

EDUCATION & RESOURCES PACK

LIFE OF PI



CREATIVE PRACTICE & CAREERS

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PUTTING ON A PRODUCTION

Staging a production is a complex undertaking and involves a large number of production and design roles including, but not limited to:

- Puppetry
- Set and Costume
- Lighting
- Sound and Music
- Video and Projection

In this single moment from Life of Pi below (image by Johan Persson), each of these elements combine to create a clear and cohesive design effect.



Reflection point: Looking at this image, consider the following questions:

- Can you see the puppeteers? Do you focus on them or the puppets? Why?
- What elements of the set design can you see? The backdrop? The boat? The revolve?
- What colours are being used in the costume? What effect does this have?
- What colours are being used in the lighting? Where are the lights focused?
- Can you recall the sound effects and/or music being used at this time?
- What does the video projection add to the design concept for this moment in the play?

PUPPETRY AND MOVEMENT



Photo by Johan Persson

In this moment from *Life of Pi* (image by Johan Persson) the actor playing Pi is carried as though floating in the ocean. Physical theatre is used throughout the play, particularly in moments of transition. In this image below (image by Johan Persson) the three puppeteers bring Richard Parker to life.

The materials used to construct a puppet can greatly affect their use. The designer must consider both the look of the puppet but also whether it is practical to use by the actors. Bringing a puppet to life employs all the physical skills of the actor.

The designer must take the actor's movements into account when creating a puppet. Animating a puppet may involve incredibly dexterous movement on the part of actors, and care must be taken to ensure that an actor is not led to injury through the design of the puppet through its repeated manipulation.

The actor(s) bringing a puppet to life must consider carefully the way the puppet moves, its weight, rhythms and breath. Where the puppeteers focus their eyeline, so too do the audience. The actor(s) must focus on the puppet as though it is a living thing and not an object they are moving around. By embodying the feelings and emotions of the character, within their own physicality, the actor(s) can manipulate the puppet with the same effect.



Photo by Johan Persson

Reflection point: Take note of the focus of the eyeline of the actors operating the puppet of Richard Parker. Look at their eyeline. Can you observe their facial expressions? What does this tell the audience about the feelings of the animal at this moment in the play? How did the puppeteers use their own breath to bring the puppet of Richard Parker to life through physical theatre and movement?

Where to study:

You can study puppetry and movement at Higher Education, at university, at drama school and at art and design school. The UCAS website details examples of degree courses that you can do in these areas (www.ucas.com) and the Federation of Drama School’s website has really helpful information about drama schools that offer design programmes. www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk/studying-at-an-fds-school/subjects-and-careers

Life of Pi Profile: Nick Barnes – Puppet Designer

Nick studied Drama at Hull University and originally thought he would be an actor, but also enjoyed the design elements of the course. He saw a number of puppetry-based shows at the Edinburgh International Festival and became aware of the huge number of possibilities that they bring to performance. Nick attended the Slade School of Fine Art. He co-founded Blind Summit theatre company in 1997.

Also working on the production is Caroline Bowman, who is Associate Puppet Designer for the show. Caroline studied puppetry at Central School of Speech and Drama after completing an art foundation course. She then did an internship at Blind Summit. As a performer Caroline has worked in shows such as War Horse with the National Theatre.

Nick and Caroline’s advice:

“Puppetry appeals to our sense of play, and it’s a great contract between audience and puppeteers that you completely engage in the story that is being told. In puppetry, you are constantly problem solving. You can’t be too prescriptive.”

SET AND COSTUME DESIGN



Photo by Johan Persson

The set in the Life of Pi constantly transforms to represent different places and times, as we see in here as the hospital and the ocean (images by Johan Persson). Set design can be brought to life realistically or represented through items that symbolise or signify an actual thing. Set design defines a space and focusses the audience's attention. A set design process consists of many moving parts and contributing individuals. It is possible to outline this work as falling within four key areas:

1. Creating the design brief
2. Planning and adapting ideas and systems to bring the opportunities to life
3. Presenting the overall concept and evaluating the final design
4. Realising and reflecting on the design in practice from production of materials to technical rehearsals

1. Creating the design brief

The brief outlines the key requirements of the design. This involves clear communication between the key stakeholders in the production to make sure the designer is fully clear on the expectations, budget, possibilities and boundaries of the production.

- The designer must read the script carefully, noting the practical requirements of the text, understanding and outlining the opportunities in the story.
- They will fully research any source material or other background information that can add to the richness of the detail of the world they are trying to create.
- The designer will explore and experiment with different materials, equipment and techniques as part of this process to make sure that their design can actually be brought to life.
- They are responsible for finding and interpreting the many clues in the text as well as hearing and understanding the views of the teams they are working with from a practical point of view.

Reflection point: Using the table below, make a bullet point list of the possibilities and the constraints a designer may face when creating a design brief for a production of the Life of Pi. This may include thoughts on use of space, budget, fixed items, movable items, interactive elements, colour and materials.

Opportunities	Constraints

2. Planning and adapting ideas and systems to bring the opportunities to life

All design ideas will have parameters. Parameters are guidelines or boundaries for the creative designer to work within, work around and account for in their planning. Sometimes these can be financial and based on budgets, at other times they are logistical and based on the performance space they have, including making entrances and exits to and from the performance space work, and sometimes time can be a factor.

Other parameters can include the director's vision for the integration of set, costume and puppetry, as well as input from the lighting and video designers. Health and safety will feature highly in the realisation of a workable design. A beautiful design concept is no good if it cannot be used in a safe and practical way without endangering the cast or technical teams.

For these reasons, the designer will not do their draft work in isolation but will be continually communicating with the wider team as the design builds in progress. Whilst creatively drawing (by hand or electronically) and creating clear to understand plans are important skills for a designer, the ability to communicate well is an essential aspect of the job role.

Reflection point: What considerations did you think the designer for Life of Pi had to consider when designing the set? This production transferred from Sheffield to London, what parameters needed to be discovered. Take a look at Tim Hatley's interview in section 1 and consider the decisions he had to take when transferring the production to a London theatre.

3. Presenting the overall concept and evaluating the final design

For all of the reasons outlined above, it is essential that the designer develop draft and final design ideas and concepts in collaboration with the wider creative production team. The white card meeting is an opportunity for the designer to come together with the show's director and the rest of the production creatives to present their vision and design concept through the presentation of either a physical scaled 3D model or electronic rendering of a 3D model.

This meeting is chaired, or led, by the show's producer. This is the moment for everyone to explore the design proposal from their own professional perspectives and to present their feedback professionally. Once this stage is completed, at a later meeting, the fine details are agreed, often including signing off on agreed colour schemes, materials and finance allocation. Clear presentation skills and excellent listening skills are essential attributes for a good designer.

Reflection point: Draw an overhead plan of the stage set for the Life of Pi. Remember to leave space for clear and detailed labels to explain each aspect of your diagram, including notes of colour palette and textures.

4. Realising and reflecting on the design in practice from production of materials to technical rehearsals

The finished designs may include, but may not be limited to clearly presented floorplans, drawings, diagrams, images, a model box, scaled models, mock up versions of items, instructions and notations. All of this work will help the design become a reality that accurately reflects the designer's intended vision and that, importantly, can cope with the demands and rigours of a production throughout its rehearsals and performances.

Some designers will include props and costume design as part of this, other productions will have props designers and costume designers that work independently of but collaborate with the set designer throughout the process.

What was the process?

The costume supervisor oversees the realisation of the design concept. Wardrobe manage and maintain the costumes throughout the production. Dressers assist the performers with quick changes during the show.

During the run of a production, the Head of Automation will oversee the operation of the set items that move such as the revolve and the boat within the revolve and the trap doors. Assist ant Stage Managers support the production stage manager.

The writer adapted the existing novel into a playscript. A dramaturg provides the cast and crew with contextual research and information, representing the playwright through the rehearsal process.

A series of meetings are held bringing together the creative design team so they can discuss, agree and adjust their ideas as needed. They will need to think about and incorporate the opportunities as well as the constraints.

The lighting design will be constructed via the rig and plotted and programmed into the lighting desk. A lighting technician (an LI Op) will operate the desk, following clear and precisely timed instructions from the Deputy Stage Manager.

Who made this moment?

Wardrobe will create, fit and maintain the costumes throughout a run of the show. Hair and Wigs design the look of hairstyles.

The set and costume designer will work together to create a cohesive design concept, built by a scenic and construction design team.

The set is automated and operated by skilled technicians under the close and timed control of the stage management team.

The writer, the playwright, dramaturg, director, movement director and more have all brought the story to the actor.

The set designer will have collaborated with the creative team to provide a design that when realised establishes a practical and workable set for the production, it's cast and crew and the venue.

The lighting designer will work closely with the rest of the design team to use a palette and intensity that establishes a clear sense of time, place, mood and atmosphere.

The lighting highlights Pi, but has a warm tone to it, washing the orangutan and puppeteers in orange.

The lighting is operated by skilled technicians.

The director will work alongside a movement director and puppetry director on a production that involves elements of movement and puppetry. The y will work collaboratively to bring together these elements of the production seamlessly.

What can I see?

Actors performing a scene.

Pi's costume is all white.

The actor playing Pi is on the back of the boat (standing on the hospital bed).

The audience are seated watching the performance.



The sea is projected onto the floor.

There are clouds projected on to the set.

The orangutan reaches out to Pi, animated by actor puppeteers.

The actors work collaboratively within the choreography of the moment to breathe life into the puppet.

A collaborative team brings an audience to a performance. These include producers, casting directors, marketing, box office and front of house hospitality teams.

The video designer will work closely with the set designers to ensure a unified design realisation.

The projection is operated by skilled technicians using software that maps the images onto the complex faceted surfaces of the set.

Putting on a production requires a large collaborative effort beyond the performance onstage. Producers will finance a production, casting directors will hold auditions and cast the performers, marketing will promote the show, box office will sell and manage the show and the front of house hospitality team will look after the patrons before, during and after the performance. Venue staff may be employed by the venue, rather than attached to the production.

The video design will be carefully planned and agreed in liaison with the director, the video designer, the set designer and the lighting designer to make sure the effect and execution are both practical and impactful. A technician will operate the video projection, following clear and precisely timed instructions from the Deputy Stage Manager.

COSTUME DESIGN



Costume can lend a sense of time and place to a production, but it can also affect the way an audience feels about a scene, situation or person. Colour can send strong messages to us. We can associate them with feelings, with times of the year. Cold, grey colours can make us feel detached, whereas warm and rich tones can draw us in toward the wearer.

Colour psychology can be utilised to understand how we use colour to communicate atmosphere and feeling. Red is known to signal danger or warmth. Autumnal colours can make us think of the natural world, white makes us think of innocence and grey tones can make things feel otherworldly, lacking emotion, remote or ghostly. Similarly, the texture of the fabric used can give signals and signs to the audience about the character. Clothes can tell us a lot about a person's age, status, wealth, job, cultural, location and time in history. Costume design must align with the overall vision for the design concept.

Reflection point: As an example, look to the image of the market scene below (image by Johan Persson) and observe the colour scheme and the fabrics used. What colour is Pi wearing? Is this in contrast to the other characters in the scene? What atmosphere does the overall colour palette create? How does this add to the set design concept for this moment in the play?

Where can you study:

You can study set and costume design at Higher Education, at university, at drama school and at art and design school. The UCAS website details examples of degree courses that you can do in these areas (www.ucas.com) and the Federation of Drama School’s website (www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk) has really helpful information about drama schools that offer design programmes.

www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk/studying-at-an-fds-school/subjects-and-careers

Life of Pi Profile: Tim Hatley – Set and Costume Designer

From the age of 7, Tim had wanted to work in theatre, and was endlessly making things, inspired by programmes like Blue Peter. Up until the age of 15, Tim wanted to be an actor, but then he saw Richard Eyre’s production of Guys and Dolls at the National Theatre. He noticed the role and importance of lighting designers. He eventually studied Theatre Design at Central St Martins. He went on to assist designers such as Bob Crowley, Alison Chitty and Jocelyn Herbert before working on productions as designer for institutions such as the National Theatre, Opera North and Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

Tim’s advice:

“Help from school is very important: I was very lucky to have a very supportive art teacher. If you aspire to be a designer, allow that passion to come to the fore. Doing an art foundation course is an important opportunity to learn about yourself as an artist. You also learn a lot by simply looking. Working as a designer demands total commitment. It’s important to find the right course, and work with the right people.”

LIGHTING DESIGN



Photo by Johan Persson

Just as a set can transport us to different places and times, and costume can give symbolise or signify meaning and feeling, lighting design can build the world of the story through colour, intensity and texture. Light and darkness can signal the time of day and the time of year. Lighting design can create mood and atmosphere and it can focus the audience's attention. A design will seek to light the performers, but also the set design, giving depth and dimension to the performance space. The design may also include or darken the audience space.

Lighting for performances can be very complicated and involve hundreds or even thousands of cues and states. There has been a lot of technological advances in lighting design and health and safety is a key element in the build and design of a lighting rig and design. Light can be filtered and focussed so it is more or less intense and we can adjust the brightness. The 'angle at which we place the light to the object it is focused on can change how the light and the subsequent shadows it creates is seen.

Lights, or lanterns can be rigged to hang overhead on lighting bars, to the side of the action on booms, in front of the action from the auditorium, or on floor level. Different types of lanterns are used for each of these jobs and they each create different effects. Lanterns used to create specific effects beyond contributing to the general lighting effect are called specials. We can change the colour of lights through presets on the lighting system, or with film called gels. We can also shape the beam of light with shutters and barn doors so there is no unnecessary light spill, as well as making shapes using gobos. Moving lights can create incredible effects.

Fade times can be adjusted and you can fade lights up from or down to a blackout or from one lighting state to another with a crossfade. An immediate change in lighting is called a snap. Slower fades and crossfades can be timed to last from a fraction of a second to hours! A lighting design is plotted or programmed onto the lighting board and then operated by a technician.

Reflection point: The lighting design in the Life of Pi creates a clear sense of place, time and atmosphere. As an example, look to the image of the zoo scene below (image by Johan Persson) and observe the colours, the tones, the intensity and the shapes used. What lighting effects can you see being used here? What atmosphere does the overall colour palette create? How does this add to the set design concept for this moment in the play?

Where can you study:

You can study lighting and lighting design at Higher Education, at university and at drama school. The UCAS website details examples of degree courses that you can do in these areas (www.ucas.com) and the Federation of Drama School’s website (www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk) has really helpful information about drama schools that offer lighting and lighting design programmes.
www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk/studying-at-an-fds-school/subjects-and-careers

Life of Pi Profile: Tim Lutkin – Lighting Designer

Tim was involved in school productions where he operated the lighting desk. At the age of 16 he got a job at Hull New Theatre, operating the follow spot. He went on to study at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and then assisted Hugh Vanstone, another high-profile lighting designer, before becoming a lighting designer working on an international scale.

Tim’s advice:

“See as many shows as possible and try to decipher what systems they are using. Remember what you liked and let that guide you in your own ideas and designs.”

SOUND AND MUSIC DESIGN



Sound design forms a crucial part of creating the world of a play. As with set, costume and lighting design, sound and music, or audio can develop an audience's understanding of time and location, can establish a sense of the cultural world of the setting and can create mood and atmosphere, enhancing the action of the play's narrative. Sound, music, and not to forget purposeful moments of silence, can also develop a story beyond the action seen onstage.

Just like film scores, theatrical scores, soundscapes and incidental music can define moments, amplify the drama, elevate the tension or establish a sense of love, loss or relief. With both sound design and music scores, live or digitally recorded moments can be utilised to great effect, using naturally occurring sounds, voices, lyrics or electronically created sounds.

Acoustics is the way sound behaves and acoustics can be affected by the size of the space, the hard or absorbent materials in the space. Clarity of sound is understood by its volume, echo, reverberance (reverb), range, silence or tone. Sound can be acoustic (not amplified) or amplified through an electronic sound system using microphones and speakers (amps). Microphones can be worn by a performer, handheld, or placed along the front of the stage known as float mics.

Foldback speakers are speakers directed to the performers, so they can hear the sound clearly rather than relying on the auditorium sound system, which is directed toward the audience. An immediate change in sound lighting is called a snap. Slower fades and crossfades can be timed to last from a fraction of a second to hours!

Sound needs to be balanced. As with a lighting design, a sound design is programmed onto the sound desk and then operated by an engineer. Along with live sounds, these are live mixed at the desk by the sound operator to make sure the correct microphones are muted or muted and that the sound faders are appropriately adjusted to achieve the highest quality of sound mix.

In the Life of Pi, the musical score and sound design combine to create an emotional and narrative journey through the play and Pi's story, as well as to establish time and place. Music and sound in the Life of Pi help to build the dramatic tension toward a climactic moment on the boat between Pi and Richard Parker, shown in the image below (image by Johan Persson).

Reflection point: You can explore this moment in your own drama studio or at home. Can you find several different pieces of music, each contrasting in mood? What happens when you look to this image, or a physical recreation of this image whilst playing the different pieces of music? Does the difference in music evoke different feelings and responses from the viewer/ audience?

Where can you study:

You can study sound design and music and composition at Higher Education, at university, at drama school and at music school or college. The UCAS website details examples of degree courses that you can do in these areas (www.ucas.com) as does CUKAS (<https://www.ucas.com/conservatoires>) and the Federation of Drama School's website has really helpful information about drama schools that offer design programmes. www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk/studying-at-an-fds-school/subjects-and-careers

Life of Pi Profile: Andrew T. Mackay – Composer

Andrew began playing the piano aged 12, citing his teachers for inspiring him. He also had a band during his school days. He then attended the Royal College of Music, taught by Dr Lloyd Webber and John McCabe. He focussed on piano, clarinet and composition and knew that he did not want to explore any other career. Andrew composes for both live orchestras and using technology – both of which are important in his work as a composer. Life of Pi is his first composition for theatre but has previously worked in short films and feature films. He is particularly interested in how music aids storytelling, which isn't necessarily explicitly taught at music school.

Andrew's advice:

"For this type of work, you have to be 100% committed. Nothing less will do! You need a vision, and today's technology can help you make your own music. Technology, and what we have learnt in the pandemic, means that the world of making music has become even smaller and easier to navigate, so go for it!"

VIDEO AND PROJECTION DESIGN



Photo by Johan Persson

Projection and video design can play a major role in creating a defined sense of space, location and atmosphere. This area of theatrical design is certainly not new but has grown in use significantly in recent years.

This field of design looks to the creation of digital graphics, animations, film and live feeds and integrates it with live action onstage through projection, LED walls and monitors. The video designer will work very closely with the set, lighting and sound designers to co-create a cohesive design concept.

In the moment above (image by Johan Persson) on board the boat when a storm rages, video and projection are used to tremendous effect to create the atmosphere and visual image of the ocean and the rain.

Reflection point: What would the audience response to this moment onstage have been if there were no video or projection? Do you think it would have been as effective? How would the effect have been different?

Where can you study:

You can study projection and digital video and media design at Higher Education, at university and at drama school, at film school and art college. The UCAS website details examples of degree courses that you can do in these areas (www.ucas.com) and the Federation of Drama School's website has really helpful information about drama schools that offer design programmes.

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Life of Pi Profile: Andrzej Goulding – Video and Projection Designer

At primary school, Andrzej was interested in a variety of subjects such as maths, science and history, and he kept up that interest at secondary school. As well as developing his art skills, he remained very interested in physics in particular, and still listens to the Royal Institution lectures every year! He studied Art, and Design Technology at A level, and then studied at Central St Martins, first completing a foundation course and then a degree in Theatre Design.

He then applied to work with Rob Howell on the Lord of the Rings musical, originally working for a week to assist with model making. However, he actually worked with Rob between 2004 and 2010, learning a lot about both set and video design. In 2008, Andrzej was asked to make a short video sequence for a Christmas show. It worked so well that Andrzej inserted five more sequences and composed the music! Having assisted other designers such as Bill Dudley and John Driscoll, Andrzej then began to work independently as a designer, taking on a range of projects.

Andrzej's advice:

"There is no easy way up in this industry. You need to make sure that you can forge relationships with people. Remember that in design, there is no right or wrong: if there was there wouldn't be so many different productions of Shakespeare plays, for example! Be willing to experiment with ideas and make sure you're having fun. If the process isn't fun, it will show on stage. And remember: never be late and always be reliable!"

FURTHER INFORMATION ON CAREERS IN THEATRE

Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre

CDMT offers quality assurance and membership services to institutions delivering training, education and assessment in the performing arts.

www.cdmt.org.uk

Creative Access

Creative Access enables people from communities under-represented in the creative industries to access careers, progress and reach leadership.

www.creativeaccess.org.uk

Federation of Drama Schools

The Federation of Drama Schools partners are institutions that provide conservatoire vocational training for those who want to be professional performers, theatre makers and technical theatre practitioners.

www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk

Get Into Theatre

Get Into Theatre is the essential website to help you find all the information and opportunities you need to pursue a successful career in theatre in the UK. From backstage to performing, training to apprenticeships, you will find up-to-date theatre jobs information and advice.

www.getintothetheatre.org

Mousetrap Theatre Projects

Based in the heart of the West End, we're a theatre education charity dedicated to enriching the lives of young people. We believe all young people should have the opportunity to enjoy, learn and benefit from seeing live theatre, irrespective of their cultural, social or economic background.

www.mousetrap.org.uk

UCAS

UCAS connects people to University, post Uni studies including teacher training, apprenticeships and internships.

www.ucas.com

Discover! Creative Careers

Bringing together careers information and opportunities from creative organisations in one explorable directory.

www.discovercreative.careers

TheatreCraft

A monthly newsletter and social media site provides up to date opps and insights.

www.theatrecraft.org

Inspiring Future Theatre

Teachers can sign up to Inspiring the Future for free and request a volunteers from the theatre industry to attend a school event to talk about their career.

www.inspiringthefuture.org/schools-and-colleges

Creative & Cultural Skills

We support the UK cultural sector by shaping skills, education and employment best practice.

www.ccskills.org.uk