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РЕПОЗИТОРИЙ ГГУ ИМЕНИ Ф. СКОРИНЫ

В мире театра

Практическое пособие для студентов IV-V курсов
факультета иностранных языков

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Практическое пособие предназначено для студентов старших курсов факультетов английского языка. Оно составлено в соответствии с программой по данному курсу и включает тексты и упражнения к ним. Упражнения содержат задания, направленные на развитие навыков неподготовленной монологической речи, а также ведению дискуссий и диспутов.

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2009 год

THE THEATRE

VOCABULARY

The language of the theatre:

1. Theatre, drama, company, troupe, civic theatre, regional theatre, subsidized theatre, commercial theatre, run;
   The company is on a tour,

good		
brilliant	experienced	company
young	well-established	company
new	permanent	company
recently-formed	resident	company

2. Repertory, repertoire, a repertory company/theatre, cast, cast list, casting.
3. Director, the managing director, associate directors, an artistic director, an administrative director
   to arrange auditions, to cast the play, to rehearse the play, to rehearse the actors in their parts, the play is taken off, run/to run, the play ran for two years, long runs; to order movement on the stage; producer, manager, a general/box-office/house/stage manager.
4. To direct, to produce; to stage, to put on, to present, to do, The National Theatre are doing “The Rivals” by Sheridan next season.
5. Production, to stage/put on a production, production opens, John Gielgud’s production of “King Lear” provoked a lot of controversy, new production, performance, the performance begins at 7.30, first performance, first night, première, evening performance, matinee, show, a variety show, a series of numbers/acts-musical items, dames, jokes, conjuring tricks, acrobatic turns, compère, show business.
6. Acting, play, I didn’t like the play but I was very impressed with the acting, Who played Hamlet? to appear (in), to be

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7. (in), He has appeared in many successful productions, He's been in a lot of interesting productions.
8. Part, the main/leading/supporting/walk-on/speaking/ male/ female part, to learn one's part, to look the part, role, the main/title/leading/supporting/make/female role, lines.
9. Lead, to play the lead, the male/female lead, the leading lady, star, co-stars, an all-star cast, to stand in for smb, understudy.
10. Designer, to design scenery/costumes, stage designer, costume designer, scenery, sets, lighting, the lighting was very effective, original lighting effects.
11. Tragedy, comedy, tragi-comedy, farce, comedy of manners, slapstick comedy, pantomime, drama, straight play, historical play/drama, thriller, musical, musical comedy.
12. Dramatist, playwright, author.
13. Foyer, box office, cloak room, bar, auditorium, the theatre was full, house, house full/sold out/All tickets sold, the house was packed, They played to full/packed house, There was a laugh from the back of the house, The house lights went out/down, stalls, front/back stalla, I bought a seat in the stalls, boxes, dress circle, upper circle, balcony/The gallery/The gods, We sat in the gods, stage, The actors come on (The stage)/go off, Thet make their entrances and exits, on the stage, stage-hand, stage directions, stage fright, stage door, off-stage, backstage, wings, dressing room.
14. Box ofice, ticket agency, advance booking, returns, standing ticket/room, complimentary ticket, house seat, I've got two tickets for the theatre.
15. Audience, a memeber of the audience, one of the audience, somebody/one person/some people/a lot of people in the audience.
16. Success, the production is very/quite/rather succeccful, it was a great/tremendous success, Box-office success, flop,

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review, to get good reviews, it got/had good/ favourable/ poor/unfavourable/terrible reviews.

17. Receive, reception, the play/production/performance was well/favourably/ enthusiasticaly/poorly received, the play had a good/poor reception.

READING 1.

Spend some time trying to absorb the language of the theatre and stage cintained in this text.

Confessions of a Would-be Actor. After playing Joseph in a nativity play at the age of five and a half, - I can still remember the three lines I had – my theatrical career really took off. I was chosen to be the back end of the pantomime horse in our school end-of-term Christmas show. Success there, or rather lack of it – the horse's seams came apart soon after our first entrance – led to my being given the job of stagehand for all future productions. Even scenery falling over in the middle of an Italian light opera and last-minute panic over the missing set for an ancient Greek tragedy failed to persuade our drama teacher that I would be less of a risk on stage than off. (That, in fact, is not strictly true. I did have a walk-on part once in a French bedroom farce – as an apparently dumb police constable – but to everyone's horror I tried to exit with the wrong character at the end of the wrong scene, stage left instead of stage right).

On leaving school, I joined an amateur dramatic society, full of enthusiasm but rather short on experience, technique and timing. For some years, I was restricted to bit parts in sketches, satirical reviews and one or two slapstick comedies. My finest hour came when I had to stand in for a member of the cast who had been taken ill – I was the general male understudy – and take the part of the villain in a Victorian melodrama; lots of overacting and asides to the audience. I had only a very short

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rehearsal beforehand and I thought my performance was reasonably competent. The producer, however, suggested that I took up some less public hobby, like pottery or rug-making.

Not deterred, I joined a repertory company as stage and costumes manager, also responsible for props and make-up. And I was their prompter as well. During my time with them I wrote a number of scripts, most of which were rejected, but one of which was accepted and performed. It turned out to be the most terrible flop. I didn't do much acting there – just one part, if I remember rightly, in the chorus of a musical, a revival of "West Side Story". Nobody "discovered" me. What I had always wanted was to play the hero in something like "Romeo and Juliet" or to have the leading part in an Oscar Wilde comedy of manners. When I turned fifty, however, I began to accept that it was probably not going to happen.

You can image my surprise and delight, then, when some nights ago I learned that I had landed the title role in Shakespeare's classic play "Macbeth" with the Royal Shakespeare Company. I couldn't believe my luck. "Macbeth": that superb monologue before Duncan's murder, the passages with the witches on the heath, that fantastic "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech in Act Five, Scene 5. The dress rehearsal, with co-stars Olivier and Glenda Jackson, was a dream. And with the first night to follow - ten curtain calls – bouquets – reviews the next day: "Smash hit!" "Don't miss it!" "A box office winner!" "Triumph for new Macbeth!" "A Star is …".

And then that horrible ringing sound in my ears …

PRACTICE 1.

1. Ask questions for which these remarks would be suitable answers.
   a) Yes, it got rave reviews.
   b) No, I'm not really a theatre-goer, but thanks anyway.

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c) The cast were fine, but the direction was weak.

2. Describing a performance: match definitions with the words they explain.

We went to see a new production of “Hamlet” last night. The sets (1) were incredibly realistic and the costumes (2) were wonderful. It was a good cast (3) and I thought the direction (4) was excellent. Anthony O’Donnell gave a marvellous performance (5). It got rave reviews (6) in the papers today.

a) the way the director had organised the performance
b) clothes the actors wear on stage
c) scenery, building, furniture on the stage or in the studio
d) got very enthusiastic comments
e) all the actors in it

3. Speak on the problem of how theatre are run in this country and in Great Britain. Consider the following.
   a) the financing of the theatres
   b) the renting of the building
   c) the company/troupe
   d) the repertoire
   e) attendance at theatres
   f) prices of tickets
4. Name all the parts of a typical theatre. The Oxford-Duden Pictorial Dictionary might help you.
5. Give a talk on the type of sets that modern theatre may have. Should the scenery be realistic or not? How does the scenery affect the expressive value of the production? What do you think of the following statements?
   a) Representation without any scenery is too symbolic. A branch of a green tree and a bench on the stage are not enough to represent a garden.
   b) The acting should be emphasized at certain phases of the performance and this can be done with the help of skilful scenery.

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c) Without realistic sets a lot of people in the audience will fail to understand the message and even the plot of the play.
d) Sound and light effects are always put to advantage against the background of impressive scenery.

6. Imagine you are a famous actor or actress. Write and design a poster publicising yourself in a play or a film. Use exaggerated language to sell yourself to the public.

READING 2.

WHAT IS THEATRE?

Read the following text and state the place of the theatre among other performance arts.

Before we follow the history of the THEATRE through so many centuries, we ought to try to understand what the Theatre is all about, why if offers amusement and pleasure, but then so do lots of other things. Is there something special in itself that it offers us? Clearly there is, otherwise the Theatre would not have gone so long in so many different places. But what is it that is special about the Theatre?

True, when we see a play we see it with a number of other people; we form part of an audience. This is important, because we behave differently when we are part of an audience. If the play is funny, we laugh a great deal more than we should if we were by ourselves. If it is pathetic, we are more deeply moved just because a lot of other people are being moved too. And notice this, we cannot enjoy the play at all unless it is having the same effect upon us as it is having upon all the other members of the audience around us.

We have to share the feelings of a great many other people to enjoy a play properly, and this in itself is a good thing, particularly these days, when to many people, usually living in large cities, feel cut off and separate and lonely. To enjoy the

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Theatre we have to join it; and we feel better after it in the same way (though to a less degree). That we feel better after attending some great public meeting.

Now all this business of being part of an audience, which is essential to the Theatre, is very important. But it still leaves unexplained what the Theatre has to offer its spectators that other public gatherings and other forms of amusement cannot offer them. Is there some kind of experience that we enjoy at a play and nowhere else? And it there is – then what is it? This is a question easy to ask, but as we know from the work of dramatic critics and theorists at many different times who have asked themselves the same question, very difficult to answer adequately. Now we will try.

A theatrical production consists of a member of players acting imaginary characters. Here are two quite different elements – the real actors, the imaginary characters. We have to accept them both; and this is where theorists of dramatic art have gone wrong, for they have generally accepted one to the exclusion of the other. And this simply will not work as the following reasons show.

If we say we go to the play only to follow the fortunes of the imaginary characters, then we have to assume, what certainly is not true, that we do not know we are in a playhouse, looking at and listening to actors.

If we go to the other extreme, as some critics have done, and say we go to the play for the acting, then what becomes of the play itself, the imaginary life of its characters? Why should these unreal people and what happens to them have any interest for us, when we know it is all make-believe, just so many actors performing?

Nearly all theorists of the drama have been baffled by this dilemma, simply because they have assumed that the experience offered us by the theatre must be based on either the imaginary life of the play or on the reality of the performance.

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And clearly it cannot be, both elements must contribute to the experience, which is complex, involving two different levels of mind. One level is accepting the imaginary life of the play and its characters. The other level is concerned with the actual presentation of the play, with theatre, stage, actors, scenery, lighting and effects.

A very young child generally cannot accept the experience, assumes that what is happening in the stage is real, and is either frightened or bored, wanting to run up and down the aisle to play. A year or two later, the same child may be enchanted, eagerly following the fortunes of the characters and yet at the same time being tremendously conscious of sitting snugly in the theatre with Mummy and Daddy. It is this eager responsiveness on both levels that makes children such a splendid audience. Adults who have completely forgotten their childhood, who have allowed all wonder and imagination to wither away, who are really incapable of making this double response, are never keen playgoers and usually dislike Theatre.

This, then, is dramatic experience, the result of an appeal to two different levels of the mind and off corresponding response on both levels. And as on one level we are fully conscious of being in a theatre, watching and listening to actors, it follows that on this level we accept whatever convention of theatrical writing, production and acting may be in vogue; that all drama depends upon some convention – a generally accepted pretense that something is something else. There are, many different kinds of convention as we shall see; but all of them have and always have had one central purpose – to offer audience that unique type of experience which we can call dramatic experience. It is to provide this that the Theatre exists. What must be remembered is that acting, like everything belonging to the Theatre, has a double aspect: the actor must be the character he is playing and also himself.

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Without some truth to life, the costume comedy would not be engrossing: without some theatrical artificiality, the realistic play could not hold our attention. The Theatre must always be what we should never be-two-faced.

PRACTICE 2.

1. Comprehension check:
   a) What can the theatre offer that the cinema can't – and vice versa?
   b) Why do you think the theatre is so important in the lives of people?
   c) Does the author's statement that "we have to share the feelings of a great many other people to enjoy a play properly" sound convincing? Why?
   d) What is essential on the part of the audience to enjoy the theatre?
   e) Do you agree that the theatre possesses a "dual nature"? Prove your point of view.
   f) What does the author want to inform the readers of as for as truth of life and theatrical artificiality are concerned?
2. Find in the text the arguments the author puts forward to prove the following points. Ad your own arguments.
   a) The theatre is a special kind of pleasure and amusement.
   b) To enjoy the theatre we have to join it.
   c) The theatre is a two-levelled phenomenon based on the imaginary life of the play and on the reality of the performance.
   d) Children are a splendid theatre audience.
   e) Careful rehearsing is necessary to produce any serious work in the theatre.
   f) Special training is necessary for actors.
   g) Acting possesses a double aspect.
3. Comment on the memorable quotes.
   a) Ars longa, vita brevis (Art is long, life is short). Seneca.

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b) All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. W. Shakespeare
c) They are our raw material. We are the meaning of their lives. We take their silly little emotions and turn them into art, out of them we create beauty, and their significance is that they form the audience we must have to fulfil ourselves. They are the instruments on which we play, and what is an instrument without somebody to play on it? W.S. Maugham.
d) … is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her?
W. Shakespeare

4. "I much prefer going to the theatre to visiting the cinema, because the performance is live and the people are real."
Write an essay giving your opinions based on the statement above. Say whether you prefer the cinema to the theatre and give reasons for your preference.

READING 3.

Dictionary of the theatre.

Read through this brief overview of some of the major theatrical schools and movements of the 20th century which looks at their origins, nature and ideas and the key personalities associated with them.

a) Stanislavsky, Konstantin Sergeyevich (1865-1938) Russian director, actor and teacher, one of the most important

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theorists of the 20th century theatre. From the first Stanislavsky strove in his productions for an easy, realistic style of acting and a careful naturalism in sets and costumes, rejecting the histrionic style of acting in vogue in Russia at the time. In 1898 he founded the Moscow Art Theatre in partneship with Nemirovich-Danchenko. His greatest triumphs as a director were his productions of Chekhov's plays, starting with "The Seagull" in 1898. Chekhov's writing matching Stanislavsky's chosen style of production perfectly, calling as it does for a detailed realistic production which yet has glints of poetry, depending more for its effect on atmosphere and psychological suggestion than on detailed literal re-creation. In fact, during the 1900s Stanislavsky came to place less emphasis on the naturalistic externals, and more on the actor's development of character. Stanislavsky had a great influence on the theatre outside Russia, especially in America. The emphasis of his teachings has been partly misunderstood, because only "An Actor Prepares", in which he concentrates mainly on the psychology of acting rather than on technique, was easily available. His later books correct this with a powerful insistence on the importance of style, and of matching the style to the role and fitting the role into the production as a whole.

b) American adaptation of Stanislavsky's teachings ("Method") was stressing mainly the building of the role rather than the technical side of its presentation. The leading idea here is the complete losing of the actor in the role. The chief exponents of the Method (Lee Strasberg and others) place great emphasis on improvisation and exercises to improve the actor's gifts of empathy, and the usual criticism of Method-trained actors is that they neglect diction and are limited to naturalistic acting.

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c) Meyerhold, Vsevolod (1874-1940), Russian actor and director of primarily experimental interests. He was elaborating and putting into practice his own version of Gordon Craig's ideas, which reduced the role of the actor to a mere cog in the wheel of the director's vehicle, to a sort of director's puppet. During the 1920s he had his own theatre, where he developed Bio-mechanics, a system of dramatic training which involved a considerable amount of almost acrobatic physical exercise and a detailed study of all the body's mimetic possibilities. His most brilliant productions at this time were two later plays by Mayakovsky, 'The Bed Bug' and 'The Bath House". In the 30s, with the institution of socialist realism as the official style of Soviet theatre, he fell increasingly out of favour and his theatre as closed in 1938.

d) Brecht, Bertolt (1898-1956), German dramatist, poet, director and theoretician. Brecht's importance made itself felt in two ways: through the production of his plays' and through the increasing influence of his theories about the theatre. His plays can be divided into four periods – romantic-nostalgic, didactic, more generally humanist, and again didactic – though in fact all the elements are present to a greater or lesser extent at all periods of his career. It seems safe to say that all the works by which he will survive as a dramatist date from the third period. Characters like Mother Courage, the indomitable survivor of the Thirty years War, or Galileo, or Shen Teh, the good-hearted woman of Setzuan, and the ruthless alter ego she has to create in order to survive in a capitalist world, are so fully imagined, so felt as intricate and contradictory human beings, that they escape all rigid formulations of their social and political significance.

As a theorist Brecht's most telling influence has been counterbalancing Stanislavsky as misunderstood by his

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American Method disciples. Instead of the complete absorption of the actor in his role Brecht demanded the retention of a critical distance: the actor should not attempt just to be the character, to present it entirely from the inside, but, while understanding psychological workings, to present it in such a way as to imply an attitude towards it. Thus the audience, instead of identifying with characters in the drama, are encouraged to remain sufficiently outside what is happening on the stage to judge it critically to Brecht "the essential point of the epic theatre is that it appeals less to the spectator's feelings than to his reason". One of the principal ideas in Brecht's "theory" of drama, is this "Alienation effect", which requires the audience and actors to retain a degree of critical detachment from play and performance.

e) Beckett, Samuel (1906-1989), Irish dramatist and novelist, most of whose later works were written originally in French. It was his plays initially which established his international reputation. "Waiting for Godot", first performed in Paris in 1953, was rapidly performed all over the world and became unexpectedly a great popular success. It is an elusive tragic farce about two tramps forever awaiting the arrival of the mysterious Godot, who will in some unexplained way make everything different but who never comes. Exemplifying as it does the existential absurdity of man's situation, the play became one of the cornerstones of the Theatre of the Absurd. The term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950s who did not regard themselves as a school but who all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of man in the universe: essentially those summarized by Albert Camus in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus". This diagnoses humanity's plight as purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings (absurd literally means out of harmony). Awareness of this lack of purpose in all we do-

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Sisyphus, for ever rolling a stone up a hill, for ever aware that it will never reach the top, is the perfect type-figure here – produces a state of metaphysical anguish which is the central theme of the writers in the Theatre of the Absurd, most notably Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Jenet, Arthur Adamov. The ideas are allowed to shape the form as well as the content: all semblance of logical construction, of the rational linking of ideas with idea in an intellectually viable argument, is abandoned, and instead the irrationality of experience is transferred to the stage. Beckett's play "Happy Days" seemed to represent the farthest refinement possible in his dramatic method, being virtually a monologue for a woman who is progressively buried alive till in the last act only her head is visible. But in "Play", first performed in 1963, even such remote concession to theatrical conventions disappear: here there are three characters, heads protruding from urns, and each speaks only when a shaft of light hits his or her face, the whole text being played through twice in twenty minutes. "Come and go" (1965) also has three characters (female), a minimum of action, and indeed a minimum of everything else, running for only three minutes and containing only 121 words of dialogue.

PRACTICE 3.

1. Analysis and comprehension check:

a) Comment on the comparative importance of the notions "catharsis" and "empathy" for different theatrical movements.

Note: Catharsis – Aristotelian concept of tragedy's function as a purgation by pity and terror. it is a way of getting rid of strong emotions, fears, tension, or unhappy memories that you have, especially by expressing them in some way (e.g. talking about them openly).

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EMPATHY: the ability to share another person's feelings and emotions as it they were your own. You empathize with someone because you understand their situation, problems and feelings, perhaps because the situation that they are in is one which you have been in yourself.

Were they of equal importance for Stanislavsky's method, in the Epic theatre, the Theatre of Absurd, etc?

b) Why is Stanislavsky's Method best adapted to the productions of Chekhov's plays?
c) What is the role of the actor in Meyerhold's Bio-mechanics?
d) What is the essence of the art of acting as developed by the leading figures of different theatrical schools?
e) Explain the principal ideas in Brecht's theory of drama; the Theatre of the Absurd, Method.

2. Write a summary of Shakespeare's life and work. No household in the English-speaking world is property furnished unless it contains a copy of the Holy Bible and one of the Works of William Shakespeare. It is not always though necessary that these books should be read in maturer years, but they must be present as symbols of religion and English Culture.

Shakespeare has not always been so symbolic figure. He was an actor and a playwright, when neither actors nor the stage were regarded as respectable or of any importance. The notion that he was the supreme genius of the English Race did not begin until he had been dead more than a century; but since then it has become so firmly accepted that no schoolboy can avoid a detailed study of at least one of his plays.

THE FACTS.

26 April 1564: Baptised, Stratford. Son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden.

27 November 1582: Obtained a marriage licence, with Anne Hathaway.

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1583: Daughter, Susanna, born.
1585: Twins. Hammet and Judith, born.
1592: First mentioned as an actor and playwright, living on London.
1593/1594: Published two narrative poems, “Venus and Adonis” and “Rape of Lucrece”.
1594: A founder member of “The Chamberlain’s Men”, a group of actors.
1594/1595: Performed in front of Queen Elizabeth I.
1597: Bought a large house in Stratford.
1603: His acting company became “The King’s Men”, under the patronage of James I.
1611: probably retired to Stratford.
23 April 1616: Died. Stratford.
25 April 1616: Buried, Stratford.

Shakespeare wrote at least thirty seven plays, although few were published in his lifetime and the first eight didn’t even carry his name. Eighteen plays were published in his lifetime. The first collection (The First Folio) wasn’t published until 1623, seven years after his death, and contains thirty six plays.

He was a working actor, as well as a shareholder in London’s most important theatre, The Globe. He usually wrote for a specific group of actors, and as they grew older he wrote plays with older characters to suit them. There were no female actors, and boys took all the female parts in the plays.

1588- 1593	A Comedy of Errors
1592-1593	Richard III
1594-1596	Romeo and Juliet
1594-1596	A midsummer Night’s Dream.
1598-1599	Henry V
1599	Julius Caesar
1600-1601	Hamlet
1603-1604	Othello

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1605-1606	King Lear
1605-1606	Macbeth
1606-1607	Anthony and Cleopatra
1611	The Tempest

3. QUOTATIONS

There are many expression in modern English which have come from Shakespeare's plays. They have often been changed a little, modernized and used in a different way that Shakespeare intended. Here are some examples. Read through the modern sayings and match them with the original.

Source	Shakespeare's original	Modern saying
Henry IV Part 2	1. He hath eaten me out of house and home.	a) Love's blind
Hamlet	2. I must be cruel, only to be kind.	b) All the world's a stage.
Cymbeline	3. I have not slept one wink.	c) He's eaten me out of house and home!
Hamlet	4. A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.	d) That's cold comfort.
As You Like It	5. All the world's a stage. And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances.	e) Discretion is the better part of valour.
All's well that ends well.	6. All's well that ends well.	f) You've got to be cruel to be kind.
Hamlet	7. Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.	g) A rose by any other name … (would smell as sweet)
Romeo and Juliet.	8. What's in a name? That which we call a rose. By any other name would smell as sweet.	h) In my/the mind's eye.
The	9. But love is blind, and lovers	i) I haven't slept a

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Merchant of Venice	cannot see.	wink.
King Lear	10. The wheel is come full circle.	j) Neither a borrower nor a lender be.
Hamlet	11. The lady doth protest too much, methinks.	k) Methinks the lady doth protest too much.
King Lear	12. I am a man more sinned against than sinning.	l) (I did it) more in sorrow than in anger.
Henry IV Part I	13. The better part of valour is discretion.	m) Brevity is the soul of wit.
Hamlet	14. It is a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance.	n) Tell the truth and shame the devil.
Hamlet	15. Brevity is the soul of wit.	o) There's method in his madness.
Hamlet	16. Neither a borrower nor a lender be.	p) A custom more honoured in the breach than the observance.
Hamlet	17. In my mind's eye, Horatio.	q) The wheel has come full circle.
Henry IV Part I	18. O! While you live, tell truth, and shame the devil.	r) All's well that ends well.
King John	19. I beg cold comfort.	s) (He's) more sinned against than sinning.

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4. The theatre is one of the oldest of the arts. It goes back right into the time of the Ancient Greeks. Both the Greek and the Romans had theatrical performances that were very similar to ours. Choose any aspect of theatrical history and make a study of it. Here are some aspects of the subject that you could research:

a. Theatrical costume.
b. Greek or Roman theatre.
c. Old-time Music Hall.
d. The design of theatres.
e. Theatre in Shakespeare's time.
f. Training for the theatre.

Make notes on what you read and write a report based on your notes.

READING 4.

THEATRE REVIEWS

Do you ever read critics in newspapers or listen to what people say about films, plays, concerts, etc on radio or television? Do the opinions of critics affect you at all? If every critic said a play/a film was terrible, would that influence you not to go and see it? Discuss these questions as a class. As you read the reviews, work out their typical structure.

1)

"Sylvia", a new comedy by the American boulevard playwright A.R. Gurney opens with a neat theatrical conceit: middle-aged financier (Robin Ellis), living in Manhattan apartment, finds stray dog and bring her home. The twist is the dog is played by Zoë Wanamaker, who scampers round the room, sniffs the furniture, climbs over the cushions and shits behind the sofa. That's not in itself particularly funny. What is, is the way the financier talks to the dog and the dog talks back. One of the great platonic relationships has found its way on to the stage.

In Michael Blakemore's polished production, the casting is good too: many actresses can play bitches, but few are as well suited to play this sort as Wanamaker. She has the dog–eyes, the pixie-face and the endearing ski-jump nose. When she muzzles

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and wiggles and stares imploringly you want to throw her a bone.

Not least because she hasn't got much else to get her teeth into. Husband wants the dog. Wife doesn't. Marriage suffers. The elegantly disdainful Maria Aitken, who somewhat impobably teaches Shakespeare to inner-city schoolkids, has the thankless role of the complaining wife. Sylvia to her is Saliva. It was a risky joke for the playwright to have made.

Having put a fresh spin an the conventional spin on the conventional triangular relationship, Gurney lapses into sketch-like scenes: trip to Central Park, late-night walk, showdown with the wife, and-yes, this is Manhattan – a trip for the three of them to the marriage-guidance counsellor. Along the way, Gurney touches on mid-life crises, the dog as wife-substitute and urban man's need to get back in touch with nature. But the shows considerably less interest in these themes than Wanamaker shows sniffing round the lamp-post. We readily invest Wanamaker's Sylvia with human qualities, but when Wanamaker returns from the vet after being spayed-no joking matter , we imagine, for a dog – the scene is played for its winsome comedy. This complacency has more bark than bite.

2)

The playwright Peter Whelan is establishing himself as our leading exponent of speculative – or "what if" – drama. In "School of Night" he dramatised the mysterious circumstances Surrounding Christopher Marlowe's death in 1593. In "Divine Right" he made an 18-year-dd Prince William decide whether in the year 2000 he wanted to be King or not. (Answer: Not). In the "Herbal bed" he resurrects a case involving Shakespeare's elder daughter, Susanna.

There are two Whelans at work in these speculative plays. The first is a tough private eye who constructs crafty old-fashioned thrillers. The second is a schoolmaster who raises the tone of the proceedings with lofty themes and explanations.

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In “The Herbal Bed”, Whelan builds a remarkably convincing drama about puritanism and marital infidelity from only a few pieces of evidence. The central characters are not as intriguing as their situation. Shakespeare’s daughter, Susanna (the slightly vapid Teresa Banham), is married to a Stratford physician, John Hall (played with brisk importance by Liam Callaghan). In 1613 Susanna is publicly accused by a reckless young gentleman, Jack Lane (raffish David Tennant), of having been “naught” with a local haberdasher Rafe Smith (an earnestly infatuated Joseph Fiennes). Despite the fact that Lane recants, a charge of defamation is brought at the diocesan court at Worcester Cathedral. Cue courtroom drama.

Whelan’s masterstroke has been to make the allegations neither entirely true or entirely false. Susanna can survive with her dignity intact if she economical with the truth. She tells the slow-witted Fiennes: “It’s only a matter of what you leave out”.

The trouble is that the tight-lipped Vicar-General, Stephen Boxer, wants to hear all the facts. Boxer has great fun, menacingly sifting through documents and delivering dusty rebukes. Elsewhere, in Michael Attenborough’s enjoyably taut production, there’s a gemlike performance from Jay McInnes, the diminutive wide-eyed maid, around whom the whole cross-examination collapses. I’ve never seen anyone carry bedding across stage with a greater sense of purpose.

3)

Finally, in “The Power of the Dog” at the Orange Tree, Ellen Dryden has written a brooding, complex portrait of female relationships that centres on Vivien (Joan Moor), a successful schoolteacher. She has a brlliant, difficult pupil, a mother in a wheelchair, a bullying aunt and a manipulative cousin. It’s rare to see female relationships explored in this depth-even if, sometimes, this multifarious play becomes submerged in detail. Director Sam Walters evokes this acrid genteel world with characteristic precision.

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PRACTICE 4.

1. Analysis and appreciation.

a) Which of these reviews would you describe as favourable or unfavourable?

b) How does the critic evaluate the direction of the three productions?

c) What are the epithets chosen to characterise the acting?

d) Has the casting been adequate?

e) What is it that makes playwright Peter Whelan the leading exponent of speculative drama? What is "speculative" drama? Provide examples of the genre, if you can.

f) Can you reproduce the synopsis of any of the three plays described?

2. As you go through the synopses of Royal Shakespeare Company productions in the Theatre Guide, choose one you would rally like to see. Give intelligent reasons for your choice.

a) "As You like It" by William Shakespeare Banished from the court by her usurping uncle Frederick, Rosalind takes to the Forest of Arden with her cousin, Celia, and Touchstone, the Fool. Her exiled father, the old Duke, lives there already and (many young gentlemen flock to him every day and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world". Free from the treacherous machinations of court life, the forest's new inhabitants rediscover a world of natural innocence. Shakespeare's great rhapsody on love explores the possibility within each of us of a return to Eden.

b) "Macbeth" by W. Shakespeare.
A man and a woman destroy themselves and their country in the pursuit of power. Their ambition goads them on to break all moral boundaries even to the point of killing innocent children. With scenes of almost unimaginable horror,

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Shakespeare's remarkable play holds eternal fascination for actors and audiences alike.

c) "The White Devil" by John Webster.
As her passionate affair with a rich, married man heads towards a violent climax, Vittoria finds herself battling against a society bent on revenge. Disturbingly violent, Webstor's brilliantly compelling Jacobean thriller draws us into a blood-thirsty world of corruption, intrigue and murder.

d) "The herbal Bed" by Peter Whelan.
In June 1613, Shakespeare's elder daughter, Susanna is publicly accused of having a sexual liaison with a married neighbour, Rafe Smith. On July 15th she sued for slander in the court of Worcester Cathedral. Her husband, Stratford physician, John Hall, desperate for her to clear her name and protect his practice, gives her full support. But how can he avoid discovering that one summer's night while he was away, Rafe Smith was seen secretly leaving their herbal garden? "The Herbal Bed", based on actual events, is an emotional thriller in which three people's private lives are subjected to the glare of intense public scrutiny.

e) "The Learned Ladies" by Molière.
Henriette wants to marry Clitandre but Maman has other ideas for her younger daughter. Maman may be a boirgeois but she knows the power of enlightenment – Henriette is to marry a poet!
Her sister is no help – she once loved Clitandre but has renounced the pleasures of the flesh for the stimulation of her mind. The thought of losing Clitandre, however, disturbs her new minted certainties. Life vies with learning as the family falls to feuding. Molière's elegant and sharp satire punctures pomposity and pretension, and shows that there's no fool like a clever one!

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3. Role play.
   Stage a radio play.

Roles: John/Julie Brent – producer; Robert, played by actor William d'Arcy;
Kate, played by actress Amanda Redman;
John, played by actor Simon Wilson, and sound effects by Ted/Brenda Grey.

Look at the following script extract from a radio play.

Sound Effects 1 (not too loud)	Sound of 3 Knocks on door.
1. Robert: (puzzled) →	Who on earth can that be at this time of night?
2. Kate:	I'll go and see.
Sound Effects 2 (louder) →	Sound of 3 more knocks on door.
3. Kate: (loudly)	All right! All right! I'm coming!
Sound Effects 3	Sound of door opening.
4. Kate: (surprised)	There's no need to knock so … John! What on earth are you …?
5. John: (interrupting) (loudly)	Darling! I couldn't stand it! I had to come!
6. Kate: (urgently)	Keep your voice down! Robert's in there.
7. John: (Quiter)	I know. That's why I've …
8. Robert: (loudly in the distance)	Kate! Who is it?
9. Kate: (shouting)	Oh! … It's … it's only John!
10. Robert:	Well, don't keep him put there in the cold. Ask him to come in.
11. Kate: (Quietly)	Oh, John … we can't!
12. John: (softly)	Don't worry, darling. Leave it to me. Everything's going to be all right.
Sound Effects 4 (Fade in) →	Sound of drink (Fade out)
13. Robert: (in a friendly manner)	Ah! Hello, John! Just in time for a drink.
14. Kate: (sharply)	He's not staying!
15. Robert:	Of course he is! Since where has

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	John refused a drink? Whisky all right?
Sound Effects 5	Sound of drink being poured.
16. Ribert: (lodly and surprised)	Here you are … What! A gun? What on earth!
17. Kate: (shouting)	John! Are you mad?
18. John: (calmly)	No, Kate. I'm perfectly sane.
19. Robert: (anxiously and nervously)	Now, John … come along, old chap … put that gun away, eh?
20. Kate: (very loud)	John! Please!
21. John:	No, Kate. I love you and there's only one person stopping us being together.
22. Kate; (desperately)	John! Don't!
23. John: (lodly)	I must! Sorry, Robert, (softly) but you must see that …
24. Robert: (hysterically)	For God's sake, Kate! Do something!
25. Kate: (pleadingly)	John! Please! This won't get us anywhere …
Sound effects 6. Kate screams.	Loud gunshot. Sound of a scream. Then sound of Robert's body falling and the smashing of glass.
26. John: (calmly)	Now there's no one between us.
27. Kate: (angrily)	Oh, you fool! You stupid … stupid … stupid fool!
Sound effects 7 (Kate)	Loud crying. Fade out.

Each person chooses a role and reads through the corresponding role card. The role-play is divided into two parts.

Script reading/Rehearsal:

1) The producer goes through the script with the actors, telling them how he/she wants the various lines read. This could be done in 2 parts – speeches 1-12, then 13-17.
   Each actor makes notes.
2) Then the actors look through their scripts while the producer goes through the sound effects with the sound effects

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man/woman. It is a good idea to practice a few sound effects, e.g. glass smashing, gun shot, etc.

3) The producer goes through speeches 1-12, then 13-27 with the actors and sound effects man/woman. If the producer thinks the actors have not said a line as he wants, he makes them stop and repeat it until it is said properly.

Recording.

Since this is supposed to be a 'live' recording, the producer cannot stop the actors doing it.

1. The actors read through the play. If mistakes are made they have to carry on! The producer listens and makes notes of anything she/he is not happy with. (If possible, a real recording should be made).
2. After the recording, the producer tells the actors what he/she thinks and points out any mistakes. But the actors do not have to agree with the producer!

The sound effects man/woman:

Work out ways of making various effects required. Here are some suggestions:

Fade in	- turn the volume control of the tape-recorder up gently.
Fade out	- turn the volume control slowly back to silence.
Doors	- use a cupboard or a classroom door.
Gun shot	- hit a desk very hard with a ruler. Do it very near the microphone.
Breaking glass	- drop some small metal objects on the floor.
Pouring drinks	- use a bottle of water and a glass. Strike the bottle lightly against the glass before pouring.

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Role Cards.

a) Julie Brent/John Brent Aged 49

You are he producer. It is up to you to tell the actors how you want the script read. You have been a producer for 29 years and feel you know what you are talking about. You lose your temper easily, especially when things go wrong! You do not like the people who disagree with you. You also call everyone ‘Darling’!

b) William D’Arcy Aged 40

You are actor. You are reading the part of Robert in the play. You have worked with the producer before and do not like him/her very much. You have been an actor for 15 years and do not like to be told how to say your lines. You tend to argue with the producers. You also like using the phrase, “I have acted before, you know!”

c) Amanda Redman Aged 22

You are an actress. You are reading the part of Kate in the play. This is your first radio play and you are very excited and nervous. You want to do everything the way the producer tells you. You keep saying “Thank you” to him or “I’m awfully sorry!” when you make a mistake.

d) Simon Wilson Aged 30

You are an actor. You are reading the part of John in the play. You have been an actor for 8 years, but this is only your second radio play. You want to go on working in radio, and so you try your best to do as the producer asks. Unfortunately, you speak too loud and find it hard to speak any quieter. (Actually, you are slightly deaf).

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e) Brenda Grey/Ted Grey Aged 52

You are in charge of sound effects. You have been doing this for more than 25 years and do not like a producer trying to tell you what to do. You disagree with everything he/she says ‘on principle’, and keep saying, “If you want it like that, then do it yourself!” You also have a slight problem – you are sometimes a little slow in bringing in the sound effects.

Here are some useful phrases

For the producer:
Right, everyone, let’s go through the script.
That’s good/That was terrible/dreadful!
No, not like that! Try it again!
That’s better!
Haven’t you ever acted before?
Put more life into it!
Back to speech (21)
Good luck!

For the actors:
How do you want me to say it?
How about saying it like this instead?
Was that right?
What was wrong with it?
I’m sorry. I’ll try it again.
Sorry. I can’t seem to get it.
How was that?
Can we go over speech (14) again, please?

4) Write an unfavourable review for the radio play that you have listened to. You may criticize in particular an individual member of the cast, stating that he/she has given the worst performance in his/her career.

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5) Write a review for the play that you have recently seen. include in your review all or most of the following points:
   - the title of the play
   - the playwright/the director
   - the genre
   - the synopsis of the play
   - the theme
   - the sets, the costumes
   - the cast
   - the direction
   - the acting
   - evaluation

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Акулич Людмила Давыдовна

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