**Section B – Set Play – A Level Drama and Theatre**

**‘Our Country’s Good’ / Timberlake Wertenbaker**

The Play

Genre

‘Our Country’s Good’ is an EPIC play, it explores the nature of theatre in a political arena. It is also historicised which means that it is based on historic fact with creative input from the playwright (and in this case actors and director); some of the events that are in the play are real – Ralph, his diary, his wife and his affair are all documented in the real Ralph’s diaries; some events are invented and other events are based on fact but changed slightly.

Style

The style is EPIC. OCG has both functional characters who appear once and rounded characters who develop, inter-relate and change through the play. As the play is EPIC, the audience should be thinking about the message of the play. The actors multi-role and could also change the set between scenes. The design of the play must be EPIC due to the constantly changing locations; your set design should take account of the constantly changing locations.

Form

‘Our Country’s Good’ is a play with two main aspects of form. The first is that the play is **episodic** – this means that each scene stands alone to tell its own story, however when the scenes are put together, joined they create a deeper story (think of it in the same way as episodes of a soap opera – one that you watch every episode of in comparison to one you watch on occasion.) Giving each scene a name is a typical aspect of form of epic plays. These episodes are joined **by character, by narrative and by theme**. In order to succeed on this paper you need to show that you understand that the characters and themes develop through the play – use design, technical and acting ideas to show this.

The second important aspect of the form is that it is a **metadrama** which means that there is a play within the play (‘The Recruiting Officer’).

Historic, Geographic and Sociological Context

‘Our Country’s Good’ has two distinct but linked contexts. It was written and created (through a workshop between Stafford-Clark, Wertenbaker and actors) in 1988 which makes the play **modern.** The play was written after Max Stafford-Clark read ‘The Playmaker’, the conservative government were continually making cuts making projects gradually more difficult to bring to fruition, Stafford-Clark felt driven to create a stage version of the novel because a key message is the redemptive powers of theatre. ‘Our Country’s Good’ is set in 1788 when convicts where shipped from England to Australia because of overcrowding in prisons and poverty driving ever more people to crime. At this time in history there was a strong belief in class structures and also (for many) in criminal tendencies being inbred. The link comes in the belief in the power of theatre to bring about change.

You need a **significant** amount of background research including the following:

* Historic background (‘Bound for Botany Bay’ and ‘The Fatal Shore’ are the best sources)
* A concept of how Australia would have looked – plants, landscape etc.
* Accurate costume research for convicts, officers and the Aborigine
* Research about weaponry, crates and any other aspect of props / setting / sound effects.
* Previous reviews – both images and writing – search on google then search newspaper sites.
* The original creation of the play by Max Stafford-Clark, Timberlake Wertenbaker and the company of actors.
* ‘The Playmaker’ – Stafford-Clark’s original inspiration for creating the play.

RESEARCH PROJECT

In the examination at the end of year 13 you need to refer to *relevant research* that you have completed around ‘Our Country’s Good.’ This project is designed to assist you in completing some independent research which is **in addition** to the research that we will be completing in class. Complete wider research covering the following points:

* The historic background – 1788
  + What was Britain like in 1788?
  + Why were British criminals shipped to Australia?
  + What kinds of crimes had prisoners committed?
  + What were the conditions on the ship like?
  + What happened when they docked in Australia?
* The background of the facts behind the story
  + Were any of the Officers or convicts real?
  + Can you find any archive material about officers / convicts on the first fleet?
  + How were convicts punished? What for?
* Setting – Australia – **MUST BE SUPPORTED BY IMAGES**
  + What would the beach have looked like? The cove?
  + What kinds of plants and trees would have grown? You need specific names / images
  + What sounds would they have been able to hear at night? Birds (specific names) / animals (specific names)/ sea etc.
* Costume – 1788 – **MUST BE SUPPORTED BY IMAGES AND KEY VOCABULARY TO DESCRIBE THEM**
  + What would the officers have worn (Captain, Reverend, Major, Lieutenant, Second Lieutenant, Midshipman)?
  + How will the audience be able to tell the rank?
  + What would the convicts have worn?
    - Women?
    - Men?
  + What would the Aborigine look like? Costume / make-up (colours, style, need words to describe) / prop(s)?
* Props – **MUST BE SUPPORTED BY IMAGES AND KEY VOCABULARY TO DESCRIBE THEM**
  + What weapons would the officers have used?
  + How would rooms be lit?
  + What would a book / diary / photograph have looked like?
  + What would the playscript look like?
  + What would crates look like?
  + What would candles / tankards / bottles / telescope / rope look like?
* Previous productions of the play
  + Find as many newspaper reviews as you can. Try google searches but also search the archives of ‘The Stage’, ‘The Guardian’, ‘The Times’ etc.
  + Find as many images / films of previous productions as you can. Complete image, YouTube and google searches. Save the videos that you find to a word document or to the Theatre Studies Facebook page.