

imitating the dog:

How to Watch an imitating the dog Production

A guide for students, teachers, and curious audiences

About this guide

imitating the dog (ITD) makes theatre unlike a lot of theatre you'll have seen. Its productions combine live performance with projected images, live cameras, real-time film editing, miniature environments, and sound worlds that move between recorded score and foley sound effects. If you've never seen this kind of work before, some of it can be disorienting at first: not because it's difficult, but because it asks you to watch differently.

This guide is designed to help you get the most from watching an ITD production, whether you're seeing it live for the first time, watching recorded material online, or using a production as a case study for A Level Drama, Film Studies, or related subjects. It covers what to pay attention to, how to read what you're seeing, and what questions to bring into the room with you.

At the end, there are questions for before, during, and after the show which you can adapt for any ITD production. For questions specific to a particular production, see the production-specific "What to Look Out For" document for that show.

What makes an ITD production different to watch

You're watching two things at once

In most ITD theatre productions, there are screens on stage – sometimes a large screen at the back, sometimes multiple screens at different positions. Live cameras (operated by performers or crew visible on stage) film what's happening and feed the footage to those screens in real time. This means that at any given moment you can watch:

- The live performers on stage – their bodies, their movements, their physical presence
- The projected footage on the screens above or around them – a processed, edited, cinematic version of the same performers

These two versions of the action are not the same. The camera frames, selects, and processes what it sees. It might show you a close-up of a performer's face – details you could never see from your seat – while the live body in front of you is doing something quite different in scale. It might show you something that happened a few seconds ago, or something that won't be visible live until a moment later.

There is no single “right” version to watch. The relationship between the two – live and screened, embodied and mediated (the body physically present in the room, versus the image processed through a camera) – is part of what the production is about.

The cameras and crew are part of the show

In most theatre, the technical crew are hidden: offstage, in the wings, in a lighting box at the back of the auditorium. In ITD’s productions, the cameras are operated on stage, in view of the audience. You will see camera operators moving around the performance space, framing shots, adjusting angles. You may see performers handling props or models in ways that don’t make immediate sense from where you’re sitting, but that make perfect sense on the screen above.

This visibility is deliberate: ITD wants you to see how the illusion is made. Some of this influence comes from the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, who argued that theatre should show its own construction rather than pretend to be a seamless slice of reality. When you can see the camera being pointed at a performer, you’re invited to think about the act of framing:about who is controlling the image and why.

The technology is always a metaphor

ITD does not use cameras and projection because they’re impressive or spectacular (although they often are both). The technology in an ITD production is always doing conceptual work. In *Macbeth*, the witches operate the cameras, connecting the idea of fate and prophecy with the act of filming and controlling the image. In *The Zero Hour*, Chinese camera crews filmed a European historical story, raising questions about who records history and from whose perspective. In *War of the Worlds*, the protagonist can’t see the cameras filming him, because his perception of reality has been distorted by ideology.



War of the Worlds (2026)



Macbeth (2023): the witches operating cameras

When you're watching an ITD production, always ask: what is the camera doing here, beyond filming the action? What does this particular piece of projection communicate that live performance alone couldn't?

The source text has been transformed, not illustrated

ITD adapts source texts radically. It is not interested in putting the original on stage in a different costume. ITD looks for what the original text is really about: what it's anxious about, what it avoids, whose perspective it excludes, and builds its production from that hidden content. Some characters are removed; new ones are invented. The time period might shift. Political or ideological dimensions of the source text that the original kept implicit are made explicit.

This means that if you know the source text well, you'll find it rewarding to track the choices ITD has made: what's been kept, what's been changed, what's been added, and why. But you don't need to know the source text to follow and enjoy the show.

What to pay attention to

The screens and the stage: reading the relationship

As you watch, notice the relationship between what's happening live and what's on the screens. They are not always showing the same thing at the same time. Ask:

- Is the screen showing you something the live performance can't – an interior state, a close-up, a perspective from a different angle or time?
- Are the live performance and the screen version telling the same story, or are they in tension with each other?
- When the camera focuses on a particular performer, what is that focus saying? Who is being watched, and what does being watched mean in this production?
- What happens at moments when the screens go dark, or when the live performance and the screen version suddenly come into alignment?

The cameras: who controls them, and what that means

If the show involves live camera feeds, pay attention to who operates the cameras at each moment of the production. In ITD's work, the relationship between who holds the camera and who is being filmed is almost always meaningful. Questions to ask:

- Do some characters get filmed while others don't? What might that distinction mean?
- Are the camera operators characters within the world of the production, or do they stand outside it?
- Do the characters being filmed seem aware of the cameras? What does it mean if they are, or if they aren't?
- Does the camera seem to be on anyone's side, or aligned with a particular character's perspective?

Sound and music

ITD's sound worlds are built from several layers: composed score, recorded sound, and the ambient or environmental sound of the production itself. These layers don't always line up. A scene might be visually calm while the soundscape is threatening; a moment of apparent chaos might be underscored with something quiet and internal.

- When does the sound feel naturalistic – like the sounds you'd expect to hear in that situation?
- When does it feel abstract – creating an atmosphere or emotional state rather than a realistic environment?
- What does the music make you feel, and how does that feeling relate to what you're seeing?
- If sound effects are created live on stage, what does watching them being made do to how you hear them?

Design: set, costume, and projection

ITD's design is never merely decorative. Every choice in the set, costume, and projection has been made to serve the meaning of the production. As you watch, ask:

- What world does the design create? Is it naturalistic (resembling a real place) or more abstract?
- Does the design remind you of anything from cinema, television, or visual art? What is the effect of that association?
- How do the surfaces on stage work with the projection? Are they being used as screens, as environments, as both?
- What do the costumes communicate about character and situation? Are there moments when a costume is used in an unexpected way?

Adaptation: what's the same and what's changed

If the show is an adaptation and you know the source text, one of the most rewarding things to do is track the choices ITD has made in adapting it:

- What has been kept from the original, and what has been changed or removed?
- Has the time period, setting, or political context been updated? What effect does that have?
- Are there characters, perspectives, or stories that the original text marginalised that ITD's version brings forward?
- Does ITD's version change what you think the original is really about?

Questions for before, during, and after

Before

Read the production's description on the ITD website. Then consider:

- What does the description lead you to expect? Does it sound like the source text you know, or something quite different?
- What do you think it means to "retell" or "adapt" this particular story for a contemporary audience?
- If you were adapting this text, what would you change and what would you keep?
- Should classic stories be radically reinterpreted, or should they be kept close to the original? Is any text sacred?

During

You don't need to take notes during the show, but if it helps, here are some questions to have in mind:

- What is your first impression of the world of the production? Does it feel familiar or strange?
- How, when, and why is technology used? Does it add meaning, or does it surprise you?
- What emotions do you experience as you watch? Which moments or characters do you respond to most strongly?
- Do you think ITD is trying to communicate a particular argument or message? What might it be?

After

- What stayed with you? What images, moments, or ideas are still with you after the show?
- What did you think about the choices ITD made in adapting the source text?
- How did the technology shape your experience of the production? Did it bring you closer to the story or create distance?
- Did the production change the way you think about the source text?
- Would you have made different choices? Which ones, and why?

If you're attending a post-show discussion

- Who would you like to ask a question of: a performer, the director, a designer?
- What question would you most like answered?
- After the discussion: was your question addressed? What was the most surprising answer?

For teachers: using this guide

This guide is designed to work across productions. For questions specific to a particular show, download the "What to Look Out For" document for that production from the relevant learning resources page on the ITD website.

For A Level Drama and Theatre students, the "During" questions above map directly onto the live theatre evaluation components of Edexcel Component 3 and Eduqas equivalent components. Students should be encouraged to make specific, detailed notes after the show rather than during it – the questions here are prompts to orient their attention, not a checklist to complete in the dark.

› Reverse-Engineering the Rules (Exercise 2) in The Rules of the Game: How ITD Builds Its Worlds (Section 2) gives students a structured way to analyse a single five-minute sequence on a second viewing.

For students using an ITD production as a practitioner case study, the questions in the "Design", "Cameras", and "Adaptation" sections above generate the most useful material for portfolio contextual statements and research reports. Encourage students to cross-reference what they observe in the production with the company's own accounts of their working methods, available in the permanent learning resources on this site.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Source text: The original work (novel, film, play, or other material) from which an adaptation is made. In ITD's practice, the source text is a starting point and a set of constraints, not a blueprint to be faithfully reproduced.

Published 2026 as part of imitating the dog's learning resources (Section 4: Try It Yourself). For the production-specific version of this guide, see the What to Look Out For document in the relevant production's learning resources pack on the ITD website. For deeper engagement with the ideas behind ITD's approach, see Screens, Bodies and Stories: Technology as Scenography in ITD's Work (Section 2).

For how this guide links to GCSE, A Level and university specifications, see Curriculum Connections (Section 4).

Photography of *Macbeth* and *War of the Worlds*: Ed Waring.