

Adapted by Andrew Upton

THE UNDERSTUDY
DRAMA & THEATRE RESOURCES

The **Cherry** **ORCHARD**

Anton Chekov

FREE
PRE-READING
ACTIVITIES

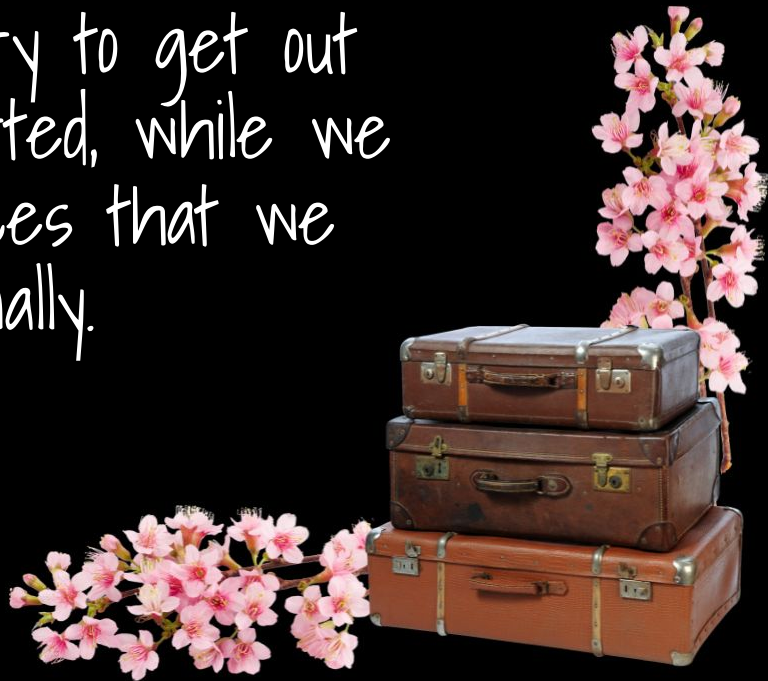


A NOTE

In case this is your first time with us...

This resource is designed in a hurry to get out fast for those who want to get started, while we work on the actual teaching resources that we design more carefully and professionally.

Just so you know...



Dear Teachers,

This is our freebie resource to introduce the first extracts of the Pre-Release Material for May/June 2026.

We like reading the extract before starting the practical exploration to get a first sense of the play. It means that students have read the extract and gives them time to 'digest' the plot and characters, before coming to their practical work and written work. It also means that when they do the practical work, they can draw on their knowledge of how the characters behave in the whole extract in order to shape their ideas.

There is some guidance on the next slide for introducing the play using these slides. Then there are slides for various activities leading up to a first read and a few simple activities to help organise information. We find that students respond very well to having this kind of help with setting up their scripts and being organised - especially those who might usually be the kind to lose scripts, keep half-hearted notes. This is a great opportunity to teach skills of analysis and organisation of ideas. The fact that the extracts are only 15 pages or so means they can keep on top of it and feel successful.

The first set of slides for practical exploration is due out on or before 14 September.

If you would like to pre-order (especially if you need to pay via a bank transfer from school) you can do so in the shop: www.the-understudy.org/shop.

Just choose 'manual payment' at check out in order to generate an invoice.

Otherwise you can buy an instant download as soon as they are published.

Kind regards,

Jane

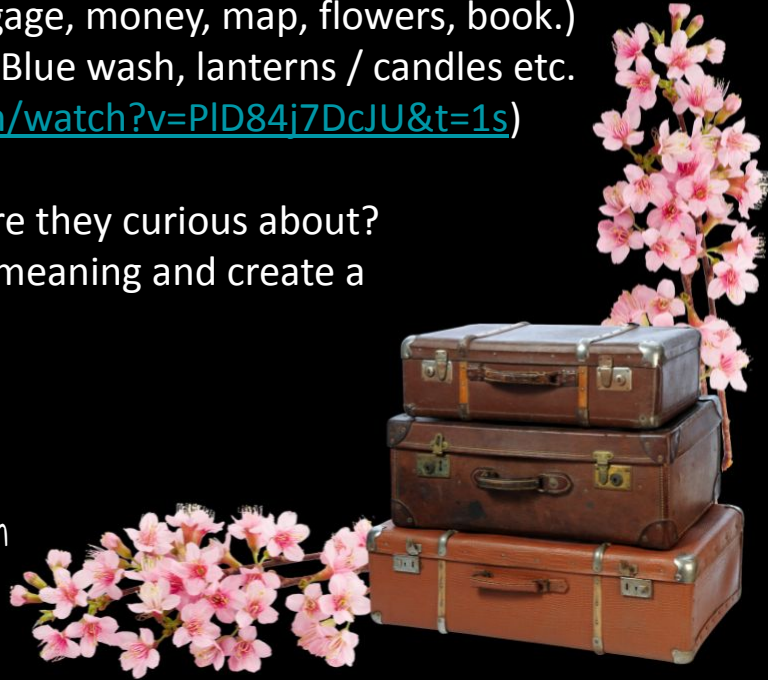


INTRODUCTORY LESSON

We love to start with a fun introductory lesson before students have any knowledge of the play. It gets them excited about the play and ignites curiosity.

1. Print out the images and quotes at the end of these slides and put them around your room. (If you have the props, you could put these out instead: luggage, money, map, flowers, book.)
2. If you have lighting, maybe make it feel like 2am in 1904. Blue wash, lanterns / candles etc.
3. Play some Russian folk music. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PID84j7DcJU&t=1s>)
4. Invite students in to wander around and explore.
5. What sense do they get of the world of the play? What are they curious about?
6. Get them each to choose one of the quotes, try to make meaning and create a naturalistic interpretation of it.
7. They must then get into small groups (probably 2/3) and create a scene with all their quotes in it (slide to project next).

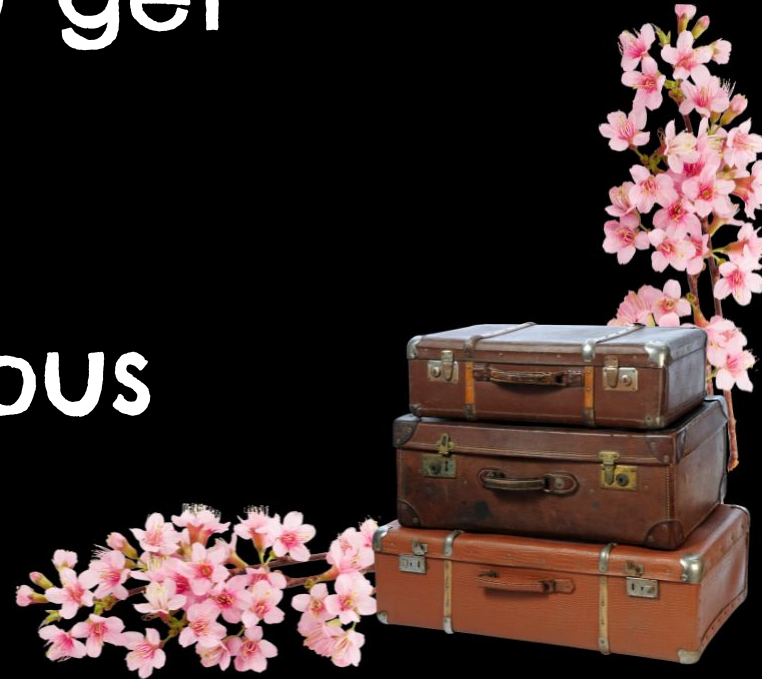
There are 10 quotes so if your class is bigger, more than one student can have the same quote. Make sure they are in different groups. It will be interesting to see what different students do with the same quote.



EXPLORE THE ROOM

What sense do you get
of this world?

What are you curious
about?



CHOOSE A QUOTE

You can have the same quote as someone else.

Can you make it make sense?
Decide what it is about.

Experiment with speaking the lines in a way
that feels naturalistic - try not to perform!

Try to make sense of the lines.

Share around the room.

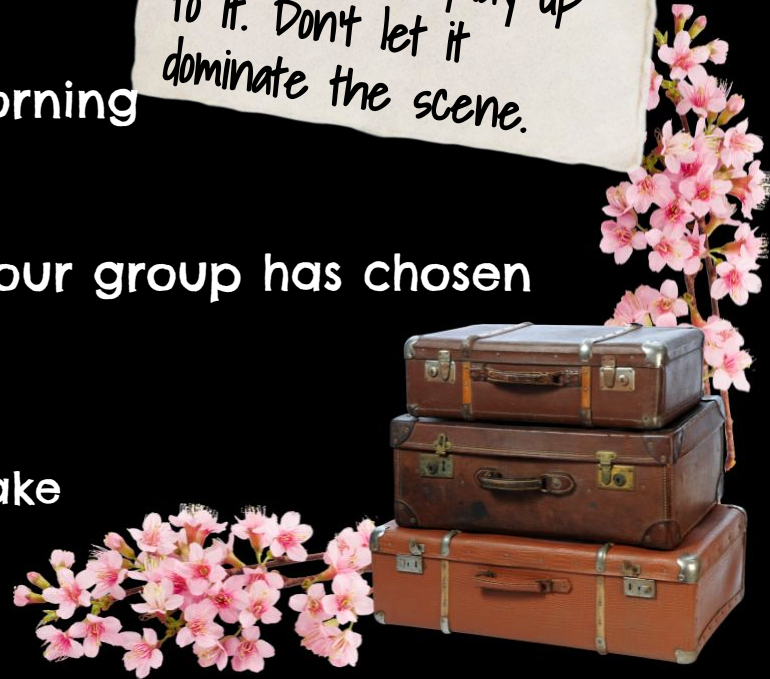


DEVISE A SCENE

- Work in groups of 2 or 3.
- Share your quotes with each other and discuss what they might mean.
- Create a scene which:
 - must be set at 2 o'clock on a cold morning
 - must be very naturalistic
 - must be set inside a house
 - must include at least one of quotes your group has chosen

Remember that we are looking for naturalism in one single scene, not silly plots designed to get the quotes in. How can you work hard to make meaning and make sense and make us believe in your characters and their situation?

Try not to play the scene for laughs. There may be some comic elements but you should not play up to it. Don't let it dominate the scene.



Student
Task

SHARE & REFLECT

Share your scenes and discuss any emerging themes and ideas.

What did the quotes inspire?



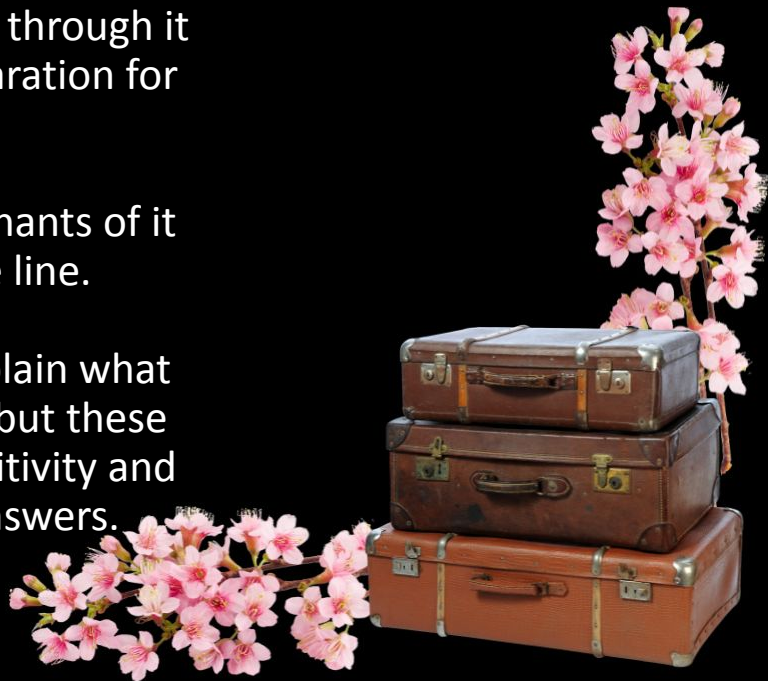
A NOTE FOR TEACHERS

The next exercise is fairly sophisticated so decide whether it's a good idea for your class or not. If it will lead to them writing weird answers vaguely referencing 'layers of nature' at some stage later down the line, it may not be a good idea.

If they are capable and bright and you lead them carefully through it and manage their understanding, it will be excellent preparation for studying the play.

But even then, you will need to be careful that vague remnants of it don't creep into answers in unhelpful ways later down the line.

Be clear that most written answers expect students to explain what they would do on stage, not what their preparation was - but these exercises can help us to prepare roles with creativity, sensitivity and imagination, which will hopefully lead to better written answers.



Student
Task

KATIE MITCHELL

NATURALISM EXERCISE

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/schools/teacher-resources/practitioners-in-practice-katie-mitchell-film/

Discuss Mitchell's 6 layers of Naturalism.

Can you remember what they were and explain them to each other?

Watch the first eleven minutes of this video about Katie Mitchell's approach to Naturalism.

00:00 - 11:00



KATIE MITCHELL

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

- * Character biography
 - * Place
 - * Time
- * Immediate circumstances
 - * Events
 - * Intentions

You can decide whether to have the teacher lead and all observe one actor, or split into pairs with one actor and one director to lead them through the exercise.

Try the exercise that Katie Mitchell did exactly as she did with one actor.

KATIE MITCHELL

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Character biography: The incidents in a character's past which create their behaviour in the present.

AND/OR
Try the exercise
that Katie
Mitchell did
exactly as she did
with one actor
walking into a
room.

You are a middle aged woman, who
owns a lot of land but you can't afford
its upkeep and are in a lot of debt.
You refuse to acknowledge this and still
live a 'champagne lifestyle'. You left
home ten years ago to recover from
your husband and son's death. You
spent all your money in Paris on a
boy who treated you badly.

Student
Task

KATIE MITCHELL

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Place: The location where the action of the scene happens.

AND/OR
Try the exercise
that Katie
Mitchell did
exactly as she did
with one actor
walking into a
room.

You are walking into your
home for the first time in 10
years.

Student
Task

KATIE MITCHELL

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Time: The year, season, day of the week and time of day the scene takes place in.

It is a frosty morning at 2am.

AND/OR
Try the exercise
that Katie
Mitchell did
exactly as she did
with one actor
walking into a
room.

KATIE MITCHELL

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Immediate circumstances: The incidents that happen in the 24 hours before the scene starts that affect the character's mood and behaviour.

You have travelled all night
on the train. It is more than
2 hours later than expected.

AND/OR
Try the exercise
that Katie
Mitchell did
exactly as she did
with one actor
walking into a
room.

KATIE MITCHELL

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Events: The changes in the scene that affect the thoughts, feelings or actions of all the characters.

The room is filled with people from your past life here on your estate, who know how little money you have.

AND/OR
Try the exercise that Katie Mitchell did exactly as she did with one actor walking into a room.

KATIE MITCHELL

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Intentions: What the character wants the other character(s) to do, feel or say.

You want to make everyone
in the room see how well you
are doing and how happy you
are.

AND/OR
Try the exercise
that Katie
Mitchell did
exactly as she did
with one actor
walking into a
room.

KATIE MITCHELL'S SIX LAYERS OF NATURALISM

1. **Character biography:** The incidents in a character's past which create their behaviour in the present.
2. **Place:** The location where the action of the scene happens.
3. **Time:** The year, season, day of the week and time of day the scene takes place in.
4. **Immediate circumstances:** The incidents that happen in the 24 hours before the scene starts that affect the character's mood and behaviour.
5. **Events:** The changes in the scene that affect the thoughts, feelings or actions of all the characters.
6. **Intentions:** What the character wants the other character(s) to do, feel or say.

Now see if you can go back to your scene you created and apply these six layers. If this is too challenging to do in groups, perhaps the whole class can work on one scene, making offers and suggestions while just the 2/3 people play the scene.



Student
Task

SHARE & REFLECT

"I saw. I know."

How has this exercise helped develop your understanding of a naturalistic style of acting?

What are you curious about in terms of the play we are about to study based on everything you have experienced today?



PREPARING YOUR SCRIPT

You will be working closely with this script for the next few months so get it organised, so you can access what you need easily, and you can easily see who is in a scene.

The script is two scenes. We've broken those down into seven units for our learning.

THE UNDERSTUDY
DRAMA & THEATRE RESOURCES

© Jane Fisher

PREPARING YOUR SCRIPT

Choosing a colour for each character and highlighting your whole script allows you to see who is in each scene and makes reading in class (or to yourself) and experimenting with scenes much easier. It also allows you to see how prominent a character is.

Adding tabs to mark each section makes finding your place easy and helps organise the script in your head.



THE UNDERSTUDY
DRAMA & THEATRE RESOURCES

© Jane Fisher



PREPARING YOUR SCRIPT

In drama analysis, directors and designers often break down the script into units.

This makes it easier to analyse what is going on.

Different directors/designers use different ways to decide where a unit starts and ends. Often an entrance or exit of a character is useful as it means characters' intentions change. Each play is unique as is each decision about how to do this.

We like to give each unit a name to help us remember it and to be able to talk about it with our class / company. We try to choose names that are simple and easy reminders of events.

UNIT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PAGES	3	4	4-6	6-8	8-10	10-11	11-13
LINES	1-46	47-87	88-137	138-242	243-305	306-393	394-467
NAME	ANTICIPATION	LOVESICK	ARRIVAL	TALK OF TRAVEL	HOME	THE PLAN	ULTIMATUM

A decorative border of pink cherry blossoms with green leaves, set against a black background, framing the top of the slide.

PREPARING YOUR SCRIPT

[illegible]

You can complete this document as a class or as individuals. You get deeper understanding and more attention to detail if you each do your own but you share ideas (and workload) if you do it together. Or you could each do your own then share and create a central document. It helps enormously with noticing details and understanding design requirements.

Here's a blank template with just the first one done as an example



BLANK THE CHERRY ORCHARD UNITS.xlsx

THE UNDERSTUDY
 DRAMA & THEATRE RESOURCES

© Jane Fisher

READ THE SCRIPT TOGETHER

You can now read the script together and stop to complete your uniting document and begin a character study, so that when you come to do your second read and practical explorations, you know the characters and the plot of the whole extract and can draw on that knowledge in your activities and explorations of staging them. You can keep character notes on the second tab of the uniting sheets or you can keep notes in your script. (See next slide)

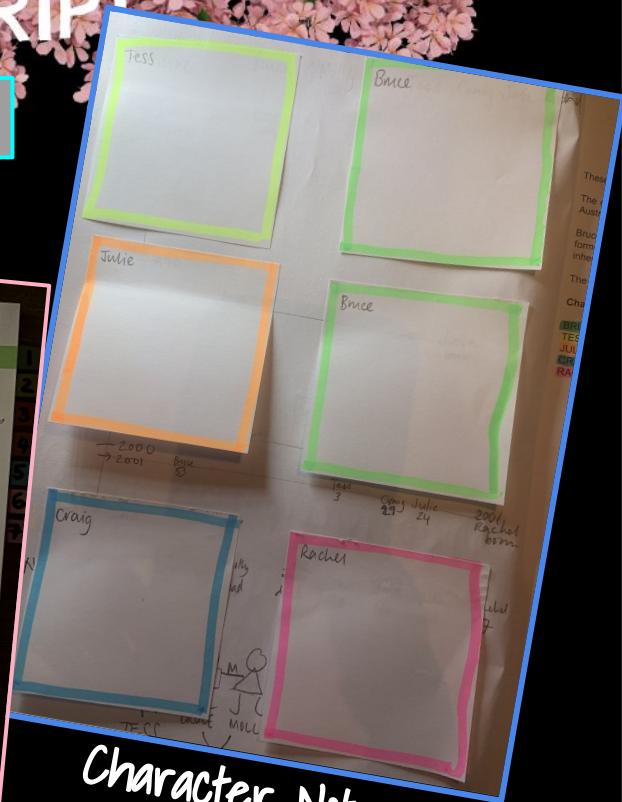
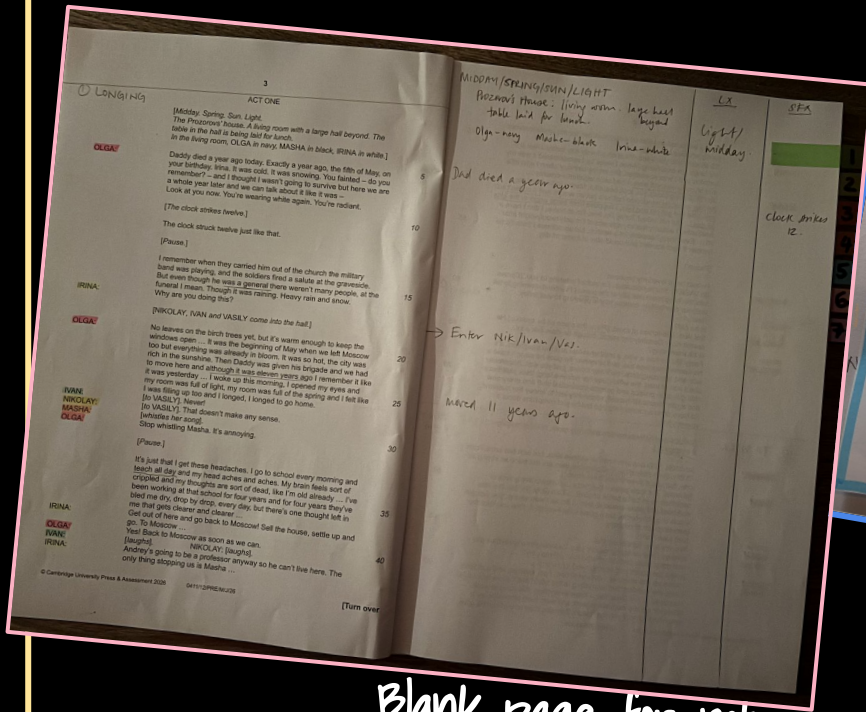
1	NAME	DESCRIPTION	AGE	Further Notes	
2	RANYEVSKAYA	landowner			
3	GAEV	RANYEVSKAYA's brother - talkative eccentric			
4	ANYA	RANYEVSKAYA's daughter, close to TROFIMOV, a revolutionary	17		
5	VARYA	RANYEVSKAYA's adopted daughter, close to LOPAHIN	24		
6	LOPAHIN	wealthy merchant from a humble background			
7	SIMONOV-PISCHIK	landowner			
8	CHARLOTTA	governess to ANYA			
9	YEPIHODOV	estate manager, in love with DUNYASHA			
10	DUNYASHA	maid, in love with YASHA, but is being pursued by YEPIHODOV			
11	FIRS	elderly, eccentric manservant	87		
12	YASHA	an insolent and self-obsessed butler			

PREPARING YOUR SCRIPT

TIPS FOR SCRIPT NOTES

We print our script with a blank page next to each page for notes, diagrams for staging etc. We keep all notes in pencil so we can keep changing them as we go on.

on the front inside cover we use post-it notes to keep character notes. We can keep adding to these if needed.



Character Notes

Blank page for notes

THE UNDERSTUDY
 DRAMA & THEATRE RESOURCES

© Jane Fisher

A decorative border of pink cherry blossoms frames the top of the page.

MAKE A FAMILY TREE

After (or during) your first reading, create a quick “family tree”, showing all the characters in the play and their relationships. To each other and to others mentioned.

Include spouses and others who are mentioned in the play so you can keep a tab on who is married, divorced, related, in love, servant, master etc.

Find the best way to represent the web of relationships that are portrayed in the play.

Extension: pick a quote that shows something about the relationship.

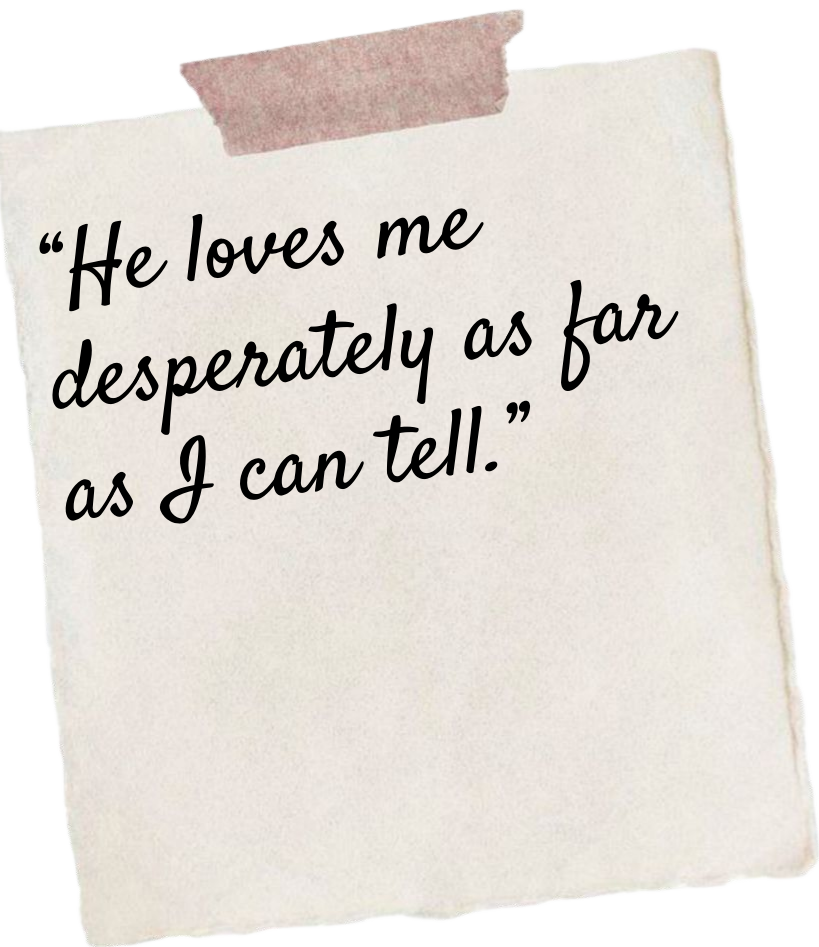
These do not need to be neat and pretty diagrams: a quick pencil sketch will do the job that you need it to. It's to help you to understand the relationships and history. It's the act of doing it that is the learning. Maybe use the colours you've been using for highlighting. This is especially useful for this play with lot of characters.

*"I was suddenly just
sorry for her. I could see
her stranded in the
corner. I hugged her,
squeezed her to me and
couldn't let her go."*



*"We sit down to lunch
and she orders the most
expensive thing on the
menu. And champagne.
And a tip for the
waiters..."*



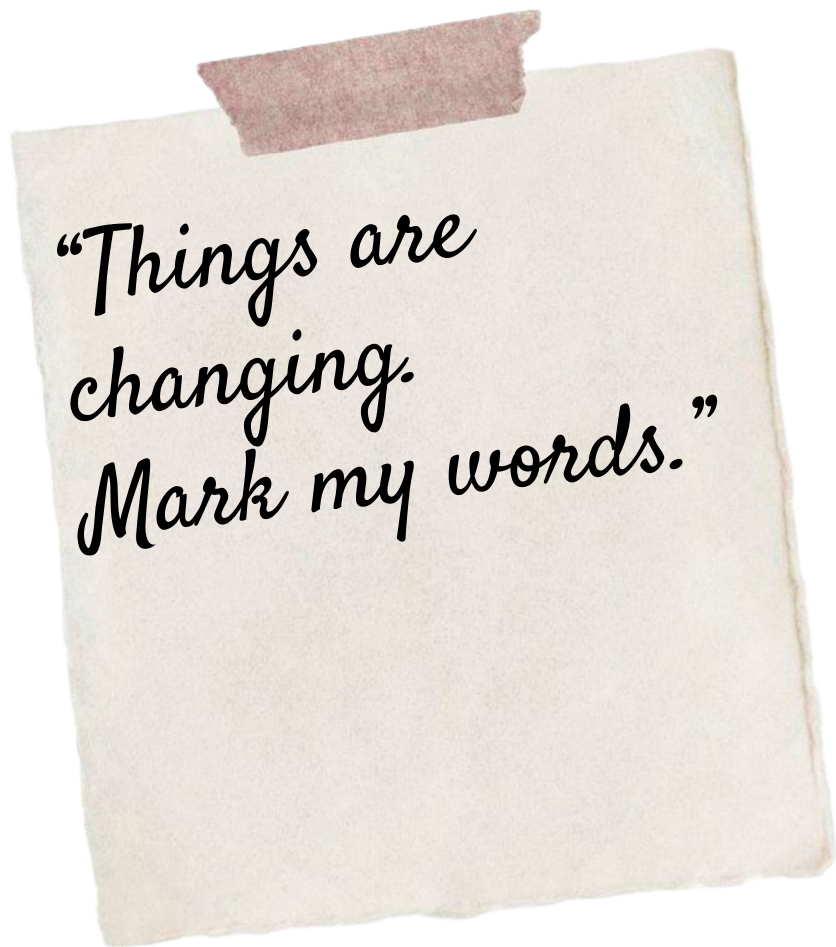


"He loves me
desperately as far
as I can tell."



*"I can't believe -
it's like I take a
breath and here I
am, suddenly fifty."*





*"Things are
changing.
Mark my words."*



*"You decide. You
decide. You all.
Decide. But I've got
a plan and I can't
see any other way
out."*

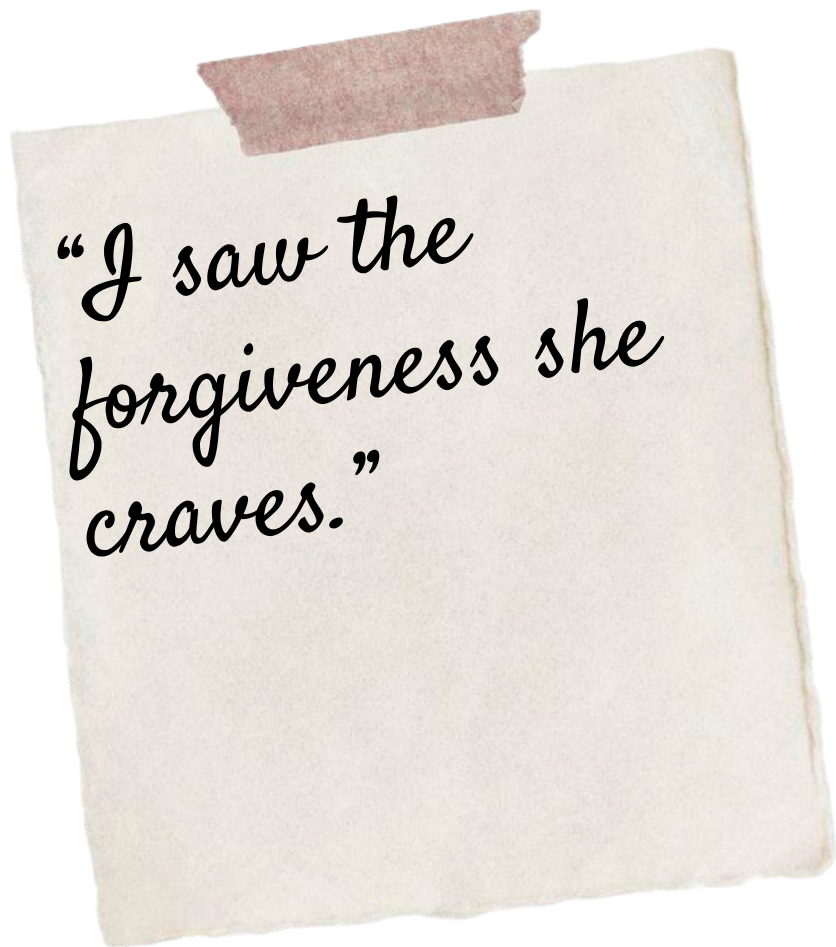


"This whole area might support a new type of community. It may be the future. Happy, rich, grand."



*"She had to leave, I know
why now. I saw
something in Paris. I
understood her. She
couldn't stay on with
Grisha drowned."*





"I saw the
forgiveness she
craves."

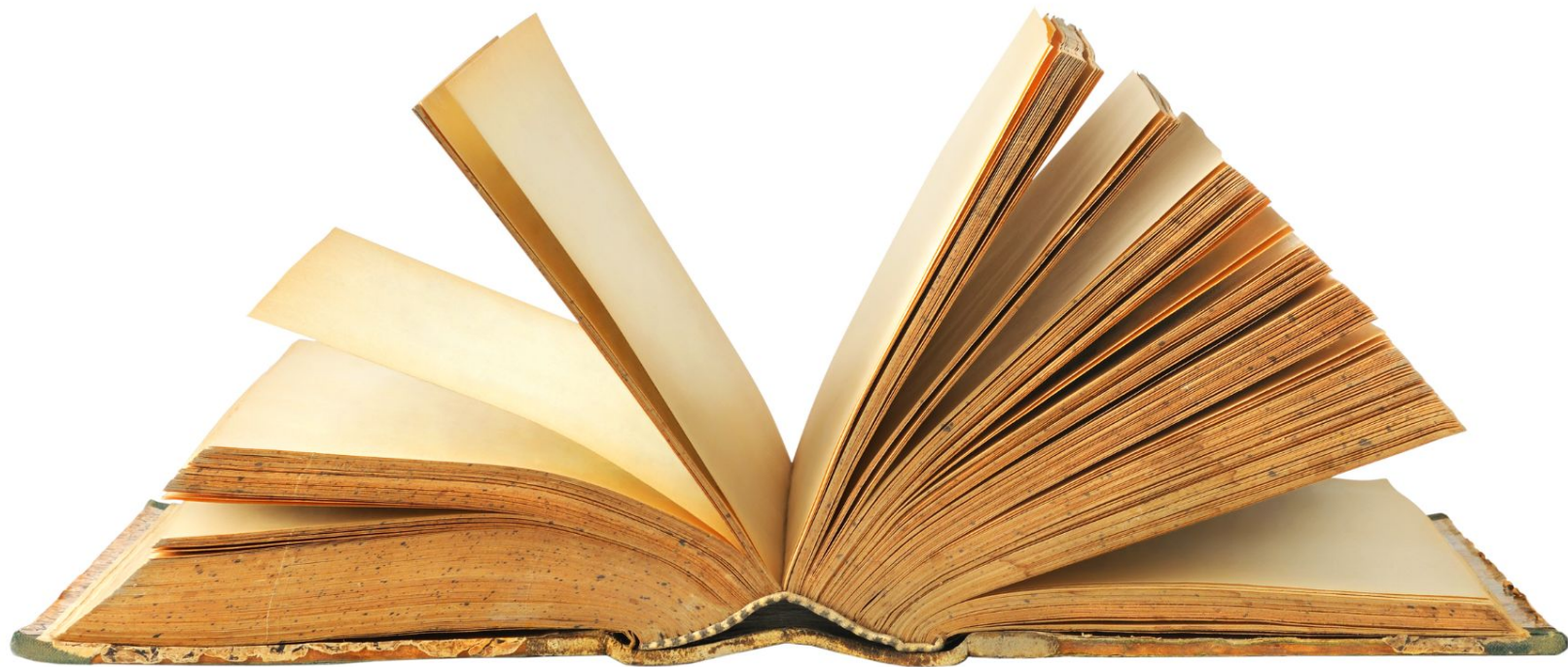


*"We don't need
all the past at
once. Do we?"*

















This resource is a freebie from

www.the-understudy.org

It is designed to help you set up your scripts so that you will find working with our slides to explore this play much easier. And you will feel organised before you embark on your exploration.

The full set of resources are published over a series of dates as we write and publish as we go, due to the time constraints of receiving new material each September. For more details, go to:

<https://www.the-understudy.org/iqcsedramapre-release>

