STUDY GUIDE

DRACULA: The Bloody Truth

By Le Navet Bete & John Nicholson

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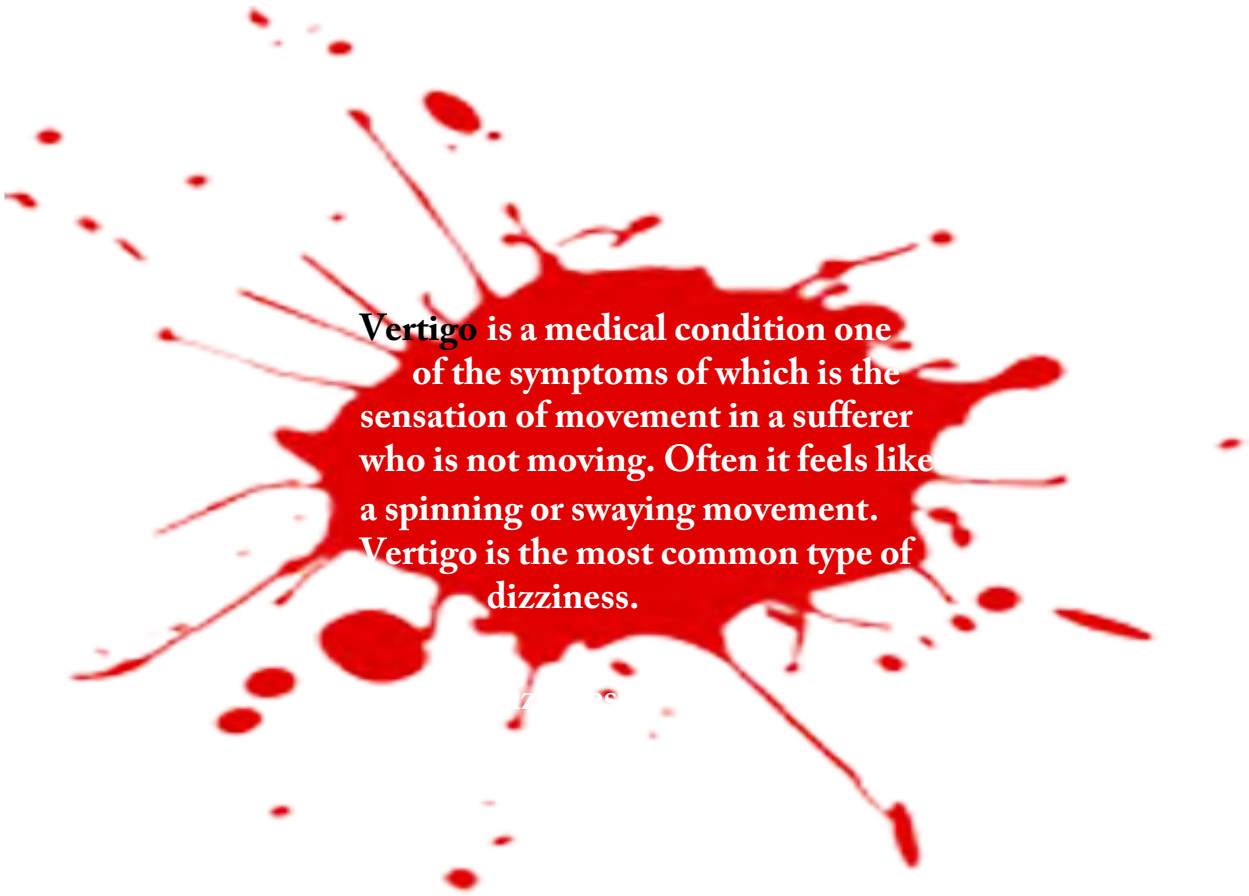
Vertigo Theatre is committed to creating a welcoming atmosphere for schools and to assisting teachers and parent chaperones with that process. It is our wish to foster and develop our relationship with our student audience members. It is our intention to create positive theatre experiences for young people by providing study guides and post-show talk backs with our actors and theatre personnel, in order to enrich students' appreciation of theatre as an art form and enhance their enjoyment of our plays.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Study Guide for Vertigo Theatre's production of Dracula: The Bloody Truth by Le Navet Bete and John Nicholson.

In this guide you will find information about how the legend of Dracula became one of the most adapted stories of all time, the creative team and performers involved in the production, as well as a variety of activities to do with your class before and after the show. There are topics suitable for class discussion, individual writing projects, as well as games and exercises that get students moving around and learning on their feet.

For this production, you'll find activities that will get students thinking about point of view in storytelling, as well as exercises that will get your class using their creativity and ingenuity like the performers in the show. We are also featuring an interview with actor Christopher Hunt, who talks about his preparation, acting in comedy, and his crime fiction recommendations. Sometimes your students might read an unusual word or term and feel some "**vertigo**", so we've got handy-dandy blood spatters that provide definitions or point to topics of interest. Like this:



TOP 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GOING TO THE THEATRE

Because some of you may be first-time theatre attendees (and some of you more experienced theatregoers may need a little reminder), we've compiled a Top 10 list of some of New York Show Tickets Do's and Don'ts of Broadway Theatre Etiquette as well as a few of our own:

1. **Power Down**

Turn off your cell phone, people. Turn. It. Off. And, no, putting your cell phone on vibrate isn't good enough - the people next to you can hear that weird buzzing sound, too. Besides which, the use of cameras and recording devices in the theatre is strictly prohibited.

2. **Don't Send Text Messages During the Show**

You may think you're being all incognito, but in a darkened theatre, the light from your cell phone screen is incredibly distracting to those around you. And why do you still have your phone on anyway? We just told you to turn it off!

3. **Eat Your Lunch Before the Show, NOT during it**

This isn't the movies. Eating, drinking or chewing gum is not permitted in the theatre. There is a water fountain out in the lobby for your use during the intermission.

4. **Unwrap Cough Drops and Candies in Advance**

If you anticipate any coughing fits during the show, be sure to unwrap your lozenges before the performance starts and have them at the ready. That crinkling sound is like nails on a chalkboard during a quiet play. And, no, unwrapping it S-L-O-W-L-Y does not help the situation ... it's much, much worse.

5. **Pre-Show**

When the houselights go down at the beginning of the play, this lets you know that we're starting. It is at this moment that the actors and technical staff do their final preparation for the opening moment, so please let them do their work by being quiet and respectful.

6. **Don't Be A Disruptive Miss Manners**

Sure, it's irritating when someone's cell phone goes off, but what's even worse is when it's followed by a series of annoyed "Tsks," and"Hmphs". Hisses, snarls, and shouts of "turn it off!" can be just as distracting as the original disruption.

7. **Zip Those Lips**

A quick whisper to your neighbour, or an audible reaction to something interesting that happens on stage is fine (this is live theatre, not the morgue), but keep conversations to intermission and after the show.

8. **Stay put, watch and enjoy the play.**

If you absolutely must use the washroom during the performance, please exit the theatre quickly and quietly. You will be readmitted to the theatre at the discretion of the House Manager.

9. **You're not in your Living Room**

Please do not stand up, walk around or put your feet on the seat or stage in front of you. Everyone around you, including the actors, will appreciate it.

10. **Enjoy Yourself!**

Come to the theatre to get swept away into another world. Be sure to thank all of the artists for their hard work by applauding during the curtain call.

CAST AND CREW CREDITS

THE CAST

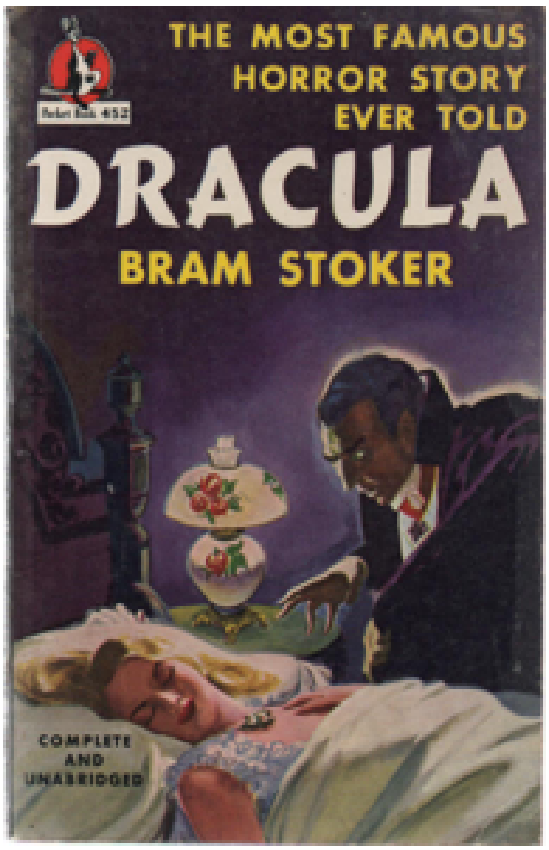
CHRISTOPHER HUNT	Van Helsing
JULIE ORTON	Actor
NATASCHA GIRGIS	Actor
STAFFORD PERRY	Actor

CREATIVE TEAM

LE NAVET BETE & JOHN NICHOLSON	Playwrights
CRAIG HALL	Director
ELLEN CLOSE	Assistant Director
SCOTT REID	Set Designer
DEITRA KALYN	Costume Designer
ANTON DE GROOT	Lighting Designer
ANDREW BLIZZARD	Sound Design and Original Music
MARK BELLAMY	Musical Staging
ELIZABETH WELLWOOD	Assistant Costume Designer
LISA FLOYD	Assistant Lighting Designer
KARL SINE	Fight Director
ZAKK MACDONALD	Assistant Fight Director
MICHAEL HOWARD	Stage Manager
JUSTIN BORN	Assistant Stage Manager
CLAIRE BOLTON	Apprentice Stage Manager
JANE MACFARLANE	Voice and Dialect Consultant
TECHART CUSTOM CREATIONS	Set Construction
DEREK PAULICH	Head of Props
LEAH MACRAE	Head of Wardrobe
MATTHEW HALL	Production Apprentice
WENDY EAKINS	Stitcher/Cutter
DAWNA MARK	Head Scenic Painter

The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited

DRACULA: FROM MYTH TO STAGE



Like many great stories that have become a part of popular culture, it's difficult to trace an exact beginning. Myths become novels, novels become films, films become television shows, and so the genre grows. Many of the classic tropes of the genre were made popular—though not necessarily originated—by the Stoker novel. A missing reflection in the mirror, an aversion to garlic and sunlight, transformation into bats, and the stake through the heart are a few of the conventions that have captured our imaginations and fed a hunger for more vampire stories.

Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897) is known as the quintessential vampire story, though it wasn't the first of that genre. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem The Bride of Corinth (1797) was an early take on vampire literature, and later Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla (1871); however, the story that introduced the "gentleman vampire" was John Polidori's The Vampyre (1817).

Stoker would have been aware of this literature, as he undertook research over a period of seven years, surveying a variety of materials, including Emily Gerard's essay Transylvania Superstitions (1885), which touched on vampire mythology.

ADAPTATIONS

From the moment of its publication, Dracula was already being adapted for the stage. Stoker wrote it himself, and it opened the same month as the novel's publication. He was able to accomplish this so quickly because of his day job as the Lyceum Theatre's business manager. Though the first film adaptation was technically Dracula's Death, a Hungarian production from 1921, most people think of the classic Nosferatu (1922). Though clearly an adaptation of Stoker's work, it was unauthorized (Stoker had passed away in 1912) and changed character names to avoid copyright infringement. The notoriety that came from Stoker's widow's attempts to block the film actually increased the popularity of the original novel.

Dracula is one of the most adapted characters in the world, second only to Sherlock Holmes, with over 200 films featuring the character. Great stars have played the infamous Count, including Lon Chaney Jr., Christopher Lee, Frank Langella, and Gary Oldman. The character has also been ripe for parody, like in the 1995 Mel Brooks film Dracula: Dead and Loving It, starring Leslie Nielsen, and Roman Polanski's 1967 film, The Fearless Vampire Killers.

The version that Vertigo Theatre is producing is a parody by UK company Le Navet Bete in collaboration with John Nicholson. The creators had a shared interest in comedy theatre and created the show through a combination of writing and improvisation. Though it takes the original novel as inspiration, this version eagerly diverges from the source material to send up the story, the genre, and theatre in general.

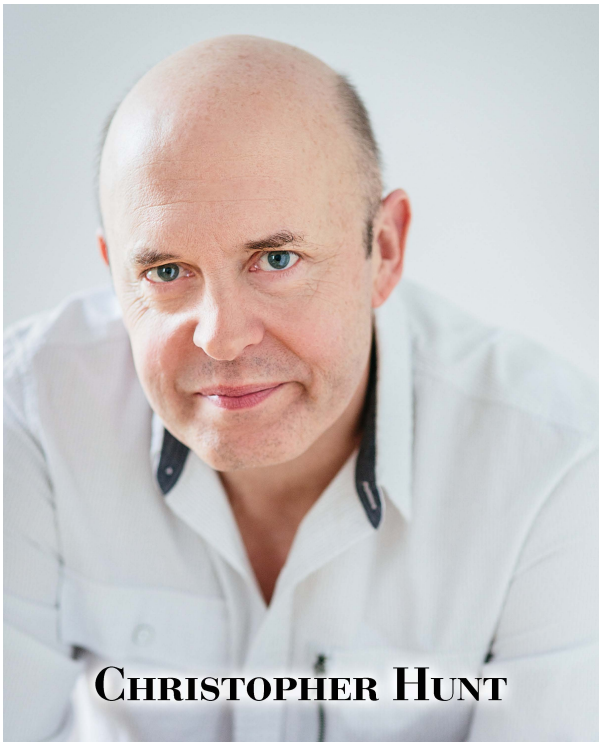
SYNOPSIS & CHARACTERS

SYNOPSIS

Professor Abraham Van Helsing leaps off the pages of Dracula and onto the stage to tell you, dear theatre goer: Bram Stoker's novel had it all wrong! At last Van Helsing hopes to set the record straight and bring the truth of the legendary vampire to light...even if he only has three amateur actors to help him do it! Van Helsing and his troupe dive into 40 different characters on a breakneck journey from the Transylvanian mountains to the seaside town of Whitby.

CHARACTERS

Professor Abraham Van Helsing
Jonathan Harker
Cart Driver
Cart Driver's Wife
Dracula
Bride 1
Bride 2
Bride 3
Peasant
Mina Murray
Train Conductor
Lucy Westenra
Mrs. Westenra
Dr. Seward
Quincey Morris
Holmwood
Dock Worker
Ship's Captain
Ship's First Mate
Dad and Son on a cliff
Bloke
Box Man
Margaret
Renfield
Paperboy
Dock Boy



We talk to actor Christopher Hunt about his acting process, working on comedy in rehearsal and performance, and his crime fiction favourites.

What most excites you about working on Dracula: The Bloody Truth?

I think I'm most excited about working with this incredibly talented team of artists. Such an amazing group of folks - they'll keep me humble and on my toes. I look forward to the playful discoveries we'll make as we work our way through the play, putting all of the characters into all of the situations. And I can be pretty sure that there will be lots of laughs too — I find that exciting!

Can you tell us how you prepare for rehearsals or a little bit about how you approach your work?

As the years click by, I find that learning the lines becomes more challenging, so getting a handle on the words I have to say will be part of my prep before we start rehearsals, or at least being more familiar with the script. And I'm always open to reading articles or books on the subject of the play, or watching filmed adaptations — in this case, I think there'll be plenty to choose from. For me, it's always a combination of whatever helpful research I can find as well as being open to those discoveries in the rehearsal hall with the team.

What do you find to be the most challenging part in the rehearsal process or the run of the play?

Plays are such different beasts — every one is different, and each one has its own challenges. Sometimes, the hardest thing for me is learning the text. Other times, it's the physical regimen of the show, or sometimes its the emotional demands. I'm not sure what the challenges will be for this one — ask me when we're done!

When you're working on a comedy, you try to figure out what's comedic in the rehearsal room, but then the show evolves and grows once you put it in front of an audience. Can you tell us about that experience?

There is usually an adjustment from what we work on and find funny in rehearsals to when we share it with the folks. Often, it's simply the mechanics of timing - letting the funny stuff land, and giving the audience the chance to respond. Sometimes, we're surprised that what we thought was funny doesn't get a response, and other moments set them off. And night to night, show to show, all audiences are different. So I just try to stay present, and remember that they're seeing it for the first time. And personally, I rarely laugh out loud when I see a show, so I try to be kind to myself — if they're quiet, they might be enjoying it, not hating it!

What's the best piece of advice you've received about acting or about being an actor?

Hmm . . . good question. I think it was the lesson that what we feel personally and what the audience sees don't always match up. I might be thinking I'm super sad/powerful/wicked/lovable etc., but that might not be what the folks out front are picking up on. So for me, it's finding that three-part balance between myself, my scene partner and the audience - if that gets out of whack and I'm leaning too hard into any one of those areas, there could be trouble.

What are some of your favourite works from the mystery genre?

My wife Elizabeth loves the British television mysteries — that's where I get my major dose of the genre. There's a new season of Endeavour coming out — it's the prequel to the Inspector Morse series. We'll be watching that for sure. Other recent faves include Foyle's War, DCI Banks, Whitechapel and Ripper Street. And we also loved The Bridge, which is a great Scandinavian series. So many great mysteries to read and watch!

PRE-SHOW PROJECTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DRACULA AND THE POPULARITY OF VAMPIRES

Dracula was the story the kickstarted the public's interest in vampires and it still carries on today. It's a part of our popular culture and almost everyone has had some experience of a vampire story. Here's a series of questions and topics for you and your class to discuss.

- What are the things that you think you know about Dracula?
- What other vampire stories do you know? These could be from books, films, television shows, or video games.
- Why do you think the vampire genre has been so popular? What are the elements that we love about it?
- The vampire genre has also been ripe for parody (What We Do in the Shadows), contemporary commentary (True Blood), high school comedy/drama (Buffy, the Vampire Slayer), and angsty teen romance (the Twilight series). What makes the genre so flexible? Why do we want to see so many stories about vampires? What is it about vampire stories that we find relatable?

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The hook of Dracula: The Bloody Truth is that we are hearing the "real" story from Van Helsing's perspective. In our era of "alternative facts" and "fake news" it has become more difficult to know what what the true story really is. Even if you were present for a set of events, your story is likely to be differ from someone else who was there. So perhaps there's no single truth.

Try putting your own spin on a story by shifting the perspective. You might try a news item and choose the point of view of one of the participants. For example, in a story about a house-fire, you could tell the story from a fireman's perspective, the homeowner's perspective, or even the fire's perspective. All three will be very different.

You might also try taking a famous story or series like Harry Potter and telling it from Voldemort's point of view. Or Cinderella from one of the stepsister's points of view or from the Fairy Godmother's.

Another powerful exercise would be to take a story from your life and challenge yourself to see it through another person's eyes, like one of your parents, a sibling, or your friend.

Whichever source you use, keep in mind that most people feel like they are justified in their choices. They usually feel they are doing their best with the circumstances they find themselves in. Even if we find a person's behaviour to be despicable, that person might feel like they have no other choice.

THE EPISTOLARY NOVEL

Dracula is an example of an Epistolary Novel. It's a form that has been in use for hundreds of years and is still used today. In the original Stoker novel, the story was told using diary entries, letters, newspaper articles, and more. Instead of following one person's journey, the story is told through a patchwork of sources.

Epistolary Novel- An epistolary work of literature is one written through a series of documents. most often, these documents are letters, though they can also be diary entires, newspaper clippings and more recently blog posts and e-mails.

Here are some of the questions for discussion:

- Why do you think Bram Stoker chose to tell his story in this way?
- What are the advantages of this type of storytelling?
- What are the disadvantages?
- Can you think of examples where the epistolary form is used today?

Try writing your own epistolary story. You can use whatever sources you like, but they must all be "found" forms. That is, they must be something that a person could discover. This could be: diary entries, journal entries, letters, emails, voice recordings, newspaper articles, websites, emails, texts, tweets, facebook posts, video blogs, or whatever else you can think of.

When writing your story you might stick to one form or you might use a variety. Whichever you choose, make sure you're true to the medium. Smartphone texts, for example, are written very differently than journalism.

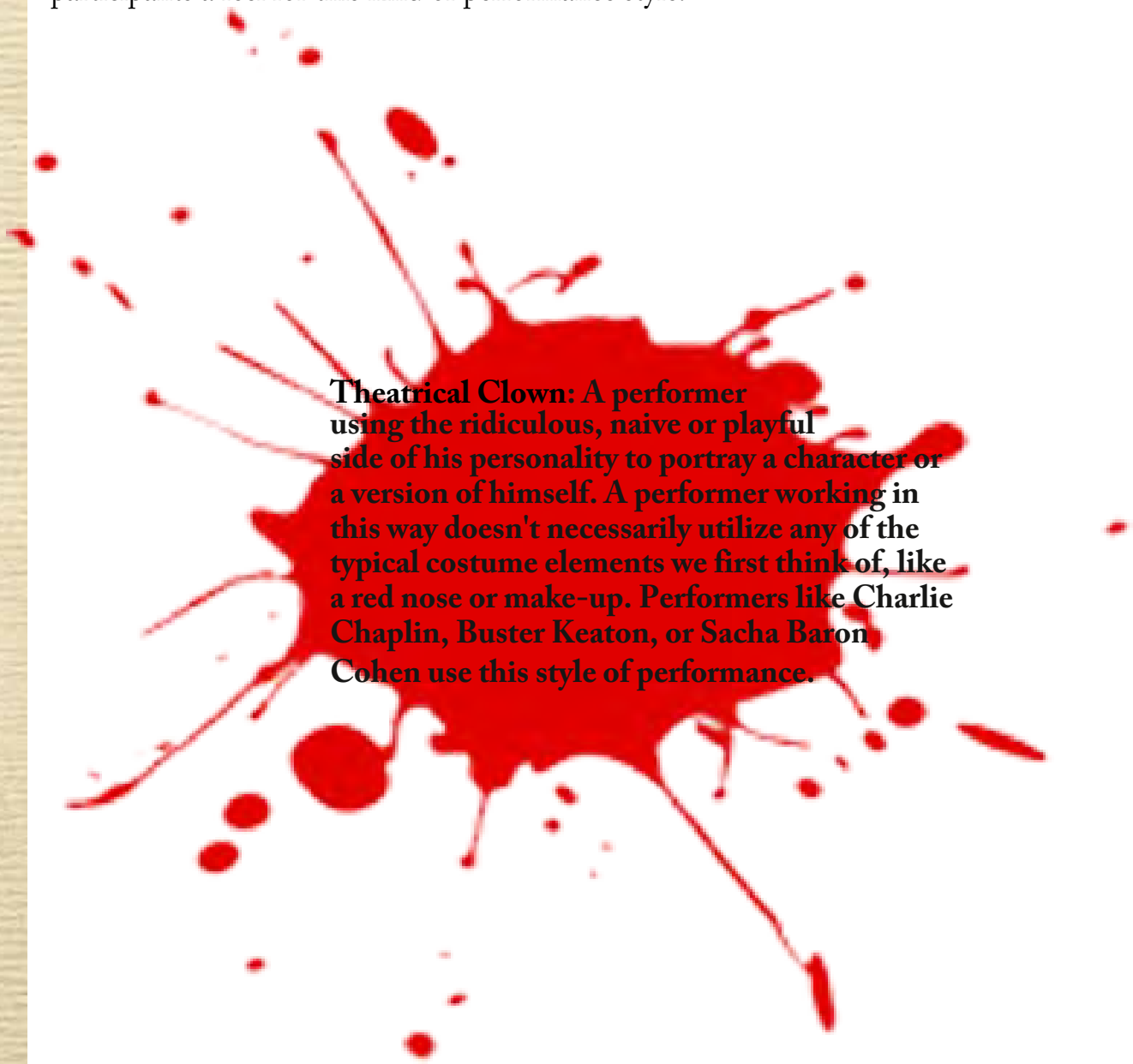
YOUR BURNING QUESTIONS

There will be a question and answer session after the show. What questions do you have about putting on the play? What have you always wanted to know about theatre? What do you want to know about being an actor?

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

A Clown's Story

Though we think of clowns as people with make up and red noses, the idea of a theatrical clown can be much broader. The writer/creators of Dracula: The Bloody Truth have a background in theatrical clown and that spirit is prevalent in the story. The play finds Van Helsing employing a group of "actors" to help him tell his story. We can see very early on that these actors are not the best actors available. And Van Helsing is perhaps not the most effective director. The following exercise will give participants a feel for this kind of performance style.



Theatrical Clown: A performer using the ridiculous, naive or playful side of his personality to portray a character or a version of himself. A performer working in this way doesn't necessarily utilize any of the typical costume elements we first think of, like a red nose or make-up. Performers like Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, or Sacha Baron Cohen use this style of performance.

A Fairy Tale Re-Told

A team of performers will re-tell a classic fairy tale or story, with one person acting as narrator and the others as the characters. This is an exercise that will employ skills in improvisation, storytelling, and clowning techniques.

1. Put everyone into groups of 3-5. One group performs at a time. One person is the narrator and the others are the "clowns".

2. The narrator's job is to tell a classic fairy tale. She doesn't need to tell the whole story in great detail, but rather tell it through a series of set-ups. Once a moment is set-up, the clowns use it as a starting point to improvise. (Example: "Once upon a time, Hansel and Gretel got lost in the woods.")

3. The clowns use the set-up as a place to begin, but they don't need to worry about staying on track. Clowns often get distracted with a problem or something that entertains them and lose track of their original purpose. That's what we find enjoyable about them. (Example, carrying on from the previous: Hansel and Gretel realize they're lost and they try calling for help, singing songs, pretending to be animals, having a "fear competition", eating berries as fast as they can, etc.)

4. The narrator lets them go until the story seems to be getting too far off track and then sets them up for the next story moment. The narrator has the job of allowing the clowns to explore a moment, but not letting it go on past the point where the audience loses interest. (Example, carrying on from the previous: "Then Hansel and Gretel discovered a cottage made of candy.")

5. And so the process repeats. Set-up, clowns have fun, narrator puts them back on track. The narrator can also challenge the performers. (Example: "Then hundreds of gingerbread children come alive." This will be impossible, so it's fun for everyone to see how the clowns will make it work.)

A couple of things to keep in mind:

- The narrator shouldn't try to be funny. His or her job is to tell the story.
- The clowns don't need to worry too much about the story. They should be having fun and following their whims.
- No matter what the narrator throws at the clowns, their answer, whether in their heads or out loud should be no problem! Just as children have few problems imagining and playing anything, clowns embrace whatever comes their way.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Were the stories entertaining?
- Did the narrator keep things moving or did they let the clowns go on too long?
- Did the clowns have fun and get lost in the story? Or did they get self-conscious or run out of ideas?
- What's fun about seeing a story told this way?

CHANGING SCENES

The play moves through time and space rapidly with dozens of scenes. This means that the performers, creative team, and crew have to find a way of making a scene evocative but not too literal. A window frame hung from wire and a standalone door might suggest a room of a house. Or some boxes a carriage. One of the things that theatre does well, which film doesn't, is using the power of suggestion. The following exercise will help students discover this principle.

INSTA-STAGING!

A group of performers uses creativity and suggestion to create a variety of settings and objects.

Instructions

1. Start by finding a selection of objects and things that the performers can make use of. This could be things like, chairs, tables, boxes, rope, balls, pool noodles, paper, books, umbrellas, bamboo sticks, blankets, etc. Place these objects to the side of the playing space.

2. A group of performers takes the stage.

3. From the outside, a leader calls out different places or objects. This could be virtually anything. Some examples: the deck of a ship, a motor home, a court room, a desert island, the stomach of a giant whale, the land of Oz, etc.

4. As quickly as they can, the group of performers tries to create the setting using the objects. They need to do it on the fly, without discussion. Music could even be played to inspire them. It's important to make them go quickly. Often the best ideas come when we go with our gut instincts rather than careful consideration.

5. Because they can't discuss it, they'll need to pay attention to what each person is doing to make sure they are contributing effectively.

6. They can also provide movement (eg. Pool noodles swaying like trees), sound effects (eg. Blowing wind), or even use their own bodies (eg. A performer makes a bird out of his hands).

7. If you want, you can now add actors into the setting to create a scene!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Which creations were the most evocative? Why?
- Was it more effective using more objects or fewer?
- Were the performers able to maximize their contributions (ie. Adding sound, using themselves, etc.)?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does this comedic adaptation make us appreciate the story in a new way? Is it worthwhile finding new ways to tell classic stories? Or is there an ideal form?

2. What is Van Helsing's purpose in telling the story from his perspective? Does he succeed?

3. In the play, Van Helsing rails against theatre. What exactly is it that he dislikes about it? What strengths does theatre have that make it different from film or books?

4. Why do you think Dracula has become a cultural staple? What made it frightening in the first place? Put yourself in the shoes of someone experiencing the story for the first time.

5. How did you feel about the characters breaking the "fourth wall" (ie. speaking directly to the audience or interacting with them)? How is this different than a story where the characters stay in their own world?

THE ART OF THE THEATRE REVIEW

Now that you've seen the production, it's time to write a review. But how do you do it? Where do you start? The Guardian Theatre critic Lyn Gardner ***suggests***:

> A traditional theatre review often begins by giving the reader some background about a production, a brief outline of plot and themes, a sense of what the staging looks (and sounds) like; it offers an evaluation of the writing, the production and the performances and concludes with a summing up.

But, most importantly, she says that:

> The first rule is that there are no rules – you're writing a review to express your thoughts and feelings about a theatre show, not taking an exam. There are as many ways to write a review as there are personal responses to any production. There is no right or wrong. Allow yourself to develop your own distinctive voice, and be honest about what you really think about a production: convey your enthusiasm for it or explain why you disliked it. Don't worry about going out on a limb. A timid theatre review is often a dull read. The hardest reviews to write are not about the shows you passionately loved or hated, but about ones that were just so-so.

To begin, jot down what stuck with you in the production.

- What do you remember the most?
- Which performances did you love and why?
- What did you think of the costumes, the set, the lighting, the sound?
- Did you like the story?
- Did the production make you feel something?

This last question is perhaps the most important. Kenneth Tynan, one of the most celebrated critics of all time said the following about that very topic:

> If a play does anything—either tragically or comically, satirically or farcically—to explain to me why I am alive, it is a good play. If it seems unaware that such questions exist, I tend to suspect that it's a bad one.

By "explain to me why I am alive", Tynan is suggesting that a play should speak to you about some aspect of your life. Some other questions you could address are:

- If you lost interest, where did the production go wrong?
- Was there a part of the story that you had difficulty accepting? A performance you didn't believe? A twist in the story that didn't make sense?
- Would you recommend this play to others? Was it worth your time?

Bonus Activity!
Can you summarize your review in the length of a tweet? You get 140 characters. This includes spaces!

If you're on Twitter, tag Vertigo with @vertigotheatre, so we can know what you thought!

ABOUT VERTIGO THEATRE

We are a professional, not-for-profit charitable organization with a dual artistic mandate. Our mission is to thrill, entertain and challenge by creating theatre that ignites the curiosity of our community. We are dedicated to the revitalization of the Mystery Theatre genre and to inspiring and mentoring the next generation of arts leaders.

Our vision is to be a premiere cultural institution in Calgary. Vertigo Theatre occupies a unique place in Calgary's cultural landscape as:

- The only professional theatre in Canada producing a series of professional plays based in the mystery genre
- Providing a performance home for other arts and arts education organizations
- Committed to mentorship and training in all areas – artistic, production and administration

Vertigo Theatre is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and engages under the terms of The Canadian Theatre Agreement professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actor's Equity Association.