



Young Critics Resource Suite
Workshop 4

**“Detective Work”:
Researching the
Production**

Workshop Duration

This workshop should take around one hour to deliver. However, this will depend on the size of your group and their responses to the research material.

Resources

Refer to the *Sample Research Pack* in the 'Preparing to See the Show' section of this resource suite.

To help ensure that your group are prepared for their visit to the theatre, have a look at the resources in 'The Theatre Experience' section of the suite. If participants haven't been to the theatre before, it is a good idea to familiarise them with the 'Top Tips for Being a Good Audience Member' contained in that section.

Preparation and Materials

There is some advance preparation. You need to gather research materials on the production and group them under the following headings:

A: The Creatives (i.e. the cast and crew)

B: Theatrical & Historical Context (this will not apply if you are attending a production of a new play)

C: The Theatre Company's History

D: Visual Clues

E: The Play and its Characters

Suggested Research Material:

Copies of the production programme (if available). You will need to break the programme into the following sections:

- The biographies of cast and crew - The Creatives. (A)
- Production Notes - Theatrical Context. (B)
- Biography of the theatre company producing the play - Company History. (C)

In addition to the programme:

- Find any material on the author of the play. This can include biographical details, but also titles of other plays, their themes and production histories. (A)
- Information on the production history of the play (i.e. has it been produced before and by whom) - Historical Context. (B)
- Information on the historical context in which the play was written/set/originally performed. (B)

- Additional biographical material on the producing company. The company website is a good place to start. (C)
- Full colour production shots from the production under discussion, printed (and laminated if possible) on A4 sheets. (D)
- Any promotional material for this current production, including posters, flyers, features and cast interviews (these are additional and not essential but should not include any reviews.) (D)
- If it is a known play, include a full and accurate synopsis of the play, including descriptions of major characters. (E)
- Some material you find may not fit into any of these categories so be creative with how you use it. Remember a lot more companies are using digital marketing resources, short teaser trailers on social media etc. This kind of material can be particularly engaging for the group.
- Don't worry if you can't find a lot of material on a particular play or company, it may not exist. It is always a good idea to contact the company and/or venue to see if they can provide you with material. If they know you are bringing a sizeable group, they may be very eager to make the experience as rewarding as possible. Don't be afraid to ask!

When you have gathered your research material, organise it into packs according to the five headings provided (The Creatives, Theatrical & Historical Context, Company History etc.) Make copies of each of the packs so there is one pack for each participant in the group.

You will also need enough A4 sheets, felt tip pens and flip chart paper for your group.

Each participant will need their own critic's notebook and a pen before they go to the show. If possible, try and provide one for each of them.

The Workshop

Facilitator's Note

The group will need to be focused and calm going into this workshop. Start with some exercises you think will achieve this for your particular group.

Divide the group into five sub-groups and give each group one of the packs:

A: The Creatives

B: Theatrical & Historical Context

C: Company History

D: Visual Clues

E: The Play and its Characters

They will need enough time (15-20 mins) to work through the material and find out as much information as they can about the production. Give them felt tip pens and A4 sheets to take notes.

Facilitator's Note

The idea is that each group will be exploring a different aspect of the production. Don't worry if you don't have a lot of material to do the research. Use whatever you can get your hands on and make the packs accordingly. Your main objective is to get the participants interested in the production, they don't have to understand every aspect of it.

When selecting the groups, try and balance out the different personalities (participants who may be intellectual, quiet, talkative etc.) so there is a good mix in each group. When the group are choosing spokespersons, encourage those who haven't taken on the role previously to volunteer.

Allow the participants to make discoveries for themselves rather than providing them with answers. However, you can float between groups and prompt discussion when necessary.

Let them know when time has nearly elapsed so they can capture any last thoughts. Ask each group to nominate a spokesperson to present their findings. Then, invite the groups to create a circle. The group who had the 'A: Creatives Pack' present first, followed by B, C etc.

After each spokesperson has finished presenting, summarise their findings and draw attention to anything you feel is important they may have missed.

After all the groups have taken their turn, you can lead a short open discussion on any key findings and also look at broader questions such as:

*Why do you think a theatre company would produce this play now?
What does a play like this have to say about our society in 2018?*

At the end of the exercise, the group should have a good understanding of the play they will be attending. Hopefully they will be excited about it too!

Give each participant their critic's notebook and pen.

Facilitator's Note:

Providing notebooks and pens is a small but important step. On a very practical level, it ensures participants have the materials to take notes, but it also prepares them to enter the theatrical space in a manner different from casual audience members. It emphasises that the job of the critic is not just writing after the fact, but watching perceptively and taking careful notes.

Have a chat with the group about why notes are important. They help the critic to keep track of thoughts as they have them, so they don't have to waste brainpower

trying to remember each and every thought. Notes can help provide an early structure for the critical response; there may be an insight that comes to them during the performance that becomes a key focus for their deeper reflection.

Another point to emphasise is that note taking, although necessary for a critic, can be disruptive to both fellow audience members and the performers, and that discretion is a valuable skill to cultivate.



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