



ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PACK

Classroom
VIDEO
Education with Vision

Theatre Practitioners: Berkoff

Produced by:
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For Teachers

Brief Summary of Programme

This programme examines the Theatre of Steven Berkoff, his influences, his style along with his approaches to performance. Moreover it focuses on the era of Berkoff's adaptations of existential writer Kafka's short stories *Metamorphosis*, *Penal Colony* and *The Trial*.

Broken down into a series of chapters, students are led through an exploration of Berkoff's style, physical approach to performance, Total Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd.

The programme includes interview footage of Steven Berkoff, Simon Murray, extracts from *The Trial* and discussions about the Universality and relevance of Berkoff's theatre for a modern audience.

Timeline

00:00 Introduction (Berkoff and presenter)

00:48 Chapter One; Development of style (Berkoff's influences; Lecoq, Brecht, his use of mime and physical gesture, exploration of sound and speech).

05:22 Chapter Two; Berkoff, Kafka and the Theatre of the Absurd (Berkoff and his relationship with Kafka and also with the Theatre of the Absurd).

08:57 Chapter Three; Physicality and Voice (Berkoff's use of stylized characteristics, heightened physicality, Voice and sound effects).

14:59 Chapter Four; Berkoff and the 21st century (relevance for contemporary audiences. (Existentialist ideas, government control, bureaucracy and corruption)

UK Curriculum Links

KS4

For a strong GCSE groups Berkoff's work is suitable. In the case of *The Trial* choose a selection of scenes for example the 'City', 'Inspector arrives', 'office' scenes. Also *Metamorphosis* is a challenging but enjoyable play, and students can work on selected scenes. Another interesting text is *Agamemnon*. Students can experiment with the use of sound, and the use of basic minimal props and bodies. This fulfils the criteria for AQA specification

KS5

Edexcel

Unit One – Exploration of Drama and Theatre

- A) Students work practically on two plays (chosen by teacher). Berkoff's plays are ideal for this.
- B) Students complete a set of notes covering both texts

Exploration in both practical and written format on the following elements:

- Use of Language
- Non-verbal communication
- Social, Historical, Political and Cultural context
- Visual, Aural and Spatial elements
- Characterization
- Vocal Aspects
- Response to Practitioner
- Interpretation

Unit Three – Exploration of Dramatic Performance

Students need to create an original piece of theatre, building on the Unit one work in the AS year

- The teacher will assess student involvement in the development and structure of work throughout the creative process as well as the final performance in front of an identified audience.
- Students need to submit written evidence of research and exploration for the piece.
- Students must also write an evaluation of both the process and the final performance of the work.
- Edexcel will externally moderate the teacher assessment

AQA

Unit Two – Presentation of an Extract from a Play

Practical performance by a group of an extract from a published play. The assessment also includes candidates' preparatory and development work and supporting notes. Any Berkoff play would suit this, *Fall of the House of Usher*, *Metamorphosis*, *Greek*, *East* etc....

Unit Three – Further Prescribed Plays including Pre-Twentieth Century

Candidates are required to answer two questions, one on each of two different set plays. One play is to be chosen from Section A: Pre-Twentieth Century. Plays and one play is to be chosen from Section B: The Twentieth Century or Contemporary Drama.

Unit Four – Presentation of Devised Drama

Practical performance by a group of devised drama. The assessment also includes candidates' preparatory and development work and supporting notes.

Choice of set plays for the A level examination includes Berkoff's *The Trial*.

In Section B, candidates answer a single compulsory question based on their chosen set text.

Useful Links

Being Berkoff

DVD of the Trial – The National Theatre production and the Tokyo production.
www.iainfisher.com

www.stevenberkoff.com

Influences

Marcel Marceau
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8brJ1S3VXk&feature=related>

Le Navet Bete
<http://www.lenavetbete.com>

Black Moon Theatre Company
<http://www.blackmoontheatrecompany.org>

Berkoff, Steven – *The Theatre of Steven Berkoff* new edition (Methuen Drama)

Look at Kafka's short stories

Look at other plays- *Metamorphosis, Agamemnon, Fall of the House of Usher...*

Suggested Activities

The Trial by Steven Berkoff

(Who is Berkoff? Who was Kafka?)

Research the 1920's when Kafka was writing, 1970's when Berkoff was adapting the novel and make notes on today's (21st Century) contexts.

Historical and political context

- 1920's, 1970's, 21st Century
- What was (is) happening in the world? (e.g. between world wars)
- Were (are) there any natural disasters?
- What were (are) the main political beliefs?
- And how was (is) the country divided?
- What was (is) morale like and approach to religion?
- What natural disasters etc. occurred during these 3 time periods. How does this affect a 'reading' of the play?

Social context

- 1920's, 1970's, 21st Century
- What was (is) the position of women?
- Were (are) there rigid class systems?
- Were (are) there any particular group in the forefront of society?

Cultural Context

- 1920's, 1970's, 21st Century
- What sort of music was (is) popular?
- What did (do) people do in their spare time?
- What art movements were represented in this period?

With the information gathered:

- Create 3 separate collages/posters to demonstrate the 3 different time periods
- In groups create a presentation of:
Kafka and the 1920's
Berkoff's world 1970's
21st Century What's the world like today?

Active Viewing Guide

Being Berkoff

1. Who were Berkoff's major influences?
2. Which of Kafka's plays did Berkoff adapt?
3. Why was there a need for a change in theatre post war?
4. In 'The Trial' what did Berkoff use to create the set besides the chorus' bodies
5. How does Berkoff create the atmosphere?
6. Did Berkoff adapt any other stories? What were they?
7. Where did Berkoff get idea of a 'Chorus'?
8. Why is Berkoff's Kafka range described as the Theatre of the Absurd?
9. What are the key elements that make up Theatre of the Absurd?
10. Why might Kafka make good stimulus for absurdism?

Suggested Student Responses

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1. Who were Berkoff's major influences?

Lecoq, Artaud and Brecht

2. Which of Kafka's plays did Berkoff adapt?

'The Trial', 'Penal Colony' and 'Metamorphosis'

3. Why was there a need for a change in theatre post war?

There had been huge loss of life, disasters, poverty and fear of the increasing government control of everyday life... therefore people began to question the very existence of God and the purpose of life.

4. In 'The Trial' what did Berkoff use to create the set besides the chorus' bodies

A set of metal frames were carried by the Chorus, these became a variety of props, and suggested different locations and settings. These were used in a symbolic manner.

5. How does Berkoff create the atmosphere?

By the use of sound collage and effects created by the Chorus. Also by lighting, the bare and minimalist set, sound effects, make up, the physical nature of the acting style and the costumes.

6. Did Berkoff adapt any other stories? What were they?

'The Fall of the House of Usher' by Edgar Allan Poe, Oedipus Myth 'Greek' and 'Agamemnon'

7. Where did Berkoff get idea of a 'Chorus'?

From Early Greek Theatre

8. Why is Berkoff's Kafka range described as the Theatre of the Absurd?

The subject matter placed the characters in absurd, un-natural circumstances. For these characters the future was futile.

9. What are the key elements that make up Theatre of the Absurd?

Caricatured characterization, futile situations, a sense of unjust circumstances and a real existentialist outlook

10. Why might Kafka make good stimulus for absurdism?

Kafka wrote at a time at which there was a growing sense of futility. He was among a group regarded as existentialists who questioned, religion and life's purpose..... The Theatre of the Absurd provided the opportunity to explore these themes by placing the characters in the plays into ridiculous, often absurd situations. Many of the existentialist writers began to explore Theatre as a way to explore their beliefs.