

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION



ON CUE

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Compiled by Lisa Mumford.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Lisa Mumford is the Education Projects Officers for Sydney Theatre Company.

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each school show is accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which features essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the **ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS** and **TECHNIQUES**, visit: <https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/community/education>

Education resources include:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- worksheets
- posters

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; The Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural

areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

[sydneytheatre.com.au](https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au)

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SUITABLE FOR

- Students in Years K-6 and up

SUBJECTS

- English- Literacy
- Drama- Physical comedy



The Listies, Matt Kelly and Richard Higgins, in rehearsal for *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*. Image: Hon Boey. ©

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET: PRINCE OF SKIDMARK

A BADAPTATION OF THE BARD
BY THE LISTIES

CAST
RICHARD HIGGINS
MATT KELLY
OLGA MILLER

CREATED BY
DECLAN GREENE
RICHARD HIGGINS
MATT KELLY

DIRECTOR
DECLAN GREENE

DESIGNER
RENÉE MULDER

LIGHTING DESIGNER
VERITY HAMPSON

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER
JED PALMER

VOICE & TEXT COACH
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

PRODUCTION MANAGER
KATE CHAPMAN

STAGE MANAGER
TIM BURNS

VENUE TECHNICIAN
ROMY MCKANNA

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER
HON BOEY

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER
PRUDENCE UPTON

1 HOUR, NO INTERVAL

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT
WHARF 1 THEATRE ON 19 JUNE 2016

SYNOPSIS

The Listies tell the story of Hamlet...

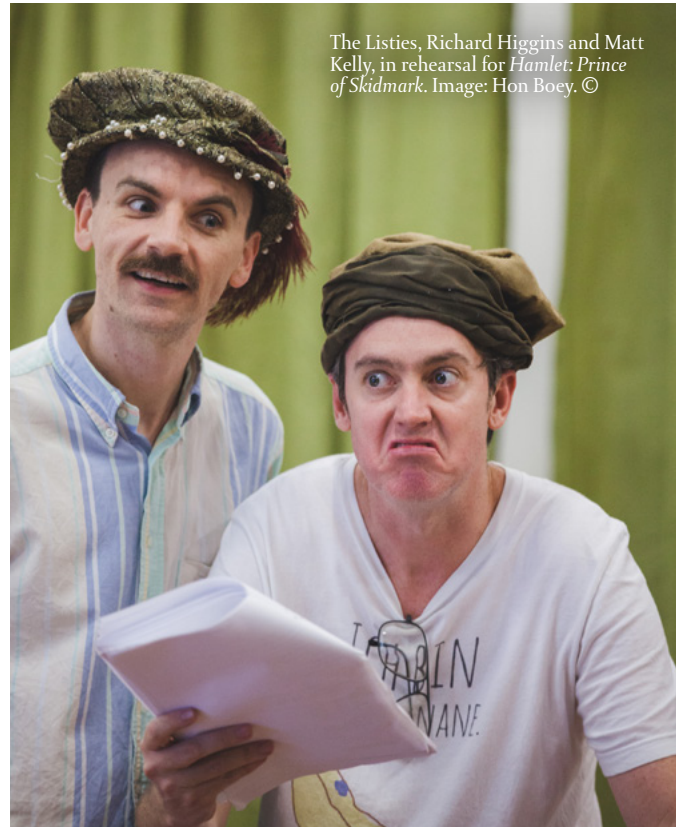
The story of Shakespeare's Hamlet: Prince of Denmark, goes roughly like this

Hamlet's father, King Hamlet, is killed by his brother, Claudius (Hamlet's uncle.) Claudius takes the throne and marries Hamlet's mother, Gertrude.

The ghost of Hamlet's father comes to Hamlet and tells him that he was murdered by Claudius, and Hamlet vows to take revenge. Meanwhile, Hamlet has a romantic interest in Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius, a chief adviser to the King and Queen. Hamlet starts to go mad with anger about what his uncle has done, and when Hamlet's friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive with a troupe of actors, Hamlet sees this as an opportunity to prove his uncle's guilt. He decides to stage a play in which a King's brother kills him and takes the throne. He will watch his uncle's reaction to the play to gauge his guilt.

When the play is staged, Claudius stands and leaves, indicating his guilt. Hamlet goes to his mother to explain and when he hears someone listening behind a curtain he assumes it is Claudius and stabs violently through the curtain. However, it is Polonius and Hamlet has accidentally killed him. Gertrude thinks Hamlet is mad. Ophelia wanders the land desperate with the grief of her father's death. Later, she is found dead, drowned in a stream.

Laertes (Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother) and Hamlet duel in a fencing challenge orchestrated by Claudius, designed to kill Hamlet. Laertes' blade has been dipped in poison, and Claudius has brought a goblet of poisoned wine to offer Hamlet, should Laertes fail with the poisoned sword. Gertrude unknowingly drinks the poisoned wine and dies, Laertes stabs Hamlet with the poison blade but before he dies, Hamlet takes the blade and kills both Claudius and Laertes. They die and the play ends with the Norwegian prince Fortinbras who was passing through, taking the throne.



The Listies, Richard Higgins and Matt Kelly, in rehearsal for *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*. Image: Hon Boey. ©

The Story of The Listies' Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark, goes roughly like this

The Listies (Matt Kelly and Richard Higgins) greet the audience who have come to see the Royal Shakespearean Players perform *Hamlet*. Matt tells Rich that he has given the Players a basket of 'Shakespearean food,' food literally from Shakespeare's time. The stage manager (Olga Miller) comes on to tell them that all of the Players have become ill from the food, but Rich has already taken a bite! They only have 50 minutes until Rich gets sick too. In that time the three of them will try and tell the story of *Hamlet*...

The Listies call on every trick in the book to tell the story of *Hamlet*; there are fancy costumes, Shakespearean insults, a science experiment, zombies and nunjas (nun ninjas!), and a healthy dose of audience involvement. While diverging from the original plot, The Listies raise important questions about the value of re-telling canonical plays, the roles of women in Shakespeare, and if there is a 'right' way to tell a story. All of this is done with lots of fart jokes, vomit machines and slapstick—we're in for a good time!

THEMES AND IDEAS



Matt Kelly in rehearsal for *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*. Image: Hon Boey. ©

THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS AND DISRUPTION

The Listies may seem pretty silly, but they're also very clever. They have made this play with lots of jokes, but they still tell the story of *Hamlet*. When children and young people think about going to the theatre they might think it sounds very serious and boring, that they have to sit still and be quiet, or even that they might not understand what's going on. If they feel these things, they might think that the theatre is not for them, that it is for adults or other people.

This play is definitely for children and young people! The Listies use clever comedy techniques to tell the story, and they make the audience feel included. Instead of this being a play where the audience sit in their seats and watch at a distance, it is a play where the actors speak directly to the audience, include them in the jokes, and even invite them up on stage. Theatre is about telling stories and helping the audience to understand more about themselves, things they like and don't like, things they find funny. Watching this play may help children and young people decide things about themselves, or things about the theatre, and the kind of stories they do and don't like.

This play is even more interesting, because it asks questions about the original play, for the audience to think about. In the original *Hamlet*, Ophelia is not very happy and is not treated very well before she dies. In The Listies' version of the play, Ophelia comes back from the dead and has the opportunity to tell Hamlet she doesn't like the way he treated her. When people retell stories, like The Listies have, they have the opportunity to deliberately make changes they think are important. By bringing Ophelia back to life like this, a statement is being made about how female characters are usually treated in Shakespeare's plays.

Have a discussion in your classroom about what you expect you might see when you go to this play. After you've seen the play, have a conversation about what actually happened and compare if these things are similar or different.

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)



REPRESENTATION AND THE CANON: WHOSE STORIES GET TOLD ON OUR STAGES?

Throughout this play, the audience are presented with two very different stories. There is the story of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, and there is the story of The Listies attempting to stage Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Shakespeare is the most well-known playwright in the world, and his plays are constantly produced all around the world. His plays are widely accepted as being very important and are often interpreted in different ways. That means that even though the plays were written around the same time, the stories are often told in new and different places and times. This version asks the important question of why we keep staging Shakespeare's plays. By creating a version which is devised, meaning that The Listies created it themselves, with director Declan Greene, they are telling their own story as well as Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare's stories are retold because they explore universal themes. Audiences can relate to these stories which were written hundreds of years ago but still help us understand who we are; the characters have experiences that we still relate to today. The Listies like this idea, of telling stories that the audience can relate to, so they've added things for us to laugh at because everyone likes to have fun! By doing this, the audience feels more included and better understands the play.

NAUGHTY FUN STUFF! VOMIT, FART JOKES, BLOOD AND GORE!

The Listies use comic elements to make us laugh, which is a good way of inviting us into the story of *Hamlet*. If we can laugh at silly things then we're engaged, and the story is much more fun and easier to follow. Creating great comedy is a very fine skill that can take a long time to learn. The Listies have been working together for a long time and they use physical comedy, which means lots of the jokes are created by using their bodies in exaggerated ways.

Using comedy to explore serious stories is a technique which is often used to understand a story in a new way, to draw attention to a particular aspect of a story, or to make it more accessible for the audience so they understand the story better. The Listies use comedy to retell *Hamlet* and in doing so, they achieve all of these things. They help the audience understand the original play and they draw attention to important questions, such as the representation of female characters in the play.

STYLE

COMEDY, SLAPSTICK, AUDIENCE INTERACTION

Slapstick is a kind of physical comedy in which the actors make humour based on silly jokes with their bodies, often about getting hurt. Falling over things dramatically, or pretending to hurt each other in ways that are too over the top to be real, are common kinds of slapstick. Exaggerated physical actions that are not real such as pretending to fight or vomit, are funny for the audience but also help to tell the story. You can find some great demonstrations of slapstick comedy on YouTube to show in your classroom.

SHAKESPEARE ADAPTATION

The play is based on *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's plays are often adapted into new places and times, but this version goes even further. This version changes the story and imagines a new ending, gives Ophelia the opportunity to stand up for herself and invites audience members on stage to be a part of the play.

Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark is a devised work, meaning that it is not performed from a script in the traditional sense, but that the creative team have made this play themselves. Devised theatre means a play that is made not by one playwright but by a group working together and improvising to create the play. This show was devised by The Listies and Declan Greene drawing inspiration from *Hamlet*.

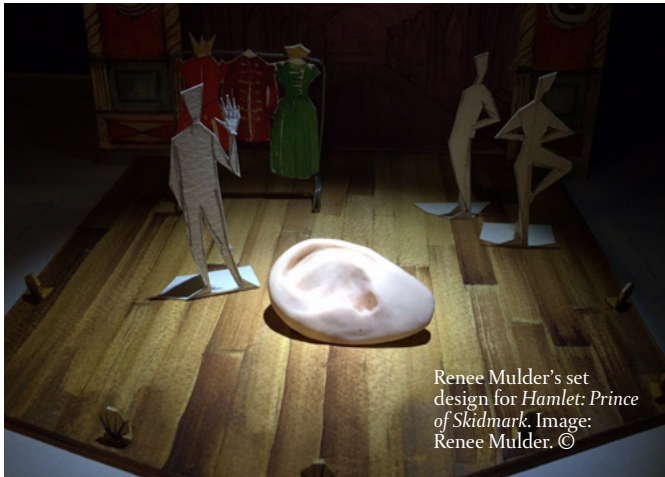
Devising in this way allows the audience a new perspective on a classic story, and helps the audience to understand the original play in an exciting new way.



Olga Miller and Richard Higgins in rehearsal for *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*. Image: Hon Boey. ©

THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

SET AND COSTUME DESIGN



The costumes and set are designed by Renée Mulder. There are costume changes throughout the play, to signify when the actors become different characters. The costumes are on stage throughout the play, and the audience watches as they are used to indicate new characters.

Set pieces are also brought on and off, and backdrops change, to indicate when the setting has changed. The first setting is a conventional design for a classical Shakespearean theatre and it changes when Ophelia comes back from the nunnery as a zombie nunja (ninja-nun!)

BACK IN YOUR CLASSROOM

This lesson plan is a guide only. Please tailor it to suit the needs of your students.

WARM UP

'Nunja' Destruction! Be like Ophelia – get your mind and body drama ready with this 'nunja' themed warm up.

1. Stand in a circle, and everyone put one hand in the middle to form a huddle. Together, count to three and jump out to form a large circle. While doing this everyone chant NUNJA DESTRUCTION together! As you jump up in the air, land in the circle in your favourite ninja pose.
2. The aim of the game is to tag the hand of other players, without letting them tag your hand. If one of your hands is tagged, it goes behind your back, if both hands are tagged, you are out and you leave the circle to stand on the side.
3. To tag another player's hand, you can only make one clear, dynamic move. If someone is aiming to tag your hand, you are allowed one move to pull away.
4. Make your best ninja sound effects as you strike!
5. This game creates focus and attention in the performance space.

FREEZE FRAMES

From the 'Nunja' destruction circle, break students into groups of four or five and give them a limited amount of time to create freeze frames.

'Freeze Frames are frozen images of a particular point in the drama, as if we had taken a photograph of the action. Freeze Frames are sometimes called frozen images, depictions or tableaux. They allow students to really focus on one or more significant moments in time and to embody the action. Freeze Frames can be useful when predicting what might happen next in a text or when choosing a story's most important moments. The teacher can ask students to create a single Freeze Frame, two or three Freeze Frames to depict a scene or event at three different times or a Freeze Frame from the orientation, complication and resolution of a traditional narrative.'

Each group needs to create the image collaboratively – all members of the group are part of the same image. Explain what they will be doing, and that they need to work quickly, collaboratively, and cooperatively.

Only allow two minutes for each of these.

In you groups, create;

1. A family portrait
2. A soccer team
3. A beach holiday
4. The Harbour Bridge
5. The Opera House

After each image they freeze and hold. You can direct all student attention to one group at a time and point out things they have done well. Point out the use of different levels, spacing, interesting shapes, and other elements which create meaning.

Staying in these groups, students take this exercise and appropriate it to their learning from their recent theatre excursion.

BACK IN YOUR CLASSROOM (CONT.)



Richard Higgins in rehearsal for *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*.
Image: Hon Boey. ©

DIFFERENT ENDINGS

***Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark* takes a familiar story, *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, and changes it to make an interesting statement about Shakespeare, as well as to create comedy.**

In this exercise, students will create their own endings to familiar stories.

1. In the same groups students are given time to choose a fairy tale that they all know. The teacher may also allocate this.
2. The groups are given time to break their fairy tale into the beginning, middle and end, focusing only on the main points of action. They may use pens and paper to aid at this stage.
3. Student create a freeze frame of each of these main parts of their fairy tale. This is three freeze frames, one for the beginning, one for the middle, and one for the end.
4. At this point, students present their series of three freeze frames to the class.
5. Go back to their groups, this time they are changing only the last freeze frame in their series of three. This is the fun part! How will you change the ending of your fairy tale? Does Little Red Riding Hood become friends with the wolf and take him home as a domestic pet? Be creative!
Allow extra time for this part.

Now present your three freeze frames, and this time the last one is the new ending!

As a class, discuss how the different endings changed the meaning of the fairy tales.

Back at your desk: Create a costume design for the main character of your fairy tale. Remember, don't rely on designs you've seen before. Create something new and different. Your fairy tale ends differently so your design should represent this. What does the character need to be prepared for? Include one symbol in your design and write a note explaining what it represents.

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