

**23 September  
to 22 October**

**21<sup>st</sup> WY PLAY  
HOUSE**

# King Lear

By **William Shakespeare**

With **Tim Pigott-Smith**  
as **King Lear**

Director **Ian Brown**

Designer **Ruari Murchison**

Lighting Designer **Chris Davey**

Sound Designer **Mic Pool**

Company Movement **Joyce Henderson**

Composer **Richard Taylor**

Voice **Bardy Thomas**

Fight Director **Kate Waters**

Casting Director **Siobhan Bracke**

**Cast** **Iain Batchelor, Peter Cadden,  
Sam Crane, Hedydd Dylan, Lloyd Everitt,  
Joe Forte, Tim Frances, Chris Garner,  
James Garnon, Richard O'Callaghan,  
Bernard Lloyd, Neve McIntosh,  
Olivia Morgan, Tim Pigott-Smith,  
Graham Turner**

**Teacher Resource Pack**

# Introduction



Welcome to the Resource Pack for West Yorkshire Playhouse's production of King Lear by William Shakespeare. In the pack you will find a host of information sheets to enhance your visit to the show and to aid your students' exploration of this classic text.

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## King Lear

By William Shakespeare, Directed by Ian Brown, Designed by Ruari Murchison

King Lear abdicates the British throne, to divide his kingdom among his three daughters in proportion to their professed love of him. When Cordelia, his youngest and favourite daughter, refuses to flatter her father, she is disinherited and banished.

King Lear, with its intense exploration of kinship, loyalty, old-age and madness is widely held as the greatest of Shakespeare's tragedies; to some, it is the greatest play ever written.

Award-winning stage, film and television actor Tim Pigott-Smith will perform the title role, directed by West Yorkshire Playhouse Artistic Director Ian Brown.

Don't forget to look at the teacher blog online.

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## Creative Education at West Yorkshire Playhouse

Thousands of young people enjoy our performances as part of a school trip but we can offer much more than just tickets. From opportunities for students to work with professional directors to set design workshops the Playhouse offers a range of activities to complement a trip to the theatre.

We are always open to ideas about future projects or one off activities taking place at the Playhouse or in your school so please do get in touch to talk about ways in which we can support your work.

To find out more about the work of the Creative Education Team, please contact Lisa Parrott on [lisa.parrott@wyp.org.uk](mailto:lisa.parrott@wyp.org.uk).

## Resource Pack Thanks

Matt Humphrey (cover image), Keith Pattison (rehearsal photography), Eddie de Pledge, Ruari Murchison, Jessica Farmer, Ian Brown, Sam Wood, Beth Goodliff

# Synopsis



King Lear is the aging king of Britain who feels the time has come to abdicate his throne and pass on his power to his three daughters Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. In order to decide how much land each of the daughters will receive, Lear decides to test their love for him. He asks each daughter to express how much they love him. Both Goneril and Regan are gushing in their descriptions of how much their father means to them.

The sisters are rewarded generously with their father's land. In addition he marries Goneril to the Duke of Albany and Regan to the Duke of Cornwall.

Cordelia, Lear's favourite, by comparison says nothing as she feels that her love cannot be expressed in words. Lear is outraged and disowns Cordelia. The Duke of Kent tries to reason with Lear and asks him to reconsider. Lear refuses and banishes Kent.

Lear offers Cordelia to the Duke of Burgandy but as she has not been gifted any of Lear's land he refuses. Cordelia therefore leaves her father's court with the King of France whom she plans to marry.

Lear gives all of his powers of governance of Britain to Albany and Cornwall. Very quickly Lear learns that he has made a poor decision as Goneril and Regan and their husbands betray him. Their betrayal drives Lear to insanity and he flees to the heath with his fool and the banished Kent who is disguised as a peasant, Caius.

Meanwhile, the Earl of Gloucester is encountering problems in his own family. His illegitimate son Edmund convinces him that his legitimate son Edgar is trying to kill him. Gloucester orders his men to kill Edgar. Edgar disguises himself as a beggar named Poor Tom and flees to the heath.

Gloucester learns that Lear has been betrayed by Goneril and Regan and goes to help Lear. However, Regan and Cornwall accuse him of treason for trying to assist Lear and in punishment they blind him and send him out into the wilderness. Edgar, in disguise as Poor Tom, finds him and leads him to Dover, where Lear is heading.

In France Cordelia has enlisted the help of the French army and invades Dover to try to save her Father and the country.

Goneril's husband, Albany, has become sympathetic to Lear's cause so Goneril and Edmund (who have become lovers) conspire to kill him. Regan and Edmund have also become lovers.

Upon arrival at Dover, Lear and Cordelia are reunited but the French troops are met by the British troops, led by Edmund. The French are defeated by the British and Cordelia and Lear are imprisoned.

Edgar reveals himself to his father who dies as his heart bursts with joy. Edgar reveals Goneril, Regan and Edmund's treachery to Albany who challenges Edmund to a duel with his knight, revealed to be Edgar. In jealousy over learning of Regan and Edmund's relationship, Goneril poisons and kills her sister. When it is clear that Edmund is also done for in the battle with Edgar she kills herself.

# Synopsis



In his dying breath, Edmund reveals that he has sent orders to kill the imprisoned Cordelia. Determined to do good before he dies, Edmund sends a messenger to stop the execution of Cordelia. It is too late and Lear enters carrying the body of Cordelia. Lear dies of his grief at Cordelia's death.

Albany offers to reinstate the power and titles of Edgar and the elderly Kent but Kent refuses. Albany and Edgar are left to govern a country heaving with grief.



# Negotiating Lear

## An interview with Tim Pigott-Smith and Ian Brown by Stuart Leeks

'It's a play that's very relevant to the way we're thinking about the world now. We're in a time of change, and there's a lot of gloom about the future. It was written as a warning to the fairly new king of a united kingdom to try to hold everything together. And it's a lesson to us all about how perhaps we might live our lives a little better.'

Over a salad during a break in rehearsals for his production of *King Lear*, director Ian Brown is musing on the ways in which the play might speak to its audiences now, almost 400 years since it was written. His leading man is in agreement: 'It was a time of great turbulence and fear, years in which there was concern about the succession, about the future of the monarchy' says Tim Pigott-Smith. Ian continues: 'And at the time that Shakespeare wrote the play, London was full of young people. It was a young city: there was no time for the old'. 'Plus ça change' adds Tim. 'What do we do with the old buffers?'

That time was mid-way through the first decade of the 17th century. *King Lear* was probably written late in 1605 or in 1606; what is certain is that it was first played before the King at court during the Christmas season of 1606. James I (James VI of Scotland) had been on the throne for just three years, having succeeded Elizabeth I in 1603. Given the pertinence of the play to its own time and the contemporary resonances that both Ian and Tim detect in it, what choices had they and designer Ruari Murchison made about the creation of a world for the play – a particular challenge, when, on the face of it, it seems to be set in a pre-Christian society?

'You either go historical or you go modern' says Ian. 'But it does seem to me to be a play that emerges from a particular time, so our production reflects the period in which it was written, although not to the extent of slavishly accurate reproductions of Jacobean costuming. It's set in England, it is conscious of when the play was written, but there's a contemporary edge to it.'



# Negotiating Lear

## An interview with Tim Pigott-Smith and Ian Brown by Stuart Leeks



Tim continues: 'One of the difficulties with modernisation is that the concept of kingship doesn't sit easily, and I think that both Ian and I felt that Lear's journey has to begin with him being a very powerful king. You don't have long to establish the world, but in the first scene I hope we achieve a sense of Lear's absolute power – what he says goes. And that's crucial, because what he learns is how absolutely unimportant that is in the scale of things. He wanted to be told that he was loved. Those who told him that they did, clearly didn't; the one who wouldn't, clearly did. His is a world of power and all its trappings, which are then stripped away from him. And he comes to realise that the only thing that is of any importance is to love another human being properly'.

Both Tim and Ian feel that King Lear is Shakespeare's bleakest work. 'I am struck by the absence of a divine power to safeguard the men and women in the play' says Ian. '“We're on our own” it seems to say'. Gloucester might seek to attribute human 'machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders' to heavenly influence ('These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us'), but his bastard son Edmund will have none of it: 'This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune – often the surfeits of our own behaviour – we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and stars . . .' Certainly, it's difficult to discern much evidence of providence at work in a world in which a cruelty of the magnitude of the blinding of Gloucester may take place. Yet such gross cruelties are counterbalanced by small acts of human kindness – such as that of the servant who fetches flax and egg whites to salve Gloucester's horrific mutilation. How, I wondered, is such a scene to be borne?

'The blinding of Gloucester is particularly difficult for me' Ian says. 'I said so in rehearsal yesterday. The actors did it so well, and I'm sitting there having to watch that. They said, “Well, we're in it, so it's different for us”. Watching it, you feel tremendous pity for Gloucester, and that's a very powerful thing to feel for any character on the stage. Tackling that feeling is important. You're made to witness a truly horrific act, but then we hear about truly horrific acts every single day of our lives. We have to live with them, as well as some of the more positive things about human nature. And maybe that's how you understand humanity, by understanding both aspects'. Tim points to the metaphorical significance of Gloucester's blinding. 'When he is blind, Gloucester says “I stumbled when I saw”. It's almost as if he has to be blinded in order to see the truth, as Lear has to go mad in order to achieve sanity.'

The play derives much of its power from the way in which its great themes are woven into the texture of its language – the recurrence of images associated with seeing (and not seeing), with love, with negation (never, nothing, none) and, above all, with feeling. When the blind Gloucester is reunited with the mad king, Lear says 'you see how this world goes on', to which Gloucester replies 'I see it feelingly'. The Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate has written: 'To be truly responsive to the play we must, as the final speech has it, “Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say”. To be human is to see feelingly, not to fall back on easy moralising. . . . And seeing feelingly has to do with our sympathetic response to the images that confront us, both on stage and in the great theatre of the world'.

Ian Brown has no doubt about the stature of Shakespeare's uncompromising achievement. 'It is a masterpiece. It's one of the greatest works of literature. Whatever you think of it, whether you like it or whether you don't, it's there, and it has to be negotiated.'

# King Lear Blog



As teachers across the country make the reluctant journey back to the classroom after six weeks of pupil-free bliss, we will all be asking ourselves how we can deliver lessons this year which are more innovative, interactive and inventive than last year. For an English teacher, this is a perpetual challenge, especially as the set texts on the GCSE and A Level specifications rarely vary. This is indeed the case with Shakespeare's plays and, if you are anything like me, you will have taught Macbeth and Othello so many times that you can recite entire scenes in your sleep. You will also be familiar with the stony silence resonating back from your class of bored students when you ask, with blind optimism, 'Who wants to read the part of Lady Macbeth today?', followed by resorting to your own desperate performance which attempts to portray half a dozen characters using as many different voices as you can muster during last lesson on a Friday. The opportunity, therefore, to observe rehearsals for the West Yorkshire Playhouse's forthcoming production of King Lear was one I leapt at, hoping it would be both a source of information and inspiration for teaching Shakespeare in the terms ahead. The experience certainly has not disappointed so far, and has revealed a number of new ways in which to approach plays which are as complex as they are fascinating, and as challenging as they are rewarding.

The first rehearsal I had the chance to sit in on was for Act I, Scene ii, and featured the characters of Edmund, Edgar and Gloucester. It occurred to me whilst watching this that the role of the director, Ian Brown, is much like that of the English teacher – to enable those for whom the play must become real (the actors/the pupils) to realise its many facets and meanings, and to be wholly engaged by them, so as to produce a polished final piece (the play on stage/a coursework essay). As teachers, we can easily become so preoccupied with assessment objectives and mark scheme criteria that the real pleasure and delight of a Shakespeare play can be lost in the teaching, but watching Ian explore the text with his cast members reminded me that there are ways to study the play which elucidate its meanings and subtleties without losing sight of the beauty of the language and the thrill of the story.

Act I Scene ii is a brief but significant scene which makes use of the ubiquitous Shakespearean device of 'the letter'. Edmund, the illegitimate son of The Earl of Gloucester, convinces his father that his half brother (and Gloucester's legitimate son) Edgar is conspiring to bring about Gloucester's downfall, and that only Edmund can be trusted. Their tense and, on Edmund's part at least, duplicitous relationship is forced to shift, as the dynamic between father and illegitimate son suddenly becomes a bond of misplaced trust. Ian used the actors' positions on stage to demonstrate their status; a simple enough technique to an experienced director, but something that, if replicated in a classroom, could easily demonstrate to visual and kinaesthetic learners the simple 'who's who' of the play. By placing Edmund behind Gloucester, or by putting a falsely generous arm around his shoulders, it soon became clear who was controlling who. Extended discussions took place about the relative positioning of Edmund and Gloucester and the actors each made clear their own reasons for standing, turning, glancing and moving as they did. Ian advocated 'listening and reacting' as ways of showing how lines were delivered and received, and tried a number of different locations for each actor on the stage. Could students in the classroom explore a scene as a series of actions, reactions, steps and movements in the same way, I wondered? Dare I allow my sometimes-rambunctious Y11s to get out of their seats and block the scene around the classroom? If I want them to understand and be engaged, then the answer is definitely 'yes'. The use of props also allowed the script to come to life; the line 'if it be nothing I shall not need spectacles' was accompanied by the putting on of spectacles. A simple enough action in

# King Lear Blog



itself, but one which made me think about ways in which my classes might provide their own 'props list' for the play. If they can decide which objects are crucial, they can begin to make sense of the devices and motifs which drive the plot.

Perhaps the most significant element of any Shakespearean drama, for both a teacher and a director, is the language of the play. Undoubtedly there is a reason that even someone who has not studied Shakespeare since secondary school can still remember snatches of phrases from the plays they read for O Level; the language is compelling, concise and beautiful. In rehearsal, this was evident throughout, and it was a delight to hear the words delivered so crisply and emotively, rather than by a nervous fourteen year old who stops at the end of every line... The actors and director explored the words which recurred throughout the scene, and it became obvious that these were the words on which the entire scene rested: 'villain' and '(un)natural'. Strategically placed at both regular and irregular intervals throughout I, ii, the actors were often asked to deliver the same word in three or four speeches, each time with a different meaning. The repeated words seemed to chart the emotional tenor of the scene, which made me consider how to address this discovery in the classroom. Rather than simply writing 'repetition' on the board and asking students to list those words which are repeated, I will follow Ian's lead and encourage students to repeat the words themselves, giving them as many different meanings and tones as possible. It is no use simply identifying those words which recur, but the students need to be asking where, why, when and how they are repeated, and how subtle variations can create layers of meaning. It was also exciting to see Ian and the actors experimenting with Shakespeare's intelligent wordplay. Edmund's line, 'All with me's meet that I can fashion fit', for example, plays on the dual sound of 'meet/meat' to demonstrate the character's crude interests. Could students in my class identify other homophones in the play? Shakespeare would never use one without intending to do so, and an hour spent exploring the playfulness of his words is often a far more interesting lesson than one spent 'translating' his verse into modern English.

These early rehearsals reminded me that, as an English teacher, being able to share Shakespeare with students in my classroom is a pleasure, and that any Shakespeare play worth teaching more than once is worth teaching well. I look forward to watching more rehearsals and trying out more of the ideas I pick up from Ian and his cast in my own classroom.





# Reviewing and Reflecting



## **IMMEDIATE RESPONSE – TABLEAUX**

In small groups ask the students to create tableaux of key moments from the play – it doesn't have to be a direct copy but rather a representation of moments from the play which stood out.

Share with one another and use as a starting point for group discussion.

## **THE ACTORS AND THEIR PERFORMANCES**

What sort of skills do the actors need to employ to portray their characters?

Do you think they are successful?

Were there special moments of performance that you remember?

## **DIRECTORIAL INTERPRETATION**

What choices has the director made?

When and where in the production are these choices evident?

Why has the director made these particular decisions?

## **THE SET**

Is the set realistic or representational?

What words would you use to describe the set?

What sort of mood/atmosphere does this create?

Does the set visually reflect the imagery within the text? How?

## **LIGHTING**

What mood/atmosphere is created by the lighting?

Are colours used?

Do you think this lighting was appropriate to the play?

## **SOUND**

Were sound effects used?

Was the sound recorded or live?

How did this add to the impact of the production?

## **COSTUME**

Are the costumes of a historical period?

What do they tell us about each character?

What do the colours and materials used say about the characters?

# Character List



## **King Lear**

is the King of Britain. At the start of the play Lear is vain and enjoys his absolute power. Keen to relinquish responsibilities of governance in his old age, Lear divides his kingdom between his daughters which leads to the tragedies of the play.

## **Goneril**

is the eldest of Lear's daughters and married to the Duke of Albany. She is ruthless and aggressive and, along with her sister Regan, betrays her father.

## **Regan**

is the middle daughter and married to the Duke of Cornwall. Like Goneril she is also ruthless and intent on destroying their father. Regan and Goneril compete for the affections of Edmund.

## **Cordelia**

is Lear's youngest and favourite daughter however, after her refusal to flatter him as her sisters do he disowns her. She marries the King of France and heads across the channel where she plans to gather an army to help her father.

## **The Earl of Gloucester**

is a nobleman loyal to Lear. He has two sons, one from his wife Edgar, and one illegitimate son, Edmund. He is deceived by Edmund into believing Edgar is out to kill him.

## **Edgar**

is Gloucester's eldest and legitimate son. He spends much of the play in disguise, mainly as Poor Tom. He is one of the "good" characters and he is eventually the one who reveals the true depth of the deception by Goneril, Regan and Edmund.

## **Edmund**

is Gloucester's "illegitimate" son which he resents. He schemes to usurp his father's title and land from Edgar. He joins forces with Goneril and Regan.

## **The Earl of Kent**

is a nobleman loyal to Lear. When Kent tries to reason with Lear over the disowning of Cordelia, Kent banishes him. Kent spends much of the play disguised as a peasant Caius and goes with Lear onto the heath.

# Character List



## **The Fool**

is Lear's jester who stays with Lear throughout the play offering advice and a view on his predicament through riddles and songs.

## **The Duke of Albany**

is Goneril's husband. At first he goes along with Goneril and Regan's actions eventually denouncing their cruelty and exposing their deception.

## **The Duke of Cornwall**

is Regan's husband who joins Regan and Goneril in their persecution of Lear.



# Interview

Ian Brown – Director

Sam Wood – Assistant Director

## Why King Lear? Why now?

**IB** It is one of Shakespeare's greatest plays, perhaps one of the greatest plays of the English language. That's not to say that it's the easiest to play or that it's the most accessible but it deals with situation and character in such a big way that it's a landmark piece of literature. As a director it's a huge challenge and privilege to get your hands on a play like this. I've always liked and enjoyed the play and found the story compelling. When you have an actor like Tim Piggott-Smith working with you it's pretty irresistible to get excited. Tim's a good choice for Lear because he is a very energetic and spirited actor and he will bring that to the part.

King Lear portrays a society in turmoil. It shows what happens in a society that is not well-led and the consequences when it factionalises. The play is set in a time of unrest which Gloucester refers to; there are cities mutinying. It is also about human nature, both good and bad showing the very worst of human beings and the best. Lear stops being a king and becomes human but the only way for him to see his humanity is by becoming mad.

## What's the setting for this King Lear?

**IB** The setting is very open. We are actually setting it in the period in which it was written so it is broadly Jacobean although not slavish to that period. I think there is an issue with updating Shakespeare to modern day simply because of the questions that begs; why are they using swords, why is communication so slow. This is a version which is set in another time, a time where people did carry swords, when communication was slow which, of course, is vital to the narrative of the play.

King Lear was written very specifically for the king and was about showing James what a good king is and is not. It held a mirror to kingship.

In terms of the set we have gone for a very cold, sparse world. In the first half on-stage structures represent the various settings such as Lear's castle, Gloucester's castle and Albany's palace. By the second half of the play almost everything has been taken away. It's just the actors onstage.

**SW** It's a world that lacks warmth and wouldn't have suited lavish castles. It's a harsh backdrop to the action of the play.

## Rehearsals start next week. At this stage what do you know already and what will you be exploring in rehearsal?

**IB** What we know is who is playing who which means that we have already made some character decisions such as age which does have a bearing on the play. For example Goneril and Regan are of child bearing age in this production whereas often they are played as older than this. When Lear curses Goneril in act 1, scene 4 "Into her womb convey sterility!" this feels much more of a threat. It was also important to get Lear's contemporaries right; Gloucester, Kent and the Fool have to feel like a unit who have known one another for a long time.

# Interview

**Ian Brown – Director**

**Sam Wood – Assistant Director**



All of this helps to shape the production but what we don't know is what each actor will bring to their character and the play. Some of the performers have been in the play before as other characters and of course each actor will have done a lot of work on their own character so there is an enormous amount of knowledge in the rehearsal room.

**SW** Every cast is different and each actor will bring something to the process. Casting decisions and subsequent character exploration will invest the text with particular meaning.

## **Will you be exploring King Lear as a tragedy of kingship or of family?**

**IB** I have to make the piece as real as possible which means I will be looking at the family relationships in the play and making them credible. In this play the younger generation is at odds with the older generation – this is a very potent issue and, as events over the summer have shown, it's still an issue today. When this play was written life expectancy was very low and London was a young people's city. Looking after the older generation was a big concern, just as it is today.

I don't think that there is any question that the battle between fathers and daughters is central to the play. The question is why – are they getting their revenge for not being a good father? Lear mishandles the dividing of his kingdom and this leads to the crisis of kingship. He is responsible for the breakdown of society. He's done what a lot of leaders do – he has put his personal needs and wishes over what is right for the kingdom. He is stepping down although in reality he still wants to retain some power and he cannot bear not being king and all that is afforded to that position.

## **How does Gloucester's story relate to the central narrative?**

**IB** Gloucester's story mirrors Lear's story. He is also duped by his offspring in that he has been persuaded by Edmund that Edgar is out to destroy him. We learn that Edgar is Gloucester's legitimate son and heir and that Edmund is his illegitimate child. Gloucester has clearly been a philanderer and possibly didn't treat his wife very well. Gloucester's journey in the play is that he has to learn the value of trust and faithfulness. I'm not sure as an audience we like him at the start of the play but by the end we do certainly feel for him.

**SW** Gloucester is a man who is blind to what his children are and this causes him to be blinded literally.

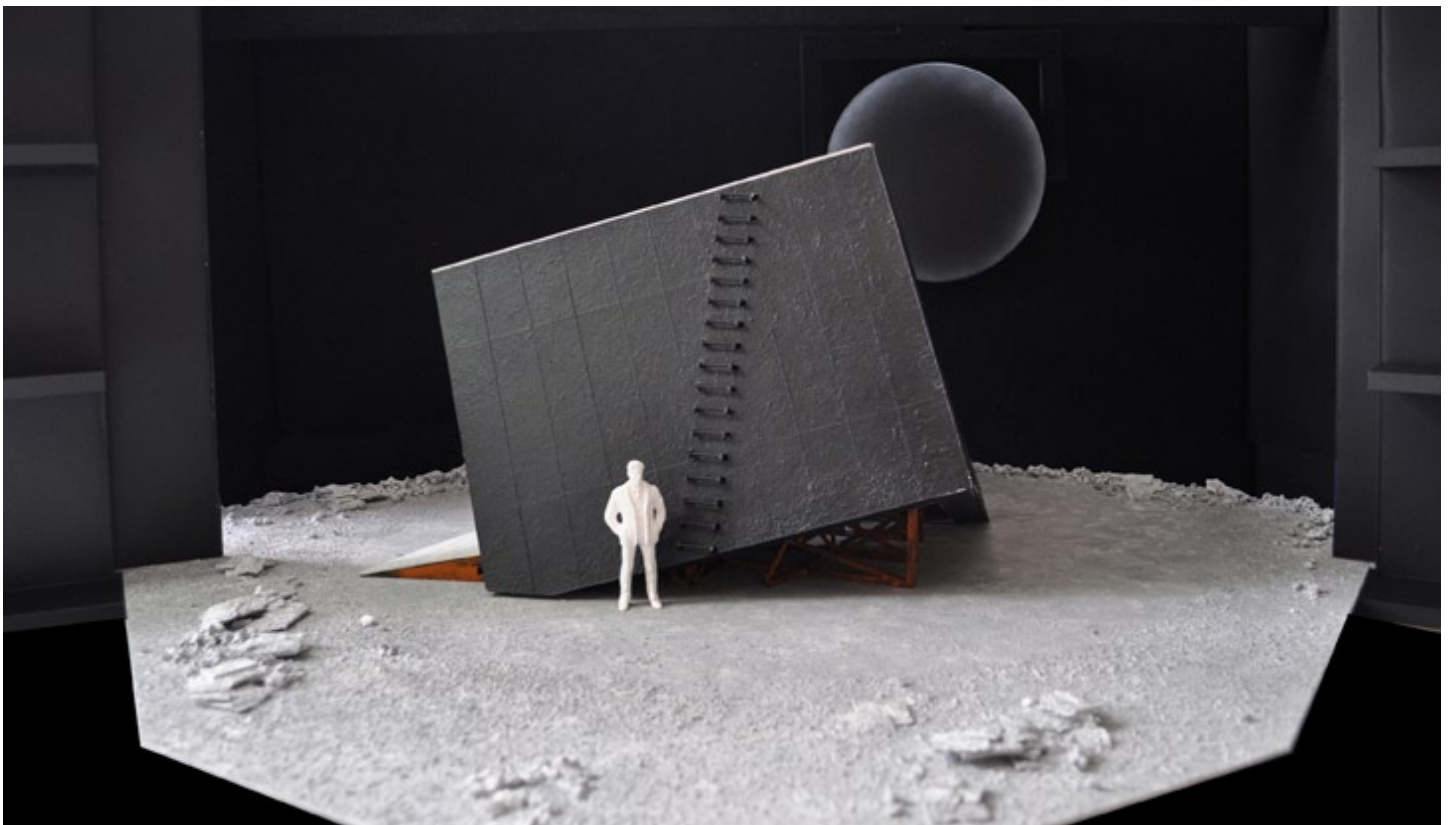
**IB** The play is about keeping your eyes open, appreciating what we have. Human beings find it hard to learn these lessons.

## **What are the biggest challenges you are facing in rehearsals over the next few weeks?**

**IB** I hope that I can bring something different to this play. I'd like to make it feel uncomplicated to the audience and ensure that the narrative is clear. And of course that it's an entertaining piece.

# The Design

Ruari Murchison –  
Set Design and Model Box



# The Design

Ruari Murchison –  
Set Design and Model Box

