

# VCASS

## THEATRE ARTS CURRICULUM HANDBOOK



Image: Sarah Palmieri and Hayley Edwards Year 12 Theatre Arts Students as *Athena* in *THE ODYSSEY*, 2017; photo by Michael Hollis

Victoria's Premier School for the Training and Education of Talented  
Young Dancers, Musicians, Theatre and Visual Artists

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# VCASS

## PURPOSE & PHILOSOPHY



## Purpose

The purpose of the School is to provide a high quality education and training program to prepare talented young people for careers in dance, music, theatre and visual arts.

## Philosophy

Theatre artists are an essential part of any society, as they reflect and comment upon that society in the most fundamental ways.

The Theatre Arts are vital to any culture as they:

- are a major force for social criticism and evaluation
- raise the quality of life
- assist in the development and articulation of a nation's identity
- contribute to the basic framework of education  
(*Industries Assistance Commission Report, 1976*)

The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School recognises the importance of theatre artists and of their relationship with the world. It is committed to the nurturing and development of talented and educated students who can effectively and creatively enrich our lives.

In pursuing the goals of developing the theatre arts and artists, the school believes that it must educate and produce graduates who are willing and ready to pursue the option of developing a career in the theatre arts regardless of social and economic circumstances.

The theatre arts course provides an intensive two year program that guides and mentors students, providing them with access to performers, actors, designers and theatre arts industry professionals to support their unique education.

The vocational training should be taught within a broad educational framework, which provides students with the knowledge, skills and attributes to enable them to exercise autonomy and participate effectively in a rapidly changing and interdependent world.

The School seeks to recognise, develop and foster the unique talent of each student.



# Rationale

The Theatre Arts Program was established in 2016 to provide focused and concentrated opportunities for students to learn about the production and performance within a community of like-minded peers. The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School is located in the heart of Melbourne's Arts Precinct and is a short walk from Melbourne's most significant performing arts and cultural organizations.

One to one teaching is a key element of the Theatre Arts Program. Small class sizes ensure students have opportunities to learn about theatre art practices that encourage ambitious and exciting outcomes.

An essential part of the Theatre Arts Program is the chance for students to undertake broad experiences. Regular performances and learning throughout the year attribute to the powerful and rapid development of each student's artistic practice. These opportunities seek to support them in developing a professional approach to presenting their work and understanding the stages of theatre design and development.

Partnerships with key cultural organizations alongside the promotion of student engagement with the wider arts community is integral to student learning within the Theatre Arts Program. Students visit performances spaces regularly to develop an expanded understanding of contemporary performance practices and historical traditions in the theatre arts.

A full Academic program in addition to the Theatre Arts program ensures each student achieves a comprehensive VCE education.

## Goals

- To develop a caring and supportive community.
- To provide a friendly, safe and purposeful environment in which students are able to value and enjoy learning.
- To provide high quality education and training in theatre, with an emphasis upon contemporary approaches to theatre making and responding to theatrical performance.
- To encourage exploration and discovery and to foster creativity in the theatre arts.
- To provide tuition and training by practitioners of excellence, in conjunction with a quality academic education.
- To provide opportunities for developing performance skills through a combination of 'in-house' and public presentation of theatrical works.
- To endeavour to ensure that individual needs and differences are taken into account.
- To develop a theatre arts aesthetic through observing and appreciating the work of others, comparing a range of theatre arts styles and exploring how performance reflects the views, values and spirit of contemporary society.



These goals are realized through:

- providing a wide range of experience for each student;
- providing a balanced curriculum;
- making connections between studies;
- providing an 'inclusive' curriculum;
- providing for the personal growth of each student.

## Artistic Vision

The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School is uniquely placed to offer senior secondary students an educational experience that is based upon the principle of Specialisation. The school has provided specialist training to young dancers and musicians since 1978. In 2013 a Visual Arts program was added to the existing specialisms.

The school has further expanded its artistic vision through the introduction of a specialist senior secondary Theatre Arts program designed to meet the performance needs of artistic and creative adolescents. In collaboration with practicing theatre artists, performers and industry professionals, students can develop performance and production skills appropriate to further study at university, TAFE or in the making of their own theatre work. To achieve this students will experience exciting, innovative and rigorous pedagogy delivered by teachers and guest lecturers who support personalised student learning.

The Theatre Arts Program will provide senior secondary students who demonstrate interest in an artistic and creative education with:

- improved access to facilities and resources that will support the achievement of enhanced learning outcomes;
- the opportunity to work with theatre arts experts and other creative practitioners;
- the chance to work alongside like-minded students in a supportive learning environment that values arts education;
- a preparedness to enter into further theatre study in the competitive environment of tertiary education with a highly developed understanding of production and performance;
- a developed sense of creativity and the ability to demonstrate lateral thinking;
- a course dedicated to the development of pathways for senior secondary students to tertiary education in contemporary theatre practice;
- a learning environment dedicated to senior secondary students to develop their interest in and knowledge about contemporary performance.

**Chris Button**  
Head of Theatre Arts



# Year 11 Theatre Arts Studies

## VCE Drama

### Unit 1: Dramatic storytelling

This unit focuses on creating, presenting and analysing a devised performance that includes real or imagined characters and is based on stimulus material that reflects personal, cultural and/or community experiences and stories. This unit also involves analysis of a student's own performance work and of a performance by professional drama practitioners. In this unit students use performance styles from a range of contexts associated with naturalism and non-naturalism.

Students examine storytelling through the creation of solo and/or ensemble devised performance/s. They manipulate expressive skills in the creation and presentation of characters, and develop awareness and understanding of how characters are portrayed in naturalistic and non-naturalistic performance styles and document the processes they use. Students also gain an awareness of how performance is shaped and given meaning. They investigate a range of stimulus material and learn about stagecraft, conventions and performance styles from a range of contexts.

#### **Aims**

On completion of this unit the student should be able to:

- devise and document solo and/or ensemble drama work/s based on experiences and/or stories.
- perform a devised drama work/s to an audience
- analyse the development and performance to an audience of their non-naturalistic devised work
- analyse the portrayal of stories and characters in a drama performance by professional or other drama practitioners

#### **Assessment**

Assessment tasks for this unit include the following:

- demonstrate the use of play-making techniques to devise and rehearse a solo and/or ensemble drama work/s based on stories and/or characters
- document use of processes to create and develop stories and characters in drama
- perform a solo and/or ensemble devised drama work/s that features stories and characters
- analyse the drama work created and performed in in class in either a single written response or in individual responses to structured questions
- a written analysis of a professional drama performance



## Unit 2: Non-naturalistic Australian Drama

This unit focuses on the use and documentation of the processes involved in constructing a devised solo or ensemble performance that uses non-naturalistic performance styles

Students create, present and analyse a performance based on a person, an event, an issue, a place, an artwork, a text and/or an icon from a contemporary or historical Australian context.

Students use a range of stimulus material in creating the performance and examine non-naturalistic performance styles from a range of contexts relevant to Australia and Australians. Conventions appropriate to the selected performance styles are also explored. Students' knowledge of how dramatic elements can be enhanced or manipulated through performance is further developed in this unit.

Students analyse their own performance work as well as undertake the analysis of a performance of an Australian work by other actors.

### Aims

On completion of this unit the student should be able to:

- devise and document the processes used to create a solo or ensemble non-naturalistic performance work
- present a performance of a devised non-naturalistic work to an audience
- analyse the creation, development and performance to an audience of their non-naturalistic devised work
- analyse a performance of an Australian drama work

### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit include the following:

- demonstrate the use of play-making techniques to devise and rehearse a solo and/or ensemble drama work/s based on stories and/or characters
- document use of processes to create and develop stories and characters in drama
- perform a solo and/or ensemble devised drama work/s that features stories and characters.
- analyse the drama work created and performed in in class in either a single written response or in individual responses to structured questions
- a written analysis of a professional drama performance



# VCE Theatre Studies

## Unit 1: Pre-modern Theatre

This unit focuses on the application of acting and other stagecraft in relation to theatrical styles of the pre-modern era. Students work with playscripts from the pre-modern era of theatre, focusing on works created up to 1920 in both their written form and in performance. They also study theatrical and performance analysis and apply these skills to the analysis of a play in performance.

Periods from the pre-modern era of theatre include Ancient Greek, Roman, Liturgical drama such as morality/miracle/mystery plays, Italian and the Commedia Dell'Arte, Elizabethan and Shakespearean, Restoration comedies and dramas, Neo-classical, Spanish and French, Naturalism/Realism, and non-Western theatre such as Beijing Opera, Noh theatre, Bunraku and Kabuki and other traditional indigenous theatre forms.

### Aims

On completion of this unit the student should be able to:

- identify and describe the distinguishing features of pre-modern theatre playscripts
- apply acting and other stagecraft to interpret playscripts from the pre-modern era
- analyse a performance of a playscript

### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit are selected from the following:

- performance of playscripts from the pre-modern era
- oral/visual/multimedia reports/presentations
- tests
- responses to structured questions
- research report



## Unit 2: Modern Theatre

In this unit students study theatrical styles and stagecraft through working with playscripts in both their written form and in performance with an emphasis on the application of stagecraft. Students work with playscripts from the modern era, focusing on works from the 1920s to the present. They study theatrical analysis and production evaluation and apply these skills to the analysis of a play in performance.

Theatrical movements in the modern era include Epic Theatre, Constructivist theatre, Theatre of the Absurd, Political theatre, Feminist theatre, Expressionism, Eclectic theatre (contemporary theatre that incorporates a range of theatrical styles), Physical theatre, Verbatim theatre, Theatre in Education.

### Aims

On completion of this unit the student should be able to:

- identify and describe the distinguishing features of modern era theatre playscripts.
- apply stagecraft to interpret playscripts from the modern era
- analyse and evaluate stagecraft in a performance of a playscript

### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit are selected from the following:

- performance of playscripts from the modern era
- oral/visual/multimedia reports/presentations
- tests
- responses to structured questions
- research report



# Associated Programs

## Acting: Processes and Style

Acting classes will be conducted for the entirety of year eleven and form the basis for all other performance studies within the Theatre Arts program.

Acting Processes provides students with a practical study of realistic and non-realistic acting. The program introduces students to the concept of acting as authentic response and seeks to embed this principle in their work across a range of performance contexts. Workshop sessions will include an exploration of the teachings of Morris, Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, Meisner and the non-naturalistic works of Meyerhold.

Second semester classes will focus more specifically on acting style and theatrical form. Students will initially undertake workshops to extend naturalistic acting technique. Later in the semester students will explore both traditional and contemporary Commedia del Arte and traditional Kabuki performance through Kata.

## Movement for Actors

Movement for Actors introduces students to the notion of utilising their body as an artistic instrument. Students will initially explore movement dynamics, the principles of the actor in space, the use of levels, direction, shape and gesture within the context of creating dramatic performance. In second term students will focus on the techniques and principles of Laban for actors exploring concepts such as the kinosphere, the eight basic efforts, dimensional cross, dynamosphere and patterning.

This program is completed over two school terms. It begins in Term One of year eleven and concludes at the end of Term Two.

## Voice for Acting

Voice for Acting aims to develop students' awareness of their voice as an organic part of their acting instrument. Classes focus upon the interdependence of the voice and body. Students engage in a range of exercises that reflect the philosophies of Kristin Linklater and others with the intention of developing an expressive voice that is connected to emotional impulse, shaped by intellect but not restricted by it. Students will explore exercises in relaxation, awareness of breathing, experience of vibratory sound, opening the throat, vocal resonance and range, vocal dynamics and articulation.

This program is completed over two school terms. It begins in Term One of year eleven and concludes at the end of Term Two.



## Production Processes

Production processes provides students with an understanding of the process of creating a live performance. Students will undertake classes in design realisation, performance technologies and stage management focussing on the production process from concept to realisation. Occupational health and safety and how this relates to performing arts practice and risk management practices are also investigated.

This work program is completed over three school terms. It begins in Term One of year eleven and concludes at the end of Term Three.

## Theatre Perspectives

Theatre Perspectives provides students with the opportunity to develop their critical appreciation of theatre as an art form and of professional theatre practice. The course encourages students to consider the broader philosophical concerns that inform performance art. A central element of the course is the program of theatre performances that students will attend throughout the year. Through discussion and written response, students will develop their capacity to respond both formally and informally to a broad range of theatre forms and theatrical styles, presented in a varied assortment of performance spaces.

## Musical Theatre Workshop

Musical Theatre Workshop explores aspects of this theatrical form and the skills associated with it. Students undertake classes in theatrical dance, group (part) and solo singing. They are involved in the process of developing and refining work for inclusion in a showcase performance that concludes the three terms allocated to this area of study.

Students are encouraged to take private lessons in singing. These are available by arrangement and are conducted in accordance with school practice during academic class time.

## Writing for Performance

Writing for Performance allows students to develop an understanding of dramatic storytelling though a focus on the narrative elements involved in the creation and development of a script for performance. Students will explore character, motivation, causality, the effect of location, developing realistic dialogue and other related aspects of writing for performance.

Material generated in this class may be workshopped in Acting classes or form integral parts of Drama, Theatre Perspectives or Theatre in Education performances.

Assessment will be derived from class exercises and a major assignment.



# Year 12 Theatre Arts Studies

## VCE Drama

### Unit 3: Devised non-naturalistic ensemble performance

This unit focuses on non-naturalistic devised ensemble drama. Students explore non-naturalistic performance styles and associated conventions from a diverse range of contemporary and cultural performance traditions and work collaboratively to devise, develop and present an ensemble performance. Students use and manipulate dramatic elements, conventions, performance and expressive skills, performance styles and stagecraft in non-naturalistic ways to shape and enhance the performance. Students also document and evaluate stages involved in the creation, development and presentation of the ensemble performance.

Students also analyse a professional performance that incorporates non-naturalistic performance styles and production elements selected from the prescribed VCE Drama Unit 3 Playlist published annually on the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority website.

#### Aims

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- develop and present character/s within a devised non-naturalistic ensemble performance
- analyse the use of processes, techniques and skills to create and present a devised ensemble performance
- analyse and evaluate a non-naturalistic performance

#### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit include the following:

- development and presentation of character/s within an ensemble performance
- written analysis of the development and performance of character/s from a group devised non-naturalistic ensemble work
- written analysis and evaluation of a professionally produced play selected from the VCAA Drama Playlist

### Unit 4: Non-naturalistic solo performance

This unit focuses on the development and presentation of non-naturalistic devised solo performances. Students explore non-naturalistic performance styles and associated conventions from a diverse range of contemporary and cultural performance traditions. They develop skill in extracting dramatic potential from stimulus material and use dramatic elements, conventions, performance styles and performance and expressive skills to develop and present a short solo performance. These skills are further developed as students create a devised solo performance in response to a prescribed structure. Students also document and evaluate the stages involved in the creation, development and presentation of a solo performance.



## Aims

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- devise a solo performance in response to given stimulus material and describe the non-naturalistic qualities of the performance
- create, develop and perform a non-naturalistic drama solo in response to a prescribed structure
- analyse and evaluate the creation, development and presentation of a devised non-naturalistic solo performance

## Assessment

Assessment for this unit of study includes the preparation and presentation of a solo performance of no more than seven minutes duration to a panel of external assessors appointed by the VCAA. Additional assessment will include:

- a short written statement that identifies the non-naturalistic qualities of their response to the stimulus material
- a one to three minute presentation of a solo response to stimulus material
- a written report that uses the language of drama to analyse and evaluate the solo performance developed for the external examination

A written examination is conducted by the VCAA in November. Assessed work in VCE Drama units 3 and 4 contributes to students' study score and is a component of their ATAR score.

# VCE Theatre Studies

## Unit 3: Playscript Interpretation

In this unit students develop an interpretation of a playscript through the stages of the theatrical production process: planning, development and presentation. Students specialise in two areas of stagecraft, working collaboratively in order to realise the production of a playscript. They use knowledge they develop from this experience to analyse the ways stagecraft can be used to interpret previously unseen playscript excerpts. Students also attend a performance selected from the prescribed VCE Theatre Studies Unit 3 Playlist and analyse and evaluate the interpretation of the playscript in the performance.

## Aims

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- apply stagecraft to interpret a playscript for performance to an audience
- document an interpretation of excerpts from a playscript and explain how stagecraft can be applied in the interpretation
- analyse and evaluate the interpretation of a written playscript in production to an audience



## Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit include the following:

- practical application of two areas of stagecraft across all stages of the production process, and demonstration of understanding of how selected stagecraft can be effectively applied to interpret a playscript in performance to an audience
- written documentation that describes how stagecraft can be utilised to interpret previously unseen excerpt from a playscript
- a written analysis and evaluation of an interpretation of a prescribed playscript

# Unit 4: Performance interpretation

In this unit students study a prescribed scene and associated monologue and develop a theatrical treatment that includes the creation of a character by an actor, stagecraft possibilities, and appropriate research. Students interpret a monologue from within a specified scene using selected areas of stagecraft to realise their interpretation. Students' creative work is supported through analysis of a performance they attend selected from the prescribed VCE Theatre Studies playlist.

## Aims

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- interpret a monologue from a playscript and justify their interpretive decisions
- develop a theatrical treatment that presents an interpretation of a monologue and its prescribed scene
- analyse and evaluate acting in a production

## Assessment

Assessment for this unit of study includes the preparation and presentation of a solo performance and framing statement of no more than ten minutes duration to a panel of external assessors appointed by the VCAA. Additional assessment will include:

- a theatrical treatment that outlines an interpretation of a monologue from a prescribed scene
- a written analysis and evaluation of acting and its interrelationships to direction and design in a production from the prescribed playlist

A written examination is conducted by the VCAA in November. Assessed work in VCE Theatre Studies units 3 and 4 contributes to students' study score and is a component of their ATAR score.



# Associated Programs

## Acting: Text into Performance and Repertoire

Text into Performance provides students with the opportunity to devise their own play based on a classic text. Students will engage in a range of playmaking and building processes, develop scripted monologues, duologues and ensemble based dialogue pieces as a part of the process of devising a new dramatic text.

Students will explore non-naturalistic dramatic elements and conventions that will allow them to reinterpret the classic text as a new dramatic text including narration, chorus, monologue, dialogue, prose, heightened use of language, character, relationship, symbol, meaning, song and movement.

In second semester students will concentrate on developing and refining performance and expressive skills with regard to monologue preparation for VCE and tertiary audition purposes.

## Physical Theatre

Building on Movement for Actors, this series of classes further develops students' kinaesthetic and spatial awareness in movement. The course will reference the work of Rudolf Laban that the students have already undertaken and extend their understanding and use of force and flow, and strength and control of weight, leading to an exploration of physical risk in movement.

Referencing the work of physical theatre companies, DV8 (Lloyd Newson), Pina Bausch Dance Theatre and Complicite, and the form of Contact Improvisation (developed by Steve Paxton), the students are introduced to exercises and improvisations that allow them to develop their physical skills as individuals and in partnership with others.

Initial sessions investigate the use of gravity and weight in movement, fall and recovery and dynamic transitions into the floor. This will lead to working physically with the studio space itself, its walls and features. Students will also begin to explore processes that delve into their own physical histories or 'body stories' to create movement/ character. From this point the students will begin some partner and group work to explore trust and weight sharing, leading to more challenging and risk taking physical falls and lifts.



## Theatre Perspectives

Students will undertake an enquiry based approach to learning in Theatre Perspectives, which will involve using research methods: Action Learning and Reflective Practice. Students will choose an area of theatre to research, which will inform their practice as a performing artist and lead to a solo performance outcome.

This investigation will be based on selecting from either a traditional, modern or post-modern approach to performance and then deciding on what enquiry to take based on the selected area of theatre.

## Musical Theatre Workshop

This program is a continuation of the year 11 coursework with a focus on repertoire and the application of skills developed in the first two terms of study in musical theatre. The course concludes with a showcase performance at the end of Term One.

A detailed description of this course can be found in the year 11 program outline.

## Writing for Performance

This program is a continuation of the year 11 coursework with a focus on consolidating the skills associated with writing for a range of performance styles and purposes. This course concludes at the end of Term One.

A detailed description of this course can be found in the year 11 program outline.

## The Mentor Program

In 2017 students in the year 12 Theatre Arts program have been partnered with third year students from the VCA Bachelor of Fine Arts acting stream. Students meet with their mentors six times in total during the first three terms of the academic year. The focus of these meetings is the practical development of performance material that may be used for audition purposes and the opportunity to experience another actor's process of performance development.

It is intended that this program will continue in 2018.

