BIG DRAMAS second edition

Out of Your Mind

TEACHER NOTES *by Anna McHugh*

Level	Suitable for Year 10
Difficulty	Text language ●●●●●
	Lesson concepts ●●●●●
Genre	Expressionist drama
Themes	Inner existence, inner and outer struggle, various types and levels of conflict, shared space, privacy, selfhood, honesty in relationships, anxiety, negotiating verbal communication
Literary and dramatic techniques	Mime, song, dance, climax, tone, under- and overstatement, omniscient narrator, personification, verbal and visual comedy
Cast	27+ characters: 7 male, 10 female, 10+ 'mind set' movement and mime group

Why choose this play?

If you've ever looked along a railway platform and thought about how many human stories are standing there, waiting for a train, this play will interest you. It's a striking visual representation of how ordinary spaces brim with people's bodies, thoughts, grievances, impulses and possibilities. Teachers often have to prompt students to consider how characters' thoughts and anxieties are almost independent agents in a drama. This play turns that on its head, and will have you reminding students that people must act with their bodies, although their mental selves are quite definitely controlling the action!

Practical considerations

Plan for 50 minutes to read through the text and around 100 minutes to set up and act it out. This lesson takes around 100 minutes to teach, including a class read-through of the play.

Teaching *Out of Your Mind* by Sue Murray

Learning objectives

Students will:

- revise and apply the Freytag model of plot structure and consider how the play involves two parallel plots in the same space. (The Freytag model is the proper name for what many teachers and students know as the 'story pyramid'. Googling 'Freytag model' will return many useful images of Gustav Freytag's famous representation of the literary plot in Western narratives.)

- understand and apply ideas of conflict in literary texts and analyse how the twin plot structures actually use different types of conflict

- analyse how texts foreground one mode of experience and represent it objectively or subjectively, understanding that this exclusive representation is analytical, rather than holistic

- adapt an existing text which represents an experience in one mode and one style, by adding more modes and styles to create a more holistic representation of the event.

Meeting outcomes: Australian Curriculum—English

Year 10 content descriptions	Literature: Examining literature	ACELT1774	Analyse and evaluate text structures and language features of literary texts and make relevant thematic and intertextual connections with other texts.
	Literacy: Texts in context	ACELY1749	Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices.
	Literature: Creating literature	ACELT1815	Create literary texts with a sustained 'voice', selecting and adapting appropriate text structures, literary devices, language, auditory and visual structures and features for a specific purpose and intended audience.
General capabilities	Personal and social capability		In the Australian Curriculum, students develop personal and social capability as they learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. The capability involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, establishing and building positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills.

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1. Approaching the text

This text requires students to imagine clearly how the stage will be used by the two groups, and what each group is doing. It might be prescient to stop at certain moments—perhaps when the Mind Set are moving—and ask students to picture exactly how the stage would look at that moment. You could even sketch the tableau on the board to make sure everyone has the idea. If your drawing skills aren't that great, find an image of a railway platform and keep it on the board as you read through the text, stopping now and again to discuss how the characters would be positioned in that space.

2. Introducing ideas

i) In most texts, there's a common plot structure through which the action is introduced, developed and resolved. Some texts are composed of major and minor structures which we think of as plot and sub-plots.

By Year 10 the traditional plot structure, represented by the Freytag model, or story pyramid, should be familiar to students. Revise it if you need to—by Stage 5 students may find the history and philosophy of Gustav Freytag of interest. You could point out that Freytag actually used this model to analyse drama, and it's really only firmly evidenced in the five-act play, yet we apply it to novels and other non-dramatic texts.

Understanding activity

Ask students to chart the actions of the physical characters (*not* the Mind Set) on a blank Freytag model. Then ask them to chart the actions of the Mind Set on a separate blank Freytag model.

It should become clear that there are really two plots going on in the one space, each using the other as a stimulus for its own transition to the next stage.

ii) The twin plot structures are fuelled by slightly different types of conflict.

Again, hopefully the types of conflict will be familiar to students by now, but revise them if they're not. Conflict is usually understood (in literary terms) as coming from one of six different directions: person vs. fate/God; person vs. self; person vs. person; person vs. society; person vs. nature; and person vs. technology (this is a slightly dubious one but is increasingly present in discussions of literary conflict). Some critics give person vs. supernatural as a seventh conflict type.

Understanding activity

Ask students to show what conflicts are evident between the characters and whether this conflict is predominantly part of the physical or mental plot structure. For example, the first conflict between Hudson and Mac is, on a physical level, a misunderstanding about why Mac can't purchase a ticket at the ticket office. It's a person vs. person conflict—Mac is unhappy that Hudson hasn't opened the ticket office and Hudson is unhappy that Mac can't simply use the machine. However, on a mental level, the conflict is a person vs. society one—Hudson dislikes Mac because he represents a social group of annoying old folk, and Mac understands that this ageist stereotype is being applied to him and resents it.

iii) The use of two plots and sets of characters in the same space innovates on ideas about the unity of place.

If students don't know about the 'classical unities' (time, action, place), explain them. Although these were only hard-and-fast-rules to the seventeenth-century dramatists who formulated them (by expanding Classical ideas about drama), many plays still use them. If you need examples of recent movies which strictly abide by these rules, *Buried* (2010) is handy, as is (almost) *Dredd* (2012).

Now explain that most text-types confine themselves to representing one type of experience: physical, emotional, intellectual and so one. They usually also do this in one mode: objectively or subjectively.

For example, when students write an essay, the text-type 'essay' demands that they represent their experience of whatever information they're discussing to the intellectual. In an essay on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students are expected to discuss the characters, the plot, the 'issues' and so forth. They might say that

Atticus' paternal attitude to Scout and Jem is touching but not emotionally engaged.

because this shows their own intellectual engagement with the text.

They wouldn't say

Atticus seems like the loneliest man in the world and I cried because he was so evidently alone and incapable of seeing his kids as anything other than little moral quantities.

because that shows an emotional engagement with the text. The conventions of text-types restrict the type and extent of experience, so that they often seem only partially to represent how we've actually engaged or participated in something. This is an analytical way of representing human experience, not a holistic one.

Most dramas do the same: they only represent the characters' physical engagement with the world of the stage. We must infer their emotional or intellectual experience from what they say and how they act. If *Out of Your Mind* had no Mind Set, we would simply have an objective representation of the railway platform and how the characters use the space physically. There would only be one plot structure, and one type of conflict (we'd have to infer the deeper conflicts from their remarks or tone). There would be one strict unity of space.

Sue Murray's innovation is to compose a text that's not just an analytical and exclusive representation of how the characters experience the space and events. Instead she composes a holistic and inclusive representation of how the characters' bodies and minds experience and use the space and events. She encourages us to think about everything that's going on in a space— every classroom, for example, has many more actions going on than simply students sitting with texts waiting for the bell. That's just an analytic, exclusive way to think about it. Consider how that classroom might be represented holistically and inclusively—what emotional, intellectual, cognitive, metaphysical content might also be present in the same space? How might it inform the action? How might it disregard time?

Understanding activity

This is a complex idea, but students might grasp it clearly with examples: every church or temple is not simply a building with humans in it performing ritual actions. That's analytical and exclusive. It's also a place of hopes, prayer, sorrow, the dead, contracts, where God or gods live, expiation and so on. Build a list, if you need to, showing analytical/exclusive ways of representing something in one column and in another, the holistic/inclusive ways.

To illustrate the idea visually, look at these images:

* Photos by Jerry Uelsmann
* Photos by Seth Taras
* Photos of ghosts.

Discuss how the text (the photographs) is attempting to represent all the modes of being in that space. Then apply these ideas to the play.

3. The learning activity

Ask students to choose a text type relevant to a recent experience of theirs. This could be as varied as an essay or a shopping receipt, as all texts represent the composer's experience according to the conventions of that text type. Students should work out what mode of experience—physical, emotional, intellectual, metaphysical (i.e. to do with the soul or spiritual element of our existence)—is foregrounded, and in what way (subjectively or objectively).

For example, a receipt for the shopping foregrounds our physical existence. It tells us where we shopped and when, who served us, and what we chose, how much it cost and how we paid for it. But it doesn't reflect the nature of our interaction with the assistant (was she pleasant? Did you know him from school? Did she remind you of your mum?), or why we chose what we did (you really wanted a Violet Crumble but it's Ramadan, so you steered away from that aisle and bought laundry powder instead). You paid cash because you left your card at home because you had a really bad sleep, for example. If the emotional or intellectual side of the experience was added into the text, if would represent the event much more holistically and subjectively.

When they have analysed their text for its mode and style of representation, they should adapt it to include more modes of experience so that it represents the event in a more holistic way.

4. Rounding up

Altered texts are very fashionable at the moment, particularly altered objects such as books. You can find images of altered texts here, although a Google image search will produce many more. Physically altering a text suggests that, although texts are created with one experience, purpose or set of conventions in mind, they can also be repurposed much later for other types and styles of representation.

More traditional ideas of representation focus on a static and linear process—things happened (or the author imagined that they happened) and then they were pinned down on the page in words. The words were chosen and arranged according to certain fixed conventions and the finished text represented the experience in the way that the author wanted to convey it. More experimental styles of representation acknowledge that no single perspective on something ever accurately conveys the experience. We can tell someone what we saw at the circus and what our opinion of it was, but we can't convey the actual experience of being there because we must settle on one mode to focus on. That's why adapting a text by adding more modes to it might create a messier text, but a more authentic representation of an experience.

Assessment ideas

i)   Use one of the Uelsmann photos as a stimulus for *either* a creative piece in which students choose a moment in time and represent the multiple modes of being which informed their experience of that moment *or* a critical piece which discusses how the concepts which are used in the image's construction can be applied to a text which they have studied (the play works well as a text for this).

ii) Having practiced adapting one text to include multiple modes of being, students should perform the same task for a longer text, and present it together with a written or verbal discussion of why they have adapted it in this way. This should include how they have drawn on ideas of inclusivity, subjectivity, and the holistic vs analytical approach to inform their adaptation.

iii) Arguably, most drama strives to show that there is much more occurring on the stage than simply physical actions. Using a play which the students know well (Shakespeare works well for this task) ask them to analyse one scene to show how the playwright populates the space with more than simply the physical. They might consider the use of gestures, props, visual and verbal symbols, lighting and rhetorical devices such as the rhetorical question, apostrophe and aside.

Using the play with other resources

It is possible to combine this play with other Macmillan resources if you have them in your collection. The exercises in the following workbook provide useful warm-up activities with which to differentiate the concepts in this lesson. Students could attempt one or two of the exercises at home as a preparatory exercise for this lesson.

	English Workbook 4 (3rd edn)	Unit 4: Values and messages in texts—provides many good extracts from texts which teachers can use to demonstrate how texts represent one aspect of experience in either an objective or subjective way. The Macbeth extract is also useful to show how the stage can represent more aspects of an experience than simply the physical.

Further reading

• A fairly standard explanation of the Freytag model, which can be distributed to students.

Linked texts

Out of Your Mind could support and relate to the following Board of Studies prescribed texts for Stage 5 (among many others)

• *Journey through Horror*, edited by Richard Baines
• *Green Monkey Dreams*, Isobelle Carmody
• *Merryll of the Stones*, Brian Caswell
• *Wolf on the Fold*, Judith Clarke
• *Eva*, Peter Dickinson
• *The Eyre Affair*, Jasper Fforde
• *Northern Lights*, Philip Pullman
• *Dreamwalker*, Isobelle Carmody, illustrated by Steven Woolman
• *The Watertower*, Gary Crew, illustrated by Steven Woolman
• *Memorial*, Gary Crew, illustrated by Shaun Tan
• *The Staircase Cat*, Colin Thompson, illustrated by Anna Pignataro
• 'The tyger', William Blake
• 'Dover beach', Matthew Arnold
• 'Ozymandias', Percy Bysshe Shelley
• *Apollo 13* (PG), directed by Ron Howard
• *Breaker Morant* (PG), directed by Bruce Beresford
• *Edward Scissorhands* (PG), directed by Tim Burton
• *Pleasantville* (M), directed by Gary Ross
• *Shine* (PG), directed by Scott Hicks
• *Yolngu Boy* (M), directed by Stephen Johnson
• *Tales from a Suitcase—the Afghan Experience*, Will Davies and Andrea Dal Bosco
• *Katie.com*, Katherine Tarbox
• *My Forbidden Face: Growing up under the Taliban—A Young Woman's Story*, Latifa

Acknowledgements