

imitating the dog: Adaptation – Practical Exercises

Practical Exercises for A Level Drama & Theatre, English Literature, and BTEC Performing Arts

Introduction

imitating the dog has adapted a wide range of classic literary and cinematic texts – including *Macbeth, Frankenstein, Dracula, Heart of Darkness*, and *War of the Worlds* – into productions that use live cinema, projection mapping, live cameras, fragmented staging, and contemporary political framing. These exercises are built around ITD's approach to adaptation: finding what a classic text is really about, stripping away assumptions about how it should look and feel, and rebuilding it using the theatrical and technological tools available to the company.

The exercises work best when students have some familiarity with at least one ITD production and with the source text being adapted. They can be used individually or sequentially. A suggested 90-minute workshop structure using a selection of these exercises is included at the end of this document.

Before beginning, it is worth reading, or asking students to read, the essay "Screens, Bodies and Stories: Technology as Scenography in ITD's Work" (Section 2), which provides the conceptual grounding for the exercises here.

Key terms: Mediation, multimedia performance, live cinema, projection mapping, foley, Brechtian theatre and the Verfremdungseffekt. These and other terms used in the exercises are defined in the Key Terms section at the end of this document.



Frankenstein (2024)

Exercise 1: "Translate the Text"

ITD connection: In every ITD adaptation, the first question is: what does this text become when you remove all assumptions about how it should be staged? The company starts not from the stage directions but from the emotional and dramatic content of a scene, then rebuilds it entirely using their own theatrical vocabulary.
Aim: Students identify the emotional and dramatic core of a scene from a classic text, then redesign it using ITD's toolkit rather than naturalistic staging.

Choose a short extract from a classic text. Suggested options:

- *Macbeth:* the dagger soliloquy (Act 2, Scene 1)
- *Frankenstein:* the creation scene
- *Dracula:* the arrival at the castle
- *War of the Worlds:* the narrator's first encounter with the Martians
- *Heart of Darkness:* Kurtz's final scene

Working individually or in pairs, students should:

- Identify the emotional beats and dramatic turning points in the scene
- Remove all original staging assumptions (setting, blocking, costume, dialogue delivery)
- Redesign the scene using at least two of the following: projection, live camera, soundscape, split or simultaneous action, miniature models, pre-recorded video
- Write a brief director's concept note explaining their choices (200–300 words)

Making challenge:
Students present a "director's concept pitch" for their adaptation, verbally or as a written document with rough sketches or diagrams. They should be able to explain what each technological or staging choice is doing for the meaning of the scene, not just its appearance.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- What becomes more powerful in your version? What gets lost?
- Why might ITD choose multimedia staging over naturalism for this scene?
- What does the technology you've chosen add that live performance alone couldn't?

Assessment objective: OCR AO1 (practical exploration of methodology); Edexcel knowledge and understanding of practitioner methods applied to a performance text.

Exercise 2: Live Cinema Workshop

ITD connection: In productions including *The Zero Hour, A Farewell to Arms, Macbeth,* and *War of the Worlds*, ITD creates film live in front of the audience. The audience watches both the making and the result simultaneously: the camera crew operating on stage, and the projected footage on the screen above. This is the exercise most directly replicating ITD's working method.

Aim: Students experience the basic structure of live cinema first-hand and discover what changes when a scene is simultaneously performed and filmed.

In groups of four:

- One student performs a scene or monologue (from a classic text or devised)
- One operates a smartphone camera
- One creates foley sound (using objects to produce sounds matching the action – clothing, props, surfaces)
- One manipulates props or a small model environment live

Stage the scene as a live film sequence. The camera footage should be projected (via a laptop/Zoom or equivalent) or, if projection isn't available, screened on a second device visible to the audience. Run the scene at least twice: once with the audience watching only the live performance, and once watching only the projected result.

Making challenge:

Groups develop a 2–3-minute live cinema sequence from a chosen classic text scene. They should make deliberate choices about what the camera films and what it doesn't, what the foley emphasises, and whether the camera operators are visible to the "audience" within the world of the piece.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- Which version feels more "real": the live performance or the projected result? Why?
- Does seeing the construction change how you respond to the scene?
- What does mediation (the process of filming and projecting) do to the story?
- In ITD's *Macbeth*, the witches operate the cameras. What effect does that have on how we understand the relationship between the cameras and the characters being filmed?

Assessment objective: OCR AO1 and AO2; Edexcel devising skills; BTEC professional practice (collaborative roles, technical operation).



Macbeth (2023): the witches operating cameras

› For how ITD's own version of this system is wired together, see Video Design and Projection Mapping – Technical Plan and Music and Sound Design – Technical Plan (both Section 3).

Exercise 3: Fragmented Narrative

ITD connection: ITD frequently uses non-linear storytelling, overlapping media, and simultaneous perspectives. In *War of the Worlds*, the protagonist's hallucinatory world and the hospital reality run alongside each other. Fragmentation places the audience in the position of constructing the story rather than simply receiving it.
Aim: Students experience how fragmenting a familiar narrative changes what it means and who it invites the audience to become.

Take a scene from a classic text and divide its content across the following simultaneous or sequential channels:

- Live speech (some of the original text, performed directly)
- Projected text (stage directions, internal thoughts, or contradicting narration shown on a screen)
- Recorded or live audio (a memory, a voice from another time or place, ambient sound)
- Physical action (non-verbal movement that may contradict or run parallel to the text)

Groups reconstruct the scene so the audience has to piece together the full picture themselves. At least one channel should be in tension with,rather than simply illustrating, the others.

Making challenge:
Present the fragmented version to another group. That group describes what they understood the scene to be "about", not the plot, but the meaning. Compare their reading with the group's intention.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- What does the audience gain when they have to construct the narrative themselves?
- What do they lose?
- Why might ITD prefer this approach over a linear retelling?

Assessment objective: All boards: analysis of theatrical style and conventions; understanding of how form and structure shape meaning for an audience.

Exercise 4: "What Does Technology Add?" Debate

ITD connection: ITD is sometimes criticised for allowing technology

Aim: Students develop their ability to evaluate the use of technology in theatre through structured debate, generating material directly useful for evaluative writing.

After watching clips or trailers from ITD productions, students debate the proposition:

"Technology deepens emotional engagement in theatre."

One side argues for: immersion, cinematic scale, visual metaphor, the ability to show what language cannot, access to interiority through close-up.
The other side argues against: emotional distance, audience distraction, loss of liveness, spectacle displacing character, the mediated image feeling "safer" than the live body.

After the debate, students write a short evaluative paragraph (150–200 words) taking a position and supporting it with specific reference to at least one ITD production.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- Did the debate change your initial position?
- What would ITD's own answer to this question be, based on what you've read and seen?
- Is "emotional engagement" the right measure of what technology adds to theatre?

Assessment objective: OCR AO4 (analytical and evaluative record); Edexcel Component 3 (live theatre evaluation); Eduqas evaluative writing components.

Exercise 5: Multimedia Stage Directions

ITD connection: When ITD's writers and directors approach a scene, they think in terms of projection cues, camera angles, sound events, and the relationship between what the live body does and what the screen shows. Rewriting stage directions as multimedia instructions trains students to think from inside ITD's theatrical language.
Aim: Students shift from thinking like literary analysts to thinking like theatre-makers working in ITD's vocabulary.

Take a short scene or key moment from a classic text. Rewrite the stage directions entirely as multimedia instructions, removing all conventional theatrical assumptions. For example:

Instead of: "Thunder and lightning. Enter Macbeth."

A multimedia version might read:

- Projection: the room dissolves into static, then into a flickering CCTV image of an empty staircase
- Sound: heartbeat, slowing. A distant voice, barely audible: "Is this a dagger…"
- Camera: close-up on hands, shaking slightly, fingers opening and closing
- Live action: the performer crosses the stage with their back to the audience, moving toward the camera
- Edit: cut to close-up of the performer's face on the screen above – eyes fixed, expression unreadable

Making challenge:
Students swap their multimedia stage directions with a partner, who then stages them exactly as written. The original writer observes and notes the gap between their intention and the result. Discussion follows: what did the language not capture? What would ITD's rehearsal process do to close that gap?

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- What does writing in this form reveal about the scene that conventional stage directions don't?
- What is hardest to capture in multimedia stage directions?
- How does this exercise change how you read stage directions in other texts?

Assessment objective: Edexcel and OCR: understanding of how theatrical style and conventions are realised in practice; design pathway skills.



Heart of Darkness (2018)

Exercise 6: "Visible Mechanics"

ITD connection: A defining feature of ITD's work is that the theatrical machinery is visible: camera operators and prop handlers operate in plain sight of the audience. This is a deliberate Brechtian choice: by showing how the illusion is made, ITD asks the audience to think about what illusions are being constructed and why.

Aim: Students discover what changes when the machinery of theatre is exposed rather than hidden, and what that exposure communicates.

Create a short scene – either from a classic text or devised – in which:

- Costume or prop changes happen visibly, in front of the audience
- Sound effects are created live and in view
- Camera operators (if used) are seen operating their cameras
- At least one moment makes the construction of the scene explicitly visible

The scene should still tell a story. The visible mechanics should add a layer of meaning, not make the scene incoherent.

Making challenge:
After performing the scene, the group discusses: when did the visible machinery add something, and when did it get in the way? What decisions would they make differently?

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- Why show the artifice? What does the audience gain by seeing the construction?
- Does this approach alienate the audience from the story, or draw them closer to it?
- How does this connect to Brecht's theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* (the alienation effect)?
- In *Macbeth*, the witches operate the cameras and are both characters in the story and visible technicians. How does that double role work?

Assessment objective: All boards: understanding of the relationship between practitioners' methods and their theatrical and political aims; connections to other practitioners (Brecht).

Exercise 7: Miniature World Building

ITD connection: ITD frequently uses scale models and miniature environments filmed live and projected at scale, most extensively in *War of the Worlds*, where everyday objects become set elements in the protagonist's hallucinatory world. Filming miniatures at close range and projecting them at large scale collapses the distinction between the intimate and the epic.

Aim: Students experience how scale and the camera's relationship to physical objects can transform meaning.

Groups build a miniature set or environment from a classic text using whatever materials are available: cardboard, paper, household objects, found materials. The set should represent a key location in the source text.

Once built, groups film the miniature set using a smartphone camera, exploring different angles, distances, and framings. Then, with one or more performers interacting live alongside the miniature (at a different scale), film sequences that place the live body in relationship to the miniature world.

If projection is available, project the footage while the live interaction is happening. If not, screen the footage on a second device.

Making challenge:
Groups devise a 2–3-minute scene that uses the miniature set as a central element, with the relationship between live performer and filmed miniature doing work for the meaning of the scene.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- What does filming a miniature at close range do that a full-scale set cannot?
- In *War of the Worlds*, why might ITD have chosen miniature environments to represent the protagonist's hallucinatory world?
- How does working at miniature scale change the relationship between the audience and the story?

Assessment objective: Edexcel and Eduqas: design pathway skills; understanding of how design choices convey meaning.



War of the Worlds (2026)

› Abby Clarke describes designing the miniature worlds and Pepper's ghost set-up for *War of the Worlds* in Set and Costume Design: Abby Clarke interview (Section 3).

Exercise 8: The Camera as Character

ITD connection: In ITD's *Macbeth*, the witches operate the cameras throughout the production, which means the cameras are not neutral recording devices but active participants in the story, aligned with particular forces (fate, power, surveillance). In *The Zero Hour*, the Chinese camera crews who filmed the European historical action were themselves a kind of character: a perspective, a presence, a point of view. The camera in ITD's work is never just a camera.
Aim: Students explore what happens when the camera is given an intentional, character-like presence within a scene, and how that presence shapes the meaning of what it films.

In groups, set up a simple scene between two or three performers. One student operates a smartphone camera throughout. The camera operator is given one of the following behavioural roles: they should not announce it, but embody it through how they move, frame, and attend:

- A judge: observing the scene from a position of authority, filming what confirms a pre-existing verdict
- A friend: aligned with one character, following their perspective, filming what that character notices
- Fate or destiny: knowing what will happen before it does, framing moments of significance before they occur
- A surveillance system: mechanical, indifferent, recording everything with equal weight
- A manipulator: actively intervening, moving closer when it shouldn't, cutting away at moments of vulnerability

Run the scene several times with different camera roles. Project or screen the footage after each run. The watching group should try to identify which role the camera was playing, and explain how they read it from the footage.

Making challenge:
Groups develop a short scene in which the camera's role is a deliberate and legible part of the piece: the audience should be able to tell not just that there is a camera, but whose side it is on and what it wants. The camera role should connect to the themes of the source material being used.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- In ITD's *Macbeth*, why are the witches given the cameras? What does that choice say about the relationship between fate, power, and observation?
- Can a camera ever be truly neutral? What does ITD's work suggest about this question?
- How does giving the camera a "character" change what the audience does with the footage they see?
- How does this exercise connect to debates about surveillance, power, and who controls the image in everyday life?

Assessment objective: All boards: artistic intention; understanding of how staging and design choices convey meaning; OCR and Eduqas: connections to practitioners' political and theatrical aims.



The Zero Hour (2012)

› Morgan Bailey describes what operating a camera while performing actually demands in Performing in a Digital Environment: Morgan Bailey interview (Section 3).

Exercise 9: Love Beyond Representation

ITD connection: In *A Farewell to Arms*, ITD removed the cameras entirely for the Switzerland section of the novel: the section in which the two central characters find temporary sanctuary from the war. Something about that private human experience seemed to resist being filmed. ITD's decision not to mediate that section was as deliberate as every decision to use the camera elsewhere. This exercise explores that limit: what kinds of experience resist being captured by technology, and what does that resistance reveal?

Aim: Students discover through practical experiments where the limits of mediation lie, and what ITD's choice to remove the cameras in *A Farewell to Arms* communicates about intimacy, authenticity, and the relationship between technology and human experience.

Create an intimate or emotionally significant scene: a reconciliation, a farewell, a moment of grief, a declaration of feeling. It should involve genuine emotional stakes for the characters involved.

Perform the scene twice in full:

Version 1: With full ITD technology – projection, live cameras, foley, music. Use the technology thoughtfully, as ITD would: not as decoration but as a way of getting closer to the emotional truth of the scene.

Version 2: Strip everything away. No cameras, no projection, no sound design. Just the live bodies in the room, performing the scene with no mediation at all.

Making challenge:
After both versions, the watching group discusses which felt more powerful and why. Then the performing group discusses which version felt more powerful to make. These answers may not be the same, and that gap is itself worth examining. Groups then write a short reflection (200 words) on what the experiment revealed about the relationship between technology and emotion.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- Which version felt more emotionally powerful, for the audience, and for the performers? Did they differ?
- Why did ITD remove the cameras for the Switzerland section of *A Farewell to Arms?* What does that decision say about the limits of what technology can do?
- Is there a difference between technology that gets closer to emotional truth and technology that distances us from it? How do you tell the difference?
- Are there kinds of human experience that theatre should not try to mediate? Who gets to decide?

Assessment objective: OCR AO4 and Edexcel evaluative components; all boards: analysis of artistic intention and the relationship between form and meaning.



A Farewell to Arms (2014)

Closing Discussion: "Respectful or Radical?"

A discussion and reflection activity. Works well as a closing activity at the end of a workshop or scheme of work, after students have engaged practically with several of the exercises above.

ITD Co-Artistic Director Pete Brooks has noted that some audiences find their work "scandalously disrespectful to classic texts."

Discussion question: Does radical adaptation keep classic texts alive, or does it distort them?

Students draw on examples from ITD's productions and from other adaptations they know. They should take a position and support it with specific evidence: this discussion generates strong material for evaluative writing.

Possible extension: students write a 200-word evaluative response to the proposition, referencing at least one ITD production and one other adaptation.

Suggested 90-Minute Workshop Plan

This plan uses a selection of the exercises above to create a coherent session. It works best for groups who have already seen or watched clips from an ITD production.

0–10 mins – Introduction: Brief introduction to ITD and the concept of adaptation as excavation (see Excavating Hidden Stories in Classic Texts (Section 4)). What are we looking for when we adapt a classic text?

10–30 mins – Exercise 5: Multimedia Stage Directions (individual, then swap with a partner). Establishes the vocabulary of ITD's theatrical language.

30–55 mins – Exercise 2: Live Cinema Workshop (groups of four). The central practical activity: – students experience ITD's method firsthand.

55–70 mins – Exercise 1: "Translate the Text" (pairs). Apply the learning from the Live Cinema Workshop to a specific scene from a classic text.

70–85 mins – Showing and discussion: Groups share their work. Discussion focused on what the technology added and what it changed.

85–90 mins – Closing Discussion: "Respectful or Radical?" Brief whole-group discussion as reflection and evaluation prompt.

For a longer session, Exercises 8 ("Camera as Character") and 9 ("Love Beyond Representation") work well as extended activities that move from technical to philosophical. Exercise 7 ("Miniature World Building") works well as a sustained afternoon activity if materials are prepared in advance.

Key Terms

Brechtian: Relating to the methods of German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), who wanted audiences to think critically rather than simply becoming absorbed in a story. Brecht made the construction of theatre visible, reminding audiences that they were watching something made, with a point of view. ITD's work shares this concern with exposing the mechanism.

Foley: Everyday sound effects (footsteps, doors, objects being handled) created to match the action. In ITD's productions, foley is recorded and triggered as part of the sound design.

Live Cinema: A form of theatre, associated with director Katie Mitchell, in which a film is shot, edited and screened live during the performance. ITD's work is often compared to Live Cinema but draws on a wider range of influences.

Mediation: A mediated image is one that has been processed and transmitted through a medium (a camera, a screen) rather than experienced directly. ITD's productions frequently place the live, unmediated body alongside the mediated image, and ask what the difference between them reveals.

Multimedia performance: Theatre that combines live performance with other media, such as projected film, live camera feeds, animation and recorded sound. ITD's productions place live performance and the projected image in a direct, active relationship.

Naturalism: A style of theatre that aims to recreate real life on stage as closely as possible, through realistic settings, costume, speech and behaviour. A naturalistic choice is one that resembles what we would expect to see or hear in real life.

Pepper's ghost: A Victorian stage illusion that uses an angled sheet of glass or film to make a brightly lit subject appear as a ghostly reflection floating in space. ITD used it in *War of the Worlds* to composite live performers into filmed shots.

Projection mapping: Shaping a projected video so it fits precisely onto the surface of an object or building, often to appear to transform it.

Scenography: The combined visual and spatial design of a production, encompassing set, lighting, costume, projection and sound, treated as a unified whole. In ITD's work, scenography is conceptually motivated from the earliest stages of making rather than being added to a finished piece of theatre. Each element carries meaning, not just atmosphere.

Verfremdungseffekt: Brecht's term, usually translated as the 'alienation' or 'distancing' effect (sometimes called distanciation). It describes techniques that interrupt the audience's absorption in the story, such as showing the stage machinery or having performers speak directly to the audience, so that they watch with a critical eye.

Published 2026 as part of imitating the dog's learning resources (Section 4: Try It Yourself). For the companion document on dramaturgical and critical approaches to adaptation, see Excavating Hidden Stories in Classic Texts (Section 4). For the theoretical context, see Screens, Bodies and Stories: Technology as Scenography in ITD's Work (Section 2).

For how these exercises link to GCSE, A Level and university specifications, see Curriculum Connections (Section 4).

Photography of *The Zero Hour, A Farewell to Arms, Heart of Darkness, Macbeth, Frankenstein* and *War of the Worlds*: Ed Waring.