

# VCASS

## THEATRE ARTS CURRICULUM HANDBOOK



Image: Amon Mether, Angus Stoffel, Mack Williams and Pearl Hunter - Year 12 Theatre Arts Students in *THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM* Season Directed and Staged by Chris Button 2019  
photo by Dylan Breniger

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

2020

# THEATRE ARTS HANDBOOK

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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 realised through:

- providing a wide range of experiences 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 practising 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: Introducing Performance Styles

In this unit students study three or more performance styles from a range of social, historical and cultural contexts. They examine drama traditions of ritual and storytelling to devise performances that go beyond re-creation and/or representation of real life as it is lived. This unit focuses on creating, presenting and analysing a devised solo and/or ensemble 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 a work by professional drama performers. Students apply play-making techniques to shape and give meaning to their performance. They manipulate expressive and performance skills in the creation and presentation of characters, and develop awareness and understanding of how characters are portrayed in a range of performance styles. They document the processes they use as they explore a range of stimulus material, and experiment with production areas, dramatic elements, conventions and performance styles.

#### **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 to an audience
- analyse the development and performance to an audience of their devised work
- analyse the portrayal of ideas/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 class in an aural presentation or a multimedia presentation, or in responses to structured questions
- a written analysis in response to structured questions



## Unit 2: Australian Identity

In this unit students study aspects of Australian identity evident in contemporary drama practice. This may also involve exploring the work of selected drama practitioners and associated performance styles. This unit focuses on the use and documentation of the processes involved in constructing a devised solo or ensemble performance. 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. In creating the performance, students use stimulus material that allows them to explore an aspect or aspects of Australian identity. They examine selected performance styles and explore the associated conventions. Students further develop their knowledge of the conventions of transformation of character, time and place, the application of symbol, and how these conventions may be manipulated to create meaning in performance and the use of dramatic elements and production areas. Students analyse their own performance work as well as undertaking an analysis of a performance of an Australian work, where possible, by professional actors.

An Australian work might:

- be written, adapted or devised by Australian writers or theatre-makers
- reflect aspects of Australian identity, for example the voice of Australia's first peoples, the Celtic perspective, the twentieth or twenty-first century migrant experience, the refugee experience, urban and rural perspectives.

Across this unit, students study performance styles from a range of historical and/or social and/or cultural contexts.

### Aims

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

- devise and document the processes used to create a solo or ensemble performance that reflects an aspect or aspects of Australian identity and contemporary drama practice
- present a devised performance that reflects aspects of Australian identity and contemporary drama practice
- analyse the development, and performance to an audience, of their devised work.
- analyse and evaluate a performance of a drama work by Australian practitioners

### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit include the following:

- demonstrate the use of play-making techniques to devise and develop a solo and/or ensemble drama work/s based on stories and/or characters
- document the processes to create and develop stories and characters in drama
- perform a devised solo or ensemble devised drama work that features stories and characters
- analyse the drama work created and performed in class in an aural presentation or a multimedia presentation, or in responses to structured questions
- a written analysis in response to structured questions



# VCE Theatre Studies

## Unit 1: Pre-modern Theatre Styles and Conventions

This unit focuses on the application of acting, direction and design in relation to theatre styles from the pre-modern era, that is, works prior to the 1920s. Students creatively and imaginatively work in production roles with scripts from the pre-modern era of theatre, focusing on at least three distinct theatre styles and their conventions. They study innovations in theatre production in the pre-modern era and apply this knowledge to their own works. Students develop knowledge and skills about theatre production processes including dramaturgy, planning, development and performance to an audience and apply this to their work. Theatre styles from the pre-modern era of theatre include Ancient Greek, Ancient Roman, Liturgical drama such as morality/miracle/mystery plays, Commedia dell'Arte, Elizabethan, Restoration comedies and dramas, Neo-classical, Naturalism/Realism, Beijing Opera, Noh, Bunraku and Kabuki and other traditional indigenous theatre forms.

### Aims

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

- identify and describe distinguishing features of theatre styles and scripts from the pre-modern era
- work creatively and imaginatively in production roles to interpret scripts from the pre-modern era
- analyse a performance of a script

### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit are selected from the following:

- interpretation of scripts from the pre-modern era through the application of acting, direction and/or design: costume, make-up, props, set, lighting, sound
- oral/visual/multimedia reports and/or presentations
- structured questions
- a research report



## Unit 2: Modern Theatre Styles and Conventions

This unit focuses on the application of acting, direction and design in relation to theatre styles from the modern era, that is, the 1920s to the present. Students creatively and imaginatively work in production roles with scripts from the modern era of theatre, focusing on at least three distinct theatre styles. They study innovations in theatre production in the modern era and apply this knowledge to their own works. Students develop knowledge and skills about theatre production processes including dramaturgy, planning, development and performance to an audience and apply this to their work. They study safe and ethical working practices in theatre production and develop skills of performance analysis, which they apply to the analysis of a play in performance. Theatre styles from the modern era of theatre include Epic theatre, Constructivist theatre, Theatre of the Absurd, Political theatre, Feminist theatre, Expressionism, Eclectic theatre, Experimental theatre, Musical theatre, Physical theatre, Verbatim theatre, Theatre-in-education, and Immersive/Interactive theatre.

### Aims

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

- identify and describe the distinguishing features of theatre styles and scripts from the modern era
- work creatively and imaginatively in production roles to interpret scripts from the modern era
- analyse and evaluate a theatre production

### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit are selected from the following:

- interpretation of scripts from the pre-modern era through the application of acting, direction and/or design: costume, make-up, props, set, lighting, sound
- oral/visual/multimedia reports and/or presentations
- structured questions
- a 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 Second Term.

## 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.



# Year 12 Theatre Arts Studies

## VCE Drama

### Unit 3: Devised Ensemble performance

In this unit students explore the work of drama practitioners and draw on contemporary practice as they devise ensemble performance work. Students explore performance styles and associated conventions from a diverse range of contemporary and/or traditional contexts. They work collaboratively to devise, develop and present an ensemble performance. Students create work that reflects a specific performance style or one that draws on multiple performance styles and is therefore eclectic in nature. They use play-making techniques to extract dramatic potential from stimulus material, then apply and manipulate conventions, dramatic elements, expressive skills, performance skills and production areas. Throughout development of the work they experiment with transformation of character, time and place, and application of symbol. Students devise and shape their work to communicate meaning or to have a specific impact on their audience. In addition, students document and evaluate stages involved in the creation, development and presentation of the ensemble performance. Students analyse and evaluate a professional drama performance selected from the prescribed VCE Drama Unit 3 Playlist published annually on the VCAA website.

#### Aims

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

- develop and present characters within a devised ensemble performance that goes beyond a representation of real life as it is lived
- analyse the use of processes, techniques and skills to create and present a devised ensemble performance
- analyse and evaluate a professional drama performance

#### Assessment

Assessment for this unit of study includes:

- Development and presentation of characters within a devised ensemble performance that goes beyond a representation of real life as it is lived
- Analysis of the use of processes, techniques and skills to create and present a devised ensemble performance
- Analysis and evaluation of a professional drama performance



## Unit 4: Devised Solo Performance

This unit focuses on the development and the presentation of devised solo performances. Students explore contemporary practice and works that are eclectic in nature; that is, they draw on a range of performance styles and associated conventions from a diverse range of contemporary and traditional contexts. Students develop skills in extracting dramatic potential from stimulus material and use play-making techniques to develop and present a short solo performance. They experiment with application of symbol and transformation of character, time and place. They apply conventions, dramatic elements, expressive skills, performance skills and performance styles to shape and give meaning to their work. Students further develop and refine these skills as they create a performance in response to a prescribed structure. They consider the use of production areas to enhance their performance and the application of symbol and transformations. Students document and evaluate the stages involved in the creation, development and presentation of their solo performance. Students are encouraged to attend performances that incorporate a range of performance styles to support their work in this unit.

### Aims

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

- demonstrate, in response to given stimulus material, application of symbol and transformation of character, time and place, and describe the techniques used
- create, develop and perform a solo performance in response to a prescribed structure
- analyse and evaluate the creation, development and presentation of a solo performance devised in response to a prescribed structure

### Assessment

Assessment for this unit of study includes:

- A one to two-minute presentation of a solo demonstration devised from given stimulus material
- A short oral or written statement, which describes techniques used in the demonstration
- Analysis and evaluation of the devised solo performance

In addition all students will undertake:

- The preparation and presentation of a solo performance based on a prescribed structure selected from the VCE Drama Solo Performance Examination published annually by the VCAA

**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: Producing Theatre

In this unit students develop an interpretation of a script through the three stages of the theatre production process: planning, development and presentation. Students specialise in two production roles, working collaboratively, creatively and imaginatively to realise the production of a script. They use knowledge developed during this process to analyse and evaluate the ways work in production roles can be used to interpret script excerpts previously unstudied. Students develop knowledge and apply elements of theatre composition, and safe and ethical working practices in the theatre. Students attend a performance selected from the prescribed VCE Theatre Studies Unit 3 Playlist and analyse and evaluate the interpretation of the script in the performance.

### Aims

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- interpret a script across the stages of the production process through creative, imaginative and collaborative work undertaken in two production roles.
- outline concepts and ideas for a creative interpretation of excerpts from a script and explain how these could be realised in a theatre production.
- analyse and evaluate the creative and imaginative interpretation of a written script in production to an audience.

### Assessment

Assessment tasks for this unit include the following:

- Ongoing developmental contributions to creative interpretation of a script across all three stages of the production process through collaborative work in two production roles
- Analysis and evaluation, supported by relevant documentation, of ongoing developmental contributions across all three stages of the production process
- Documentation that outlines the concepts and ideas for a creative interpretation of excerpts from a script and provides an explanation of how these could be realised in a theatre production
- An analysis and evaluation of a creative and imaginative interpretation of a prescribed script



## Unit 4: Presenting an Interpretation

In this unit students study a scene and an associated monologue. They initially develop an interpretation of the prescribed scene. This work includes exploring theatrical possibilities and using dramaturgy across the three stages of the production process. Students then develop a creative and imaginative interpretation of the monologue that is embedded in the specified scene. To realise their interpretation, they work in production roles as an actor and director, or as a designer. Students' work for Areas of Study 1 and 2 is supported through analysis of a performance they attend. The performance must be selected from the VCE Theatre Studies Unit 4 Playlist. Students analyse acting, direction and design and the use of theatre technologies, as appropriate to the production. In conducting their work in Areas of Study 1 and 2, students develop knowledge in and apply safe and ethical theatre practices.

### Aims

#### Monologue selection

For Areas of Study 1 and 2 students must select a script, scene and monologue from the VCE Theatre Studies Monologue Examination published annually by the VCAA. The list will consist of a set of prescribed scripts, a specified scene from each script and a selected monologue from that scene.

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

- describe and justify a creative and imaginative interpretation of a monologue and its prescribed scene
- interpret and present a monologue and orally justify and explain their interpretive decisions
- analyse and evaluate acting, direction and design in a production

### Assessment

Assessment for this unit of study includes the preparation and presentation of a solo performance of a monologue from a scene in a play and explain their interpretive decisions. The monologue will be selected from the VCE Theatre Studies Monologue Examination set annually by the VCAA.

Additional assessments include:

- A written report that describes and justifies dramaturgical decisions for a creative and imaginative interpretation of a monologue and its prescribed scene
- An oral presentation about the possibilities, intentions and vision for an interpretation of a monologue and its prescribed scene, including responding to question/s
- An analysis and evaluation of acting, direction and design and their interrelationship 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 Eleven program outline.

## The Mentor Program

Since 2017 students in the year 12 Theatre Arts program have been partnered with third year students from the VCA Bachelor of Fine Arts, Theatre 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 2010.

