MACBETH
by William Shakespeare

UK Tour 2018 – 2019
Welcome to the National Theatre's education pack for Macbeth

Through imaginative and innovative in-school, on-site and online activities, NT Learning opens up the National’s repertoire, artistry, skills, and the building itself, enabling participants of all ages to discover new skills and experience the excitement of theatre-making. If you’ve enjoyed this background pack or would like to talk to us about getting involved in NT Learning activities, please contact us on learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk or 020 7452 3388.

Jenna Omeltschenko
Touring Partnerships Manager, NT Learning
October 2018
The National’s Production

Lady Macbeth  Kirsty Besterman
Malcolm  Joseph Brown
Witch  Elizabeth Chan
Fleance  Nisa Cole
Doctor/Ensemble  Reuben Johnson
Witch/Murderers  Helen Katamba,
Malcolm/Macbeth  Brad Morrison
and Hauk Pattison
Duncan/Macbeth  Tom Mannion
Witch/Boy  Michael Nardone
Lennox  James Robinson
Banquo  Patrick Robinson
Ross  Rachel Sanders
Witch/Gentlewoman  Duncan Ross
Macduff  Olivia Sweeney
Porter  Ross Walton
Lady Macduff  Deka Walmsley
Lady Macbeth  Lisa Zahra

Understudies
Lady Macduff  Elizabeth Chan
Witches  Nisa Cole
Banquo  Reuben Johnson
Ross/Doctor  Helen Katamba
Siward  Tom Mannion
Malcolm/Macduff  Brad Morrison
Lenox/Murderers  Hauk Pattison
Duncan/Siward/Porter/Murderer  Duncan Ross
Fleance/Gentlewoman  Evelyn Roberts
Macbeth  James Robinson
Boy  Olivia Sweeney
Lady Macbeth  Lisa Zahra

Director  Rufus Norris
Set Designer  Rae Smith
Costume Designer  Moritz Junge
Tour Lighting Designer  Paul Pyant
Composer  Orlando Gough
Composer/Music Director  Mark Tritschler
Sound Designer  Paul Arditti
Tour Movement Director  Cydney Uffindell-Phillips
Original Movement Director  Imogen Knight
Associate Director  Liz Stevenson
Associate Set Designer  Aaron Marsden
Associate Tour Lighting Designer  Ed Locke
Associate Sound Designer  Mike Winship
Fight Directors  Kev McCurdy
Original Instrument Maker/  Simon Allen
Sonic Bricolage  Jeannette Nelson,
Casting Director  Stevie Rickard
and Sam Stevenson
Assistant Director  Fay Lomas
Pole & Movement Captain  Hauk Pattison
Text Arrangements and Edits  Paul Prescott

Opening
UK Tour opened at The Lowry on 29 September 2018,
This version of Macbeth opened at the National Theatre’s
Olivier Theatre, 6 March 2018.

Setting
Now, after a civil war

Length
2 hours 45 minutes, including a 20-minute interval
NB This time is approximate. Please speak to theatre staff for accurate timing.
Rehearsal diary: week one

Following a sell-out run at the National Theatre in 2018, Macbeth embarks on a national tour from October 2018 with a new cast of actors. Assistant Director for the production Fay Lomas’ diary tracks the five-week rehearsal period, beginning in Autumn 2018

Following its run on the Olivier stage, the National Theatre’s production of Macbeth is embarking on a tour of 18 venues across the UK and Ireland. Prior to our departure for Salford, we embark on five weeks of rehearsals in London with our new acting company and some new members of the creative and production teams. This version of Macbeth will bring together the framework and concept of the original production and incorporate many new elements.

We start off the week with a meet and greet, in which everyone involved in the production – from the theatre, the cast, the creative team and the production team – comes together to introduce themselves. This involves one giant circle and a lot of names; it is amazing to see everyone in the same room and to realise just how many people are working together to make this show happen.

After the meet and greet, Rufus Norris (director) and Aaron Marsden (associate designer) talk to the company about the model box – a to-scale model of the whole set, complete with miniature models of actors and props. It has already proved an invaluable tool for the creative team who have used it to storyboard all the scenes of the play, working out where they will happen on the stage and how to transition between them. It is also incredibly important for the actors to get a sense of the space in which they will be performing and how this will change over the course of the show.

The Olivier stage set has needed significant alterations in order to accommodate the new spaces of the tour. The theatres we will be visiting will be in an end-on seating configuration (meaning the audience are facing the stage directly), whereas in the Olivier the auditorium is fan-shaped, with the audience surrounding some of the stage. In addition to this, the touring set does not incorporate a revolve, so new solutions have to be found for moving the set around and travelling between scenes.

The company begin with some ‘table work’, in which the actors read through the script and conduct an in-depth discussion of each scene. We start by asking questions about the relationships in the text, the characters’ motivations and the language of the play. For this work, as well as having Rufus and Liz Stevenson (associate director) present, we are joined by Dr Paul Prescott from the University of Warwick. Paul and Rufus have worked with Shakespeare’s text to produce the version of the play that we are using, and Paul is able to talk us through the reasoning behind certain changes to the script. Our production has fewer characters than Shakespeare’s play, and the characters who remain have taken some of the lines from those who have been cut – our Porter remains a member of the Macbeth household all the way up to Act 5, for example, meaning that this character goes on more of a journey than in the original.

For the rest of the week, we start to stage scenes in the space. We are fortunate to have the set with us in rehearsals right from the first day, including the giant, movable bridge, which is quite a monumental sight in the rehearsal room. It has been invaluable for the actors to start familiarising themselves with the set right from the beginning, to be able to explore all the possibilities it offers in terms of staging and to start to inhabit the physical world of the play. In these first ‘work-throughs’ of each scene, we create a general shape, make sure the story is really ‘landing’ and that the relationships between the characters are clear. Nothing is set in stone at this early stage, and when we next return to each scene we will be building on these foundations and adding further detail. We have also been working on creating the world of the play by exploring different forms of greeting in this society. This is a language that is much more physical and visceral than our own – we weigh up how people would greet each other, say, after returning from the war, versus how they might greet the King.
This week, we also have a fight session with fight director Kev McCurdy. This session takes the form of an introduction to the psychology of violence and the unforgiving world of the play. The actors are able to explore how violence and aggression are a state of mind, and how this might affect how the characters hold themselves, how they think about the space around them and the distance they would leave between themselves and other characters. We introduce weapons to this session, which mostly take the form of knives, sabres and swords, and the company carry out a physical improvisation with these weapons; they explore how their physicality changes once they are armed with a weapon and how allegiances and divisions emerge within the group.

The other major element to the week has been training certain members of the company when it comes to using the poles, which form a significant part of the set. The witches will be climbing these poles throughout the show and require specialist training to be able to do so – they have already had two weeks of pole training prior to rehearsals, to start to build the necessary muscles. Hauk Pattinson, who is a specialist in circus arts and Chinese pole and was also a member of the company in the Olivier production, runs these sessions. They are truly exhilarating to watch.

We finish off the week with an understudy read-through of the play. Each role in the production is understudied by another member of the company, so that the show can go ahead even if an actor is unable to perform. Over the course of the next four weeks, we will be rehearsing our understudy company alongside the other rehearsals, and so it is great to get the ball rolling with this read-through.

All in all, we’ve had a busy and very productive first week of rehearsals and are looking forward to continuing our work into week two.
This week we spend time exploring movement in the show with Rufus Norris, Liz Stevenson and Cydney Uffindell-Phillips (movement director). The production contains many different elements and types of movement – from a big party at Macbeth’s house to the way in which the witches move and interact with each other. We explore how the characters might release the tension and stress of surviving in this brutal world through revelry, and how they might move and dance in a way that is unfamiliar or strange; Cydney talks about this release of pent-up energy feeling like a fizzy drink that suddenly explodes.

To develop the language of the movement of the witches, we explore how they could feel like individuals and also appear to be a unit: they move at various paces and have different energies but constantly work together. We are able to start to put into practice all the hard work the actors have been doing on the poles by starting to look at their relationships to the poles – how the witches might watch events from these vantage points, and how they can twist and turn around the poles, almost as though they are an extension of their bodies.

We also have a first look at a major movement scene at the start of Act 4, in which Macbeth visits the witches and they produce various apparitions to foretell what will happen to him. We explore the way in which movement could reflect the fact that the scene builds until Macbeth feels completely overwhelmed. We make some useful discoveries about how the apparitions might echo the witches’ energy and movements, and how they might position themselves in relation to Macbeth to increase the tension for him with each new apparition.

We also continue to look in detail at Lady Macbeth and Macbeth’s scenes together, particularly Act 3 Scene 2. There are so many different ways of playing this scene – to what extent is Macbeth confiding in her? To what extent does she feel shut out, or does she choose to distance herself? When are they emotionally closest to each other in the scene, and when does she feel repulsed by him? It is important for the story of our production that the rupture between them begins to form in this scene – but there are many ways of achieving this. Each time we went through the scene, we discover different layers and a new possible journey. We start to make some decisions and will find more details when we return to the scene in week four.

We continue to have storyboard meetings this week, and are still working on the transitions from scene to scene using the set itself in the rehearsal room. We also have a meeting about the show’s music, and discuss how we might adapt it from the original composition to fit the needs of the tour. We are lucky to be able to work with prototypes for the potential costumes for the witches, as these will be different from the costumes used in the original production. We trial these during the pole work, to see how they work with the movement of the witches.
This week, members of the company also have individual sessions with our voice coach, Jeanette Nelson, in which they look in detail at the structure of Shakespeare’s language and what options linguistic devices like similes or antithesis might offer to them in their playing of a scene. The actors have also been busy with wig fittings, costume fittings, and with understudy rehearsals.

It’s been another full week and we’ve made great progress on working through the script. Next week we’ll be looking at Act 5, as well as having a big ‘fights’ rehearsal all day on Wednesday, so things will continue to move forward apace.
This week, we finish our first work-through of the play, which means that we have now visited each scene once. The cast have got a sense of their characters’ full journeys through the play and we can now return to work on more closely on each scene, focusing on the detail.

We spend much of the week looking at Act 5. In this act, there are huge dynamic shifts from scene to scene, as well as moments that are epic and fast-paced, such as Malcolm, Macduff, Siward and their armies preparing for battle, and others which are deeply private and still, such as Macbeth’s famous ‘Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow’ soliloquy. Rufus wants this soliloquy to offer some conclusion to the relationship between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth and so, in our staging of the scene, Macbeth speaks the soliloquy to Lady Macbeth’s body. This decision means what could become a philosophical speech becomes deeply personal, prescient and more specifically about Macbeth’s loss.

While working on this scene, we also discuss the scream that happens offstage as Lady Macbeth dies. We investigate and interrogate several possibilities: is this the scream of Lady Macbeth, of the Gentlewoman who finds her, or a mixture of both? We found that if both the Gentlewoman and Lady Macbeth scream together this creates the greatest sense of havoc, which gives Michael Nordone (playing Macbeth) a lot to work with: it means he is almost expecting and dreading the Gentlewoman’s words, ‘The Queen, My Lord, is dead’. This particularly helpful in terms of his line in response to her death, ‘She should have died hereafter’, which can feel quite understated.

We also look closely at another famous scene from Macbeth: the sleepwalking scene. We make some important discoveries about the Gentlewoman and Doctor’s roles in this scene, after discussing how much the Gentlewoman wants the Doctor to find a cure for Lady Macbeth, and how his advice at the end of the scene – ‘Look after her’ – falls short of the mark. By making the Gentlewoman and Doctor active participants rather than passive observers in the scene, with much at stake themselves, the tension created is far greater.

We spend Wednesday working with fight director Kev McCurdy, setting and blocking all of the fights in the show. There are several of these, from smaller scuffles to larger-scale combat scenes, and many occur on the large bridge that dominates the set, which makes them particularly dramatic. The actors are able to build on their week one work with Kev, in which they considered the violence of the world of the play and the way in which this affects how they bear themselves. Over the last two weeks we have also had the actors rehearsing...
with their weapons on their person, even in scenes where they do not actively use them, so they can get used to what it feels like to carry a weapon. With this in mind, the company are ready for the intense work with Kev on Wednesday. It is really important to work out the story behind each fight – what are the intentions of those involved in the fight? Do they play by the rules or do they break them? How emotionally involved are they? For instance, Rosse’s fight with members of Macbeth’s household feels very different to the highly-charged stand-off between Macbeth and Macduff.

We also spend a significant amount of time developing the choreography for the party scenes in Act 1. We want this party to feel like a release of tension, but also for there to be key ‘story beats’ within the choreography – narrative moments where we establish an event or a relationship through movement. These enable us to illustrate moments that are not specifically referenced in the text: for example, when Banquo and Fleance see each other for the first time since the war. Within this sequence we also want to set up a moment where Macduff and Lady Macduff arrive at the party together, to build up their relationship for the audience. Such moments enable us to embellish and flesh out the story, but also to add moments of joy, lightness and humour in a play which is otherwise so dark.

We finish the week with an event in the rehearsal room in which representatives from every theatre we’ll be visiting on the tour come into the rehearsals to watch an extract from the play, hear Rufus and Liz talk about the ideas behind the show and the process, and participate in a Q&A session with the cast. It is exciting to suddenly have so many people in the room with us, to be able to talk through our process and to share a little of our work with them.
This week, we begin to recap all our work so far, reworking each act in detail. We start the week with detailed work on Act 4; although it is made up of only three scenes, it is a massive act, with each scene occurring in a completely different location and introducing a new element of the story. It is also an act that takes the narrative away from the Macbeths and moves towards the consequences of their actions as a couple. We only see Macbeth in the opening scene of the act and Lady Macbeth doesn’t appear at all in the text (although she does in one of our transitions – see below). Not only this, but it is an act in which every scene has a very different feel: we move from the epic scene featuring the witches and their apparitions, to the vastly more intimate home of the Macduffs, and then shift to the political world of Malcolm and Macduff in England.

Even within the scenes themselves, there are many smaller shifts. In the Macduff scene, there are four different sections: Rosse and Lady Macduff's argument about Macduff's desertion, the witty wordplay of the dialogue between Lady Macduff and her son, the tension created by the Porter's informing the Macduffs they are in danger, and the brutality of their subsequent murder. We rework each scene in the act to explore achieving these shifts and this adding detail. For instance, we found that if Lady Macduff is absolutely furious, not only with Macduff, but also with Rosse (as Rosse is defending Macduff) during the opening section of the scene, it makes the shifts within the scene much more dynamic and consistent. We also discover that if Rosse fails to placate her during the scene (to the extent that they do not even say goodbye to each other), it gives Rosse even more to play with later on, when she is charged with notifying Macduff of the death of his family.

After recapping the acts in detail, we begin to run each act and experiment with running a couple of acts together. It is incredibly useful for the actors to start piecing together their character's journey through the play in this way, and for Rufus, Liz and Cyd to start to get a sense of the bigger picture. It starts a process of ‘running’ scenes and acts in sequence, which will continue next week when we run the whole play for the first time.

We also spend a morning looking at all the transitions. The production at the National Theatre incorporated the revolve to change between scenes – not having this on the tour makes a huge difference to the way in which we travel between scenes. We explore how we could make the stage business happen while also continuing to tell a story during these transitions. For instance, coming out of the scene in which the Macduff family is murdered, we need to move from their house to the set for the scene in England between Macduff and Malcolm. In this transition, we want to introduce the idea of Lady Macbeth sleepwalking and explore Lady Macbeth walking across the stage, being met by a vision of the murdered Lady Macduff and her son. This adds extra resonance to her line in the sleep-walking scene: ‘The thane of Fife had a wife, where is she now?’ Lady Macbeth is haunted by the ghosts in her dreams, while Macbeth is haunted by them in reality.

Another aspect of this week sees the team leading Michael in some detailed soliloquy work. In the soliloquy in which Macbeth appears to see a dagger floating in the air, we speak about what exactly Macbeth might see and when – how does the vision change? When precisely does he see the blood? And what is the link from the dagger section of the soliloquy into the line, ‘Now o’er the one half-world/Nature seems dead’? We also consider how important stillness is for this soliloquy, especially considering what has recently occurred – the big party comes just before, and involves a lot of movement – now Macbeth is alone and completely still.

We also have another fights session with Kev this week, finessing some of the fights we have already choreographed, and also enabling the actors to practise and to ask any questions they might have. On Saturday, we have a full day of rehearsals with the understudies, all of whom are members of the company and also playing other roles within the production. Saturday is an opportunity for the understudies to rehearse their potential roles in some of the bigger scenes in the play, such as the party.

The company have worked very hard this week, and we only have one more week to go in London before we move into technical rehearsals in Salford.
Rehearsal diary: week five

At the start of the week, we finish reworking Act 5 and run the act together. The dynamic of this act is completely different to the act preceding it; while Act 4 only has three, long scenes, Act 5 has nine – some of which are very short. This serves to create the feeling that the play is hurtling towards its inevitable conclusion, as one scene swiftly follows another and as the scenes document both the army approaching Macbeth, and Macbeth making preparations for their arrival.

On Tuesday, we have our ‘stagger-through’ – the first time we put the whole play together and run it. We all learn a huge amount from being able to see the journey of the whole play in its entirety. One revelation that emerges from the run was the desire to give the world of the play a ‘rougher’ quality. Cyd, Rufus and Liz work closely with the company at creating this roughness in specific scenes and interactions.

We discuss the fact that these characters are all warriors – they are not ‘nice’ people and have all committed brutal acts as a result of the demands placed on them by their harsh world. This permits them to be tougher and ruder than we might initially have expected. We looked at the impact of this especially in the group scenes, such as the banquet scene, as well as in the way that Rosse and Lennox greet Macbeth and Banquo. We also started to refine the language of greetings that we have been exploring throughout rehearsals: we have evaluated many options and now is the time to make decisions about which ones will remain in the final version of the show.

Following the run, we also look more carefully at the ways of getting into the soliloquies. Rufus wants to explore a ‘dynamic’ way of entering these soliloquies – so that some physical movement brings the focus in the scene away from what else is happening and onto Macbeth. We find new ways particularly of approaching the soliloquy in Act 1 (‘Two truths are told’) and in Act 3 (‘To be thus is nothing’).

We continue to work comprehensively on the scenes between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, making further decisions about the journey of each scene and its story beats. For example, we discover that it is useful if Lady Macbeth doesn’t suspect that Macbeth is getting cold feet about the murder – it gives her much more to play with when he later tells her, ‘We will proceed no further in this business’. The couple are then diametrically opposed, with Lady Macbeth trying to persuade her husband to continue with the murder and his repeated refusal, right up until she appeals to him with ‘I have given suck’. We discuss with the actors the idea that the couple have lost two children, and that here we see Lady Macbeth invoking their loss to manipulate her husband. She makes herself vulnerable by mentioning it and completely disarms Macbeth, so that he can only respond with, ‘If we should fail’.

After this, the scene completely changes and Lady Macbeth and Macbeth begin to plot together – we discuss the hope and excitement that the audience needs to feel in this part of the scene, as though the murder will bring great things. We also discuss the significance of Macbeth’s line, ‘Bring forth men children.
only’ in the context of Lady Macbeth having said: ‘I have given suck’. While both characters mention children and their lack of children in soliloquies, this scene is the only occasion in which they mention it to each other, and it occurs twice within a few lines. We discuss how, ‘Bring forth men children only’ might be a moment of triumph in this context: that the murder becomes almost an answer to their childlessness – the thing that will give them hope for the future. Having decided on the story and journey of the scene, we then look at how to stage it. We want to make sure that the movement is related to the story of the scene that we want to tell: for instance, ‘We will proceed no further in this business’, ‘I have given suck’ and ‘If we should fail’ are all key and pivotal turning points in the scene – we need to find a way of these shifting moments being reflected in the physical dynamics.

We also have a session this week with composers Orlando Gough and Marc Tritschler. During this period, they are able to play the company the music they have composed for the piece and discuss how different instruments respond to different themes and characters in the narrative. It was exciting to start to experience and examine the technical side of the production, ahead of going into tech in Salford next week.

Another session of rehearsals this week involves a morning dedicated to the understudies rehearsing the play’s fights: each understudy has to learn the fights of the character they are understudying. Some actors are understudying several characters, as well as having their own fights in their main characters’ role – which means that they are very busy!

We finish off the week with a final rehearsal room run of the play with the main cast, followed by an understudy run of the play on our last Saturday of rehearsals. We are all ready and excited for tech, and are packing our bags to start in Salford next week.
My final rehearsal diary takes the company through a week at the Lowry Theatre in Salford – from the start of technical rehearsals to the first preview. Tech is a busy, tiring and exciting week – it is the first time all the elements of the production come together, so it means long hours, large amounts of coffee, and lots of rewarding work.

The technical team have already done a ‘get-in’ prior to the acting company’s arrival: they have put the set up in the theatre over the weekend. Lighting designer Paul Pyant and his team have also started ‘plotting’ the lights: working out different lighting states for different scenes and starting to program them. The acting company arrive on the Tuesday, ready to start technical rehearsals, which involve working the entire way through the play, adding in sound and lighting and also changing the staging as is required by the space.

The music was composed for the production on the Olivier stage at the National Theatre and then recorded for this touring version. Composers Orlando Gough and Marc Tritschler imagined what instruments would be available in a country that has been destroyed by a brutal civil war – as a result, the music uses completely innovative instruments created out of bits of plastic or found metal. Much of the dialogue is underscored with this music, and while we have been introducing some elements of it in rehearsal, this is the first time that we start to add it fully into the production, and check the levels of sound in relation to the dialogue.
This week is also the first time the actors rehearse in full costume. With the costumes, comes the question of quick changes: when an actor only has a short amount of time to shift between different characters or has multiple costumes for the same character. Backstage are dressers, who help the actors achieve these quick changes in a remarkably short amount of time. Another consideration, especially important with a play like Macbeth, is the fake blood, which is trialled for the first time in technical rehearsals. How much blood is used, how it is used (in a blood bag that’s palmed from one actor to another in a fight, for instance), how quickly it can be cleaned up for the next scene – these are all questions that have to be resolved in tech.

Although we have been very lucky to have the set with us in the rehearsal room, finally being on the Lowry stage itself has inevitably led to some changes. As the stage and auditorium is so large, we move a lot of scenes as close to the audience as we can, so that moments like the scene between the Macduffs or the banquet scene are as far downstage as they can practically be, to make the audience feel as close to the action as possible. In addition, we’ve started to develop the transitions between scenes, keeping the broad framework we created in the rehearsal room but adapting it as required in this new space.

We also make discoveries about the way in which the characters can enter the scenes; movement director Cyd Uffindell-Phillips finds a way for the three witches to appear from under the bridge, the central element of our set, which is truly eerie. Much of our work this week has been about finding the balance between the intimate and the epic – Macbeth is a play that moves very quickly between both, and we want our production to take the audience on a journey between huge battles and small-scale domestic scenes.

In tech, the day is divided into three sessions – morning, afternoon and evening. We have 10 tech sessions in total. We then have our first dress rehearsal: the first time the actors run the play the whole way through, without stopping, with light, sound and costume on the stage – as if it were a real performance but without the audience. Following the first dress rehearsal, we make some further changes and then have a second dress rehearsal, prior to our first preview. It is exhilarating for the actors and creative team to have an audience in for the first time, and to finally to be able to share all our work. As we move through the previews in Salford, elements of the show will continue to change and develop. After another week of previews and a press night in Salford, we will be taking the show around the UK and to Ireland. Members of our cast hail from all over the United Kingdom, so many of them will be returning to their hometowns over the course of the tour – and everyone is looking forward to sharing this show with the eighteen venues we are visiting.
Theatre Glossary

Meet and greet
Usually held on the first day of rehearsals, the meet and greet is a chance for the company and production team to meet everyone who is involved in the production as well as staff from marketing, learning, fundraising, etc. The director – and sometimes the writer – may take this opportunity to explain a bit about their vision for the production.

Round the table / table work
Some directors like to start rehearsals by reading through the script, and getting an understanding of the play, characters and setting without adding movement or blocking.

Blocking
Working out where actors should stand or move on stage, and at what point.

Put on its feet
The point in rehearsals where the company start to add in blocking and try out movement for scenes. Some directors like to put a play ‘on its feet’ from the very start, and work out the intention of the play and the characters at the same time as the movement.

A run
Rehearsing each scene of the play in chronological order, without interruption. Runs help directors and actors to see which parts of the production may need more attention or reworking. The first run-through of a play is often referred to as a ‘stagger-through’, as there are usually delays and mistakes.

Off book
Once an actor has learnt their part, they no longer need to use their script in rehearsals and are described as being ‘off book’.

The book
This is another name for the script. A stage manager who is ‘on the book’ will be in the wings of the stage, ready to help any actor who may have forgotten a line – they are also known as the ‘prompt’.

Act
The separation of a play into different sections, which in turn are sometimes sub-divided into scenes.

The space
The area in which the work is taking place. This term can refer to both the rehearsal room and the theatre stage.

Staff director
The National Theatre uses staff directors rather than assistant directors. Staff directors have a variety of jobs, depending on the production and the director they are working with. They can help with background research for rehearsals, lead improvisations and act as a liaison on behalf of the director. Once a production has had its press night, the director steps away from the production and the staff director takes over. The staff director rehearses the company at ‘bring back calls’ and also rehearses the understudies.

Bring back call
The National Theatre operates a ‘rep’ system, meaning that a production will not be playing every day and a company may have a break every other week or so. A bring back call is a short rehearsal on the day when the company return from having a break. The staff director normally holds a line run with the company, and rehearses in more detail complicated scenes, movement sequences or fights.

Rehearsal call
The stage manager will work out a day-by-day rehearsal schedule for a production, in consultation with the director. The rehearsal call sets out the scenes that are being worked on that day, and the actors or production team who are needed, and when.

Ensemble
A company of actors or performers where the emphasis is on collaborative group work.

Company
The cast, production team and other staff associated with the show.

Understudy
An actor who learns the role of another member of the company so that they can perform that part in the event of injury, illness or scheduled absence.

Actioning / intentions
A way of approaching a text, which some actors and directors like to use. Each line is assigned a transitive verb, which may help the actor to explore ways of delivering that line and uncover the meaning behind what their character is saying or trying to achieve.

Stanislavskian
Relating to Constantin Stanislavski, a Russian theatre practitioner usually associated with method acting.

Beckettian
Relating to playwright Samuel Beckett, whose work is associated with minimalism.

Alexander technique
A system designed to promote healthy movement and posture. Named after its creator Frederick Matthias Alexander.

Upstage
The area at the back of the stage furthest from the audience.
Theatre Glossary continued

Downstage
The area at the front of the stage closest to the audience.

Improvisation
Action taken by an actor(s) that is unprepared or unrehearsed. During the rehearsal process this is often led by suggestions from the director for the purposes of exploration and discovery. During performance improvisation is often used by actors to cover a mistake or accident on stage.

Beat
In the script a playwright may use the term ‘beat’ to denote a pause or a shift in pace or intention in the play. In rehearsal, the term is often used to describe a particular moment or event on stage. It can also be used to describe a unit of time.

Line run
The company say their lines without adding movements. Line runs help actors to feel confident that they know their words before going on stage. Sometimes line runs are done at speed, which can really test how well actors know their roles.

Model box
A scale model of the set, used by the director and designer to work out how each scene could look. For the acting company, model boxes help them to visualise where they will be standing on stage and the world their character is living in. Carpenters, production managers, scenic artists and prop-makers will also study the model box, to get an idea of textures and finish on the set, as well as the overall look. Model boxes can also help to flag any issues with elements of staging before they are made.

Fit up
The set is assembled on the stage.

Get in
The set, props and costumes are brought to the stage, ready for technical rehearsals.

Technical run
Running through the play setting all technical cues, including lighting, sound, set changes and automation. This is an opportunity to practice scene changes, characters’ entrances and exits, costume changes, and for actors to get used to being on the set.

Dress run / dress rehearsal
A dress rehearsal is a chance to pull together all elements of a production, including sound, lighting and costume, and work through the play as though it is a performance.

Previews
Before a production has its press night, it normally has a couple of preview performances. Productions can still change right up to press night, and it is during previews that the company and director get to see how audiences respond to the production, and they may rework sections accordingly.

Press night
The night the critics see the production before reviewing it.