

MERCURY



**G R E A T
E X P E C T
A T I O N S**

**Teacher's
Education
Pack**

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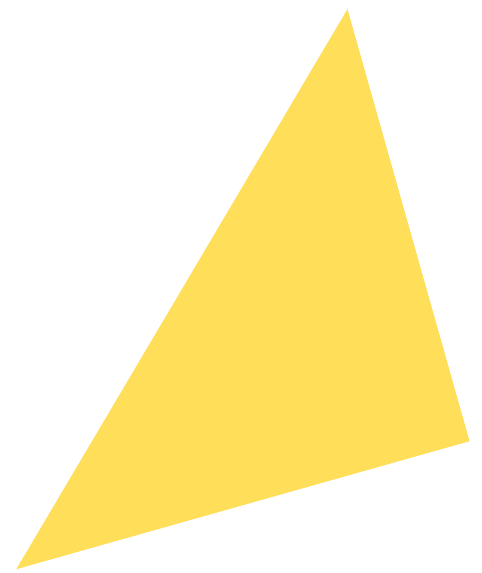
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Charles Dickens

WHO WAS CHARLES DICKENS?

Five Top Dickens Facts:

1. He had an obsessive-compulsive disorder and would comb his hair hundreds of times a day, constantly looked in the mirror. He also touched things 3 times for luck.
2. When he was 11 he was forced to leave school, when his father was imprisoned in the Marshalsea debtors' prison, and take his first job in a blacking (shoe polish) factory applying the labels to the bottles.
3. His pen name was Boz.
4. In his study he had a secret door which was designed like a bookcase filled with fake books.
5. He was not very tolerant of his friends. When Hans Christian Anderson stayed with him, he gave him a BIG hint that he had overstayed his welcome by attaching a note to his mirror which said Hans Anderson slept in this room for 5 weeks which seemed to the family, like AGES.



Charles Dickens

DICKENS THE WRITER

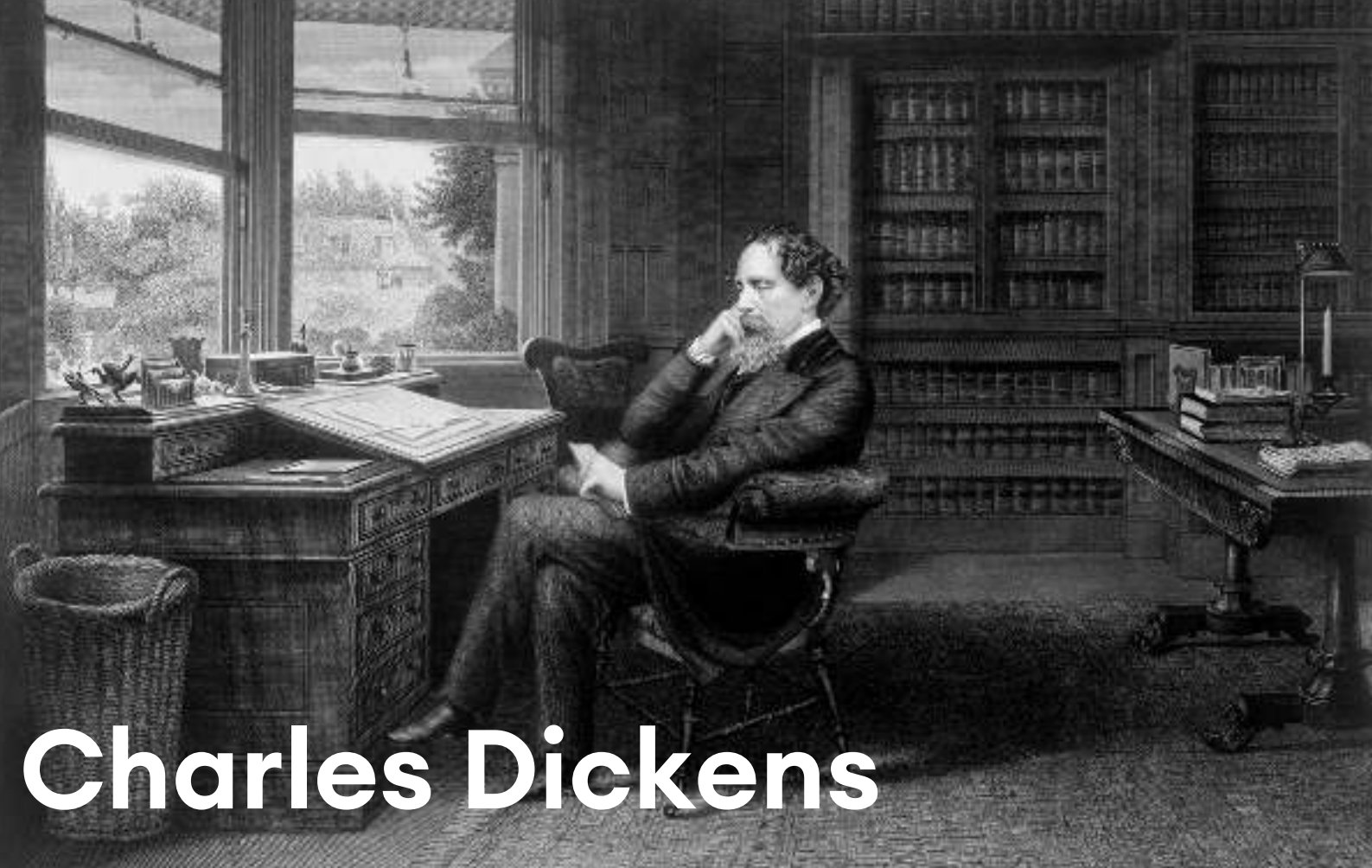
Dickens was born into a poor family, in Portsmouth on February 7th, 1812. As a young boy he enjoyed reading and amongst his favourite novels were Robinson Crusoe and The Arabian Nights. He got his first job writing for a magazine in a busy office. When he had established himself as a writer, he had his own weekly journal called 'All The Year Round' in which he published weekly instalments of his books. In total Dickens wrote 15 novels. He was the first superstar author, the J.K.Rowling of his day!

A Christmas Carol – in full A Christmas Carol, in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas, a short novel, was originally published in 1843, - suddenly conceived and written in a few weeks. It is one of the outstanding Christmas stories of modern literature.

Dickens often employs a number of specific techniques in his writing, including repetition, long lists, powerful adjectives, similes and metaphors, rhythm and exaggeration. Many critics have commented upon Dickens' universal appeal – that is, the issues and themes highlighted in his novels are as relevant today as they were during the Victorian era. His main concern as a writer was with raising social awareness on issues affecting the poor.

Dickens died aged 58 on 9th June 1870 and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

His books have never been out of print.



Charles Dickens

DICKENS THE PERFORMER

‘Dickens’ novels were uniquely suited to being performed out loud: they were almost like scripts, in the pungency and speakability of the dialogue and in the vividness of the narrator’s voice. It is almost as if they had been written with performance in mind”. Simon Callow who created a long-running one-man show about Dickens.

Dickens acted from a young age – he wrote his first play aged 6! At school he acted in and directed a number of plays and when he was 21 he applied for an audition with one of the great actor-managers of the day. At 30 he embarked on a series of very high-level amateur productions – performing to Queen Victoria who remembered it as ‘the greatest performance she had ever seen in a theatre’!

Dickens himself said “Every writer, though he may not adopt dramatic form writes, in effect, for the stage”.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Great Expectations was written between 1860-61 and first published as a serial in a magazine, a chapter often ending with a mystery or a threatening situation, encouraging the reader to buy the next instalment. It is set in 19th century England, mainly in London and surrounding marshlands. The River Thames acts as a linking motif for the whole story. The novel has an incredible narrative drive, with vivid characters and dialogue that works through conjuring up images.



Synopsis

A terrifying chance encounter propels young orphan Pip from the life of a humble blacksmith's apprentice in the marshlands of Kent, to that of a wealthy gentleman of London, something he had always dreamt of becoming.

When his wish is granted by a mysterious benefactor, his life becomes one extraordinary encounter after another. Determined to prove himself worthy of the 'heart-broken' Miss Havisham and her beautiful but icy ward Estella, Pip eagerly embraces his new position. But he is plunged into a world of dark secrets and cruel twists of fate, where beautiful girls are used as weapons and old friends are neglected.

But Pip's past is not so easily abandoned and when the nature of his great expectations are discovered, Pip must decide on his true identity. Nothing is more important than knowing who you are and remembering where you came from.

A WORD ABOUT GALE CHILDS DALY'S ADAPTATION

This stage version of the novel is performed by 6 actors – Pip, and 5 Narrators, operating inside and outside the story, who play almost 40 characters between them.



Interview with Director Ryan McBryde





Interview with Designer Libby Todd

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got into theatre design?

I always enjoyed being creative and drama at school. I used to make costumes for school plays, but it wasn't until I went to art college that I got a taste for set design as well. I loved creating worlds for my costume creations to exist in, so it was a natural next step to explore a career in theatre design. I started out designing for all kinds of shows, from dance and circus to site specific and immersive performances. Now I mainly design for plays and musicals and I'm passionate about new writing. I'm the Graduate Rep for Society of British Theatre Designers which means I help support new Designers starting out in the industry.

What is the concept behind your design for Great Expectations and what inspired you during the process?

Early on in the creative process we decided that Pip's working class roots were an important aspect we wanted to explore. Our Narrators felt like they could become workers of industrial Victorian Britain, telling the tale of Great Expectations. From factories to dockyards, we took inspiration from the architecture and machinery of the age. Rough textures of brick, wood and metal evoke a feeling of grubby London streets, whilst large factory windows echo the Gothic grandeur of Satis House.



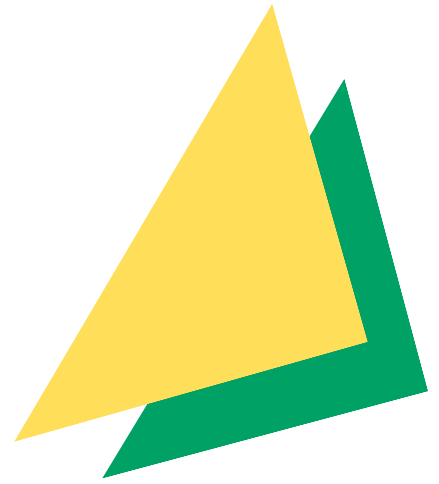
Five of the actors play a number of roles in this production, how did this effect your approach to costume design?

When an actor has to play lots of different roles it's important to balance the storytelling and the practicalities. I want to make sure each character has some signifying items of costume, whether that be an oversized cravat, a tall top hat or a grubby overcoat. But practically the quick costume changes mean we can't always change everything an actor wears. By keeping all the costumes in a focused colour palette, it means that multiple jackets and ties can work with the same waistcoat or trousers. I was inspired by colours associated with metals - greys, steely blues, rusty tones. Using a palette of these means all the costumes work harmoniously together and fit within the industrial world of the set.

What advice would you give an aspiring theatre designer?

When designing a show, it's really important to keep an open mind. Theatre is all about collaboration and learning from others you work with, so having lots of conversations and allowing room for other people's ideas is key. There's no right or wrong way to design for theatre, everyone develops their own style, but you need to be great at communicating your ideas, so that everyone else involved in the show understands how the design will work. Take inspiration for a wide range of sources - art, photography, film, the world around you - a good idea can come from anywhere.

Key Themes



"Such a very fine, new, and grotesque idea has opened upon me," wrote Charles Dickens on first conceiving his idea for what would become *Great Expectations*. The story of Pip, Estella, Miss Havisham and Magwitch is a story of the social class system, of the judicial system, of misery and abuse – and of love, in many of its varied forms.' Lucinda Dickens Hawksley - the great-great-great grand-daughter of Charles Dickens.

Dickens uses the format of the traditional fairy tale to tell his story and then subverts it. The 'evil and frightening old man', Magwitch, turns out to be Pip's caring benefactor. The 'kindly old grandmother', Miss Havisham, turns out to be a vindictive old woman, and the 'beautiful princess', Estella, is a cold inhuman figure.

Other themes include:

- oAmbition and self-improvement (social, economic, educational, moral). Can you ever escape your roots?
- oGuilt and innocence – ashamed of your background
- oLove and loss
- oCruelty breeds cruelty – is it possible to break the cycle?
- oThe growth from childhood to adult
- o Transformations for good and bad. Identity.
- o Doubles – two convicts, two secret benefactors, two invalids

Meet the Cast



STANTON WRIGHT
PIP

Fri 12 - Sat 27 May

MERCURY

G R E A T
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GARETH KENNERLEY
NARRATOR 1

Fri 12 - Sat 27 May

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SAM LUPTON
NARRATOR 2

Fri 12 - Sat 27 May

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EMILY POLLET
NARRATOR 3

Fri 12 - Sat 27 May

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BESSY EWA
NARRATOR 4

Fri 12 - Sat 27 May

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JIM FISH
NARRATOR 5

Fri 12 - Sat 27 May

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Meet the creative team

Director: Ryan McBryde

Designer: Libby Todd

Lighting Designer: Rajiv Pattani

Sound Designer/Composer: Stefan Janik

Movement Director: Chihiro Kawasaki

Casting Director: Natalie Gallacher c/o Pippa Ailion
Casting

Casting Consultant: Pippa Ailion

Associate Casting Director: Richard Johnston c/o Pippa
Ailion Casting

Assistant Director (Birkbeck Placement): Emmy Briggs



In rehearsals



Photo credit: Pamela Raith



Set Design by Libby Todd



Costume Designs by Libby Todd



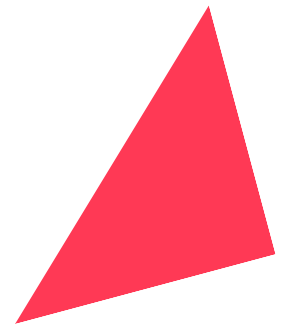
Secondary Activities



Workshop (Secondary)

Curriculum links: Drama, English Literature

Objection: Ideas for further exploration of the production, through games and exercises.



WARM UP

Bomb and Shield

The group are invited to move around the space and to choose one of their fellow participants to be their 'bomb', and another to be their 'shield', without either of them knowing. They must then keep their 'shield' between themselves and their 'bomb' as the facilitator counts down to detonation. While a fun and energetic warm up game, it can also be applied to the world of the play, and the story of *Great Expectations*. Having played the game a few times, discuss with the group which characters in the play are 'bombs' and which are 'shields'.

The game can then be played with participants as characters from *Great Expectations*. What interesting relationships and combinations of bombs and shields occur in the play?

EXPLORING CHARACTER

In Gale Childs Daly's adaptation of *Great Expectations*, the cast (with the exception of Pip) each play numerous characters. In the novel, Dickens' descriptions are vivid, detailed and very physical so the actors need to translate this for the stage to make sure each character is easily distinguishable. The following exercise uses physicalisation, based on Commedia dell Arte techniques, to explore the link between body and character.

Ask the group to find a space. Explain that many stock characters in drama have recognisable ways of moving because they 'lead' with specific parts of their body. Suggest a body part - e.g. the nose - and ask half the group to move around the space silently (while the other half watch) with their nose leading the way. Explain that noses must not only go first but must make the decisions about where to go. It's not simply about sticking out a body part and walking with it in front of them.

Ask watchers what kind of characters they see emerging - thinking about age, status, temperament etc. Try out different body parts to lead: chin, stomach, pelvis, knees, elbows. Watchers and walkers swap. Now think specifically about characters in *Great Expectations*. Which body part might Magwitch lead with? Miss Havisham? Estelle? Pip? Can watchers guess which characters the walkers are portraying?

EXPLORING SETTINGS

Divide the whole class into 3 groups: Narrators, Soundscapers and Image-makers and give each group the short descriptive extract from the novel, describing the dining room at Satis House, below. The Narrators task is to select some key descriptive lines from the text and decide upon ways in which they can deliver those lines as an ensemble. Meanwhile the Soundscapers are tasked with reading through and seeing what sounds they might be able to create, to bring to life the atmosphere of Satis House. They may choose to echo certain words. The Image-makers create a series of still images suggested by the description. With the class sat in a circle have the Narrators read their chosen lines, with the Soundscapers accompanying them with vocal and percussive sounds – and the Image-makers presenting their freeze-frames so that together they develop a sense of the atmosphere that the passage evokes.

Extract:

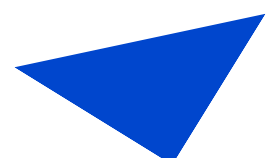
MISS HAVISHAM'S DINING ROOM

“I crossed the staircase landing and entered the room... A fire had been lately kindled in the damp old-fashioned grate... Certain wintry branches of candles on the high chimneypiece faintly lighted the chamber... The room was very spacious, and I dare say had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces. The most prominent object was a long table with a tablecloth on it, as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clocks all stopped together...A centre-piece of some kind was in the middle of this cloth...heavily overhung with cobwebs... I saw speckled spiders with blotchy bodies running on it...I heard the mice too, rattling behind the panels.”

EXPLORING NARRATION

All 6 of the cast act as Narrators in the production. Sometimes they are outside the action and speaking in the 3rd person. Sometimes they are inside the action and speaking in the 3rd person and sometimes they speak as a character – in the 1st person – inside the story. Sometimes they move from one to the other and share the narration. Pip, as in the novel, is the 1st person narrator of his own story.

The class could explore the use of narration to tell a well-known fairy story – for instance Little Red Riding Hood. Divided into sub-groups, each group is given a specific focus. One group must present their version using narrators outside the action, speaking in the 3rd person. Another group tells their version using narrators speaking in the 1st person – inside the action. A third group must bring the story to life with all the actors sharing the narration both inside and outside the action. Discuss – which was the most effective? Why? Who had most contact with the audience? Which group really brought the storytelling to life? How?





G R E A T E X P E C T A T I O N S

BY *Charles Dickens*
ADAPTED BY
GALE CHILDS DALY

MERCURY
FRI 12 – SAT 27 MAY
mercurytheatre.co.uk #BeMercury

REFLECTIONS

- Decide on several statements to pose to the class, linked to themes within Great Expectations (see below for suggestions).
- Create an imaginary line running diagonally across the space.
- Read out a statement.
- Explain that to stand at one end means you agree with the statement, and to stand at the other means you disagree.
- Standing somewhere along the line means you agree/disagree to varying degrees.
- Once standing at the point on the line which reflects their opinion, class members can be asked to explain their position, thereby generating discussion.

STATEMENTS:

- There is no such thing as fate or destiny.
- You should never be ashamed of your family.
- Money can't buy happiness.
- You reap what you sow.
- Rich people are smart.
- Sometimes we break the law to do what's right.
- Your education affects how well you do in life.

