

Extracts of student evidence. Research and analysis of the text for performance:**Identifying the intention of the playwright** *The Pardner's Tale* by Gerald Murphy

The Pardner's Tale is a theatrical adaptation of Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale* from his *Canterbury Tales*. The tales are connected by an overarching story of a group of Pilgrims engaged in a storytelling contest, hence the location of the One-Act version is referred to as "Pilgrim's Gulch". This relates to the characters of the tale, who (despite unaware of it) are on a journey of fate. Gerald Murphy's version of the tale is almost identical to the original, excepting the obvious stylistic change.

Identifying the ideas, themes and messages within the chosen text

The underlying theme here is that of greed and betrayal. The bandits plot to kill one another once they have stumbled upon a large fortune. Each of them want the gold for themselves, and not one of them shows remorse for the death of their companions. The idea that greed corrupts is a strong one in this piece.

There is a touch of fear of and rebellion against the inescapable reality of death. The Old Woman presents the idea of reluctance toward aging and surfeited look at her own worn-out existence. She wants to find someone who will 'trade their youth for her age'. She can also be seen as an omen of death; it is her that leads the bandits to the pot of gold, and thus their demise.

3

Establishing the social background of the text

There are a few references to the plague, as made by Amber and Nasty Nancy. Another name for the plague was the Black Death – illustrations in history of the Black Death depict skeletons doing something called the *Danse Macabre* – "The Dance of Death". This is to do with the idea that death is everywhere and is inescapable, which ties in with the play on the metaphorical level and the literal. The plague itself destroyed about a third of the European population between 1347 and 1353 – making it a link between Chaucer's time and Gerald Murphy's depiction of the west. There was a major outbreak of the bubonic plague in San Francisco between 1900 and 1904, in the Chinatown area.

1

Considering the development of the characters and action throughout the text

The play is very promising in terms of character interaction, characterisation, and use of space. Many of Nasty Nancy's lines refer to profit or reward. This ties in with the theme of greed, as the bandits' actions in the latter half of the play are attempts to profit from the downfall of the others. All characters, excepting the deceased Sally Joe, spout verbal abuse toward the Old Woman. This is for comic effect, as the constant hassling they give her is not disputed by the woman until Billy refers to her smell.

Balmy Buck repeatedly refers to guns, such as the "Winchester repeating rifle". He is also seen pulling his gun out a number of times and has a sort of sadistic pleasure in the idea of torture and killing.

2

Formulating an explanation of the director's production concept.

The style of this play is almost a Melodrama – it is set in a stereotypical location (a saloon in the wild west) with stock characters (saloon girls, bandits, a very old woman) and over dramatisation of a situation. It seems fitting to have a male play the old woman for an added level of humour and 'style points'. This piece is meant to highlight themes of greed and corruption, and the inevitability of death. It is meant to be a comical piece, which builds tension $\frac{3}{4}$ through, once the bandits begin to plot against one another.

3

Translating the scripted text to facilitate the enactment of the script from ‘page to stage’:

<p>Communicating a concept to convey the intention of the play</p> <p>I want humour to show through in exaggerated actions, reactions, and delivery of lines. This is a light-hearted play, despite its themes, so I don't want to fill it with genuine dramatic tension, only suspense for the next piece of plot development. Accents will be used to characterise the people and ridiculous, over-the-top, or otherwise ‘bad’ accents are more than welcome.. Costume will be exaggerated to make the bandits stand out, and to make the Old Woman look very old (rags and a walking stick). The set will be designed to be a typical Saloon set-up, with a lot of bottles, a counter, table and chairs for the bandits, saloon-styled swing doors, and a cabinet to the side.</p> <p>I want the audience to be constantly aware of the dramatic irony and they will realise what will happen before the fact. I want the play to have a ‘story telling’ feel to it. The old woman acts as a narrator in a way. Lighting will be very simple. Lights come up to begin the piece, fade out at the end.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">②</p>
<p>Casting of actors</p> <p><i>An audition poster has been created and marketed. In auditioning I asked for ‘dastardly charisma’ and alluded to the stereotypical. Acting should be over-the-top and characterised. Audition scripts have been extracted from the text.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">④</p>
<p>Developing and implementing a rehearsal schedule</p>
<p><i>A rehearsal schedule with times and dates is developed.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">④</p>
<p>Supporting the development of roles and dramatic action</p> <p><i>A detailed rehearsal log is evident for the duration of rehearsal</i></p> <p><i>For example: Melodramatic acting. To my delight their projection was great, so that was a short lesson. I then detailed a brief summary of Melodrama to them and got them to do ‘character walks’, poses, and voices. I think it all went very well, even when I asked them to exaggerate things 20 times what they were doing to begin with. Expression is coming along well, but I think articulation needs some work. Volume does drop a tad during lines, but isn't reproduced whenever I ask them to say the line again. Will need to work on that once everyone's there. Aside from that, I realise the majority of my rehearsals will be focussed on the three bandits, with a couple of small cameos by Jack's Old Woman character.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">⑥</p>
<p>Guiding the production team</p>
<p><i>A lighting plan, props list and set design have been included for use by the production team.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">④</p>
<p>Fostering a positive and co-operative working environment to enable the production to be realised.</p> <p>I have always been in favour of being friendly with my cast. When I want their attention I will usually wait for the right moment to break a conversation. I treat my cast with respect and courtesy, and expect the same in return. They seem to reciprocate and listen attentively and take my directions very well. If anyone has a suggestion, I consider it and in some cases they are in the final performance.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">⑤</p>