Sound

If you hold these pages to your ear, you might hear the sea. Though reading them might be more useful...

A sound designer should consider the director's vision

1) Kelly doesn't include much information about sound in the stage directions — he indicates when there should be "*silence*" on stage, but he doesn't refer to any music or sound effects.
2) Although this means that a sound designer can be creative, it's important that all sound effects are in keeping with the director's vision and the overall style of the production.
3) When a designer makes a sound plot, they need to consider how sound can:

- convey the setting and context
- convey actions on and off stage
- emphasise characterisation
- create mood and atmosphere

A sound plot is a plan that contains a list of all the sounds and sound equipment used for a production. It also says when each sound should be used.

Sound can establish the play's settings...

1) The action takes place in three outdoor settings — a sound designer might create a different soundscape for each one. For example, the bustling atmosphere of a 21st-century "*Street*" might be created with pre-recorded sounds like distant traffic noise and sirens, the sound of a dog barking and a radio playing.
2) In "*Field*" scenes, a soundscape of occasional birdsong, a gentle breeze rustling through grass and trickling water might be used to create a peaceful impression. This would make this setting feel open and spacious, as well as showing that Leah and Phil are distanced from the other settings and the rest of the group.
3) A sound designer might use pre-recorded sounds, such as twigs snapping or leaves rustling, in the scenes that occur in "*A Wood*". These sounds could be routed through speakers positioned around the audience — this use of surround sound would make the setting more vivid to the audience.

A soundscape is created by layering up sounds — this can give a strong sense of place.

... and support the action of the play

1) A sound designer can use live sound effects to emphasise onstage actions. For example, the rustling sound of the packaging from Phil's snacks might be captured by an overhead microphone. This would draw the audience's attention to Phil's eating and away from what Leah is saying to him during "*Field*" scenes, emphasising how little attention Phil pays to Leah.
2) Other sound effects might be created off stage to suggest that the action is happening elsewhere. In Act One ("*A Wood*"), the audience might hear Brian "*crying*" through a speaker before he appears on stage.
3) Sound can also be used to highlight the importance of an action. For example, a sound designer might use a pre-recorded sound of footsteps on leaves when Adam is led away in Act Three ("*A Wood*"). This sound might get quieter as he gets further away to emphasise to the audience that he isn't coming back.

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The sounds described on this page are all diegetic. This means the characters on stage can hear them and that they form part of the action, rather than being there to create mood.

Characterisation

A sound designer might use wireless microphones to amplify the actors' voices differently. For example, the speech of dominant characters like John Tate or Phil might be amplified more than the rest of the group — this would emphasise their authority over the other, weaker characters.

Sound

Incidental music can add to the mood and atmosphere...

A sound designer can use incidental music to create or enhance mood and atmosphere:

Incidental music is non-diegetic — the characters can't hear it.

- During Act Three ("*A Wood*"), low-pitched string instruments could be played in a minor key for a few seconds when Cathy and Brian leave the stage. This would create a threatening atmosphere and suggest to the audience that Cathy is going to go through with murdering Adam.
- The scenes set in "*A Field*" could be underscored with soft piano music to highlight the decreased tension in this setting. In contrast, this music might increase in volume and become discordant during more violent moments, like when Leah tries to strangle herself in Act One.

Underscoring is when incidental music plays softly in the background to accompany the action or create a certain mood or atmosphere.

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... as can other non-diegetic sounds

Incidental music isn't the only type of non-diegetic sound that a sound designer could use:

1) Cellos might be used to create low, rumbling sounds to announce Phil's arrival on stage in Act One ("*A Wood*"). This would highlight Phil's importance and build anticipation for what will happen next.
2) A timpani or bass drum could be played live in the wings to create ominous sound effects which echo around the stage. This may be used at the end of Act Three ("*A Wood*") when Leah pleads with Phil not to kill Adam. This would add to the tension and emphasise the fearful mood.
3) Sound effects can be used for comic effect. For example, cymbals or bar chimes could over-dramatise Leah's attempt to predict the future in "*A Field*" at the end of Act Two, making her failure funnier.

Be specific about sound in the exam

When you're writing about sound in the exam, you should make it clear how and when each sound is made:

Describe the sounds you would use as clearly as possible.

Use technical terms to explain your ideas to the examiner.

At the beginning of Act One ("A Wood"), I would establish the play's setting by using a pre-recorded soundscape of trees creaking in the wind, crows cawing and bushes rustling. This would make the setting seem creepy and reinforce the ominous atmosphere established in the previous scene. I would position speakers around the audience to create surround sound, so they would be immersed in this setting. The sounds would fade when the characters start speaking to stop the audience being distracted by the sound effects.

Remember to write about the effect on the audience.

EXAM TIP

The end of these pages must be like music to your ears...

It's important that you don't lose sight of the bigger picture when you're writing about sound design in the exam. All of your ideas should work together and contribute to the overall style of the production.

Costume

There's much more to costume design than dressing all of the characters in the same ol' school uniform.

Realistic costumes reflect the play's context

1) All the characters in *DNA* are school pupils, so in a naturalistic production a costume designer might convey the play's 21st-century setting by dressing the group in modern school uniform.
2) For example, the group could wear white button-up shirts along with grey trousers or skirts made from materials such as polyester which are commonly used in the 21st century. The costumes might include ties and blazers, which could match in colour and pattern to suggest that the characters attend the same school.

A costumer designer has to consider details including the material, colour, style, fit and condition of every item of clothing.

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Costume design can be used to support the action...

1) A costume designer can use clothing, hair and make-up to reinforce what's happening in the play.
2) When Jan and Mark interrupt Leah at the end of a "*Field*" scene, they might appear sweaty and have messy clothing and hair. This would make it seem like they have been running to find Leah and Phil.
3) In Act One ("*A Wood*"), a costume designer could apply make-up around Brian's eyes so they look red and swollen. This would suggest that he's been crying for a long time before appearing on stage.
4) Leah might wear a coat and a scarf when she threatens to leave Phil near the start of Act Three, as though she's trying to convince him that she's serious about leaving.

Effect on the Audience

A character's costume can effect the audience's opinion of that character. For example, the audience is likely to have more sympathy for Brian if he looks like he's been crying.

A costume designer should make sure costumes are practical for the actors to wear. They need to be comfortable and safe, and shouldn't restrict an actor's movements or actions.

... and it can reveal information about the characters

1) Given that all the characters might be wearing a similar school uniform, a costume designer might want to include individual details in each costume to reveal more about each character's personality:

- Phil's clothing and hair might be clean and neat to match his calm and collected behaviour. However, he might wear trainers and a hoodie instead of smart shoes and a blazer to show that he doesn't conform to society's expectations.
- Cathy's costume could be used to suggest she's unpredictable and doesn't follow rules. She might wear an untucked shirt with an open collar, wear a lot of make-up and have multiple piercings to reflect her rebellious side.
- Brian is more well-behaved than the rest of the group, so he might wear a smarter uniform and style his hair into a neat side parting. This would show his desire to follow the rules.

These are just examples. The idea of tweaking a character's costume to match their personality can be applied to every character in the play.

2) A character's costume might be used to convey their position in the group. For example, Phil's costume could be more individual to set him apart from the group, while lower-status characters such as Danny and Lou could wear the same costume to reflect that they're part of a group following a leader.

Costume

A character's costume might change during the play

1) A costume designer can use changes in costume to reinforce a character arc to the audience.
2) For example, Brian's appearance may become progressively worse as the play goes on. At the start of the play, he could look clean and wear tidy clothing. In Act Three ("*A Wood*"), make-up could be used to make him look filthy, and his clothes could be mismatched and untidy. This would give the audience a visual representation of his mental decline and encourage them to feel more sympathy for him.
3) Phil could have fashionable, neat clothing and hair in the first three acts of the play. Then, in Act Four, his costume could become messier to suggest that he isn't taking care of his appearance anymore. This would reinforce to the audience that he's miserable about Leah leaving.

Costumes can be non-naturalistic

1) In a non-naturalistic production, the costumes could reflect the play's themes or have symbolic meaning.

This production dressed the characters in red, which could symbolise blood and violence.

2) A costumer designer could dress the group in orange boiler suits to make them look like prisoners. This would highlight that they are behaving like criminals, and also increase the tension by acting as a visual reminder of what might happen to them if they're caught. Individual details could show each character's personality — e.g. Cathy's costume might be ripped to suggest that she's been in a fight.
3) Alternatively, some characters could be dressed in different colours to show their personalities using colour symbolism. For example, Leah may wear white, which is associated with goodness and innocence, to suggest she's not as guilty as the other characters.
4) In a minimalist production, all the characters might be dressed in plain, black clothing, except for the group leader. This would highlight the mob mentality of the group, making it harder for the audience to distinguish the characters from one another.

Justify your costume choices in the exam

Here's an example of how you could write about Adam's costume:

In Act Three ("A Wood"), I would dress Adam in a similar school uniform to the other characters. However, his white cotton shirt would be filthy, bloodstained and missing a few buttons, and his grey trousers would be torn at the knee. This would suggest that Adam has suffered badly as a result of the fall. I would also smear his face and hair with charcoal dust and fake blood to make him look dirty and covered in cuts. This would make the audience sympathetic towards Adam by reflecting his fragile physical state.

This gives precise details about how the costume looks.

This explains your choice of costume.

This shows the effect on the audience.

EXAM TIP

I'm not going to dress it up — costume design is tricky...

If you're answering a question about costume design, don't forget that a character's costume goes beyond the clothes that they're wearing — it's just as important to think about details like hair and make-up.

Practice Questions

The stage is set, the path to success is lit, you can hear the end of the section calling and you're dressed to impress. It's time to bring it all together with some practice questions, so see how you get on with this lot.

Quick Questions

1) Give two factors that directors must take into account when choosing a stage type for a production of *DNA*.

2) Give one reason why a set designer might choose a non-naturalistic set design for *DNA*.

3) Explain two ways that technical devices such as trucks, flats or projectors could make it easier to stage *DNA*.

4) How might a designer use lighting to reveal more about a specific character's personality?

5) What is colour symbolism? Give an example of how it could be used for effect when lighting a production of *DNA*.

6) Why might a sound designer for *DNA* amplify one character's voice more than others?

7) Give one example of how non-diegetic sound could be used in *DNA* to create a fearful mood.

8) Give three examples of details a costume designer has to consider when creating an item of clothing.

9) How might a designer use costume to reflect a character's position in the group?

In-depth Questions

1) As a director, which stage type would you use for a production of *DNA*? Explain why this stage type is suitable for presenting *DNA*, as well as any limitations of it.

2) How might a set designer use levels in the scenes set in "*A Field*"? Give reasons for your ideas.

3) How might lighting be used to create mood and atmosphere when Leah walks away from Phil at the end of Act Three?

4) What sound effects might a sound designer use when Phil explains the cover-up to the rest of the group in Act One ("*A Wood*")? Explain how you would create these sounds.

5) Explain how a designer could use costume to show that Cathy is dangerous. You might want to suggest how this costume would change as the play goes on.

Practice Questions

Now you know how to design a production, you need to practise designing the perfect answer to some exam questions. When you're finished, why not treat yourself to an ice cream... or a packet of crisps... or a waffle?

Practice Questions

Find the part of Act One where Leah and Phil are introduced to the audience for the first time. Read from where it says "***LEAH and PHIL, PHIL eating an ice cream***" to where it says "***JAN and MARK enter***", then answer Question 1 below.

1) Imagine you're a designer working on *DNA*.
Explain how you would use staging and set design to portray this extract effectively on stage to the audience. You should refer to the play's context in your answer.

Read Act One ("*A Wood*") from the start to "**This is mad, eh?**", and then answer Question 2 below.

2) Imagine you're a costume designer working on staging this extract of *DNA*.
Describe how you would use costume design to enhance the production of this extract and the play as a whole on the audience.

Read Act Two ("*A Street*") from where Jan says "**What?**" to where she says "**What are we going to do?**", then answer Question 3 below.

3) Imagine you're a lighting designer working on *DNA*.
Describe how you would use lighting design to enhance the impact of the play on the audience in this extract and the play as a whole.

Read Act Four ("*A Field*") from where it says "***RICHARD sits with PHIL***" to the end of the scene, then answer Question 4 below.

4) Imagine you're a sound designer working on staging this extract of *DNA*.
Explain how you would use sound design to portray this extract effectively on stage to the audience. You should refer to mood and atmosphere in your answer.

Act One

This section looks at performance skills and design features using the kind of close analysis you should be doing in the exam — excited yet? If you want a reminder of the plot, look back at the introduction (p.4-5).

Act One creates a mood of anxiety

1) Act One plays an important role in establishing the mood and atmosphere of the play — there are humorous moments, but these are overshadowed by the dominant mood of fear and unease. The act also introduces the characters and shows the relationships between them.
2) The play opens with Mark telling Jan that someone is dead — this creates suspense and establishes a tense mood as the audience waits to find out who has died and how the characters are involved.
3) The action moves to "*A Field*", where Leah talks to Phil. The contrast between Phil's silence and Leah's chattiness is initially funny. However, Phil's silence becomes unnerving, especially when Leah tells him she's scared — this creates tension as it makes the audience wonder why she's afraid.
4) In the next scene, John Tate tries to assert his authority over the group but shows himself to be a weak leader. This scene establishes the characters' personalities and relationships, whilst adding to the fearful mood.
5) The mood darkens further when Jan and Mark describe Adam's fall down the mineshaft. The details of the bullying and their attempts to deny responsibility create an unsettling atmosphere.
6) The anxious mood continues to the end of Act One. The audience is left guessing whether Phil's plan to cover up Adam's 'death' will work, and Leah's statement that the group are in trouble heightens the ominous mood going into the second act.

Phil has a focused facial expression as Mark describes Adam's fall.

Leah reveals her insecurities

See p.26-28 for more ideas on how to perform the character of Leah.

1) Act One ("*A Field*") is the first impression the audience get of Leah's and Phil's characters and relationship.
2) Leah's monologue reveals her lack of self-confidence and desire for understanding and reassurance from Phil. An actor playing Leah could show how she feels using performance skills:

Physical Skills — Movement and Proxemics

- An actor could use movement and proxemics to show how Leah is feeling. When she says "Not that I'm bothered", she could move away from Phil to show she's embarrassed. When she "*sits*", she could leave a gap between her and Phil to highlight the emotional distance between them. Later in the monologue, when she admits to being "scared", she could move closer to Phil as if she is seeking reassurance.
- As Leah talks about fear, she could move round to face Phil — this would show her desire for closeness and comfort from him.
- Leah could fidget to show that she feels anxious — she might wring her hands or keep shifting her position to show that she is uncomfortable and self-conscious.

Vocal Skills — Volume, Emphasis and Pace

- An actor playing Leah could speak loudly when she says "I'm not bothered, Phil" to show that she is pretending to be confident. This could contrast with a quiet delivery of lines such as "Everyone's scared. S'not just me" to show her real, vulnerable self.
- She could stress words such as "scared" and "terror" to emphasise her fear.
- When Leah talks about the fact that she "talks too much", she could speak quickly as if the words are tumbling out — this could suggest that Phil's silence makes her nervous.
- Leah could trail off on sentences that end with an ellipsis, such as "You need me as much as..." to suggest that she doesn't really believe what she's saying.

Act One

Phil devises a plan to cover up the truth about Adam

1) As Phil outlines his plan, his leadership and the other characters' reactions to his plan could be shown through movements and facial expressions.
2) The stage directions indicate silence before Phil's speech, which could be used to create anticipation about what will happen next. The actor playing Phil could put his drink down slowly to draw the audience's attention.
3) Phil could use decisive hand gestures, such as pointing when giving instructions like "enter the woods from the south entrance", to show his authority. He could also close his eyes and frown when he is interrupted to show he is concentrating on his plan.

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Theatrical Conventions

The scene could end with a tableau where all the characters except Phil freeze as Phil picks up his drink. This would emphasise the importance of the moment by fixing it in the audience's minds as the point where the cover-up begins.

4) Characters like Richard and Danny, who are given instructions they don't like, could clench their fists or scowl to indicate their annoyance. They could quickly go back to listening intently with their arms folded to suggest they're still not happy but have accepted Phil's decision. This would show how strong Phil's control is — Richard and Danny can't oppose him for too long.
5) An actor playing Cathy could show her enjoyment of the situation by smiling slyly and nodding enthusiastically. This would hint at her lack of morals and her desire to please whoever is in charge.

Leah attempts to strangle herself

1) Leah's monologue emphasises her desperate need for Phil's attention — she's even prepared to hurt herself to get it. Lighting can be used to set the mood throughout the scene.
2) Immediately before Leah starts to strangle herself, soft white light could be used to create a gentle mood. This would make Leah's sudden action more shocking as she "*grabs her throat*".
3) At this point, the white lights could cut out and be replaced by a spotlight focused through a red gel. The red light would make the scene more intense, and colour symbolism would reflect the danger Leah is in. When she "*stops*", the red light could fade and the white lights come back up to show the danger's over.
4) As Leah says "We're in trouble now", the white stage lighting could start to fade to create a foreboding atmosphere going into the next act.

Set Design — Scenery and Staging

- Images of different weather conditions could be projected onto a cyclorama upstage to reflect different moods, e.g. clear blue skies could be replaced by dark clouds when Leah threatens to kill herself.
- Trucks painted with dark, lifeless bushes and trees could be positioned behind the actors. This would act as a visual reminder of the forest and the cover-up, giving a darker edge to the scene.
- A wooden box covered in hay to look like a hay bale could form a raised platform stage right. Leah could use this as a stage when she strangles herself, reinforcing that she's doing it to get Phil's attention.
- During her monologue about bonobos, Leah could stand on the outer ring of a revolving stage, while Phil sits on the stationary inner ring. Leah's orbit around Phil would reflect the way her life centres on him and how important he is to her.

EXAM TIP

Leah is so into Phil — he leaves her breathless...

The decisions made by the director, actors and designers have an impact on the mood and atmosphere. Consider the overall effect you want to create before settling on any performance or design ideas.