

Year 8 Drama – Brecht and Political Theatre

Overview of topic: students will develop their knowledge and understanding of Brecht and political theatre.

Key content/ ideas/ concepts

WHO WAS BRECHT?

- Bertolt Brecht was born in Germany in 1898 and died aged 58 in 1956. He was a poet, playwright and theatre director. His influence is still present in much of theatre and many would argue that Brecht changed the face of modern theatre.
- Brecht made his theatre highly political. He wanted his theatre to spark an interest in his audiences' perception of the world. He did not want his audiences to sit passively and get lost in a show's story, but to make them think and question the world they live in. He encouraged them to be critical of society. His work was often mischievous, provocative and ironic.
- Brecht did not want the audience to have any emotional attachment to his characters, so he did various things to break it. Here are some of the techniques he used.

SOME OF BRECHT'S TECHNIQUES

Breaking the fourth wall- This is where the imaginary wall between the audience and actors on stage is broken. Rather than allowing the audience to sit passively and get lost in the show, the actors will sometimes directly address the audience with a speech, comment or a question.

Narration- Narration is used to remind the audience that they are watching a story. Sometimes the narrator will tell the audience what is about to happen in the story, before it happens, because if the audience knows the outcome then they may not get as emotionally involved.

Minimal set, costumes, props and lighting- Brecht believes the stage should be brightly lit at all times. That sets should not be realistic, just suggestive. And that actors should use minimal props, often only one per character. Also props can be used in several different ways, for example a suitcase may become a desk.

Using placards- A placard, or projection screen can be used to give the audience some extra factual information, for example it might say how many people have died in a particular war. Placards can also be used to introduce characters in generic ways, e.g. 'mum,' or 'dad.' Placards are also used to introduce a new scene, or to tell the audience when one has finished.

Freeze frames/tableaux- The actors may go into a freeze frame, so as to break the action. Sometimes it's done so that the audience can stop and think critically for moment. And sometimes it's done so that the narrator can speak, or so that an actor can come out of character and perhaps break the fourth wall.

Keywords/ Glossary

Verfremdungseffekt, or the 'estrangement effect,' was used to distance the audience from the play and is sometimes called the alienation effect.



Wider reading

Wikipedia page has a wealth of information about the social/ political context of Brecht's life and why he created this form of theatre.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertolt_Brecht