilogy, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Coriolanus, Trelawny of the Wells (Donmar). For Daniel Radcliffe: The Cripple of Inishmaan, How to Succeed in Business, Equus. For Jude Law: Hamlet, Anna Christie, Henry V. For Clive Owen: Old Times. Barbara has been Associate Director (Voice & Text) at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre since 2012.

JASON LAWSON
Assistant Director
Theatre, as Director: Kissing Sid James (Jermyn Street/Off-Broadway); Not a Game for Boys, Danny’s Wake, Huge (King’s Head); Unimaginable, Some White Chick (Southwark Playhouse); Christmas Concert (Chichester); Red Sky Blue Sky (Bridge House Theatre). As Associate Director: Passion Play (West End); Backbeat (West End/Toronto/LA). As Resident Director: Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (West End). As Assistant Director: Arcadia (Broadway); Through a Glass Darkly (Off-Broadway); In a Dark Dark House (Almeida); Nicholas Nickleby (West End Chichester); The Syndicate (Chichester Minerva).
CHARACTERS

ROSENCRANTZ
A gentleman and a childhood friend of Hamlet’s. Along with Guildenstern he has been summoned by Gertrude and Claudius to find out what might be wrong with Hamlet. Rosencrantz is quite laid back and practical, looking for realistic solutions to the predicament the pair find themselves in. He isn’t curious about the coin flipping episode, where a coin he tosses repeatedly lands heads up, just accepts the outcome and continues, something which deeply unsettles his friend Guildenstern. He's supportive and kind to his friend Guildenstern, and although seemingly not a deep thinker he experiences fear when considering his own mortality; when thinking about being stuck in a coffin and at the end of the play when facing his own death. He is frequently baffled by the world he finds himself in and often thinks and reacts quite slowly.

GUILDENSTERN
Like Rosencrantz he’s a gentleman and a childhood friend of Hamlet’s. Initially Guildenstern seems to be the opposite of Rosencrantz; philosophical, anxious and searching for meaning. Like Rosencrantz he is baffled by the world but he is always seeking to understand what is happening to them and why. He is frustrated by Rosencrantz’s attitude and sometimes gets angry with him. At the same time he often reassures his confused friend, for example when Claudius confuses them and on the boat. Guildenstern’s fury and despair at his imminent death at the end of the play is heightened by his feeling that he hasn’t understood anything that has happened to him. He's the ‘straight man’ in the pairing, to Rosencrantz’s silliness.

THE PLAYER
A mysterious character who leads the Tragedians. He can be very coarse – when he offers to sell the bodies of the Tragedians – and at the same time he seems to know a lot that he doesn’t let on. The Player seems to understand what is happening to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, even if they are unable to get a clear answer from him. He seems to know that they are characters, and actors, in a play and throughout he hints at what may happen to them. He is witty, confident and passionate about theatre, sure that every performance must contain blood – hinting at the parallels between theatre and life, and the fact that we must all die. He grows in significance during the course of the action, becoming more omnipotent as the play progresses.

Joshua McGuire as Guildenstern and Daniel Radcliffe as Rosencrantz
THE TRAGEDIANS OR PLAYERS
A group of poor travelling actors led by The Player, they will do anything in order to make money. They seem other-worldly and at the same time very coarse and earthy.

ALFRED
The only named Tragedian and a young man who The Player sells for sex, offering him to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He does not like being an actor.

HAMLET
The Prince of Denmark. He has returned to Elsinore after the death of his father and his mother’s re-marriage to his Uncle, Claudius, who has assumed his father’s throne.

CLAUDIUS
The new King of Denmark, he has married his brother’s widow Gertrude and is challenged by Hamlet’s behaviour. He is sinister and arranges for Hamlet’s death in a letter to the King of England.

GERTRUDE
Hamlet’s mother, the Queen of Denmark. Very quickly after her husband’s unexpected death she has married his brother. She is worried about her son’s behaviour and uncertain what to do about it.

POLONIUS
The Lord Chamberlain, a courtier and advisor to Claudius and Gertrude. He is a somewhat meddlesome, pompous old man. He is trying to understand what is wrong with Hamlet and will put his own children at risk to find out.

OPHELIA
The daughter of Polonius who has had some sort of love affair with Hamlet in the past. He is now rejecting her and behaves quite violently towards her. She is upset and confused by Hamlet’s behaviour.

HORATIO
A loyal and compassionate friend of Hamlet’s from Wittenberg University where they have been studying together. He appears at the very end of the play and gives the final speech.

LAERTES
Ophelia's brother and Polonius' son appears at the end of the play as a body, after he has fought Hamlet with a poisoned sword.

David Haig as The Player leading his Tragedians
ACT ONE

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are wandering in a place of nothingness ‘without any visible character’ and flipping coins. Each time the coin lands heads up Rosencrantz wins it from Guildenstern. Guildenstern becomes increasingly agitated by the coin flipping and wonders if they have crossed into an alternate universe where the laws of probability no longer apply, or where actions are disconnected from each other. Guildenstern asks Rosencrantz the first thing he remembers. After trying to understand what he means, Rosencrantz forgets the question. Guildenstern remembers that they have been sent for and he uses logic to try and reason why the coins land heads up and to reassure himself. The pair hear music in the distance. Rosencrantz trims his fingernails and muses about how our fingernails and hair continue to grow after death, but how he can never remember cutting his toenails. Guildenstern gets annoyed with Rosencrantz and questions him about what he remembers from that morning. Rosencrantz says he remembers being woken by a stranger, who banged on the shutters, and called them by name. It was a royal summons and is the reason they are travelling. They can’t remember where they are meant to be going. They think they hear music again but dismiss it as their imagination. Guildenstern talks about the power of an audience to make events seem real or to change them, by the end of his speech they can hear a band and the Tragedians enter.

The Player introduces himself and the Tragedians to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, delighted to have an audience. He calls them ‘fellow artists’ and offers to put on a show. The Player lists the performances on offer, including sexually explicit ones that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can join in with, for a fee. Rosencrantz gets confused by the Player’s bargaining and the Tragedians are about to set off. They are heading to the Court where Guildenstern says he has some influence. Guildenstern gets angry at the Player who seems to be insulting him, then offers him Alfred. Guildenstern is disgusted and suggests they are prostitutes. The Player seems to take it in his stride and encourages the Tragedians to set off again. Rosencrantz asks what they perform and what they will do for one coin, tossing one on the ground, which the Player spits on. The other Tragedians are trying to get the coin but the Player urges them to leave. Guildenstern then proposes a bet and they flip coins. The coin continues to fall heads up and the pair are winning, when Guildenstern proposes a bet. The Tragedians lose and have no way of paying. The Player offers Guildenstern Alfred, who is frightened. Guildenstern asks for a play as payment for the bet. The
In the darkness we hear shouting. The lines from Hamlet indicate that Claudius the King is angry at the Tragedian's comments that death is something that cannot be acted. There is a blackout. to see what they expect, and only want stage deaths, not real ones. The spies die in the rehearsal and Guildenstern else. Guildenstern questions the Player about representing death on stage. The Player says that people only want Guildenstern and himself but can't quite place them, eventually deciding that he has mistaken them for someone begins again, until Rosencrantz stops it because he recognizes two spy characters who are dressed identically to good story with a beginning, middle and end while Guildenstern says he'd prefer if art mirrored life. The rehearsal art follows a logical course and that characters who are written to die, must die. Rosencrantz says he wants a Hamlet will be dispatched to England before exiting with Polonius and Ophelia. The Player announces that all reject her. Claudius and Polonius enter, disrupting the Tragedians rehearsal further. Claudius announces that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are inside, watching as Ophelia and Hamlet run past. Claudius and Gertrude approach and get the two mixed up. Using text directly from Shakespeare's Hamlet they explain that they want Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find out what is wrong with Hamlet. Polonius enters and says he has an idea about what is causing Hamlet's madness and then leaves with Gertrude and Claudius. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trying to figure out what just happened and Guildenstern offers comfort, saying they'll soon be home and that there is logic in the universe. They try to understand what might have made Hamlet mad and then play 'questions', a game with tennis like scoring. Hamlet appears silently and then leaves again and they both comment that he has changed a lot. They decide that Rosencrantz will pretend to be Guildenstern, who will pretend to be Hamlet. Rosencrantz (as Guildenstern) will ask questions to practise how they will approach Hamlet to try and understand what is going on. They end up confused, as Hamlet seems to have lots of reasons to be upset. Hamlet re-enters with Polonius, confusing the old man with riddles, then greeting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, getting them muddled up just before the lights go black.

ACT TWO
In the same location, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are talking to Hamlet when Polonius announces the arrival of the Tragedians. Guildenstern feels like they have made some progress but Rosencrantz is angry because he thinks Hamlet beat them at their own question and answer game, 27–3. They discuss how little information they managed to get and ponder the direction of the wind and how to work it out. Rosencrantz offers to lick Guildenstern's finger and waggle it around which enrages Guildenstern. Rosencrantz begins a game of hiding a coin in his fist ultimately realizing it has actually disappeared. Polonius and Hamlet enter with the Tragedians, who will be performing the Murder of Gonzago for the court. The Player is critical of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for abandoning the Tragedians, who need an audience for their very existence. Their identities depend on someone watching them. The three discuss the performance and the Player advises Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to relax, trust, and stop questioning what is happening all the time. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern share what they have learned about Hamlet with the Player who leaves to learn his lines. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern talk about death and Rosencrantz becomes upset at his helplessness and the certainty of death.

Claudius, Gertrude and Polonius enter and Rosencrantz tells them that Hamlet wants everyone to watch the play that evening. Hamlet enters upstage and is debating taking his own life. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern debate whether to approach him. Ophelia enters praying and she and Hamlet exit talking. Alfred enters dressed as a Queen and Rosencrantz, thinking it's Gertrude, steps behind him and covers his eyes, playing 'Guess Who'. The Player enters and calls Alfred's name and Rosencrantz realises what he's done and marches downstage to the Player, thinking he has a coin under his foot. The Player begins narrating a silent rehearsal of that evening's play. The Player explains that a dumbshow is necessary to help the audience understand what is happening because the language they use is obscure. Just at the point at which the Queen in the dumbshow acquiesces to the King's brother and murderer, Ophelia enters in distress. She is followed by a hysterical Hamlet who shouts at her and rejects her. Claudius and Polonius enter, disrupting the Tragedians rehearsal further. Claudius announces that Hamlet will be dispatched to England before exiting with Polonius and Ophelia. The Player announces that all art follows a logical course and that characters who are written to die, must die. Rosencrantz says he wants a good story with a beginning, middle and end while Guildenstern says he'd prefer if art mirrored life. The rehearsal begins again, until Rosencrantz stops it because he recognizes two spy characters who are dressed identically to Guildenstern and himself but can't quite place them, eventually deciding that he has mistaken them for someone else. Guildenstern questions the Player about representing death on stage. The Player says that people only want to see what they expect, and only want stage deaths, not real ones. The spies die in the rehearsal and Guildenstern comments that death is something that cannot be acted. There is a blackout.

In the darkness we hear shouting. The lines from Hamlet indicate that Claudius the King is angry at the Tragedian's play. The lights come up and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are lying in exactly the positions that the dead spy characters were. They try to work out which way is East. Claudius enters and tells them that Hamlet has killed Polonius. He tells them to find Hamlet and Polonius' body but they are unsure what to do and don't take action. They spot Hamlet in the wings and can't work out what to do, eventually deciding to trap him using their belts. Hamlet enters on the other side of the stage with Polonius' body, quickly exiting then returning without the corpse. He dupes them, escaping off stage before they are surprised by Claudius' entrance behind them. Claudius wants them to find Hamlet, but before they can do anything he is brought across the stage by guards. There is a lighting change and we are outside.
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss how they now have to take Hamlet to England. They can hear the music of the Tragedians in the distance. They discuss how it seems to be autumnal before Hamlet asks them to go on ahead of him. Guildenstern states he’d like to know where he is and Rosencrantz says they may as well go on, having come so far.

**ACT THREE**

It is dark and we hear the sounds of a ship and the ocean. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss where they are and realise that they are on a ship at sea. Hamlet is upstage, behind a large umbrella, with a lantern that he turns on. Guildenstern says he likes being on a ship because he feels both contained and free at the same time. The lights slowly come up and we see three large barrels on stage. Rosencrantz explores and tells Guildenstern that Hamlet is asleep behind the umbrella. Guildenstern becomes agitated as he doesn’t know what to do. Rosencrantz engages him in a game where he hides a coin in his hand and Guildenstern has to tap to guess which one. It becomes clear that Rosencrantz has a coin in each hand, and he tells Guildenstern that he was trying to cheer him up. They try to work out how much Claudius has paid them and whether it was the same amount. The situation becomes tense and Rosencrantz becomes upset before Guildenstern comforts his friend and says that everything will be ok. They try to work out what to do, confused about whether England is real, what might happen when they arrive, and how the King of England will receive them. At last they remember that one of them has a letter from Claudius. They find it and mimic meeting the King and when Rosencrantz reads the letter he realises it is a request to execute Hamlet. Rosencrantz suggests they should not continue with their mission because Hamlet is a friend but Guildenstern says it’s not for them to make this decision, and that maybe they don’t know the whole picture. He quotes Socrates, saying that as we don’t know what will happen when we die it’s foolish to be afraid of it. Guildenstern summarises the action of the play so far and suggests that they are ok and in control. Hamlet turns the lantern off and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to sleep. Hamlet switches the letter they have with one of his own before returning to his spot under the umbrella.

Rosencrantz is sure he knows which way is East as the sun comes up and comments that things could have turned out worse than they have. They hear the sound of the Tragedians music and Rosencrantz investigates to find out where it came from, eventually finding them in the barrels. The Tragedians emerge, which seems impossible, and explain that they are stowaways, having fled the castle unpaid as Claudius was angry with them. Then the ship is attacked by Pirates and there is confusion. They all climb in barrels with Hamlet hiding in his barrel alone. When the lights come back up there are only two barrels and Hamlet has disappeared. The Player, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern emerge from the two barrels and Guildenstern is extremely worked up that Hamlet has gone. Rosencrantz offers him a bet to settle him down but it doesn’t work. They begin to re-enact their meeting with the English King and when they read the letter they discover that it calls for their execution. The rest of the Tragedians
emerge from the barrels and The Player explains that death is common. Guildenstern asks what the players know of death. Rejecting the idea that death onstage is anyway similar to real death he takes a knife and stabs The Player, who seems to die. Guildenstern says the Player's death is simply his fate. The Tragedians applaud and The Player gets up and shows that the knife was fake. Surprised and delighted Rosencrantz asks for another performance and The Player orders all the Tragedians to perform a wide selection of gruesome deaths. These deaths mirror the end of Hamlet and include the two Tragedians who had been playing the spy characters. Rosencrantz has been clapping throughout but now realises that the end is near. He ponders staying on the boat and avoiding their fate. He asks Guildenstern if they did anything wrong but neither one can remember. Rosencrantz announces he is glad to be done with it all and disappears from the stage. Guildenstern doesn’t notice at first and tries to recall everything that has happened to see if they could avoid their fate. He realises he is alone and begins to cry for his friend, he is unable to remember who he is and says that things will be better next time before vanishing, leaving the stage in darkness.

The stage lights come up to reveal the final moment of *Hamlet*, with the corpses of Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude on stage. The English Ambassador announces that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead and Horatio says that this had not been ordered and begins to tell the story of how the tragedy unfolded. The music gets louder and drowns him out.
UNCERTAINTY: *Uncertainty is the normal state. You’re nobody special.*

From the beginning of the play, when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are confused about who they are, where they are going and why, to the end of the play and their bewilderment at their imminent death, uncertainty is a major theme. They both have a very tenuous grasp of their identities and histories and they rarely understand what is happening to them, often returning to the same conversations as they try to make sense of their experience and the world around them. They become increasingly frustrated with the (from their point of view) random interjections of other characters. Each time they come close to making a decision that would disrupt the narrative of *Hamlet*, a scene from that play sweeps onto the stage and throws them into disarray. As an audience, we understand that it is simply the plot of *Hamlet* unfolding but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never get close to this understanding, despite hints from the Player.

CONVERSATION STARTER
What could Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do to get more certainty? How uncertain is their world?

CHANCE AND GAMBLING: *Life is a gamble, at terrible odds — if it was a bet you wouldn’t take it.*

The role of chance is highlighted by the repeated gambling and gaming motifs. These include the coin toss, the coin hiding game and the bet offered to the players around doubling your birthdate. The reliance on these games and bets underlines Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s passivity. Instead of taking action when they do have any energy or impetus they play games of chance to distract themselves from the reality of their world, accepting the outcome whatever.

CONVERSATION STARTER
Do you think the play suggests that we should accept chance or challenge it?

METATHEATRE, ART AND REALITY: *There’s a design at work in all art.*

Guildenstern says ‘There is an art to the building up of suspense’, at the very beginning of the play. This launches us into a metatheatrical experience. We are asked never to forget that we are watching a play in a theatre, and the comic potential of this is used throughout. The ‘real world’ that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trying to get to in the beginning is in fact, the fictional world of Elsinore, the setting of *Hamlet*. We, the audience, are aware of this and of that other story unfolding, with regular interruptions of *Hamlet* into this play. These moments directly quote the text of the original, though often showing a slightly different take on those scenes. For example, while Hamlet contemplates suicide in his ‘To be, or not to be speech’ upstage in near silence, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern decide that this is the perfect moment to approach him for a chat. *Hamlet* becomes just one of the plays within a play in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. The other plays within include Rosencrantz and Guildenstern playing out scenes: being Hamlet and each other, and being themselves meeting the King of England. Yet more plays are provided by the Player and Tragedians, actors playing actors, who play different characters in *The Murder of Gonzago*, in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern see their own deaths rehearsed twice. The Player recognizes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ‘as fellow artists’ at their first meeting, something they fail to comprehend. The Player explores this blurring of the boundaries between art and life, with detailed exchanges.
about how audiences believe performed deaths more than they do real deaths because they see what they expect in these performances. There is also comment about how art has an order, unlike the ‘real’ life of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as they experience it. Things are ‘written’ and will reach a logical conclusion in art, at the same time conferring some significance on the subjects lives and deaths, something that is lacking in the ‘real’ world of the characters. We are asked to believe in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as ‘real’, even though they are characters from another work of fiction, appearing as characters in their own drama, often playing other people, being played by actors. These layers create uncertainty and obscure any meaning.

CONVERSATION STARTER

Can you think of any other characters that have a life outside of their original story? Does the new story obey the integrity of the original story in the same way that Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead does? What is the effect of a character or characters, appearing outside their original story?

LANGUAGE: Words, words. They’re all we have to go on.

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and the Player spend a great deal of time engaging in witty banter, puns and verbal jokes, and there is a lot of joy to be had in language in the play. ‘The Questions Game’ that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play is rhythmic and good fun but we start to realise that there is a desperation underlying it. They are playing this word game because they don’t know what else to do and the questions they ask are largely useless, getting them no closer to meaningful answers or understanding. The conventions of the game, not using rhetoric or statements and only using a question actually inhibit them gaining insight into their experience. The play also explores the instability and inadequacy of language as we see the characters are unable to make themselves understood or describe their experiences. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggle to articulate what they want and discern what others mean and expect of them. The play features direct quotations from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, where the language is very different in style from the contemporary language that Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and the Player use when they are not caught up in the action. This contrast doesn’t aid our understanding and maybe even highlights some of the irrationality and barbarity of Hamlet, making us question this bastion of the canon of English theatre. We can also notice how competent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are when they speak their lines in the sections of Hamlet, in comparison to their uncertainty when using their own language (despite frequently being confused by Hamlet’s use of language).

CONVERSATION STARTER

What do you think the impact of using Shakespeare’s original text is on the audience?
1963
Tom Stoppard sees the first production by the new National Theatre at The Old Vic, an uncut Hamlet directed by Laurence Olivier and starring Peter O'Toole.

1964
The first incarnation of the play is called Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear, a one act play written for a writer’s conference in Berlin. Kenneth Ewing, Tom Stoppard’s agent, had long been interested in who the King of England was, to whom Hamlet was sent. Stoppard writes a short pastiche in an attempt to answer this question.

1966
The now fully developed script Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead is performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival by a student company, the Oxford Theatre Group. Performed in the Cranston Street Hall on the Royal Mile the first night audience contains six critics and one paying audience member. It is not universally loved but The Observer critic Ronald Bryden comments that the play is ‘the most brilliant debut by a young playwright since John Arden’... ‘an existentialist fable unabashedly indebted to Waiting for Godot but as witty and vaulting as Beckett’s original is despairing’... an ‘erudite comedy’. Kenneth Tynan, now running the National Theatre, had been Bryden’s predecessor at The Observer and requests a copy of the script.

1967
On 11 April Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead premieres in London, revived by the National Theatre at The Old Vic. Directed by Derek Goldby and designed by Desmond Heeley, with John Stride as Rosencrantz, Edward Petherbridge as Guildenstern and Graham Crowden as the Player. The production uses the costumes from the 1963 Hamlet that Tom Stoppard had seen. The Sunday Times’ Harold Hobson, usually a champion of new writing, slated the production in Edinburgh as ‘a literary and theatrical curiosity, offering neither guarantee nor bar to Mr Stoppard’s future as a dramatist’. However, he reviews the National Theatre production calling it ‘the most important event in the British professional theatre since Harold Pinter’s The Birthday Party’.
1967
*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is the first National Theatre production to transfer to Broadway, where it runs for 420 performances. The play is nominated for eight Tony Awards, and wins four: Best Play, Scenic and Costume Design, and Producer.

1968
*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* wins Best Play from the New York Drama Critics Circle.

1978
The play is adapted for BBC Radio 3, directed by John Tydeman; the cast includes Edward Petherbridge as Guildenstern, Edward Hardwicke as Rosencrantz and Freddie Jones as The Player.

1990
Tom Stoppard adapts *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* into a screenplay. He directs the film starring Gary Oldman as Rosencrantz, Tim Roth as Guildenstern and Richard Dreyfuss as The Player. The film wins the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival.

2007
As part of a celebration of Stoppard’s 70th birthday, a new radio production is directed by Peter Kavanagh with Danny Webb as Rosencrantz, Andrew Lincoln as Guildenstern and Desmond Barrit as The Player.

2011
*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is revived in a production directed by Sir Trevor Nunn, opening at Chichester Festival Theatre before transferring to the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London’s West End. It stars Samuel Barnett as Rosencrantz and Jamie Parker as Guildenstern.

2013
Benedict Cumberbatch plays Rosencrantz and Kobna Holdbrook-Smith plays Guildenstern, in an extract from the play to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the National Theatre.

2017
50 years after its first performance, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is revived at The Old Vic. Directed by David Leveaux with Daniel Radcliffe as Rosencrantz, Joshua McGuire as Guildenstern and David Haig as The Player.

**CONVERSATION STARTER**

How many drafts do you think a writer will go through before a script is completed? What sort of changes might have to be made to adapt a stage play to a screenplay or radio script?
WEEK ONE
A warm welcome from The Old Vic staff, director David Leveaux and writer Tom Stoppard is followed by a meet and greet with all the cast and crew. Designers Anna Fleische and Loren Elstein show us the model box, so that we know what the set will look like. We do a read through of the play where I read all the stage directions.

David says this is ‘Not dusting off an old play but renewing the contract with its audience.’ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not, and cannot leave the stage. They are adults, but were born yesterday. The play starts with very little physical activity, purely spinning coins. We spend lots of time establishing the rhythm of the opening pages, which are a very fiddly and tricky part of the play to get right. Tom Stoppard’s writing has an inherent rhythmic infrastructure that we try to discover. During the week, we continue exploring the power of the edges of the stage with endless spinning coins, many of which end up on the floor.

WEEK TWO
This week includes some work with Lizzi Gee, a Movement Director, to develop the physicality of the Tragedians. Some of the exercises include;

— Walking around the room, letting different parts of the body lead
— Leading with your eyes in the soles of your feet
— As a group making shapes: triangle, square, circle, rectangle
— One person adapts a physical shape; one by one the group adds to that picture
— Basing a shape/image on a theme: marriage, death, betrayal, secrecy
We also do some work with the objects that are our props. Discovering an object for the first time, everything about it and what can be done with it other than its principle use. We make lots of discoveries about relationships, sounds, playfulness and acceptance. We try to avoid ‘why’s’ and focus on ‘what if’.

**WEEK THREE**

Daniel Radcliffe and Joshua McGuire, who play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, do some voice work in the auditorium with the Voice Coach, Barbara Hausman. They experiment with using the space, talking to each other across the entire auditorium and engaging in dynamic conversation. They try a range of vocal exercises, including using the sound ‘BBrrr’ instead of text which is a technique to help actors to connect with the diaphragm and bring more vocal energy. They then work on the text to improve articulation and diction. Actors continually work on technique, like on-going training for an athlete, it helps them to adapt to a new play and a new space. Matthew Warchus, the Artistic Director of The Old Vic visits the rehearsal room to say a quick ‘Hello’ and talk to the company about his ‘favourite theatre in the world’. We do lots of physical work to discover as many possibilities around climbing in and out of the large barrels that feature in Act Three as we can. There are varying degrees of success, which leads to alterations to the final shape they will be. The Deputy Stage Manager (DSM), who is always in rehearsal, is responsible for compiling and sharing daily notes about anything like this that will affect other parts of the team, such as set, costume or lighting.

**WEEK FOUR**

This week BBC Radio 4 record some of the rehearsal, focusing on a particular section of script with a static microphone to pick up dialogue and direction from David. The players do some work on the Dumbshow section with Movement Director, Lizzi. They explore letting chaos occur in a space, allowing for new discoveries and connections of thoughts. It’s great fun and just the experience of it generates energy. Terry King, a legendary Fight Director, starts to work with us on safely staging fights, including punches, double duels, murder and the use of trick weaponry. From the end of this week, David changes the rhythm of the rehearsal schedule so that we start to run the play in the morning, take a short lunch break, then have extensive notes followed by rehearsing particular sections. As the Assistant Director, I begin to work with understudies to rehearse staging and line runs. It will be my responsibility to make sure that the understudies are rehearsed throughout the life of the production.

**WEEK FIVE**

Each day this week we start from the beginning of the play and run without stopping (if possible!), followed by notes and rehearsal of specific sections each afternoon.

Almost as an echo of our very first week, David reiterates the importance of the questions that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are initially confronted with; Why are we here? Where are we? What are we doing? How did we get here? Spinning coins keeps the characters in the present moment and the task of spinning coins leads them to consider one problem at a time. Tom Stoppard watches a run-through and thanks everyone for such wonderful work. He highlights his awareness of listening to the words, defining understanding and their use.

Daniel Radcliffe, Joshua McGuire and David Haig, The Player, sit down with director David and Tom to negotiate a selection of small amendments to the script. This includes new inclusions of Shakespeare’s text from *Hamlet*. It’s amazing to have the writer working in the room with us. We are nearly ready to start our final week in the theatre, when we’ll be rehearsing on stage with full set, costume, lights and sound in our technical week.
What does your job as a set and costume designer involve?

Anna: Set and costume are two different things but they obviously have to work together in the end. The first thing to do is to read the play and start thinking about what it is about, but also what you see and what you find interesting, what you find that excites you. Some of it is about what kind of questions come up about the setting, and how you want to answer that.

The first thing is really finding the style and the environment that you want to create. In theatre, and especially a piece like this, it isn’t necessarily a naturalistic style. It’s not set in a farmhouse or a room, and even if it was, it doesn’t mean that in a theatre production it has to be that.

To start with I do research, look at lots of different images of things that seem to connect with the play and kind of ring true for me as a designer. I remember that when I first read Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, there’s a description at the beginning written by Tom Stoppard where it says that they’re nowhere. They appear in a place that is nowhere and I found it interesting to think about what ‘nowhere’ could be. I quite like the idea of creating something that feels like it goes on forever. To try and create a space that has a character to it where lots of different things can be read in to it. It can be outside or inside, it can be open or it can be closed. This is the kind of thinking that led me to the idea that you see on stage.

The research involves looking at pictures or images because we’re visual people, working in a visual medium. For this project, I looked at quite a lot of expressionist and surrealist art and photography. There are some really amazing things from the ‘20s and ‘30s where photographers painted a picture of the sea in a perfectly naturalistic style. The picture could be someone standing by the line of the water but then it looks like they’re lifting up the water and it’s actually just a cloth. Images like this play with illusions of what’s real and what isn’t. You think you know exactly what it is and then something happens that makes you realise it isn’t quite that. I started looking at images and combined them with the practicalities of the play, such as actors’ entrances and scene changes. We have to do some things because they’re written in the text and have to be staged, like being aboard a ship. You then meet with...
the director several times and find a way to get what you like. I tend to make very rough models quite early on. I want to look at the space in a three-dimensional way, but in a way where you don’t get too hung up about the finer details.

From that, I slowly develop what’s called a white card model. This first stage of the set doesn’t necessarily have any finishes on it, like paint or colour, but it gives a feel for the general shape of the space. On a more realistic level this also ties into the first costing and answers questions like, ‘can we do it?’ or ‘is it too big?’, ‘will it fit?’ Hopefully you have a lot of these questions answered before you build the final model, because it’s quite a lot of work and you want to have the big questions answered before you do that.

It’s quite a long process - sometimes you find something really quickly, and sometimes you kind of work your way slowly into it. Then you build a 1:25 scale model of the actual design. Sometimes if costume is quite contemporary then you can do that quite a lot later but with this play, we had quite strong ideas about how the costume complements or contrasts the set right from the beginning.

**How did you approach designing the costume?**

**Anna:** In this play the costume is quite obviously from a strange world, and because it’s *Hamlet*, and the way Tom Stoppard has written it, it’s kind of Elizabethan as well. The contrast of having these recognised characters placed in a different scenario, when he wrote the play 50 years ago was a break with convention. We felt that 50 years later, you’ve got to go a bit further and making sure everything’s done and it works. As we’re co-designing the costumes, it’s complete team work but Loren did most of the visuals, so they fit together with other ideas. We also had some of the costume fittings together, where we could see the actors in their costumes.

**Why do you think you complement each other? What sort of things do you bring to each other?**

**Loren:** We think quite similarly and share the same style, and we’ve also got a good relationship because we’ve been working together for five years.

**Anna:** I think the nice thing of finding someone you can work with well is that you find someone who you can develop a shared language with, and who has a similar aesthetic. Co-designing is one thing, but then for me to do a bit and leave it in someone else’s hands, you have to feel that you can really trust them. I know that Loren sees things and will pick up on the same things that I would pick up on. In our job, it’s sometimes a tricky thing when you have a really clear picture of what you wanted to explain to someone and you have people who go, ‘Yeah, great’, and they know exactly what you mean. And sometimes it takes ages. Not because anyone is right or wrong, it’s that you have a different way of looking at it. It’s the second time we’ve co-designed costumes, and we’ve also done shows where I did the set and Loren did all the costumes. So, we’ve worked in a lot of different ways together. It’s always very fluid, there’s nothing formal about how we do things.

**What was the most challenging thing about working on this production?**

**Anna:** I think it’s probably the boat sequence, isn’t it? That’s been the most challenging thing.

**Loren:** Yeah, definitely technically.

**Anna:** The whole sequence of disappearing and appearing, lots of people coming out of barrels, and, you know, disappearing and then the barrel disappearing. The challenge or the excitement of getting that right is when you can’t actually hide things. What people don’t know is that you can’t go into the floor...
at The Old Vic. Normally if you have people suddenly disappear, you would go through a trapdoor but that isn't possible here. Because the audience don't know that, we need to come up with something that makes that clear. I don't know, we'll see if it works, but we've got something where the barrels are not directly on the ground....

Loren: That was definitely the most challenging thing. The great thing has been that Tom Stoppard has been so supportive. He has been very up for things being different and really excited about there being a really new look to the play. It's always great if you have the writer in the room, but then if you have the writer in the room and they're so generous with it, and so open, and so prepared to see a different vision, that can be even better.

Did you ask him questions? Did you show him early ideas? How did the relationship with the writer develop?

Anna: I met him really early on, just to say hello. And he already said then, 'Look, you know, you just have to take it on and make it your thing'. That's what's nice, is you feel like you've been given license.

Loren: It was actually at the final design stage that he fully saw the ideas. So, he didn’t see it in between, and he just completely and utterly loved it, which is great. It's always really nice to have made the writer happy. I hope it's different to other versions - luckily, I've never seen the play before.

Anna: Generally, I think it helps not to have seen the play before. If you see something that you think is really brilliant and you really like, it's quite difficult to distance yourself from and let go of. If you see productions that aren't great, then it is not so difficult, because you think that you wouldn't design in that way anyway. Generally, it’s really nice if you have a very fresh approach so that the answer isn’t, 'It's always done like that,' or, 'It needs to be this.' You’re free to play and come up with your vision.

How did you start as designers? What was your first inking that this might be a direction you wanted to go in?

Anna: I've always loved going to the theatre. I did quite a bit of theatre when I was at school, but it was more the acting side and I always knew that even though I loved that, it wasn’t necessarily what I wanted to do. The other side was that I loved painting, I loved fashion, clothing, and buildings and interiors. It was always a mad mix. I’m from Munich, so I came over to the UK, because I wanted to study here. I came over and did a Foundation in Art and Design and it was mainly doing that, that I discovered I could combine all the things I liked as a designer. The most amazing thing about theatre, or being a designer, is that you’ve got the costume and fashion side to it. You’ve got the painting and drawing, and you’re creating architecture with the set. It combines everything! I think the other thing that I knew is I wanted to go into an artistic profession and I really love working in a team, and I like being inspired by a story or by a theme. I could never see myself as a painter somewhere on my own in a studio. The lovely
thing with being a designer is that you have time just on your own with your thoughts and playing with different ideas, and then later when you go into rehearsals and tech, you work with massive groups of people all the time, constantly having to collaborate. I just love the mix of everything. In the Foundation course we did a bit of theatre design and I knew from that point on that's what I wanted to do. I applied for a theatre design course and never looked back. It's the best profession in the world for me.

Loren: I got involved in theatre because my grandfather and father were both designers in theatre. I grew up in this environment, coming into his tech sessions. The first one that I remember, I must have been about four, and it was Peter Pan in the West End – I got taken in to see if I could see what the illusion was. I just fell in love with it – I loved seeing the costumes backstage, and couldn't ever imagine doing anything else. I have been away, tried lots of other different avenues and jobs and I've come back to it now. I studied in Australia and met Anna just after I came back.

What skills or qualities do you think make a good designer?

Anna: I really think that collaboration is important. The artistic side is one part of it, so of course you have to be someone who has these ideas, can create visions and communicate them effectively. If you can't communicate your ideas, then it's really difficult. I think you definitely have to be a good team player and good with collaboration. It's also a certain lifestyle I think you have to be made for. You have to be fully in it because it's such a hard life. To make a career out of it is really, really hard and you also need to be calm due to the hours and the stress. You have to be really passionate about it. You really need people skills. I don't believe in coming in and bossing people around. It's getting everyone around you to get excited about it, so that you can all solve problems together. The other thing that I really love is to be surrounded by so many people with incredible skills.

Loren: Being open enough to listen to other people's ideas is really important.

Anna: Yes, and suggestions of how to do things. I mean, if you look at this set you need brilliant scenic painters to do it. I couldn't paint this, not on that scale. You have to give value to that, as well, so that you get the best. Really appreciating the other skills you have around you is so important. It's the same with costume – we've had some really amazing makers on this, where it's just a joy to watch them work and create the things that you were hoping for.

What advice do you have for a young person who thinks they might want to be a designer?

Loren: To go and see as much theatre as possible.

Anna: To get experience. I really think that it's very important to see the reality of the profession. I always feel a bit sad if you're taught that you can do 'this, that and the other' but never really talk about the technical side to it. You can have the most amazing idea but it has to physically be able to stand up and someone has to be able to walk up on it. There are things that you just can't ignore, people always think that it's a restriction but it isn't, you just have to find your way around things. I do think that to learn a bit more about the reality of the scenarios at the theatre is really important, so you know that that's actually what you want to do. It isn't as glamorous as you think! There is glamour, to a certain extent, but there's also a lot of really hard work involved and it's a big responsibility. It's not just the responsibility of the money that people invest in it, everyone invests their skills and energy, so if something goes wrong, they also lose out. If it's something you really want to do, then you should really go for it. It's worth it.
Could you tell us exactly the plot of Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead?

Daniel: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two supporting characters in Shakespeare’s Hamlet who suddenly find themselves in their own play, but they’re not sure if they are in their own play or not. They don’t really know who they are, what they are, or what they have to do with anything. They keep getting dribs and drabs of information about Hamlet. Sometimes people rush on and give them instructions and then they try and do what they’ve been told, and then as those people leave, that impetus leaves. They’re just really trying to figure out what the hell is going on and why they can’t get off the stage. It’s funnier than Hamlet too. If Shakespeare had written a mash up of The Matrix and Groundhog Day it would be Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead.

Joshua: And The Truman Show....

Daniel: It would be like this play.

What, if anything, do you do to prepare for rehearsals?

Daniel: I make sure I learn my lines.

Joshua: I don’t usually learn my lines before we start. I did for this project though. This isn’t a joke but I try and do the least amount of work possible before I walk in to the rehearsal room. For me, everything happens in the rehearsal room, so I make sure I’m in the best possible shape to be as open and playful as I can on day one of rehearsal.

Has developing the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern been different to your approach to other characters you’ve performed?

Daniel: I think it changes slightly with every project but it’s basically the same principle. In every scene I’m trying to understand, what the character is trying to do and how he is trying to do it. Sometimes if it’s a real person you are playing, you’ll end up doing lots of research, or if it’s based on a book then you’ll read the book and hopefully maybe talk to the author. I think the fundamentals are the same every time.

Joshua: It can be dictated by the director you are working with and their process but for me, it remains all about the text, especially in theatre. I think it’s my job to be told what to do sometimes, or even most of the time, and that’s the right relationship. This is a play about language, and my character says in response to
a Rosencrantz question, ‘what are you doing? What are you playing at?’ And I say, ‘words, they’re all we have to go on’. So more than ever, the characters are the text because that is all they have to go on, so for me it’s always the play that’s the focus.

What have you found most challenging about rehearsing this play?

**Joshua:** Probably - I know this is such a basic thing to say - but the language. I was going to say the lines...

**Daniel:** Me too!

**Joshua:** But the language is like a workout for your brain and for your mouth. It is a play about language, about the pitfalls of language, the misunderstandings of the English language, how confusions can be made and how beautiful it is as well, so it’s getting on top of that, and it really is like a workout.

**Daniel:** I noticed yesterday that at several times throughout the play, you say ‘A man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters’, and then I noticed at one point yesterday, one of your lines is, ‘A man standing in his saddle’; just one line with a very subtle difference in there. You want to get the accuracy of what Tom Stoppard wrote, and it is very specific sometimes.

**Joshua:** And we have a dialogue going, ‘Is he there? What’s he doing?’ but that changes progressively through the play.

**Daniel:** We’ve got about six or seven moments that start in the same way, and at each one, I have to think, which one is this?

**Joshua:** It’s not really a play where you can go, ‘can we just go back ten pages and start from there?’ Because you’re like, ‘bu-u-u...’ You don’t know where that is.

Does it excite you to be doing this play where it was originally performed 50 years ago?

**Daniel:** Absolutely! The wonderful thing about being in our industry and particularly being in theatre, and particularly in this theatre, is that you get to join a lineage, a history. You become a part of that, a part of that continuation, and that’s incredibly exciting. To have Tom Stoppard here is a huge privilege. It was very intimidating at first but I think we’ve all settled down to it a little bit more now, and so it’s incredibly exciting.

What advice would you give to your younger self about work and work ethic?

**Joshua:** I think, just relax. It’s your job. It’s a very important job, but it’s not brain surgery. Do take your work seriously, do not take yourself seriously. That would be my main thing.

**Daniel:** I would echo all of that. I think if I could tell my younger self one thing, it would probably be to relax more and not panic so much, we’re all better at our jobs when we’re relaxed.

How do you think theatre making skills can be used to help in everyday life or everyday work?

**Daniel:** We’re very lucky to be in an industry which thrives on community and so you’re a part of a team and everybody, from a lot of different disciplines, comes together to make one thing. So, the experience of being in a team and working with people is incredibly valuable. I think there is a huge value to anybody. I also think that if you ever get a chance to be on a stage and speak in front of people, do it. It’s a good thing to shed that fear.

What’s the top tip you give someone that’s going for an audition or even a job interview?

**Joshua:** Relax. Genuinely, my advice for anyone going for an audition or interview is to relax. The actor Bryan Cranston once said the moment he realized he was going in to show them something rather than try and fit into what they wanted, he felt released and started working more than he ever had. I just think you’ve got to find your way to be relaxed about it.

Why do you think theatre is important?

**Joshua:** There’s a load of guff spoken about theatre but you know it wouldn’t exist if it wasn’t important. And there’s a line, which I can’t remember fully from the play, but David Haig (The Player) says it about the moment that ‘cracks the shell of mortality and when the light, when the light shines at a certain angle, the metaphorical light, shines at a certain angle, you can reveal something that you never thought existed’, I think, we’ve all had these experiences. You can say you’re not a theatre person all you like, but I guarantee that people who don’t like theatre go to the cinema, and they’ve got a favourite film, or they’ve got a favourite song. You know, these things don’t need to exist, but they do, and by the very dint of their existence, they’re obviously important.

**Daniel:** I think theatre’s important because, like a book or a film or a song, it gives you a different perspective. It shows you the world for a second through the eyes of the writer and of a character, and I think that’s amazingly valuable. It can be both shocking when something unexpected happens and something you would never do is done by a character onstage, and then sometimes you have a moment of immense connection with them and feel like they are the same as you, and both of those things are incredibly valuable.
Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead is in many ways a re-telling of William Shakespeare's Hamlet. Hamlet is frequently considered one of the greatest plays in the English language, an example of the pinnacle of human achievement and a piece of 'high' art of immense cultural significance. Tom Stoppard treats the play lightly, with a sort of irreverence. Hamlet becomes the background story as we focus on the often ridiculous world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. We don't actually see very much of the original text, and certainly none of the particularly recognised or poetic elements. Stoppard's selection speeds up the narrative, and the inaction and indecision we associate with Prince Hamlet become the key character traits of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet becomes a dynamic force, driving forward the action of Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead which honours, or is constrained by, the narrative arc of the Shakespearean text.

At any point where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern move towards taking any action which may cause them to deviate from the Hamlet narrative, a scene from that play sweeps across the stage and contains them. In his essay, 'The Spectre of Shakespeare in Tom Stoppard’s Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead' Benjamin Vonwiller suggests that this reflects the pressure that contemporary dramatists are under when trying to write and carve out a space in a cultural landscape so dominated by Shakespeare. It is also interesting to note that Stoppard places in the background one of the most instantly recognisable speeches in the English language, 'To be or not to be'. While Prince Hamlet is contemplating his own mortality, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the audience's main focus and they are trying to work out if they should approach him for a chat about his mental state. This is one example of how the play relies on some knowledge of Hamlet in the audience. It is not just comic potential that is released by an understanding of the source play; as the plot of Hamlet unfolds we know that it moves towards the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and we know from the title of this play that they cannot, or will not escape the fate that Shakespeare had in store for them. This moment is also an example of how Stoppard creates a
slapstick and vaudevillian world that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern inhabit. Much of the humour is silly, for example when they talk about not being on boats in Act III. These theatrical forms are often considered 'low' art forms, popular entertainment that merely distracts, contrasting with the improving and expanding 'high' art of Hamlet.

**Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead** does not just have a relationship with *Hamlet*, it also connects to two other texts by celebrated writers, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and T.S Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, both of which Stoppard has acknowledged as influences. The connections with *Waiting for Godot* are very clear, we have two clown like characters, unable to understand the world that they find themselves in, engaged in anxious verbal games and physical slapstick. While *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* seems to owe a lot to *Waiting for Godot* it differs on some key points. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggle to retain their identities but they do have some fixed points, they are Elizabethan gentlemen. There is also a logical world order, albeit the fictional world of *Hamlet*. The characters also derive comfort and joy from their obvious friendship with each other, the humanity of this relationship sustains them. Even though they are unable to realise it, their world is not entirely devoid of meaning. As such, despite having many hallmarks of Theatre of the Absurd, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is not considered to be a pure example of this genre.

The less well known *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is an influence on *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* through its use of romantic irony. That is, the development of a convention that seems to be significant or meaningful that the author then punctures. Lots of the humour of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* emerges from this technique, the two characters aren’t heroic and every attempt they make to understand their world collapses because of their own inadequacy, or the demands of the plot of *Hamlet*. At the end of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* the central character acknowledges that they are, effectively, already dead and this mirrors the experience of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The audience, familiar with *Hamlet*, and aware of the title of the play, know the eventual outcome for these two characters, and we laugh at their inability to understand all the clues presented to them about their fate. Their dawning realisation of their imminent death and their frustration at not understood what has happened, to some extent mirrors our experience; we know we are born to die, even if we rarely behave as if that is the case. This is one source of any empathy we develop for the two main characters.

When considering why Stoppard chose to engage with *Hamlet*, it might be interesting to look at how other writers have engaged with classical tests in their own re-working of material. The dramatist Edward Bond's *Lear* engages with another classical Shakespearean tragedy, *King Lear*. Bond is a committed socialist, interested in the cyclical nature of violence that humans inflict on each other, and the clash between society and individual freedoms. He believes 'the work of literature is to make society self-conscious', that art should instigate change. *Lear* is a re-telling of the story of *King Lear* keeping some of the original narrative but changing significant characters and events to serve the writers intention of presenting Shakespeare not as aesthetic experience, but as a provocation to incite change. Stoppard is not using *Hamlet* in this way; *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* doesn't incite action in its audience, any more than it does in its lead characters. Neither Bond or Stoppard is overly reverential to Shakespeare's text, rather seeing the potential for their own story emerging from the source text.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Jean Rhys tells the story of Bertha Rochester from Austen's *Jane Eyre*. Bertha is Mr Rochester’s first wife and the mad woman in the attic of *Jane Eyre*. Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Bertha is constrained by the narrative of the source text. Bertha cannot escape her fate of burning to death in the attic any more than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can escape their fate at the hands of the King of England. In Rhys’s telling we develop a deeper understanding of Bertha and empathise with her plight. Stoppard doesn’t enable us to get so close to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, we are amused by them and may feel some pity but their lack of comprehension of their world, and our knowledge of it is a barrier between us. Rhys's decision to tell Bertha's story is about creating space for unheard voices that have historically been ignored or oppressed in the canon of literature; challenging the dominant cultural narrative of the white, heterosexual, frequently male voice that is presented as ‘the’ story. In choosing to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s story, Stoppard certainly makes us consider that there is more than one story worth telling, that there are many more stories woven into the Shakespeare canon. Voices of every man and woman who don’t get considered when the focus is on Kings. These stories, from our past and our present are maybe not being heard as Shakespeare's plays still dominate our stages. However, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are noblemen with some money, so can hardly be considered oppressed or unheard voices, this is even more clear 50 years after the original play was produced, when presenting the stories of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as significant may have been more radical than it is today.
An interesting contemporary example of appropriating other stories and working inside their narratives is the Marvel universe. Since the 1960s, superhero characters from Marvel have frequently appeared inside the stories of other characters, always retaining each other's narrative arc, and building a mythology and complex, interconnected world. A group of different writers and illustrators have created, developed and sustained the integrity of this world. Here *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* differs in that the play does not affect the narrative of *Hamlet*, in the way that some of the Marvel stories do. It has added to the mythology of *Hamlet*, creating in popular consciousness the image of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as hapless fools, even though there is scant evidence for this in the original text. While initially seeming to subvert and challenge the cultural dominance of *Hamlet*, it could be argued that *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* actually reinforces it, by suggesting that two minor characters have a rich and full life away from the text because of Shakespeare’s mastery as a writer. However, the selection and presentation of the extracts of *Hamlet* that appear in Stoppard’s play playfully and subtly undermine this interpretation while allowing it to exist.

If *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* does not challenge its source text, bring new, unheard voices to the stage, or contribute to sustaining a mythology of Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, it does not not do that either (sound familiar? All of a sudden we are not, not in a boat, like Rosencrantz’s Act III dilemma). The playful way in which Stoppard engages with *Hamlet* within his drama is mirrored by its relationship to the text in its cultural significance. Ian Johnston, in his lecture on the play, suggests that *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is a fine example of post-modernism, a response to Nietzsche’s ‘call for us to appropriate our cultural past and turn it to our own original purposes, deriving from the process the highest delights of human life: the joy in artistic play’. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trapped by *Hamlet*, unable to create or invent, Stoppard seems to suggest that as contemporary artists and audiences we are not. There is both merit and delight in playing with great ideas and exploring the possibilities within them, indeed it could be this that marks our very humanity.

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**CONVERSATION STARTER**

Stoppard has been described as a ‘theatrical parasite’ by one critic – do you agree?
The following are two, one hour sessions suitable for participants aged 13+. The timings are a guide based on a group size of 20 participants. These sessions could be run before or after participants have seen the production. The first session focuses on developing performance skills relevant to duologue work on the script of Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, and the second session explores writing for an existing character.

ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD DUOLOGUE SESSION PLAN

Resources Required

- Drama studio or hall – somewhere with space to move around
- Copy of the simple script, see below
- Pencils, one per participant
- Copy of the script extract, Act 1 of Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, where the pair play Questions. From Rosencrantz 'We could play at Questions' to Guildenstern 'What are the rules?', 1 per student
- Synopsis of the play and/or character overview may be useful for leader to refer to or to distribute at the end of the session

WARM UP (5 MINS)

Introduce the group to three simple characters – Pirates, Royals, Players. Pirates stand on one leg, with one bent tucked up behind them, a cutlass in hand and say 'Avast'. Royals stand tall, reach both hands forward and laugh. Players bow down while looking forward and say 'Darling'. Pirates beat Players, Players beat Royals and Royals beat Pirates. Practise the gestures with the whole group once or twice encouraging participants to perform on a big scale.

Split the group into two and ask each group to form a line on either side of the space. Each team secretly decides if they are going to be Pirates, Royals, Players, then forms a line. The leader counts ‘1,2,3, now’ – on each count the lines take a step towards each other. When the leader says ‘now’ the group take up the position of the character they have decided upon. The ‘losing’ team must then race back to their side of the room before being tagged by the winning team. If they are tagged they join the other team. You can play until one team wins or for a few rounds.

PLENARY

Ask participants why this might be a good game for actors to use to warm up. It encourages teamwork, listening and responding, picking up cues, warming up voice and body, and play. These groups of characters are in the world of the play, so we start to move closer to the themes and ideas.

Ask participants how they felt when they played – excited, confused, nervous. Introduce the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to the group, you can use character overview. Explain that throughout the play these two characters play different games with each other.

Finally ask participants about tactics for winning this game, did their actions or decisions have any impact on the outcome? They chose to play, not playing would have meant losing. Lead into a short discussion about chance, probability and taking action vs staying passive in the play Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead.
BUILDING COMPLICITE (10 MINS)
Ask the group to get back with their partner and stand facing opposite each other, labelling one another A and B. Whilst maintaining eye contact ask the pairs to jump, first A, then B. A simple two foot jump, whilst maintaining eye contact. The aim of the game is that as A lands, B begins to jump. Let the participants experiment for a couple of minutes then lead a short discussion. How easy or difficult was it? What would go wrong? What were you doing when it worked? Commonly participants can’t find a rhythm and it’s very disjointed, or they find a rhythm and then end up bouncing at the same time. Introduce the idea of rhythm in performance, and how important it is for each actor to maintain their own character’s rhythm, and not to end up in the same place. Notice how much concentration and energy it takes to get it right – this is how much focus and energy performing requires.

You can swap pairs around between each stage of the exercise if you want to encourage participants to work with new partners, or they can stay in their pairs. Introduce the next exercise, the aim is to count to three in a continual loop. The script would look like this, though it is easier to demonstrate the exercise with a participant.

A: One

B: Two

A: Three

B: One

A: Two

B: Three

A: One

Ask the participants to run this for a minute or so, then ask what they noticed was easy or difficult. Then ask participants to swap the number one for a clap, run this for a moment, then swap number two for a jump, run the game and then finally swap number three for a spin. Ask participants to feedback their experience – when does this work? What is difficult or challenging about it?

Finally ask participants to reflect on both exercises – why do these activities? What could they help actors playing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do? They help develop a close relationship for the two central performers (sometimes called complicite) they explore rhythm, which becomes very useful when you introduce text and they encourage listening, responding and concentration

TEXT AND ACTION (15 MINS)
With participants in pairs distribute copies of the simple script (below) and ask them to read it through to each other a couple of times. What do they notice? There’s not a lot there but there is a story. We know what is happening is linked to a time. Ask each pair to decide on a context for their scene, what is about to happen? Who are these people? Share a couple of these with the group.

Introduce the idea of a character objective – I want X – this is what guides the characters behaviour through the scene, or play. When character’s objectives are different we have conflict and drama. Characters’ objectives can change when they achieve want they want or if the circumstances change. Ask the participants to select A or B and decide on an objective for their character and write it on their script, I want…It needs to relate to their context. Say your objective out loud to each other then read your script – does this change anything?

Depending on the group you may need to set up some ground rules about appropriate touch for the next section – only touch your partner on the shoulder or arm, work safely and considerately. Emphasise this is about using theatre techniques to develop your skills and improve your acting.

Finally, look at each line of text and try to give it a physical action. For example, ‘what’s the time’ could have the action ‘to poke’. Say ‘I poke’, then poke your partner while saying the text, then replace it with ‘to stroke’ and say ‘I stroke’ and gently stroke your partner while saying the line. What does that do to the quality of the line? Make sure that your action is getting you closer to your objective, it’s a tactic to help you achieve your aim. Ask participants to
discover a physical action for each of their three lines. Once they have decided on the action they make a note of it next to the line and don’t do or say the action but try to embody it when they speak.

Short plenary – this is complicated and actors working on text will often go through this process over some days in the rehearsal room. Starting by understanding the context by getting the facts from the text, actors usually have more to go on, then deciding their character’s objective and finally actioning the text. It helps to understand if something isn’t working, why it isn’t working and gives you tools to try out. For example, I might change the action for a line to find a way that works.

**WORK ON SCRIPT (25 MINS)**

Distribute the *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* script extracts and ask participants to read it through in their pairs. When everyone has finished reading, group pairs up so you have groups of four or six and ask participants to try to find out as much as they can about what is going on and what the relationship between the two characters is. Allow a couple of minutes of discussion and then ask for feedback in a whole group discussion. We learn that they seem to like playing games (they’ve played this before), they like words, they are confused, the text moves quickly, they can seem quite childlike. Introduce the context, use questions – does anyone know who Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are? They’re childhood friends of Hamlet’s who have been summoned to Elsinore to find out what is the matter with Hamlet. They don’t quite know how to do that, or what is going on.

Ask each pair to prepare and present 10–14 lines of the text, encourage them to decide an objective for their section and then action the text. The opening section is good, as is the section from Guildenstern: What’s your name? as is the final section Guildenstern: That’s the question. Allow participants to work on their sections for about 10 minutes then in the final ten minutes share them back with the audience invited to comment on things they like and things they’d like the pair to work on.

**FINAL PLENARY (5 MINS)**

Ask participants to re-cap what you did in the session and why you did it. Ask participants to share what they have learned about the play or the characters, you can note these on a board or flipchart if you are going to return to exploring the play. Finally ask each participant for a rose – something about the session they enjoyed/discovered/surprised them or a thorn – something they found more challenging.

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**SIMPLE SCRIPT FOR ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD DUOLOGUE EXERCISE**

A What’s the time?
B Ten. Are you ready?
A I think so. You?
B Yes
A OK?
B OK

**SIMPLE SCRIPT FOR ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD DUOLOGUE EXERCISE**

A What’s the time?
B Ten. Are you ready?
A I think so. You?
B Yes
A OK?
B OK
FAN FICTION DISCUSSION (10 mins)

Put participants into small groups of four or five (if using tables you can work with everyone around one table) and ask them to come up with a definition of what they think Fan Fiction is. After a couple of minutes ask for some feedback and reach an agreement. Fan Fiction is about characters or settings from an original work of fiction, created by a fan, not the original creator. There are lots of fan fiction websites, most fan fiction is written but it doesn't have to be, could be any medium.

Introduce the play Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead. Tom Stoppard was inspired by seeing a production of Hamlet and a question about who the King of England, mentioned in the play but never by name, might be. He wrote Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead as in relation to the Shakespeare classic Hamlet, which sort of appears in the background of his play. In some ways this play could be said to fall into the genre of fan fiction.

Give each group a short question to discuss:

— What might make Fan Fiction exciting or interesting?
— What might make Fan Fiction boring or weak?
— How do you think a writer or creator might feel about Fan Fiction?
— What might be challenging about writing a piece of Fan Fiction?
— What would be important to do before writing a piece of Fan Fiction?

Share feedback from each group and note down any key points on a flipchart. These can help guide participants in the writing stages. You can reference how Tom Stoppard chose to keep the integrity of Shakespeare’s plot, the characters do things that are ‘off stage’ that Shakespeare didn’t write. However, relationships with other characters and their narrative arc, their written fate, are true to Shakespeare’s original work. Stoppard also uses excerpts from Hamlet. For example, the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern speak some of their lines in scenes from Hamlet. Discuss how other mediums do this, particularly the Marvel world of films and comics, where characters move around and appear in other stories but keep the integrity of their own.

UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER (15 mins)

Ask each participant to think about a human character that they know well from fiction, theatre, film or TV (or even from a fairytale) and ask everybody to share the character they know well and write a list on flipchart. Repeat the exercise, so you have a long list of characters. Ask the participants to get into a pair or three with others who share knowledge of each character.

Give each pair or group a few sheets of A3 paper and marker pens. Ask them to make a list of the characters ‘given circumstances’ – the facts we know about that character. Their age, gender, nationality, the time period they live in, family, job – as much information as you can from your shared understanding of the main narrative. Give participants three minutes to complete this task.

Next ask participants to create a mind map showing all the other characters that this character interacts with. Writing the name of the character in the bubbles and the relationship along the lines that connect them. Encourage
participants to think about very minor characters, if the central character takes a bus there must be a bus driver even if that person isn’t mentioned in the main narrative. Give participants three minutes to complete this task.

Finally ask participants to draw a line across the centre of a sheet of paper, and create a timeline for their character. They can add in as much detail as they can – when the character took a bus, for example, and when they think events might happen. How old might this character be when they die? Ask them to be clear about what is fact about the character from the main narrative by writing these above the line and what they are inventing below the line. Give participants three minutes to complete this task.

Reference how directors and actors will do some of this work, looking for the facts, when starting work on a new play, trying to understand as much as they can. Explain that the given circumstances, relationship map and timeline are now references for the next stages of the exercise.

**OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY (15 mins)**
Distribute lined paper and pens/pencils. Ask each participant to select one of the main events in the character’s timeline and then another character from the relationship map who would have been present or connected in some way to that event. Ask them to write a short diary entry for this character – giving their perspective on the event. Allow participants about five minutes to write their diary entry, ask for a couple of volunteers to read out their entries and comment on things you like and things you’d like them to develop if they had more time. Ask participants what it was like to do the exercise? What did they find easy? What did they find difficult? Explain how writers will need to completely understand the world and characters that they are writing about to write something with integrity. Comment on how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern see the action of *Hamlet* and we get to hear some of their perspective on the story.

**SCRIPT TREATMENT (15 mins)**
When a writer is beginning to write something, especially for a stage, film or TV script, they will often begin with a ‘treatment’. This is a really simple overview of their plan and can be used for themselves or sent to theatres or film companies to get them interested in producing the idea. A treatment can be one page long or longer (rarely more than 30 pages).

In your groups you are going to create a one page treatment for a new script that you are writing that references in some way the lead character you started with. Give the group three minutes to discuss and agree the story they are going to create. Ask the group to write ‘Working Title’ across the top of their page, then ‘Log Line’ and leave a space then ‘Plot Summary’ (it can help to have a flipchart pre-prepared for students to copy). The participants then make a list of 8–15 bullet points to tell their new story.

Next ask participants to write their ‘Log Line’ – this is a one or two sentence description of their story. Include the main character, the big challenge they face, give an idea of the genre through the language it uses, eg. this thrilling story, this hilarious adventure, and hint at the plot without revealing the end. Give the group three minutes to write their log line.

Finally, they have two minutes to come up with a working title. Ask participants how they could expand their treatments if they had more time (character lists, lists of locations, back stories, more detailed scene descriptions). Share back a few of the treatments and give feedback about what was great and what you’d ask participants to work on.

**FINAL PLENARY (5 mins)**
Ask participants to re-cap what you did in the session and why you did it. Ask participants to share what they have learned about the play or the characters of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. You can note these on a board or flipchart if you are going to return to exploring the play. Finally ask each participant for a rose – something about the session they enjoyed/discovered/surprised them, or a thorn – something they found more challenging.
A DAY IN THE LIFE

MICHAEL PEERS, DIGITAL MANAGER

What does your job involve?
As Digital Manager my focus is on communicating the work of The Old Vic (on and off the stage) to audiences outside of the physical building – working with all departments and sharing the exciting or interesting elements of the theatre’s day-to-day life. This is a new role for The Old Vic and signifies a wider move for theatres to embrace digital technology to engage more people in new ways.

What do you do on an average day?
My main objective for any given working day is to keep the many different projects moving forward whilst working on whatever may be the focus on that day. Otherwise I could be coordinating a film shoot, preparing material for social media, brainstorming communications for upcoming productions and activities, interviewing cast and creatives, preparing a blog post, highlighting opportunities to digitally capture our work, etc. It’s a predictable thing to say, but no two days are really the same in my role.

Have you always worked in theatre?
I actually studied Film at university and never planned on moving into theatre…but I was attracted by the opportunity to join the team at the National Theatre who were keen to explore opportunities to use digital technology to engage and widen their audience.

Did you have any theatre heroes when you were growing up?
I remember seeing the National Theatre’s production of Peter Pan in Dublin when I was a child – my mind was blown. I remember the Lost Boys’ den, Peter Pan flying and the sense of adventure that, in hindsight, was the start of my love for theatre.

Which part of your job do you enjoy the most?
My favourite aspect of my job is any moment when a piece of content or activity seems to have affected someone. I think the role of theatre is as a space for exploring ideas, themes as well as to entertain. And if I can achieve any of that through the work I do then I’m delighted.

What is your best memory of working at The Old Vic so far?
This would have to be Mix the Play, an online platform where users can direct a scene from A Midsummer Night’s Dream and decide the cast, costume, setting and music. It was terrific to work with the British Council and digital agency, Flying Object, on the project, where our different expertise combined to create something that I think effectively gives audiences an insight into the process of directing theatre and be fun too.

If you were to offer a young person wanting to get into the industry some advice, what would you tell them?
Be confident in your abilities. You may be in the most supportive of teams but it is always beneficial to be aware of and be confident in your own abilities. And whenever things aren’t looking great I always pull out this one from Oscar Wilde: ‘We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars’. In short, things could be worse.
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