

ADELAIDE
FESTIVAL **AF**

EDUCATION RESOURCE

Krapp's Last Tape



Youth and Education
Program Partners





Suitable Year Levels

Year 10 – Year 12

Genre

Theatre of the Absurd

Background Information

Stephen Rea's critically acclaimed performance captivated audiences and wowed critics during its sell-out run in Dublin earlier this year

with The Guardian claiming that 'Stephen Rea is hauntingly good in Beckett's masterpiece'.

Twelve years ago, Rea (The Crying Game, V for Vendetta, The Honourable Woman) recorded Krapp's earlier tapes on the off chance an opportunity might arise to play this role in his future. He said: "I had no certainty that one day I might play Krapp, but I thought it a good idea to pre-record the early tapes so that the voice quality would differ significantly from that

of the older character, should the opportunity ever arise to use it."

These are the tapes that are used in the current production adding an extra layer of significance and authenticity to the moments when we hear the older Krapp listening to the voice of his younger self.

Krapp's Last Tape was the first production in Landmark's 20th anniversary year. It played a sell-out run at Project Arts Centre in January and February 2024.

Synopsis

Meet Krapp, a bitter elderly writer approaching the end of his life who is beaten down and consumed by his failures. Every year on his birthday, Krapp records a new tape – a review of the year just gone. But on this occasion – his 69th birthday – he listens back to a tape he recorded decades before. As Krapp listens to the musings of his

ambitious younger self, he reacts mostly with distaste, self-criticism and sarcasm. Most confronting for him is the recount of ending a relationship with a woman, Bianca, that he referred to as being a 'hopeless business'. When he finishes listening to the tape, he decides to record one last tape in which he accepts the choices he made in his younger years and the extreme loneliness, isolation and

lifetime of regret that followed as a result. Beckett's witty writing and introspective narrative compels audiences to reflect on their own journey of self-discovery as time marches on.



Curriculum Links

This education resource has been developed with links to the Australian Curriculum. Activities have been created to reflect each of the achievement standards, depending on the year level, including content descriptions within each learning area and the general capabilities. The resource aims to provide teachers with information to help prepare students before attending the performance, as well as structured learning activities for the classroom after viewing the performance.

General Capabilities

The Arts Learning Area has a natural link to the elements of the General Capabilities. Specific learning activities have been linked with the following icons:



Critical and Creative Thinking



Personal and Social Capability



Intercultural Understanding



Ethical Understanding

Drama

Year 9 and 10 Drama

- draw on drama from a range of cultures, times and locations as they experience drama
- Learn that over time there has been further development of different traditional and contemporary styles of drama and that dramatists can be identified through the style of their work, as they explore drama forms
- Explore meaning and interpretation, forms and elements, and social, cultural and historical influences of drama as they make and respond to drama
- evaluate actors' success in expressing the directors' intentions and the use of expressive skills in drama they view and perform
- build on their understanding from previous bands of the roles of artists and audiences as they engage with more diverse performances

SACE Stage 1 Drama

Understanding and Exploration

UE1 Understanding and exploration of dramatic roles, conventions and processes.

UE2 understanding and exploration of dramatic ideas, texts, styles, and/or innovations.

Critical and Creative Thinking

CCT2 Analysis and evaluation of dramatic ideas, products, and technologies.

SACE Stage 2 Drama

Knowledge and Understanding

KU1 Exploration and understanding of dramatic theories, texts, styles, conventions, roles, and processes.

KU2 Understanding and evaluation of the artistic and cultural value of local, global, contemporary, and/or historical drama.

Critical and Creative Thinking

CCT2 Analysis and evaluation of the student's own drama-making and others' dramatic works, styles, and/or events.

Creative Application

CA3 Integration of theory and practice to make meaningful dramatic outcomes.



Performance Literacy

As students engage with and view live theatre, they develop a deeper understanding of the language of performance art. They develop literacies allowing them to 'read' the gestures and movements of a performer, and an understanding of the intention of the set, costume, lighting design and reflect on how they contribute to the narrative. Students consider the intended meaning of the choreographers, playwrights, directors and/or artists' in choosing a setting, character, or artistic form as well as what they are looking to communicate through their work.

Attending live theatre and responding to performances, addresses the criteria for Literacy in line with the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

...students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society. Literacy involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts.

Art is a means of expressing emotion, a way of transmitting feelings, culture, beliefs and values between the creators and performers of the work and the audience or viewers. Some art is created for the explicit purpose of eliciting a strong emotional response from the audience and

there is a myriad of emotions that students will experience when they are viewing live performance from happiness to anger, surprise, annoyance, and confusion, just to name a few.

The **Before the Show** activities are designed to support students to develop these literacy skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to their Adelaide Festival experience.

The **After the Show** activities are designed to provide students with the opportunity to discuss, analyse and comprehend their responses to the show. Having a strong knowledge and understanding of theatre terminology will support students and extend their vocabulary as they describe their theatre experience with authentic language.

Theatre Etiquette

The French word *l'etiquette*, meaning 'requirements for proper behaviour', was adopted by English speakers in the middle of the 18th century. This can sound a bit formal but understanding theatre etiquette helps an audience understand what to expect and how to get the most out of their theatre experience.

Depending on the age of an audience the expectations can vary. Theatre designed for very young audiences will have different expectations and will often invite and encourage participation. However, as the content becomes more complex and audiences mature, there is an expectation that students will have developed an understanding of the difference between enthusiastic participation and thoughtless disruption.

Group discussion: Why does it matter?

Students to talk about the theatre being a shared space and respecting other audience members attending the performance.

- Discuss the shared role of audience and performer, each is dependent on the other to ensure a great performance.
- Remind students that just as they can see the performers, the performers can see them!
- As a class exercise, compile a list of all the roles and tasks it takes to bring a live performance to the stage.

- What experiences have they had when their engagement with the performance was compromised by others in the audience?
- What is the role of the audience? What responsibility do they have to the performers on stage?

Theatre protocols to share with students

When in the foyer they should:

- Go to the toilet before going into the theatre.
- Follow the directions of the front of house staff.
- Turn off mobile phones.
- Wear a mask if required.

When the lights go down:

- This is a sign the performance is about to start. It is time to end chats and be quiet.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- No eating in the theatre. Only water bottles are allowed.

For senior students writing the review in the darkened auditorium can be disturbing for the performers, particularly if using a mobile phone as a torch. Plus, all the performers can see is the top of the student's head. *Why would this be disturbing for the performers?*

Photographing and filming is not permitted because:

- It can disturb the actors on the stage and break their concentration

- Intellectual property is paramount. The production on stage is the intellectual property of the theatre company therefore no photographs or filming is allowed.
- You will be missing the detail you cannot see through the viewfinder

Five broad groups of children whose responses as audience are characterised as:

- **Technicians** – children who are more interested in the technology than the performance, deconstructing the performance techniques employed in the show.
- **Narrators** – children who talk through the performance, asking questions, commenting on actions.
- **Dramatists** – children who immediately imitate what they see, participating through their own actions.
- **Mystics** – children who are completely engrossed in the sensory aspects of the experience.
- **Spectators** – children who hover around the edges, playing with whatever they can find, apparently not engaged, but often able afterwards to recall what they saw.

Ask your students which group they think they would be. Does their response match your observation?

Themes and Ideas

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett explores existential themes of memory, identity, mortality, isolation, and the limitations of language, illustrating how the search for meaning can lead to more questions than answers.

Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical movement centered on the belief that individuals must create their own meaning and purpose in a world devoid of inherent answers. Existentialists argue that humans are born into an indifferent, answerless universe and must find meaning through their own actions and choices.

Krapp's obsessive recording of his life highlights the human desire to preserve and make sense of time. However, the tapes fail to provide lasting meaning or answers. Instead, they emphasise the passage of time, which Krapp cannot control or reverse. His futile attempts to grasp meaning from his past reflect the absurdity of existence, as he remains trapped in memory and regret with no resolution.

Memory, Identity and the Quest for Purpose

The tapes serve as a way for Krapp to reconnect with his past and preserve his memories. They contrast the ambitious identity of his younger self with the disillusioned, disappointed man he has become. The stark difference between the hopeful

language of his youth and the despondent, fragmented speech of his present self highlights a shift in identity. Krapp's sense of self has evolved, shaped by his choices and experiences. Beckett uses this contrast to explore existential themes of identity, the quest for purpose, and the impact of memory on self-understanding.

Mortality

The word 'Last' in the title carries dual meanings. It suggests that the tape Krapp is recording could be his last, implying his imminent death. It also refers to the final tape he listens to, before moving to the next recording. This duality reflects themes of memory and mortality. Krapp's reflections on his past and acceptance of his fate underscore the play's focus on closure and the end of life. In one moment, Krapp acknowledges, "Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now."

Isolation, Regret and Loneliness

Krapp's isolation and loneliness are self-inflicted, stemming from choices he made earlier in life. He rejected a woman's love as a "hopeless business" and chose to spend his birthday alone in a pub. After his mother's death, his sense of the future became even more bleak. His only companion is his tape recorder, which plays back

the recorded voice of his younger self. His solitude highlights his emotional detachment and the deep alienation he feels from both his past and present.

The Limitations of Language

The repetitive nature of Krapp's listening and recording underscores the limitations of language. His attempts to articulate his emotions and experiences through language seem increasingly futile. The recordings of his past words suggest that language cannot fully convey the complexity of human experience or offer definitive meaning. Krapp's reliance on language to capture his essence exposes its inadequacy in providing lasting answers or understanding.

Production

Music/Sound

Silences are significant in Theatre of the Absurd, in Beckett's writing and in this production. Long drawn out pauses and silences where it seems like nothing is happening emphasise and enhance a feeling of disconnection, loneliness, isolation and the meaninglessness of time.

A challenge in this play is to make the voice of the younger Krapp sound more youthful. This has been achieved by Rea recording these tapes over a decade ago in the off-chance that he might get to play the role of Krapp in the future. There is an added authenticity in the audience hearing Rea's own younger voice through the tape player and how this contrasts between his older present-day voice.

Set Design

The design is expressionistic and serves to be interpreted by the audience to provide a closer examination of Krapp's internal world, his dashed hopes, growing fears, and the psychological impact of his self-created loneliness.

While minimalist and sparse, the design concept reflects ideas of light and dark and a black-and-white dichotomy that can be alluded to throughout the text. The monochromatic palette featuring few set pieces and props creates an austere atmosphere that mirrors Krapp's empty and barren life. Krapp appears static and devoid of the light and vigour of his vibrant

younger self. The significant aspects of the set design are largely achieved by lighting: a diagonal walkway and rectangular acting space which harbours Krapp's table are created by a stark white light which cut through the darkness.

The action being contained to a rectangular shape reflects the common trope in absurd plays of characters being trapped in terrifying circumstances that they cannot escape. In this case, Krapp is unable to escape his loneliness, the passage of time, his regrets and his failures. Rea's costume further evolves the monochromatic aesthetic and symbolism of the production. There is something equally timeless and of its time about his pants, shirt and vest which might suggest the enduring relevance of some of the plays themes and depict Krapp as an 'everyman'. The costume design conventions of Absurdism are closely observed here with Rea's striped socks and white boots referencing clowning, circus and Vaudeville often seen as elements of absurd plays and certainly evident in many of Beckett's other works.

Lighting

The interplay between the younger more vibrant Krapp and his older more despondent self is symbolically reflected in allusions to lightness and darkness in the design and technological elements of the production.

Shadow, light and darkness also work together to create an ambience reflective of memory and, interchangeably, regret, hope, disillusionment and isolation. The lighting design captures this by carving out the sharp shapes of the acting space and the diagonal walkway from the darkness with crisp and pristine white light. The rectangular island of white light which houses Krapp's table creates a sense of him being captive in his darkness further reinforcing his feelings of isolation. The crispness of the light also reflect the way that Krapp views his memories as the pathway to clarity, though what he really encounters are terrifying shadows of loneliness and isolation caused by the choices of his past.

Costumes

Rea's costume further evolves the monochromatic aesthetic and symbolism of the production. There is something equally timeless and of its time about his pants, shirt and vest which might suggest the enduring relevance of some of the plays themes and depicting Krapp as an 'everyman'. The costume design conventions of Absurdism are closely observed here with Rea's striped socks and white boots referencing clowning, circus and Vaudeville often seen as elements of absurd plays and certainly evident in many of Beckett's other works.

Characterisation

Rea carefully observes the many pauses and silences as directed by Beckett in the writing which enhance ideas about the meaninglessness of time and the absurdity of human action and language. He navigates the tension between silence and movement to convey Krapp's pessimism, realisation, self-criticism and regret. Facial expressions, controlled physicality and deliberate line delivery are key aspects of his performance. Observe the way that his actions, expressions and even holding a look during the silence can convey to the audience his inner feelings as he responds to the voice on the tapes. There is symbolism the way he slowly caresses the tape recorder when hearing his younger self talk about ending a relationship reflects the recorder and tapes as his only companionship and his being engulfed by loneliness.

Rea's voice in the recordings of Krapp's tape sounds appropriately younger, livelier and more optimistic, partially because we are hearing Rea's own younger voice but also because of how Beckett wrote the two versions of the same character. Rea's sarcastic and pessimistic portrayal of the older Krapp evolves aided by his reactions to his younger self on the tape.

Dramatic Structure

ABSURD THEATRE

Absurd plays often depict characters trying to make sense or find meaning in a life that they see as meaningless, and often trapped in terrifying circumstances

that they cannot get out of. In this case, Krapp is trapped in a cycle of pushing people away and isolating himself which has resulted in a wasted life full of regret and overwhelming loneliness.

In her direction, Victoria Featherstone has emphasised this context through symbolic design and technical elements, a monochromatic aesthetic and in observing and making dramatic moments from Beckett's detailed stage directions, especially Beckett's insistence on long dramatic pauses.

The audience is forced to engage with Rea's detailed, controlled and stylised portrayal in order to make sense of the action on stage and to understand Krapp's plight and destiny.

Dramatic Form/Convention

ONE-HANDER (SOLO-SHOW)

Rea is the only actor in this production with the tapes of the younger Krapp having been recorded by Rea in his younger years. Rea only plays the one character throughout the performance and mostly reacts to the voice and experience of his character's younger self.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Samuel Beckett is considered among the earliest practitioners of Absurd Theatre. The style emerged out of post World War II Europe and the thriving artistic culture of Paris in the 1950s where Beckett lived and worked alongside other influential playwrights, like Jean Genet. The term, Theatre of the Absurd, was first used in the 1950s when a theatre critic, Martin Esslin, used it

to describe the works of Beckett, Genet, Eugene Ionesco and Arthur Adamov. From the late 1950s through to the 1980s, a Second Wave of Absurdism emerged with playwrights like Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and Tom Stoppard as definitive practitioners.

Underpinning the style is an existential philosophy. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and the inherent meaninglessness of life, urging individuals to create their own meaning. This aligns with the Theatre of the Absurd, which depicts a world devoid of purpose or rational structure, highlighting human struggle in a senseless universe. Absurdist playwrights like Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco explore existential themes through illogical plots and characters, reflecting the existential belief that life's meaning must be self-constructed despite its absurdities.

Absurd theatre, or Absurdism, refers more to things being 'out of harmony' as opposed to the common definition of absurd as meaning 'ridiculous'. In this context, absurdism in theatre can mean

- useless and lacking purpose
- illogical
- out of harmony
- meaningless and without reason
- hopeless
- chaotic and lacking order
- uncertain

Absurdism is a non-realistic form of theatre labelled by some as 'anti-theatre' in that it rejects many of the elements and techniques of conventional theatre. Design conventions in this genre also reflect

the themes of meaninglessness, disorientation, and the breakdown of traditional structures.

Typical Conventions of Absurd Theatre

- Minimalistic or Non-Realistic Sets

The set design is often sparse or abstract, avoiding realistic depictions of places. This mirrors the absurdity of life, with empty or surreal spaces suggesting a lack of meaning or clarity in the world. This is evident in the production as Krapp inhabits an almost empty space with few set pieces that suggest a setting or location.

- Illogical or Fragmented Dialogue

The language used in the play is often disjointed, repetitive, or nonsensical, reflecting the breakdown of communication and the absence of clear meaning. Characters might speak in circles or make meaningless statements, emphasizing the existential themes of isolation and confusion. Long pauses and silences where nothing seems to happen are also common. Krapp spends a lot of time in silence and in pauses as he tries to make meaning of his existence. Some words, like the repetition and elongation of the word 'spool', reinforce the idea of the breakdown of language and communication.

- Exaggerated or Stylized Costumes

Costumes are often simple, exaggerated, or disconnected from realistic fashion, highlighting the absurdity of the human condition and often reducing characters to archetypes or symbols rather than fully developed individuals. Rea's costume with its monochromatic simplicity and hints of clown and

vaudeville present Krapp as a shell of a man depleted of life, vigour and colour.

- Nonlinear Structure

The narrative may lack a clear beginning, middle, or end, defying traditional dramatic structure. Time and space may be fluid, with scenes repeating or breaking into disconnected fragments, emphasizing the unpredictability and chaos of existence. Circular narratives are also frequently used in Absurd plays.

- Absurd Props

Everyday objects are often used in unconventional ways or have no clear function, underlining the arbitrary nature of human life and the futility of attempting to impose structure or purpose. The central prop in this production is the tape recorder which, while used for its purpose to record and play tapes, is also identifiable as Krapp's only source of company and companionship. This is highlighted in the moment where he holds and caresses the machine like he might a partner to seek comfort.

- Physicality and Repetition

Characters may engage in repetitive, absurd actions (e.g., waiting, walking in circles), representing the futility and monotony of life. These physical movements contribute to the overall sense of alienation and absurdity. There are large sections of the performance performed in silence where a sense of monotony of life is suggested whereas scenes like eating the banana – a mundane action performed absurdly – or the ritualistic recording of the tapes enhance the idea of trying to make or find meaning amid the monotony of life.

- Contradictory or Unresolved Endings

Rather than offering closure or resolution, absurdist plays often end on an ambiguous note, leaving the audience with lingering questions about the meaning of the events, mirroring the existential uncertainty central to the genre. Rea stares out in the distance in silence at the end of the play with a foreboding sense of realisation of and succumbing to the meaninglessness of his own life. He remains trapped in a cycle of isolation made worse by accepting that he cannot undo what he has done and that this is his fate. Whatever happens to him next, we do not know, so the play's ending is unresolved.

These elements combine to create a disorienting and often unsettling theatrical experience, highlighting the existential themes of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Further reading on Theatre of the Absurd thedramateacher.com/theatre-of-the-absurd-conventions/#theatre-of-the-absurd-origins



Suggested Tasks

BEFORE the show:

Questions to put to your students

- How do you feel when you see video recordings of yourself from when you were younger? Why?
- Imagine yourself at 69 years of age. Describe what you think you will look, sound and be like at that age.
- How do we, as humans, tend to feel about our own failures? In what ways can our failures influence our identity?
- The performance is a monologue presented by one actor. What do you think are the challenges for a solo performer?
- What are the significant events that occurred in your life that have made you the person you are today? How might you be different if one of those experiences had never happened?
- What are the stylistic conventions of Theatre of the Absurd?
- What is meant when a person refers to 'having and existential crisis'?
- What are the central beliefs of existentialism?

- Why are humans concerned with questions like 'what is the meaning of life?' and 'what is my purpose?' Why is having a sense of purpose so important to people?

Activity 1: Taking Nonsense

Warm-up: Start by discussing with the students how communication in Absurdist plays often seems disjointed, circular, or nonsensical. Explain how characters might speak in ways that seem illogical or repetitive, reflecting themes of alienation and meaninglessness

Pair the students up and give them a starting prompt that leads to a "nonsense" conversation. Some examples of prompts might be:

- "You are two people trying to decide on the best way to choose a shoe, but you keep talking about completely unrelated things like vegetables or time travel."
- "You are meeting for the first time, but you both keep repeating phrases from a children's nursery rhyme in response to each other."

The students should engage in the conversation with no clear resolution, using fragmented speech, abrupt topic shifts, and absurd logic. Encourage them to be as illogical and repetitive as possible — for example, one student might say "I love oranges," and the other might reply, "Oranges are like clocks, aren't they?" then continue to elaborate in increasingly nonsensical directions.

Debrief: After a few minutes, ask the students to reflect on the exercise. How did it feel to engage in such disconnected dialogue? How did the audience (if any) react to the apparent lack of meaning? Discuss how Absurdist playwrights use dialogue not to communicate ideas but to highlight the absurdity of human existence and the difficulty of meaningful communication. supported, where relevant, by the Roberts family research group.

If you have chosen to do this activity on paper or card, construct the physical timeline by sticking these on the wall around the room.

This task has been designed to help students gain a sense of the broader experience of First Nations People, laws and governance, and their social and political experience in Australia. It should also serve to demonstrate the extraordinary success of her cousin in a time of great adversity.

Activity 2: Absurd Actions

Warm-up: Discuss the role of physicality in Absurd Theatre. Explain that many absurdist plays feature characters engaging in repetitive, ritualistic, or illogical actions (e.g., in *Waiting for Godot*, the characters often perform

repetitive tasks like taking off their hats and putting them back on, or in Beckett's *Endgame*, characters perform seemingly pointless tasks like trying to get out of chairs or looking for objects).

Divide the students into small groups and give them a scenario or prompt that involves a seemingly pointless, repetitive physical task. Examples might include:

- "You are trying to find your way out of a room but every door leads back to where you started."
- "You are both attempting to build something (a tower of chairs, a structure with everyday objects) but you keep knocking it over before it's finished."

The students must perform the scenario, repeating the same action over and over but with small variations each time. The task should feel futile and never fully resolved, emphasizing the absurdity of the characters' actions.

Insist students incorporate elements of frustration, confusion, and a lack of progress into their movements, making the repetition feel increasingly absurd. Encourage them to exaggerate their physicality, such as exaggeratedly slow movements, sudden pauses, or erratic gestures.

Debrief: After the performance, lead students to discuss how repetition and physical absurdity can convey the futility of human endeavour. How did it feel to be caught in a cycle of repetitive tasks? How does Absurdist theatre use physicality to convey the breakdown of meaning, communication, and human agency?

ACADRM047: Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama

ACADRM048: Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles

ACADRR052: Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect

ACADRR053: Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making, starting with drama from Australia and including drama of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider drama in international contexts



Literacy



Critical and Creative Thinking



Personal and Social Capability



Ethical Understanding



AFTER the show: Questions to put to your students

- How would you describe Krapp's character at thirty-nine and at sixty-nine years of age? How has his character developed over thirty years?
- What does the older Krapp think of his younger self? How do you know?
- What does Krapp regret? A more complex question: does older Krapp regret anything that his younger self does not? Or vice versa?
- In what ways is Krapp an 'everyman' figure? How does Beckett present us a character who is like all of us and shares common thoughts and feelings about time, our experiences and the self?
- How are language, movement and silence used in the play? How does the performer, Stephen Rea, explore this through his body and voice to create the character?
- How did you feel about the character of Krapp at the start and the end of the play? Why? What was it about Rea's performance that made you feel this way?
- What is the significance of the play's title? What are possible interpretations of the title?

- How is 'light and dark' imagery referenced throughout the text? How is this reflected in the technical and design elements of the production?
- How are the themes of memory and isolation explored in the play? How is this enhanced through the performance and technical elements of the production?
- Jean-Paul Sartre, another existentialist playwright and philosopher, said "man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does". How is this idea explored in *Krapp's Last Tape*? What role does freedom and choice play in Krapp's fate?
- What did you make of Krapp's silence at the end of the play? Why?

Activity 1: See, Think, Wonder

Theatre of the Absurd can be challenging for students to make sense of with all of its existential underpinnings. The approach of this thinking routine is to help students identify what they saw and understood as well as the questions that the production raised for them.

TASK: Students create a table with three columns labelled 'See', 'Think' and 'Wonder'.

- In the SEE column, students list everything they remember seeing onstage during the performance. This might be the set design, costume design, actions and aspects of the actor's portrayal, symbols, images etc. This is about being observant as an audience member and capturing a memory of the production.
- In the THINK column, students list what the performance made them think about. What was relatable or universal in the ideas and themes presented? Could they see links to other characters or works? This is about making links between the theatre they have seen and their own understanding and thoughts about the world.

- In the WONDER column, students note the things that the performance has made them curious or want to know more about. This could be curiosity about aspects of how the show was directed or produced, about the performer, the playwright, the genre, the play's themes, or even how certain aspects of staging and stagecraft were created. This is about exploring how theatre can spark curiosity, creativity and conversation.

Use this as the basis for a structured group discussion or as scaffolding for a written, oral or multimodal review of reflective response.

Activity 2: Mining the Script for Clues

Students may be fascinated to learn that the full script of *Krapp's Last Tape* is only eight pages long. The script is very dense with stage directions which inform the actor, director and designers what is necessary in order to embody the character and achieve Beckett's intentions for the piece.

You can access the script here for free [HERE \(LINK\)](#)

Read the script together as a class. Discuss:

- What do you notice about the script?
- What challenges and opportunities do the stage directions provide for actors? Directors? Designers?

TASK: Students work through the script again either independently or with a partner to highlight the text for 'clues' that could help an actor, director and designer approach the page-to-stage process. They will mostly focus on stage directions, but some of the monologue may also be useful.

- Use one colour to highlight information that will be useful or relevant to actors, another colour for information relevant to a designer, and another again that will be important for the director.

TASK: Take the perspective of either an actor or designer (eg costume, hair, make up, set, lighting, sound, multimedia, publicity and promotions) and outline how you would approach interpreting the play in your chosen role with reference to the clues you identified in the text.

A note to teachers of Stage 1 and 2 Drama: This activity may also help students to form a question to investigate for the Responding to Drama task (or part-task) in Assessment Type 2 in Stage 1 and 2 Drama.

ACADRR052: Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect

ACADRR053: Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making, starting with drama from Australia and including drama of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider drama in international contexts



Literacy



Personal and Social Capability



Critical and Creative Thinking



Ethical Understanding

If approaching the task as an ACTOR you might consider:

- Krapp's Given Circumstances
- the impact of the setting on his emotional state,
- acting conventions in absurd theatre,
- physical portrayal,
- the interplay of silence, movement and language
- If approaching the task as a DESIGNER they might consider:
- How the space reflects or enhances Krapp's emotional state and Given Circumstances
- How textures, materials, shape, cut, fit, colour, patterns and embellishments can enhance the audience's understanding of character and/or place
- Shadow, light and dark: look at the many references in the script to light and dark. How does this reflect the thematic concerns of the play? How can you demonstrate this through your design concept?

ACADRR052: Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect

ACADRM048: Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles

ACADRM049: Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces, including exploration of those developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dramatists

ACADRM050: Structure drama to engage an audience through manipulation of dramatic action, forms and performance styles and by using design elements



Literacy



Personal and Social Capability



Critical and Creative Thinking



Ethical Understanding

If approaching the task as a DESIGNER they might consider:

- How the space reflects or enhances Krapp's emotional state and Given Circumstances
- How textures, materials, shape, cut, fit, colour, patterns and embellishments can enhance the audience's understanding of character and/or place
- Shadow, light and dark: look at the many references in the script to light and dark. How does this reflect the thematic concerns of the play? How can you demonstrate this through your design concept?

Activity 3: Word Grenades

This warm up activity uses words and sounds to create nonsensical and illogical stories.

- Students work in pairs. Explain that when given the signal, one student in the pair (A) will begin telling a story on a given topic. As A tells the story, the other student (B) will call out random unrelated words and make absurd sounds that A must seamlessly weave into the story.
- Give the topic of the story that all groups must work with (eg The cat next door; Last Christmas; The best chocolate donut I ever ate)
- Set the timer for one minute and give the signal to start.
- After time is up, A and B swap roles, a new topic of the story is given and teams play for another minute.

Ask the group for a recap of the stories that were told. How do these reflect Absurd conventions?

ACADRM047: Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama



Literacy



Critical and Creative Thinking



Personal and Social Capability



Ethical Understanding



Activity 4: House

In this Drama improvisation game, one student plays a character who is determined to spend a quiet night 'in' yet is interrupted by a series of intruders who threaten their peace. This is a game played best with fast action and confident characters and simulates Krapp's desire to push people away.

- Mark out on the floor a large square on the floor which becomes the acting space. Ask one student to sit on the chair in the middle of the circle.
- Explain to the class that the square is the student's house and that this student simply wants to have a nice, quiet, pleasant, uninterrupted evening in their chair, drinking tea and reading books.
- Then explain that the remainder of the class will become a series of visitors or intruders who come to interrupt and threaten the peace. They have several ways they can enter the house:
 1. Knock on the front door imagine the door is downstage left of the square, demonstrate making the action of knocking on the door with your closed hand and the vocalise or make the sound by stamping your foot on the ground.
 2. Enter through the window demonstrate lifting and climbing through a window on the left side of the square.
 3. Come through the back door demonstrate opening a back screen door on the upstage right side of the square, make a screeching sound as you open the door and walk in.
 4. Down the chimney demonstrate jumping into the square via an imagined chimney on the right side of the square; accompany your action with a 'whoosh' sound as you 'land' in the house.
 5. On the phone demonstrate that a player can call the occupant of the house by holding an imaginary phone to their ear and loudly making the 'ring ring!' sound of a telephone.

ACADRM047: Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama

ACADRM049: Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces, including exploration of those developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dramatists



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- Explain that during the game, the student occupying the house must answer anyone who knocks on the door or rings on the phone, but anyone can intrude at any time via the window, back door or chimney.
- The aim of the game is for the occupant of the house to get everyone out of their house and to be left alone, but they can only do this by responding to the people who find their way in. The rest of the class are trying to create chaos and conflict in the house so up to five players may be in the house at any one time.
- Keep playing until the occupant successfully gets everyone out of the house and is left in peace, until every student has had a turn, or until you decide the game has gone on long enough.

Play multiple rounds with different students taking on the role of the occupant. At the end of each round debrief the game:

- How do you feel as the occupant? Why?
- How do you feel as an intruder? Why?
- How do we think the audience feels? Why?
- What is challenging about the game?
- Were there any storylines or a narrative emerging through the improvisations?
- If this were a performance, how could we improve it?
- How does this game reflect some of the ideas and themes that we have seen in *Krapp's Last Tape* or in other Absurd plays?

This is a high-energy game that has the tendency to get loud and confusing, though often students will build on ideas throughout the game. For example, someone might enter looking for their cat and another student might enter a little later as the cat looking for their owner.

Try to encourage students to look for opportunities to build on narratives and character relationships if possible which will become easier when they refine their improvisation skills through more active listening.

Activity 5: Making Theatre Inside the Square

Using the game 'House' and the staging choices in *Krapp's Last Tape* as inspiration, students conceive ideas for stories about characters confined to a 'square'.

Devising absurd plays through the lens of a square provides students with some structure and a variety of creative approaches that can inspire innovation, challenge conventional thinking and apply the conventions of Absurdism.

The shape of the square invokes ideas of rigidity (sharp corners, defined edges, parallel lines), geometric simplicity, and symbolic and structural starting points to explore themes like conformity, limitation, isolation and the breakdown of logic.

- Discuss and brainstorm how the simple geometric shape of the square can be seen as a metaphor in absurd plays to represent themes of confinement, repetition, order v chaos, identity, isolation, rigidity, conformity and the absurdity of existence.

Mark a large square on the floor using masking tape, cone markers, rope or chairs. A masking tape square is preferable and if possible create enough square zones on the floor for students to work in groups and to have their own square to work with.

TASK: Working in small groups, create a series physical representations that may contain sound but no dialogue (eg tableaux, short physical or movement sequence) using the square to inform your blocking that represent the following:

1. The Square as a Cage (eg being confined, restricted space; physical and psychological limitation; escape is futile)

2. Repetitive Patterns and the Monotony of Life (eg characters stuck in a cycle; repetition of actions; making the same decisions; roads lead to nowhere)
3. Rigid Order v Chaos (eg an attempt to impose order, symmetry and logic on an inherently chaotic world; the illusion of control and inability to maintain control and make sense of surroundings)
4. Breaking the Square (eg What happens if the square is metaphorically 'broken'? What happens if the characters try to step out of their prescribed roles, routines or rigid framework of the square? Character refuse to conform to logic)
5. The Square as Time (eg Characters stuck in a loop of time returning to the same moment or scene in the way that the square returns to its original form at the turn of each corner; time passes but nothing changes)
6. The Square as Safety (eg Characters keeping terrifying realities out of the square; the square as a 'safe haven')

TASK: Groups choose one of the six contexts from the previous task to extend into a short scene or moment using a maximum of 5 lines of dialogue in addition to pauses, silence and other conventions of Absurd Theatre

TASK: Work as a small company to devise, rehearse and present a performance (or a pitch for a hypothetical performance) of an original Absurd play.

- Take inspiration from *Krapp's Last Take* and the activity 'House' to inform your work
- Consider setting your play inside a physical marked-out square
- Apply the various literary, performance and technical conventions of Theatre of the Absurd.

A note to SACE Stage 1 and 2 Drama teachers: This task could be used to scaffold an approach to AT2 or AT3.

ACADRM047: Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama

ACADRM048: Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles

ACADRM049: Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces, including exploration of those developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dramatists

ACADRM050: Structure drama to engage an audience through manipulation of dramatic action, forms and performance styles and by using design elements

ACADRM051: Perform devised and scripted drama making deliberate artistic choices and shaping design elements to unify dramatic meaning for an audience

ACADRR053: Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making, starting with drama from Australia and including drama of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider drama in international contexts



Literacy



Personal and Social Capability



Critical and Creative Thinking



Ethical Understanding

About the Company

Landmark Productions is one of Ireland's leading theatre producers, which celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2024. We produce wide-ranging work in Ireland and share that work with international audiences.

Led by Anne Clarke since the company's foundation, our productions have received multiple awards and have been seen in leading theatres in London, New York and beyond. Landmark produces a wide range of ambitious work – plays, operas and musicals – in theatres of all scales. We co-produce regularly with a number of partners, including, most

significantly, Galway International Arts Festival and Irish National Opera. Our 30 world premieres (and counting) include new plays by major Irish writers such as Enda Walsh, Mark O'Rowe and Deirdre Kinahan, featuring a roll-call of Ireland's finest actors, directors and designers.

In Ireland, we produce a wide range of ambitious work – mostly plays, but occasionally operas and musicals, too – in theatres ranging from the 66-seat New Theatre to the 1,254-seat Olympia.

The company has received numerous awards, including – at

the Irish Times Irish Theatre Awards – the Judges' Special Award in recognition of sustained excellence in programming, and for developing imaginative partnerships to bring quality theatre to the Irish and international stage, and a Special Tribute Award for Anne Clarke, for her work as a producer of world-class theatre in the independent sector in Ireland.

With the support of the Arts Council and Culture Ireland – and with the backing of individual investors for our commercial productions – we aim to support artists to make their best work, and to make sure that work is seen as widely as possible.

Links

Landmark Productions website www.landmarkproductions.ie

Reviews

The Guardian

[theguardian.com/stage/2024/jan/19/krapps-last-tape-review-stephen-rea-project-arts-centre-dublin](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/jan/19/krapps-last-tape-review-stephen-rea-project-arts-centre-dublin)

RTÉ Ireland's National Television and Radio Broadcast

[rte.ie/culture/2024/0130/1429484-krapps-last-tape-stephen-rea-triumphs-in-a-beckett-masterpiece/](https://www.rte.ie/culture/2024/0130/1429484-krapps-last-tape-stephen-rea-triumphs-in-a-beckett-masterpiece/)

Interviews

On *Krapp's Last Tape* – how we made the acclaimed Beckett revival: Director Vicky Featherstone and actor Stephen Rea discuss their work together on *Krapp's Last Tape*

[rte.ie/culture/2024/0930/1471658-on-krapps-last-tape-how-we-made-the-acclaimed-beckett-revival](https://www.rte.ie/culture/2024/0930/1471658-on-krapps-last-tape-how-we-made-the-acclaimed-beckett-revival)

Extra resources

Trailer [youtube.com/watch?v=0ariFAOoD-8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ariFAOoD-8)



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