

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL 2026



Mary Said What She Said

EDUCATION RESOURCE

Youth and Education Program Partners



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Overview

Suitable year levels

10 – 12

Warnings

The action concerns Mary, Queen of Scots, on the eve of her execution and explores a range of adult themes and concepts including:

- Execution and death.
- Descriptions of political violence, betrayal and imprisonment with references to murder plots and recounting violent events.
- Intense emotional language around death and fear.

Strobe effects and loud music at the beginning may disturb some audience members.

Note

The play is performed in French with English surtitles.

Genre

Solo-show/one hander; biographical theatre, avant-garde, postdramatic theatre

Synopsis

Mary Said What She Said follows the inner life of Mary, Queen of Scots, in the final hours before her execution. The play unfolds as a series of fragmented memories, visions, and confessions, rather than a linear historical retelling. Mary revisits key moments of her life—her fraught political alliances, her marriages, her rivalry with Elizabeth I, and the betrayals that shaped her downfall. These recollections appear as poetic, looping monologues that blur the boundary between past and present. As she confronts her fate, Mary wrestles with questions of identity, power, faith, and womanhood. The narrative becomes a psychological and emotional portrait of a woman reflecting on the story imposed upon her, and the one she claims for herself. Through shifting imagery and repeated motifs, the play reveals Mary not as a passive figure of history but as a vivid, complex voice reckoning with her legacy in the moments before death.

Background information about the show

The piece was created by director and designer Robert Wilson with text by Darryl Pinckney and music by Ludovico Einaudi. The work premiered as a Théâtre de la Ville production (Paris) and has had runs in major houses in Paris, Barbican London, and New York.

Image Credits

(c) Lucie Jansch

Themes/Ideas

Power, gender and authority

Playwright Darryl Pinckney assembled the script from Mary Stuart's letters revealing a personal voice that craved dignity while being exposed to political judgement. Through the monologue, Mary's political power is revealed as well as the threat that she represented: she had a strong bloodline claim to the English throne and many believed she was in her legitimate right to rule England. She was a devout Catholic at a time when England was firmly Protestant, and as a queen in her own right, she challenged gendered expectations of female rule. Her existence as a powerful female monarch made her a ideological threat in a male-dominated power structure.

Truth, testimony and language

The production explores that idea that Mary's letters are both evidence and performance, and invites the audience to interrogate the reliability of these sources. This is reinforced by the repetitive looping of phrases creating the sense that Mary's testimony is rehearsed with a sense of staged presentation. The audience is therefore forced to judge and decide whether her speech is, at different times, a confession, self-justification or a manipulation of the audience. Wilson himself says of the character "She is lying, but on the eve of her death, has fear persuaded her that she is telling the truth?" (<https://robertwilson.com/mary-said-what-she-said>)

Memory and identity

In the opening monologue, Mary says 'Memory, open my heart', an invocation that frames the entire play as an introspection while being a deeply political piece. As Mary faces her imminent death by execution, she 're-performs' memories of her past marriages, loves and betrayals in a non-linear collection of scenes. This exploration of her memories presents a sense of a constructed and rehearsed identity. Huppert uses repeated, ritualised gestures and slow, measured movements that build emotional meaning to reinforce this idea of performed identity. Wilson uses tableaux and light to frame the performer creating a sense of a heightened and freeze-framed reality and captured significant memories. Sections of the text are also prerecorded adding to the staged performance aspect of Mary's confessions.

Public History v Private Voice

The script is derived from Mary, Queen of Scots' own letters. These private communications depict Mary's own private voice but in a non-linear, looping stream of consciousness rather than in a chronological biographical retelling of her life. The jumps between memories of childhood to imprisonment to religious conflict establishes a sense of the workings of Mary's private memories: fragmented, emotional, and subjective, often at odds with political records that exist around her. The tension between the historical 'truths' that come from public records and the personal thoughts and writings from private letters puts the audience in the position of having to judge which truth is more reliable while considering the humanity and mortality of the subject.

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:



Literacy



Critical and Creative Thinking



Personal and Social Capability



Intercultural Understanding



Ethical Understanding



Information and communication technology

Year 9 and 10 Drama

- Refine and extend their understanding and use of role, character, relationships and situation in drama.
- Maintain focus and manipulate space and time, language, ideas and dramatic action.
- Experiment with mood and atmosphere, using devices such as contrast, juxtaposition and dramatic symbol; and adapt production elements to suit different audiences.
- Engage with drama works from a variety of cultures, times and locations, including influences from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and from the Asia region.
- Explore meaning and interpretation, forms and elements of drama; and consider social, cultural and historical influences in drama they make and view.
- Evaluate actors' success in expressing directors' intentions and the use of expressive skills in drama they view or perform.

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

- CCT1: Creative thinking and experimentation in the development of dramatic ideas
- CCT2: Analysis and evaluation of dramatic ideas, products, and technologies

Creative Application

- CA1: Application of dramatic skills
- CA2: Collaborative application of dramatic ideas and processes to realise outcomes

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

CCT1 Creative thinking and experimentation in the development of dramatic ideas.

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

Creative Application

CA1 Application of dramatic processes, individually and in collaboration with others.

CA2 Application of dramatic skills.

Year 9 and 10 Music

- Analyse how composers and performers use the elements of music (duration/time, pitch, dynamics/expression, timbre, texture, form/structure) and compositional devices to engage audiences.
- Manipulate musical elements and compositional devices to compose original music in different styles/forms, using appropriate notation or recording/documentation.
- Understand and appreciate music from a variety of cultures, times, places, including works by First Nations Australian composers/performers, and reflect on how music can celebrate and challenge perspectives of identity.

Stage 1 Music

Understanding Music

UM1: Development of knowledge and understanding of musical elements (eg rhythm, melody, harmony, structure)

Creating Music

CM2: Exploration and application of musical skills and techniques in developing, refining and presenting creative works (composing, performing, arranging)

Responding to Music

RM1: Analysis and discussion of musical works and styles (comparing, contextualising, critiquing)

Stage 2 Music Explorations

Exploring and Experimenting with Music

EEM1: Application of knowledge and understanding of musical elements to explore and experiment.

EEM2: Exploration of and experimentation with musical styles, influences, techniques, and/or production.

EEM3: Synthesis of findings from exploration/experimentation — creating coherent, developed musical works.

Responding to Music

RM2: Analysis and discussion of musical works (own and others'), including contextual, stylistic, technical aspects.

RM3: Reflection on and critique of own learning within music — evaluating process, choices, outcomes.

Stage 1 Society and Culture

Knowledge and Understanding

KU1 Knowledge and understanding of

contemporary social and/or cultural issues in Australian and global contexts.

KU2 Understanding of connections between societies and cultures.

Investigation and Analysis

IA1 Analysis of and reflection on contemporary social or cultural issues.

IA2 Analysis of how and why social change occurs.

IA3 Investigation and analysis of a range of sources and perspectives.

Communication

CM2 Communication of opinions supported by evidence, with appropriate acknowledgment of sources.

SACE Stage 2 Society and Culture

Knowledge and Understanding

KU1 Knowledge and understanding of different aspects of and issues related to contemporary societies and cultures, in local and global contexts.

KU3 Understanding of ways in which societies and cultures are connected and interdependent.

Investigation and Analysis

IA2 Investigation and analysis of ways in which power structures operate in societies.

Evaluation and Communication

EC1 Evaluation and use of evidence from a range of sources and perspectives, with appropriate acknowledgment of sources.

EC2 Communication of informed ideas about societies and social and cultural issues.



Production

Music/Sound

Atmospheric soundscape:

Composer, Ludovico Einaudi's score is sparse and atmospheric score that underpins the drama shaping the tempo, mood and emotional undercurrents. His composition is slow-building and features ostinato (repeated motifs) and ambient sounds that also reinforce the mood and atmosphere of memory. The soundscape also supports Wilson's meditative pacing in his direction of the performance. The sound design creates a sense of hypnotic continuity, enhances moments of high emotion with grand swells and also uses silences for dramatic impact.

Set Design

Minimalism and symbolism:

Robert Wilson's productions are noted for his scenic and furniture design and the way that light is used as part of the architecture of the set. The stage is largely empty that creates an abstract and isolating environment. A large, three layered screen upstage provides the primary visual element. The screen, coupled with symbolic uses of coloured and stark light, reflect Mary's internal world and psychological state. This gives the production an expressionistic quality where the production elements are used to provide a closer assessment of the character's psychological and emotional truth. The production is also almost totally devoid of props. The uncluttered production and stylised symbolic lighting design redirects the attention on the performer, in particular her language, gesture, micro-gestures and how these become the primary communicative tools.

Lighting

"...Light is not an afterthought. It's something that's architectural, it's structure, it's thought about from the beginning, it's part of the book, it's like an actor. So it's not a decoration."

— Robert Wilson in an interview with John Bell, *Theater Week*, January 3, 1994

"[I appreciate]...Hollywood portraits of the early 30s and those from Germany in the 20s where light performed as an actor, where every movement, every second was lit and sculptured, allowing us to hear and see more readily and intensely...Light in my work functions as a part of an architectural whole. It is an element that helps us hear and see, which is the primary way we communicate. Without light there is no space."

— Robert Wilson interviewed in *Dance Ink*, 1995

Lighting as set:

The stage floor is covered in black fabric that, coupled with blacklight and Japanese kabuki-style lighting helps to create illusions of objects disappearing and appearing as if from nowhere. Wilson starts his design concepts with lighting first and places the actors and any necessary objects into the space in an expressionistic way.

Mood, Atmosphere and Psychological State:

Wilson's works are renowned for the way he uses light as almost another actor or element of architecture in the production. In *Mary Said What She Said*, Wilson's lighting is deeply integrated into the meaning and emotional landscape of the production: it is not merely decorative. It controls the rhythm and frames moments in photographs: long, carefully-timed fades, tight pools, striking colour choices and stark Beckett-esque lighting states help to isolate and reframe the performer. The lighting goes beyond complementing the set; it is almost the set in itself.

The lighting often moves between white, blue and grey tones. These colours are emotionally evocative and suggest, at different times, memory, coldness, grief, spiritual reflection and the eerie space between life and death. In some moments, piercing light penetrates through the darkness suggesting an extreme emotion or revelation such as intruding memories, a sudden rush of guilt or clarity.

Symbolism, metaphor and Identity

Light helps to create the distinction between Mary's public and private identity; when she is shadow or silhouette she appears as a figure of authority or myth. When she is sharply lit, she appears vulnerable, human and fully present.

Light is also used as a metaphor for power and revelation. The design also suggests liminality wherein Mary is neither wholly in the present or the past; she is caught in an emotional and psychological state between her memories and the anticipation of what is to come, and between her impending death and her legacy.

Lighting changes can feel slow, drawn-out and deliberate highlighting ceremonial movements. This helps to elevate the production from a monologue to a meditation on history, identity and mortality.

Costumes

Stylised references to period:

Complementing Wilson's intentions in other aspects of the design to create an abstracted visual world, the costume design aims for a stylised reference to the period rather than achieving full historical realism. High ruffled neckline and the tight fitting dress the accentuates the actor's silhouette assist to register Mary's status.

A metaphorical and psychological cage:

Isabelle Huppert's costume consisting of a heavy, formfitting and austere gown, sees it function as a symbolic prison: the rigidity and heaviness of the garment restricting movement, emphasise the ways in which Mary is trapped by gendered expectations, royal lineage, and the political machinations that exist around her.

Characterisation

Archetypal interpretation:

Isabelle Huppert's characterisation and performance style are significant because they break away from naturalism and conventional psychological acting, instead foregrounding theatrical form, image, and rhythm.

Wilson does not present Mary Stuart as a psychologically realist figure.

Instead, Mary becomes an archetype, an image, a mythic presence. Her identity is fragmented and reconstructed through repetition of text rather than linear narrative, non-naturalistic vocal delivery, often rhythmic or performed like incantations, and physical stillness contrasted with sudden, precise gestures and micro-gestures. The highly stylised movement appears ritualistic rather than realistic and the deliberate slowness (it takes 20 minutes for Huppert to move downstage in the opening sequence) and tableaux-like staging creates a sense of Mary being suspended in time, trapped somewhere between memory and myth.

Huppert's portrayal is characterised by extreme control of voice and body, minimalist facial expressions, vocal modulation and intensity. This creates a commanding presence of a queen with absolute authority and who demands attention.

This approach distances the audience from traditional empathy and invites them to contemplate Mary as a historical, symbolic, and theatrical construct. Students will be able to make links to Brecht's Epic Theatre and the performance techniques associated with this style, in particular how Wilson and Huppert reject naturalism in favour of symbolism, ritual and image and how this performance style challenges audiences to engage intellectually rather than emotionally with the subject.

Dramatic Structure

Non-linear, fragmented dramatic structure:

Mary Said What She Said adopts an associative structure in which memories, visions, accusations and fantasies overlap. Loops in language and audio motifs, as well as circumstances and situations in the text, create a cyclical energy conveying a sense that Mary is trapped in an eternal return to the traumas that defined her life. This non-linear structure abandons the chronology of the historical story making this less a biographical work and rather the depiction of Mary Stuart's psychological breakdown placing the audience inside Mary's inner consciousness. This structure also symbolises how history tends to fracture, reconstruct and mythologise women of power.

Dramatic Form/Convention

Postdramatic Form:

Mary Said What She Said embodies the elements of Postdramatic Theatre. Specifically, in this production, language is treated as sound, pattern and texture rather than as a vehicle for driving the plot. The visual composition and rhythm of the production are prioritised with the clarity of the narrative. Isabelle Huppert's portrayal is intended to create a presence of Mary Stuart as a sculptural and choreographic component of a highly stylised production in which the audience is invited to experience sensorially, not just intellectually. The postdramatic form destabilises the audience's expectations of character, story and realism in a more conventional historical drama and instead aims to create a meditative, dream-like encounter with Mary's myth.

The term 'Postdramatic Theatre' was coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann to describe a form that does not centre on linear plots or conventional character development as might be expected in a traditional dramatic play. Instead, theatre is regarded as a live event and therefore elements of sound, image, physical presence, and the interaction between performers and the audience are emphasised. Postdramatic productions often use fragmented storytelling, repetition of words, symbols or ideas, mixed media and a sense of ritual and ceremony in its structure. The goal is to create an affective sensory experience for the audience that allows them to engage with the psychological and emotional truth of the character instead of depicting reality.

Postdramatic Theatre represents a shift in how theatre-makers think about performance transforming it from storytelling to a creating an event that engages all the senses to convey meaning. Postdramatic artists have the freedom to explore more abstract ideas in their work, challenge traditional narratives and engage audiences in the participation of the drama.

For the audience, postdramatic plays become less about following the narrative, anticipating what happens next or even what you understand to be the meaning of the play. Instead, audiences are encouraged to experience how the performance makes them think and feel. It's more about the theatrical and emotional experience than it is about the story.

For more information about Postdramatic Theatre: thedramateacher.com/postdramatic-theatre/

Mary Stuart Milestones

1542 Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland and of France, is born at Linlithgow Palace. The daughter of Mary of Guise and James V of Scotland, she becomes queen six days after her birth, following the death of her father. Regency shared between various rivals in Scotland. Rather than attack Scotland, King Henry VIII of England proposes a marriage between Mary and his son and heir, Edward.

1543 A treaty is signed that accommodates Scotland's demands. But Henry fails to respect the treaty and is met with the Catholic opposition of Cardinal Beaton, who with the backing of 2,500 soldiers moves Mary and her mother to the safety of Stirling Castle, where she is crowned queen on September 9. She is one year old at the time, and her crown, sceptre and sword are borne by others. The Parliament of Scotland relies on France (Catholic arrangement against the Protestants).

1547 Deaths of Francis I and Henry VIII. Edward VI becomes King of England; he dies in 1553. Henry II reigns at the French court. Hostile to England and influenced by the Guise, the parents of Mary Stuart, he considers a union between her and his son Francis.

1548 Mary Stuart, promised to the Dauphin of France, sets sail for France via Ireland, accompanied by four young companions, all named Mary. She is educated in France (horsemanship, falconry, lute, literature, dance, philosophy and poetry, writing some fine poems indeed). The Queen Dowager of Scotland, Mary of Guise, her mother, arrives in France and is received with great pomp and circumstance in Rouen by Henry II.

1558 The wedding between Mary and Francis II is held at the Louvre on April 19 and then at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. They are both fifteen years of age. Death of Mary I of England (Mary Tudor, i.e. 'Bloody Mary'). She is succeeded by Elizabeth I even though, in the eyes of the Pope, she is considered illegitimate, being the daughter of Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII, who was divorced from Catherine of Aragon. As the senior legitimate descendant of Margaret Tudor and elder sister of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart is a rightful pretender to the English throne. Henry II of France thus proclaims Mary Stuart Queen of England, Ireland and Scotland.

1559 Henry II dies from injuries sustained in a joust. His son Francis, King of Scotland along with Mary Stuart, becomes Francis II, King of France, and Mary becomes Queen of France. France recognises Elizabeth as Queen of England, much to Mary's displeasure.

1560 Death of Mary of Guise deposed by the Protestant Lords. Death of Francis II, from ill health. He is succeeded by his brothers Charles IX (St. Bartholomew's Day massacre), then Henry III in 1574, who is murdered in 1589.

1561 Mary returns to Scotland where she faces a Protestant opposition fomented by John Knox, the Scottish Protestant reformer, who reproaches her for her elaborate lifestyle and her fondness for dancing.

1565 Mary marries Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, her Catholic half-cousin. Protestant opposition. Her private secretary is David Rizzio. Darnley conspires with rebel nobles.

1566 Liaison between Mary and James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, an adventurer. Mary suffers a serious illness (porphyria).

1567 Mary is in Edinburgh, recovering from her illness. Henry Stuart dies in an explosion. Bothwell is suspected of being behind the attack, with Mary complicit. He forces her to marry him. Arrested by Scottish nobles, she is imprisoned in a castle on an island. She miscarries. She abdicates in favour of her son James, born in Edinburgh in 1566, who on Elizabeth's death will become King of Scotland, England and Ireland and reigns until 1625.

1568 She escapes with a small army and flees to England where she is taken into protective custody by officials under Elizabeth's command, first in Carlisle, then in Bolton. She utters the phrase: 'In my end is my beginning.' Elizabeth orders a commission of inquiry, which is held in York. Discovery of supposedly compromising letters. The court does not find her guilty. Elizabeth has Mary confined for eighteen years under the guard of George Talbot. Bothwell dies in prison in 1578.

1587 Coded letters exchanged with her partisans are intercepted. Her enemies make use of the letters, thus contributing to her death sentence. On the eve of her execution she writes a letter in French to her brother-in-law Henry III of France, a letter that has been preserved. She is executed at Fotheringhay Castle on 8 February 1587. She wears a crimson gown. The executioner, who is drunk, has to strike three blows with his axe before her head is severed from her body and held aloft to the crowd. She now lies at rest in Westminster Abbey, just a few steps away from the tomb of Elizabeth.



Suggested Tasks

BEFORE THE SHOW

Questions for students:

- What do you already know about Mary, Queen of Scots?
- What ideas, stereotypes, or myths exist about her?
- Why do you think Mary's story continues to fascinate artists and audiences?
- What do you expect from a play centred on a historical figure presented by a contemporary European company?
- Why might a playwright or director choose to retell a well-known historical story in a non-realistic way?
- What expectations do you have when seeing a monologue or single-actor performance?
- How might the experience differ from a multi-character play?
- What does the name "Robert Wilson" suggest, if anything?
- What kinds of performance elements do you associate with avant-garde, experimental, or visual theatre?
- How might lighting, sound, and movement tell a story even when the text is abstract or poetic?
- What kinds of pressures might a young queen face politically and personally?
- How do gender and power interact in historical

narratives?

- How is a public figure's reputation created—by themselves or by others?
- Why might a play explore the difference between a public myth and a private voice?
- What emotions do you associate with imprisonment, isolation, or being misunderstood?
- Can you think of a time when your story was told or interpreted by others differently from how you saw it?
- How do expectations placed on you—by school, family, or society—shape your identity?
- Why might someone's private truth conflict with their public image?
- What does "voice" mean to you—literal voice, political voice, personal voice, public voice, private voice?
- What elements of drama, aside from the text, invite the audience to think and feel?
- What are your expectations of a play based on an historical figure?
- How do you feel about seeing a performance that may challenge your expectations of what theatre looks like?



ACTIVITY 1: Exploring Visual Language

Exploring Robert Wilson's theatrical style, elements of design, and symbolism. Present students with a collection of images from the production of *Mary Said What She Said* or any other Robert Wilson productions.

TASK: Thinking Routine – See, Think, Wonder

Students should work in pairs or trios for this activity. On a large piece of paper, ask students to create three columns and label the first as 'See', the second as 'Think', and the third one as 'Wonder'. Give each group a different image to discuss and analyse documenting their notes in the appropriate column. The following prompts should guide them as to what they are looking for:

In the SEE column, students should discuss and note what they notice in the image, for example colour, shape, lines, composition and symbols

In the THINK column, students should discuss and note what they think or feel in response to what they see; how do these elements influence or communicate meaning in performance?

In the WONDER column, students should discuss and note a list of 'things to watch for'; what does this image make you wonder about what to expect from the production?

Groups present their responses to the class.

ACTIVITY 2: Mini Monodramas

Students explore approaches to acting, focus, vocal control, non-realistic storytelling and symbolic staging in a small devised monodrama applying techniques associated with Robert Wilson's work and postdramatic theatre. This activity activates student understanding of monodrama, symbolism and expression in postdramatic theatre

TASK: In groups of 3–4, students devise a 1–2-minute monologue based on:

- A character under political pressure
- A secret confession
- A moment of downfall or triumph
- The performance should include two or more of the following
 - a repeated symbolic gesture
 - a repeated phrase
 - slow and sustained movement followed by a sudden movement or micro-gesture
 - symbolic lighting
 - a recurring sound motif

Your intention as a company is to have the audience feel and think about the character's emotional and psychological truth and not focus on literal storytelling.

Perform your workshop piece to the class.

REFLECT:

What were the challenges in producing a performance that relies on elements of design and performance to communicate feeling rather than text or dialogue?

What did other groups do in their performances that made you think and feel about the emotional and psychological experience of the character?

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.



Suggested Tasks

AFTER THE SHOW

Questions for students:

- What aspects of Mary's story were most emphasised in this production?
- How did the performance explore power, gender, and political manipulation?
- Which images or moments stayed with you the most, and why?
- How does the slipper, as a recurring symbol, shape our understanding of Mary?
- How did lighting shape mood, rhythm, and meaning?
- What effects did the soundscape or music have on your interpretation of Mary's emotional state?
- What was the impact of the sections where the performance was delivered to pre-recorded dialogue? What did it make you think, feel or consider?
- How did the costume influence Mary's physicality or presence on stage?
- In what ways did the set feel like a prison, ritual space, or psychological landscape?
- How did Isabelle Huppert convey Mary's inner conflict using voice, gesture, and stillness?
- What performance choices communicated fear, authority, vulnerability, or defiance?
- How did repetition (voice, movement, images) shape your experience of the monologue?
- Which moments revealed the contrast between Mary's public image and private voice?
- How did the non-linear, poetic structure affect your understanding of Mary's story?
- How does this compare to more traditional historical dramas you have seen?
- What dramatic conventions (symbol, tension, contrast, fragmentation) were most effective in communicating meaning or creating impact?

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

ACTIVITY 3: Public People, Private Worlds

Students choose a well-known historical and/or public figure. Some suggestions could be:

- Cleopatra
- Anne Boelyn
- Nelson Mandela
- Julius Caesar
- Marie Antoinette
- Joan of Arc
- Emperor Nero
- Ned Kelly

TASK: Working in pairs or trios, students

Research and generate a factual historical timeline of the significant events in the person's life

Research, list and/or mark on the timeline the public narratives, legends or myths associated with the figure

Speculate about what the person might have privately felt/experienced

Discuss ideas for staging a postdramatic performance that could reveal the inner life and private thoughts of the character in a significant moment/s of their life. Consider ideas for set, costume, lighting, sound and characterisation using Mary Said What She Said as inspiration for these ideas.

ACTIVITY 4: Internal Monologue v Public Spectacle

Each student chooses a significant moment from the character's factual or fabled experiences that evokes imagery and emotion.

TASK: Set a timer for 10 minutes and ask students to write the internal monologue of the character capturing the essence of what they are feeling and thinking (their internal truth) versus how they feel they are being perceived or judged by others (public perception) in this moment.

Have students rehearse the monologue with simple staging and present it in a traditional theatrical performance style.

REFLECT:

How does language, dialogue and narrative drive the performance and ideas for staging in a traditional theatrical performance?

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.

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



Critical and Creative Thinking



Ethical Understanding



Personal and Social Capability

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.

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

ACTIVITY 5

As a small company of 2 or 3 students, or working independently, have students choose one or more monologues from the previous task to interpret for a hypothetical or realised performance applying Robert Wilson's techniques and the conventions of postdramatic theatre.

Some approaches to completing this task could include:

Technical and Design Approach: Creating an 'Image Score'

Students produce a sequence of 6–10 images (sketches or photos) with accompanying technical notes detailing:

- Lighting intent
- Sound cue
- Set/prop interaction
- Timing

The sequence should create meaning without dialogue, mirroring the production's image-driven storytelling.

Students discuss their creative choices in a written, oral or multimodal presentation.

Sound Design Approach: Creating an Atmospheric Soundscape

Using digital audio software (such free software like BandLab, Audacity, GarageBand), students design an atmospheric soundscape for different moments of the production inspired Ludovico Einaudi's score.

They should seek to include at least:

- One rhythmic element (slow pulse, ticking, chime)
- One sustained drone
- One symbolic sound (e.g., heartbeat, wind, ritual bell)

Students could try to sync their soundscape to a lighting design concept and actor movement, blocking and gestures.

Collaborative Theatre Making Approach

In small groups, students produce a performance of their monologue with each student taking different roles. They should try to focus their performance on:

- One or two performers
- Highly controlled lighting that creates tone, guides focus and conveys psychological states
- Minimalist scenic elements and visual tableaux; symmetry, asymmetry, depth, lines and negative space
- Slowed, expanded or stylised time, rhythm and pacing including fragmented or looping sequences and extended moments of stillness
- Precise, slow and deliberate gestures and microgestures
- Repetitive or fragmented speech
- Rhythmic sound
- Layered symbolism
- Inviting the audience to interpret, experience, question and feel – as opposed to just understanding.

AC9AMU10E01 Investigate the ways that composers and/or performers use the elements of music, compositional devices and/or vocal or instrumental techniques in music from a range of cultures, times, places and/or other contexts.

AC9AMU10D02 Reflect on their own and others' music to inform choices they make as composers and performers about how they will interpret and/or manipulate elements of music and/or compositional devices.

AC9AMU10C02 Compose music, manipulating and combining elements of music and compositional devices relevant to chosen styles and/or forms to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning; notate, document and/or record the music.

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.

This could be the basis of Assessment Type 3: Creative Synthesis in Stage 1 Drama, a combined response for Assessment Type 2: Creativity and Evaluation in Stage 2 Drama or the inspiration for Assessment Type 3: Creative Presentation in Stage 2 Drama.



Critical and Creative Thinking



Information and communication technology



Ethical Understanding



Literacy



Personal and Social Capability



About the Creatives

Robert Wilson – Director and Designer

"[Robert Wilson is] a towering figure in the world of experimental theater and an explorer in the uses of time and space on stage." – *The New York Times*

Born in Waco, Texas, 4 October 1941, Wilson is among the world's foremost theater and visual artists. His works for the stage unconventionally integrate a wide variety of artistic media, including dance, movement, lighting, sculpture, music and text. His images are aesthetically striking and emotionally charged, and his productions have earned the acclaim of audiences and critics worldwide.

After being educated at the University of Texas and Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, Wilson founded the New York-based performance collective "The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds" in the mid-1960s, and developed his first signature works, including *Deafman Glance* (1970) and *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974-1975). With Philip Glass he wrote the seminal opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). Wilson's artistic collaborators include many writers and musicians such as Heiner Müller, Tom Waits, Susan Sontag, Laurie Anderson, William Burroughs, Lou Reed, Jessye Norman and Anna Calvi. He has also left his imprint on masterworks such as Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, Brecht/Weill's *Threepenny Opera*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Melisande*, Goethe's *Faust*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Jean de la Fontaine's *Fables*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Verdi's *La Traviata* and several of Shakespeare's works.

Wilson's drawings, paintings and sculptures have been presented around the world in hundreds of solo and group showings, and his works are held in private collections and museums throughout the world.

Wilson has been honored with numerous awards for excellence, including a Pulitzer Prize nomination, two Premio Ubu awards, the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale, and an Olivier Award. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as the German Academy of the Arts, and holds 8 Honorary Doctorate degrees. He is a Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters and Officer of the Legion of Honor in France, bearer of the German Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit, and laureate of the 2023 Praemium Imperiale.

Wilson was the founder and Artistic Director of The Watermill Center, a laboratory for the Arts in Water Mill, New York.

Wilson passed away on 31 July 2025.

Darryl Pinckney - Writer

Darryl Pinckney is a long time contributor to The New York Review of Books, the author of two novels, *High Cotton* (1992) and *Black Deutschland* (2016), and several works of nonfiction, including *Out There: Mavericks of Black Literature* (2002), *Blackballed: The Black Vote and US Democracy* (2014), and *Busted in New York and Other Essays* (2019). He has contributed to numerous other publications, including *The Guardian*, *Harper's*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *the New York Times Book Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Slate*, *TLS*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Vogue*. His several theatrical collaborations with director Robert Wilson have appeared internationally and at Brooklyn Academy of Music. His most recent book is *Come Back in September: A Literary Education on West Sixty-Seventh Street, Manhattan*.

Isabelle Huppert – Performer

Isabelle Huppert is a French actress and producer. A loyal collaborator of Claude Chabrol, Benoît Jacquot and Michael Haneke, Isabelle Huppert alternates between stage and screen, art house cinema and mainstream films. She was introduced to the general public by filmmaker Claude Goretta in 1977 in the film *The Lacemaker*.

She is one of the most prolific actresses in France (two or three films per year on average) and one of the few French performers whose filmography is truly international: her demanding and recognized career has led her to shoot in the United States (under the direction of Michael Cimino, Hal Hartley, Curtis Hanson, Joseph Losey, David O. Russell, and Otto Preminger), in Italy (with the Taviani brothers, Mauro Bolognini, Marco Ferreri, and Marco Bellocchio), in Russia (with Igor Minalev), in Central Europe (with Michael Haneke, Werner Schroeter, Andrzej Wajda, Ursula Meier, Márta Mészáros, or Aleksandar Petrović), and even on the Asian continent (with Hong Sang-soo, Brillante Mendoza, or Rithy Panh).

Her theatrical career also leads her to work under the direction of renowned directors such as Bob Wilson, Claude Régy, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Jacques Lassalle, or Luc Bondy, and to interpret contemporary authors such as Yasmina Reza or Florian Zeller.

She has received numerous international awards: two Best Actress awards at the Cannes Film Festival, two Volpi Cups for Best Actress at the Venice Film Festival, a Silver Bear for Best Artistic Contribution and an Honorary Golden Bear at the Berlinale, two European Film Awards for Best Actress, as well as a Lola in Germany, a BAFTA in the United Kingdom, and a David di Donatello in Italy.

In France, she is the actress with the most nominations at the César Awards with sixteen nominations. She has won the César Award for Best Actress twice, in 1996 for Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* and in 2017 for Paul Verhoeven's *Elle*, which also earned her the Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Drama Film and a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actress.

In 2017, she received the Europe Theatre Prize.

On November 25, 2020, *The New York Times* ranked her as the best actress of the 21st century, citing Denzel Washington as the best actor.

Ludovico Einaudi

Ludovico Einaudi, born in Turin in November 1955, studied composition at the Milan Conservatory with Azio Corghi before undertaking advanced work with Luciano Berio. His early chamber and symphonic pieces were quickly performed at major international venues, including Teatro alla Scala, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Tanglewood, IRCAM, UCLA and the Budapest Music Festival. A Tanglewood scholarship in 1982 broadened his artistic outlook, and during the 1980s he began seeking a more personal musical language influenced by diverse cultures and the immediacy of rock. This exploration led to *Time Out* (1988), a multimedia music-theatre work created with writer Andrea De Carlo for ISO Dance Theatre, followed by further collaborations such as *The Wild Man* (1990) and *Emperor* (1991). His 1990 album *Stanze*, written for electric harp, marked a shift toward expressive minimalism. Major works of the 1990s include *Salgari* (1995), the piano collection *Le Onde* (1996), and orchestral works such as *Chatrang Ouverture* and *Selim*. Einaudi has since enjoyed an extensive career as a performer and film composer.

Jacques Reynaud

Jacques Reynaud studied fashion design in New York, where he lives and works. He has been noticed for his artistic projects for the theatre.

He made his professional debut with director Luca Ronconi, for whom he created the costumes for *Peer Gynt*. Since the middle of the 1990s, he has been working with Robert Wilson. Their collaboration gave birth to the costumes for *Ozeanflug*, a play performed in 1998 at the Berliner Ensemble, *The Days Before* and *POETry in Hamburg*, or *Doctor Caligari* in Berlin.

In 2003, he designed the costumes for *Leonce and Lena*, staged by Robert Wilson to an original score by Herbert Grönemeyer. They pursued their collaboration in 2005 with William Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, staged at the Berliner Ensemble. In 2017, he worked with Martin Zehetgruber for Michael Walter's *The Birthday Party* at the Salzburg Festival. In 2019, he designed the costumes for *The Jungle Book* at the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus.

He recently created the costumes for Robert Wilson's productions of *Otello* in Baden-Baden and Handel's *Messiah* in Salzburg.

Producers: Théâtre de la Ville

The Théâtre de la Ville rests on two inseparable pillars: an artistic project open to the world and an iconic building steeped in history.

Since 1968, Jean Mercure has given the Théâtre de la Ville a strong ambition: to foster dialogue between the cultures of the world, support contemporary creation and bring together theatre, dance and music. In 1985, Gérard Violette placed dance at the heart of this identity and invited artists who would become key figures on the international choreographic scene. Maguy Marin, Robert Wilson, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Romeo Castellucci, Hofesh Shechter, Israel Galván, Ivo van Hove, Boris Charmatz, Tanztheater Wuppertal-Pina Bausch and many others found a loyal home here, helping to make the Théâtre de la Ville a major landmark for international creation.

This artistic project is housed in a building with an equally unique history. Built in 1862 by architect Gabriel Davioud, carried by the legend of Sarah Bernhardt from 1899 to 1923, transformed by Fabre and Perrotet between 1966 and 1968 into a large 1,000-seat auditorium, in 2023 – after seven years of renovation – its name Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. The opening in 1996 of a second 380-seat theatre, the Théâtre des Abbesses, in the 18th arrondissement, has made it possible to expand the programme and support more intimate forms, young artists and emerging writers. Together, the two venues form the Théâtre de la Ville and structure its influence.

Since 2008, Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota has been developing the project to make it even more inclusive: welcoming theatre in foreign languages, the international Danse élargie competition, the Parcours Enfance & Jeunesse programme, Chantiers d'Europe, and creating bridges between art, science, health and sport. The Consultations poétiques, initiated during lockdown and now supported by 345 artists around the world, embody this desire to offer accessible, inclusive and deeply human artistic gestures.

In 2023, with the creation of the Festival des Places, the Théâtre de la Ville will extend its activities beyond its walls: the Place du Châtelet will become an open-air stage, and other squares in Paris and around the world will join in this dynamic. The theatre is thus exploring new ways of inhabiting the city, connecting the interior and exterior, residents and artists.

Designing a popular, multi-artistic and international theatre, while inhabiting a historic site that tells the story of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries: it is this dual nature – the project and the building – that makes the Théâtre de la Ville a space for art, hospitality and inspiration, where every visitor can feel welcome and where imagination opens up paths to the future.

Resources



Robert Wilson's official website

www.robertwilson.com

Postdramatic Theatre

<https://thedramateacher.com/postdramatic-theatre/>

The Guardian review

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/article/2024/may/12/mary-said-what-she-said-review-barbican-london-isabelle-huppert-robert-wilson>

British Theatre Guide review

<https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/mary-said-what-barbican-theatr-23266>

Documentary: **Le Mystère Huppert | Incarnant Marie Stuart**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clZr9jLwl58>

Explores Isabelle Huppert's creative process in making this production. In French with autogenerated subtitles in multiple languages.

Robert Wilson: Embracing the Artificial

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-IKH9xHzQU>

Explores the creative world of Robert Wilson and his avant-garde and innovative approach to theatre.

Theatre de la Ville website

<https://www.theatredelaville-paris.com/en>

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