

# Dressing the Stage

## Overview

*Introductory Activity circa 1 period*

*Main Activity circa 2 periods*

*Conclusion circa 1 period*

*Activity covers English, ICT, History, PSHE and Art and Design*



*“Exit, pursued by a bear” The Winter’s Tale, stage direction 3.3*

**The Wallbooks aim to foster natural curiosity by bringing together everything important that has ever happened on a series of timelines and organised in ways that allow readers to make interesting links and connections. Thus Shakespeare’s plays are presented within the iconic Globe Theatre, each in their own audience box, providing the main story for each play and illustrated with key characters.**

In this activity pupils will look at the *What on Earth? Wallbook of Shakespeare*. They will investigate what information can be gathered visually about each play from looking at the people and props featured in each play. They will also discuss what the supernatural would look like on the stage before designing their own set and costumes for a play of their choice.

## Resource List

*What on Earth? Wallbook of Shakespeare*

*What on Earth? Wallbook of Shakespeare  
Introductory Presentation*

**PUPIL SHEET 13.1 PARTIAL SET DESIGN**

Range of age appropriate texts based on the play they have chosen

*Shakespeare on Toast* by Ben Crystal (Optional)

Access to the internet (Optional) Shakespeare’s Globe website in particular

Plain A3 paper and Post-it notes

Paints, crayons, felt tips etc.



*“Revenge his foul and  
most unnatural murder”  
Hamlet, Ghost 1.5*

“What angel wakes me from my  
flowery bed?” *A Midsummer  
Night’s Dream*, Titania 3.1

## 4 Learning Aims and Objectives

In this activity pupils will:

- analyse textual and visual clues for information
- research a play in depth and work in groups to categorise the information in order to communicate ideas in an engaging way
- work creatively to design, present and review ideas of set and costume design
- evaluate each other’s work and discuss what they like about each design



## Introductory Activity

1. You might like to begin by watching the *What on Earth? Wallbook of Shakespeare Introductory Presentation* as a class. This will establish the context for the activity. You can find this video at [www.whatonearthbooks.com/wonderboxshakespeare](http://www.whatonearthbooks.com/wonderboxshakespeare)
2. Divide the Wallbooks between the class and discuss how the book has been designed and organised. Where is the Wallbook set? How is it divided up? What kind of people can they see? What kinds of props or sets are there?
3. Divide the class into groups and task each group to find all of the plays with: ghosts, kings, animals, twins, shipwrecks, storms etc. Ask one group to find all the plays with supernatural elements to them e.g. witches, ghosts, fairies etc. Write each group up on the board and see how they connect with one another.
4. Discuss what things like ghosts and fairies would look like on the stage. How would you show a storm on stage? What kind of special effects might we use? Could they use them in the 16<sup>th</sup> century? Read the news article on the back of the Wallbook about ‘Garrick’s Electric Performance’ and discuss how the audience would have reacted to seeing this performance.

## Main Activity

5. Explain that groups are going to design their own set and costumes for one of Shakespeare’s plays. Use the Wallbook to pick 5 favourite plays and discuss in pairs why they chose them.
6. Discuss the fact that when Shakespeare was writing his plays, sets were very basic and audiences were expected to use their imaginations to set the scene. Special effects were minimal with sound effects such as thunder being made by rolling cannonballs along the floorboards. There were no lighting effects and the theatres were open air so the actors and audience were all standing in daylight. Costumes were incredibly expensive because they were the best way to show that one person was playing a king and another a witch, making it easier for the audience to tell the actors and the roles apart. For example, a ‘black velvet cloak with sleeves embroidered all with silver and gold’ cost £20 10s 6d which is equivalent to £2,692 in today’s money. See Act 2 Scene 2 of Ben Crystal’s

*Shakespeare on Toast* for more information about the staging of plays in Shakespeare's day.

7. Once the pupils have chosen their favourite play (or assign them so each play is covered?) they can use the Shakespeare's Globe website and other appropriate resources to research their chosen play, costume design and set design.
8. Provide the pupils with A3 paper and drawing/painting materials to design their own set design with characters for their chosen play. Have pupils write a short blurb to accompany their drawing outlining who each character is and the main storyline
9. Stick the panels together to form a Wallbook of Shakespeare as made by the pupils. Display in the classroom and along the corridor(s).

## Conclusion

10. Give each group of pupils some strips of Post-it notes. Ask groups to look at each of the designs and to decide on the three most creative ones. When the group has agreed they should stick on their Post-its, being careful not to obscure writing or pictures. Pupils can

write a brief comment on the strip saying what they like about each design. Bring the class back together to discuss their favourites and what they can learn about the play by seeing the designs.

"Once more unto the breach,  
dear friends, once more"  
*Henry V, Henry V 3.1*



## Support Activities

Younger pupils, or those who need more support, could be provided with **PUPIL SHEET 13.1** where some of characters or part of the set is already drawn for a play and they can add to the scene and colour it in.

## Extension Activities

Older pupils, and those who benefit from additional challenge, could make a poster advertising their chosen play to the public. Ask them to think about what kind of images, information and language they would use in order to entice people to go to the theatre to see the play.

# Partial Set Design

