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Dramatic Literature

# Design Project and Written Justification

For your design assignment, *choose one* of the projects below (lighting, scene design, or costume design) from one of the plays that we have read or seen.

The written justification explains how the visual choices in your illustrated design realize the ideas of the play. That is, your writing justifies the creative and interpretive choices that you made in your design, anchoring itself with a solid basis of research and analysis.

In the written justification, use direct evidence from the play text to support your design concept. Typically, this takes the form of direct dialogue or summary. Also integrate research into your design to make the details of your design convincing and thorough. In total, your written justification must be at least 850 words and it should include proper citation in MLA style with a Work Cited page.

Your project will be graded on how thoughtfully detailed your design is; the depth of your engagement with the play text; the research you are able to show in your justification; and the creativity and originality of your design.

Submit the written justification to turnitin.com before 11:00 pm on Monday 12/07.

On 12/07, during class, everyone will give very brief, 3-minute presentation of his or her project. In the presentation, show your project and briefly summarize your justification.

# 1. Set design:

As Robert Edmond Jones says, “A stage setting holds a curious kind of suspense.” The job of the scene director is to maximize a feeling of dramatic tension for the audience by creating an environment ripe for action. For this project, select a specific scene from one of the plays and show how the stage would look at that point in the play. Even in plays that have one basic set, the set changes significantly throughout—furniture gets repositioned, Christmas trees and brought in and out, *et cetera*.

These are the general responsibilities of the set design:

* Create an environment for the performers and for the performance.
* Help set the mood and style of the production
* Distinguish realistic from nonrealistic theater
* Establish the locale and period in which the play takes place
* Furnish a design concept
* Provide a central image or visual metaphor for the production
* Solve practical design problems.

In your written justification, describe how your design responds to the above concerns.

## The illustrations

Show your design from two different perspectives. The **first** perspective will be a ground plan or ‘bird’s eye view’ of the stage set. It should look like it’s in scale, though you need not get out a ruler and make exact measurements. In the ground plan, indicate if any parts of the stage move or rotate; where the upstage and the downstage is; how doors open and if anything else on stage opens or moves.

You will need to decide if the stage space that you are designing for would be a proscenium stage, an arena theater (also known as ‘theater in the round’), or a thrust stage. Since you can choose any configuration of the stage itself, choose the one that you think would best serve the meaning of the play and your design.

The **second drawing** will show what the stage set would look like from the audience’s perspective. Draw this image. If you would like to show the texture or material you would use for a surface or set piece, you can attach images of this texture or material. Likewise, if there are projections, scrims or flats in your set, you can attach an image of what those projections would look like. An example of this would be the ‘photo shoot’ scene in *How I Learned to Drive*. You could draw the set, indicating the basic shape and color of the projected image and then have an attachment showing the exact picture that would be projected on the screen.

Your set design should convey your “design concept” or the “unifying idea carried out visually.” In your written justification, describe how your design concept realizes the energy, mood, or meaning of the play text. What is your central image or metaphor? How is your central image supported by the play text? How does your design express that particular metaphor? Explain in your justification and make sure to consider that in your design. You will be graded on how consistent your design is with your interpretation of the play’s meaning.

# 2. Lighting Design

Create a two-dimensional drawing of the lighting in one particular scene from one of the plays that we have read. Your drawing will show what the stage lighting would look like from the audience’s perspective. Draw this image. You will need to decide if the lighting that you are designing for would be for a production on a proscenium stage, an arena theater (also known as ‘theater in the round’), or a thrust stage. Since you can choose any configuration, choose the one that you think would best serve the meaning of the play and your design. Indicate the areas of the stage that are illuminated; what the colors of the lights are; and how intense the illumination is in the different areas of the stage.

These are the responsibilities of the lighting design, objectives that you may wish to explicitly address your design concept and justification:

* Provide visibility
* Reveal shapes and forms
* Provide a focus onstage and create visual compositions
* Assist in creating mood and reinforcing style
* Help to establish time and place
* Establish a rhythm of visual movement
* Reinforce a central visual image

The basic tools of the lighting designer help him or her meet the challenges of design:

* Intensity: (bright or dim?)
* Color: (warm or cool?)
* Direction: the angle that the lights hit the objects on stage
* Form: also known as the “texture” of the lighting (patterned, soft, or shaped?)
* Movement: Does it shift from one spot to another?

If there’s a special moment of lighting in your scene, discuss how your lighting cues or timing helps tell the story of the play.

The lighting design has the unique challenging of communicating the rhythm of visual movement in the story. The lighting indicates changes as the passage of stage time moves forward, greatly affecting the audience’s perception of the meaning and feeling of the action. Your design will have to take into consideration the timing of the light changes in the scene that you choose. In the scene for which you are designing, pay attention to the script. Where does the script show a change of light?

In the scene for which you are designing, attach a list of the lines of dialogue where the lighting changes and *describe what would happen visually with lighting*. For example, if you were designing lights for the last scene in *A Doll House*, you would include your light cues, like this:

*Helmer: [sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands]. Nora! Nora! [Looks round, and rises.] Empty. She is gone. [A hope flashes across his mind.] The most wonderful thing of all--? [The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]*

ALL STAGE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK WITHIN 30 SECONDS OF THE SOUND OF THE DOOR SLAMMING.

You should also indicate in your drawing if there are any special lights, such as spot lights, or lights that will move around.

# 3. Costume Design

For this option, you can select either one character in a few costumes, or select one scene, designing the costumes for every character in that scene.

Draw what the costumes would look like from the front and back. It’s perfectly acceptable for you to draw to indicate the texture and shape of the costumes. However, you can specify the fabric you would use with an attached image as examples of the main drawing.

Consider these objectives of costume design, considerations that your design should address.

* Establish the style of a production
* Indicate the historical period of a play and locale in which it is set
* Indicate the nature of individual characters or groups in the play by their stations in life, their occupations, and their personalities.
* Show relationships among characters—separating major characters from minor ones, contrasting one group with another.
* Where appropriate, symbolically convey the significance of individual characters or the theme of the play.
* Meet the needs of individual performers, making it possible for an actor or actress to move freely in a costume, perhaps to dance or engage in a sword fight, and to change quickly from one costume to another.
* Be consistent with the other visual elements in the play production.

How does your design incorporate the resources of the costumer?

* shape, and silhouette (is the costume flowy or linear? What kind of silhouette was used in the time period?)
* color (is the lead character in a color that contrasts with the others? How does the color indicate changes in mood?)
* fabric (what’s the drape, does the fabric reflect light or absorb light? Is the fabric elegant or rough?
* accessories (fringe, lace, parasols, canes?)

In your written justification, you should relate each costume that you’ve designed to the others. For example, if you were to choose Nora from *A Doll’s House*, you should discuss how the differences in her costuming over scenes reflect the changes in her character. If you were designing for characters in one scene, you should justify how the costume design establishes relationships between the characters.

If you are looking for the historical shape of clothing, this site has some useful material: <http://thecostumersmanifesto.com/index.php?title=Costume_History_Sorted_by_Era>

However, you should not feel constrained to be faithful to the original setting of the play. If you have a design concept that justifies changing the historical setting of the play, you should do that! For this assignment, you should make the most interesting choices that you can make. Feel free to create a non-realistic costume that is heavily symbolic.