

National Theatre

Set Design exercise for Teachers

**Dream Rooms
by Emma Tompkins**



Prep and set up

Printing

- The students will use 1-3 of the poses for their design, so print the relative number of pages to allow for choice.
- The 'Items against Grid' and '1:25 Grid' pages are to help students think about the scaled

down size of the model, one to a table / 4 students should suffice. The poses and scale images need to be printed on A4 at as close to 100% ratio as possible.

Small boxes

- Any 5 sided box, ideally a shoe box but they can vary - 15 x 15x10cm minimum. You will need to use card as they need to lie on their side (with the 'bottom' of the shoe box representing the back wall of the theatre) If you are able to use black

paper to line the boxes (or get the students to line their own first) then you will create your very own 'black box'. Set designers make black box models for the model set to go in and they are usually a scaled down version of the theatre building.

For this exercise you will need

- Scissors
- Glue
- Tape (Sellotape / Masking / Electrical tape will all work)
- Coloured Card / Paper
- Newspaper or magazine scraps

Extras if available, the activity works best with there being options for the students to pick from:

- String / Blue Tac / Straws (paper or plastic) / Coloured Pens / Any scrap craft materials

An example of the exercise completed simply:
Last night I dreamt of a lawn full of flowers, I walked around and picked bunches for hours.



Intro to set design

The Designer gets to interpret the story and create the world of the play. We do this by choosing shapes, colours and textures that tell the audience where they are and how they feel.

To do this we make a model, a scaled down version of our set design. We work at 1:25, so our model is 25 times smaller than it would be on stage. It is a medium of communication used to show all the other departments working on the show what we intend to put on stage and helps everyone to visualise the world and incorporate all the other work needed to create it.

Before the final model is created, a model box (the theatre space itself

rather than the model pieces of set) is a place of play and experiment. Set Designers do something called 'Sketch Modelling' where they play with shape and texture and form by making shapes made of basic materials and moving them around in the space.

Set Designers look at how the shapes look in 3 dimensions and how it might echo the locations or the feelings in the story.

Here is a task that can allow students to interpret a moment from a story and explore set design through a 'Sketch Model'.

Dream rooms

- 1) Read the poem below. Have the students pick one of the lines to design the set for in their box. Imagine each as a scene from a play.
- 2) Have the students pick a pose from the sheet that best reflects the person in their dream room.

TIP

To help the person stand up, strengthen the back by sticking it onto card. To create a simple back support, follow the guide below.

- 3) Let the students create the world of the dream in the box using the materials available. Keeping as much as possible to the scale.

TIP

By cutting out the pose first they will have a good idea of the size the other

things need to be. It doesn't have to be precisely 1:25 (as this can be very tricky and Designers use a special ruler to help them). Creative use of space is encouraged so if a student makes something bigger or smaller deliberately then go with it for the concept! This is a dream space after all.

Things to encourage:

- Imaginative interpretation of the poem line. What does the line mean to them?
- Use the grid print out to help the understanding of the size the world needs to be
- How could they visually show the weirdness of the dream? Proportion? Colour? Shape?
- Remember sight lines. Could an audience member see everything?
- Movement, if the scene has action how could the set design show that?

Extra help

If you have students that need more specific support, try these prompts:

Play with the space

Cut shapes out and see how they look and feel in different positions, what you like and don't like.

Naturalistic or Stylised?

Do you want the space to feel like our normal world or do you want to experiment with the concept.

If Normal - keep the size of objects, furniture and architecture as close to what you would need if the room were real. Look at the grid examples for help. Look around the room and see how big the chair is next to the table or the Door is to the wall etc.

If Stylised - Treat it like an abstract painting or a surreal space. Make things different sized if it makes sense for the scene. Make things different to how things are in the real world: colours, sizes, angles. How do they make you feel? And is that the right feeling for the scene?

Advanced

Play with Layouts. If you lay a piece of card at the base of the box, extending out, you have created a 'thrust' stage. If each wall of the box is the same, the stage is 'end on'. If you remove all the walls entirely and just have the paper on the table it's 'in the round'.

Research

If there are pictures in the newspaper or magazine, or reference books or they are allowed to research ideas on their phone please encourage research. Designers do a lot of research as the first part of the design process.

Doodle

If you're not sure on an idea then sketch it on paper or in the model box first. After researching, Designers come up with ideas and refine them through drawing and sketch modelling in the model box (what you are doing now). Be careful with drawing as students can lack the confidence to move from the paper into the model box.

Theatre is magic

Theatre spaces have ways of making things fly, move, or disappear. Your design doesn't always need to comply with the laws of gravity! Use bits of card or string or straws to suspend things or show the secret structure of your designs might move.

If you are interested in working with scale in more detail:

Use the Scale print out.

If you are struggling with the smaller scale, use the print out. A good rule of thumb is that 1m in your box = 4cm on your traditional ruler. An extra tip is that most chair seats are 45-50cm high in real life, so your chair seat will be 2cm from the floor in the model.

Dream room

Last night I dreamt of a lawn full of flowers, I walked around and picked bunches for hours.

Last night I dreamt I was trapped in a boardgame, as big as me, no two pieces the same.

Last night I dreamt of land made of cake, frosting houses with sprinkles and a candy floss lake.

Last night I dreamt I was floating in space, above clouds and near planets with comets to chase.

Last night I dreamt I fell through the floor, and landed on jumpers, and soft toys and more.

Last night I dreamt I crawled into a clock, I saw its pieces and cogs and the ticking had stopped.

Last night I dreamt of a room without walls, it had a stairway and windows that just didn't fall.

Last night I dreamt I went to your party. It was full of celebrities like Paul McCartney.

Last night I dreamt I found a big clue, and it led me to discover a room painted blue.

Last night I dreamt I could swim underwater, I followed the fish for an hour and a quarter.

Last night I dreamt I was changing a sail, on a boat that was swallowed by a 16 ton whale.

Last night I dreamt that I won an award, the ceremony was pompous but my prize was a sword!

Last night I dreamt everything was upside down, my things were on the ceiling and my smile was a frown.

Last night I dreamt I was playing a sport, it was two merged together on a strangely shaped court.

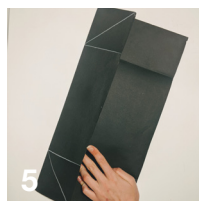
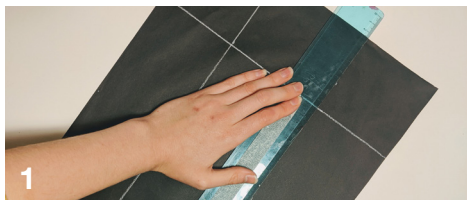
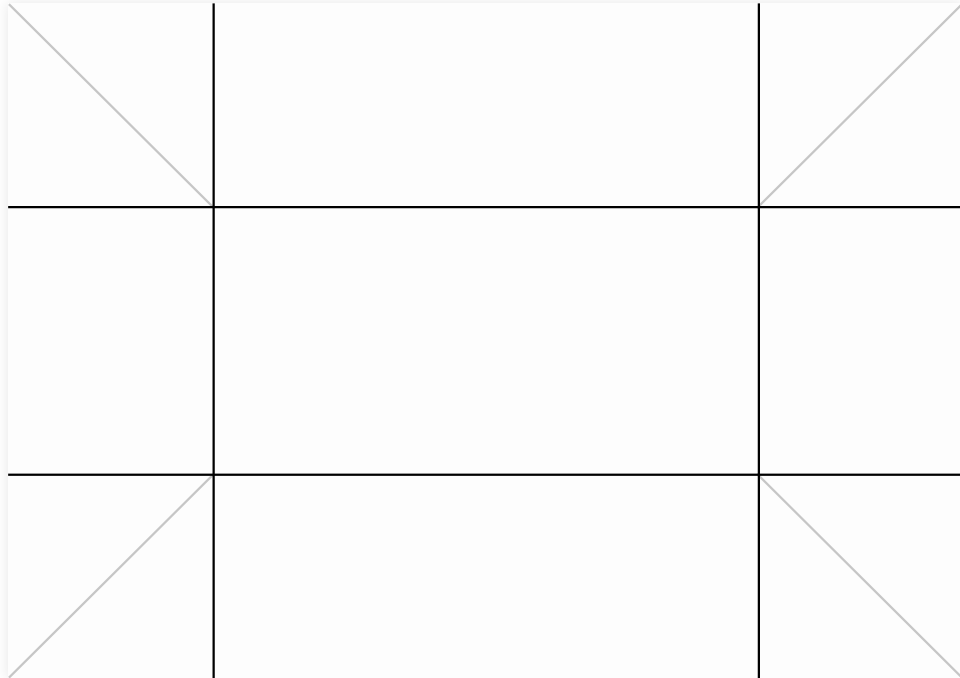
Last night I dreamt that I rolled down a hill, and you sat and watched from your pink window sill.

Last night I dreamt in black and white, and everything changed with the switch of a light.

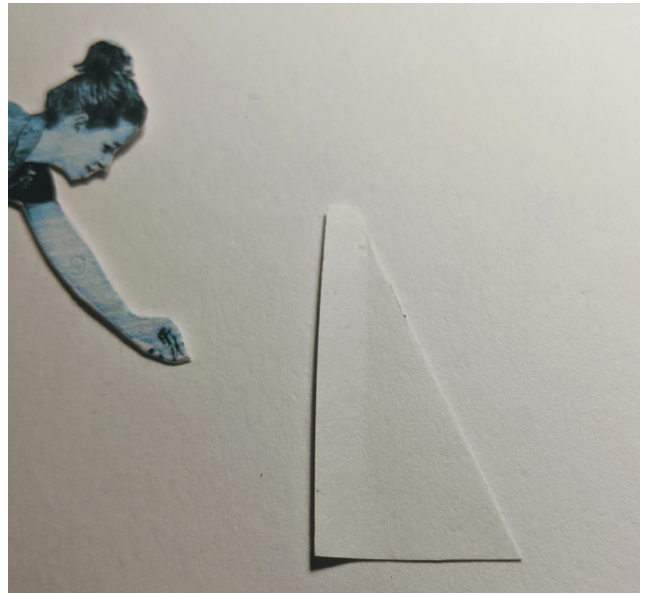
Last night I dreamt that you made me my dreams. They were wonderful and tiny and ought to be seen!

How to make a box from A3 card

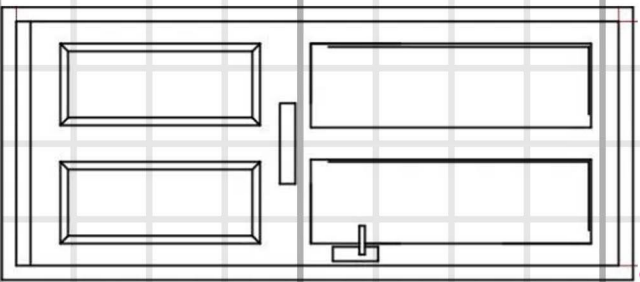
- 1) Take a A3 piece of card or thick paper (Ideally black)
- 2) Mark up as follows. Each black line is 9cm in from the edge.



How to add a stand for the figure



A DOOR
w/ 1.2m

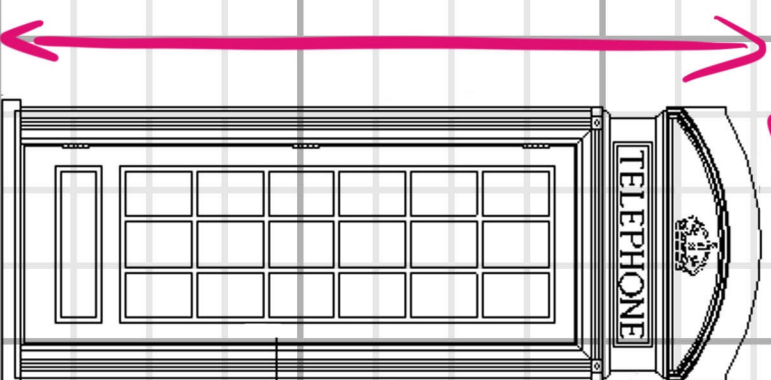


A CHAIR



w/ 50cm

TELEPHONE
BOX
2.57m



GRETA
1.5m



THE ROCK
1.96m



1:25 SCALE

↔ = 1m

